

Visual Hegemony and Resistance: Race, Gender, and Gaze in Jasmine Ward's *Let Us Descend*

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Abstract: *By applying the theory of “gaze” and combining feminism and racism, this article delves into how black women in Let Us Descend deconstruct and reshape their subject identities amidst complex power relationships, racial discrimination, and gender inequality. In a white dominated social structure, Annis underwent a transformation from a passive object to an active subject, which was achieved through her anti-gaze strategy, which helped her resist both internal and external oppressive forces psychologically and physically. In addition, the article also examines how Ward uses literary narratives to guide readers to deeply reflect on racial issues in American history, thereby inspiring sympathy and support for oppressed black communities, further reflecting the author’s profound vision of exploring social reality with humanistic care.*

Keywords: *Let Us Descend*; Gaze; Visual hegemony; Anti-gaze.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jesmyn Ward, a new generation of African American female writer, was born in Mississippi, USA. She obtained a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Michigan and is currently a professor of creative writing at Durham University. Her works mainly focus on the life of poor African Americans living on the Mississippi coast, with the Mississippi state where Wade grew up as the background. Among them, the novels *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* won the National Book Award in 2011 and 2017 respectively, making Wade the first female writer to receive this honor twice.

In her fourth novel, *Let Us Descend*, released in 2023, the author draws on prominent phrases from Dante’s *Inferno* as the title, using it as a starting point to delve into the past of slavery in the United States. This is a deeply emotional and poetic novel that vividly depicts the natural landscape of lush forests, misty swamps, and winding rivers in the southern United States. The first half of the novel mainly tells the story of Annis being sold by her white slave trader father from Carolina to the slave market in New Orleans. In this heartbreaking turning point, she became a reliable guide to lead readers through this hellish situation. During this long journey, the heartwarming memories of her mother and the legendary story of her African warrior grandmother gave her solace and strength in her heart. In the end, Annis’s footsteps stopped at a sugar plantation in Louisiana, which not only marked the end of her physical and mental journey, but also symbolized the beginning of her soul’s rebirth. Through Annis’s story, the author weaves the struggles and hopes of African Americans into the memories of this land, telling a touching tale of resilience, recovery, and self reshaping.

Since Wade won the National Book Award in the United States, her works have become the focus of attention in the literary world. After conducting an in-depth search on the Chinese Academic Journal website, it was found that scholars’ research on Ward mainly focused on her early masterpieces, such as *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Researchers at home and abroad adopt multiple perspectives such as intertextuality, feminism, trauma theory, and existentialism to finely interpret her works, with a focus on exploring issues such as social politics, ecological environment, and racial identity. After *Let US Descend* was released, it also attracted widespread attention from mainstream Western media. The National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States praised the novel as an outstanding historical novel, stating that “in this story, readers will walk alongside Annis, perceive the world through her eyes, and experience the pain she endured. In this process, the journey and pain gradually become clear, allowing readers to have a deeper understanding of love, sadness, and the essence of slavery.” Muyumba proposed in 2023 that “Wade uniquely blends historical fiction, supernatural elements, and ornate prose, thus occupying a unique position in literary works that criticize slavery. Few historical stories can touch on modernity, but Wade has achieved it.” However, given that this work is a newly published novel by the author, there are currently no research articles on it on the Chinese academic journal website. This study aims to fill

this gap by using the perspective of the “gaze” theory, combined with feminist and racist theories, to deeply analyze how the female protagonist Annis deconstructs her subject identity under the influence of the interweaving of power, race, and gender, and ultimately uses “anti - gaze” strategies to maintain her self dignity and reshape her subject identity. This thesis will also explore how Wade guides readers to reflect on the dark side of American society, evoking sympathy and concern for the long oppressed black community, and realizing the author’s vision of exploring life with compassion and goodwill.

