

Female Silence and Psychotherapy through Feminist Approach in Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*

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Abstract

This study examines the roles of women in society and their attitudes toward family and societal expectations, focusing on Alicia and Theo Faber from Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient* (2019). It explores how Alicia's silence symbolizes the broader silencing of women by men and their search for meaning in chaos. Using a feminist lens, the study analyzes Alicia's traumatic childhood, revealing how misogyny and patriarchal structures shape her life. It addresses key questions such as how her upbringing under a patriarchal system impacts her and how her perceived insanity becomes an escape from punishment. The study aligns with feminist critics who argue that Western narratives reflect masculine biases and perpetuate patriarchal values. The findings suggest that Alicia's murder of her husband is a result of the compounded trauma of her childhood and the failure of her parents to protect her, ultimately leading to their tragic end. The study emphasizes the complex relationship between personal trauma and societal oppression, highlighting how these forces shape Alicia's actions and fate.

Keywords: Alex Michaelides, Female Silence, misogyny, traumatic memories,

INTRODUCTION

In *The Silent Patient*, the post-murder silence of Alicia Berenson makes a feminist statement against violence, against women within the context of her marriage. Her silence notably acts as an effective counter to the expectation of women to be quite, obedient, and voiceless. This quietness with the effort it takes with her to come up with a reason for her actions goes against the usual norms of society and raises questions about the balance of power between the two genders. Through the lens of Theo Faber, the narrative unfolds, where the dual roles of the narrator who is also the antagonist Andrew is said to provide insight into the mental cruelty and power that exists in this kind of interpersonal gender relationship. In this case, *The Silent patient* explains in detail why men often need to control women's voices literally and figuratively and what happens as a consequence for this power struggle when the story includes Theo's obsessive concern with Alicia's silence.

The Western literary canon has historically failed to accurately portray women, prompting feminist critics to advocate for the inclusion of works by and about women in mainstream literature. These critics argue for the recognition and analysis of women's writings from a feminist perspective, asserting that this field of literature deserves significant attention and cannot be overlooked. Feminist critics investigate the presence and nature of power held by female characters within literary works. They examine whether these characters possess any power and, if so, what form it takes. Additionally, feminist analysis confronts the political, social, and economic exploitation of women. This includes scrutinizing how the labor market perceives women's power and their status within it, assessing whether women receive the same job opportunities and wages as men.

The analysis delves into various aspects of feminine life depicted in Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*, examining how these elements both reflect and challenge societal norms and expectations. Through this exploration, feminist critics aim to elevate women's voices and experiences, ensuring they are accurately represented and valued within the literary canon. *The Silent Patient* is a compelling psychological thriller centered on Alicia Berenson, a celebrated painter accused of murdering her husband, Gabriel. The narrative opens with the chilling scene of Alicia shooting Gabriel multiple times and subsequently falling into complete silence. This refusal to speak results in her being institutionalized in a secure psychiatric facility, where she remains for six years.

The story is driven by Theo Faber, a psychotherapist who becomes deeply obsessed with Alicia's case. Theo is determined to uncover the mystery behind Alicia's silence and understand the circumstances that led to the murder. Despite warnings from his colleagues, he takes a job at the psychiatric facility where Alicia is confined, with the hope of treating her and coaxing her to speak once more. By analyzing Alicia's character and her silence, the study seeks to illuminate the broader themes of female oppression and resistance within a patriarchal society. It aims to reveal how Alicia's silence serves as a powerful statement against the societal forces that seek to silence women. Through this feminist lens, the study underscores the importance of acknowledging and valuing women's perspectives and experiences in literature.

As Theo begins his sessions with Alicia, he uncovers her past through her artwork and the diary she kept prior to the murder. He learns that Alicia endured a troubled childhood, marred by her father's suicide and her mother's subsequent neglect. Alicia found solace only in her art, using it as a means of escape from her painful reality. Theo's investigation also reveals Gabriel's infidelity, adding another layer of complexity to the case. He starts to suspect that Alicia's silence might be a strategic choice to protect herself from the harsh truths of her life. As Theo delves deeper into Alicia's psyche, he begins to question his own mental stability, haunted by his traumatic past and the unsettling parallels he finds between his life and Alicia's story. The deeper Theo goes, the more he is drawn into the labyrinth of Alicia's mind, struggling to distinguish between reality and his own psychological projections. This exploration not only unravels Alicia's silence but also forces Theo to confront his own unresolved issues, blurring the lines between therapist and patient. As the story unfolds, Theo's personal and professional life begins to unravel. His obsession with Alicia's case strains his marriage and deteriorates his mental health. Despite these challenges, Theo remains resolute in his quest to uncover the truth behind Alicia's silence. A turning point occurs when Theo makes a startling discovery about Alicia's past. He learns that Alicia was not the one who killed Gabriel. In a shocking twist, it is revealed that Max, Alicia's seemingly supportive friend, was the real murderer. Max manipulated the evidence to frame Alicia, hiding his own affair with Gabriel. With this revelation, Theo confronts Max, who ultimately confesses to the crime. The truth is finally unveiled, exonerating Alicia. However, this revelation comes at a great personal

