

Resisting Power: Analyzing Power Abuse and Resistance in Ridley Scott's 'The Last Duel' through Foucauldian Lens

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Abstract

This study is entitled “Power Abuse in The Last Duel Film”. This study aims at analyzing the power abuse committed by a count Pierre against a noble Jean and how Jean deals with the power abuse against him. The object of the study is taken from a film entitled The Last Duel (2021), directed by Ridley Scott. This study uses the qualitative method to present the findings in both essay and picture form by examining the narrative and cinematography elements. Moreover, Michel Foucault’s theory regarding power, power relations, and power resistance is used to address the issues presented in the film. Foucault’s theory dictates that the goal is to understand what it means to be human subjects, which implies that studying power relations and power abuse is part of a bigger picture where power relations are a mode of actions on possible actions exercised towards others and power resistance is a response against the power abuse. The results of the study show that the count abuses his power through coercion, authority, and persuasion that harms Jean in terms of wealth and dignity. At the same time, Jean displays power resistance against the power abuse by suing Pierre and proposes for a duel to the death against his confidant.

Keywords: Power abuse, power relations, power resistance.

A. Introduction

Adolescence is a period marked by profound self-exploration and identity Power abuse has become a pervasive social issue with profound implications for individuals and societies. It encompasses the misuse or manipulation of power by individuals or institutions, leading to unjust practices that oppress and undermine. The effects of power abuse can range from the violation of human rights to the perpetuation of inequality and social injustice. Understanding how power abuse operates and its profound impact is essential to address and prevent such abuses. According to Pamugari (2023) in Cxomedia.com, power abuse can occur in a wide range of settings, from personal to political, and has been discussed in various fields, including sociology, psychology, and cultural studies.

The choice to focus on power abuse as the topic is driven by its pervasive influence on individuals and communities, affecting diverse domains such as politics, institutions, workplaces, and personal relationships. Such abuse perpetuates social

hierarchies and undermines the fundamental principles of fairness and equality. This study aims to examine and analyze the depiction of power abuse and its consequences. Drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault's (1928) theory of power relations, which posits that power is not solely possessed by individuals but exists within a network of relationships embedded in social institutions and practices, this study aspires to contribute to efforts promoting justice, equality, and the prevention of power abuse in contemporary society.

Power abuse exists not only in real life but also in literary works, especially in films. Films, as one of the most popular media nowadays, often aim to illustrate the importance of power in human existence. However, they also portray various human issues and problems. A film serves as a medium to express stories, ideas, and feelings, akin to other literary works, albeit with a more straightforward storyline while conveying deep messages. The choice of "The Last Duel" (2021) as the object of analysis is motivated by its compelling narrative and its potential for shedding light on power abuse within a historical context. The film's depiction of power dynamics and the consequences of its abuse offer a rich source for understanding the complexities of power relations.

Literary works such as films provide tools to analyze and explore stories. The narrative elements, including plot, theme, setting, characters, characterization, and point of view, play crucial roles in shaping the storytelling process. In filmmaking, cinematography is significant, as it is utilized to illustrate the story visually. Blain Brown's statement that "The term cinematography is from the Greek roots meaning 'writing with motion'" highlights the importance of movement and visual storytelling within the realm of filmmaking.

Power can be defined as a way of influencing and causing others to act, behave, or think in a certain way. It encompasses the ability of individuals or groups to influence the actions of others. Power relations have constantly existed throughout society, manifesting whenever one individual or group can impact the lives of others. However, power abuse arises when leaders evade basic administrative responsibilities while manipulating controlled realms for personal gain at the expense of others.

According to Foucault (1978, p. 95), power and resistance are interdependent, with resistance being inherent to power structures rather than an external force. Resistance challenges dominant power structures and creates spaces for alternative ways of thinking and being.

B. Method

In this study, a descriptive qualitative approach was applied, using a film as the object of analysis in essay form. Qualitative approaches entail diverse data sources, including words, sentences, texts, pictures, etc. Data were collected from the film "The Last Duel" (2021) directed by Ridley Scott, depicting power abuse during the wars of France and England in the 14th century. The data collection process involved

watching and re-watching the film to understand its narrative and cinematographic elements. Key scenes related to the study topic were identified, captured, and analyzed to reveal power abuse among the main characters. Foucault's concept of power relations guided the analysis, particularly in relation to select key scenes.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Power Abuse Operates through Coercion by Deprivation of Property Rights

The first instance of power abuse in this film is found in Chapter One, which is told through the perspective of Jean de Carrouges. In this scene, Jean and Pierre's confidant, Le Gris, visit an area described as vast gardens called Aunou-le-Faucon. Aunou-le-Faucon is valuable land meant to be part of the dowry of Jean's wife, Marguerite. However, before the wedding, Aunou-le-Faucon was confiscated by Pierre to pay off tax debt to Marguerite's father. Subsequently, Le Gris explains the borders of Aunou-le-Faucon that have become his property. Jean also mentions why the land suddenly became his, even though it was part of Jean's wife's dowry. Le Gris explains that Pierre gave the land to him as gratitude for his services as Pierre's accountant.

