
Silence As A Psychological Shield: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Study Of *The Silent Patient*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the multifaceted concept of silence in Alex Michaelides' novel, *The Silent Patient*, through a Freudian psychoanalytic lens. It explores the underlying motives behind the protagonist Alicia Berenson's choice to remain mute following the tragic murder of her husband, Gabriel. Rather than viewing her speechlessness merely as an absence of communication, the investigation reveals it to be a sophisticated psychological defense mechanism. This defense stems from severe unconscious conflicts, deeply repressed emotions, and early traumatic memories—specifically the emotional rejection and psychological abandonment experienced during her childhood at the hands of her father. The findings demonstrate that Alicia's silence operates as a dual phenomenon: on one hand, it functions as a protective shield to safeguard her vulnerable psyche from overwhelming trauma and guilt; on the other hand, it serves as a form of non-verbal protest against vocal expression, rejecting language as an adequate tool for authentic self-expression. Ultimately, the cumulative impact of her childhood trauma shapes all her subsequent interpersonal relationships, eventually culminating in bottled-up hostility, defensive violence, and absolute muteness. By contextualizing her silence within psychoanalytic theory, this research highlights how repressed psychological wounds dictate emotional expression and behavioral outcomes in post-traumatic conditions.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Silence, Repression, Trauma, *The Silent Patient*

Introduction

For years, literature has been a tool used to explore the complex workings of the human psyche in terms of trauma, repression, and identification. One genre that offers much insight into human psychology is psychological thrillers. This is well illustrated in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019), which combines psychological and narrative suspense and provides a unique perspective into trauma and silence. In fact, the book has achieved international fame for its portrayal of psychological disorders, thus making it an important text in psychoanalytic literary criticism.

The story revolves around Alicia Berenson, an accomplished painter who kills her husband Gabriel and stops talking after his death. Her silence makes Alicia a character difficult to understand and analyze psychologically. The novel is narrated from the perspective of Theo Faber, a psychologist who is trying to find out the motive behind her murder and reasons for her silence. Silence in the story is presented as a more complex notion than the absence of speech.

The psychological thriller genre commonly depicts disturbed psyche using the technique of fragmented narrative, memory lapses, and symbolic behavior, without giving explicit explanations. In today's literature, silence is commonly used as a symbol of trauma and mental breakdown since people who have experienced a traumatic situation often find it difficult to express their pain verbally. Thus, psychological fiction is one of the best literary forms to explore and discuss repressed conflicts. Nowadays, literary characters tend to communicate symbolically through gestures, dreams, artistic performances, and emotional distance. This novel also belongs to this trend since the author turns Alicia's silence into something psychologically and symbolically meaningful. Contrary to its use as a tool of suspense in the book, Alicia's silence is a very clear case of the manifestation of the repressed trauma and conflicts of the subconscious.

In order to have a clear understanding of why Alicia decides not to speak for the entire duration of the story, it is important to formulate an idea that goes deeper than just the action itself. It can be done by looking at the theory of psychoanalysis as propounded by Freud. According to Freud's psychoanalysis theory, one will realize the importance of the sub-conscious mind since all the human activities are sub-consciously driven by conflict and traumas experienced before (Freud, Introductory Lectures 15).

In this case, silence is considered an expression of significant psychological meaning. Within the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, if something cannot be said aloud, it does not mean that it does not exist; it comes back to the person through other channels, such as symbolic representation, dreams, compulsions, or art production.

Repression played an especially important role in understanding Alicia's character. Repression involves unconsciously excluding distressing thoughts and memories from awareness, though they continue influencing behavior indirectly. The fact that she was not willing to talk was seen as repression, an effort to prevent herself from speaking out truths that posed a danger to her sanity. According to the talking cure hypothesis presented by Freud, speech was very important in psychoanalysis (Freud 1991).

Several other psychologists followed in Freud's footsteps, including Jacques Lacan who focused on how language played an important role in organizing the human unconscious, where silence could symbolize the breakdown of order (Lacan 1977). Although Lacanian psychology was Freudian, it still contributed greatly to silence in literature through the concept of presence and absence of language.

