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A Psychoanalytical Reading of the Novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides

Komal Larik[1], Faheemuddin Shaikh[2] & Tania Laghari[3]

[1]*BS English Scholar at Department of English Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad,*
Email: komallarik69@gmail.com
[2]*Lecturer, Department of English, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad,*
Email: faheem.uddin@sbbusba.edu.pk
[3]*Associate Professor, Department of English, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad,*
Email: tania.laghari@sbbusba.edu.pk

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Corresponding Author:
Tania Laghari
Email:
tania.laghari@sbbusba.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the psychological complexities in Alex Michaelides' novel 'The Silent Patient' through a psychoanalytical lens, focusing on the intersection of literature and psychology, particularly the influence of trauma on unconscious mind and human behaviour. Psychoanalytic literary criticism provides a valuable framework for uncovering the hidden psychological dimensions of fictional characters, especially in crime fiction. The study aims to apply Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory to analyse Alicia's psychological state, emphasizing her silence as a trauma response and the role of unconscious desires and defence mechanisms in her violent actions. Utilizing qualitative design and textual analysis, the research dissects the psychoanalytical elements within the novel, particularly in relation to Alicia's mental struggles, her silence, and her violent outbursts. Findings indicate that Alicia's silence functions as a defence mechanism reflecting deep psychological wounds rooted in childhood trauma and emotional neglect. Her ultimate act of violence represents a manifestation of unresolved emotions repressed in her unconscious mind. Theoretically, the research contributes to psychoanalytical literary criticism by applying Freud's theories to a contemporary work. Managerially, the findings suggest that psychological insights from literature may aid mental health professionals in comprehending trauma, defence mechanisms, and the manifestation of unconscious conflicts, particularly in cases involving silence as a coping mechanism.

Introduction

Alex Michaelides, born in 1977, is a British Cypriot writer and screenwriter. His first book, The Silent Patient, became very popular, reaching bestseller lists like the New York Times and Sunday Times. This novel was released in 2019. It is a thrilling story about Alicia, who is deeply upset after the death of her husband, Gabriel. The book delves into Alicia's mind as she is accused of killing Gabriel and a therapist's effort to help her.

Instead of focusing on the crime, The Silent Patient explores the offender's psyche which rise the interest in readers. Alicia Berenson appears to have a perfect life: she is a wellknown painter; married to a famous photographer and living in a beautiful house in London. However, one night, Alicia shoots Gabriel multiple times without saying a word. Alicia's choice to stay silent and not explain turns a personal tragedy into a big mystery, making Alicia famous. She stops talking and goes to a secure unit in London.

Theo Faber, a therapist, is eager to work on Alicia's mental illness and uncover the reasons behind her actions. Though, he digs deeper, yet he realizes he has his reasons for wanting to find the truth, even if it puts him in danger. (Amuthavalli & Rajkumar, 2022).

The novel explores various themes such as silence, childhood trauma, mental illness, Rage, Social exclusion, depression, the effect of abuse, phobia, trust deficit, and nonverbal expression. Michaelides has attempted to deeply portray childhood trauma and suffering.

Crime fiction is a genre of literature that focuses on crimes, how they are solved, criminals, and their motives. Most crime novels follow a common structure: first, there is a crime, usually murder; then, there is an investigation; and finally, there is a resolution or judgment, often involving the criminal's arrest or death. Alex Michaelides' novel "The Silent Patient" is an example of crime fiction. In the novel, the main character, Alicia, kills her husband, and this act is a key reason for her silence throughout the story.

The main idea is to understand how having a mean dad and no mom around can really mess up someone's head, causing serious mental health problems. To figure this out, we need to use a way of looking at things called psychoanalysis. This helps us dig deep into the hidden parts of the mind, like stuff from childhood that still bothers us, and how our family situation affects how we feel. With this approach, we want to find out why the characters are having such a hard time and how their past experiences are messing with their head now.

The fascinating tale and inner conflict of Alicia Berenson have drawn attention to exploring her mind and the relationships people have with her through Anna Freud's (1936) Defence Mechanisms theory. One aspect, Displacement, helps understand how Alicia deals with her negative feelings. Displacement is when someone shifts a bad emotion from its original cause to a safer target. For example, if someone is mad but can not confront the real issue, they might take it out on something or someone else. Displacement, like other defence mechanisms, often happens without awareness. The person might not realize they are doing it.

The novel is a psychological thriller. The book also talks about how parents can influence us, how bad experiences in childhood can affect us, our silence plays the role of what and where our unconscious desires take us. Overall, "The Silent Patient" is an exciting story that makes us think about why people act the way they do.

This research aims to analyse the psychoanalytical elements within the character of Alicia Berenson as depicted in the novel *"The Silent Patient."* The focus is on her portrayal as a psychological patient who commits the murder of her beloved husband. The aim is to delve into

the underlying reasons behind her actions, exploring the complexities of her psyche and unravelling the mystery surrounding her silence and the murder.

Research Objectives

- To unfold the layers of psychoanalytical elements, Silence and mental trauma, faced by the protagonist Alicia.
- To analyse Alicia's unconscious desires, fears, and psychological conflicts affecting her mental state.

Research Questions

1. How do the elements of silence and mental trauma reveal the psychoanalytical layers of Alicia's character?
2. In what ways do Alicia's unconscious desires, fears, and psychological conflicts affect her mental state?

Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalytic literary criticism looks at stories using ideas from psychoanalysis, a theory by Sigmund Freud about how our minds work. This way of studying literature uses concepts like the unconscious mind, different parts of our personality, and psychosexual development to understand what stories mean. The goal is to find out more about the themes and characters in the story by digging into their deeper meanings. According to Freud, our unconscious mind holds desires and drives that we are not aware of but still influence us, sometimes leading to psychological issues. Drapela (1995)

This theory of psychoanalysis is relevant in this research as it can be directly applied to the main character "Alicia Berenson". She suffers from various psychological disorders like anxiety, victimization of radical parenthood, and unconsciousness, which are the core elements of this theory.

Freud had ceased his analysis of the brain and his physiological studies and shifted his focus to the study of the psyche, and on treatment using free association and the phenomena of transference. His study emphasized the recognition of childhood events that could influence the mental functioning of adults. His examination of the genetic and then the developmental aspects gave the psychoanalytic theory its characteristics. Tyson, Phyllis. (2002).

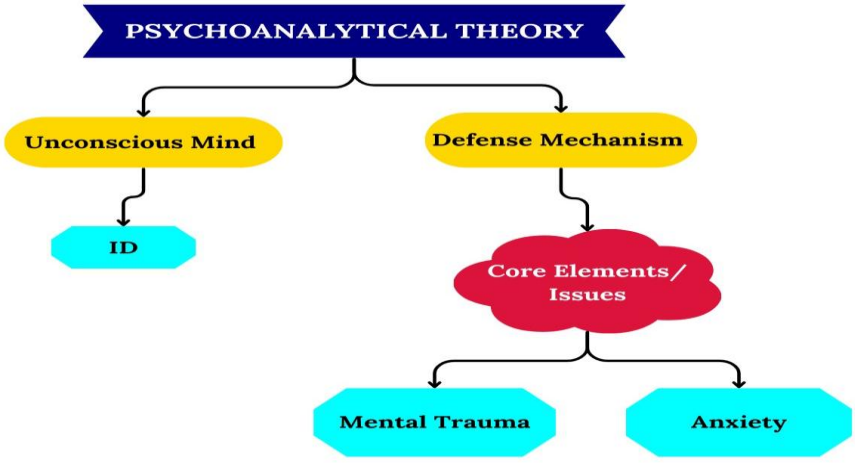


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Unconscious Mind

According to Freud, the unconscious mind holds thoughts, feelings, wishes, and memories that we are not aware of but still affect how we act and feel. In a study of psychoanalysis, the focus is on the unconscious mind. Freud believed it is like a hidden place where people keep their hurts, fears, secret desires, and problems they do not want to face because they are afraid those things will be too much for them to handle if they remember them.

Structure of Personality

Freud proposed a three-part structure of personality the id, ego, and superego. These components interact and influence each other in shaping human behaviour.

Id: The id operates on the pleasure principle and represents our instinctual drives and desires. It seeks immediate gratification and ignores social norms and consequences.

Defence Mechanism

If someone appears reluctant to accept a difficult truth, you might say they are "in denial." If they attempt to find a logical justification for behaviour that is not acceptable, you might indicate they are "rationalizing."

Denial and rationalization are examples of various defence mechanisms employed by the id to shield itself from anxiety. While denial, repression, and regression are among the most recognized defence mechanisms, there exist numerous others.

Core Element/ Issues

Mental Trauma

Mental trauma is a kind of psychological hurt that happens after going through a very upsetting or dangerous event. It can cause strong feelings of fear, helplessness, or shock. People with mental trauma might have bad memories, nightmares, or intense anxiety, and they may try to stay away from things that remind them of the event. This can seriously affect their daily life and overall well-being. (Balaev, 2017).

Anxiety

Anxiety is the state of constant despair tension and fear. It creates psychological blocks in one's mind and limits strength, power, and courage. This happens with the main character Alicia; she becomes continuously plagued by anxiety after killing her husband.

Literature Review

The exploration of psychological childhood trauma has become a prominent area of interest in both academic and wider literature. One such work that has sparked discussions is the novel ‘The Silent Patient’, which has been analysed through various ideal paradigms by researchers. Leslie Lothstein, a Psychology expert, delved into the narrative, plot, and trauma depicted in the novel. Lothstein's analysis revolves around Alicia, the protagonist, who experienced significant trauma in her childhood. Alicia was mistreated by her father, and her mother's attempt to kill her in a car accident resulted in her mother's death instead. This event led to Alicia being despised by her father, who blamed her for her mother's demise and expressed a wish for her death, suggesting possible jealousy towards Alicia. Following her mother's death, Alicia received no care or affection from her father and was ultimately abandoned, leading her to perceive her father as unloving. As Alicia grew into adulthood, she harboured feelings of rage and blamed herself for her

mother's death. She sought to mend her childhood losses through her relationships, idealizing her husband. However, her inner turmoil and damaged selfled her to believe that her husband did not truly need her in their marriage. The shooting of her husband, described in the novel, was not a conscious act but rather an unconscious manifestation of Alicia's unresolved emotional issues. Her father's hurtful words, particularly "You don't deserve to live," and her inability to give and receive love contributed to her inner turmoil. This analysis suggests that Alicia's silence and her violent act were driven by deep-seated psychological dynamics, particularly repressed rage. (Akram et al., 2024)

