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UNVEILING THE SILENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN MICHAELIDES'S THE SILENT PATIENT: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The psychoanalytic study reveals the silence and psychological trauma in Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*. The story revolves around Alicia Berenson, an artist who stays silent after being accused of killing her husband, Gabriel. Using psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud, our research examines Alicia's complex psychological layers that lead to her silence and the impact on her mental state. This study aims to analyse the main characters, Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson, through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts such as the Id, ego, and superego. Through the silence and interactions of the other characters, the research seeks to reveal conflicts and unresolved issues that contribute to the psychological story. Furthermore, our research critically discusses a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between silence and trauma. The study highlights how Alicia's silence works as both a defence mechanism and a manifestation of her oppressed emotions. By analysing Theo Faber's obsession with Alicia's case, the study also analyses the underlying psychological motivations that direct him to unveil her past. Additionally, the research delves into the role of childhood trauma in constructing the behaviours and personalities of both Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber. By applying Freud's theory, this research aims to provide insights into the unconscious mind, revealing how restricted emotions and past experiences influence present actions.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, *The Silent Patient*, silence, trauma, Id, ego, superego.

Introduction

Psychoanalytic Theory by Freud, is a psychological framework that explore the dynamic interaction between conscious and unconscious outlook of the mind. It begins from childhood and ends till maturity. It can be caused by results from physical or verbal abuse, bullying or loss of loved ones, accidents, natural disasters, unkind behaviour of parents, emotion of inferiority, disloyalty etc.

Alex Michaelides, an influential author and screenwriter captured the psychological conditions of the characters from his novel, *The Silent Patient*. *The Silent Patient*, published in 2019, is a significant work representing the mental state in the novel. The novel depicts how the psychological trauma ruins the lives of the people. How people become murderers from lovers and how their mental state leaves them alone to suffer.

The Silent Patient is the story of an artist name Alicia and the psychotherapist Theo Faber.

Alicia remains silent after killing her beloved husband Gabriel five times with her own gun. Six years later, Theo wants to do his own thing, and he joins the Grove where Alicia is receiving treatment for what she did. Theo finds Alicia's past trauma related to her mother's suicide, reduces her medication, allows her to paint

again in Grove, and tries to heal by talking to other sources outside of her. He also finds that she has been attacked by Gabriel's brother Max

Berenson and Theo plan to trade her paintings at her best friend's art gallery. Michaelides's uses Greek mythology in his novel to present *The Silent Patient*, as a modern-day allegorical renewal of the tragedy of *Alcestis*. As a result, Alastair sacrifices herself for her husband and comes back to life as Hercules but remains silent forever just like Alicia Berenson. This adds another aspect to the story and sets it from other modern psychological thrillers. Alice is painted in a portrait called *Alice*, accompanied by a note from her diary about her own life's past. Both Alicia and Theo are in parallel universe. This is difficult to mention here who is the villain and who is the hero of the story. Theo was ready to accept the fact that his wife Kathy cheated on him. On the other hand, Alicia was not ready to accept the consequences and the reality of Gabriel. This psychological trauma and ego lead them to take revenge on their spouses. This analysis will show how the presence of mental state and ego disturbs the lives of the common people. This study will critically discuss psychological trauma, and its effects. This study will reveal Alicia's unwanted shift from a happy wife to a silent widow, who has no home, no family and no words because of psychological trauma.

Literature Review

Apart from a few reviews and commentaries, there is no extensive literature on the novel *The Silent Patient*, nor are there any scientific sources. The novel was published in 2019. This novel is the debut novel by Alex Michaelides, which was ranked number one on the New York Times bookseller list. This novel focuses on psychological trauma. In addition to suspense and thrills, this novel can also be seen as an exploration of child development from a psychological perspective. The novel *The Silent Patient* could serve as a rest with psychological elements that should treat the child with care and love. The research paper titled *Mariam's Character Dealing with External Conflicts in the Novel of a Thousand Splendid Suns* (2015) written by Sumiati discusses the external factors that cause Mariam's external conflicts. The researchers attempted to shed light on the fluctuations in Mariam's personality through an analysis of Freud's theory of personality, which includes the id, ego, and superego. Mariam's external conflict was accentuated by the fact that she eventually succumbed to her impulsive impulses. On the other hand, she is portrayed as a person under the command of the superego in adhering to the traditional norms of the Pashtun patriarchal society. But ultimately, her ego awakens as she seeks freedom.

A study titled *Psychoanalysis: A study of Freudian theory in personality psychology* conducted by Zhang (2020). This study shows the similarities and contrasts between Freud's personality theory and other psychological theories. Additionally, this study

aims to explain the relationship between various psychologists and Sigmund Freud. Overall, researchers have tried to highlight the position and influence of Freud's personality theory over other psychological theories, making Freud's a unique theory in the field.