cost to Theo, leaving him shattered by the experience. In the aftermath, Alicia's silence remains, but its meaning transforms. She chooses not to speak, not out of guilt, but because she has nothing left to say. Theo, on the other hand, finds a semblance of peace, realizing that his obsession with Alicia was a way to escape his unresolved trauma. *The Silent Patient* is a tale of trauma, obsession, and the power of silence, posing a haunting question: What drives someone to commit a crime, and what happens when the truth is finally revealed? The subsequent analysis covers several crucial aspects that fulfill the study's purpose: The selected previous studies, Alicia Berenson's Childhood and Trauma, Silent Patient, Psychotherapy and the Concept of Othering, Patriarchal Oppression and Socio-Cultural Critiques of Gender Disparity, and Conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Words as Medicine: The Therapeutic Art of Storytelling in Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*," Rana Manahil (2023) uses narrative medicine to examine how storytelling enhances the bond between clinicians and patients. Emphasizing three main components: Attention, Affiliation, and Representation. Manahil contends that connecting with patients' stories enhances empathy and comprehension. Utilizing *The Silent Patient* as a case study, the examination emphasizes Alicia Berenson's traumatic silence following the murder of her husband. Utilizing Rita Charon's narrative medicine theory, Manahil explores how suppressed emotions can explode harmfully. The research shows that storytelling, whether in therapy or fiction, is essential for grasping emotional suffering and revealing concealed realities.

In their 2024 work, 'A Psychodynamic Study of *The Silent Patient*', Zainab Akram and et al utilize John Bowlby's attachment theory to explore the psychological trauma featured in *The Silent Patient*. The research examines Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber, exploring how their insecure childhood bonds shape their behaviors in adulthood. It examines how Alicia's trauma, which involves her mother's passing and her father's emotional neglect, along with Theo's emotional mistreatment by his father, influence their disordered attachment patterns. This examination emphasizes the enduring influence of early attachment issues on mental well-being, demonstrating how previous experiences significantly shape current behaviors and relationships. In "The Power of Non-Verbal Communication: Analysis of Alicia as Alcestis in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*", Ayesha Shoaib and et al examine Alicia Berenson's silence and her utilization of non-verbal cues to convey her feelings. The study investigates how Alicia conveys her message through her paintings, aggression, gestures, and facial expressions by means of textual analysis. The research highlights similarities between Alicia and Alcestis, a character from Greek mythology, emphasizing that both figures experience betrayal and are rendered voiceless by those they care about. It reaches the conclusion that suppressing emotions may result in a volatile outpouring of feelings, frequently appearing as revenge motivated by fear, affection, animosity, or despair. In "Beyond Words: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into Silence and Trauma in the Novel *The Silent Patient*", Arain performs a psychoanalytic analysis of Alicia Berenson's silence, interpreting it as a multifaceted means of communication instead of simply a state of victimhood. The research examines Alicia's psychological growth in relation to socio-cultural and psychiatric settings, focusing on themes of trauma, hidden stories, and personal exploration. Utilizing psychoanalytic theory, the study enhances our comprehension of how mental health is portrayed in literature, emphasizing the transformative power of addressing trauma.

In "Healing Hues: Art Therapy's Journey to Wholeness in the Silent Patient" by Ayisha Zidha, Meenakshi Rana examines how art therapy aids Alicia Berenson in revealing suppressed

emotions and fostering psychological recovery. The research investigates Alicia's employment of art as a means for self-discovery and emotional articulation, highlighting its importance in dealing with trauma. Utilizing Freud's concepts of defense mechanisms, the study emphasizes the healing potential of art in aiding recovery, demonstrating its significant effect on exploring the intricacies of the human mind.

In "Stress in Alex Michaelides' novel the *Silent Patient*" by Mai Sarah and Asnani (2021) investigates the various stressors encountered by the protagonist, Alicia Berenson, in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*. Its primary objective is to analyze the types and effects of stress that Alicia experiences, employing Priyoto's (2014) theoretical framework on stress as the analytical lens. By applying Priyoto's theory, this research aims to elucidate how different forms of stress influence Alicia's psychological state and narrative trajectory, thereby offering deeper insights into the character's mental and emotional struggles.

Saftiri and et al. in "An Analysis of Archetypes of Alicia Brenson in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*" utilize Priyoto's theory of stress management to examine Alicia's mental journey. The research explores how Alicia's behaviors, particularly the killing of her husband and her later silence, illustrate her effort to liberate herself from emotional weights. It contends that Alicia's challenges are connected to her process of individuation, influenced by trauma experienced from her early years into adulthood. The study emphasizes Alicia's inner psyche, exploring both conscious and unconscious aspects, as essential for comprehending her emotional and psychological intricacies. (P. 148).

Prior analyses concentrate on Alicia Berenson's mental condition but frequently neglect the societal influences affecting her existence. Conversely, Theo Faber's story deceives readers into thinking Alicia is the killer, while subtly concealing his own involvement in the crime. This research adopts a feminist perspective to demonstrate that Alicia's silence results from a patriarchal society that stifles her voice and self-expression. Through the investigation of Alicia's warped depiction, the examination uncovers how Faber's prejudiced storytelling encourages readers to embrace Alicia's culpability without scrutinizing his intentions or pondering other viewpoints. According to Beth Moroney:

As believers in the narrator's mission to reveal the events in the story, we tend to accept his words at face value. And so, Faber describes his fascination with the unfortunate Alicia, who stands accused of shooting her beloved husband, Gabriel. By all accounts the two had been madly in love, and therefore, speculation about what motivated Alicia to destroy her spouse by shooting him in the face, obliterating him, runs to a variety of wild theories. (Beth's Book Review)