2. WHITE DOMINATED POWER ARENA

“Gaze” is a way of seeing that carries the operation of power or the entanglement of desire. It is usually a product of visual centrism, in which the viewer is empowered with the privilege of “seeing” and establishes their own subject position through “seeing”. While the viewed become the object of “seeing”, they experience the power pressure brought by the viewer’s perspective and objectify themselves by internalizing the viewer’s value judgments. The criticism of “gaze” has become a powerful weapon for cultural critics to resist visual centrism, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of discrimination (Chen, 2006). When exploring racial issues, we must recognize that the visual domain itself is not neutral, it is actually a form of coercive hegemonic knowledge constructed by racial concepts. Judith Butler revealed a profound power dynamics of observing and being observed in the American social structure under the influence of racism (Butler, 1997). In this relationship, white people occupy a dominant and controlling position, with the power to freely observe black people or completely ignore them, thus treating black people as invisible entities. This power dynamics is not limited to visual behavior, but also reflects the establishment of the relationship between the subject and the object, where the observer is positioned as the subject and the observed is demoted to the object. Therefore, in this process, the visual dominance of white people gives them an advantage in constructing their own subjectivity, while black people are marginalized and become the “other”. This gaze dynamic is not only a marker of individual identity, but also a manifestation and consolidation of social power structure.

In *Let Us Descend*, this power relationship dominated by white people is particularly evident, mainly including the oppressive gaze of the white slave owner father on Annis, and the harsh scrutiny of black slaves by white buyers in the slave market. This section mainly explores how the gaze of white people deconstructs the subjectivity of black people, simplifying and objectifying their identity and humanity, becoming a silent group, thereby exacerbating their marginalization and alienation in society.

2.1 White Slave Owner Father’s Gaze on Annis

Michel Foucault explored the evolution of power in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, pointing out that power has shifted from crude physical punishment to more subtle disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault, 1979). This gaze reinforces the power structure applied to racial relations, manifested as the visual dominance of white people giving them an advantage in constructing subjectivity, while black people are marginalized and become the “other”. The panoramic open view prison described by Foucault is a symbol of this disciplinary mechanism, in which prisoners are constantly monitored and ultimately internalize this monitoring for self-regulation. The life of the female protagonist, Annis, seems to be in such a prison, where she is not only oppressed by racial gaze, but also burdened by the dual burden of gender gaze.

On the one hand, she is a mixed race child born to a black mother who was raped by a white man. Due to the deep-rooted concept of “white supremacy” racism, she was never accepted by her father, whose gaze towards her was filled with racial discrimination and objectification. His gaze not only positioned her as a second-class “other”, but also deprived her of her basic rights and dignity as a human being. In the family, she was assigned all the heavy household chores. She and her black mother worked from morning till night, not only picking up firewood, carrying water, transporting miscellaneous tasks, cleaning, cooking, but also serving her father and sisters’ meals, and even helping her father take off his shoes. And her half sisters, who are white from the same father, enjoy education and a comfortable life. They receive classical education at home, sleep on clean sheets, and wear exquisite dresses.

The white father controlled Annis’s every move through extensive surveillance, oppression, and punishment, and any small mistake could lead to abuse. The novel repeatedly depicts her father’s control over her through “gazing”.

“But his gaze snags on me, square then trails me around his room as I feel his washbasin, gather his clothes, grips his chamber pot. He appraises me in the same way he studies his horses”.

“When I turn down my sire’s bed, he watches from beside the cold fireplace. His eyes shine with the light of the candles”.

“Still, I see the way he seems fixed on my mouth, my mane” (Ward, 2023).

The repeated use of words such as “gaze”, “watch”, and “fixed” in the novel describes the father’s gaze towards Annis in daily life. This “gaze” carries the operation of power, and it is not only a product of visual centrism, but also establishes the subject status of the observer through observation. In this empowered visual relationship, the observed internalizes their value judgments and objectifies themselves. These “gazes” are constant reminders of power in her life, making her aware of her marginalized position and sense of powerlessness. This silent gaze violence caused great psychological pressure on her, making her feel fearful all day long and living in mental pain and torment for a long time. “I keep my eyes on my hands. And it’s only when I descend the stairs that I realized they are shaking” (Ward, 2023).

