

RECLAIMING THE GAZE: RACE, GENDER, AND VISUAL RESISTANCE IN JESMYN WARD'S *LET US DESCEND*

Dr. Mudasar Jahan¹, Shabnam Jabeen Zahra², Samina Khaliq Butt³

¹Associate Lecturer in English, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

²Assistant Lecturer in English, University of Gujrat, Pakistan.

³Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Islamia Graduate College, Railway Road Lahore.

¹mudasar.jehan@uog.edu.pk, ²shabnam.jabeen@uog.edu.pk

³buttsam76@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/>

Keywords

Traumas, Gaze And
Oppositional Gaze, Resistance,
Black Girl Protagonist.

Article History

Received on 22 June 2025

Accepted on 16 July 2025

Published on 19 July 2025

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Abstract

This research examines how author Ward constructs the dominant themes prevalent in America in *Let Us Descend*. Through the eyes of a Black female protagonist, Annis, she explores the male gaze in America. She focuses on Black female subjectivity and their resistance. The entire novel centers on a single pivotal point of resistance to patriarchal hegemonic control of gender and race, achieved through her acute sense of gaze and revival of spiritual and visual power. The research also emphasizes the objectives related to the different functions of the Gaze in her mind and within the novel's structure. The protagonist uses her spiritual sight as a tool of resistance and self-definition in a symbolic way. Earlier research works in literary fiction have addressed themes of trauma, ancestral presence, and memory. At the same time, Gaze, as a theoretical lens, has not been utilized in fictional literature and thus remains unexplored. This research has filled and responded to the research gap by applying Gaze as a theoretical approach, integrating Mulvey's (2006) and hooks' (2012) gaze and oppositional Gaze, respectively, as interpretative theories. The research is qualitative, and the analysis process is done through textual-analytical strategies, which were embedded in close reading. The selected novel is *Let Us Descend*, by Ward, in which she conveys her voice through her character, Annis. Annis is a Black enslaved girl who is facing slavery and issues of freedom. The key findings of the research are that Annis developed the ability as she transitioned from one phase to another, reclaiming her sight, memory, and identity by transforming the traditional reality into a new narrative, one that is resistant and no longer a victim. Her acute sense of vision, or Gaze, makes her a unique character. She can envision her late mother's suggestions for spending her life, and she refuses to be an object anymore. The research deals with an intersectional framework, reconfigures the Gaze, and transforms from passive to active. The research contributes to fictional literature and allocates a scholarship by offering a new sustained gaze, enhancing discussions around African-American literature, feminist theory, and visual politics. The findings also affirm that visions within the novel operate not as domination but as spiritual authorship, agency, and finally historical reclamation. .

INTRODUCTION

Jesmyn Ward is a renowned novelist of twenty-first-century African American literature, particularly from the Southern United States (Ward, 2025). The topics of her novels deal with poverty, gendered violence, and the legacies of racism (Keeble, 2020). Ward was born in Mississippi, which is why her writing contains experiences of Black people, and she presents cultural memories and historical trauma of her people well. Being a naïve African American, Ward's writing style is narrative in her novels (Pauley, 2021). She blends realism, spiritualism, and mythic elements in her books. Her unique fiction writing style is emotionally and politically charged Ward, in her latest novel, *Let Us Descend*, published in 2023, reinterprets the era of enslaved people by centering on the character of Annis, a teenage enslaved girl in the Black community (Bona, 2025). During the pre-Civil War era, she was relocated forcefully from North Carolina to New Orleans. In the Narrative novel, Ward constructs a narrative of barbarism. The character of Annis Ward challenges dominant paradigms, including those of race, hierarchy, and gender.

Ward's novel *Let Us Descend* presents a horror scene of the era regarding enslaved Black people, the horror, violence, and terror include psychological and physical trauma endured by imprisoned enslaved Black people. Despite all the problems, Ward presents her victim as the protagonist; Ward focuses on inner life, agency, resistance through memory, ancestral connections, and spiritual visions. In this way, Ward relocates the Black female gaze from hyper sexuality to spiritual power. In this research, Ward's novel is examined through the lens of gaze, which operates within the context of visual culture in literature. A significant amount of research is still being conducted on this novel, mainly due to its popularity and status as a bestseller. Earlier academic attention focused on the narrative genre of enslaved persons. For example, in early 2024, a research paper was written on *Let Us Descend* in *African American Review* by Thompson (2024), who argues that the novel functions as a ritual remembrance, raising a voice for historically silenced Black female voices (Tan, 2025). This research initiates a new inquiry into the topic, exploring how the novel engages with the politics of being and seeing about gendered power structures and

race. Thus, a considerable amount of work has already been done; yet, a noticeable gap remains, especially in the application of gaze theory, particularly in the perspective of intersectional concepts through hooks' gaze theory (hooks, 2012).

The idea behind this research work is to fill this gap, as Ward's novel has been discussed from the perspectives of trauma, memory, and resistance. There is a lack of academic discussion on the concepts of gaze, spectatorship, and visibility. One of the primary purposes of conducting his research is to examine how the gaze operates as a mechanism of suppression and how the novel presents the protagonist's resistance within the context of black women's history. This research revolves around the concepts of hegemony, race, and gender, reconfigured through the narrative of the gaze. Particularly, this research focuses on patriarchal gaze about slavery found in the world of literature, and the way its female protagonist spiritually visions an oppositional gaze and retrieves subjectivity. The way characters' act is both literal and symbolic, and they resist resistance and gendered oppressions. All these situations interlink when analyzed through a theoretical

approach. Another purpose of the research is to contribute to the existing literature on the African American context by applying gaze theory, especially Laura Mulvey's (2006) concept of the *male gaze* and bell hooks' (2012) *oppositional gaze*, to a text that has not yet been widely examined through this lens (Mulvey, 1975; hooks, 2012). This research examines the role of gaze as a tool of empowerment and oppression.

This research paper examines the assertion that Ward's novel presents challenges to traditional narrative writing and storytelling. The book endows its characters with a strong inner life, particularly its female, subjugated characters, as they resist subjugation. She empowers Annis by allocating her ritual power and freedom; her character seems to question aspects like race and gender. Thus, this research aims to fill the research gap by introducing a new perspective and conducting research on novel elements, including gaze, race, and gender. This research explores and reframes Black women's history in a different way that was previously ignored and misrepresented.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore how Ward challenges the traditional white male gaze in her novel *Let Us Descend* through the use of symbolism and narrative style.
- To investigate the pivotal character's gaze style, which works as an intervention and resistance by applying intersectional gaze theory.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **RQ1.** How do Black female characters in *Let Us Descend* resist the prevailing white male gaze in America?
- **RQ2.** How does Ward's '*Let Us Descend*' portray the protagonist's resistance to the white male gaze and their rescue from objectivity?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The current research is significant because it provides valuable insights into the genre of African American literature. It allocates power to re-echo those voices that were historically ignored. Through characterization, readers gain insight into the treatment of Black women in America and are challenged by their resistance to the existing social situations in the region. This research also reveals that Black women have a significant level of control

over the world, as they possess the ability to resist and advocate for their rights, and they can shape their own stories. This research also contributes to feminist discourse on Black literature, marking the first in-depth exploration and examination of how Ward utilizes the concept of gaze in *Let Us Descend* to resist sexism and racism. Generally, this research examines the idea of Black women's ability to shape their perspectives and narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature captures the glimpses of gaze theory and existing research on Wards' novel.