Theo Faber, a criminal psychotherapist, has recently taken up a position at The Grove, a prominent psychiatric unit. His primary objective is to address the enigmatic case of Alicia Berenson. As the novel's narrator, Faber sets the tone for his investigation with the declaration, "But I'm going too fast. I'm getting ahead of myself. I must start at the beginning and let events speak for themselves. I mustn't color them, twist them, or tell any lies. I'll proceed step by step, slowly and cautiously" (P.11). This statement reveals his commitment to an unbiased and meticulous examination of Alicia's case. However, his pledge of objectivity stands in stark contrast to the manipulative narrative that unfolds, raising questions about the reliability of his account and his true intentions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Alicia Berenson's Childhood And Trauma

Alicia Berenson, a renowned painter, was accused of murdering her husband six years ago and has not uttered a word since. Known for her gentle demeanor and artistic spirit, Alicia's reputation contrasts sharply with the crime she is accused of: shooting her husband multiple times in the face, seemingly revealing a deep-seated hatred and grudge. Despite her success in the art world, this violent act stands in stark opposition to her public persona. Her last completed painting, titled "Alcestis," is named after the heroine in Greek mythology who sacrifices her life to save her husband. This painting not only showcases the beauty of Alicia's soul but also highlights her profound commitment to her husband, adding a layer of tragic irony to her story.

Theo, a psychotherapist, endeavors to delve deeply into Alicia's past, seeking to uncover the darkest corners of her character. He begins his investigation by exploring Alicia's closest connections, starting with her cousin Paul and her former therapist Ruth. These early inquiries suggest that Alicia's mental instability and frequent hospital visits could have contributed to her potential to commit murder. Alex Michaelides's writing style is highly engaging, immersing the reader in the psychological landscape of the characters. However, his style can be misleading, guiding the reader along a path that he meticulously crafts.

Childhood traumatic memories shape the early lives of the two main characters in *The Silent Patient*. Both Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson carry these painful memories into adulthood. Theo grew up in a household dominated by his abusive father. In an attempt to escape his father's violence, he focused on his studies, striving to attend a college far from his father's domination and aggression. However, despite his efforts, Theo finds it impossible to start a new life, continually haunted by his traumatic past. Alicia's early life was marred by the traumatic experience of her mother's suicide while Alicia was still in the car. Her mother, seemingly oblivious to her daughter in the car seat, drove into a red brick wall, resulting in her death. Alicia reflects on this traumatic event with profound confusion and anguish, questioning, "Was she crazy? Is that why she did it? Why she strapped me into the passenger seat of her yellow Mini and sped us towards that red brick wall?" (Michaelides 67). Alicia's childhood is marked by her mother's suicide, followed by an upbringing under an unkind aunt and an emotionally abusive father. Like Theo, she leaves her family home but remains unable to escape her traumatic memories. While Theo seeks to overcome his past by studying therapy, Alicia retreats into her private world of provocative painting, using her art as an attempt to break free from her haunting past.

The turning point in Alicia's life occurs when she murders her husband after his apparent betrayal, which reawakens her deeply buried traumatic memories. Her father's wish for her death instead of her mother's resurfaces, driving her to this extreme act. Michaelides masterfully intertwines these histories, making their psychological landscapes a central theme of the novel. Theo's childhood was marred by violence and abuse, leading him to leave home as soon as possible, much like Alicia. However, by the end of the novel, Theo returns to the very home where he endured so much suffering. Despite Ruth's advice to sever ties with his past, his return signifies a psychological regression. Stuck in a cycle of trauma, Theo finds himself replaying his painful experiences and unwittingly taking on the role of his father, becoming the head of a troubled household. This return to his origins underscores his inability to move forward and break free from the shadows of his past.

In the moments before she murders Gabriel, Alicia is enveloped by the scent of jasmine blossoms, triggering a vivid memory of that same fragrance from her past. During his second conversation with Paul, Theo learns that jasmine was in bloom on the warm summer night when Alicia overheard her father wishing she were dead. In contrast, Theo's childhood is symbolized by winter. One of his few positive memories involves walking outside on a snowy day, catching snowflakes in his hand, and feeling a fleeting sense of freedom from his abusive father, a reminder of the vast world beyond his oppressive home. At the novel's end, as Theo realizes the police have evidence of his crimes, he reaches out of a window to catch a snowflake. This action poignantly connects his present predicament to his past, underscoring the cyclical nature of his experiences and the seasons that symbolize them.

Silent Patient, Psychotherapy And The Concept Of Othering

In analyzing *The Silent Patient* through Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the "Other," the theoretical approach emphasizes how Alicia Berenson's silence may be viewed as a reaction to being objectified and sidelined in a patriarchal environment. De Beauvoir posits that women have been historically regarded as the "Other," characterized in contrast to the male "Self" and subjugated to the prevailing societal roles of men. In this situation, Alicia's silence serves as a strong indication of this oppression. She is regarded as the "Other" by the patriarchal society surrounding her, her spouse, the mental health facility, and even Theo Faber, who aims to dominate her story and analyze her suffering. De Beauvoir's theory indicates that women frequently lack agency and are diminished to mere objects or "Other" by patriarchal systems, and this theory can help elucidate Alicia's silence as both a response to and a means of resisting being solely characterized by the expectations of others. Her quietness thus serves as a means to regain some power over her identity in a society that denies her complete humanity. Embracing this viewpoint allows us to examine how gender, power, and oppression influence Alicia's character and narrative, ultimately illustrating how her silence contests the societal positioning and perception of women. As a psychological thriller, the story is enriched by Michaelides' extensive background in the field, drawing on three years of formal study and two years of hands-on experience in a secure facility for young adults. This wealth of knowledge infuses the narrative with significant psychological depth and complexity, making the plot both engaging and intellectually stimulating. Theo gains intimate knowledge of the realities within contemporary Britain's mental health facilities, particularly through his work at The Grove. This experience allows him to witness firsthand the financial pressures that strain both the institution and its patients. One notable incident involves a patient named Elif, who requests a replacement for a broken pool cue. Weeks later, Theo notices that this simple request remains unfulfilled, reflecting broader systemic issues. Professor Diomedes, the head of psychiatry at The Grove, reveals that the facility's future is uncertain due to chronic underfunding and a lack of essential medical resources. Alex Michaelides uses these details to highlight the dire state of health facilities in contemporary Britain. The insufficient support hampers the ability to provide optimal services, leading to a decline in patient care.