As emphasized by postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon, racial consciousness can penetrate into an individual’s self-awareness and personality construction through the eyes of others, causing black people under the gaze of white people to experience alienation and become “others” (Fanon,2005). Annis’s experience validates this viewpoint, as she experiences alienation under the gaze of white people and becomes a silent “other”. “I take care to hide from his gaze. It is something that I have always known how to do: I seal my mouth silent” (Ward, 2023). Annis gradually learned to adjust her behavior under her father’s discipline to avoid possible abuse. Her subjectivity was eroded under constant oppression and became increasingly silent. On the other hand, her father’s gaze towards her was also partly male gaze. Multiple descriptions in the novel suggest her father’s covetousness towards her physical body. The male gaze theory emphasizes the power differences in gender dynamics and the position of women as objects of scrutiny and objectification. At home, the father’s gaze is always filled with authority and ownership. His gaze constantly assessed the value and purpose of Annis. Annis’s mother once revealed that she was a product of being raped by a white man, which made Annis wary of her father’s every move. When she was doing household chores in her father’s room, she constantly reminded herself to complete tasks quickly and escape his sight as soon as possible. “I expect his eyes to glaze over me as they do every morning, like water over smooth stone. But his gaze snags on me, square, then trails me around his room as I fill his washbasin, gather his clothes, grips his chamber pot. He appraises me in the same way he studies his horses. His attention as sure and close as his touch on the long-maned neck, a muscled haunch, a bowed, saddle-worn back” (Ward, 2023). Usually, he was cold and ruthless towards Annis, but that day he looked at her with an unusually intimate gaze, making her feel for the first time the sinister intentions hidden in his heart. “He raises one arm, makes as if to palm my head, grab my hair, pull me toward his lap, but I rise and lurch away from him and am out of the door before he can touch one curl. Still, I see the way he seems fixed on my mouth, my mane” (Ward,2023). In this environment dominated by male gaze, Annie learned to carefully maintain her physical boundaries and remain vigilant under her father’s authority.

2.2 The Gaze of Slave Owners in Black Markets Towards Black People

Although the United States officially abolished slavery through *the Thirteenth Amendment* in 1865, slavery remained legal in many states in the 1850s. Black people were bought and sold as property, and slave auctions were a common way of transaction. These auctions are usually held publicly in markets or auction houses, where black slaves are displayed, evaluated, and sold to the highest bidder like commodities. As Annis grew up, she also faced the unfortunate fate of being sold. After a long journey and hardships, she was taken to the slave market by Georgia Mann. In the market, Annie’s body is constantly being displayed and adjusted to meet the expectations of potential buyers. Buyers’ scrutiny of Annis is everywhere, as they observe her body as a livestock like gaze. They buyers commented, “Fine Stock, by the look of her”, “She has no mark of childbearing, but she ripe for it”. “The hard glaze of an eye as another inspects and questions. As he demands we open our mouths and show him our teeth” (Ward,2023). Annie’s physical condition became one of the important criteria for potential buyers to evaluate her value. She was asked to open her mouth and show her teeth to check her oral health, which is an important physical indicator for a slave who may be used as labor or to have offspring.

The bodies of black women are endowed with specific economic and symbolic values based on white dominated social aesthetics and economic needs. This process reveals the reality of racialized body regulation, where the bodies of specific racial groups are subjected to different treatment and evaluation in public spaces. In the slave market, in order to increase market value, slaves were subjected to body washing and beauty treatments, which reflected the direct discipline and control of the slave’s body by the sellers. This kind of micro management of the

body embodies Foucault's biopolitics, and these techniques for governing life shape the individual's body and behavior.

Combining Fanon's perspective and racism, we can see that Annis's experience is not only a personal level self-objectification, but also a direct result of racial oppression and social violence. Fanon emphasized that the gaze of colonialism and racism solidifies power relations in visual images, which not only define the bodies of the ruled, but also implant a self-monitoring mechanism within them. In the slave market, Annis's body became a battlefield for racialized and gendered power relations, and her self-awareness was forced to be filtered and constructed through the perspective of white slave owners. This inherent racist gaze deprived Annis of her subjectivity, causing her to attach her own value to satisfying the needs and desires of the slave owner. Therefore, Annis's predicament is not only a crisis of personal identity, but also a reflection of the racist social structure that maintains inequality and discrimination through the politicization and symbolization of the body.

3. BLACK DOMINATED POWER FIELD

In the field of power dynamics, black subjects can not only challenge and dismantle existing power structures through the practice of anti gaze, but also construct their own power domains. Traditionally, the aesthetic and cultural narratives of white supremacy often reduce black people to silent others, who are often depicted as stereotyped, objectified, and simplified images in literature, film, and other visual art forms. However, in the works of contemporary and modern black writers, we see active resistance against this oppressive structure, where black characters have a clear intention to resist white oppression and superiority. As Foucault said, power operates in a network like structure composed of various power nodes, in which individuals are both objects of power and subjects exercising it (Foucault, 1979). *Let Us Descend* presents a network of relationships without a central power point, where each character is a link in the power network, using their own power to influence and connect with others. In the white dominated racial social order, although black people are often placed in a passive and controlled position, it does not mean that they cannot maintain their personal and racial dignity through anti gaze and build their own power field on this basis. This section analyzes how two major black female characters in the novel transform from victims of racial discrimination to proactive actors through anti gaze behavior, demonstrating how marginalized black people can take action to resist racism and thus transform the power relationship between observing and being observed.