OVERVIEW OF GAZE THEORY

The concept of the male gaze was introduced by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her essay "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*" (Mulvey,2013). The essay argues that most are strictly structured. Viewers see the male perspective as heterosexual. The perspective concept of the male gaze is presented as if women are objects of visual pleasure. Cameras, storytellers, and character developers present women as items of pleasure and take away their power (Dey,2019). However, later on, a lot of critics expanded on it, and it was emphasized that

Black women's experience is not possible to capture without knowing the power of racism and its dynamics. Then, the concept of the oppositional gaze emerged, highlighting how Black women developed new agency to view media as a form of resistance critically. Their act of oppositional gaze challenged the dominant discourse and allowed Black women to reclaim their agency, giving them the power to challenge stereotypes (Jacobs, 2016).

BELL HOOKS' OPPOSITIONAL GAZE IN PRACTICE

Since bell hooks (2012) introduced the "oppositional gaze" concept, it's become a key way to understand how Black women resist negative representations in media. This idea has evolved and is now applied in various fields, including education, digital media, and art, underscoring its enduring significance.

Research was conducted in by (Cox, et al. 2022) on oppositional gaze. His subjects were high and middle school students; studies showed that students think critically about what they watch. A study concludes that students can understand and recognize stereotypes, and they can imagine more effectively how images can be biased. He added that capturing understanding and gaining an active approach

require critical thinking and imagination. I'll do a study on Black women filmmakers in Brazil. He studied the topic and examined the oppositional gaze to challenge the existing traditional white gaze, or the dominant gaze, in the field. He added that filmmaking presents things in a usual way on screen and takes control of the narrative. He claimed that Black women create online content by applying an oppositional gaze and challenging the most prominent and dominant views. They prefer to share their perspectives. The characters Kimberly and Foster and Khaadija adopted a perspective that was very challenging for the mainstream. They claim or reclaim that these are their stories on their respective podcasts and YouTube. Their new approach helps combat misogynoir and enables them to explain it clearly. Many other research works have found that applying an oppositional gaze can powerfully reclaim one's social identity and challenge the prevailing dominant views. In the latest research Charry (2025), the researcher analyzed the films regarding the oppositional gaze in the movie *The Woman King*, which portrays Black women as hard workers and strong characters, rather than self-defined. Among scholars, a wave has been

triggered to apply this concept to online communities.

In 2025, research concluded by Gregg (2025) that Black women, especially girls, create memes on Instagram and Facebook to challenge and critique stereotypical images, employing visual, sarcastic, and situational satire to challenge the existing gaze, which functions as an oppositional gaze or form of satire. Thus, all these existing research works claim that optional gaze is effective in various areas, including education, social media content creation, activism, filmmaking, and daily life. In these existing research works, it is clear that Black girls are resisting the negative presentation. They are also creating new phases and spaces, such as a social media platform, to express themselves or promote self-expression, and by applying visuals, they achieve critical visibility. hooks' (2012) research is essential in the context of the male gaze, and this research highlights the postulates of the theory, helping to understand how people challenge and resist dominant narratives.

GAZE THEORY AND LITERATURE

Research conducted by Luo et al. (2024) analyzed the portrayal of male and female characters in late 19th and early 20th-century

novels. They identify that most novels written by male authors tend to focus more on women's appearance than their actions, whereas female novel authors do not exhibit such biases. This situation supports the concept of the male gaze. Numerous research studies have explored the idea of gaze in literature. One of the studies was conducted by Nivetha and Hema (2024), who investigated a novel by Margaret Atwood, showcasing a narrative that portrays a particularly intense male gaze, as well as objectifying the female major characters or protagonists. They claimed that the novel challenges the gaze through different narrative perspectives. Similarly, Jubair (2024) studies gaze theory in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and finds that adaptation can shift focus towards empowering the female characters in the novel. Research conducted by Hurwitz and deline (2023) investigated how ladies on the social media website Instagram engage in self-authorship and satire to react and resist the concept of objectification. He also observed the same on TikTok; women are seen objectifying and re-centering. Thus, many researchers have applied gaze theory to various literary and digital discourse analyses to gain

insight into narrative structure and understand the agency of characters. Although many research works have studied gaze theory, Ward's novel *Let Us Descend* has not been investigated from the perspective of gaze theory. Thus, the existence of this gap makes the current research very important. This research examines how Ward challenges objectification and regains authority through the lens of the Black female perspective. This research offers valuable intersectional analysis.

PRIOR STUDIES ON JESMYN WARD

Ward's novel *Let Us Descend* (2023) has been widely discussed and has become a bestseller in the academic community since its release. In this regard, Thompson (2024) notes that Ward, through her novel, gave power to the historically silenced voices of Black women, thereby giving them more agency, and through memory and rituals. Even then, it is found that Thompson (2024) did not conduct an in-depth exploration of visibility or gaze; thus, he leaves room for further research in the field of gaze on Ward's novel.

Another researcher, Khedhir (2024), explored Ward's novel *Let Us Descend*, focusing more prominently on ancestral knowledge and motherhood, as well as the way the novel's

main character survives and resists. However, there is still a lack of exploration of how Annis perceives herself and the people around her; thus, the visual aspect is missing, leaving room for further research. Earlier, many critics criticized Ward's novel, particularly for its themes of family bonds, trauma, supernatural elements, and historical memories. These critics praised the novel's narrative depth and spiritual elements. The critics defined the novel as "a novel of triumph" due to its legendary structure and the assortment of historical realism. One notable aspect is that these critics overlook the concept of gaze and the novel's hidden visual power. For example, how the main character Annis perceives the world and how she is perceived by it. Although they work extensively on the novel and recognize its strength, they did not apply gaze theory or gaze-based analysis to show how Annis resists proclaiming subjectivity and battles objectivity. Thus, this research gap leads to arranging prompts for a research work on gaze, utilizing it as a theoretical approach to Ward's work, and it appears to be a valuable and needed contribution.

