

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
ABDERRAHMANE MIRA UNIVERSITY OF BEJAIA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE



**A Psychoanalytic Reading of Alex Michaelides's
The Silent Patient (2019)**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for an M.A. Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Dedications

Praise be to Allah for the joy of accomplishment, and praise be to Allah at the beginning and the end...

I dedicate this dissertation to everyone who loved me;

To my father, who illuminated my paths and guided me in every step I took.

To my loving mother, who always supported me with her sincere prayers.

To all my brothers and sisters, who have always been there for me throughout my educational career.

To my childhood friend and binomial Nihad, with whom I shared all the challenging and joyful moments in preparing this thesis.

Thank you all for your love and support.

-Bedouhene Amel-

A special feeling of appreciation to my small family;

To my mom for her love, sacrifices and support, who was and still believing I will reach my far dreams.

To my dad for his special care about me and his endless efforts to make me safe and happy during my five years at university.

To my two Brothers.

To my childhood friend Amel with whom I started my first year of primary school and I ended my final year of university by this work.

To my dear friends.

I love you all.

-Manseur Nihad-

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Benkhodja Abida, whose guidance, support, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout the completion of this thesis.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to all our professors who have taught us and offered invaluable advice over the past five years. The knowledge and wisdom they have shared will undoubtedly benefit us throughout our lives.

We are very grateful to the board of examiners who will read and evaluate this thesis.

Abstract

This study presents a psychological analysis of Alex Michaelides' novel *The Silent Patient*, focusing on the main characters Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber. The purpose of this study is to analyze the personalities of the main characters and uncover the negative effects of childhood traumas on their lives. In this dissertation, we applied Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, consisting of eight stages, to the main characters using a qualitative method. The analysis revealed that Alicia and Theo struggled through most of the stages due to their childhood traumas, resulting in issues such as mistrust, identity struggles, role confusion, isolation, and silence for Alicia, and feelings of inferiority and isolation for Theo. The study indicated that both characters share the experience of trauma from their upbringing, which impacted their ability to progress through the stages of psychological development.

Key words: *The Silent Patient*, psychosocial analysis, childhood traumas, psychological development.

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General Introduction

The Silent Patient is a psychological thriller and the debut novel by British author Alex Michaelides, first published in 2019. Inspired by Greek mythology, particularly the story of "Alcestis," and influenced by Agatha Christie's works. Michaelides crafted a masterful exploration of various psychological disorders. The narrative progressed through the perspective of psychotherapist Theo, interspersed with entries from Alicia's old diary. It's a mysterious and profound novel filled with twists and culminating in an unexpected conclusion.

The novel centered around Alicia Berenson, a talented painter, who was accused of murdering her husband, Gabriel, with whom she shared a profound love story. After the crime, Alicia fell into such a state of shock that she chose not to speak or defend herself. Consequently, she was deemed psychologically disturbed during the trial and committed to the psychiatric institution known as "The Grove." As Alicia's case gained widespread attention, psychotherapist Theo Faber took on the challenge of treating her, hoping to unravel the mystery behind her prolonged silence. His goal was to uncover the true identity of the killer and clear Alicia's name, as she was the primary suspect in her husband's murder.

Several researchers explored the enigmatic novel *The Silent Patient*, focusing on the analysis of the main characters' personalities, specifically Theo and Alicia. These scholars explored the traumas experienced by Theo and Alicia in light of their shared past experiences.- Laila Shoukat, Khushnood Arshad, and Sana Azam conducted a study about the main character of *The Silent Patient*, Theo Faber, titled "A psychoanalytic analysis of the character of Theo's Faber in Alex Michaelides in the novel *The Silent Patient*". They discussed the changes in Theo Faber's personality through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory of personality, focusing on the interplay between his id and ego. The researchers employed a qualitative analysis and inductive reasoning to

explore Theo's psyche, examining his sexual and death instinct desires that conflict with his ego, which prioritized rational thoughts and actions.