There's not much academic research on the novel Silent Patient, mostly just some scattered reviews and commentary. Published in 2019, it quickly rose to the top of the New York Times bestseller list, marking author Alex Michaelides' debut. This popular psychological thriller explores the importance of a balanced and healthy childhood in shaping adulthood. Beyond its suspenseful appeal, the novel offers insights into childhood development from a psychological standpoint, which is particularly relevant in the 21st century. In today's complex world, with various personal, familial, social, and global issues, ensuring healthy childhood development is crucial. Fortunately, there have been significant advancements in child psychology, social psychology, family psychology, and relationship management aimed at fostering this. Silent Patient serves as a reminder, albeit in a thrilling format, of the significance of childhood, emphasizing the importance of addressing a child's mental and psychological well-being and fostering a supportive family environment. Previous studies emphasized the importance of having a supportive figure, someone to lean on during tough emotional times. "When someone's ability to cope with mental distress falls short, they naturally seek out another person's help to confront their pain and potentially find relief and transformation." (Hossain, 2021)

In a previous research article called 'Traumatic Childhood and Adult Personality in Michaelides 'The Silent Patient', it was found that Alicia's difficult childhood had a big impact on her mental and social behaviour, shaping her personality. Alicia relates to the character in the play 'Alcestis', who goes through similar struggles. She feels a lot of anger, especially towards Theo, expressing in her diary that she wants to hurt him back for what he's done. Theo realizes that Alicia's present behaviour is linked to her tough childhood, worsened by her father's hurtful words after her mother's death. This makes her blame herself for the accident. Alicia's diary shows she is deeply depressed and anxious, fearing someone is watching her and feeling unsafe in her own home. She stays inside for days to protect herself. Alicia's cousin Paul confirms her mental struggles, saying she is not mentally well. These signs point to her battling depression and anxiety about feeling threatened by someone. (Akram et al., 2024).

Previous research has been conducted in the field of psychology and literature. However, none of these studies have focused on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in language studies. Yet, the following analyses are relevant to current issues. One study highlights Theo Faber's love obsession symptoms: anxiety, possessiveness, and manipulation. Another study discusses Alicia's chronic stress due to troubled social relationships and anxiety. This stress manifests in behavioural changes, aggression, and self-harm. Additionally, a study by Cahyani aims to identify childhood trauma types and their impact on inner conflicts. It identifies two trauma types: interpersonal and impersonal trauma, with the impact of a traumatic childhood being an idealized selfimage and self-hatred. (Amelia Pratiwi & Tri Pramesti, 2022).

Another study on the book 'The Silent Patient' explores the concept of stream of consciousness, which means delving into the inner thoughts and emotions of characters.

Theo exposed Gabriel's affair with Kathy, leading Alicia to shoot her husband in the face and subsequently experience mental illness. The novel delves into Alicia's troubled past, including her

mother's fatal car accident and her suicide attempt. Alicia's father even confessed that he wished Alicia had died instead of her mother, adding to her trauma. Alicia's aunt Lydia also inflicted torment upon her. Theo himself endured torment and abuse from his father, while Kathy cheated on him, adding to his pain. The protagonist experiences profound hurt and loneliness throughout the novel. Alicia's father showed her no love or concern, her mother committed suicide, and her aunt subjected her to torment. While her husband initially brought her happiness, Alicia ultimately killed him, leading to her descent into silence and psychological distress. Both Theo and Alicia fear abandonment by their partners in the novel, despite knowing about their infidelities, simply because they are lonely. In 'The Silent Patient', murder and infidelity are depicted with psychological realism, as the perpetrators grapple with inner conflicts, family troubles, and betrayal, leading to aggression. This study analysed the psychological realism in Alex Michaelides' novel 'The Silent Patient' (2019). (Akram et al., 2024)

Methodology

The research examines the novel *"The Silent Patient"* using descriptive methods. It focuses on understanding the story using qualitative research, specifically the 'Theory of Psychoanalysis' by Sigmund Freud. The analysis method used is content or textual analysis.

Textual Analysis

In this study of the novel *"The Silent Patient"*, the entire text is analysed for a better understanding. The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part explores the psychoanalytical elements, silence, and the mental trauma experienced by the protagonist, Alicia. The second part analyses Alicia's unconscious desires, fears, and psychological conflicts, which affect her mental state.

Procedure

This research is based on qualitative studies and employs textual analysis for analysing data and answering research questions. It examines different parts of the text using Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical theory.

Text Analysis Tools

The gathered information is examined and handled manually, looking through the perspective of Psychoanalytic theory. Different parts of the novel are analysed using content or textual analysis, along with close reading, to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

Selection of Text

The content for this research is gathered through a close reading of the book "The Silent Patient" and analysed using psychoanalytic theory. Moreover, additional information backing up the research questions and goals is gathered from secondary sources like research papers and articles.

Text Analysis

In the book, information is collected by focusing on the main idea of the story, studying the main character, Alicia Berenson, examining why she does not speak, and understanding the traumatic experiences she had in her childhood.

Results

In this study, the author addresses the research question introduced in Chapter One. The primary objective of this study is to analyse the psychoanalytical elements present in the novel *The Silent*

Patient, as interpreted through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The analysis focuses specifically on the main character, Alicia Berenson, examining how these psychoanalytical elements manifest in her character and behaviour throughout the novel.