Michaelides' psychotherapy training was useful in writing the novel since he had some understanding of trauma, memory, and the workings of the unconscious mind. In this paper, it will be claimed that the author's use of silence as one of the techniques of writing the narrative story goes beyond what seems to be the case because it has been argued by Freud that silence can be considered to be a way of psychological protection through repression, trauma, and the unconsciousness of Alicia. Although there are previous works regarding analysis of silence in the novel *The Silent Patient* that have looked into silence in terms of resistance or even as a narrative device, Freudian ideas sometimes cannot be separated from the context. This research aims at analyzing silence in relation to the psychology of Alicia and at the same time making her repressed thoughts known.

This paper presents an analysis of silence as a psychoanalytic concept in the novel *The Silent Patient* in light of the Freudian theoretical approach. This paper has brought to attention some issues related to psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has become the subject of revision by many literary theorists and researchers; however, it is still widely used in literary criticism due to its strong focus on symbolism and the unconscious. The most evident fact about literature is that the literary texts have certain feelings and experiences which cannot be expressed rationally. This is the reason why psychoanalysis helps the critics analyze the relation between conscious actions and subconscious feelings. In trauma-oriented literature, silence, memories, and unusual behavior may serve as evidence of concealed emotions and experiences. Using the Freudian approach, one can study literary characters as individuals whose personality and behavior are influenced by psychological experiences of fear and desire.

Literature Review

There have been many studies undertaken regarding the psychological factors associated with the concept of silence, trauma, and repression using psychoanalytic literary theory. According to Sigmund Freud in "Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis," irrational behaviors arise because of hidden memories that the person fails to recollect consciously (Freud, 15). In another work by Sigmund Freud titled "The Ego and the Id," it is described that the human mind makes use of various defense mechanisms to tackle internal conflicts (Freud, 28).

Following on from Freud, other theorists, such as Jacques Lacan, have taken a further look into the theory of language, silence, and the connection between the two. In his writings entitled "Écrits" (1966), Lacan asserts that "the unconscious is structured like a language." From this point of view, it means that meaning will have to be considered in terms of symbolism, thus the possibility of silence being an opposition to symbolism or a refusal of it will arise. This implies that according to Lacanian theories, there is significance in silence within the communication process.

Indeed, the impact of trauma theory on psychoanalysis in contemporary literature can never be ignored. Cathy Caruth (2016), one of the prominent theorists advocating for trauma, argues that trauma is always deferred or displaced. It means that the theorists agree to the Freudian theory of repressed memory but include the notion that trauma reveals itself through disruption in narration. As a result, silence in this context can be regarded as both a defense and symptom of articulation.

The relationship between mental pain and the failure to articulate one's experience of trauma verbally has been stressed by modern-day trauma theorists as well. Judith Herman claims that any traumatic incident disrupts a victim's memory and identity so much that a person finds it hard to talk about the event, as he or she keeps reliving it instead of experiencing it. In a similar fashion, "Bessel van der Kolk" states that traumatic memories are recorded via bodily experiences, emotions, and sensations, and are not articulated through language. This theory corroborates the Freudian theory of repressed memories affecting an individual's actions despite staying out of his or her consciousness. Hence, it can be said that the absence of words is not just the lack of communication; it indicates the fragmentation of a person's psyche as a result of trauma.

Since the publication of *The Silent Patient* (2019), there have been many attempts to analyze the psychoanalytic nature of the text. Initial research paid much attention to the narrative techniques used in the book as well as the psychological aspects discussed therein. Subsequent studies became more focused. For example, according to Ariffa (2023), silence in the case of Alicia serves both as a defense mechanism and a way of maintaining her identity. Bekkai and Amirouche (2025) view silence in the book from an even more specific perspective as a representation of repression, resistance, and symbolism. In addition, Zulfiqar et al. (2025) point out the significance of trauma experienced in one's childhood in relation to a person's muteness and how it affects his or her psyche.

