

Weaponized Truth: Power and Discourse in Colleen Hoover's *Verity*

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Abstract: The paper focuses on how manipulation and psychological control works in Colleen Hoover's *Verity*, using Michel Foucault's ideas about power, surveillance, and discourse. Even though *Verity* Crawford is in coma, she still has a strong narrative influence on the people around her especially Jeremy and Lowen. According to Foucault, power isn't always about control from the top but it can also be silent and hard to see. This study shows how *Verity* uses silence and her hand written autobiography to watch and control others without doing anything directly. She becomes a kind of panopticon where she doesn't need to take direct actions. Just the idea that she might be aware of what is happening in the house is enough to make others uneasy. Her manuscript, whether it's true or not, becomes a powerful way to shape thoughts and actions of others. This connects with Foucault's view that language and the way of narration can influence understanding of the reader. In the end, the novel is not just a thriller, but it also reveals how silence and hidden forms of power can control people. This aligns with Foucault's theory, that things like the idea of truth can also be more powerful than force.

Keywords: Psychological manipulation, Foucauldian power, surveillance, discourse, narrative control.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Colleen Hoover's *Verity* is a psychological thriller that explores the dark side of human relationships, obsession, and the unsettling power. The novel starts with Lowen, struggling writer hired to finish the bestselling series of the author Verity Crawford. When Lowen starts her professional opportunity, she discovers a disturbing manuscript written by Verity where she confesses chilling events from the past. As Verity is in coma, Lowen doesn't face any open violence but sensed a psychological tension and manipulation. The mystery of whether the manuscript is true or fictional becomes the main source of control in the novel, making it hard to separate truth from lies, or victim from villain.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and the essay collection *Power/Knowledge* (1980) is a major contribution to radical thinking of how power works. He challenged the traditional idea of power as something held by a ruler or institutions. Instead, he sees power as something spread out, constantly shifting through language, behaviour and social norms. For him, power doesn't just punish, it also creates knowledge and shapes what we see as truth. This helps to understand that manipulation and control are not just as obvious or forceful acts, but as quiet, psychological and language-based strategies like subtle power used in Colleen Hoover's *Verity*.

Panopticism, one of the most influential concepts by Michel Foucault was introduced in *Discipline and Punish*. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon, a prison where one guard can observe all inmates without them knowing if they're being watched. Foucault uses this as a powerful metaphor for how modern power works. The genius of the panopticon lies in how it led people to monitor their own behaviour, simply because they believe they might be under observation. In this way power becomes invisible, constant and psychological. This mirrors the internalized control of how Lowen becomes mentally unstable under the silent influence of Verity's passive presence.

Foucault states that what we accept as 'truth' is not an objective fact but constructed by dominant discourse. In *Verity*, the manuscript becomes a tool of discourse shaping how Lowen and Jeremy view Verity and even

themselves. Whether the manuscript is true or fictional becomes less important but the way it creates a version of reality that influences their thoughts, fears and decision is significant. This reflects Foucault's idea that who control the narrative hold the power to control and others behaviour.

3. VERITY AS A PANOPTIC FIGURE:

Although Verity Crawford appears physically helpless and silent throughout the novel, her lack of movement does not diminish her influence. On the contrary her silence and constant presence in the house becomes a powerful source of control. For Lowen, Verity represents a haunting figure embodies Foucauldian panoptic power. Her open eyes and subtle movement turn her from passive patient into a figure of surveillance which makes Lowen to question herself and monitor her own behaviour. This inability to confirm whether Verity is truly watching, mirrors panoptic mechanism.

Lowen's self-surveillance intensifies when she starts to read Verity's manuscript. The act of reading itself is an invasion of private space which Lowen violated. Verity body became intimidation to Lowen even though she is in coma. For example, Lowen hesitates to read the manuscript in Verity's office room, as if the walls are embedded with her consciousness. This is not the active control but the power derived from the presence alone. Like the panopticon's watchtower, verity doesn't need to act, her potential to act is enough to alter Lowen's psychological state, pushing her to feel anxious all the time.

