

## Power Resistance in The Lighthouse: Illuminating Domination, Subjugation and Exploitation

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### Abstract

*This study investigates how power is exercised and resisted in Robert Eggers' The Lighthouse (2019), a psychological film depicting two isolated lighthouse keepers in a deteriorating relationship. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research analyzes selected scenes through both narrative and cinematographic elements to reveal the dynamics of power and its resistance. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, the study adopts a post-structuralist critical framework to examine how domination, subjugation, and exploitation function as discursive mechanisms of control. In Foucault's terms, power is not merely repressive but relational and productive, exercised upon the actions of others and always met with forms of resistance. This research finds that the supervisor figure enacts power through threats, identity construction, and control over labor, while the assistant engages in both verbal and non-verbal resistance—challenging authority, identity labels, and withheld economic rewards. These power struggles are also visually represented through shot composition, lighting, and character blocking. The findings demonstrate how film can function as a discursive site where power relations are not only portrayed but also critically interrogated. This study contributes to the expanding discourse on cinematic representations of power and resistance, and it underscores the utility of Foucauldian theory in film criticism.*

**Keywords:** domination, exploitation, Michel Foucault, power resistance, subjugation

### A. Introduction

Power is a pervasive yet often invisible force that shapes human behavior, social structures, and interpersonal relationships. It is not confined to institutions or sovereign authorities alone but is embedded in the micro-practices of daily life—whether in schools,

households, workplaces, or media (Foucault, 1982). Despite its omnipresence, power remains a contested and evolving concept, raising foundational questions: What mechanisms allow certain individuals or institutions to influence others? What are the limits of such influence? And how do the subjects of power respond, resist, or reconfigure these dynamics?

The study of power and its resistance is not new; philosophers from Aristotle to Foucault have long debated its nature and manifestations. However, Michel Foucault's reconceptualization of power as relational, non-hierarchical, and exercised through discourse provides a nuanced lens for analyzing modern subjectivity and control. In Foucault's view, power is not merely repressive but productive—it constructs identities, regulates bodies, and orchestrates social relations through subtle mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and subjection (Foucault, 1997). Importantly, where there is power, there is always the possibility of resistance (Foucault, 1978).

Within this theoretical framework, the present study identifies a gap in the application of Foucauldian power analysis to contemporary visual narratives, particularly psychological cinema. While considerable scholarship has examined power in literature and institutional contexts, fewer studies have systematically investigated how power and resistance are performed and visualized through film form, character embodiment, and spatial arrangement. This is especially true of *The Lighthouse* (2019), a film whose dense symbolic texture and claustrophobic mise-en-scène render it a compelling case for discourse analysis. The evolving power dynamics between the film's two characters—an older lighthouse supervisor and a younger assistant—are portrayed through acts of domination, resistance, surveillance, subjugation, and identity negotiation.

Rather than treating *The Lighthouse* as mere entertainment or psychological horror, this study approaches the film as a discursive site—a space where power is not only enacted but also interrogated. The film's minimal cast, isolated setting, and black-and-white cinematography function as aesthetic choices that intensify the dynamics of power and resistance. As the narrative unfolds, the characters shift from hierarchical roles to antagonistic equals, enacting a series of confrontations that mirror broader questions of labor, authority, submission, and autonomy.

This study aims to examine how discursive power operates within the narrative and visual structures of *The Lighthouse*, using a Foucauldian lens to identify instances of domination, subjugation, and exploitation, as well as their corresponding resistances. Employing a qualitative, descriptive method, and drawing on post-structural literary criticism, this research contributes to the growing body of work on cinematic discourse and visual representations of power. It situates *The Lighthouse* not only as a film but as a critical text that allows us to see how power is constructed, resisted, and ultimately undone in moments of psychological rupture.

## B. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, which is well-suited for analyzing complex social dynamics represented in narrative and visual media. As Yilmaz (2013) explains, qualitative research is emergent, interpretive, inductive, and naturalistic, aiming to reveal how meaning is constructed and enacted within specific social and cultural contexts. Given that literature and film often reflect and reproduce power relations, this approach provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for examining how power operates between characters in *The Lighthouse*.

The object of analysis—*The Lighthouse* (2019), written and directed by Robert Eggers—is treated as a literary and cinematic artifact. The researcher views the film as a discursive site where power is dramatized, performed, and visualized. The analysis draws from Michel Foucault's (1982) theory of power, specifically his concepts of domination, subjugation, and exploitation, as outlined in *The Subject and Power*. The analytic framework is deductive, using Foucault's typology as a lens to identify and categorize instances of power and resistance. This deductive structure allows the study to trace how different power modalities manifest in selected scenes and how resistance emerges in response.

### 1. Data Source

The primary data source is *The Lighthouse* (2019). Secondary sources include scholarly literature on power, film analysis, and Foucauldian theory. The film was viewed repeatedly in full and segmented formats to enable close reading of narrative and visual elements.

### 2. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed these steps:

1. Close viewing: The film was watched multiple times to internalize plot structure, character dynamics, and thematic tensions.
2. Identification of key scenes: Both narrative progression and visual cues (e.g., blocking, lighting, camera angles) were used to identify moments where power relations were most salient.
3. Scene documentation: Selected scenes were captured as still images to support visual-textual analysis.
4. Coding of power instances: Scenes were mapped to Foucault's categories (domination, subjugation, exploitation), which also served as thematic codes.