Pratiwi Amelia and Pramesti Tri undertook research concerning "Alicia Berenson's Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*". The researchers examined the various symptoms and causes of Alicia Berenson's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Drawing on the theory of the psychology of literature by René Wellek and Austin Warren and the theory of PTSD by Carlson & Ruzek, the researchers identified a set of PTSD symptoms exhibited by Alicia's character, including reliving trauma through flashbacks, negative self-view, aggressive behavior, social isolation, and relationship difficulty. These symptoms were linked to a range of causes, from traumatic childhood experiences to a tragic accident and verbal abuse. They concluded that this complex of symptoms did not originate with the murder of her husband or her admission to The Grove, but had been present since childhood.

In their article titled "Exploring Alicia Berenson's defense mechanisms in Alex Michaelides' Novel *The Silent Patient*," Priyaa P and Kanchana C. Muthuswamy focused on analyzing Alicia's personality and the use of displacement as a defense mechanism at various stages of her life to express her emotions and feelings, drawing from Anna Freud's theory of Displacement. The article also drew parallels between Alicia's story and that of "Alcestis," a Greek mythological figure who chose silence after her husband's betrayal. The researchers concluded that excessive reliance on displacement or any defense mechanism could be harmful both to the individual and to society.

Similarly, Ayesha Ashraf, Shafqat Naseem, and Ghania Khan conducted a study titled "Traumatic Childhood and Adult Personality in Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*." The paper examined the impact of childhood trauma on adult personality, focusing on the main character, Alicia Berenson. It explored Alicia's personality and the psychological traumas she has experienced

since childhood through the lenses of two different psychological theories: Sandor Ferenczi's trauma theory and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. The findings revealed that as an adult, Alicia struggles to develop a positive self-image, remaining trapped in the grip of her traumatic childhood experiences.

Swetha.M and Menaka.V analyzed the impact of childhood experiences on Alicia's and Theo's lives in their work "Psychological Trauma as portrayed in *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides". They confirmed that both main characters, Alicia and Theo, underwent difficult childhood experiences that resulted in psychological traumas in adulthood. These early experiences had a negative impact on their emotional and social well-being, leading to destructive behaviors such as depression, obsession, and, in Alicia's case, murder. Alicia was traumatized by her mother's suicide and her father's abandonment, while Theo suffered from the cruelty of his father. Ultimately, they suggested that Theo's and Alicia's lives might have been better if they had experienced a healthier childhood, emphasizing the significance of a positive childhood in shaping a more positive adulthood.

Similarly, Mohammed Afzal Hossain, in "Exploring the Concept of Containment, Childhood Development and Silence in Alex Michaelides's Novel *The Silent Patient: A Psychoanalytic Critique*", focused on the childhood development of the protagonist Alicia Berenson and its influence on her adult life. Specifically, the study examined the impact of Alicia's relationship with her father on her subsequent relationships, ultimately leading to her husband's murder and her subsequent admission to a hospital. Drawing on the theories of Wilfred Bion and Donald Winnicott, Afzal Hossain discussed the role of the "container" in forming a balanced and healthy psyche in infants, as well as the impact of caregiver communication on language acquisition and loss.

Based on the previous studies, it is clear that the novel *The Silent Patient* discusses an important topic, which is psychological trauma and its negative effects on the characters' lives. The narrative features multiple characters who have experienced various psychological traumas, notably the main characters Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber. Previous researchers have analyzed their traumas, mental health issues, and personalities using different theoretical frameworks.

In our current study, our aim is to analyze the main traumatized characters in this novel through the lens of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, which was first published in his book *Childhood and Society 1950*. This approach will provide a detailed and organized analysis of their personalities by examining their progression through these developmental stages. To guide our research, we will answer the following question: How are the personalities of the main characters portrayed in the novel *The Silent Patient* within the framework of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development?

In this study, the primary focus is to illuminate the psychological traumas experienced by the main characters and the detrimental effects of these unresolved traumas on their lives, employing Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as a framework for analysis. This theory outlines eight stages spanning from infancy to late adulthood. According to Erikson, personality development depends on the individual's capacity to adapt to the demands of each stage and overcome the challenges encountered within them.

Each stage encompasses a series of challenges and life tasks that individuals must successfully complete to progress to the next stage. If individuals fail to adapt to these challenges, they may be at risk of developing psychological disorders that can impede their personal development. By achieving balance and successfully addressing the challenges across all stages, individuals can experience healthy psychological growth and fully develop their personalities.