Another research paper, Psychoanalytic ego-image by the Freudians: A psychological study in the protagonist of the Hang Utah story (conducted by Pratiwi, Suwandi and Wandani, N.,2019) provides a detailed analysis of Freudian theory. It has been. Hanging personalities especially Tuah's persona. Researchers have described his personality through the ego aspect. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Markus Zusak's The Book Thief is analyzed through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theories to reveal the characters' psychological development, coping mechanisms, and the effects of their traumatic experiences.

Similarly, another research paper Analysis of the Characters of the Novel Ullid by Mahfud Ikhwan using the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud conducted by Septiadi. Andaya. Wandani (2019) demonstrated the individuality of the characters in Mahfud Ikhwan's novel Ullid through a thorough application of d. Ego and superego (Freud's theory of personality). The author talks about personal character conflicts that caused him to change his personality. Applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory, we can also understand personality conflicts.

Conceptual Framework

Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory and approach developed by Sigmund Freud. It involves the exploration of unconscious mental processes as well as behaviours and how they influence thoughts, feelings, and actions of humans. According to Freud, people can be healed by turning their unconscious into conscious thoughts and motives, thereby achieving insight. Freud's critique of psychoanalysis has become the most influential framework in the field of literature. It is mainly based on different aspects of the human modify the personality of the person. Similarly, Freud (1923) in his book The Ego and the Id, proposes a psychoanalytic theory of personality growth and superego. The id is described as the unconscious portion of the human psyche that prompts a person to fulfil their impulsive desires. It also includes sexual and aggressive instincts. The superego, on the other hand, is described as an essential follows strict norms of right and wrong. In contrast to his two extreme poles of the human personality mentioned above, Freud (1923) presents the ego as the mediator between the id and the superego. It resides in the conscious part of the human psyche and functions rationally. By considering these views of Sigmund Freud, this study will investigate Alex Michaelides's novel The Silent Patient, which is an appropriate depiction of psychoanalytic theory.

Analysis

Mental illnesses, also called mental disorders or mental disorders, include a wide range of symptoms that affect a person's thoughts

feelings, behaviours, or combination thereof. These conditions can interfere with daily life activities, affect relationships, and affect overall wellbeing. There are many different mental illnesses that affect human beings, including depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. These mental issues are often caused by a combination of biological, genetic, psychological, and environmental factors. Symptoms vary widely but may include changes in the mood, cognitive functions, and social interactions. Emerging trends of mental illness caused great changes in the lives of people and affect their personal relations. Alex Michaelides in his novel *The Silent Patient* depicts the mental condition and its consequences on individuals. In his novel, Michaelides highlighted the issue of mental breakdown. He clearly reveals the ill treatment faced by their loved ones who turned their lives into hell and forced them to take steps against them.

The story revolves around Alicia Berenson. She is a famous painter who seems to have it all until she shoots her beloved husband Gabriel and then stops talking. The novel unfolds from the perspective of Theo Faber, a forensic psychologist who is fascinated by Alicia's case and makes it his mission to uncover the truth behind Alicia's shocking acts of violence and killing of her own husband. Alicia is then admitted to a secure psychiatric hospital named Grove and her silence becomes the story's central mystery and the prominent part. Theo attempts to navigate the complex systems of psychiatry to access Alicia's world and unravel the mystery behind her silence and the events that led to Alicia's fateful night. As Theo delves deeper into

Alicia's past, he finds dark secrets, her mother's suicide, complex relationships, and unexpected developments that challenge his understanding of mental health and human psychology. The novel is a complex psychological thriller that unfolds the story of Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber. The novel is divided into five sections: *The Alcestis*, Alicia's diary, again Alicia's diary, Theo Faber, and Alicia's diary. All these five parts covers many of the inspiration incidents leading to the conclusion. The novel opens with the first part *The Alcestis*. *Alcestis* is the heroine of a Greek myth. *Alcestis* sacrifices herself for her husband and is brought back to life by *Hercules*, but like Alicia remains silent forever. *Alcestis* is a painting by Alicia and related to Alicia's situation. Alicia is like *Alcestis*, and her husband Gabriel is like *Admetus*. Alicia is the person who is silent, a wife and a painter who has been presented by Michaelides as one to highlight the suffering faced by her in the hands of her husband. Helplessness and suffering are shown here, which is the result of the lack of love and care both morally and mentally. *But I'm going too fast. I'm getting ahead of myself, I must start at the beginning and let events speak themselves. I'll proceed step by step, slowly and but t I' not the hero of this tale. It is Alicia Berenson's story, so I must begin with her and The Alcestis.* (Michaelides's, 2019, p, 6)