### 3. Analytic Strategy

The analysis prioritizes both narrative content (dialogue, character behavior, symbolic motifs) and cinematographic form (shot composition, spatial arrangement, lighting). Narrative and visual elements were interpreted in dialogue with Foucault's theory, with narrative bearing slightly more analytical weight due to the film's minimalist setting and character-driven structure. However, cinematography was treated not merely as aesthetic, but as ideologically loaded—reinforcing or undermining verbalized power structures.

### 4. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher acknowledges their own interpretive position as a literary and media studies scholar, shaped by prior engagement with Foucauldian discourse and interest in the intersections of film and ideology. To mitigate interpretive bias, the analysis consciously avoids over-reading or moralizing character behavior, instead focusing on discursive practices and structural relations. The goal is not to pathologize the characters but to understand how cinematic discourse reproduces or challenges hierarchies of power.

## C. Findings and Discussion

### 1. Power Relations Depicted through the Exercise of Power in the Film *The Lighthouse* (2019)

In every line of work, in every establishment, there will always be people working in different positions. Some people through experience, knowledge, and time served have been employed at higher positions than newer, less experienced people which creates a dynamic in power relations between them, such as the power relations between Wake, a lighthouse keeper supervisor, and Winslow, his assistant in the Film *The Lighthouse*. As a mode of action on possible actions, the power relations between the supervisor and the assistant can be examined through how power is exercised. To begin analyzing how power is exercised between the supervisor and the assistant in the film, Foucault (1982, p.780) suggests using resistance as a response to highlight power relations, locate its source, and find out which method is used in its application. Foucault (1892, p.781) then goes on to say that there are three types of struggles against power relations which are struggles against domination, exploitation, and subjugation. This implies that based on the struggles against the exercise of power, one can identify the methods used to exercise it. Domination involves exercising power backed by force and imposes either violence, threats, or both. Exploitation involves separating people from what they earn. Subjectivity or subjection involves ties that the person has on themselves which submits them to others, which implies that it is about separating a person's identity and giving it back to them. It is important to mention that these three methods of exercising power can either be isolated or mixed together and when they are mixed, one usually comes out on top while the rest reinforces it. Selected essential scenes from the film will be used as case examples to highlight this point in the next section.

Furthermore, Foucault (1982, p.787) mentions that there are blocks of adjustment that arrange objective capacities, relationships of communication, and power relations into regulated and coordinated systems. Take for example the lighthouse establishment in the film where *Wake*, the supervisor, is in charge of a specific lighthouse off the coast of New England. The arrangement and positioning of buildings, the worker's manual, and the workers themselves who live there, all make up the objective capacities. The activities which ensure apprenticeship and how the assistant should behave are carried out through relationships of communication which include orders and encouragement. And finally, the series of power relations are exercised through hierarchy, enclosure, surveillance, rewards, and punishment. These blocks of adjustments, according to Foucault (1982, p.788), help identify the three realities that are concerned with exercising power to not only identify how the realities are regulated and coordinated into a system, but also to identify how the three realities are wielded by those who exercise power and the type discipline that takes superiority between the relationships of the three realities, which in film's case is obedience and power relations, like in prison-type disciplines.

Moreover, to approach the notion of how to analyze power relations between the supervisor and assistant in the film, Foucault (1982, p.792) introduces critical shifts to avoid analyzing institutions but instead focus on power relations between the characters, which are as follows. First, a system based on distinguishing who gets to do and decide what and condition the action of others are and why. Concerning power relations between the supervisor and assistant, it is obvious that the supervisor is the one who gets to decide, and as for why, it is largely due to the differences in know-how competence between both characters. Second, the objective or the purpose of why the supervisor exercises power over the assistant and based on numerous observations of the film, the supervisor's objective can be boiled down to the maintenance of privilege and the exercise of statutory authority. Third, instruments, the supervisor acts on the actions of the assistant by use of confrontation, threats, surveillance, and encouragement to show that the supervisor does not always exercise power in the same way. Fourth, is the form of institution which is the lighthouse establishment. And finally, the degree of rationalization or the complexity of the bringing of power relations into play includes factors like the certainty of results based on the effectiveness of the instruments used in proportion to the possible cost. For the most part, the instruments used by the supervisor are effective in getting the assistant to do and act the way he wants; however, it is not worth the cost in the end. In addition, throughout the film, the supervisor uses various types of strategies in exercising power concerning power relations which include winning solutions, reproducing power over time to maintain power, exercising power on actions while anticipating a counter-response and responding to it, and using confrontation strategies which will be presented and explained below.

As a closing statement and perhaps the most important point in this subchapter, it is worth re-stating that there are conditions that makeup power relations, these conditions are the specific nature of power relations, its essence, and without them, the exercise of power cannot be considered power relations. These specific conditions of power relations according to Foucault (1982, p.789) isn't that violence and consent can't be a part of power relations; however, at its core, the very essence of power relations lies with

subjectivity and being acknowledged as subjects as well as acting or being exercised on a field of possible actions as power is something that provokes, tempts, nudges, or in extreme cases forbids completely. Moreover, Foucault (1982, p.790) mentions that power can only be exercised on free subjects to a certain degree. Therefore, freedom is an important element in power relations; however, only to a certain degree as real freedom happens within constraints and possibilities where a subject can either push back and breakthrough or get pushed back and constrained.

### 1.1. The Exercise of Dominative Power

The earliest display of the exercise of power in the form of domination exercised by the supervisor towards the assistant happens in during the first dinner they have together where the supervisor establishes power relations between them. At the dinner table, *Wake*, the supervisor, pours alcohol in both their cups, says a sailor's version of a prayer, and instigates a toast. *Winslow*, the assistant, rejects the offer of an alcoholic beverage to which *Wake* states that it is bad luck to leave a toast unfinished. *Winslow* then states that according to the manual that he read, drinking on duty is against regulation.