We find Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development to be a valuable theory to apply to *The Silent Patient*. Given that the main characters have experienced various traumas, exploring their personalities through these stages will provide us with a detailed understanding of their growth and personality development throughout the narrative.

In this study, we adopt a descriptive qualitative method, relying on two types of data: primary data and secondary data. The primary data consists of the novel written by Alex Michaelides entitled *The Silent Patient*, while the secondary data encompasses all information collected from various sources such as books, magazines, websites, and journals.

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter covers the background, setting, plot, and characterization of the novel. As well as it introduces the theory selected for application to our subject. Following this, the second chapter focuses on applying the chosen theory to the main characters of the novel. Finally, the general conclusion that will contain the findings of the thesis.

Chapter One

Introduction to Alex Michaelides's *The Silent Patient*

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of Alex Michaelides' novel *The Silent Patient*. It covers the author's biography and the novel's plot, setting, and characterization. Additionally, it presents the theoretical background of the novel, selecting Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of human development as a basic for the analysis of the novel's main characters and their personalities within the framework of the stages of human psychological development.

1-1- Biography of Alex Michaelides

Alex Michaelides is a British author, a psychotherapist, and a screenwriter who was born on September 4, 1977 in Nicosia, Cyprus. He grew up with his Greek father and English mother, and his older sister who was a psychiatrist. From an early age, Alex showed an interest and love of reading and writing. He often wrote stories and plays and read them to his mother in the kitchen, hoping to impress her. She in turn created a small library for him in the house, collecting all the books that might interest him.

In fact, Alex was deeply influenced by books by authors as diverse as Charles Dickens, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Ruth Randell, Patricia Highsmith and Stephen Fry. He was also so taken with the writings of Agatha Christie that he admitted to himself that one day he would write a book about a murder mystery. In addition, Alex Michaelides had a great desire to read about the lives of other writers, perhaps to glean wisdom and lessons from their lives, including "The Trip to Echo Spring" by Olivia Laing. ("Alex Michaelides: The Cypriot Author Behind the New York Times Bestseller").

Alex was also fascinated by crime novels and Greek tragedies, especially those of Euripides and Sophocles. He was born in Cyprus and was exposed to Greek culture and mythology, as the Greeks always revived their culture through plays and performances, so he began to study and understand *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* at a young age, which led him to become attached to Greek mythology and use it as an inspiration for his mysterious novels, as he stated in one of his interviews with Uma Thurman for American Film Institute.

“Alcestis” by Euripides (the last of the great tragic playwrights of Greek theatre) is considered one of the most important plays that Alex admired. It is a Greek legend about the beautiful queen who married King Admetus and sacrificed her life to save him, but in the end came back to life thanks to Heracles, who fought Thanatos (Death), as she was forced to remain silent until her body was completely purified. In fact, Alex quoted a lot from this play in his novel *The Silent Patient*, even beginning with an epigraph, a quote from the play: "But why does she not speak?" (Michaelides 7).

When Alex was about eleven or twelve, he went into his older sister's room. He was drawn to her bookshelf, which contained a selection of Agatha Christie's novels. Agatha's books inspired him to write the crime thriller *The Silent Patient*. Alex confirmed in an interview with Phileleftheros that he did not read modern thrillers; he reread Agatha Christie's works because he was afraid of being influenced by other thrillers.

After finishing secondary school in Nicosia, Alex chose to continue his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge, England, because his older sister and cousin attended the college. During this time, Michaelides spent much of his time at the ADC Theatre, where he acted in fourteen plays. After three years, he graduated with a Master of Arts degree in English Literature. After graduating,

Michaelides attended the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, where he learned story planning, outlining and screenwriting. He graduated with a Master of Arts in Screenwriting.

Having been through individual therapy and suffering as a patient in his early twenties, Alex had a deep interest in psychotherapy, which motivated him to study therapy at postgraduate level for three years. While studying, he got a part-time job in a teenage psychiatric unit in North London and worked there for two years. This experience helped him with his individual therapy. Unfortunately, he didn't complete his training at this unit for one main reason; the unit had closed. He left his psychotherapy studies without obtaining a degree, believing that he was a writer and not a psychotherapist.