Verity's control extends beyond observation into emotional manipulation. Even in her absence, she dictates the rhythm of the household. Her injured body ensures that all the routine revolves around her needs. Verity's manuscript functions as a discursive surveillance where it shapes Lowen and reader's versions of truth. She feels the manuscript watches her as much as she reads it and the disturbing content alters her perception of Verity, Jeremy and herself. Through the interplay of silence and textual control, Verity becomes a panoptic figure which foster fear and internal observation for other characters in the novel.

4. THE MANUSCRIPT'S DISCURSIVE POWER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRUTH:

Foucault states that discourse is never neutral, it always changes. Discourse shape what we know as knowledge, what seems believable and what was accepted as 'truth'. In *Power/Knowledge*, he states that the one who have control over discourse define reality, because discourse not only control what can be said but also what can be thought. In *Verity*, the manuscript operates in exactly this same way. It constructs a version of reality that is emotionally intense and morally wrong, powerful enough to override judgments. Whether the manuscript is fact or fiction becomes less important than the impact it has on readers, where its discourse changes the perception of Verity, themselves and the world around them.

For Lowen, reading manuscript is deeply disturbing experience. It offers an alternative version of Verity who is unmotherly, cruel and homicidal. This version contradicts the physically helpless women she sees before her. As the manuscript is written in first person's narrative, its confessional tone carries the illusion of intimacy and authenticity. Foucault states that confessional discourse is an effective tool because it historically links to religious and psychiatric institutions where it demands self-exposure and truth telling. Verity used this confessional tone not to reveal herself, but to manipulate those who reads her words.

Jermy's reaction to the manuscript illustrates how discursive power holds control over once belief. When he reads it, he is not only disturbed but he convinced that Verity could able to commit such act even though he knows her to the fullest. His entire perception of his wife and his past shifted not because of something Verity has done in the present, but because of how she framed the past through narrative. In this way, Verity controls emotions and perceptions of others around her which gives her the power to control.

The manuscript's power also lies in its strategic ambiguity. Verity later claims it is fiction, a writing exercise in her letter she hid in her room floor. This revelation destabilizes everything the reader and Lowen believed so far. At some point readers starts to question the truth behind the letter, either it's a trap like manuscript. It leaves the readers psychologically disturbed and unable to dismiss the content as fantasy yet incapable of proving its veracity. This is precisely where the manuscript holds maximum power, its ability to generate doubt, moral fear and self-questioning.

This manipulation mirrors the structure of modern psychological thrillers, where its unreliable narration and uncertainty plays the major role for suspense. In *Verity*, the manipulation is not only narrative but in structural. This align with Foucault's idea that power is most effective when it makes the readers to questions their own perception and judgement. Lowen and readers caught in a web of discursive control by the force of language and the anxiety of uncertainty. Verity doesn't need to speak aloud or even move; she controls the world from the page.

5. SURVEILLANCE AND SELF-REGULATION IN LOWEN:

One of the most frightening aspects of *Verity* is not what Verity does to others, but what she does to influence other's behaviour. It is most explicitly showed in Lowen's growth through the course of the story, reflects the theoretical

concept of self-surveillance by Michel Foucault. Even though Verity seems physically disabled, she acts as an omniscient observer in the mind of Lowen. Verity's presence combined with her narrative, functions as a passive observer. Lowen is aware that she is stepping into Verity's personal space: the home, the family, the narrative. Every step she takes, every room she enters, feels like an offence. Even as she tries to uncover 'the truth,' she is haunted by the fear that she is being evaluated, not only by Verity but by the moral weight of her actions. This internal conflict forces her into self-regulate, mirroring how subjects in Foucault's theories manage themselves to align with the expectations of authority.