Figure 1

*Wake establishes power relations during first dinner*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [07:58], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

In response to Winslow's rejection and statement about the regulation on drinking on duty from the manual, *Wake* says, "Didn't picture you a reading man" (Eggars, 2019, 07:51-07:53). Winslow, who understands his position as his assistant, responds by saying, "Well, I ain't tryin' for trouble" (Eggars, 2019, 07:56-07:57). Immediately, *Wake* exercises power in the form of domination reinforced by subjectivity through a relationship of communication by saying, "**Then you'll do as I say. That's in yer book too**" (Eggars, 2019, 07:58-08:02).

The domination part of the exercise of power comes in the form of a threat that if you don't do what I say, then there will be trouble. While the subjective reinforcement comes from *Wake* using the manual against *Winslow* which now ties *Winslow* himself to a new identity as an assistant lighthouse keeper who must obey his supervisor. The objective of *Wake*'s exercise of power, in this case, is the maintenance of privilege where he acts in response to make sure that *Winslow* knows his place. Furthermore, through their conversation, it is clear that *Wake* applies all three senses of power relation strategies which are means and mechanisms to get what he wants, modes of action on possible action of others by anticipating *Winslow*'s counter-response, and the confrontational strategy where *Wake* tries to fix the power relation due to *Winslow*'s insubordination.

The scene uses a medium shot at eye level to capture both characters from the knees up revealing their body language as *Winslow* is seen with his head down, signifying consent, while *Wake* is looking directly at him, clearly showing both their positions in the establishment and who is in charge. Moreover, besides capturing both characters, the medium shot used in this scene also captures their environment for context; however, the deliberate use of dim lighting in this scene is done not only to signify the time of day but also to keep the audience's focus on the two characters rather than the background. In addition, the juxtaposition between the darkness of this scene and the title of the film, *The Lighthouse*, is a bleak feature intended to build a claustrophobic atmosphere where both characters are stuck in a small, remote space together with nowhere to go which intensifies the conflict.

In this scene, further into the film, *Wake* exercises power in the form of domination towards *Winslow*.

**Figure 2**

*Wake exercises surveillance by watching Winslow work while taking notes*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [28:05], by Robert Eggers (director) 2019

In this scene, *Wake* exercises power towards *Winslow* in the form of domination. *Wake* uses confrontational strategy of surveillance to maintain power relations by watching *Winslow* work while writing in his logbook. This particular case of exercising power is an example taken straight out of Foucault's essay (p.794) where *Wake* now uses strategy of power relations in the third sense, confrontation strategy to do two things, first, the fixing of power relations as it has become unglued due to *Winslow*'s resistance in order to get *Winslow* to become submissive again. And second, *Wake* is doing what Foucault calls coming up to the limits of power where *Winslow*'s freedom, insubordination, and stubbornness to resist are put to the bare minimum. *Wake* is also using strategy of power relations in the second sense as a response to *Winslow*'s earlier resistance. The domination factor in this example is subtle and it comes in the form of an indirect threat where *Wake* uses his logbook as a means to threaten *Winslow* into working the way *Wake* wants him to.

The scene uses a medium-long shot at eye level to capture the character's action. *Winslow* is displayed in the foreground as it is his action that is being observed, while *Wake* is displayed in the midground as an observer along with the audience. The distance between both characters or their positions in the scene and the absence of dialogue is done to display positions of power along with revealing the tension between them. There is just enough lighting to see what both *Wake* and *Winslow* are doing and the medium long-shot provides us with information about where they are. Furthermore, due to *Wake*'s position

in the midground, the light doesn't cast as much on him as it does on *Winslow* which creates a dominating and slightly menacing atmosphere.

In the next scene, *Wake* exercises of power in the form of domination. The event happens when *Wake*, who is sleeping on his bed in the living quarters, catches *Winslow* sneaking up on him to try to steal his keys and thinks about killing him by suddenly waking up to find *Winslow* hovering over him. At first, *Wake*'s response is quite casual which is due to *Winslow*'s wittiness when he says, "just didn't wanna wake, you is all. It's a long night. And such" (Eggers, 2019, 1:05:55-1:06:02). *Wake* then rolls over and immediately exercises power in the form of domination.

**Figure 3**



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [1:06:17], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

*Wake* exercises power over *Winslow* by saying, "get back to ye're duties **or I'll give you a real keelhauling**" (Eggers, 2019, 1:06:16-1:06:17). This form of exercising power is a great example of exercising power in the form of domination through both a relationship of communication and confrontational strategy by directly threatening *Winslow* with punishment if he doesn't do as he's told. Foucault (1982, p.781) mentions that the exercise of power in the form of domination implies that somebody imposes a threat of violence on another. Furthermore, this scene makes a great example of how forms of the exercise of power aren't always mixed and reinforced, but it can also be isolated where only one form of the exercise of power is seen.

The scene uses a medium shot at eye level to capture *Winslow*'s body gestures, the positioning of the characters in the scene, and *Winslow*'s initial reaction to the exercise of power. *Winslow* is seen hovering over *Wake* in a more dominant position; however, the dialogue contrasts their positioning as it is made clear that even though *Winslow* is at a more dominant position in the scene, *Wake* plays the more dominant role as he is the one exercising power. *Winslow*'s body gesture, with his hand behind his back, certainly gives off a menacing vibe, but his blank facial expression reveals a confused and defeated man who has realized that he has lost a good opportunity and is now regretting it. The lighting in the room is made clear to capture *Winslow*'s blank look and the background is intentionally blurred to focus attention on *Winslow*.