The painting is a depiction of Alicia's life and her silence. The painting is a self-portrait depicting Alicia in her studio and standing in front of an easel and a canvas, along with a paintbrush. She is naked, with red hair, blue veins visible under the skin and fresh scars on both her wrists. She is holding the paintbrush between her fingers and the canvas is blank. This is from Theo Faber's perspective. The rebellious character that emerges in the novel is Alicia Berenson, who refuses to accept the truth about the affair of Gabriel. She loves him so much and wants to be loved by him. But the insecurity about Gabriel leads to her mental breakdown. The relation of silence is shown by the painting of Alcestis and Alicia. In the novel Michaelides highlights the major issue of mental breakdown. It is shown by the character of Alicia, for

Alicia Gabriel was not only a husband for her he was everything, but the betrayal of Gabriel made Alicia a real villain. The psychological trauma is responsible for her silence throughout her life. *I began scribbling ideas, notes, goals - devising a plan of attack. To help Alicia, I needed to understand her, and her relationship with Gabriel. Did she love him? I wrote down a word and underlined it: Alcestis I wrote down another word Childhood. (Michaelides, 2019, p ,30)*

The self portrait of Alcestis was Alicia's sole communication. To understand the mystery, it was important to understand the Alcestis. The painting was saying something. To understand why she killed her husband. It was needed to understand not only the events of that night but also the events of the past. The seeds of her rage. Villains are not born they are made by people. The rage of Alicia is not born in the present. It derives from her past. In her early childhood, with abusive treatment, which built with the time and exploded at the wrong target. Childhood trauma is a central element of Alicia Berenson's life. During her formative years, Alicia experiences traumatic events that deeply affect her own mental and emotional well-being. The novel gradually reveals the details of this trauma, revealing the complex layers of Alicia's past life. Alicia's childhood trauma contributes to the development of her character and sets the stage for the psychological challenge she faces as an adult. The story reveals the layers of

Alicia's past, revealing her wounds that still haunt her and traumatized her even after years. Trauma is an important piece of the puzzle that explains Alicia's silence and her healing process.

The second part of the novel Alicia's diary reflects that she is the person who is maintaining the relationship between them and their married life. Alicia's diary shows her love for Gabriel again when she rejected Max Berenson, Gabriel's brother. Alicia's remarks about Max Berenson.

I can't believe Max is Gabriel's brother. He has none of his qualities, none of his decency, none of his kindness. (Michaelides,2019, p ,102)

For Alicia Max Berenson was the opposite of Gabriel because he is the person who can read Alicia like a book. Max presence always made Alicia sick. She cannot express her feelings to Gabriel about Max because he idealizes Max. For Gabriel, Max was like a mentor. She didn't want to break his trust. But for Max, Gabriel was nothing. Alicia thinks that he's madly jealous of them and he wants to take every that belongs to Gabriel, including Alicia. After that she decided to remain silent. It is a habit of children to be quiet when they don't want to tell something. Same case with Alicia she didn't want to break his trust. She loves Gabriel so much that's why she rejected the proposal of Jean Felix, a friend of Alicia. He is always jealous of their relationship. He thinks that one day he will win Alicia's heart. The feelings of Jean Felix for Alicia when he says: *I've been watching you paint since you first picked Up a brush. (Michaelides 2019, p, 154)*. The unconditional care of Jean Felix shows his love for Alicia. But Alicia knows the difference between friendship and love. But Jean Felix was against Gabriel since day one. He thought that Gabriel poisoned Alicia against him. But the love of Alicia for Gabriel was unconditional, and she was not ready to give the place of Gabriel to anyone. For Alicia Jean

Felix was not special but a close friend. The diary shows Alicia's love for her husband Gabriel. She was not ready to give Gabriel's place to anyone. She was the true example of love. Part three of the novel is Alicia's diary that begins with the presence of someone else, an unknown person. She noticed the presence of someone, but she didn't tell Gabriel. She wanted to tell but couldn't. She mentioned the presence of the man to Jean Felix, and he said:

You need to be careful, you're way too trusting. The People around you, don't trust them. (Michaelides 2019, p, 173)