Psychoanalytic theory, developed by Sigmund Freud, is a framework used to understand personality and treat mental health conditions by exploring unconscious thoughts and desires. Freud believed that many of our behaviours and emotional struggles are rooted in unconscious memories, instincts, and unresolved conflicts. This theory highlights the influence of the id on human behaviour, with the unconscious mind playing a significant role in shaping actions. Through methods like dream analysis and catharsis, psychoanalysis helps bring hidden feelings and trauma to the surface, allowing individuals to confront and heal from their mental and emotional struggles. (Sibi, 2020)

In this context, psychoanalytic theory can be applied to understand the mental trauma, unspoken emotions, and unconscious desires of the protagonist Alicia, analysing how these hidden elements impact her psychological well-being.

Unfolding the Layers of Psychoanalytical Elements: Silence and Mental Trauma Faced By The Protagonist Alicia

Alicia Berenson's silence serves as a means of regaining a sense of control over her life. Her decision not to speak can be interpreted as a deliberate act of resistance against the world that has caused her so much pain. This silence is not merely a passive response to trauma, but a conscious choice to withhold her emotions from others, creating a boundary that gives her power over how much of herself she reveals. By staying silent, Alicia prevents others from interpreting or diminishing her feelings, using silence as a way to protect her inner self from further harm.

The protagonist Alicia Berenson experiences severe psychological trauma that leads her to stop speaking, a reflection of the deep emotional wounds she carries. Her trauma is rooted in several painful events, including a car accident in her childhood, emotional abuse from her father, and betrayal by her husband. These painful experiences build up over time, profoundly affecting her mental state. Alicia's silence is more than just the act of not speaking; it represents her buried emotions and unresolved pain. Her inability to speak reflects her withdrawal from a world that has consistently caused her suffering. This silence acts as a defence mechanism against more suffering, but also deepens her isolation. Alicia's silence represents her inner conflict as she struggles to handle her emotions, and her behaviour-marked by impulsiveness, social withdrawal, and emotional instability-further highlights the impact of her unresolved trauma. In essence, her silence and mental trauma are closely connected, representing the psychological consequences of prolonged abuse and betrayal. (Amelia Pratiwi & Tri Pramesti, 2022)

Alicia's silence draws the attention of psychotherapist Theo Faber, who seeks to uncover why she shot her husband and stopped speaking. His investigation reveals hidden traumas from her past. Psychoanalytically, her silence serves as a way to suppress painful memories. Instead of facing them, Alicia uses her art to communicate. Her silence becomes a defense mechanism, avoiding emotional conflict, and symbolizes her mental collapse and the mystery of her actions as the story reveals her internal struggles. (Dini Anggriani, Clarry Sada, 2022)

As the narrative unfolds, Alicia's silence also reflects her deeper struggle with her identity, shaped by the traumas of her past. Rather than simply avoiding emotional conflict, her silence represents the confusion and loss of self that results from her painful experiences. This inner turmoil suggests that her refusal to speak is not just a reaction to her trauma, but also a sign of her fractured sense of identity. In this way, Alicia's silence goes beyond emotional withdrawal, symbolizing her disconnection from both the world and her own understanding of who she is.

The Role of Silence in Alicia's Emotional Growth

Freud saw silence mainly as a way for patients to defend themselves or resist. Silence happened when patients were unable to speak freely, often because they were holding back emotions or thoughts they did not want to share. This silence was connected to hidden desires or conflicts that were too painful or uncomfortable for the patient to talk about. (Acheson & Avdi, 2023)

Alicia's silence plays a significant role in her emotional development and psychological state. Following the accusation of her husband's murder, Alicia completely stops speaking. Her silence becomes a form of communication, representing her trauma, unresolved emotions, and inner turmoil. Instead of expressing herself through words, Alicia creates the painting Alcestis, which reflects her complex emotional state. Her silence serves both as a protective barrier and a way of conveying a message, allowing her to manage the narrative of her life while distancing herself from others.

"Well, at the heart of all art lies a mystery. Alicia's silence is her secret —her mystery, in the religious sense. That's why she named it Alcestis." (Michaelides, 2019, p. 142)

All art contains something unknown or hidden, something that cannot be fully explained. For Alicia, her silence is like a secret—a deep, personal mystery. The reference to "religious sense" means her silence is something sacred or significant to her, something she would not easily reveal. That's why she named her painting Alcestis, which hints at this mystery. Alcestis is a character from Greek mythology who sacrifices herself and remains silent about her reasons, much like Alicia's choice to stay silent.

A key part of Alicia's silence is its role as a defence mechanism, protecting her from further emotional pain. By choosing not to speak, she separates herself from those who try to investigate or take advantage of her vulnerabilities. This choice shows the depth of her emotional suffering, as she feels that no words can properly describe her experiences. Her silence also gives her a sense of power, frustrating and challenging the people around her, especially her therapist Theo Faber. For Theo, Alicia's refusal to take part in regular therapy—often called "the talking cure"—becomes both a challenge and an obsession.

Michaelides (2019) describes Alicia's silence:

> 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. Nor did she speak when charged with Gabriel's murder. She remained silent when she was placed under arrest, refusing to deny her guilt or confess it. Alicia never spoke again. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 13)

Alicia completely withdraws into silence during a key moment in the story. Her pale, still lips highlight her disconnection and refusal to speak. This silence is not limited to the interview; it continues when she is accused of her husband Gabriel's murder and even after her arrest. By not denying or admitting to the crime, Alicia reveals how deeply she has retreated into herself, avoiding any form of verbal communication or explanation. This silence becomes a turning point, creating a lasting wall between her and the outside world, and it becomes a central part of her character as the story progresses.