3.1 Black Mother's Anti - gaze

The gaze theory holds that gaze is a manifestation of power relations, often associated with knowledge, subjectivity, and power control. In gender relations, men have traditionally been seen as active observers, while women are passive objects of observation (Berger, 2005). This dynamic is not only reflected visually, but also socially and culturally, where men hold the power to evaluate and define women. Annis's mother subverted this traditional gaze relationship through daily guidance to her daughter. Firstly, she emphasized the importance of knowing when to escape, when to stand, and when to fight in the face of white oppression. "He comes at you again, you run. Knowing when to stand and when to go, when not to fight, well, that's a part of fighting, too. Knowing when to wait and bide and watch and duck. You go to know that, too" (Ward, 2023). This intellectual resistance is a strategic anti gaze that teaches women to recognize power dynamics and take action accordingly. This education not only enhances the daughter's self-protection ability, but also gives her the wisdom to strategically respond to different situations. In addition, the mother personally guides her daughter every month in using the wand and spear for self-defense techniques, which is a direct physical level of anti gaze. It empowers women to protect themselves, reduce the likelihood of becoming victims, and be able to fight back when necessary. This kind of physical training is not only about learning skills, but also a reversal of power relations. Women transform from passive victims to capable subjects by mastering self-defense techniques.

Her mother also conveyed the spirit of resistance and the courage to pursue freedom within the family by telling Annis the story of her brave grandmother. These stories stimulated Annis resistance consciousness, helped her establish a female identity that was opposed to oppressive gender roles, and became an important step in combating the internalized oppression of gender norms. They helped Annis resist cultural and social pressures that attempted to restrict women to passive and subordinate positions psychologically. When the mother realized that her daughter might be violated by her father, she immediately took action to protect her daughter. "I know that eyes can be weapons, too, that they can glitter like small knives, like them used to gut a fish. I have never seen anyone look past my sire as my mother does now" (Ward, 2023). This behavior reinforces women's control and dignity over their own bodies, and is a form of combating gender-based body politics. The mother's behavior and

teachings taught her daughter how to use her eyes as a weapon, which is also a practice of anti gaze, as it challenges the traditional relationship of observing and being observed.

Annis's mother's teachings are a profound anti gaze practice that not only enhances her daughter's survival skills, but more importantly, challenges traditional gender power structures and empowers women with power and subjectivity. Through this anti gaze education, Annis learned how to resist and change the social structure of gender inequality on both a psychological and physical level.

3.2 Annis's Anti-gaze

In an environment that has long been oppressed by gaze, Annis initially adopted a non confrontational silent response. However, her patience and obedience made her father even more reckless, constantly seeking opportunities to violate her. Once, when her father learned that she was alone in the room, he hurried over with ill intentions. But when Annis sensed danger approaching, her instinctive reaction was to run away. When she found herself with nowhere to escape, a strong anger surged in her heart. She would never tolerate being defiled by her father, which was a serious challenge to her personal dignity. "And I know I can surrender to what he wants to do to me. I know that I don't have my mother's self control, know that I will struggle with him, that I will use my elbows like hammers, my legs like staffs, that I will make my knees fists" (Ward, 2023). If her father raped her, she would defend her dignity with self-defense skills taught to her by her mother every month. Although it was ultimately her mother who arrived in time to protect her, readers could already glimpse the strength and self love hidden beneath Annis usually silent exterior. Anti gaze is not only a physical resistance, but also a psychological and emotional rejection. Annis refuses to be a passive victim deep down in her heart, and her voice and actions reflect the strong will of black women to resist racial and gender oppression. Even beneath her seemingly fragile appearance, she demonstrated the individual power of black dominance in the power field. Through proactive anti gaze behavior, she not only defended her dignity but also challenged established racial and gender power structures.

Annis's father sold her to a slave market in New Orleans for revenge, which was an extreme betrayal of his daughter. In this environment full of racial discrimination and gender oppression, Annis faced various unethical attempts from white slave owners. However, she did not succumb to this humiliation and fear, but bravely expressed her own feelings. Annis explicitly claims to be a maid, attempting to eliminate the idea that white buyers see her as a potential fertility tool. She emphasized that she is capable of completing various household chores, such as washing dishes, ironing clothes, sowing seeds, starting a fire, and cooking rice. This is not only a recognition of her own abilities, but also a rebellion against the gender roles imposed on her by the slave owner.