IDENTIFIED GAP IN THE LITERATURE

A thorough reading of the related literature on Wards' novel *Let Us Descend* reveals that Gaze theory is used to explore spiritual themes; however, a significant gap remains that needs to be addressed. As no research has been conducted yet using Gaze Theory to examine how its protagonist resists objectification, regains subjectivity, and controls the story. This new research work will be a valuable addition, providing new insights into existing research on novel topics. Since the COVID-19 era of 2020, numerous research studies have been conducted on intersectional gaze, considering multiple aspects of life, including race, gender, and class. However, none of the critics and researchers focused on spiritual vision, and no one worked on the idea of resistance to objectification. Researcher Klesti (2025) believes that to understand a novel's hidden themes, intersectionality is a key to understanding how different identities intersect and affect existing experiences of power. These researchers argued that gaze theory cannot be understood entirely separately, as it is overlapping and complex. However, it is observed that Ward's work has

been focused on different perspectives, such as mental power and memory, but without examining how the protagonist Annis reacts to being controlled and subjected to an oppressive gaze. Thus, this represents a research gap, enabling the conduct of new studies on the concepts of gaze, objectivity, and subjectivity. Therefore, this research applies gaze theory to Ward's novel *Let Us Descend* and explores the vision of its protagonist, making the novel's story a resistance against the high-profile and powerful oppressive forces. Thus, Ward's heroine gains control over her private life and describes herself, notwithstanding her ruthless past.

HOW THIS STUDY FILLS THE GAP?

This research, which applies intersectional-based gaze theory, fills a significant gap and analyzes Wards' novel in conjunction with Mulvey's (2006) theory of the male gaze. Both collectively explain the visual concept of objectification and the alignment of narrative, while also taking into account hooks'(2012) idea of an oppositional gaze. In this way, this research highlights the resistance and spectatorship of Black women within the existing American context. Recent research and scholarship have focused on the need for

studies on visual analysis, particularly narratives of Black, marginalized women. This research should employ multiple gazes or overlapping perspectives, focusing on Black visual subjects who are reclaiming power and shifting directions. In this regard, Luo (2023) claims and demonstrates that the most awaking subject in contemporary world of literature is spiritual vision functions as resistance and it is present in Ward's novel; in novel traditional objectifying gaze is denied through Annis's role; he internal and spiritual mental approach and visions are reclaimed and she fights for subjectivity and autonomy. It also seems a powerful form of resistance against gendered and racialized oppressions. Thus, this research highlights the power of visual aids and contributes to a deeper understanding of the narratives of Black women. This research demonstrates the author's story of transformation, from weak to powerful expressions, as well as a symbol of resistance and personified idealistic influence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research is interpretative and theoretical. It focuses on visual and narrative elements in Wards' novel

Let Us Descend and applies Gaze theory as a critical approach.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

The research is qualitative and based on a literary analysis of the selected novel, *Let Us Descend* by Ward (2023). A theoretical framework is applied to it as an investigator of oppression and resistance. The research is not empirical, while this is an interpretive study. Despite data collection, the selected text from the novel is focused on for analysis. A detailed and thorough reading is conducted, exploring the narrative challenges covered by the Gaze. Throughout this entire analysis process, Black women were the matter of concern, particularly in terms of subjectivity and vision.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The textual analysis approach is employed. This approach is common in the arts and humanities, especially in language analysis in literature and linguistics. This research focuses on imagery, point of view (POV), and the interpretation of language in the selected text of a novel. This research aims to investigate how identity, power, and resistance to power are constructed and how they are challenged. This study is unique, but it aligns with the concept of revealing theoretical goals

and visual symptoms, as well as the scenario of subversion.

RESEARCH TOOL

One of the primary tools used for this research is a thorough, intensive, and close reading. It allows detailed analysis. Key passages are separated that contain or showcase the concept of Gaze. The engagement of critical theory supports this procedure. More prominently, Mulvey's (2006) perspective on the male Gaze and hooks' (2012) perspective on the oppositional Gaze. This approach helps in examining the vision of narrative and characters functioning within the system or context, with a focus on gendered and racialized spectatorship.

SELECTED TEXT

To research Gaze theory, the chosen text is *Let Us Descend* (2024) by Ward. The novel narrates a compelling story of an enslaved Black person. This novel presents an opportunity to explore the lives of contemporary Black women, specifically authors, who, as representatives, challenge the more dominant structures that shape the lives of Black women. Different chunks of text are selected from the novel, keeping in view that those chunks contain the element of

Gaze. Since the novel is recent and belongs to the contemporary world, it retells the story of Bl. The novel's fabric is too strong, offering a rich opportunity to explore women's challenges and challenges to the dominant structures. Ward's attempt to showcase Black women as heroines of the novel is a daring attempt. Through her heroine, she explains various concepts, including trauma. To understand trauma, it is necessary to comprehend Gaze theory.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The data analysis is performed through intensive close reading, and more specifically, key passages are read to collect lines containing the concept of Gaze. Moreover, visual and narrative dynamics, such as how one sees, who is being seen, and who is seeing, become a form of resistance. The application of Laura Mulvey's (2006) male Gaze and hooks' (2012) oppositional Gaze, the research explores how pivotal characters' challenge white patriarchal structures and strongly reclaim and gain control over the total story's moral lesson and final message.

The approach of Gaze is directly proportional to the research questions; it explores how Ward's novel challenges the rich and white

characters around them through male Gaze and how the pivotal character's mental approach or vision works as a source of self-definition and resistance. In the current research, the application of Gaze theory to *Let Us Descend* enriches existing research, filling a gap and providing a new perspective on narrative structure and visual symbolism. The applied methodology is suitable and effective, as it finds answers to the research questions and meets the study goals. Gaze is employed as a theoretical framework to conduct a literary analysis of the novel *Let Us Descend*, clarifying that Ward's work effectively shapes the novel's structure, vision, and representation. Thus, the application of Gaze theory and intersectional analysis significantly fills the gap and enhances the understanding of ordinary people regarding the contemporary trauma of Black women and their resistance to accepting objectivity, as well as their movement towards subjectivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current research is based on Gaze Theory, which focuses on both the male Gaze and the Oppositional Gaze. Mulvey's (2006) Male Gaze and hooks' oppositional Gaze (2012). This theoretical framework is based on an

intersectional approach, considering both gender and race. Race and gender are used for literary and visual analysis. So far, as Gaze theory is concerned, it was developed for film studies to explore how power politics affect and shape the act of being seen and looking. Researchers often employ it to examine narrative perspectives, symbolic visualization, and the sustenance or encounter of governing philosophies and personality emphasis in various literary works. Mulvey (2006) a very influential essay by the name of Visual Pleasure and another essay Narrative Cinema (1975) first time introduced the concept of male Gaze: these two famous and best read essays introduced first time the idea of male Gaze where women were positioned as passive objects; women's presence and the reason of creation in the world was only to amuse men and objects for male pleasure. In literature, the framework of Gaze is conducive to analyzing female actors, as it enables viewing women through patriarchal perspectives. This theory examines how men often deny their humanity and perceive themselves as objects of pleasure, thereby undermining their autonomy and voice. In the novel *Let Us Descend*, Ward reports differently and challenges the existing

traditions of the male Gaze by raising a voice through Annis, a young Black protagonist. Annis explains her story and can remember, watch, see, envision, and have clarity. This novel shifts the genre trends historically and in literature, portraying Black women characters as visionary. hooks' (2012) approach to the oppositional Gaze is structured to challenge Mulvey's (2006) male Gaze; the main idea behind both is the concept of spectatorship. hooks (2012) claimed that in America, Black women who are criticized develop a male Gaze and adopt an oppositional Gaze.