In contrast to the traditional emphasis on verbal communication in therapy, Alicia's silence demonstrates that non-verbal forms of expression can also support emotional development. Her refusal to speak compels others to challenge their preconceived notions about her, prompting them to seek alternative methods of understanding and engaging with her. Ultimately, her silence

functions both as a barrier and a window into her inner world, facilitating her emotional growth and influencing her interactions with those around her.

Michaelides (2019) captures Alicia's silence vividly:

> She refused to visit me in my office, so I went to see her in her room. During the sessions, she simply sat on her bed and stared out of the window. She refused to speak, of course. She refused to even look at me. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 34)

Theo Faber, Alicia's therapist, explains how Alicia refused to come to therapy sessions in his office, so he had to visit her in her room. During these sessions, Alicia sat quietly on her bed, looking out of the window, refusing to speak or even make eye contact. This behaviour shows that Alicia had completely withdrawn from communication and was unwilling to interact with Theo, which highlights her deep emotional detachment and isolation. Her silence and refusal to acknowledge Theo created a barrier, making it hard for him to make progress in her therapy.

Alicia's silence reflects her emotional pain and acts as a shield against more hurt, ultimately challenging traditional therapy methods. This silence not only shows her inner conflict but also drives her emotional growth by encouraging those around her to seek a deeper understanding of her situation.

The Influence of Mental Trauma on Alicia's Psychological Well-Being

Mental trauma, as discussed in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, significantly influences an individual's psychological well-being. Freud emphasizes that trauma often becomes repressed in the unconscious mind, leading to psychological symptoms that manifest in various ways. (Sibi, 2020)

In the novel, the main character, Alicia Berenson, shows the strong impact of mental trauma after the terrible murder of her husband, Gabriel. This shocking event affects her deeply and causes her to stop speaking altogether. This silence is not just a choice for Alicia; it is a way for her to cope with the overwhelming emotions she experiences. Her grief and trauma create a barrier that isolates her from the outside world, making it harder for her to heal. As the story goes on, it becomes clear that Alicia's silence reflects her deep pain. It is connected to her identity and makes it difficult for her to express herself or connect with others. This struggle illustrates the complicated relationship between trauma and communication, showing how a traumatic experience can silence someone and affect their ability to interact with the world.

"I thought it obvious that she had suffered a severe trauma surrounding Gabriel's death; and this silence was a manifestation of that trauma." (Michaelides, 2019, p. 17)

These lines suggest that Theo Faber, the therapist, understands that Alicia experienced intense emotional pain following Gabriel's death, which can be described as Mental trauma. This Mental trauma, caused by the shocking loss and the unbearable betrayal of Gabriel's infidelity, deeply affected Alicia. Her decision to stop speaking is a direct result of this pain. Theo believes that her silence is not a voluntary choice but rather a reflection of how profoundly she was affected by the events. Alicia's inability to express herself after Gabriel's death and betrayal shows how serious emotional trauma can impact a person's behaviour and communication. When Theo later revealed that Gabriel had been unfaithful, Alicia was left numb by this revelation. She had loved Gabriel deeply, and the betrayal was too much for her to handle. In response, Alicia shot Gabriel multiple times, killing him. After this tragic event, her silence became more pronounced, further showing how the trauma had overtaken her ability to communicate or cope with her emotions.

In exploring the profound effects of mental trauma on a young child's psychological well-being, Alicia's story serves as a poignant example. After the tragic death of her mother in a car accident, Alicia faced not only the pain of loss but also the haunting memories of the event itself. Though she survived the crash, the mental trauma left by this experience deeply affected her, leading to significant changes in her behaviour and outlook on life. These lines highlight the intricate relationship between trauma and a child's mental health, illustrating how such experiences can shape their journey toward healing and understanding.

"following the death of Alicia's mother in a car accident. Alicia had also been in the car crash, but survived. That trauma must have affected the little girl profoundly." (Michaelides, 2019, p. 42)

In the story, Alicia's mother dies in a car accident. Alicia was also in the crash but managed to survive. This experience of losing her mother and being in the accident likely had a deep and lasting effect on Alicia. It means she probably feels very sad, scared, or confused because of what happened. The Mental trauma from such a tragic event can change how a person thinks and feels, especially a young girl like Alicia.

Alicia's experiences show how deeply trauma can impact a person's mental state and behaviour. After losing her mother in a car accident, she carries the weight of that loss throughout her life. This unresolved pain affects her relationships and choices, especially when faced with betrayal or emotional distress. The complexity of her emotional struggles comes to a head in important moments, such as when Gabriel's condemnation triggers a violent response rooted in her original trauma, showing the lasting effects of her past on her present actions.