Doctors become increasingly careless and less concerned about their patients' well-being. For instance, after Alicia's overdose, the medical staff shows little concern for her critical condition, focusing instead on maintaining the facility's reputation to secure future funding. This neglect underscores the detrimental impact of financial strain on patient care and the overall effectiveness of health services in the country. The relationship between Theo Faber, the psychotherapist, and Alicia Berenson evolves into a mutual process where they emotionally open up to each other. "If

you really want to get Alicia to talk... Let her paint. That is the only way she will talk to you. Through her art" (Michaelides 163). As the narrative progresses, the boundary between patient and therapist becomes increasingly blurred. Theo believes he can interpret Alicia's feelings despite her silence, aided by the psychological phenomenon of countertransference.

In one of their final sessions, Alicia sits in the therapist's chair, symbolically reversing their roles and suggesting a shift in the balance of power between them. This role reversal illustrates Alicia's realization that her condition and Theo's are remarkably similar. Both are haunted by traumatic pasts, particularly by abusive fathers. Alicia recognizes her need for help from Theo and simultaneously perceives that he needs similar assistance. This is poignantly demonstrated when she takes his place in the therapist's chair, indicating her understanding of their shared struggles and her empathy for Theo's plight. The narrative thus underscores the complex dynamics of their relationship, where both characters confront their traumatic histories and seek solace in each other. After returning from a walk through the facility gardens, Theo and Alicia enter his office, where Alicia takes his seat, eschewing the lower seat typically reserved for the patient. In the novel, the psychiatrist's chair symbolizes the power dynamic between therapist and patient, drawing from and inverting the classical image of a therapist taking notes while a patient sits in a lower, reclined position. By assuming Theo's chair, Alicia symbolically claims authority over their conversation, marking the ongoing shift in their power dynamic. "I told her about my father, and growing up in that house; she seemed curious to know as much as possible about my past and what had shaped me and made me who I am" (p. 266). During his sessions with Alicia, Theo alternates between the roles of therapist and patient, seamlessly shifting from speaking to listening. At times, he guides the conversation, providing professional insights and analysis, while at other moments, he adopts a more receptive stance, allowing Alicia to express her thoughts and emotions. This dynamic interplay reflects the complex and evolving nature of their therapeutic relationship, highlighting the reciprocal influence they exert on each other's understanding and healing processes.

During her first session with Theo, Alicia is heavily medicated and nonresponsive, eliciting a paternalistic sense of care from him. From this initial state of helplessness, she gradually becomes more responsive to his attempts to reach her, initially communicating through subtle nonverbal gestures and eventually speaking at the novel's conclusion. Alicia takes Theo's chair, he notes that he should ask her about this "telling gesture," but refrains out of impatience to hear the end of her story. Seated in his chair, Alicia recognizes the power she now holds as the storyteller, with the key to unlocking a crucial mystery. This act not only symbolizes her newfound agency but also underscores the dramatic shift in their relationship's power balance. When Theo visits Alicia's childhood home, he describes it as "ugly, a Victorian monster," (p. 133), imbuing his narration with the eerie qualities of a gothic tale or a ghost story. He personifies the building as "obstinate and imposing," noting its facade is cloaked in ivy. This overgrowth of plant life prompts Theo to ponder the formative experiences and traumas that took root in this house, shaping Alicia's adult life. To Theo, the ivy-covered house symbolizes the deep-seated roots that bind an individual to their past, representing the inextricable connection between one's history and their present self. "This was the house where Alicia had been born. It was where she spent the first eighteen years of her life. Within these walls her personality had been formed: the roots of her adult life, all causes and subsequent choices, were buried here. Sometimes it's hard to grasp why the answers to the present lie in the past" (p.133).

Theo, who bears the scars of his own abusive childhood, perceives the overgrown house as a symbol of the roots from which Alicia's adult life has grown. He strongly believes that the experiences of one's childhood profoundly shape the decisions and events of their later years. "She

was me, and I was her. Two innocent victims deceived and betrayed" (Michaelides 317). This conviction plays a crucial role in unraveling the mystery behind Alicia's murder of Gabriel. Theo discovers that the act of violence was catalyzed by the resurfacing of a deeply traumatic childhood memory, affirming his theory that the past inevitably influences the present. "The real motivation was purely selfish. I was on a quest to help myself. I believe the same is true for most people who go into mental health. We are drawn to this profession because we are damaged—we study psychology to heal ourselves. Whether we are prepared to admit this is or not is another question" (p. 16).