This framework, which encompasses the male gaze and the oppositional gaze, is the best fit for this research, as it aims to examine and explore Annis' narrative vision and her spiritual vision as well. The character Annis reclaimed her agency in the atmosphere or context in which she was living and enslaved, that is, the Black female body has been objectified. The pivotal character, Annis, resists being a figure of objectification and actively redefines herself, using her observations of encounters as a tool of resistance. Thus, the amalgamation of both theories in a single research enables the examination and exploration of the text for

structural and visual domination, as well as the identification of potential possibilities for portraying resistance, and the availability and applicability to Black pivotal female characters in literature. This amalgamation of two frameworks, or dual frameworks, helps in answering the questions that the novel *Let Us Descend* portrays the male gaze and challenges it by posing an oppositional gaze. It works on the acts of Annis in a symbolic, literal, and spiritual way. The novel also explores the concept of women reclaiming their subjectivity. This framework also aligns with the research objectives and analyzes the text's structure through interior imagery, as well as the novel, which also challenges the more dominant structures of representation. This theoretical approach provides a lens, offering a different perspective and proving to be a comprehensive understanding of the lifestyles of Black women, their issues, and how they address them. They not only reimagine and suffer but also reclaim their identity. It leaves a transformative mold, where new life and vision, agency, and a new narrative are reclaimed. Thus, the intersectional use of gaze as an application provides a new beneficiary framework for analyzing politics of visions in a recent written

novel by an American Black woman writer in *Let Us Descend*; this new framework offers a deep insight to imagine race and gender in a phase of creation and resistance of meaning through the concept of gaze theory.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a section where selected text is analyzed through the lens chosen. This research examines the chosen text through the lens of gaze theory. A critical analysis of Wards' *'Let Us Descend'* is conducted through the lens of Gaze theory, with a specific focus on gaze and oppositional gaze. Gaze theory, as proposed by Mulvey (2006), for the male gaze and hooks' (2012) oppositional gaze. Through intensive and thorough reading, the researcher examines the written narrative and builds, challenges, and redefines the dynamics of visual spectators related to power, gender, and race. Black women, such as Annis, are the central figures in the story, serving as its heart. Her character is characterized, which provides a rich context to understand and comprehend visual politics, including the recesses and deep structure of the novel. Her character is an epitome of the actual message Ward wants to convey and introduce the world to the transformation in Black women's brains, where

they are no longer objectified but have become a new creature who knows how to fight for their rights and deserves respect.

SUBVERTING THE WHITE, MALE GAZE THROUGH NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

At the core of the novel, Ward has made a bold narrative choice by telling the story from the characters' perspectives, making it more engaging. We know the story through the eyes of an African American young woman. Through presenting her boldly, Ward rejects the external effects of the objectifying gaze, which were traditionally dominant in Black slave women, and she creates a voice that was traditionally silent across all genres, like history, literature, and media. Thus, this new approach by a Black female writer introduces a direct challenge to the existing traditional white male gaze, a situation where Black women were put in a passive situation and as objects to be looked at for pleasure purposes only. Ward does not describe Annis, but it seems she speaks and tells her own story, remembering and recalling her past as she shares her account. Thus, her gaze may be said to be internal and self-directed. In her detailed description of the landscape, she sees her own body, and she does not imagine it through the

eyes of an outsider's narrator. Thus, this new development in her character aligns with hooks' theoretical framework, the oppositional gaze. This approach emphasizes Black women's power to resist objectification and shows them transforming from passive to active participants in society, as well as interpreters of their reality. Annis's trait of narration enables her to reflect on violence and power.

"I see the trees blur past, see the dirt change shade, and I do not cry. I look, and I do not look away" (Ward, 2023, p. 61).

This excerpt contains a message that Annis' role is dual as both observer and subject. The quality of her gaze is that it is direct and politicized, and it contains resistance. She paves new paths for Black women, and she rejects the idea of being a passive object. She promotes the concept of self-defiance and controls the existing stories of trauma and objectivity.

Another powerful example of her living style is that Annis does not follow her mother, who is Aza. She says that her mother taught her how to combat. The main thing is that Annis's memories and remembrances are not merely reflections of nostalgia, but a powerful visual image that guides her in life and helps her

move forward with new courage and ideas. The vision of her mother is recalled in her brain as a living thing. She learns about how her mother used to navigate life and fight for a purpose. Her memory is as real as fact; thus, her memory acts as a visual resistance, and she sees through the lens of women's empowerment, rather than being captivated by my dominance.

"She would look at me, not with softness, but with something sharper. Fierce, like I could be made of fire. And I would look back and see myself different in her eyes" (Ward, 2023, p. 78).

In the above-selected excerpt, he envisions a dual work. As Annis views the world and context in which she is living through the strong vision of her mother, she can see the dehumanizing attitude and vision of her enslavers. Annis's gaze is very helpful in transforming self-image, just like independent white people, and she developed the ability to behave as a patriarchal ruler. It is a recollection and alignment with hooks' (1992) approach that gaze can be a version of self-definition, a resistance of Black women. Annis thinks about her bodily structure; Ward's writing presents a challenge to the long-standing,

existing objectifying norms. It is also observed that there is no voyeuristic or erotic idea or description for the white male's pleasures. At the same time, Annis explains her body structure in terms of resilience, survival, and exhaustion.

“My body aches from the march, the soles of my feet cracked like dry riverbeds. But I am still walking. Still moving. Still here” (Ward, 2023, p. 109).

The above-selected excerpt demonstrates that Annis's body was an emblem of bear, endurance, dignity, and strength. She is not presented as a spectacle to be consumed by society and white men, but rather as strong, brave, and ready to challenge the world. The narrative about her body presentation is reclaiming itself, as she rejects the old and traditional concept of the male gaze and tries to infuse a new trend for Black women's bodies as not an object of consumption.