Given that Alex Michaelides is Cypriot, he is fond of the Greek mythology that he grew up with, such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Fascinated by the tale of Alcestis and her silence, he weaved this theme into his protagonist "Alicia," symbolizing her state with the keyword "Alcestis." In addition, Alex's relationship with psychotherapy had a lasting influence on the writing of the novel *The Silent Patient*. Throughout his adolescence, he lived in a state of chaos, being nervous, anxious, and depressed to the point of attempting suicide, so he was forced to attend sessions with a psychological therapist for many years, benefiting from her advice to treat himself, which he represented in the character of "Ruth".

Michaelides' inspiration for the idea of The Grove, a secure psychiatric unit in north London, came from the psychiatric unit where he worked. In fact, he used his experience and the notes he took in the unit to write his thriller. Just as he used part of his personality in the character of the psychotherapist Theo Faber, who tried to treat his patients as well as himself.

1-2- Introduction to Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

The Silent Patient is a psychological thriller and detective novel. It was written by British-Cypriot author Alex Michaelides in London between 2013 and 2019. It made its debut on 5 February 2019 and was published by Celadon Books, a division of Macmillan Publishers. It is a fictional mystery novel with a twist, well-developed characters and a realistic setting.

The story is narrated by the psychotherapist "Theo Faber", who is fascinated by the case of Alicia Berenson, a famous artist who murdered her husband and then remained silent for six years. In dealing with Alicia's silence, Theo explores her past and present to discover the secret behind her refusal to speak, hoping to help her interact again. In fact, Alicia's silence is the central theme of the novel, along with all the childhood traumas experienced by the main characters.

The narrator makes a direct reference to the Greek tragedy "Alcestis", a famous play by Euripides, from which he took many quotations to use in the novel's plot, including Alicia's painting "Alcestis", a self-portrait that allows her psychotherapist to reveal the truth. He also borrowed the same narrative structure from Agatha Christie's work to develop the mystery thriller *The Silent Patient*.

The Silent Patient has been on the New York Times bestseller list at N.01 for 100 weeks in 2019. More than 6.5 million copies have been sold in 51 countries. The novel of mystery was praised by the Goodreads choice Award 2019 in the Mystery and Thriller category. Like any successful novel, *The Silent Patient* was made into a film in 2022, produced by Brad Pitt's company, Plan B, with another production company called Annapurna Pictures.

The novel's writing style is characterized by precise and accurate language, with Alex Michaelides using short and direct sentences. The author creates tension and suspense throughout the narrative by shifting between Theo's and Alicia's perspectives, providing insight into their thoughts and feelings. The masterful plotting and dark tone immediately draw the reader's attention

from the first page and maintain their interest throughout the story. The novel's unexpected ending was crafted perfectly to leave the reader shocked upon discovering the mystery.

The Silent Patient is a psychological thriller that includes stages and experiences from the author's life. From his childhood, he was overwhelmed by a sense of fear and anxiety for his family, friends, and even his toys, due to the possibility of a second Turkish invasion. This feeling inspired his love of thriller and edginess, which he incorporated into his novel. (“Alex Michaelides: The Cypriot Author Behind the New York Times Bestseller”).

Michaelides' experience with psychotherapy had a profound impact on his novel *The Silent Patient*. During his adolescence, he struggled with chaos, leading to feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and depression, which ultimately led him to attempt suicide. As a result, he received therapy for many years and found solace in the advice of his therapist, which he incorporated into the character of 'Ruth'. Michaelides was inspired by the psychiatric unit where he worked to create The Grove, a secure psychiatric unit in North London. He used his experience and notes from the unit to write his thriller, representing a part of his personality in the character of the psychotherapist Theo, who aimed to treat both his patients and himself.

1-2 -1 The Setting

The novel *The Silent Patient* is set in London, with particular focus on three locations: The Grove, Theo's home, and Alicia's home. The majority of the story takes place at The Grove, a psychiatric unit located in north London. The narrator describes it as a small hospital built with original Victorian redbrick, situated in the oldest part of Edgware hospital, and surrounded by security cameras. The building's exterior appears unappealing and lacks aesthetic appeal. Upon exploring its interconnecting corridors, one may notice peeling paint on the walls and a mildew odour.