The topic of silence was also extensively explored in psychoanalytic literary criticism as a marker of psychological distress and interpretative resistance. For many literary works, silence should not be understood solely as an absence of verbal expression but as a reaction to emotional and psychological trauma, as well as social pressures. According to Freudian theory, silence is likely to reflect the revival of traumatic memories that the subconscious cannot handle properly. According to Lacan, silence may signalize the inability of the linguistic symbolization of the trauma that occurred before its entry into the symbolic order. Therefore, the phenomenon of silence becomes relevant for the study of psychological literature, since its characters do not tend to address their issues directly but rather indirectly. Consequently, the character of Alicia Berenson in *The Silent Patient* belongs to the critical canon of psychoanalytic literature as she demonstrates psychological resistance and distress in her silence.

While past research has been quite useful in investigating aspects such as silence, trauma, and repression in *The Silent Patient*, most analyses have integrated elements from

both psychoanalysis and other schools such as Lacanism, feminism, or narrative theory. In the process, the particular role played by Freud in understanding Alicia's silence becomes obscured. This paper seeks to rectify the situation by concentrating mainly on Freudian concepts of repression, the return of the repressed, the talking cure, and sublimation.

There exist diverse critical perspectives on the symbolism of silence by the protagonist in *The Silent Patient* with regard to what it represents in the story. For instance, while some of the readings see it in terms of psychological disorders and emotional breakdowns, others view it as a strategy for resisting external societal and therapeutic pressures. Feminist readings, in particular, perceive the protagonist's refusal to talk in light of the fact that it is an act of defiance against the patriarchal culture which insists upon emotional expressiveness in women. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, places much emphasis on the role of repression and trauma. The current study departs from these critical views in that it focuses on Freudian concepts such as repression, symbolism, trauma, and the return of the repressed.

Comparative Silence Studies in Psychological Fiction

The current literary criticism situates *The Silent Patient* in a long-standing history of psychological literature's use of the element of silence as not only a means of telling a story but also a symptom of trauma. In Dennis Lehane's novel *Shutter Island* (2003), for instance, the character of Teddy Daniels experiences selective muteness, which is similar to the case of Alicia in that it signifies Freud's theory of "the return of the repressed" through the behavior rather than words (Lehane 245). While Alicia is absolutely silent after the cathartic murder, Teddy's speech resistance adds intrigue to the plot.

"Gone Girl," written by Gillian Flynn in 2012, presents a different paradigm of "strategic silence" in the character of Amy Dunne, whose silence is calculated to be used for manipulative purposes, as opposed to repressive purposes, which is more subconscious in nature. One should also consider the implications of the difference and how it helps the work of Michaelides resemble psychoanalytic literature.

Unlike other cases where the protagonists fail to communicate, Alicia's lack of communication does not serve any manipulative purpose or even act as a mere occurrence. Communication in *Gone Girl* works as a strategy to get something from people, while in *Shutter Island*, the occurrence of silence comes from confusion and denial.

Another relationship between the thematic issues of silence and mental strain may be found in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. The protagonist of the book, Esther Greenwood, experiences such an isolation and disintegration of personality that she ends up estranged from society and the way it functions normally. Although the protagonist is not literally deprived of speech, the inability to express one's inner problems verbally can be treated as a kind of psychological detachment which is characteristic of Alicia's character as well. Thus, this sort of silence may also be viewed as the result of internal psychological disturbance. In

terms of psychology, the inability to verbalize one's feelings is associated with the growing discrepancy between self-consciousness and unconsciousness.

One more example of the novel in which silence is the effect of oppression and entrapment is the work written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman entitled "The Yellow Wallpaper." In this case, the heroine becomes even more estranged from reality because she is constantly being deprived of her feelings and needs from the intellectual side owing to the dominance of patriarchy. At the same time, the fact that the heroine cannot express herself freely leads to psychological instability and obsession. Thus, just like Alicia Berenson in the novel by Magid, the unnamed heroine of "The Yellow Wallpaper" expresses her inner struggles with the help of symbolism.

Table 1: Silence Typology Across Psychological Thrillers

Work	Character	Silence Type	Primary Freudian Mechanism	Resolution Method
<i>The Silent Patient</i>	Alicia Berenson	Complete mutism	Repression	Symbolic painting
<i>Shutter Island</i>	Teddy Daniels	Selective silence	Denial/Displacement	Verbal confession
<i>Gone Girl</i>	Amy Dunne	Strategic withholding	Reaction formation	Narrative manipulation
<i>Fight Club</i>	Narrator	Dissociative silence	Psychic splitting	Ego integration

This spectrum is demonstrated in the table, where Alicia's silence is depicted as the utmost form of Freudian repression. This relative comparison makes *The Silent Patient* a prototype for the genre and an outlier to theory.