## 1.2.The Exercise of Subjective Power

The first case of the supervisor exercising subjective power towards the assistant also happens during their first night on the island where *Wake*, the supervisor, explains *Winslow*'s duties to him over dinner, telling him that he works, cleans, and mends various buildings on the island during the day while *Wake* works the light during

the night. *Winslow* who was expecting to also work the light, argues that the manual states that they are to alternate shifts.

**Figure 4**  
*Wake restricts Winslow access into the lantern room*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [09:45], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

*Wake* responds by stating, “it’s the midwatch. That’s the dread, lad. My watch, night ‘till morning. **Some new junior man I’m fixed with.** See to your duties, the light is mine” (Eggers, 2019, 09:38-09:51). Firstly, *Wake* exercises power in this scene to maintain privilege in the sense that he intends to put *Winslow* in his place as an assistant while avoiding the labor-intensive work. Secondly, *Wake* is exercising statutory authority by claiming that the light and the night shift is his job as supervisor and not the assistant’s job. The subjective exercise of power comes in the form of calling *Winslow* a new junior man that *Wake* has to deal with, implying that *Winslow*, as a recruit, doesn’t know the unwritten rules of working a lighthouse thus tying him to an identity that submits him to the authority of a more experienced supervising lighthouse keeper like *Wake*.

The scene uses a medium shot at eye level not only to capture *Wake* from the chest up but also his body gesture and his facial expression as he looks away from *Winslow* and down at his food while widening his eyes as though he is disappointed, downplaying both *Winslow* and his argument about expecting to work the light in the lantern room.

In a different scene, *Wake* exercises subjective power over *Winslow* through confrontational strategy to criticize and belittle *Winslow* for not doing a good enough job cleaning the living quarters. *Wake* brings *Winslow* to the living quarters and shows him a small part of the floor that he claims hasn’t been clean. *Winslow* responds by displays power resistance which is discussed and captured in figure 12. In response, *Wake* reinforces his subjective power with domination and exploitation which can be seen below.

**Figure 5**  
*Wake accuses Winslow of not cleaning the floor properly and makes him re-sweep and re-mop the floor*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [27:29], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

As a response to Winslow's resistance, Wake says, "And I say you did nothing of the sort. And I say you swab it again. And you swab it proper-like this time, and you'll be swabbin' it ten times over after that. And if I tells ye to pull apart every floorboard and clapboard of this here house and scour 'em down with yer bear, bleedin' knuckles, you'll do it! And if I tells ye to yank out every single nail from every moulderin' nail-hole and suck off every speck of rust 'till all them nails sparkle like a whale's pecker, and then carpenter the whole light station back together from scrap, and then do it all over again, you'll do it. **And by God and by golly, you'll do it smilin' lad, 'cause you'll like it. You'll like it 'cause I says you will! Contradict me again and I'll dock yer wages. D'yer hear me, lad?**" (Eggars, 2019, 26:43-27:40).

In this scene, *Wake* uses all three senses of power relations strategy, being means and mechanism to get what he wants using *Winslow* as a resource, actions on possible actions where he reacts to *Winslow* counteraction in the form of resistance, and confrontational strategy where he belittles *Winslow* and reinforces his authority to fix the balance of power. *Wake*'s exercise of subjective power by subjectifying *Winslow* to the identity of a bad worker who needs to obey each and every command his supervisor gives him no matter how absurd in order to maintain privilege by putting *Winslow* in his place while exercising statutory authority as it is his job to make sure *Winslow* does his. On top of that, it isn't enough for *Winslow* to merely do what he is told, *Wake* wants *Winslow* to do it smiling because he says so. This is a great example and perhaps the very essence of subjective power. Furthermore, to reinforce power and make *Winslow* almost incapable of fighting back again, *Wake* reinforces his subjective power with a threat of docking *Winslow*'s wages if he doesn't do it. The exercise of dominative power comes in the form of the threat, while the exploitative reinforcements come from separating *Winslow* from his wages. Therefore, this whole scene makes for a great example of Foucault's theory where he states that the exercise of power can be isolated or mixed, but when it is mixed, usually one kind prevails while the rest reinforces it (Foucault, M. 1982, p.781).

The scene uses a close-up shot at an eye-level-angle to capture both characters from the chest up and it functions to capture both character's facial expression and their body gestures. *Wake* is seen looking up authoritatively at *Winslow* who looks like he is consenting out of fear of not getting paid even though he doesn't agree with *Wake*. The position of their body gestures despite their height differences where *Wake* is looking up at *Winslow*, and *Winslow* is looking down at *Wake*, clearly indicates who is in charge through their facial expression which is ironic in itself.

In the next scene, as they are having dinner, *Winslow* pours *Wake* a glass of alcohol to drink with his food. *Wake* then responds by subtly and perhaps unintentionally exercising power over *Winslow* due to habit; however, what *Wake* does is still exercising power nonetheless.

