Truth, Lies, and Morality in the Character of Charles Cullen as Reflected in *Good Nurse* (2022)

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Abstract

This study is aimed to analyse: 1. The deconstruction concept of Truth of healthcare This study is aimed to analyse: 1. To explain the deconstruction concept of Truth as reflected in The Good Nurse (2022), 2. To explain The deconstruction concept of Lies as reflected in The Good Nurse (2022),3. To explain The deconstruction concept of Morality as reflected in The Good Nurse (2022). The researcher used a qualitative method to examine the problem. The object of this research is the character of Charles Cullen in the movie The Good Nurse (2022). The data used in this study were collected by the researcher through several steps, namely watching and reading, identifying, classifying, and selecting. In order to answer the problem formulation and draw conclusions from this research, the data that has been selected is then analyzed by the researcher through several steps, namely displaying, explaining, and interpreting. The approaches and theories that researchers use to analyze the problem are deconstruction theory and the concept of Truth, the concept of Lies, and the concept of Morality. The results of this study show that (1) deconstruction. truth reveals that Charles Cullen, despite appearing to be a good and professional nurse, is actually a serial killer. (2) The deconstruction of lies in this movie reveals how lies can be personal and institutional. (3) The deconstruction of morality in The Good Nurse (2022) reveals the complex moral conflicts in the world of healthcare, questioning our view of right and wrong in the healthcare profession.

Keywords: *deconstruction, truth, lies, morality, The Good Nurse, healthcare and Jacques Derrida.*

Introduction

Film serves as a powerful medium for conveying information, entertainment, and multimedia elements to the public. As McQuail (2010:32) notes, movies can deliver unique messages effectively within a short timeframe. In contemporary society, films like *"The Good Nurse" (2022)*, which is based on Charles Graeber's 2013 true crime account, illustrate how visual media can influence public perception. The movie reveals the chilling tale of Charles Cullen, a nurse who is

secretly a serial killer, challenging the traditional view of nurses as protectors of health and safety.

This study aims to deconstruct the meanings of truth, lies, and morality as depicted in *"The Good Nurse" (2022).* By analyzing Cullen's character, the research will examine the impact on the image of nurses, public trust in healthcare institutions, and oversight in the medical profession. The study will explore the hidden meanings behind the different treatments provided by nurses to patients, revealing deeper insights into their duties and the concept of life protection. Employing Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, this research will decompose, describe, transform, and contrast various elements in the film to uncover new meanings. Through this analysis, we seek to understand how *"The Good Nurse" (2022)*stimulates thought and conveys complex messages about truth, lies, and morality to its audience.

Literary Review

Deconstructions

In "Of Grammatology," Derrida (1973) challenges the notion that language has a fixed meaning and can be clearly understood through a hierarchical structure. He argues that language is inherently unstable, with meaning always delayed and context-dependent, a concept he terms "différance." This approach questions traditional views of language and emphasizes the subjective nature of interpretation.

Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic" (1844) explores truth-seeking as a process filled with uncertainty and tension, emphasizing the importance of challenging accepted values and recognizing the darker aspects of human nature. He critiques morality as a tool for power and revenge, urging a deeper exploration of human motivations and values.

Culler (1982), in "On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism," describes deconstruction as a critical approach that questions the stability of meaning in language and concepts. This approach views texts as having multiple, often ambiguous meanings and challenges hierarchical structures and binary oppositions.

Overall, deconstruction is an approach that reveals the complexity and instability of language and thought, questioning traditional views of meaning and truth.

The Concepts of Truth

Truth involves the correspondence between statements or beliefs and reality. Aristotle (330 BC) in "Metaphysics" posits that truth is a state where thoughts align with reality, emphasizing the role of human reason in discerning truth. Descartes (1596) in "Meditations on First Philosophy" introduces systematic doubt, with "Cogito, ergo sum" as the foundational truth, emphasizing a rigorous, critical approach to truth. Kant (1724) in "Critique of Pure Reason" highlights the active role of the human mind in shaping truth, introducing the concept of mental categories that structure experience. Foucault (1951) argues that truth is a social construct shaped by power relations and societal norms. In summary, truth is seen as a dynamic interplay between human cognition, societal constructs, and observable reality, subject to interpretation and change.

Concepts of Lies

Freud (1899) in "The Interpretation of Dreams" suggests that lies stem from hidden subconscious thoughts influencing behavior. Nietzsche (1844) in "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" critiques those who hide malicious intentions behind moral facades. Goffman (1922) in "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" explains that social interactions often involve maintaining self-image through deception. These perspectives highlight that lies originate from subconscious conflicts, are used to mask true intentions, and serve to manage social perceptions.