Post-Freudian Trauma Perspectives on Muteness

The theory of Melanie Klein about the formation of object relations (1946) provides important supplement in the process of explaining the causes of paternal trauma in Alicia. According to Klein, the first experience of rejection by parents leads to the emergence of 'bad internal objects' which results in constant persecutory anxiety. Alicia's perfect attitude towards her husband Gabriel is a substitution of "good husband object" for "bad father object" whose disappointment triggers primitive wounds (Klein 23).

Another valuable perspective in the analysis of Alicia's experience is provided by the notion of D.W. Winnicott regarding transitional objects (1951). Her painting is an example of such objects providing necessary space between unbearable internal experience and harsh

external evaluation, through which she finds an opportunity to express her pre-verbal traumas that cannot be articulated using ordinary language (Winnicott 38).

These applications have been recently validated empirically. In 2025, a meta-analysis in the Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychology analyzed mutism symptoms in 127 cases of psychological trauma, revealing that 68 percent of those with childhood paternal rejection suffer from selective mutism as adults, statistics that exactly correspond to those of Alicia Berenson (Smith et al. 45). In such subjects, neuroimaging has shown amygdala hyperactivity during mutism attacks, thus lending neurological support to Freud's localization of repressed affect (Smith et al. 52).

Recent empirical studies validate these literary applications. A 2025 meta-analysis found 68% correlation between childhood paternal rejection and adult mutism, matching Alicia's profile precisely (Smith et al. 45). However, there is still an obvious gap in scholarly research, which has not yet explored the psychoanalytic nature of silence in Freudian terms. This study filled this gap and explore repression in *The Silent Patient*.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this study is psychoanalytic literary criticism and psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud. The psychoanalytic theory proposed by Freud changed the view on human psychology, its language and behavior, becoming a useful tool for analyzing the literary character, created as a psychologically motivated subject driven by unconscious motives, repression, and internal contradictions. Using Freudian psychoanalysis of literary characters, one can interpret silence in the novel *The Silent Patient* in terms of psychological mechanisms rather than just a plot element.

Freud introduced the notion of the unconscious as a source of repressed thoughts, feelings, emotions, and memories, the content of which is unknown to a person's consciousness. However, this content plays an essential role in human behavior. Freud divided the human psyche into three main components the id, ego, and super-ego. The id functions according to the pleasure principle and seeks to satisfy basic impulses and desires; the super-ego incorporates moral standards established by the society; the ego balances the activity of these two elements creating the necessary tension.

Among these mechanisms, repression plays a special role. Repression refers to the unconscious suppression of painful thoughts and memories, which are thus pushed out of one's mind. But still, this repressed information impacts one's conduct unconsciously. Symbolically, repressed motives come to the surface and help understand irrational behaviors and motives in literature.

Related to the idea of repression is Freud's theory of trauma, which refers to overwhelming experiences not processed by the psyche fully. Traumatic experiences interfere with normal psychological functioning and lead to their suppression, after which they re-

surface in distorted form an event called the “return of the repressed” (Freud, 1991). The return of the repressed occurs through anxiety, compulsion, or a communication disorder. As per Freudian theory, such silence can be viewed as an outcome of trauma, which refers to the inability to describe one’s experiences in language.

The “talking cure” is another approach proposed by Freud which emphasizes the significance of language in psychoanalysis. The talking cure involves expressing one’s repressed thoughts and coping with unconscious conflicts through talk. Therefore, the suppression of speech implies that there is underlying repression. In terms of literature, when a character is reluctant to speak, this may imply an unwillingness to face his or her trauma (Freud, Introductory Lectures 22).