#### Figure 6

*Wake* exercises subjective power over *Winslow* by referring to him as 'lad'



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [31:03], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

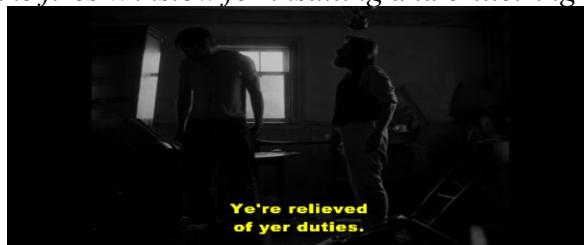
In response to *Winslow*'s action of pouring his supervisor a glass of alcohol, *Wake* says, "Thank ye, lad" (Eggers, 2019, 31:03). At first glance one might think that what *Wake* is doing is simply thanking his assistant for doing something for him; however, *Wake* is also exercising subjective power by calling *Winslow* 'lad'. *Wake*'s action in response to *Winslow*'s action is the power relations strategy of the second sense where a counteraction is taken due to committed action in order to maintain privilege by making *Winslow* aware of his position. Furthermore, the word 'lad' that *Wake* uses and always uses to call *Winslow* until this part of the film, ties *Winslow* to an identity of inferiority where *Winslow* is considered a child who is incapable, doesn't know how to do anything and needs guidance from, say, a supervisor.

The scene uses a medium long-shot at eye level to focus on *Winslow* from the knees up and *Wake* from the chest up as he is sitting down; furthermore, the shot functions as a way to capture both characters' gestures while being close enough to also capture their emotions and reveal where they are, which in this case is the living quarters. *Wake*'s body gesture and facial expression doesn't reveal much, unlike his dialogue. Furthermore, the way the light is positioned, shining on his face, reveals that *Wake* doesn't actually have an ulterior motive and it is very possible that the subjective power he exercises over *Winslow* is unintentional due to habit. On the other hand, *Winslow*'s body gesture which may appear helpful actually hides an ulterior motive which can be seen from the dark shadow that covers his face, which implies that he's only being helpful because he wants something. Moreover, what *Winslow* wants will be revealed in figure 13 as a form of power resistance.

### 1.3. The Exercise of Exploitative Power

In the final act of the film, *Wake*, who has been berated with insults by *Winslow* for being a disgusting drunken liar, exercises power over *Winslow* in the form of exploitation reinforced by subjectivity by firing *Winslow*.

**Figure 7**  
*Wake fires Winslow for insulting and criticizing him*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [1:29:53], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

As soon as *Winslow* finishes insulting and criticizing *Wake*, *Wake* responds by saying, “**ye have a way with words**, Tommy” (Eggers, 2019, 1:29:44-1:29:45). This implies that *Wake* is also criticizing *Winslow* for not choosing his words carefully which is a form a subjective reinforcement for what *Wake* is about to do. After *Wake*’s statement, he gets up and proceeds to fire *Winslow* by saying, “**ye’re relieved of yer duties**” (Eggers, 2019, 1:29:53) which is an exercise of power in the form of exploitation as *Wake* is now separating *Winslow* from what he has earned during his tour on the island. *Wake* exercises power in the form of exploitation reinforced by subjectivity using confrontational strategies to fix the power balance (third sense of power relation strategy) and as a counter-response to *Winslow*’s Actions (second sense of power relation strategy). Furthermore, *Wake*’s objective is clearly the maintenance of privilege, firing *Winslow* to make sure he knows his place as an assistant who shouldn’t criticize his supervisor; however, this particular case does not close off the possibility that *Wake* has an hidden motive of working *Winslow* to a breaking point so that he will insult and criticize *Wake* in order to accumulate profit by firing him and taking his pay.

The scene uses a full shot at eye level to capture both characters from head to toe while also capturing the background. The full shot at eye level is used to capture the characters' body gestures as *Wake* directly at *Winslow* with his head slightly raised, implying authority, and *Winslow* who is looking away with his head down and his fist clenched in disapproval, implying that he is angry and defiant. The lighting and background are made clear in this scene to mirror the character’s relationship. The living quarters are in shambles as is their relationship, and the lighting is clear which signifies that their real personalities are being revealed.

## 2. Power Resistance as a Response Against the Exercise of Power Depicted in the Film *The Lighthouse* (2019)

Going the opposite direction to those who power is exercised over, power resistance can be identified as a person’s response, their struggle against the exercise of power imposed by others or those in positions of power. Foucault (1978, p.95) states, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” This implies that in a relationship of power when power is exercised over another, resistance is bound to happen; furthermore, the resistance that happens as a response never happens outside the domain of the relationship of power, such as the power resistance that *Winslow*, the assistant displays towards *Wake*, the supervisor, in the film *The Lighthouse*. The similarities that *Winslow*, the assistant, faces concerning other universal existing oppositions that can be seen in the film include, firstly, targeting the effects of power where *Winslow*’s display of power resistance directly targets *Wake* as a gatekeeper due to his privilege of knowledge and competence as a supervisor; moreover, *Winslow* is struggling against secrecy that is imposed on him through restricted access into the lantern room and it is a display of resistance for more transparency. Secondly, *Winslow*’s resistances are immediate in nature where *Winslow* displays power resistance against *Wake*, being the closest form of authority rather than the lighthouse establishment itself to see immediate changes. Finally, *Winslow*’s display of power resistance is against the identity of a lowly assistant

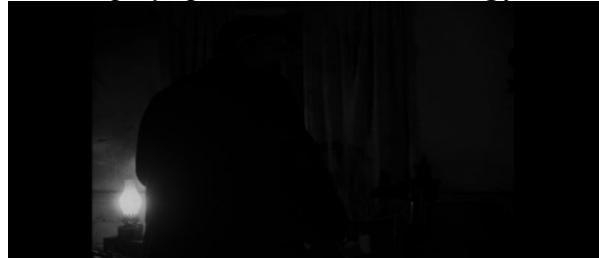
that has been imposed on him by both *Wake*'s twisted sailor ideology and the corporate-commercial ideology of the lighthouse establishment.