Michaelides (2019) explains the depth of Alicia's trauma:

> Gabriel was the second man to condemn Alicia to death; bringing up this original trauma was more than she could bear— which is why she picked up the gun and visited her long-awaited revenge not upon her father, but upon her husband. As I suspected, the murder had much older, deeper origins than my actions. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 285)

The lines show the deep impact of Alicia's trauma on her mind and actions. Gabriel, the second man to betray her, brings up her original trauma, triggering feelings that become too much for her to handle. In response, Alicia turns to violence, picking up a gun not to get revenge on her father, but on her husband, which shows her struggle to deal with her grief. This choice means that her actions are not just reactions to recent events; instead, they are deeply rooted in the unresolved pain from her past. Alicia's violent response is an expression of her hidden hurt, highlighting how past trauma can change a person's ability to cope and manage their relationships.

Alicia's journey shows how deeply mental trauma can affect a person's emotional health and behaviour, often leading to isolation and difficulty in communicating. Her experiences highlight the long-lasting effects of unresolved pain, showing how past traumas can influence current actions and relationships.

Analysing Alicia's Unconscious Desires, Fears, and Psychological Conflicts Affecting Her Mental State

Alicia Berenson is a clear example of how mental trauma can deeply affect a person's mental health. Her painful past, especially from her childhood, and the tragic death of her husband, Gabriel, lead to emotional struggles she cannot escape. By looking closer at her hidden desires, fears, and inner conflicts, we can begin to understand the complex reasons behind her mental breakdown. It becomes clear that her trauma influences every part of her life, from how she interacts with others to how she feels about herself.

Alicia's extreme reaction to her husband's death, like her suicide attempt and her violent resistance to being saved, shows her strong desire to escape from life. She feels unworthy of love and unable to handle the weight of her emotional pain. When she sits frozen by the fireplace, paralysed by an invisible fear, it represents her deep fear and inability to deal with her mental trauma. All of these factors play a major role in her mental decline, as she is overwhelmed by hopelessness and a negative view of her own life. (Safitri et al., 2023)

Alicia Berenson's mental state is marked by symptoms that reveal the deep impact of her mental traumas from the past. She frequently experiences flashbacks, such as vivid memories of hiding under a willow tree as a child, which bring back intense feelings of fear and sadness. These painful memories intrude on her daily life, making it difficult for her to enjoy positive experiences. Additionally, Alicia struggles to regulate her emotions, often reacting with sudden anger, sadness, or fear triggered by seemingly unrelated events. This emotional turmoil also affects her relationships, as her withdrawal and silence make it hard for others to connect with her. These signs show how deeply her unresolved trauma affects her ability to live a stable and fulfilling life. (Amelia Pratiwi & Tri Pramesti, 2022)

Alicia's continuous struggle with her internal conflicts highlights the importance of understanding and kindness. Her experiences remind us how crucial it is to deal with mental health problems and how trauma can affect a person's ability to manage life. Discovering a way to heal is vital for her to escape the grip of her suffering and regain her sense of self-worth and hope for what lies ahead.

Exploration of Unconscious Desires

According to Freud, the unconscious mind is a repository of repressed emotions, instincts, and desires, often stemming from traumatic or unresolved experiences. These unconscious elements exert influence on the conscious mind, shaping an individual's thoughts, actions, and personality. Additionally, the "Id" in Freud's theory is like the part of our mind that wants whatever makes us feel good right now, without thinking about rules or consequences. (Sibi, 2020)

Alicia's diary gives us a deep look into her troubled mind. Throughout the story, her experiences show the intense emotions she struggles with and how trauma affects her behaviour. The following passage shows a key moment in her life where she reacts to fear and danger with strong, instinctive actions. Alicia's battle between her unconscious desires and her logical thinking is clear, as she loses control and acts out violently. This quote highlights the inner conflict she faces and opens the door to understanding how trauma can change a person's sense of reality and identity.

In discussing her unconscious desires, the protagonist reveals:

> And something in me took over, some kind of wild animal instinct. I wanted to kill him, kill or be killed—I leaped on him and tried to strangle him and scratch his eyes out, bash his skull to pieces on the floor. But I didn't succeed in killing him, and they held me down and drugged me and locked me up. And then—after that I lost my nerve. I started to doubt myself again —maybe I'd made a mistake, maybe I was imagining it, maybe it wasn't him. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 277)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, she describes a powerful and uncontrollable urge that takes over her, comparing it to a "wild animal instinct." She feels a desperate need to attack someone, thinking in extreme terms of "kill or be killed." This highlights her fear and anger, showing how deeply she is affected by her emotions. When she acts on this impulse and tries to hurt the person, she loses control, which leads to her being restrained and locked up. Afterward, she starts to doubt herself, wondering if she made a mistake or if her feelings were imagined. This shift in her thoughts reveals her vulnerability and confusion, illustrating how trauma can create a struggle

between instinct and rationality, while also highlighting the role of unconscious desires that drive her aggressive impulses.

As Alicia's story unfolds, her emotional and psychological unravelling becomes increasingly apparent. Her unconscious desires for love, safety, and validation drive much of her inner conflict, and when these desires remain unmet, they fuel her deep sense of despair. Alicia's mental trauma, rooted in childhood and further exacerbated by Gabriel's betrayal, leads her to a breaking point. The following passage from her diary reflects her realization of this emotional destruction, where her deep need for connection and worth transforms into self-blame and hopelessness. This moment highlights how unresolved pain and rejection stored in the unconscious mind can manifest in destructive ways, ultimately leading to her violent actions, which represent the influence of the id.

In Michaelides's (2019) novel, Alicia's inner thoughts reveal her despair and realization of her self-worth:

> 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. That's the truth.
>
> I didn't kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 282)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, she expresses the deep sense of hopelessness and worthlessness she feels after realizing she will never be safe or loved.