Amelia Pratiwi1 and Tri Pramesti argue that symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

Reliving the trauma through flashbacks, this symptom can arise when sometimes see, feel, or smell something that will remind you of the events that make the sufferer afraid, and sad... Aggressive behavior towards oneself or others, is a problem that can occur due to the frustration of being unable to control the symptoms of complex PTSD. Therefore, the person tends to attack others or can hurt themselves... Social isolation is the problem that occurs when a person no longer believes in others, then they will create their own space for themselves that makes them isolated. (p.132)

Alicia is perpetually haunted by memories of her past, as if the traumatic events have remained ever-present in her life. These deep-seated wounds contribute to her psychological instability, rendering her mental state profoundly abnormal. The trauma has left an indelible mark on her psyche, causing her inner self to remain in a state of turmoil. Her experiences have profoundly disturbed her sense of self, leading to aggressive, wild, and vicious behavior. "I hate causing him pain, and yet sometimes I desperately want to hurt him, and I do not know why" (Michaelides 127). Alicia's perception of those around her as unfriendly and threatening further exacerbates her inner turmoil, highlighting the enduring impact of her past traumas on her current behavior and interactions. Alicia's diary serves as a crucial symbol in the novel, offering a window into her inner world. Through her diary entries, readers gain a deep understanding of her emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences. This intimate record not only reveals the complexity of Alicia's psychological state but also sheds light on the events and relationships that have shaped her. The diary becomes a key tool for unraveling the mysteries of her character and the underlying causes of her trauma, providing invaluable insights into her troubled mind and turbulent life.

Patriarchal Oppression And Socio-Cultural Critiques Of Gender Disparity

Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking book *The Second Sex* (1949) is a key text in feminist philosophy that examines the historical and existential formation of women as the "Other." De Beauvoir contends that women have historically been characterized in relation to men, placed as inferior, reliant, and auxiliary. She explores how this "Othering" process has infiltrated different facets of society, such as culture, religion, biology, and psychology. De Beauvoir famously declares, "One does not emerge as a woman but instead becomes one," highlighting the societal construction of gender and how women's identities are influenced by cultural expectations and standards. The book is split into two parts. In the beginning, de Beauvoir investigates the biological, psychoanalytical, and historical aspects of the oppression of women. She analyzes how women have been restricted to positions as wives, mothers, and objects of male longing. In the second volume, she explores the real-life experiences of women, analyzing their functions as employees, mothers, and spouses, and how these roles are influenced by patriarchal structures. De Beauvoir's

writings question conventional stories of femininity and advocate for women's freedom via self-determination, stressing the importance for women to rise above their prescribed roles and shape their own lives and identities. *The Second Sex* is still a significant critique of gender disparity and persists in influencing feminist ideas and conversations.

The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides presents a complex examination of gender dynamics, with Alicia Berenson's silence acting as a significant symbol for wider socio-cultural critiques of gender disparity. Although the novel mainly focuses on the mystery surrounding Alicia's connection to her husband's murder, it also quietly critiques the patriarchal forces influencing her life, her silence, and ultimately, her destiny. Alicia's choice to cease speaking after murdering her husband is a key theme of the novel. Although the novel depicts her silence as stemming from psychological trauma, it can alternatively be viewed through the framework of Simone de Beauvoir's "Other" theory. Alicia's silence may be interpreted as a form of defiance against the patriarchal demands imposed on her. In a world that constantly seeks to define her and diminish her autonomy, Alicia's silence signifies her retreat from a story shaped by men, including her husband Gabriel and the male-centric psychiatric system aiming to "repair" her. Theo Faber, the male lead and narrator, is instrumental in sustaining the gender dynamics of power and control. His fixation on Alicia, along with his effort to "comprehend" and "heal" her, reflects the patriarchal inclination to mold women's voices and existences to fit male requirements. He creates a story about her actions that portrays her as a passive victim of her situation and trauma, instead of confronting the influence of societal oppression on her behavior. Theo's efforts to reveal the truth about Alicia further illustrate how women's narratives, even in their most personal forms, are frequently viewed through male lenses, perpetuating gendered power disparities.

The mental health facility where Alicia is held reflects the wider societal inclination to dismiss women's feelings and experiences as abnormal. Alicia lacks the opportunity to express herself genuinely; her actions are viewed through the perspective of male authority figures focused more on labeling and managing her than on comprehending her trauma. This critique emphasizes the frequent misunderstanding or stigmatization of women's mental health in patriarchal structures, where their feelings are disregarded or labeled as unreasonable. Alicia's union with Gabriel exemplifies the traditional power dynamics present in patriarchal relationships. Gabriel, a well-known artist, emotionally and creatively dominates Alicia, employing her as inspiration for his work while suppressing her own expression. Her final act of aggression can be interpreted as a frantic effort to regain control over her existence and to escape a stifling relationship. In this situation, her quietness after Gabriel's death may be seen not only as a result of trauma but also as a symbolic refusal of the patriarchal systems that shaped her life.

In the novel, Alicia is diminished to her position as a spouse and inspiration, with her true identity and independence frequently ignored. The novel examines how women are frequently pushed to the sidelines in male-dominated societies, their voices silenced, and their inner experiences overlooked. Through the lens of Alicia's silence, *The Silent Patient* explores the representation of women in literature and society, frequently portraying them as mere objects for male characters to interpret instead of as fully developed individuals with their own agency.

In brief, *The Silent Patient* examines gender inequality by illustrating how Alicia's trauma and silence are influenced by social and relational power structures. By depicting Alicia's character and her relationships with male figures, the novel reveals how patriarchal systems suppress women, strip them of autonomy, and transform them into objects of male desire or domination. The novel highlights the necessity for a more compassionate and gender-aware comprehension of women's voices and experiences.