The dialogues of Annis are a reflection of the dreamlike sequence, and the novel also examines the inner world of Annis. The book presents Annis's inner experience to the reader as an internal vision. Near the middle of the story, a very vivid description of haunting moments is narrated.

“In my dream, I am looking down at myself, and I am not broken. I am glowing. I am light. They cannot see me this way but I can” (Ward, 2023, p. 172).

The scene in the above selected excerpt flips the gaze in a typical direction. Annis behaves as a powerful act of oppositional gaze, instead of letting herself be objectified by the gaze of outsiders or white men. She takes control of her self-image and sees herself as a complete and whole body, beyond the access of white men or the patriarchal gaze. The crux of the selected text is that Ward's novel challenges the dominant ways of looking at women and Black women, especially. The character F. Annis is not viewed through the eyes of other characters, but she sees the world and tells readers about the things going on around her, so readers see through her eyes. This idea gives her visual control over what has been snatched away from Black women.

VISUALITY AS RESISTANCE: SPIRITUAL SIGHT AND ANCESTRAL VISION

Ward's work also shines through Annis's ancestral and spiritual visions, challenging the dominant modes existing in society—her new phase challenges physical visibility and undeviating time. The brighter visions given to

Annis by Ward allocate her a new and different life, which is an interior, mystical, and corporeal enslavement. The story portrays her mother, Aza, as an influential figure whose visions, as she reminisces and has brighter visions, are very active throughout the novel. Annis gains insights from her memories and dreams of her mother. Her ancestral memory is an empowering tool that helps her reclaim knowledge and leads to subjectivity.

Aza, the protagonist's mother, lives in Annis's memory as real and rooted in her memory, as an ancestral power and spiritual heritage. Annis, through her strong vision, transforms the act of far-sightedness and reminiscence from surveillance into one of empowerment and regeneration. Annis's transition and shift from an objectified Black female body to one that sees into the actual, visible structures of power, resistance, and lineage make the scene a reversal from a Gaze perspective.

“She stands before me like a flame in the cold, her eyes fierce, not looking through me, but into me, as if to say: you are not only what they make of you” (Ward, 2023, p. 145).

This sentence focuses on the visions that transform from control to intimacy and later

from insight to affirmation. In this scene, the gaze is both revolutionary and maternal, offering a new perspective on spiritual recognition without subjugation. From the hook's point of view, it is an oppositional gaze, a form of self-domination and resistance, and a narrative of forging a self-defined way of knowing about things and situations. Another example can be seen when Annis envisions herself flying, transcending geographic captivity, and seems to see from a perspective that is both symbolic and liberating.

“I rise above the road and look down at the ones who have bound me. I am not there—I am here, aloft, with those who came before, and they are singing my name” (Ward, 2023, p. 193).

The scene above is an emblem of fundamental and radical rejection, as well as an act of controlling gaze. The scene also evokes a heavenly perspective and seems a scene of transformation, where being is looked at and elevated, and an act of mystical seeing occurs. Annis develops characteristics as an enslaver and is no longer seen as controlled by any gaze-like phenomenon. This situation aligns with hooks' (2012) concept of oppositional looking and critical

looking. Annis's subjectivity asserts her and frees her from the regime of visual dominance. One of the significant factors is that Ward blurs the line between the world of dreams and reality; she seems to hold spiritual perceptions and produces a valid new truth. Thus, her visions of her mom during the process of physical torment work as a political act of resistance and also as a psychological protection.

“They whip, and I see her. They spit, and I see her. They chain, and I close my eyes and she is there—her hand on my shoulder, saying: you are still mine” (Ward, 2023, p. 157).

This selected excerpt also shows repeated connection to her mother's gaze. This scene is also an emblem of ancestral protection and opposition; it also shows her connection to her mother, even after death, as both protective and personal, as well as political. Annis' gaze is a source of resistance and erasure, and in the context of enslaved people being seen by her mother. It becomes an act of revolutionary memory.

This gaze helps her resist erasure, and in a context where enslaved people were stripped of identity, seeing and being seen by her mother becomes an act of revolutionary memory.

Ward through Annis' character presents the natural world, and it seems she has dived into the spiritual world through her character. In her novel, the rivers and trees become part of the visual literary elements, and the singing of non-Western music. She resists the colonial viewpoint by portraying Annis's character.

There is a scene where Annis sees into deep water, and she sees more than just her reflection.

“The water shows me more than my face it shows her face, and her mother's, and those whose names I do not know but who live in my blood. They watch me. They do not look away” (Ward, 2023, p. 211).

The vision above shows a connection between Black women which is broken, and a reciprocal and sustaining gaze that is empowering. Thus, contrary to the objectifying gaze, this situation creates new spaces for recognition, echoing the hook's (2012) approach of gaze, i.e., an oppositional gaze, and works against existing dominant narratives. In the novel *Let Us Descend*, the mystical and spiritual sight is not escapist but confrontational; the historical violence is also tied to the strength of ancestral sense. Annis, with her bionic characteristics, can perceive the

unseen world as a reality, which shapes her new identity and places her beyond the periphery of dehumanizing logic. Ward's encounter with colonial control over perception prompts her to report her gaze on herself for self-affirmation. Thus, in *Let Us Descend*, the novel's vision becomes a means of surviving, resisting, and remembering, rather than just a vision of seeing things unknowingly.

THE POLITICS OF BEING SEEN: SPECTATORSHIP AND SURVEILLANCE

Ward's novel points out the tangling and complexities of gaze in a context where there is gendered domination and racial culture all around. She, through her book, lets us know that the white gaze is a valuable tool of control, commodification and surveillance. It aligns with Laura Mulvey's (2006) concept of the gaze as a structure of power and patriarchy. The gaze in the novel is racialized by rejecting the Black women's enforced objectification and subjectivity. It also aligns with hooks' approach that earlier Black women were excluded from the dominant visual narrative and often were seen in dehumanizing ways. The auction scene in the novel vividly depicts this approach dynamically as Annis is

seen being careful of privacy and dignity. Still, she is forced to stand bare in front of the women buyers. Thus, Ward uses the sense of gaze as a weapon that very smartly reduces her from the context of commodities and lets her enter into humanity.

“They stare at me like I am meat, like I have no name, no mother, no past. Just a price” (Ward, 2023, p. 213).