As mentioned above, the similarities of opposition that *Winslow* faces in comparison to existing oppositions categorizes power resistance into three kinds of power resistance based on the resistances against the exercise of power which are power resistances against domination, against exploitation, and against subjectivity. Furthermore, the types of power resistances that *Winslow* displays will be highlighted in essential scenes, analyzed, explained, and strengthened with cinematography elements below.

### 2.1. Power Resistance Against Domination

The first display of power resistance by *Winslow*, the assistant, against *Wake*, the supervisor, happens during their first dinner together where *Winslow* displays power resistance against struggles of domination reinforced by subjectivity. *Winslow*, who is the new assistant, is being forced to toast and drink alcohol by his supervisor, and when he rejects the offer due to it being against regulation, his supervisor exercises power over him.

**Figure 8**  
*Winslow displays power resistance during first dinner*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [08:19], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

As a form of power resistance against the struggles of domination reinforced by subjectivity in figure 1, *Winslow* gets up from the dinner table, walks to the sink, throws the alcohol down the drain, and pours himself a cup of water so they can toast. By doing this, *Winslow* is showing a degree of freedom that a subject who is acknowledged as a subject still has, where he is pushing back against the exercise of power to a certain degree successfully while still being constrained by it.

The scene uses an over-the-shoulder shot at eye level to capture *Winslow* looking back at *Wake* while he throws the alcohol down the drain, implying that he knows exactly what he's doing, which shows that *Winslow* is being both purposely difficult and stubborn. According to Foucault (1982, p.790) those two things, "the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom are what lie at the heart of a power relationship and are constantly provoking it." This means *Winslow*'s actions and stubbornness are forms of resistance that provoke the exercise of power, and that what *Winslow* is doing is resisting power through actions while still being compliant to a certain degree. The level of darkness in the scene with minimum light can be interpreted to present a nuance of defiance, as darkness is commonly associated with acts of defiance.

Directly related to figure 2, as a response to *Wake*'s exercise of dominative power, *Winslow* directly displays power resistance against struggles of domination.

**Figure 9**

*Winslow exaggerates his scrubbing motion when under surveillance*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [28:05], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

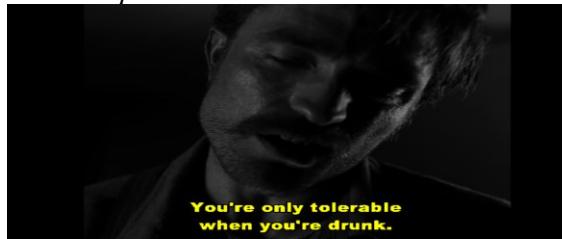
As a form of power resistance against the struggles of domination via surveillance, *Winslow* responds by resisting in a non-verbal way, by exaggerating his scrubbing motion when cleaning the tank. *Winslow* does this, firstly out of spite, and secondly, because *Winslow* knows that any resistance via relationship of communication will only be met by negativity by *Wake* in the form of a bad review in his logbook. Therefore, *Winslow* whose freedom, stubbornness, and defiance have been put to the bare minimum can only display resistance in this manner. Moreover, even though *Winslow*'s position is quite close to the limits of power relations, he still has enough freedom to protest through non-verbal actions.

The scene uses a medium-long shot at eye level to capture the characters' body gestures and environment. Focusing on *Winslow*, he is positioned in the foreground as a subject who is being examined and the lighting is made clear to capture his gestures and movements which clearly indicate that of repressed frustration.

In a different scene, *Winslow* displays power resistance against the struggles of domination directly related to figure 3, where he displays resistance in response to *Wake*'s order which was followed up by a direct threat.

**Figure 10**

*Winslow protests to Wake's order and threat*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [1:06:41], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

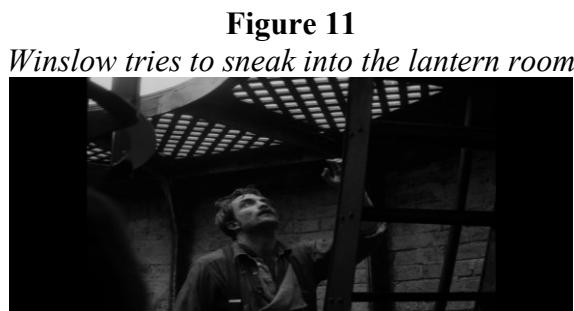
*Winslow*'s display of power resistance comes in the form of a protest through a relationship of communication where *Winslow* responds to *Wake*'s threat by saying, “**You ain't even human no more.** Workin' apart from folks so long. **You're only tolerable when your drunk**” (Eggers, 2019, 1:06:32-1:06:41). *Winslow*'s display of power resistance via protest and insult against the struggles of domination reflects a sense of desperation due to what little freedom he has against *Wake*'s power at this point of the story and it is mainly due to fear of not getting a good review and not being paid;

therefore, there are also traces of struggles against subjectivity and exploitation, though it can only be understood by watching the whole film.

*Winslow*'s sense of desperation is supported by the cinematography elements that use a close-up shot to capture *Winslow*'s facial expression of disgust and desperate restricted defiance, hence his display of resistance only goes as far as protests and insults.

## 2.2. Power Resistance Against Subjectivity

As a form of resistance to being denied entry into the lantern room in figure 4, *Winslow*, who was given orders to bring oil for the lantern, tries to sneak into the lantern room.