In *The Silent Patient*, Michaelides utilizes an unreliable narrator named Theo Faber, whose account of events greatly influences the reader's understanding of Alicia Berenson. In the novel, Theo is depicted as highly committed to comprehending Alicia; however, his fixation on her skews his perceptions of her behavior and suppresses significant realities. As an untrustworthy narrator, Theo chooses to share information selectively, frequently portraying Alicia's silence and behaviors in ways that fulfill his own needs and wishes. This alteration of the story induces a sense of intrigue while also deceiving the reader, prompting them to ponder Alicia's genuine motivations and whether she is really the one responsible for the crime. Theo's prejudice, arising from his psychological struggles and personal motives, is unveiled slowly, especially in his dealings with Alicia and his obsession with "repairing" her. As the story unfolds, Theo's lack of reliability is increasingly apparent, since he fails to share crucial details and modifies Alicia's image to align with his personal narrative. This untrustworthy narration prompts the reader to reevaluate their first impressions of Alicia, reflecting on whether she is merely a passive victim or a proactive agent in her own narrative. Alicia's quietness, for instance, might first be perceived as stemming from her trauma, yet Theo's viewpoint is influenced by his wish to reveal a concealed reality, influencing the reader's perception of her as a mystery to decipher rather than a multifaceted person.

Theo's manipulation ultimately illustrates the wider feminist theme of how women's voices and narratives are frequently misrepresented or suppressed by male figures, especially within patriarchal structures. Through the unreliable narrator, Michaelides highlights the challenges in grasping women's lived experiences when viewed through male lenses, compelling the reader to explore the intricacies of gender, power, and authority in their understanding of Alicia. The changing power dynamics between Alicia and Theo reflect important feminist themes, especially those related to control, agency, and the objectification of women. At the beginning of the novel, Theo has the advantage in the relationship since he is the psychotherapist and Alicia is the patient. His role is to "cure" her, yet in truth, this dynamic strengthens the conventional patriarchal idea of male dominance over women's bodies and thoughts. Theo believes he comprehends Alicia's trauma and tries to manage her story, placing himself as the primary authority in her life and care. This disparity in power illustrates how women's independence is frequently compromised in patriarchal structures, where male entities, such as fathers, husbands, or physicians, are viewed as the judges of women's realities. Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, the balance of power starts to change. Alicia's silence, first viewed as a sign of her victimization and trauma, transforms into a means of resistance. By choosing silence, Alicia asserts her own narrative, defying the societal expectations that urge her to fit into the roles of wife, victim, and patient. This transition in power, from Theo's dominance over her story to Alicia's restoration of her voice, reflects feminist discussions on regaining agency and liberating oneself from the oppressive structures that mute women.

Theo, in his relentless quest to "repair" Alicia, ultimately falls prey to his own manipulations. As the depths of his psychological struggles come to light, including his history of abuse and the more sinister facets of his character, the novel illustrates how unchecked power can lead to adverse consequences. Alicia's silence, at first perceived as her yielding to male dominance, evolves into a strong act of rebellion. Her behavior compels Theo to face his own shortcomings, and ultimately, it is disclosed that he, rather than Alicia, is accountable for the offense, overturning the power balance and demonstrating how women's agency can challenge patriarchal stories. In this regard, Michaelides examines how women are frequently portrayed as submissive objects of male desire or power, merely to demonstrate how they can overturn these assumptions. The changing power dynamics between Alicia and Theo illustrate feminist themes of independence, the restoration of voice, and the dismissal of patriarchal dominance, emphasizing the novel's profound

commentary on gender disparity. The inconsistent narration in *The Silent Patient* and the evolving power dynamics between Alicia and Theo act as significant mechanisms through which Michaelides critiques social and gendered power hierarchies. The inconsistent narration urges the reader to examine the misrepresentations of women's experiences within a patriarchal society, while the shifting power dynamics between Alicia and Theo demonstrate how women can regain control and challenge male-centric stories. These components enrich the novel's feminist themes, illuminating the intricate ways in which women's voices and actions are frequently managed, distorted, and ultimately, contested.

The narrative unveils a pervasive pattern of misogynistic exploitation, control, and manipulation of women by men, including fathers, brothers, husbands, mothers, and friends. Alex Michaelides highlights patriarchal domination and its detrimental impact on women throughout the story. Men consistently exploit women's perceived weaknesses to dominate and appropriate their efforts and successes. For instance, Jean-Felix exploits Alicia's artistic talents to promote his gallery, using the notoriety of her murder trial to display her paintings without her consent. Her cousin, Paul Rose, borrows a large sum of money from her, showing no intention of repayment. Additionally, her brother-in-law, Max, kisses her without genuine emotion, motivated by rivalry with his brother Gabriel rather than any true interest in Alicia. Alicia recognizes that Max's desire to possess anything belonging to Gabriel drives his actions. Through these examples, the narrative underscores the various ways men manipulate and control women, illustrating the pervasive impact of patriarchal values on their lives and relationships.

Furthermore, her husband, Gabriel, seeks therapy for Alicia against her desire and he selects close friend, Christian, to be a therapist. Gabriel and his brother undermines Alicia's faith in her senses. The misogynistic attitude of both Max and Christian surface when interviewed by Theo, calling Alicia as "a mad woman". Her husband fails to protect her from male violence, moreover, he become part of this violence against his wife. His betrayal add another burden of Alicia's shoulder. Within the intricate narrative of *The Silent Patient*, gender dynamics underscore the pervasive influence of patriarchal power structures. The novel features instances where women challenge and subvert these norms, highlighting their agency and resistance. Alicia's rebellion against oppressive patriarchy serves as a powerful example of this defiance. Through thematic content analysis, "Lips that quiver become a representation of words left unsaid, a sign of internal conflict" (6). This line vividly illustrates how physical manifestations of silence, such as trembling lips, symbolize deeper internal struggles. It underscores the psychological intricacies embedded in the narrative, revealing how the characters' unspoken emotions and conflicts are intricately connected to their experiences within a patriarchal society. This nuanced portrayal emphasizes the complex interplay between silence, power, and resistance in the characters' lives. (Arain, P. 41). In addition, Theo makes use of her health conditions to visit her daily in the hospital, sitting by her bed to complete his control over her and make her dependent on him emotionally. He cares more to succeed in his therapist task more than other things.