Annis was eventually sold to a plantation owner in Louisiana who owned a sugar plantation. There, Annis was forced to work hard every day, not only taking care of the household chores of the estate owner, but also enduring the ill intentions of the male estate owner. In this oppressive and dangerous environment, she made a brave decision to cut her long hair short. When other black maids curiously asked her why she had cut her hair short, Annis replied, "And if cutting my hair make me more ugly to the husband, all the better" (Ward, 2023). This sentence indicates her clear understanding of her own situation and her use of anti gaze strategies. Annis's behavior is a challenge to the male protagonist's visual hegemony. In slave societies, the appearance of female slaves often became the object of evaluation and control by male masters. Annis attempts to break this rigid aesthetic standard and reduce her chances of becoming a target by changing her appearance. Her actions are not only a defense of personal dignity, but also an implicit protest against the power of slave owners.

Through in-depth analysis of Annis's life and struggles, we have witnessed a process of transforming from a passive victim to an active subject shaping her own destiny. The core of this transformation lies in the practice of anti-gaze, where she not only physically resists oppression, but also psychologically and emotionally rejects and affirms herself.

Annis's story vividly embodies Lacan's theory of constructing oneself through mutual gaze between the subject and the other. In society, especially as a black woman, she faces the gaze of the white ruling class, which is both racially degraded and gendered objectified. However, Foucault and Fanon's theory of gaze as a means of power control was overturned in her. Annis did not passively accept this gaze, but actively challenged and subverted the power of the slave owner through anti gaze. Living in a harsh environment where her father recklessly violated and betrayed her as a slave for a long time, Annis's heart has always been fiercely struggling against external oppression. Her experience highlights the self-awareness and awakening of black people under the gaze of white

people, recognizing their disadvantaged position under gaze and engaging in confrontational gaze as a result. This anti gaze aims to dismantle power relations and ideology, challenge logocentrism, break down barriers between mainstream and periphery, and build a truly equal relationship. (Qian and Zhang, 2016).

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POWER FIELD TRANSITION BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE PEOPLE

Michel Foucault defined power as “a diverse, fluid, and far-reaching domain of power relations, in which there has never been a completely stable ruling effect” (Foucault, 1979). This concept of power is particularly important in postmodern society, which is seen as a power field composed of individuals with subjective desires. In this context, the history and struggle of African American slaves in the United States are not only a pursuit of freedom, but also a challenge to their position in the power field and an effort to redistribute power.

Starting from the 17th century, black slaves were forced to work under extremely harsh conditions, forming the foundation of the economy in the southern United States. Although they gained legal freedom in the mid-19th century, the long-term effects of racial inequality and social prejudice still exist. Although significant progress was made in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black and other colored people still faced systemic barriers and biases. In traditional power structures, white men typically occupy the position of “gazers”, while other marginalized groups, such as black women, are in a passive position of being gazed. This unequal power relationship has been challenged through anti gaze strategies. Black people not only promote individual self-identity and self-esteem, but also strengthen collective resistance and unity by refusing to internalize negative stereotypes and accepting inferior status. By integrating Foucault’s theory of power with black history and struggle, we can see a more complex picture: in the constantly flowing and changing power relations, black people challenge traditional racial and gender norms through anti gaze strategies, and promote the redistribution of power in the socio-cultural context. This is not only a rebellion against historical injustices, but also an expectation and pursuit for a more fair and diverse society. In this novel, through the transformation of the power field flow, black people transform from being gazed upon to the gaze subject resisting white gaze, achieving resistance against racial gaze and thus resisting racial discrimination.

Annis’s story vividly recalls the cruelty and humiliation suffered by the black community from a black perspective. Young black women often fall victim to the desires of white men, and Annis is a product of this injustice. If white owners are slightly unhappy, they will resort to physical violence against black people and even sell them at will. Annis and her mother have both experienced such a tragic fate. On the road to being sold to a foreign land, Annis endured unimaginable hardships. Her feet were bleeding and she was forced to walk in hunger for a whole day, with her hands tied and struggling to cross the river. Starting from Carolina, through fields and swamps, all the way to New Orleans, Annis witnesses and experiences atrocities every day. Annis and other black servants who were sold to the sugar plantation worked day and night at the estate owner's house and the estate, working like animals and often receiving harsh criticism and beatings.