Alicia went to the play with Jean Felix. This is the nature of Alicia. She cares about her loved ones as well as her friends. She didn't want to end up with Jean Felix like that. The play was about Alcestis. She liked it because Alcestis was dear to her. The actress playing Alcestis looked like a Greek statue. she was constantly thinking of the play in which man is condemned to die but his wife Alcestis want to save him. The presence of that man was a dilemma for Alicia. When she discussed her worries to Gabriel, he told her to visit the doctor in reply. It was shocking for Alicia to accept the truth that Gabriel is not ready to believe her. They all are treating her like a child, a puzzled child, a sick child. Gabriel's mistreatment and behaviors ruin the health and mental condition of Alicia. Her condition was not good. Michaelides gives the details of the routine of Gabriel and his reaction to Alicia was bearable. He was not giving the rights to Alicia, which led to her mental breakdown. This behaviour of Gabriel against Alicia was not acceptable and led to the psychological trauma. These words of Jean Felix reveal the care for Alicia. Through this Michaelides reveals manipulative strategies. It presents a picture of a person who is not in good condition and wants to be loved by her husband

and her peer. Gabriel represents the patriarchal male dominant society who are out to exploit the people. Alicia is feeling alienated from society. Alicia is in a problematic situation because she must support herself at any rate and face the situation.

The fourth part is about Theo Faber, when he tries to reveal the truth behind Alicia's silence.

Alicia and Theo are the same, with the same mental health and breakdown related to their past.

Throughout the novel, one can find Theo constantly under control by I'd and Ego. The struggle of his own personality highlights the I'd, and how he surrenders in front of his impulses urges whether sexual or something different. The moment of Theo's I'd started developing when Theo expresses his feelings and desires for Kathy, similarly the aggressive instinct can be found also in Theo Faber's character when he discovered the truth about his wife Kathy, and her love affair with Gabriel. Rather solving the issue, he started following his wife and Gabriel. All he wanted was revenge from Gabriel. He wants that Alicia should be aware of her husband's affairs. *You and I experienced similar kinds of childhoods, with similar kinds of fathers, and we both left home as soon as we could. I understand how serious this is, what you Father said is tantamount to psychic murder. He killed you. (Michaelides 2019, p, 215)* Theo's past was very painful as was Alicia's. Both had the same kind of fathers who do not care for their children. Their childhood trauma leads to a devastating end. They both were not satisfied with their past and fathers. Again, they faced the same issue which is caused by their loved ones. Kathy cheated Theo and Gabriel cheated Alicia. Michaelides's highlights the issue, which is not new for Alicia and Theo, they were experiencing this trauma since their childhood. They found themselves again in the same problem. Both had also received treatment from a psychologist and had the same past. They were betrayed by their loved ones. Another moment of silence can be seen in the novel when Theo finds out the truth about Kathy and Gabriel, but he didn't mention it in front of her because he didn't want to loosen her at any cost. The last part is again Alicia's diary, and this part is the truth behind all the mess. After that incident, instead of calling the police and admitting what happened on the night of the murder, Theo chooses another way to defuse the chaos. This marks the point at which his ego matures and begins to make decisions in a rational manner. Moreover, he tries to free himself from his guilt and restore everything to the way it was. To find the truth, he started working as a psychotherapist at Alicia at Grove. *I followed my gut and applied for the job. (Michaelides ,2019, P,259)*

Despite every hurdle, Theo was determined to explore the truth behind Gabriel's murder. He was consistent and reliable about all the matter. He never expected her to kill Gabriel. All just he wanted to reveal the truth about him. He wanted to show her that Gabriel didn't love her, and her happy married life was a lie.

Childhood trauma is the most common thing which possessed them for years and forced them to commit things like to follow someone, obsession of someone, anger issues, depression and murder. What if they are not traumatized? The answer is they would have lived happily with their loved ones. Even if Alicia finds out about Gabriel's affair, she would've moved on with her career. Theo would've been a good psychotherapist, even after Kathy's affair. Psychologically, being attracted by someone after marriage is a natural thing. So, Theo would have let Kathy choose what she wants and with whom she wants to spend her life. The Silent Patient very clearly reveals how the base of people forces them to do things like murder. The mental breakdown can damage everything including happy homes, and happy marriages. Michaelides reveals the horrible impact of this issue. Under the rule of mental illness, Alicia who was once a happy wife living her life with her family remain empty handed and silent. Now she has nothing in her life but silence, neither her husband nor her passion. Mental breakdown has its own ideology. Alicia is left as a person who is betrayed by her husband, and this refers to the title of the novel The Silent Patient.

Conclusion

An analysis, The Silent Patient, under the perspective of Sigmund Freud's view and psychological theory reveals the impact and role of psychological trauma in a person's life. After the critical overview of the relationship in the novel from a psychoanalytic point of view.

It can be accepted that childhood plays an important role in one's life. The aftereffects of this trauma can be found back in childhood. The novel is a direct critique of the ideology of psychological trauma and reveals the silence of being betrayed by her loved one. Language is important in expressing one's thought and feelings, but silence takes over in The Silent Patient.

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