The Grove comprises a spacious room with tall barred windows where the community convenes once or twice a day under the guidance of Professor Diomedes, the Grove's director. Diomedes's office is situated in the hospital's oldest section. The room has a distinct aroma, reminiscent of an orchestra pit, with the scent of wood, strings, and wax permeating the air. The office is adorned with various musical instruments, including a piano, violin, and flute.

The therapy room was described by the narrator as a narrow, bare rectangle, similar to a prison cell. The window of the room was closed and barred to prevent patients from escaping. The atmosphere of the room was gloomy, with the only cheerful item being the pink box of tissues provided to patients during therapy sessions. Theo Faber's office was located at the back of the building near the fire escape. The office is compact and requires additional furniture, including a suitable radiator to regulate the temperature.

The psychiatric unit known as The Grove had a courtyard where patients were taken for thirty minutes of fresh air every afternoon, regardless of the weather conditions. The courtyard was surrounded by tall redbrick walls. The poor conditions of the unit, including the building's crisp shape and the lack of response from patients to treatment, have led to the possibility of its closure.

The novel features Theo's home as a setting, where psychotherapist Theo Faber and his wife Kathy shared many beautiful moments since their marriage. Their small flat is located in London and is quiet and undisturbed by any noise, especially when Kathy is not there. The living room is described as lively and colorful, with new and tidy furniture. The room is often permeated with the smell of Kathy's favorite flowers, pretty pink lilies. Therefore, several events occurred, such as discovering Kathy's infidelity by exploring her laptop and Theo's use of marijuana.

The Berenson's' residence is located in northwest London, on the edge of Hampstead Heath. It is a large white house with two floors and two separate entrances. The front door faces the road,

bus station, and pond, while the back door leads to the summerhouse, which Alicia converted into her personal studio for painting. The kitchen, located on the ground floor, overlooks the garden through a large window. The couple's room was located on the top floor where they shared a successful love story. Their nearest neighbor, Barbie Hellman, lived alone in the blue house. An interesting event occurred there which turned the safety and stability of the house into a crime scene. This was due to Gabriel's murder by an unknown person.

1-2-2 Characterization

Alicia Berenson is a main character in Alex Michaelides's novel *The Silent Patient*. She is described as a beautiful woman with deep blue eyes and long red hair. Alicia is a well-known painter whose collection is displayed by her gallerist and best friend, Jean Felix. She was married to the famous photographer Gabriel Berenson, with whom she spent the peaceful part of her life. Alicia exuded vitality, embodying a captivating spirit, even in the face of a challenging childhood. Alicia spent her formative years in Cambridge with her parents, Vernon and Eva Rose, in a spacious house by the river. Unfortunately, Alicia's mother committed suicide in a car accident, and her aunt Lydia Rose moved in with her son Paul Rose to help take care of Alicia and her father. However, Alicia was mistreated by both her aunt and father, who eventually took his own life by hanging himself in the attic a few years later.

Alicia's difficult childhood experiences, including the emotional trauma caused by her father's neglect and cruel words, had a profound impact on her personality. Her father not only deprived her of love and care, but also expressed a desire for her to die instead of her mother. He said to Lydia: 'My poor girl, my Eva... Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be here? Why didn't Alicia die instead?' (Michaelides 221). These hurtful words contributed to Alicia's struggles with suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, Alicia was deeply affected by her mother's suicide. Eva had

intended to end both of their lives, and although Alicia miraculously survived, the event left a profound impact on her memory.

This experience has had such a lasting effect on her that she has been hesitant to have children, despite her desire to do so. After enduring years of psychological torment, Alicia has finally found happiness with her husband Gabriel Berenson, who provides her with love, care, and safety. Alicia's diary reveals that they share many intimate moments and that Gabriel's treatment is satisfying her. Despite occasional bouts of depression, Gabriel stands by her and takes her to a psychotherapist. However, their tranquility shattered when Alicia detected a mysterious stranger repeatedly watching their home, instilling fear within her. Her husband refused to believe the weird story until a heinous crime occurred.

Alicia was accused of Gabriel's murder at the age of 33, which drastically altered her life from that of a talented painter to that of a silent killer. Throughout the investigation and trial, she remained completely silent, leading the judge to deem her mentally unstable and order her to be housed at the psychiatric unit known as 'The Grove'. At the Grove, Alicia's appearance and behavior deteriorated. She became very thin, unclean, with a pale face and long, dirty nails. She also became violent and abused many patients.