The Concepts of Morality

Morality guides human behavior through values and ethical principles. Aristotle (330 BC) in "Nicomachean Ethics" emphasizes balance and moderation between extremes as the essence of moral behavior. Mill (1863) in "Utilitarianism" advocates for actions that maximize happiness and well-being for the greatest number. Kant (1785) in "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" proposes that morality is based on intrinsic obligations and universal principles, not outcomes, introducing the concept of the categorical imperative. In essence,

morality involves balancing actions and intentions, seeking collective happiness, and adhering to universal ethical principles.

Research Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate how the film "*The Good Nurse*" (2022) deconstructs the concepts of truth, lies, and morality. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the film's narrative components, identification of recurring patterns, and examination of character roles in shaping these concepts. The analysis focuses on dialogues, character actions, and story progression to understand how the film presents, reimagines, or challenges these conceptual frameworks. The study relies on literature review, consulting various books and sources to gather relevant information, following the principles outlined by Moleong (2010).

The object of this research is the film "*The Good Nurse*" (2022), specifically how it deconstructs the concepts of truth, lies, and morality through its narrative and character interactions. Data include words, dialogue, images, and character attributes from the film. The method of collecting data in this research is by doing observation. The procedures are watching the movie and reading the scripts, identifying the data from the scripts and subtitle, classifying data and selecting the data.

Finding and Discussion

This research analyzes the problems that exist in this chapter. The problem discussed is the Deconstruction Concept of Truth, Lies and Morality in "*The Good Nurse* (2022)".

1. The Concept of Truth Deconstruction in "*The Good Nurse* (2022) "

In the movie "The Good Nurse (2022)", the character Charles Cullen, played by Eddie Redmayne, is initially portrayed as a good nurse at ST Parkfield Memorial Hospital in New Jersey. He appears to be responsible for providing health care to patients, working closely with Amy Loughren, played by Jessica Chastain. Amy is also portrayed as a good nurse and a strong character in caring for and protecting

her patients, which can be seen from her interactions with patients and patients' families, as in the dialogue excerpt with Ana Martinez and her husband.

As the movie progresses, the relationship between Amy and Cullen is well established, with Cullen initially appearing to be a supportive and professional coworker. However, it turns out that Cullen's care and professionalism is a way to cover up his identity as a serial killer. This shows the deconstruction of the truth revealed in this movie.

According to Michel Foucault, truth is a social construction influenced by power and norms in society. The truth about Cullen's character as a good nurse is a social construction formed from the perception of the hospital community. Cullen utilizes the institutional structure of the hospital to hide his evil intentions. Meanwhile, according to Aristotle, truth is the conformity between statements or beliefs and objective reality. The reality of Cullen as a serial killer is very different from the social perceptions formed around him. Derrida's deconstruction shows that the narrative structure in this movie gradually dismantles and questions the truth that seems obvious at first.

Characterization of Charles Cullen

Cullen's concern for Amy and the professionalism of his work is a way to mask his identity as a serial killer. As the story progresses, it is revealed that Cullen's seemingly idealized and supportive character begins to show signs of cunning and evil. This illustrates the deconstruction of truth revealed in the movie.

The dialog excerpt between Amy and Cullen, in which Cullen confesses his deeds, reveals a deep truth about Cullen's character. Foucault's perspective on truth as a social construction, Aristotle's perspective on truth as conformity to objective reality, and Derrida's deconstruction of narrative structure, help us understand how this movie invites us to question and reflect on the various layers of truth that exist in everyday life.

Institutional Beliefs

Institutional beliefs play an important role in revealing how truths can be hidden and how lies can flourish in a healthcare environment. The character of Charles Cullen is able to capitalize on weaknesses in the institutional system of the

hospital to further his actions as a serial killer. Excessive trust in the institution covered up the truth about Cullen until it was too late.

According to Foucault, trust in institutions is not only a matter of trust in the individuals who work within them, but also in the systems and mechanisms that the institutions run. Institutional trust in the existing system created a false sense of security among patients and staff, which Cullen capitalized on to continue his actions without being suspected.

Jonathan Culler in his deconstruction shows that the structure of trust in the hospital institution in this film has dismantled itself when Cullen is able to take advantage of the loopholes in the system. The system that is supposed to protect patients and oversee staff behavior turns out to be unable to perform its functions effectively, revealing the uncertainty and instability in trust in the institution.

Through deconstruction analysis, we can see that institutional trust in *"The Good Nurse (2022)"* is a fragile and questionable construct. When the truth about Cullen is revealed, this trust is shattered, showing that the systems and mechanisms relied upon to maintain safety and truth cannot always be trusted. The movie invites us to reflect on how power and knowledge are used in institutions and how social norms can be built and dismantled.