She internalizes her father's harsh words, believing she does not deserve to live, and views Gabriel's betrayal as something that completely destroyed her emotionally and psychologically. By saying, "I did not kill Gabriel. He killed me," Alicia reveals that, in her mind, Gabriel's actions had already taken her life in an emotional sense, and pulling the trigger was merely the final act. This moment portrays her unconscious desires, as

Alicia's deep need for love, safety, and self-worth, when unfulfilled, leads to destructive impulses. Her violent action is driven by the unresolved pain and rejection stored in her unconscious, surfacing as a final, desperate response to her trauma.

Identifying Underlying Fears and Anxieties

Sigmund Freud explained that many fears and anxieties come from unresolved conflicts hidden in the unconscious mind. These hidden fears are often linked to past traumas or unexpressed emotions. To cope, the mind uses defence mechanisms like repression and denial, but when these fail, anxiety can appear as physical symptoms or emotional distress. (Sibi, 2020)

Understanding a character's mental state often involves exploring their deep fears and worries, which can influence how they act and feel. Alicia Berenson's personal struggles show strong feelings of weakness, doubt, and fear. These emotions often come up in her diary, offering a glimpse into the troubling thoughts that haunt her.

In one diary entry, Alicia writes:

> I'll be too exposed. At least here, in the house, I know I'm safe. I can sit by the window and monitor the passersby. I'm scanning each face that passes for that man's face—but I don't know what he looks like, that's the problem. He could have removed his disguise and be moving about in front of me, completely unnoticed. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 206)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, Alicia expresses her strong feelings of fear and worry. She feels safe inside her house, but she is still very disturbed by the thought of being in danger. Her fear is about a man who might be following or threatening her, but she feels helpless because she does not know what he looks like. This not knowing makes her feel even more at risk—she watches people walk by her window, trying to spot him, but the idea that he could be wearing a disguise makes her think he could be right in front of her, and she would not even realize it.

Alicia's fears are not just focused on outside dangers, but also strongly connected to her personal relationships, especially her bond with her husband, Gabriel. The fear of losing him becomes one of her biggest worries, pushing her to make decisions that do not always make sense in order to save the relationship. Alicia's strong emotional dependence on Gabriel shows how deeply vulnerable and desperate she feels, which leads her to behave in ways that go against common sense. This emotional struggle is clear in one of her diary entries, where she admits how far she is willing to go to keep him in her life, even if it means risking her own mental well-being.

"Even saying it made me feel sick. The thought of losing him, I couldn't bear it. I'd do anything to keep him—even pretend I'm crazy when I know I'm not. So I gave in." (Michaelides, 2019, p. 204)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, she reveals the depth of her emotional attachment to her husband, Gabriel, and the extreme measures she is willing to take to keep him. The thought of losing him is unbearable to her, to the point that it makes her feel physically ill. Alicia's desperation leads her to a point where she is willing to sacrifice her own sense of reality by pretending to be mentally unstable, even though she knows deep down that she is not. This reveals her vulnerability and her fear of abandonment, highlighting the emotional intensity of her relationship and foreshadowing her later actions in the novel. It also hints at her complicated psychological state, where her identity and mental stability are tied to her love for her husband.

Throughout her diary, Alicia grapples with feelings of vulnerability, paranoia, and emotional dependence, particularly surrounding her relationship with her husband, Gabriel, and the mysterious man she believes is watching her. Her writing uncovers a complex psychological landscape where fear of being watched, fear of losing Gabriel, and fear of her own unravelling mental state are interwoven. These fears not only shape her perception of reality but also drive her actions, leading her to make irrational decisions in an attempt to cope with the emotional turmoil she feels. Through her reflections, Alicia's growing sense of helplessness becomes evident as she tries to hold onto her sense of safety, identity, and love, even as everything around her begins to feel uncertain and threatening.

Michaelides (2019) describes a moment of intense observation and discomfort:

> I was in the kitchen, making coffee, looking out the window—looking without seeing—daydreaming—and then I noticed something, or rather someone— outside. A man. I noticed him because he was standing so still— like a statue— and facing the house. He was on the other side of the road, by the entrance to the park. He was standing in the shadow of a tree. He was tall, well built. I couldn't make out his features, as he was wearing sunglasses and a cap. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 191)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, Alicia is describing an unsettling experience. As she stands in her kitchen, daydreaming while making coffee, she suddenly notices a man outside her house. What makes the man stand out is his stillness, as if he's frozen, observing the house. His motionlessness is unnerving, and Alicia draws a parallel to a statue, emphasizing his unnatural stillness.

Psychological Conflicts and Internal Struggles

According to Sibi (2020) psychological conflicts and internal struggles arise from the tension between different parts of the mind, as explained in Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

Alicia's psychological struggles are central to understanding her actions and the downward spiral of her mental health. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that Alicia has always faced emotional instability, but certain traumatic events in her life worsen her condition. Her mental state is marked by suspicion, irrational fears, and delusions, all of which grow more severe as time goes on. The root of her psychological conflict can be traced back to unresolved traumas from her family, particularly involving her father.

These internal struggles gradually build up, leading to more extreme behaviour as she loses touch with reality.