In the next scene, in Chapter Two, told through the perspective of Le Gris, it reveals that Pierre sent Le Gris and two of his men to collect a tax debt from Marguerite's father. Le Gris collects forcibly and rudely. Pierre ordered him to take Aunou-le-Faucon even though it exceeded the amount of the tax debt. On the other hand, Aunou-le-Faucon was promised to be Jean's because it was part of his wife's dowry. But Pierre had more power, so Marguerite's father could not fight back and let Aunou-le-Faucon fall into Pierre's hands.

The next scene, told through the perspective of Jean's wife, Marguerite, reveals that the precious land called Aunou-le-Faucon has forcibly changed ownership to Pierre. This was directly conveyed by Robert, Marguerite's father. Robert gave the reason that he could not pay the rent and was forced to sell it. But Jean was angry about it because he had previously been promised to own the land.

2. Power Abuse Operates through Authority by Forcibly Taking a Position

This part will reveal the power abuse by Count Pierre. When Jean was in Paris, which was three days' ride from where he lived, news came to him that his father had died. Jean immediately went home, but when he arrived, his father's body had already been buried, so he did not have time to see his father for the last time. So Jean went straight to his mother. Jean had been waiting for this moment because he would inherit his father's captaincy. But Jean's mother told Jean that he would not inherit his father's captaincy because Pierre gave the captaincy to someone else. Pierre abused his power to harm Jean in terms of dignity and honor because the captaincy should be inherited by the heir.

The next scene supports the term of power abuse by Pierre, which harms Jean in terms of dignity and honor. In the night, Jean tells his wife, Marguerite, about what he did during the day. Marguerite listens well to Jean while cleaning Jean's feet. He reveals that he went to Pierre who was celebrating the ceremony of giving the captaincy to Le Gris. Furthermore, Jean reveals to Marguerite that he was angry, but he spoke well with Pierre. Jean also reveals that next to Pierre was Le Gris, and he had accused Le Gris of instigating Pierre.

The next scene, told through the perspective of Jacques Le Gris, shows that Le Gris received the captaincy. The granting of the captaincy was done with a legal ceremony attended by a priest and the troops. The granting of the captaincy was done directly by Pierre without regard to Jean. After the ceremony, they had a celebration party on the spot. At the time of the celebration, not long after Jean came over unannounced, Jean immediately expressed his anger because he had felt wronged by Pierre's actions.

3. Power Abuse Operates through Persuasion by Defending the Wrong

As a powerful person, one should behave fairly, but not Pierre, who abuses his power by protecting his confidant who is guilty of raping Jean's wife. In this scene, Pierre asks his confidant, Le Gris, to meet him. There Pierre interrogates Le Gris, who is accused of raping Jean's wife, Marguerite. Pierre asks him to confess, and Pierre promises to protect him against the rape accusation. And Le Gris did confess. Then Pierre plans to blame Marguerite by accusing her of dreaming about the rape. Pierre abused his power by protecting his confidant who was guilty of the rape of Jean's wife and assumed that Jean's wife was at fault.

In the next scene, it shows Pierre conducting a public trial attended by quite a lot of people. At the public trial, Pierre protects Le Gris with his words. Pierre makes a speech to convince people that Le Gris' rape accusation is slander without evidence. Pierre also accuses Marguerite of confessing that she had only dreamt of the rape. Furthermore, Pierre ordered to immediately send the results of the trial to Paris so as not to be investigated further by the king.

4. The Exercise of Power Resistance to Deal with Power Abuse

This scene is set during the celebration after the captaincy ceremony. Jean, who had learned that his father's captaincy was not given to him, came to Pierre who was at the celebration. He vents his anger at Pierre who has wronged him in wealth and dignity. He also said he would sue Pierre. And in their conversation, it was revealed that Jean had already sued Pierre and threatened to sue him again for the second time because of Pierre's power abuse, but his attempt failed because Pierre has higher power.

5. Jean Travels to Paris and Proposes a Duel to the Death to the King

This scene shows Jean confronting King Charles VI in private. Jean secretly traveled to Paris to file a lawsuit directly to the king for the rape of his wife. Jean did this because if he went to court then Pierre who ruled in his region would reject him. Jean proposes to leave it to God to show who is right and who is wrong by dueling to the death because God will save the righteous. Although this custom had been outlawed, the king's advisors asked the king to accept it because there had been no duels during his lifetime. On the other hand, Pierre was no longer able to refute this lawsuit because it had been accepted directly by the king.

6. Jean Duels Against Pierre's man to resistance his Power Abuse

In this scene, in Paris at a predetermined time, Jean dueled with Pierre's man Le Gris. Le Gris is Pierre's confidant to whom Pierre has given valuable land and a captaincy through his power abuse over Jean. Le Gris was also the person Pierre protected when he was caught in a rape case against Jean's wife. The duel was witnessed by the king and queen, as well as all Parisians. The duel is won by Jean with the death of Le Gris, which shows that God has shown who is righteous through who wins this duel.

D. Conclusion

Power abuse in social life involves power relations and potential resistance from those harmed. Victims reveal instances of abuse, while resistance stems from their will and strength. Abusers may benefit, but victims suffer losses. Power relations involve individuals as subjects, with actions occurring within a range of possibilities. In "The Last Duel" (2021), Count Pierre abuses power against nobleman Jean, causing harm in wealth, position, and dignity. Jean resists by suing Pierre and challenging him to a duel. Despite initial setbacks, Jean ultimately prevails, demonstrating resistance against abuse of power and achieving justice.

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