 2. **The Concept of Deconstruction of Lies in *"The Good Nurse (2022)"***

Deception by Charles Cullen

Charles Cullen's ability to hide his true nature is an important theme in "The Good Nurse (2022)". His lies are both verbal and behavioral, creating a false sense of security among his patients and coworkers. Examples of Cullen's verbal lies are seen as he speaks with concern and empathy to his patients, providing false reassurance about their condition, such as in a conversation with Amy who appears concerned for her health but is actually hiding her malicious intentions.

Cullen's lies have a huge impact on his life. Although he manages to cover it up for a long time, eventually his criminal actions are exposed and he faces severe legal consequences. His lies not only ruined his reputation but also destroyed his life, turning him into a serial killer who took advantage of the position and trust given to him as a nurse. Her colleagues felt betrayed and

traumatized, and the hospital where she worked suffered severe reputational damage.

Institutional Lies

The healthcare institutions depicted in the movie participate in perpetuating the lie, both through outright concealment and through a culture of silence and denial. The hospital management chose not to conduct an in-depth investigation and let Cullen go without a bad record that could taint the hospital's reputation. This shows how institutional lies can occur due to a system that is reluctant to reveal the truth in order to preserve its image.

Psychological Manipulation

Cullen's manipulative tactics, such as pretending to care and building trust with his victims, show how lies can be woven into everyday interactions, making them difficult to detect. These manipulations show how effective lies can be in creating the illusion of truth and trust.

Relating this to expert perspectives, Sigmund Freud stated that lies and deception are often the result of complex unconscious drives. Friedrich Nietzsche discussed the concept of "will to power" and his critique of traditional morality, where lies are used to achieve goals and power. Erving Goffman proposed the theory that social life is a stage where individuals play roles to influence the perceptions of others. Cullen's lies and manipulations fit this concept, where he plays the role of a caring and empathetic nurse to hide his true identity as a serial killer.

3. The Concept of Morality Deconstruction in "The Good Nurse (2022)"

Character Moral Ambiguity

Amy Loughren, the main character in the movie, faces a complicated moral dilemma as she uncovers the truth about Charles Cullen. Amy demonstrates the virtue of courage to expose Cullen's crimes despite risking her career and life. Amy's actions can be seen as a quest for eudaimonia through difficult yet righteous acts of virtue.

Institutional Morality

The institutions depicted in this movie are more concerned with reputation and legal responsibility than patient safety. The hospital's actions in covering up

Cullen's mistakes to protect their reputation contradicts Immanuel Kant's principle of morality which emphasizes moral action based on universally applicable principles, as well as John Stuart Mill's principle of utilitarianism which emphasizes that the right action is the one that produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

Ethical Dilemma

The situation in the movie depicts the ethical dilemma faced by the two main characters, Amy and Cullen. Amy must decide whether to report Cullen which could damage her career, while Cullen faces the dilemma between continuing his harmful behavior towards patients or stopping it. Amy's actions that demonstrate professional integrity and commitment to the ethical principles of medicine reflect a difficult but correct moral decision.

Analysis based on the principles of morality shows that Amy demonstrates acts of virtue and balance in accordance with Aristotle's teachings, as well as Kant's principle of moral obligation that can be made a universal law. Amy demonstrates that difficult moral decisions often involve personal sacrifice for the greater good and justice, while Cullen's actions contradict these principles of morality.

Conclusion

In "The Good Nurse (2022)," the film explores the deconstruction of truth, morality, and lies through the character of Charles Cullen, a nurse who is a serial killer. Cullen's outward appearance of kindness masks his true nature, and the film delves into how power and societal norms influence our perception of truth. Michel Foucault's theory suggests that truth is shaped by social power and institutions, which allowed Cullen to evade detection. Aristotle's view of truth as objective reality is challenged as Cullen's true nature is revealed through investigation. Jacques Derrida's ideas illustrate how the film's narrative questions apparent truths, while Cullen's confessions gradually uncover the reality.

The film also exposes personal and institutional lies. Cullen's deception creates a false sense of security, while institutional failures and cover-ups by hospital management reflect a systemic issue. The narrative shows how lies and manipulation can deeply impact individuals and systems, drawing on Freud,

Nietzsche, and Goffman's theories about unconscious drives, will to power, and social roles.

Regarding morality, Amy Loughren faces an ethical dilemma as she uncovers Cullen's crimes, highlighting the conflict between personal integrity and professional risk. The healthcare institution's prioritization of reputation over patient safety contradicts moral principles from Aristotle, Kant, and Mill, who emphasize virtue, duty, and justice. Amy's decision to expose Cullen, despite personal consequences, reflects a commitment to ethical principles and integrity. The film underscores the need for both personal virtue and institutional responsibility in addressing ethical challenges and ensuring justice.

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