Another major character is Theo Faber. He is also the narrator of the novel. He is a 42-year-old intelligent psychotherapist who has been married to American actress Kathryn Faber for nine years. The narrator describes him as tall with black hair and black eyes. Theo is passionate and proficient in his work and is loving and loyal to his wife. However, the novel also reveals another side of him, including dishonesty and professional manipulation.

The narrator was raised in Surrey, England. During his childhood, he was subjected to abuse from his father, while his mother failed to protect him. The trauma caused by his father's violence

continued to affect him in his adulthood. While at university, he experienced anxiety related to making friends, attending courses, and severe depression, which led him to use marijuana as a means of escaping reality. After a failed suicide attempt, the psychotherapist Ruth helped him heal from his traumas and find new hope in life. This experience sparked a deep connection with psychotherapy, nurturing a sense of purpose and curiosity. He sought therapy to address the psychological effects of a troubled childhood.

Theo had a wonderful married life with his wife, in which they shared love and respect. However, Kathy's betrayal shattered their relationship, causing them to become distant and avoid each other. Theo resorted to smoking and secretly consuming marijuana, feeling worthless. Despite the emotional pain and his pride, he could not let go of his obsession with Kathy and remained committed to her. This attachment eventually drove him to commit a crime just to be with her.

Theo, a psychotherapist, applied for a job at the Grove to treat Alicia. He organized therapy sessions, reduced her medication dosage, and provided her with a private art studio to reignite her passion for drawing. To treat her, Theo had to investigate her past and question her relatives to uncover the origins of her trauma. In a surprising turn of events, Theo himself was revealed as the unexpected perpetrator, with sinister motives to silence Alicia permanently.

Kathryn Faber is Theo's wife and a professional stage American actress who was born in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She was described as an elegant and attractive woman with long black hair, green eyes, and luminous white skin. She is talkative, sociable, and highly confident. Despite her husband's pure love and respect, she betrayed him with the photographer Gabriel. She was careful in hiding her affair and skilled in acting her love for her husband. After her lover's death, she became a depressed woman and lost her passion for life.

Gabriel Berenson is a fashion photographer for Vogue magazine. He is known for his striking beauty that rivals that of fashion models. In the novel, he is described as a handsome man with a strong jaw, high cheeks, and an elegant nose. He grew up with his adopted brother, Max Berenson, in a stable family. Gabriel is a married man who settled in London with his wife, Alicia Rose. He is a caring person who always tries to make her happy and bring her out of her shell, especially after a tough childhood. Later, he betrayed her by revealing his fake love when he chose his own life over hers. He was shot to death at the age of forty-four.

1-2 -3 Plot Overview

The novel introduces Alicia Berenson, a painter, and her husband Gabriel, a photographer. Gabriel was murdered six years ago on August 25th when he was 44 and Alicia was 33. On the night of the crime, Berenson's neighbor, Barbie Hellman, called the police after hearing several gunshots from Berenson's house. When the police arrived, they found Gabriel bound to a chair next to the gun, and Alicia with several wrist injuries. Since that day, she has remained silent, even when charged with killing her husband. Her silence has attracted the audience's attention, especially after painting her self-portrait 'Alcestis'. During her trial, she neither defended herself nor admitted her crime. Alicia was admitted to the Grove after convincing the judge of her madness. Years later, the protagonist applied for a job at the Grove in the hope of taking on Alicia's case.

The narrator, Theo Faber, is a 42-year-old psychotherapist who had a difficult childhood with an angry father. In his first year at university, he suffered from depression and attempted suicide.

He received help from psychotherapist Ruth for several years to overcome his traumas. Theo was accepted for the job at the Grove.

Theo visits Professor Diomedes' office, where he enquires about the treatment of Alicia Berenson, the patient accused of killing her husband. He discovers that she has not received individual treatment and has been challenging for former psychotherapists due to her lack of response. Professor Diomedes is among them, having tried to treat her, but she refused to talk or even look at him during their sessions.