At the beginning of the novel, when living under the close watch of the white father, Annis resents her skin color and envies the natural advantages obtained by the two white sisters who are half sisters. They immerse themselves in education every day, learning ancient Greek literature and Latin. The process of gaze largely shapes cultural identity, and through a series of representations and discourses, the object of gaze is defined as the other (Qian and Zhang, 2016). The discriminatory gaze of her father was internalized by Annis, making her a subject of submission to others’ control. At first, Annis accepted and internalized the idea that white skin was a symbol of superiority, and therefore chose to remain silent when faced with unfair racial oppression. However, as the story unfolds, we witness Annis gradually transforming from a submissive object to a subject who holds the power of discourse, achieving the flow of the power field.

The daily teachings of her mother were an important factor in Annis’s gradual escape from the fate of being gazed and her transformation into a subject of resistance to gaze. Her mother taught Annis how to use a staff and spear for self-defense, helping her grow from a passive victim to a capable and powerful subject. In addition, The story of the female warrior grandmother in the family not only inspired her resistance, but also helped her construct a female identity that stood in opposition to oppressive gender roles. Annis began to realize that despite attempts by the outside world to define her as a submissive black slave girl, she could reject this label and shape her own identity through her actions and choices. As time passed, Annis became more and more proactive in taking control of her own life and destiny. She dared to resist the oppression and offense of her white father, and after being sold to the slave market, she firmly expressed her identity and abilities, not only winning the respect of those around her,

but also gradually changing their views and attitudes towards black women.

At the end of the story, Annis discovers that she is pregnant after leaving Bastian and escaping from the slave owner's estate. She accepted her new identity as a mother and believed that being pregnant was her destiny. Annis' decision to become a mother reflects her sense of responsibility and hope for her child and future. She hopes her child will not follow in her footsteps and suffer oppression again. When Aza suggested that Annis walk along the river all the way to the city, she refused the suggestion and drove her away. Annis knew that under an unchanged social system, the children of slaves would only repeat the old path of their parents being oppressed. Therefore, she would rather survive alone in the ruins than return to the city. Annis and the child in her belly will continue to live, expressing her longing for the future.

The anti gaze strategy not only helps individuals improve themselves, but also contributes to the transformation of social cognition. When enough individuals begin to use anti gaze strategies, society's stereotypes and preconceived notions of certain groups will gradually change. This change helps to break down old racial and gender norms and promote social development towards greater fairness and inclusivity. In addition, anti gaze behavior at the individual level can motivate and inspire others in similar situations. For example, Annis's courage and resilience may become a role model for other black women, prompting them to also seek ways for self-improvement and liberation. This resistance drive from individual to collective is the key to achieving widespread social change. Through collective efforts, we can more effectively confront and rewrite long-standing unfair rules and standards.

This novel not only portrays Annis's struggle and growth, but also reflects the process of conflict and resolution at the social level. It reveals the complexity of power relations and explores how to achieve a more fair and inclusive social structure through confrontation and dialogue. In this novel, the transformation of the power field is not only a catalyst for the development of the plot, but also a profound reflection on the persistent issues of race and gender in the real world.

5. CONCLUSION

In her works, Wade shows a profound insight into the identity politics of African Americans. Especially in *Let Us Descend*, she explores how black women construct their own subjectivity in the double cracks of racism and sexism through the careful shaping of the role of Annis. The anti gaze strategy employed by Annis originates from the internalized spirit of African warriors, which is inspired by the family history narrated by her mother and embodies a cross generational cultural resistance and self-identity.

Based on Michel Foucault's discourse on the "panoramic prison" and Franz Fanon's psychological colonization caused by the "gaze" of colonizers, we understand that gaze is not only a way of exerting power, but also a pathway for marginalized groups to transform their power. Annis's story highlights the process by which individuals gain agency through anti gaze. She refuses to be a passive sacrifice and instead becomes a subject actively shaping her own destiny.

Wade denounced the racial persecution of Africans in history through literary narration, and highlighted the important role of African American collective action in striving for justice and equality. *Let Us Descend* not only records the exploration and growth of individual identity, but also reflects the shaping of personal identity through collective historical experience. Although racial gaze remains an undeniable reality in modern society, this work conveys a firm message to us: in the face of social injustice, we should bravely stand up and overcome obstacles through unity, mutual assistance, and continuous self reflection, and move towards freedom and peace

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