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [18:58], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

*Winslow*'s form of power resistance shares a few similarities with other struggles of existing oppositions mentioned by Foucault (1982, p. 780) where *Winslow* is struggling against the opposition to the effects of power linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification, meaning that his resistance is against *Wake* as the gatekeeper who restricts him from entering the lantern room; *Winslow*'s resistance is immediate in nature, meaning that his resistance is aimed against *Wake*'s authority rather than the lighthouse establishment; and finally, *Winslow*'s resistance revolves around the question of identity where *Winslow* is resisting the identity which has been imposed to him of an assistant who isn't allowed to enter the lantern room. The display of power resistance against subjectivity relates to all three similar features mentioned above.

The Scene uses a combination of a medium and over-the-shoulder shot at eye level to capture *Winslow*'s facial features and body gestures while also capturing *Wake* who is also present in the room without *Winslow* noticing. *Winslow*'s body gesture reveals that he is attempting to open the grate and access the lantern room, while his facial expression with his eyes opened wide in wonder and his jaw ajar reveals a sense of curiosity about something mysterious and even holy, to enter the light above while to not being allowed in, which usually makes a person want it even more.

Relating to the events that happen in figure 5, where *Wake* exercises power towards *Winslow* in the form of subjectivity by trying to make him mop and clean the floor again and tying him to the identity of a lazy, bad worker, *Winslow* displays power resistance against the struggles of subjectivity via relationship of communications through protesting.

**Figure 12**

*Winslow protests when Wake accuses him of not cleaning the floor properly*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [26:27], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

*Winslow* firstly asks *Wake* if he gets some sort of kick from molesting and abusing him in this manner, then proceeds to tell *Wake* that he has already swept and mopped the floor twice before getting cut off by *Wake* who exercises subjective power through the confrontational strategy by stating, “how dare ye contradict me, ye dog!” (Eggars, 2019, 26:21-26:22). *Winslow* then responds by displaying power resistance against the struggles of subjectivity by stating, **“Now, look here. I never intended to be no housewife nor slave in takin’ this job. It ain’t right!”** These lodges is more ramshackle than any shanty boys camp I ever seen. The queen of England’s own fancy housekeeper couldn’t even done no better than what I done, ‘cause I tell you, I scrubbed this here place twice over, sir” (Eggars, 2019, 26:23-26:41). *Winslow* is predominantly displaying power resistance against subjugation which ties him to the identity of being *Wake*’s dog by mentioning that he didn’t take this job to become a housewife or a slave, which is basically a struggle against the exercise of power that questions *Winslow*’s identity which he makes clear in the dialogue. There are definitely strong displays of stubbornness and insubordination from *Winslow*; however, his push for freedom is still within the constraints of *Wake*’s power as he still calls *Wake* sir in the end. Furthermore, what makes this a great example of power resistance is that when *Wake* first exercises power over *Winslow* through subjectivity to make *Winslow* clean the floor again, *Winslow* was still initially able to refuse which reveals a certain degree of freedom, as power can really only be exercised towards subjects who can resist (Foucault, M. 1982, p.794).

The scene uses a medium shot at eye level to capture *Winslow* from the chest up. The shot functions to reveal *Winslow*’s facial expression, body gestures, and emotions. *Winslow*’s facial expression is closely related to his emotion as he displays a serious look due to being angry. He leans his body slightly forward towards the camera which indicates a challenging tone. The lighting is made clear and bright in this scene to capture all the elements mentioned above while also creating a strong, capable, and slightly intimidating nuance of the character. The Background is intentionally blurred to keep the audience focus on *Winslow*’s reaction.

In this scene, at about the final stages of the first act, *Winslow* displays power resistance that is directly related to figure 6, which is also related to the intention that he was hiding in the explanation of that section.

**Figure 13**  
*Winslow wants to be called by his name instead of 'lad'*



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [31:14], by Robbert Eggers (director) 2019

*Winslow* displays power resistance against subjectivity right after *Wake* thanks him and calls him 'lad' by saying, "**Winslow. Ephraim Winslow. These last two weeks I'd...I'd like it if you called me by my name**" (Eggars, 2019, 31:06-31:15). *Winslow* is displaying power resistance against having his identity as *Ephraim Winslow*, who he truly is, being taken away from him and returned to him as 'lad'. This form of power resistance against subjectivity is directly related to Foucault's (1982, p780) theory regarding the similarities that oppositions face against the exercise of power, specifically the opposition that questions and revolves around the subject's identity; furthermore, *Winslow*'s resistance is also immediate in nature as he wants to see immediate changes from *Wake* and is adamant to being called by his name when *Wake* responds by exercising power to maintain privilege by saying, "look at ye. Giving orders, lad" (Eggars, 2019, 31:16-31:20). However, the result of *Winslow*'s display of power resistance in terms of using freedom to push back against the exercise of power actually worked this time and *Wake* concedes, calling him by his name from this point forth.