Although the professor warned against it, psychotherapist Theo decided to treat Alicia to help her communicate again. Theo examined Alicia's file and delved into her history, discovering her troubled past, which included self-harm and a violent incident at the mental health facility where she resides. Additionally, Theo explored Alicia's relationships, with a focus on her self-portrait titled 'ALCESTIS' and her childhood trauma. The protagonist attempts to reach out to Alicia's family, but is met with opposition from her aunt. He also intends to contact her lawyer, Max Berenson. Meanwhile, he reflects on his past, particularly his emotional connection with his wife, Kathy, which transformed his life from one of darkness and despair to one of light and joy.

Theo visited Diomedes' office to report his first meeting with Alicia and requested a reduction in her medication dosage. However, Diomedes informed him that Christian was in charge of Alicia's medication and that the current dosage was necessary to maintain her stability. Despite the warning, Theo lowered the dosage and during the next therapy session, noticed an improvement in Alicia's movements. However, later on, Alicia attacked him. Theo managed to convince Diomedes that Alicia's attack was a sign of communication. Upon returning home, Theo took advantage of Kathy's absence to quickly smoke. While on Kathy's laptop, he accidentally stumbled upon an email from a stranger and proceeded to read all of her emails with that man to uncover her betrayal.

After discovering Kathy's infidelity, Theo turns to his former therapist and friend, Ruth, for guidance. Ruth advises Theo to prioritize honesty in relationships, leave his current situation, and seek a more loving partner. Additionally, Ruth suggests that Theo's emotions may stem from deep-seated feelings of being unloved dating back to his childhood. Later, Theo introduces himself to the patients at The Grove, where he meets Elif, a psychiatric patient known for her provocative behavior.

During his visit to Alicia's gallery, Theo introduced himself to Jean Felix. The gallerist mentioned his close relationship with Alicia and his mutual animosity towards Gabriel, who was jealous of their relationship. Jean Felix also showed Theo Alicia's paintings and recommended that he read the play 'Alcestis' to gain a better understanding of her artistic expression. Therefore, he bought a copy of Euripides' Alcestis and read it.

After devising a treatment plan for Alicia, Theo begins sessions centered on her artwork, exploring its emotional depth and motivating her to resume drawing. His efforts result in Alicia's first reaction - a small smile - when he permits her to sketch once more. Theo arranges a private art studio for Alicia, where she produces a potent and personal work of art. Apart from Alicia's progress, Theo experiences tension with his colleague Christian and fails to locate Kathy's lover despite following her trail. Barbie Hellmann, Alicia's former neighbor, attempts to pique Theo's interest while sharing intimate details about Alicia's past, including her fear of surveillance.

Later on, a physical altercation between Alicia and Elif resulted in Elif's injury. As a result, Alicia was put in isolation, treatment was stopped, and the doses of medication to control her were increased. To resume treatment, Alicia gave Theo her diary titled 'Alicia Berenson's Diary'. Thus, Theo had the opportunity to discover the events that occurred in the days leading up to Gabriel's

murder by reading Alicia's handwritten diary. The diary entries cover the period from 11 August to 25 August.

After exposing Alicia's diary, Theo had many questions on his mind. He wondered if Alicia had discovered the man's identity and decided to look for Dr. West. Theo left his office and walked along the corridor until he reached the door of Christian's office, which had a sign that read Dr. C. West. When Theo asked Christian about his treatment of Alicia before she was admitted to the Grove, Christian denied it until Theo showed him Alicia's diary. Christian explained that he was treating Alicia as a favor for his friend Gabriel and that he was her unofficial doctor. Theo agreed to keep Christian's secret from Diomedes in exchange for information about Alicia, including her condition and the man who was watching her.

Theo is still questioning Alicia's reasons for staying silent. She explains that she was initially in shock and later realized that it was too late to speak. Alicia then recounts a traumatic experience where a masked man killed her husband, Gabriel, and tied her to a chair before fleeing. However, Theo notes some discrepancies in Alicia's account. Gabriel was shot with five bullets instead of six, and Alicia was not tied up when the police found her. After the therapy session, he discusses his concerns with his supervisor, Diomedes, who believes that Alicia is fabricating the entire narrative.