Alicia's refusal to speak is a central focus of curiosity and debate throughout *The Silent Patient*. The novel uses her silence as a key motif to explore the silencing of women by men and the quest for meaning amidst confusion. "The police questioned her in the presence of her lawyer. Alicia remained silent throughout the interview. Her lips were pale, bloodless; they fluttered occasionally but formed no words, made no sounds. She answered no questions. She could not, would not, speak" (p.8). Before she fell silent, the men in her life, her husband Gabriel and her therapist Christian, dismissed her reports of being stalked. Exploiting her past mental health struggles, they disregarded her concerns, causing her to doubt her own perceptions. Similarly, Jean-

Felix frequently talked over her in one-sided conversations, and her brother-in-law Max threatened her to prevent her from reporting his inappropriate behavior to Gabriel.

A central irony in the novel is that Alicia gains more attention and interpretation from others once she stops speaking. Her silence, rather than diminishing her presence, becomes a canvas for others to project their own narratives. The public, convinced of her guilt, interprets her muteness as a silent confession, a sentiment echoed by the judge at her trial. For the employees at The Grove, her silence is seen as a manifestation of the shock and trauma following Gabriel's murder. Theo, however, perceives her silence as tacit approval of his actions. Alicia's muteness allows others to project their own thoughts and emotions onto her, making it easier for them to construct their own stories about her. Most notably, Theo struggles to separate his emotions from hers after their therapy sessions, illustrating how her silence serves as a mirror for others' projections and assumptions. This dynamic underscores the broader themes of miscommunication, misunderstanding, and the consequences of silencing voices that seek to be heard. By exploring these themes, the novel delves into the complexities of human interaction and the impact of voicelessness on personal identity and relationships.

Given Alicia's history of mental illness, her legal team argues for a plea of diminished capacity. With the support of Lazarus Diomedes, a distinguished professor of forensic psychology at Imperial College and the clinical director at The Grove, the court is persuaded to grant Alicia admission to a long-term care facility. Diomedes's expertise plays a crucial role in the judge's decision, which reflects a recognition of Alicia's need for specialized psychiatric care rather than a conventional prison sentence. Beyond the central enigma of Gabriel's murder, there is another equally compelling layer of literary allusion woven into Michaelides's narrative. This layer is introduced through a striking painting created by Alicia while she awaited trial. Completed shortly after her husband's death, the painting has been widely interpreted as a visual confession of her guilt. Titled "Alcestis" in Greek lettering at the bottom corner, the self-portrait presents Alicia standing naked in front of an easel, paintbrush in hand. Her wrists are marked with fresh scars, and the brush, dripping with red paint, evokes the unsettling suggestion of blood. This artwork not only serves as a profound symbol within the story but also enriches the narrative with its classical reference and haunting imagery. (Beth's Book Review).

When Theo Faber compelled Gabriel to choose who would live and who would die, it mirrored the same ritualistic act of sacrificing Alicia. Gabriel had no desire to face death himself; instead, he chose Alicia to die in his place. He presented Alicia with a stark ultimatum: "Yes. Alicia dies, or you die. Your choice, Gabriel. Let's find out how much you love her. Would you die for her? You have ten seconds to decide... Ten... nine..." Gabriel's response, when it came, was unexpectedly frail and distant, almost childlike. "I don't want to die," he said, his voice barely audible, like a frightened child's plea. In that moment, Gabriel wielded the power of life and death with a chilling indifference.

When Alicia received this revelation from Gabriel, whom she had perceived as her savior, the sense of betrayal was unbearable. "I remained silent. How could I talk? Gabriel had sentenced me to death. The dead don't talk" (p. 325). Overwhelmed by the realization that she could not be happy with him as her father had decreed, Alicia felt driven to end Gabriel's life. She reflected on her shattered hopes and dreams, feeling that all her aspirations had been cruelly destroyed. Her father's words echoed in her mind: she did not deserve to live. "I saw it now. I would never be safe. Never be loved. All my hopes, dashed—all my dreams, shattered—leaving nothing, nothing. My father was right—I didn't deserve to live. I was nothing. That's what Gabriel did to me. "Alicia comes to understand that the true impact of Gabriel's actions was not her own act of killing him

but the destruction of her own sense of self. “That’s the truth. I didn’t kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger” (p. 310). In Alex Michaelides’s *The Silent Patient*, the story reaches its climax with a shocking revelation: Alicia Berenson, who had been silent throughout the novel, is revealed to have killed her husband, Gabriel. Her silence had shrouded the events leading up to Gabriel’s murder in mystery. The final twist is unveiled through Alicia’s hidden diary, which discloses that Theo Faber, the psychotherapist treating Alicia, was intricately involved in the chain of events that led to Gabriel’s death.