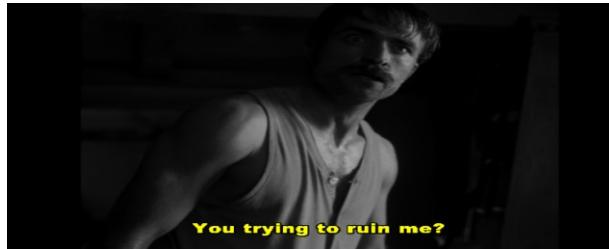
The scene uses a medium long-shot at eye level to focus on both *Winslow* and *Wake* from the chest up as they are sitting down. The shot functions as a way to capture both characters' gestures while being close enough to also capture their facial expressions and reveal where they are, which in this case is the living quarters. *Winslow*'s body gesture with his head tilted down and his hand spread open on the table reveals a posture of asking for permission while also being slightly demanding. This implies that even though he's resisting subjective power, he is also aware that *Wake* might just be exercising it out of habit and that *Winslow* is still displaying resistance by using constrained freedom as he is still being very polite about it. Furthermore, *Winslow*'s facial expression of being serious indicates that it is important to him. *Wake*'s body gesture on the other hand, looking straight at *Winslow* slightly confused, reveals that he is shocked at *Winslow*'s request, implying that he probably didn't mean to exercise subjective power; however, he did because the exercise of power can be seen by the resistances it faces. The lighting captures both their faces which implies that both characters are being honest to each other as well as treating each other equally as subjects.

### 2.3. Power Resistance Against Exploitation

As a form of power resistance against exploitation reinforced by subjugation in figure 7, *Winslow*, who has already read *Wake*'s logbook, goes off screen to get the book and proceeds to read it aloud to *Wake*, revealing *Wake*'s true report about *Winslow*'s performance that he intends to submit to the lighthouse establishment.

**Figure 14**

*Winslow* protests against the contents of *Wake*'s logbook



Note. From *The Lighthouse* [1:30:42], by Robert Eggers (director) 2019

*Winslow*'s display of power resistance against exploitation reinforced by subjugation comes in the form of a protest through relationships of communication where he says, "Assistant slept late. Worked below standard. Attitude hostile. Assistant missing, giving to habitual self-abuse in the supply shed. Drunk on duty! Assault! Theft! Recommend severance without pay. **Severance without pay? You tryin' to ruin me? I'm a hard worker. I am. I work as hard as any man**" (Eggers, 2019, 1:30:11-1:30:49). The resistance against exploitation comes in the form of the part of the protest when *Winslow* asks *Wake* if he is trying to ruin him by recommending that the establishment doesn't pay him at all, while *Winslow*'s struggles against the reinforcing subjective power happens when he states that he is a hard worker, implying that *Wake*'s report about him, though true to a certain degree, is highly exaggerated and unjust.

The scene uses a medium shot at eye level to capture *Winslow* from the waist up, this functions as a way to capture his body gesture and facial expressions as *Winslow*'s face looks very serious and angry about the situation. Furthermore, the clothes he is wearing display his arms which are quite muscular, adding to the intimidation factor of what *Winslow* is actually capable of doing if he snaps which is displaying power resistance against struggles in an aggressive, physical manner.

#### D. Conclusion

To conclude, the exercise of power imposed on to others in social interactions refer to power relations, and is always met by resistances against it. To find the form power bring exercised, one should look to the resistances that are displayed against it. The resistance that are displayed against different forms of power come from similarities that they share with existing oppositions. The exercise of power over others also has objectives as well as strategies to maintain power balance between those who exercise power and those whom power are exercised over. However, perhaps the most important point of power relations lies with its specific nature, where there are two subjects in different positions who are acknowledged as subjects and the exercise of happens on a field of possible actions where power is both exercised over and resisted by free subjects to a certain degree.

In *The Lighthouse* (2019), power is exercised by the supervisor, *Wake*, towards his assistant, *Winslow*. Being the senior lighthouse keeper and supervisor, *Wake* exercises all three forms of power towards his assistant. The forms of power that the supervisor exercises are domination where he uses threats, subjectivity where he uses the identity to which the assistant is now tied to, and exploitation where he separates the assistant's earnings from him. In the film, the supervisor exercises forms of power that are isolated,

meaning it is only one specific form of exercising power, which is through domination through threats and subjectivity. In addition, the supervisor also mixes the exercise of power, meaning that one form of power is exercised, while the other forms reinforce it, like when he exercises subjective power reinforces it with domination and subjectivity. Finally, the supervisor's objective in exercising power can be boiled down mainly to maintaining privilege, even though there are occasions where he does it to exercise statutory authority; furthermore, the supervisor uses all three senses of power relations strategies to exercise power which are means and mechanisms, actions on possible actions, and confrontational strategies.

On the other hand, the display of power resistance in the film *The Lighthouse* (2019) is mainly displayed by the assistant, *Winslow*, directly against his supervisor through either action or verbally. *Winslow* displays power resistance against domination, subjugation, and exploitation. The resistances that the assistant displays are also either isolated or mixed in accordance with the exercise of power that he is resisting. In most cases in the film, the assistant displays power resistance against domination and subjugation, either isolated or mixed, with only one case of resisting against exploitation. The main similarities that can be found between the assistant's resistance and existing oppositions are that the assistant's display of power resistances are against the effect of power linked to knowledge and competence, the assistant resistances are immediate in nature, and the assistant's resistances revolve around and question his status as an individual.

Through this study, the writer hopes that it will be of use to those who want it as reference to study or conduct a thesis on a similar topic. However, this study still lacks and can still be expanded upon. For instance, this study has yet to explore relationships of domination the very outer limit of power relations where violence and consent are put into the already complex and intricate interplay of power relations without deviating from the specific nature of power relation. Nor has it explored relationships of domination where a subject is completely objectified and can no longer fight back, resulting in the relationship being no longer considered power relations. As a closing statement, the writer wishes to convey a certain of the message of the film that still relates to the topic of this study which is that the repressive aspects of the exercise of power is more likely to have negative results and consequences when compared to the effectiveness of normalizing power which is another point that this study has also not explored.

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