This selected excerpt demonstrates that the work of gaze is to function precisely and align with Foucault's surveillance and punishment, so it is not just a matter of seeing, but also processing, regulating, and objectifying. She challenged the context where the white audience interprets her as a thing to be owned. That was the gaze of enslavers, cold and designed to erase the subjectivity of those being enslaved. That was also directly proportional to the gendered and racialized and directly underscores hooks' argument that Black women's flesh fluctuates between hyper-invisibility and visibility, even then they were not recognized as human. It is an example of brutal connection of gender and race within slavery and economy, where Black flesh was at the same time dehumanized and objectified, by doing so, Ward emphasizes the anterior

resistance of Annis. Annis can remember her narrative and consciousness even in dire circumstances; she refuses to internalize the reasoning of the gaze. Annis' thoughts are always shown as rebellious, and her mental vision shifted towards capturing the ancestral strength that taught her the way to survive. For example, she was being watched, recalling different stories about her mother, which helped anchor her and her identity. Heroine's inner world becomes a source of flexibility and allows her to resist against the dehumanizing gaze and let her affirm herself as a human despite brutalization and slavery.

“They see a girl to sell. I remember my mother’s hand, her stories of warriors. They cannot see that. That is mine” (Ward, 2023, p. 215).

Annis uses her memory to retrieve her inner mental space, which serves as an invisible shield, making her out of context or standing her out, as it makes her illegible to those who view her as a body, not as a human being. It is entirely aligned with the hooks' approach of an oppositional gaze, which is in action, refusing to be defined as white men as spectators. Annis claims that her new approach to living, characterized by subjectivity

and resisting external definitions imposed by society, works to preserve her sense of self.

One of the harsh moments captured by Ward through her character is when she is seen walking under the watchful eyes of overseers and enslavers. In that critical moment, instead of melting and shrinking, she found support in her gaze. Ward interprets that scene very actively, challenging the existing social power structure. The character of Annis undergoes re-identification by reclaiming her agency, shifting from being an object to presenting herself as a subject who can analyse and resist any tyranny. Her acts of reinterpretation developed as a source of resistance, allowing her a momentary power of dynamics that play out at work. Affirm herself as a human despite brutalization and slavery.

“Their eyes on me are like fire, but I walk upright. I know what they want to see: a girl broken. But I do not give them that. I give them my back. I give them my silence” (Ward, 2023, p. 175).

The performance of walking against the row, reacting, and withholding shows an emotional reaction, which is essentially a form of visual defiance. One important thing is that Annis denies the role was selected for in the context

she was born and withheld the weakness they were accepting from her. There is the power of looking, hooks claims. She does not offer herself as the suspect of pain. In the novel, a turning point is also seen where Annis is seen throwing a gaze back at those who observe it. There is a message when she speaks, looking into the eyes of buyers with authority, leaving weakness and fear behind. This shift of self-recognition shifts the shift and exposes the fragility of her oppressors.

“He stares at me like I am his. But I stare back, and I see the tremble in his mouth, the way his eyes flicker, unsure. He cannot hold me with his gaze. I do not let him” (Ward, 2023, p. 219).

The reversal shown in the above excerpt illustrates the supposed power of the white gaze as Annis refuses to be passive in terms of the counter gaze. In the above act, Annis shifts the power and becomes the one who sees, but not only the one who is caught. The novel contains within it the ruthless function of the gaze in a system where enslavement is pervasive, a system that renders its main characters powerless. Annis's internal spiritual memory makes her more than a subject of surveillance, raising her stature as a foreseer. The scenes of

the novel reveal that within the scenes of objectification, Ward allows Annis to remain a human being. It is evident that even within the context of profound objectification, Annis is portrayed as having a consciousness and a desire to prove herself as a human being who is socially and politically aware. It is also observed that the novel is layered and very multifaceted. White patriarchal controls all commodities, but Annis can react through her internal memory and work against her oppressors. Through gaze, Ward claims that hooks' oppositional gaze is about reclaiming power through how a person is seen and how one wants to be seen by others, i.e., how one selects to see.

VISION AS SELF-AUTHORSHIP AND NARRATIVE CONTROL

In *Let Us Descend*, the word "seeing" refers to the act of storytelling. In Ward's novel, gaze is not just looking, but also a presentation of self-authorship, as well as a means to present the heroine, rewrite or transform her identity, and assert her new existence, agency, and reclaim control, thereby influencing how others perceive her. Her vision allows Annis to shift from being a sufferer to framing herself as a winner. That is the transition from an

oppressor to a depressor. Most importantly, from the white male gaze to the "Black women's voice". This concept itself promotes the idea that earlier Black women were enslaved and they were nameless. In earlier narratives, Black women were discussed as housekeepers, baby sitters, and nannies, and were referred to by white narrators. They lacked their own identity and were often referred to by others, frequently presented as a background. However, Annis was presented as a woman who created a space for herself in the narrative, as a dominant structure. She is both heroine and presenter and author of the narrative.

"I see myself not as they see me, but as my mother did. Whole. Worthy. Alive" (Ward, 2023, p. 301).

This selected excerpt can be viewed as a demarcation line, marking a critical shift. The Black woman Annis stops being dehumanized by the white gaze and portrays an alternative vision, drawing light from ancestral and spiritual intuition. In this line, the phrase 'I see myself' is very critical, as it shows that she has developed the ability to recognize internal recognition and reclaim her humanity and personhood. She has created an external

definition and control over her internalized trauma. This concept aligns with hooks' (2012) approach of oppositional gaze and processes a site for resistance and self-definition. Annis has control over the written web of the novel, much like the fabric of the story, through which readers experience trauma and see the world through her point of view and perspective. This concept aligns with Mulvey's (2006) perspective on the male gaze, desire, and power. Annis, as a girl, faces the brutality of the world and uses her strength to reject it. She believes in the worth of her memory and gives a new name to pain, facing it, and later converts it into her strength. Her story is an example of survival despite the violence that surrounds her. It is observed that even in isolation, she focuses on what she can assume, rather than on what is physically happening around her. Her imagination keeps her in a world of freedom, and she survives in a world of brutality and isolation as well.

"They think me animal, but I see everything. I remember their boots, the shape of the trees, the faces of the other girls. I carry it all. It is mine now" (Ward, 2023, p. 188).

In the excerpt selected above, the act of seeing is recognized as an act of political assertion.

Annis does the act of perception and reclaiming memory, and as a result, she refuses the pressure imposed on her by her white enslavers. She composes, documents, and archives what others have erased. It aligns with hooks' approach of framing gaze as a site of resistance. The oppositional gaze is not for pleasure's sake, but for survival's sake, and truth's sake, and telling the truth, and for the future.

Annis's deeply insightful spiritual visions are well-explained, and they seem like an addition to the authorship, especially self-authorship. Annis's ability to recall ancestral memories and epic knowledge explains her as she is restricted to the realities of enslavement in the physical world. The novel serves as a bridge or a fluctuation between the seen and the unseen, between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Her transformation into a new human being with a new identity upsets the dominant narratives as she reduces herself from enslaved life to subjectivity. Ward is seen as a multi-dimensional girl; she experiences pain, but she also possesses the ability to prophecy. Annis sees herself through the eyes of her parents and old ancestors. It is presented and

exemplified in a scene where the l is given as Annis is envisioned, yet not a captive.