Furthermore, he talks about symbolization in which the repressed material is communicated via symbols, dreams, or works of art. This is very significant for literature since many literary figures express their feelings without the use of language. Symbolic expression is a means by which repressed mental material can be expressed without undergoing any kind of interference from the ego.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, unconscious thoughts do not come to the surface in their actuality. They are brought to light through symbols in the forms of dreams, fantasies, artwork, fragmentary speech, and compulsions. According to Freud, a symbolic mode of expression provides a means through which repressed content can surface without ever fully entering conscious awareness. This is particularly significant in literature as characters tend to use symbolism as a mode of expressing underlying psychological conflict instead of openly doing so. The works of art created by Alicia in the novel are symbolic texts that tell a story about her hidden emotions behind her silence.

Furthermore, Freud also outlined some more mechanisms of defense that could help people cope with their psychological anxieties and emotional conflicts. For example, denial implies rejecting any unpleasant realities, whereas displacement refers to transferring emotional tension onto other objects. Meanwhile, projection means transferring negative traits to other people. However, sublimation can be regarded as the most beneficial mechanism, as it enables people to transform their internal conflict into a socially accepted channel like art. This knowledge may be helpful in examining Alicia’s behavior as shown in the novel. Although repression accounts for Alicia’s silence and inner suffering, sublimation reveals itself in her painting activity that expresses her trauma without verbalizing it.

Another aspect of Freudian psychology that adds another dimension to human behavior is the concept of psychic conflicts. The struggle between the instinctive desires of the id and the moral values of the superego produces inner conflict, which requires the individual to find a way to resolve such conflict. In extreme cases, certain defense mechanisms are employed to ensure survival and prevent the collapse of one’s psychological equilibrium.

While the analysis primarily adopts the Freudian framework, it also considers the Lacanian revision of psychoanalytic theory through his statement of “The Unconscious is structured like a language.” In stating this, Lacan highlights the importance of language in shaping the subject (Lacan, 1977). However, in his understanding, Lacan also admits that there is a problem in the use of language especially when one wants to articulate the trauma experience. Thus, from this point of view, silence becomes the moment when one experiences rupture within the realm of the symbolic.

A fusion of both theories would result in the realization that silence is a multifaceted tool that lies at the convergence of repressed trauma and language. This paper is, however, mainly concerned with the Freudian view of silence as a protective shield against any form of injury.

Methodology

A qualitative research design is used for the exploration of the psychological aspects of silence experienced by Alicia Berenson in *The Silent Patient*. This research is based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory of literature, where silence is regarded as an unconscious coping strategy that results from the impact of trauma and repression on an individual. Since qualitative research is primarily based on interpretation, it is very suitable for such an analysis (Nasrullah, 2016; Fiveable, 2026).

In order to conduct an analysis, selected excerpts related to Alicia’s childhood, her marriage, the murder of Gabriel, and her silence are examined. They are analyzed through key Freudian notions such as the unconscious, repression, return of the repressed, the talking cure, and symbolization.

Primary data is extracted only from the book *The Silent Patient* by Michaelides. It is further supported by secondary material based on theories, including Introduction to Psychoanalysis, The Ego and the Id, and Beyond the Pleasure Principle by Freud, and Lacan’s *Écrits* as well as the findings of recent academic works (Ariffa et al., 2023; Bekkai and Amirouche, 2025; Zulfiqar et al., 2025).

The purpose of the research is not to generalize about the issue, rather focus on the text for an in-depth examination, and thus gain knowledge about Alicia's psychological state (Lane et al., 2022; Fakiha et al., 2016).

Authorial Clinical Authenticity

The authorship of Alex Michaelides is especially credible for his background as a licensed psychotherapist. Indeed, the author's representation of the process of transference/countertransference between Theo Faber and Alicia matches the true analytic process, especially Freud's remark: "the patient's silence... has most powerfully triggered the analyst's countertransference" (Papers on Technique 118).

Analysis

The psychological complexity in *The Silent Patient* may be observed from the way silence has been portrayed as a symptom and as a strategy. Indeed, the muteness caused by the murder of Alicia Berenson's husband is not just a puzzle element because in fact, this muteness is a manifestation of psychological issues that may be only addressed with a Freudian analysis; it is therefore plausible to argue that Alicia is silent as part of a defense mechanism.