Theo had discovered that his wife was having an affair with Gabriel. Consumed by rage and betrayal, Theo tracked down Gabriel and Alicia, broke into their house, and tied them both up. In a twisted act of vengeance, Theo forced Gabriel to choose between his own life and Alicia’s. Gabriel chose to save himself, leaving Alicia devastated. After Theo left, Alicia, feeling utterly betrayed and abandoned, shot Gabriel in a moment of profound despair and hopelessness. This revelation not only explains Alicia’s prolonged silence but also sheds light on her eventual trust in Theo. Unbeknownst to him, Theo was the key to unlocking the truth behind Gabriel’s murder. The novel concludes with Theo coming to terms with the full extent of his actions and their devastating impact on Alicia’s life. The story is a haunting exploration of betrayal, guilt, and the complex interplay of human emotions and relationships.

CONCLUSION

This analysis delves into various aspects of feminine life depicted in Alex Michaelides’s *The Silent Patient*, examining how these elements both reflect and challenge societal norms and expectations. Through this exploration, feminist critics aim to elevate women’s voices and experiences, ensuring they are accurately represented and valued within the literary canon. *The Silent Patient* is a compelling psychological thriller centered on Alicia Berenson, a celebrated painter accused of murdering her husband, Gabriel. The narrative opens with the chilling scene of Alicia shooting Gabriel multiple times and subsequently falling into complete silence, leading to her institutionalization in a secure psychiatric facility for six years. The story is driven by Theo Faber, a psychotherapist who becomes deeply obsessed with Alicia’s case, determined to uncover the mystery behind her silence and understand the circumstances that led to the murder. Despite warnings from his colleagues, Theo takes a job at the psychiatric facility where Alicia is confined, hoping to treat her and coax her into speaking once more. By analyzing Alicia’s character and her silence, this study seeks to illuminate the broader themes of female oppression and resistance within a patriarchal society. It reveals how Alicia’s silence serves as a powerful statement against the societal forces that seek to silence women.

Alicia’s situation in *The Silent Patient* is a poignant exploration of how deeply entrenched trauma can shape and distort an individual’s psyche. Her childhood, marked by her mother’s suicide, an unkind aunt, and an emotionally abusive father, lays the foundation for her later instability. The turning point in her life comes with the murder of her husband, Gabriel, after his betrayal reawakens her deeply buried traumatic memories. Her father’s wish for her death instead of her mother’s resurfaces, driving her to this extreme act. Michaelides masterfully intertwines Alicia’s past and present, making her psychological landscape a central theme of the novel. Haunted by memories of her traumatic past, Alicia’s mental state is profoundly abnormal, with her deep-seated wounds contributing to her psychological instability. Her experiences have disturbed her sense of self, leading to aggressive and vicious behavior. The study reveals that Alicia’s story underscores the profound impact of unresolved trauma and the importance of addressing psychological wounds. It

highlights the necessity of understanding and empathizing with the experiences that drive individuals to the brink, offering a compelling narrative that resonates deeply with themes of pain, silence, and the quest for healing.

In *The Silent Patient*, Michaelides skillfully intertwines unreliable narration and changing power dynamics to examine themes of gender disparity, trauma, and control. The novel examines how patriarchal systems silence and distort women's voices, with Alicia's silence serving as a means of resistance and the reclamation of her agency. Theo Faber's function as the untrustworthy narrator shows how male authority figures frequently distort and dominate women's narratives, mirroring wider societal trends of gender-based power relations. By incorporating these elements, the novel adds to feminist literary criticism by questioning the conventional stories that depict women merely as passive subjects of male longing or dominance. The investigation of silence, trauma, and manipulation in *The Silent Patient* provides important perspectives for modern psychotherapy, especially regarding the impact of gendered power dynamics on the therapeutic relationship. The novel depiction of Alicia's emotional and psychological intricacies emphasizes the significance of acknowledging how patriarchal oppression affects women's mental health and how their voices can be silenced or misinterpreted in clinical environments. The changing power dynamics between Alicia and Theo indicate that the therapeutic process should recognize and proactively tackle the fundamental power imbalances present in clinician-patient interactions.

In the end, Alicia's silence is more than a personal decision or an emotional reaction to her trauma; it functions as a purposeful act of resistance against the patriarchal powers that aim to dominate her. The novel examines through Theo Faber's perspective how his function as a narrator and an antagonist reveals the subtle tactics men use to manipulate and control women. Theo's fixation on breaking Alicia's silence reflect wider societal trends of controlling and repairing women who do not adhere to defined roles. By the conclusion of the novel, Theo's disintegration emphasizes the damaging effects of these dynamics, stressing the significance of regaining one's voice as an act of resistance, both literally and symbolically. Through this lens, Theo Faber's dual function enhances the novel investigation of power, control and gender, illustrating how Alicia's silence, instead of being passive, represents strong defiance against the patriarchal system.

For Further studies, analyzing *The Silent Patient* alongside with additional studies might explore *The Silent Patient* in relation to other modern feminist psychological thrillers, like *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn or *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins. This analysis could examine how different writers address themes of gender, trauma, and power relationships, and how these stories either mirror or confront societal views on women's mental health and autonomy. By analyzing the depiction of female leads in these works, researchers can gain deeper insights into how feminist psychological thrillers employ genre norms to challenge gender disparity. A more concentrated investigation could be performed on the convergence of feminist theory and psychotherapy, utilizing *The Silent Patient* as a case study. This study might examine how gendered power dynamics affect the therapeutic relationship between clinician and patient, providing practical suggestions for developing more fair and compassionate therapeutic practices. This research could additionally investigate the function of silence in therapy, especially for women, and how therapists can enhance their comprehension and response to the fundamental social pressures that contribute to silencing.

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