“I dream I walk beside the river, not in chains, but in light. I see the sun catch my arms, my feet bare in the grass. No one sees me, but I see me and that is enough” (Ward, 2023, p. 284).

In the excerpt selected above, the act of seeing is recognized as an act of political assertion. Annis does the act of perception and reclaiming memory, and as a result, she refuses the pressure imposed on her by her white enslavers. She composes, documents, and archives what others have erased. It aligns with hooks' approach of framing gaze as a site of resistance. The oppositional gaze is not for pleasure's sake, but for survival's sake, and truth's sake, and telling the truth, and for the future.

Annis's deeply insightful spiritual visions are well-explained, and they seem like an addition to the authorship, especially self-authorship. Annis's ability to recall ancestral memories and epic knowledge explains her as she is restricted to the realities of enslavement in the physical world. The novel serves as a bridge or a fluctuation between the seen and the unseen, between the physical and the spiritual

worlds. Her transformation into a new human being with a new identity upsets the dominant narratives as she reduces herself from enslaved life to subjectivity. Ward is seen as a multi-dimensional girl; she experiences pain, but she also possesses the ability to prophecy. Annis sees herself through the eyes of her parents and old ancestors. It is presented and exemplified in a scene where the I is given as Annis is envisioned, yet not a captive.

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS THROUGH GAZE

The analysis above presents a clear picture of Ward's recent novel, *Let Us Descend*, where a radical narrative of gaze is reclaimed from the leading and dominant structures of gender and race, which still prevail in America. The novel is presented in the form of a first-person narrative. The narration is symbolic, spiritual, psychological and subverts the powerful dominant white male gaze. The white male gaze is an emblem that Black women's voice is voiceless, their images are imperishable, invisible or hyper visible, and they do not have any agency. However, Annis, the pivotal figure, resists the structure through her gaze, challenges subjugation, and transforms from a state of subjugation to one of subjectivity. Her

sharp vision and memory help in transformation. She portrays a new canvas of her identity, moving from the unknown to the known through her gaze.

The analysis answers the research question of how Ward's *Let Us Descend* resists and subverts the dominant white, male gaze through its narrative structure, characterization, and ritual vision. The approach of gaze grants her control over herself and refuses the social frame of the patriarchal approach. The gaze throughout the text serves as an organizing force, reflecting her spiritual connection with her mom, her approach to reminiscences, and her refusal to submit to powers. Her challenge to the traditional system and her visual capacity align with Mulvey's (2006) approach. The presence of this approach in Annis serves as a means to empower her to assert her power and agency.

The analysis addresses the research question: How does the protagonist's gaze function as a form of resistance and reclamation of subjectivity? The analysis displays that Annis's gaze is innately oppositional. It also aligns with hook's (2012) approach; for example, Annis's act of looking appears political. Occasionally, she refuses to be a passive girl and does not

want to be an object; instead, she wants to be a decisive individual. Through her gaze, she consumes herself as an authoritative and objectifying human being.

At any moment, whether it is the moment of auction or the moment of spiritual awakening, the character of Annis is critical, as she is self-affirming and generates her own new identity, despite being enslaved. This situation of an oppositional gaze becomes a source of her new condition of subjectivity and a force that enables her to resist dehumanization.

The analysis of the novel through the lens of gaze fills a gap in the research. The gaze theory, as explored by Mulvey (2006) and hooks, (2012) provides two lenses through which to analyse the research extensively. During the analysis of the text, it has been observed that various themes emerge, including trauma management, ancestry, visual politics, memory, and reminiscence. Throughout the entire analysis, spectatorship and vision serve as both tools of conflict and resistance in the transition of the Black protagonist. This new filling of the gap raises a new criticism of Ward's work, also contributing to feminist Black literary theory, and it offers a new insight for vision and gaze as a means of

resisting identity. The analysis also confirms that the research objectives have been fulfilled. Ward's use of literal gaze as a narrative and symbolic device disturbs the dominant mode of symbolic mechanism and Black female subjectivity. The analysis also emerges as a symbol of visual and narrative resistance. The results demonstrate that the act of surviving is inseparable from the act of seeing, surviving, remembering and reclaiming selfhood. In the analysis, the function of gaze is not resisted but reinvented. The gaze acts as a source of narrative sovereignty and a historical intervention. Thus, Ward's novel is full of lessons; she not only tells a story of a Black girl but also allocates her the power of the five senses and the power to challenge existing traditional norms and create her own identity from passive to active, as a visionary girl who resists against centuries of hegemonic silence.

DISCUSSION

Jesmyn Ward's *Let Us Descend*, published in 2023, is a recent novel that has become a bestseller. This novel focuses on marginalized Black women. In this novel, the concept of gaze is not only recuperated but redefined—the research centers on hegemony and resistance, race and gender, and challenges to the

hegemonic system. The research is grounded in the frameworks of Mulvey's (2006) gaze and hooks'(2012) oppositional gaze, respectively. The study revolves around the two basic research questions: how the novel resists the dominant white, male gaze, and how the protagonist's gaze functions as a tool of reclamation and subjectivity.

The novel is written in first-person narrative, and it seems as if Ward herself is its protagonist and representative of Black women. It can be said that the story is a memoir of her previous life. The language of the book is metaphorical and spiritual, which makes this novel a work with universal traits and celestial significance. A power has been bestowed upon a Black teenage girl, endowing her with visual authority and the ability to transform situations from one phase to another. The author endowed her protagonist with extreme and authoritative power, encompassing the control of gaze and the power of authority. There was a tradition that was made to erase Black women's bodies. For example, Annis once asserted, "I see myself not as me but as my mother did; whole, worthy, alive." It exemplifies that Annis has undergone a redefinition of herself, as she is beyond the

commodities, beyond the enslaved person, and away from white supremacy. Thus, the analysis reveals that the concept of gaze is employed to uncover and reframe acts of resistance, memory, and self-authorship. Although maternal aspects have been discussed earlier, this research's analysis addresses the research gap by incorporating a spiritual aspect that was not previously discussed, and it has not been previously applied to this novel to examine the politics of being and seeing.