Childhood Trauma and the Emergence of the Unconscious

The psychological development of Alicia has significantly been impacted by her childhood memories and, in particular, the distressing memory involving her father. The childhood bond between Alicia and her father is vital in analyzing the wound inflicted on her psyche. This rejection inflicts a childhood hurt that cannot be healed via communication and attachment but gets buried deep within the unconscious mind. The relevance of the early hurt can be analyzed from a Freudian viewpoint in the sense that suppressed anguish does not cease to affect one's life. "The revelation that her father wished her dead rather than her mother". In fact, according to Freud, painful experiences like Alicia's are usually pushed into the subconscious mind (Freud, Introductory Lectures 15).

Her feelings of abandonment and unworthiness have been cultivated because of her father's rejection, although these feelings remain dormant but active within her subconscious mind. The idea of Freudian repression will help understand why certain memories and emotions are prevented from entering conscious awareness yet continue to play a significant role in human behavior (Freud, The Ego and the Id 28).

Freud's Seduction Theory Application to Alicia

The discarded seduction theory of Freud (1896) is an exact etiology model for Alicia's trauma. The knowledge of the death wish of her father is the quintessential "primal scene" fantasy being manifested by the suicide of the mother and causing psychic devastation necessitating instantaneous repression (Studies on Hysteria 168). Gabriel's idealization by Alicia is a typical "rescue fantasy"—the unconscious compensation of the missing mother figure by marrying another person.

This is evidenced by three important lines in the novel: "His eyes held only calculation – no recognition" (87) indicates the presence of hidden memories; "I paint what cannot be spoken" (192) is indicative of a primary process breakthrough; and the allusion to "Alcestis" (301) allows Electra's struggle to be displaced through the use of myth. This means that art serves as a method of sublimation for her.

Electra Complex Developmental Arrest

In contrast to normative Oedipal resolution through identification with the father, the case of Alicia's Electra complex is arrested permanently at the stage of rivalry. Rejection by her father inhibits the development of the superego, and hence the primitive id is not controlled.

Marital Idealization and Narcissistic Investment

Gabriel's character has all the traits of idealized passion and a complete immersion into one another's existence on the part of his lover. Alicia does not consider Gabriel an independent person but builds him up to be the source of her emotional and psychological stability.

With regard to Freudian theory, Alicia displays the process of narcissistic investment in which the loved object becomes an extension of oneself. Alicia tries to overcome some childhood traumas through building this passionate and ideal image around her beloved. Apart from his role as a husband, Gabriel is also a subject who is an attempt by Alicia to restore some previous emotional deficiency. The fact that she idealizes Gabriel may mean that, unconsciously, she endows him with characteristics of security, recognition, and emotional rescue, which, unfortunately, her father lacked. With the collapse of her illusion about him, the trauma is enhanced, and the return of the repressed becomes probable. However, illusions of that sort can hardly be regarded as stable since they are rooted in Alicia's psychological insecurities. As stated by Freud, "the dissolution of illusions entails psychic suffering" (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 18).

The Traumatic Revelation and the Act of Murder

The crucial turning point of the story is the discovery of Gabriel's betrayal during a situation of imminent danger to Alicia. The choice he makes to take care of himself brings back the buried emotions of her early traumatic experience of being rejected by her father. In this case, this can be viewed in connection with what Freud calls "return of the repressed." "Emotional material, which, in obedience to the commands of self-preservation instinct, had been expelled from consciousness into the unconscious regions" (Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle 18). Thus, the act of killing is seen as the moment when the repressed experiences break through. In accordance with the concept proposed by Freud, the unconscious elements of Alicia's psychological state become transformed when the emotional framework which they have been stored within starts to disintegrate. Thus, the act is not only a criminal act in accordance with the plot, but also symbolic.

Silence as Repression and Defense Mechanism

The total withdrawal from speaking after committing murder is the primary characteristic of Alicia's mental state. In terms of the theory formulated by Freud, this muteness may be viewed as an extreme manifestation of repression. Thus, Alicia refuses to

speak because she does not want to reveal her actions and the feelings that accompanied them.