Foucault argues that modern power thrives on invisible force, creating individuals who watch and discipline themselves. Lowen's sleepless nights, anxiety, and moral uncertainty shows the success of this form of power. She no longer needs Verity to say or do anything. Her sense of being watched is enough to destroy her sense of self. Lowen, withholding the final letter from Jeremy, represents the completely internalized panoptic structure of Verity, it becomes clear that the text has moved beyond the idea of manipulation. Lowen has become her own surveillance and this shows the Foucauldian idea that power is not something one simply has, it is something one performs and enacts upon oneself.

6. JEREMY AND THE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN NARRATIVES:

In *Verity*, Jeremy functions as the pivot around which the novel's two competing narratives revolve: Verity's manuscript and Lowen's interpretation of it. Though he is often seen as a passive character, Jeremy's role becomes central in demonstrating Foucault's insight that power is embedded in what is believed, rather than what is objectively true. Jeremy is not manipulated by force, but by the discourse. By the stories he is told and the meanings he constructs from them, he becomes the battleground for representational power.

Foucault's concept of *discourse* shows how knowledge and power are not neutral. What is accepted as truth within a society, within a relationship, is shaped by dominant narratives, not necessarily by facts. The manuscript Verity writes whether it is truth or fiction, becomes the dominant narrative not because of its factual, but because of its emotions and manipulative content. It builds a version of Verity that changes Jeremy's prior beliefs and experiences he had with her. In this way, the manuscript doesn't just influence Jeremy, it reprograms his perception of reality.

The core struggle between Verity's and Lowen's versions of the truth turns Jeremy to question the belief. His love for Verity, his grief over their children, and his growing closeness to Lowen are all shaped by the narrative he chooses to believe. When Jeremy reads the manuscript, it changes his emotions by leading him to choose violence. This illustrates Foucault's claim that discourse does not simply represent reality, but creates new actions, choices, and consequences. Jeremy's final act in Verity's death is the outcome of narrative manipulation. His actions are not in response to an objective truth, but to a discourse that has reshaped his understanding of Verity and of himself. In this context, Jeremy is less a decision-maker and more a product of discursive powers, caught between what he has experienced and what he has been made to believe.

7. THE CYCLE OF POWER: DOES LOWEN BECOME VERITY:

As the narrative of *Verity* unfolds, a transformation occurs in Lowen. By the novel's end, Lowen not only takes Verity's place in the house and in Jeremy's life but also the role of storyteller, ultimately choosing which version of the truth should survive. This shift reflects Foucault's assertion that power is not held by specific individuals, but circulates through roles, positions, and discourse. It reproduces itself through structures, not simply actions.

Foucault argues that systems of power make the people internalize domination and may then reproduce unknowingly. In Lowen's case, her growing obsession with Verity, her reading, watching, analysing eventually leads to her mimicking Verity's behaviour. She becomes hyper-aware of her presence in the home and chooses silence over disclosure regarding the letter Verity leaves behind. This is not passive submission; it is selective withholding, a subtle form of discursive control. She controls the narrative Jeremy believes, preserves the manuscript, and chooses which truths are buried. The power Foucault describes doesn't stop with the death of one dominant figure. It transfers and re-establishes itself in other persons.

8. SUMMATION:

Throughout the novel, the characters are less shaped by facts but more by the discourses. Verity's manuscript, whether fictional or confessional, shows Foucault's idea that whoever controls the narrative controls reality. Lowen, Jeremy, and even the reader is drawn into a labyrinth of interpretation, trapped not by physical chains but by the inability to verify what is real. This ambiguity becomes the most powerful form of manipulation, one that compels belief, motivates action, and reconfigures relationships.

Lowen's gradual transformation from reader to storyteller from outsider to insider further emphasizes how power is cyclical and infectious. In a world governed by perception, she learns to withhold, interpret, and dominate just

as Verity did. Her silence about Verity's letter at the end marks her final transition, not as a victim, but as someone now capable of participating in the very system of control that once entrapped her.

Ultimately, *Verity* is a cautionary tale not merely about deception, but about how easily truth itself can be weaponized. In Hoover's world, the most dangerous manipulations are not physical or visible, but those that reshape the mind, blur moral clarity, and remind us that power often lies not in what happened, but in what we choose to believe.

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