May existing theories apply gaze theory in literature and on digital culture in the European digital context. However, all these left a gap around the gaze that black women are subject to in American fiction, particularly in contemporary fiction. Thus, this research analysis fills the gap by applying gaze theory to Ward's novel *Let Us Descend*, shedding light on the fact that the book is not just a retelling of trauma, but is based on transformation and re-inscription, moving from a tool of colonizers to a feminist black power tool. For example, there is a scene where Annis walks up the ramp of the auction block of Black women, she exclaims that the white spectators "They stare at me like I am meat, like I have no name,

no mother, no past. Just a price". Her ability to perceive the situation and mentally reject it reveals her gaze and refusal to accept the auction. This situation is dually aligned with hooks'(2012) approach of an oppositional gaze, as Annis has developed not only the ability to look at, but also the capacity to resist and narrate the past powerfully and critically. Annis can visualize past events in the moments of extreme violence and hyper visibility. Annis's gaze continues as an epistemological tool. Through her gaze, she can evoke in her the ancestral knowledge of how to survive with dignity. Her gaze for her mama hovered in front of her eyes as "standing like a flame saying: you are not only what they make of you". Her imagery reinforces not optical but spiritual images, making her a strong protagonist as a representative for cultural memory and resistance.

Thus, the title of the current research is justified, as it proves that its protagonist is too strong to survive even in slavery. Yet, she also possesses the ability to transform and transition her life. She shifts from the phase of weak to the phase of strong Black women. Its research offers a literary scholarship and a message for those who are used to omitting

historical fiction. This research is an addition to the field of critical discourse analysis, offering a literary scholarship that usually overlooks the visual power entrenched in historical fiction. The study demonstrates that gaze in *Let Us Descend* is not a passive act, but a showcase of resistance and liberty, which destabilizes the existing hegemonic centre in America.

RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

The results demonstrate that the novel serves as a successful platform against the white male gaze, as it re-centers narrative, re-centers narrative authority, re-centers visual subjectivity, and re-centers spiritual vision for Black enslaved females. The close textual analysis of the novel reveals that Annis's voice is presented in a first-person, narrative writing style, which aligns with the oppositional gaze.

Through a thorough reading and close textual analysis of the selected novel, it is found that Annis is the protagonist. She relates her story in the first person; her acute sense of vision acts as an oppositional gaze, objectifying the spectator, and she reclaims her powers, developing abilities and protocols of speaking and seeing. Annis' gaze works at multiple levels as she is found resisting Annis' gaze

works at various levels as she is found resisting Annis' gaze works at multiple levels as she is found resisting Annis' gaze works at various levels as she is found resisting the literal objectification, she is found reinterpreting the spiritual images, she is found rewriting her own identity. She is found to draw help from her ancestral knowledge by utilizing her sharp and acute sense of imagination, which is referred to as her gaze. Gaze helped her rewrite her identity and helped her transform from a passive, enslaved Black woman to a free woman, no longer a piece of property but a free girl who has decisive power. The novel serves as a lesson for every reader, demonstrating that a change occurs within the human brain a mental transformation, not a physical one. If we are mentally prepared, we can do whatever we like to do. Thus, these lessons align with hooks' (2012) oppositional gaze, which showcases that Black women are not merely a piece of flesh to be sold for the pleasure of white men but are resistant and creative. Another critical finding is that Annis redefines the concept of gaze, shifting it from domination to interior knowledge, thereby developing the processes of healing and spiritual agency. The research also discloses

that Ward is not only engaging with the mental function of gaze, but she also applies it to an enslaved Black girl, which was not identified by any author in their book. Thus, vision in her personality is wielded but imposed upon her, which makes it a genre that can see and act, later resist and react, and reclaim a new identity. Thus, the research paradigm's findings directly address the research questions and objectives, thereby filling the research gap based on contemporary Black women's literature.

WORKS CITED

- Bona, Mary Jo. Mothers, Mobility, Narrative: Materiality in US Literature. 2025, pp. 1-250.
- Cherry, Alissa. Creative Pathways for Creative Workers: An Exploration of Pathways to Work for Young Black Women in Film and Television in the United States. Diss., University of Toronto, 2025.
- Cox, C. M., et al. "Infertility prevalence and the methods of estimation from 1990 to 2021: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *Human Reproduction Open*, vol. 2022, no. 4, 2022, pp. hoac051.
- Dey, Ayesha R. Contemporary Action Heroines: The Quest for Emancipation

- from *The Male Gaze*. Diss., University of Huddersfield, 2019.
- Gregg, Mary. "The Harm of Harmful Visual Jokes." *The Untold Help of Harmful Visual Jokes: No Funny Business*, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025, pp. 39-78.
- Hooks, Bell. "The oppositional gaze: Black female spectators." *Black American Cinema*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 288-302.
- Hurwitz, Madeline. "Pretty When You Cry": Feminine Melancholia in the Age of Social Media. 2023.
- Jacobs, Charlotte E. "Developing the 'oppositional gaze': Using critical media pedagogy and Black feminist thought to promote Black girls' identity development." *Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 85, no. 3, 2016, pp. 225-238.
- Keeble, Arin. "Siblings, kinship and allegory in Jesmyn Ward's fiction and nonfiction." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2020, pp. 40-51.
- Khedhir, Yesmina. *Narratives of Survival: Memory, Trauma, and Healing in Jesmyn Ward's Salvage the Bones and Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Diss., Debreceni Egyetem, 2024.
- Klestil, Matthias. "Blackness and the Anthropocene sublime in Jesmyn Ward's fiction." *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2025, pp. 37-55.
- Luo, Kexin, et al. "Reflecting the male gaze: Quantifying female objectification in 19th and 20th century novels." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2403.17158*, 2024.
- Luo, Xueting. *Spiritual echoes in motion: Integrating voice and movement in Chinese poetry and Kunqu dance as an eco-somatic practice*. 2023, pp. 225-242.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." *Media and cultural studies: Keywords*, 2006, pp. 342-352.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." *The Sexual Subject*, Routledge, 2013, pp. 22-34.
- Nivetha, Christy M., and K. Hema. "Delineation of Male Gaze in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, vol. 5, no. 6, 2024, pp. 686-689. DOI: (link unavailable).

Pauley, Donna René. "The Past Is Never Dead" in Mississippi: History, Memory, and Repair in the Writings of Natasha Trethewey and Jesmyn Ward. 2021.

Tan, Jing. "Visual Hegemony and Resistance: Race, Gender, and Gaze in Jasmine Ward's *Let Us Descend*." *Journal of Social Science Humanities and Literature*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2025, pp. 33-40.

Thompson, Danielle Fetters. *Instructional Coaching Model That Positively Impacts*

Literacy Proficiency. Indiana Wesleyan University, 2024.

Ward Jr, Jerry W. "African American Literature in the 21st Century and in the Context of American Literary History." *Foreign Language & Literature Research*, vol. 2, 2025.

Ward, Jesmyn. *Let Us Descend: A Novel*. Simon and Schuster, 2024.