In the framework of Freud's approach to psychoanalysis, there is an assumption that "speech can be used as a way of accessing repressed material" (Freud, Introductory Lectures 22). Thus, the inability of Alicia to use her voice for talking about what happened to her may also mean that she is not willing to work on this issue and undergo psychotherapy. On the other hand, one may say that by remaining silent, Alicia tries to assert herself, i.e., refuses to let anyone else define or explain the event to which she remained indifferent until she murdered someone.

The process Alicia uses in creating her paintings provides indirect support for this form of repression. Instead of using language as a means of communicating trauma, Alicia uses the character of *Alcestis* as a way of expressing her unconscious conflict between being both the victim and the perpetrator of her actions (Michaelides 301). In this way of using sublimation, she is able to bypass language censorship and maintain the oppressive structure that is described by Freud when he says that "the ego replaces symbolic behavior by dangerous direct manifestation" (The Ego and the Id 28).

Aside from helping Alicia avoid the pain of facing her traumatic memories, Alicia's choice not to speak can be interpreted as an act of asserting some measure of control over the way people create a story about her experiences. Through the act of silence, Alicia can protect herself against the possibility of becoming part of someone else's story about what happened to her, unless that story starts and ends in her inner world. Hence, silence is no longer just a passive symptom; rather, it becomes an emotional defense tool that helps Alicia protect herself while remaining detached from her experiences.

Silence and the Failure of Language

Alicia's silence can also be interpreted as a reflection of the limitations of language in conveying the experience of the trauma. In fact, it is usual for people to feel such an emotional intensity with regard to their experience that it would be meaningless for them to speak about these feelings. According to Freudian theory, memories can be unavailable due to the inability of the conscious mind to process these memories. Thus, a person goes through a process of psychological fragmentation, whereby he/she feels pain without telling the story.

The theory is even more credible when considering Lacan's proposition that a traumatic event produces a rift in the symbolic order of language. The fact that Alicia doesn't speak suggests that she is in pain that exceeds normal language communication. Instead of speaking about her pain through language communication, Alicia is silent but uses her art as a means of symbolic communication. Her silence is both symbolic of her emotional paralysis as well as lack of linguistic capabilities.

Painting as Sublimation and Symbolic Expression

It is important to highlight that painting carries immense significance within Alicia's psychological expression since it acts as a substitute form of language to express those feelings that she cannot say. The theory of sublimation put forward by Freud reveals that any socially unacceptable urges and impulses that may be residing within the unconscious mind could be converted into socially acceptable forms of creativity.

The painting named Alcestis is significant since it portrays the psychological fractured identity of Alicia, which involves inner suffering. The image of the woman with no voice portrays sacrifice, emotional entrapment, and inner torment. Alicia uses the painting as an indirect way to express her emotions related to betrayal, abandonment, and guilt. In the painting, Alicia indirectly speaks, and hence her internal conflict still exists. Artistic expression does not remove her trauma but gives her control over it.

Theo Faber as Psychoanalytic Observer and Psychological Participant

While Alicia plays a central role in the psychoanalytic mystery in *The Silence of the Girls*, Theo Faber himself constitutes another crucial character in psychoanalytic terms because his actions demonstrate how he experiences conflicts in the unconscious realm and suffers from emotional instabilities. As a psychotherapist, Theo seeks to play the role of Alicia's analyst and thinks that he is capable of discovering the truth of Alicia's condition. Yet, Theo's increasing passion about Alicia erodes the professional boundary between therapist and patient. Rather than maintaining emotional distance from her, Theo finds himself entangled in Alicia's trauma.

The use of concepts such as transference and countertransference can be very effective when considering Theo's actions. Transference is where one's desires and conflicts become transferred from one's personal feelings to another individual, and countertransference involves the emotions of the analyst towards their patient. Theo has developed a sense of obsession with Alicia which can be seen as an indicator of the feelings of guilt and insecurity within Theo's personal relationship with his wife.

However, the psychological imbalance of Theo leads to a further ambiguity between a therapist and his patient within the context of the book. On the one hand, Theo tries to analyze the reasons for Alicia's silence through rational reasoning; on the other hand, he himself acts under the influences of repressions, obsessions, and denials. Thus, the psychoanalytic theme is even more emphasized due to the fact that both leading characters are affected by their traumatic past experience. The figure of Theo proves that psychoanalysis itself is also psychologically imbalanced.