This is evident in the following passage, where her unstable mindset and emotional history are highlighted:

> She had a history—the same thing happened at the place they lived before Hampstead. That's why they had to move. She accused an elderly man across the street of spying on her. Made a huge fuss. Turned out the old guy was blind— couldn't even see her, let alone spy on her. She was always highly unstable, but it was her father's suicide that did it. She never recovered. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 218)

In these lines, we see that Alicia Berenson had a history of emotional problems. Before moving to Hampstead, she wrongly accused a blind man of spying on her, showing how her mind was creating false ideas. This event shows that Alicia was already unstable. The passage also mentions her father's suicide (though this was a misunderstanding), which was the main event that caused her mental state to get much worse. Even though she had issues before, this trauma pushed her over the edge, and she never fully recovered.

Alicia's psychological struggles are strongly connected to the trauma she experienced in her family, especially with her father. While Alicia had always faced emotional issues, her father's cruel words became a major turning point in her mental breakdown. His rejection left her feeling unloved and unwanted, which made her internal pain even worse. This sense of betrayal from her father is one of the key events that pushed her further into her emotional isolation and silence.

The following lines show a painful moment in Alicia's life, where her father's words deeply hurt her and added to her mental struggles:

> 'My girl,' he kept saying, 'my poor girl, my Eva … Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn't Alicia die instead?'" I stared at Paul for a second, stunned. I wasn't sure I understood. "'Why didn't Alicia die instead?'" "That's what he said." "Alicia heard this?" "Yeah. And Alicia whispered something to me—I'll never forget it. 'He killed me,' she said. 'Dad just—killed me.'" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 236)

In these lines, we see a crucial moment that deeply affects Alicia Berenson's mental health. Alicia overhears her father saying he wished she had died instead of her mother, Eva. This moment is devastating for her, and it causes a deep emotional wound. When she says, "He killed me," she does not mean it literally—she means that her father's words destroyed her emotionally. This feeling of rejection and worthlessness adds to the psychological struggles she already faces, leading to even more internal conflict and pain. This event is a major turning point that worsens her mental state, contributing to her eventual breakdown.

Alicia's emotional struggles reach their highest point toward the end of the novel, where her feelings of pain and betrayal become too much for her to handle. Throughout the story, she has faced many traumatic events, each one adding to her sense of loneliness and hurt. Gabriel's betrayal is the final event that breaks her mentally. This deep feeling of betrayal makes her feel dead inside, as if she has lost the ability to speak or express her pain.

Michaelides (2019) illustrates Alicia's profound inner turmoil and response to betrayal:

> I remained silent. How could I talk? Gabriel had sentenced me to death. The dead don't talk. I untied the wire around my ankles. I got up from the chair. I reached down to the floor. My fingers closed around the gun. It was hot and heavy in my hand. I walked around the chair, and I faced Gabriel. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. His eyes widened. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 281)

The quote comes from Alicia's diary, Alicia's psychological conflict reaches its peak. She feels completely betrayed by Gabriel, her husband, and describes his actions as a "sentence to death." This shows how deeply his betrayal has affected her emotionally—she feels as if she has died inside. When she says, "The dead don't talk," it reflects her sense of being silenced and powerless. Her mental state is so fragile that she can no longer express her pain in words, only through her actions. Picking up the gun symbolizes her final break from reality, showing how her emotional struggles have pushed her to take drastic action. This scene perfectly illustrates Alicia's inner turmoil and the extreme effects of her unresolved psychological conflicts.

Conclusion

The analysis of Michaelides' Novel through a psychoanalytical lens reveals profound insights into the complexities of human psychology, particularly focusing on mental trauma, silence, and the unconscious mind. By applying Freudian theories, including defence mechanisms and the structure of personality, this research delves into the deep psychological layers of the protagonist, Alicia Berenson. Alicia's silence serves as a symbol of her mental turmoil, representing the impact of childhood trauma, emotional abuse, and betrayal.

This study addresses two critical research questions: how silence and mental trauma influence Alicia's life, and the role of unconscious desires and psychological conflicts in shaping her behaviour. Throughout the analysis, it becomes evident that Alicia's silence is not merely a passive response but a defence mechanism—a means of psychological protection against further emotional suffering. Her inability to communicate verbally and her reliance on art as a form of expression demonstrate how trauma can manifest in various forms, from mental withdrawal to violent outbursts.

Additionally, this study highlights the significance of the unconscious mind, particularly in Alicia's case, where repressed desires, fears, and conflicts shape her mental state. The psychoanalytical approach unravels the root causes of her instability, tracing them back to unresolved issues stemming from childhood experiences. The unresolved trauma from her father's emotional neglect and the tragic death of her mother played pivotal roles in her later breakdown, leading to her angry reaction to Gabriel's betrayal.

Trauma, when left unaddressed, can have devastating consequences on an individual's mental health. Alicia's descent into silence and emotional isolation was a gradual process, worsened by the psychological burden she carried throughout her life. Her final act of violence against Gabriel, while shocking, was the result of years of suppressed emotions and unresolved conflicts that found their outlet in one tragic moment.

The novel provides a compelling exploration of the human mind, particularly how trauma and the unconscious influence behaviour. Alicia Berenson's story serves as a reminder of the fragility of mental health and the importance of addressing psychological wounds before they fester into deeper issues. This research not only contributes to the field of psychoanalytical literary criticism but also emphasizes the need for understanding the psychological dimensions of characters in literary works, which often reflect the complexities of real human emotions and experiences.

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