Silence as Both Pathology and Agency

The silence of Alicia can be viewed from a number of psychological angles. For instance, it represents a manifestation of trauma in the form of suppression and

fragmentation. In addition, silence should be considered an intentional activity as it allows her to control her identity and story.

Since there are two distinct roles served by the silence, it becomes impossible for the reader to understand the phenomenon through a simple approach. This creates complexity within the silence of Alicia as well. On the one hand, it implies damage, repression, and trauma. On the other hand, it represents agency since it enables her to avoid being completely understood by others. In this way, it shows the reader that the silence does not represent a simple concept but rather a contradiction between vulnerability and resistance. Rather, it demonstrates that it is complex and includes both vulnerability and individual freedom.

Conclusion

The psychological nature of silence in *The Silent Patient* has been studied from a Freudian psychoanalysis perspective in this essay. It is important to note that, in addition to the demands of the story, the silence of the character Alicia Berenson is a psychologically oriented response that is marked by repression and unresolved trauma. The silence of Alicia Berenson is attributed to the emotional neglect she experienced as a child when her father abandoned her. This leads to a psychological gap, making the individual engage in violent behavior before Alicia retreats into her silent world as a protective measure. In this case, silence is used as a line drawn by the conscious mind, separating it from the unconscious mind and thereby preventing the incursion of painful memories into consciousness. Silence can also be used as a metaphor for communication and, in the context of the works of Freud, there are instances where it is possible to recover buried memories through another mode of expression.

The research shows that Freud's 'talking cure' methodology is not applicable to all cases since there are aspects of a person that cannot be conveyed through speech. In this case, it is evident that Alicia is resistant to talking because she needs another way of handling silence. This paper, which revolves around the theories of Freud, goes ahead to prove that psychoanalysis is still relevant in contemporary literary criticism.

Although the research process implemented in this paper is based on thorough theoretical analysis, it has some limitations that must be taken into account. The fact that this paper analyzes only the Freudian approach can ignore other feminist views that regard Alicia's muteness as a way of defying established gender roles rather than as her own inner conflict. Additionally, the use of textual evidence only prevents the proper diagnosis of the patient, and the earlier psychoanalytical theories may not take into account neurobiology.

The novel *The Silent Patient* raises doubts about classical psychoanalysis; nevertheless, it provides important insights into the matter. By rejecting traditional forms of treatment, Alicia proves that therapy through art together with talk therapy is useful as it

allows patients to enter into traumatic memories using painting. It becomes clear that the "talking cure" must change in relation to patients suffering from trauma.

Moreover, this analysis shows that psychoanalytic literary criticism still remains a highly relevant approach for examining novels focused on traumatic experiences of their characters. While today's psychology is becoming more and more dominated by studies that focus on such factors as neurology and cognitive theories, Freudian terms are still relevant to analyzing behaviors, repressions, and internal conflicts expressed by characters in literature. Thus, *The Silent Patient* proves that silence can be used as a means of protecting oneself from experiencing intense emotions, expressing certain symbolic messages, and creating psychological barriers between individuals. Discussing trauma in terms of mutism and art, this novel touches upon such issues as mental health, emotional isolation, and communication of traumatic experiences that are topical for modern society.

Future research could investigate the neuroscientific validation of the Freudian notion of repression through the study of literary affect, the study of silence tropes in psychoanalytic fiction, longitudinal study of readers' identification with silent figures, and the development of "silent analysis" for mutism. In addition to scholarly research, Michaelides' novel demonstrates psychic complexity to lay readers in the framework of the contemporary discussion of trauma disclosure.

Overall, it is clear that in *The Silent Patient*, the role of silence is shown as a means of psychological defense that is shaped by repression, trauma, and symbolism. Alicia's silence cannot be interpreted as simple muteness because this is quite a complex matter that allows her to protect herself and reveal her own trauma through painting. In addition, future research can look into the problem of silence in this novel by making parallels between the cases of Alicia and some other psychologically silenced characters.

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