The narrator also shares his own struggles with Kathy's infidelity, detailing his failed attempt to avenge her lover, which resulted in discovering that the man was also married. The story takes a dark turn when Alicia attempts suicide, but Theo discovers evidence that suggests it may have been an attempted murder with a morphine injection, not an overdose. Stephanie accuses Yuri of neglect in the medication cabinet, while Theo implicates Christian in Alicia's attempted murder, leading to Christian's arrest. Later, Theo decides to visit Cathy's lover's house and inform his deceived wife

about her husband's affair. The story becomes even more intriguing when Theo Faber breaks into the wife's house wearing a mask and confronts her, revealing that she is Alicia Berenson.

The final section of Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* features Alicia Berenson's diary, which exposes Theo's manipulative and deceptive actions as he attempts to conceal his role in Gabriel's murder. Theo re-enters Alicia's life after the crime, attempting to exert control over her to prevent his culpability from being exposed. Although Alicia recognized Theo's identity from the beginning, she remained silent and turned to her diary. The diary contained evidence that convicted Theo of all his crimes, including incitement to kill Gabriel and injecting Alicia with a dose of morphine.

During the critical moment when Theo forced Gabriel to choose between his own life and Alicia's, Gabriel's declaration of 'I don't want to die' left Alicia heartbroken and speechless (Michaelides 324). The story concludes with the protagonist facing the repercussions of his decisions. The Inspector visits Theo to reveal Alicia's hidden diary and his conviction for Gabriel's murder. Initially terrified, Theo eventually finds comfort in the revelation and watches the snow fall, symbolizing his realization and acceptance.

As we delve into the intricate personalities of Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber, we uncover layers of complexity and psychological depth that shape their identities within the narrative of Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*. Each character's unique journey and struggles offer insights into the human psyche, inviting deeper exploration. To illuminate the psychological underpinnings of their behavior, in the next section we shift focus to the influential psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson about the stages of human psychological development.

1-3 Theoretical Background

Our purpose in applying Erik Erikson's theory to analyze the novel *The Silent Patient* is to understand the character's psychological development and motivations. This theory provides a comprehensive framework to explore how individuals navigate challenges and conflicts at different stages of their lives. Therefore, by linking the stages of human psychological development in this theory to the development of the main characters in the novel *The Silent Patient*, we can comprehensively analyze their psychological development and conflicts.

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) is a Danish-German-American psychoanalyst known for his pioneering theory of psychosocial development and the concept of identity crisis. His writings marked a break from traditional Freudian psychosexual theory, as they emphasized the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping human development. Erikson's theories have had a lasting impact on psychology, especially with regard to understanding how individuals navigate different stages of life and form their identities.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development was first published in his book *Childhood and Society* in 1950. Influenced by Freud's psychosexual stages, Erikson looked at social and cultural aspects. While Freud focused on biology and the unconscious mind, Erikson focused his theory on ego development rather than id dominance, arguing that personality development is a result of navigating social conflicts rather than merely the satisfaction or frustration of innate desires. (McLeod)

Erikson proposed that human development develops through a series of psychosocial crises. These crises occur at different stages of life and involve navigating challenges related to identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Therefore, Erikson's theory emphasizes the impact

of social interactions, historical context, and cultural norms on the individual's development which offers a comprehensive framework that extends beyond Freudian psychoanalysis. Erikson's work has a great influence in shaping understanding of human growth and development.

The theory consists of eight stages in which individuals develop at different stages of life dealing with challenges and conflicts. Each stage involves a conflict that serves as a turning point in development. The successful resolution of these conflicts creates psychological abilities that have a positive impact on subsequent episodes. Erikson's theory emphasizes the impact of social life experiences across the life span, recognizing the significant influence of relationships in shaping one's identity and development at each stage.

The theory consists of different stages, "Trust vs. Mistrust" is the initial phase in Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which occurs during infancy (birth to 18 months). In this stage infants discover ways to trust or mistrust their caregivers primarily based on the consistency of care and responsiveness to their needs. If caregivers offer love, interest, and meet the kid's basic needs, the infant develops a feel of trust. This trust forms the basis for the infant's growing confidence in the reliability of the world and the people around them.

However, inconsistent or inadequate caregiving may lead the infant to view the world and his caregivers as untrustworthy. This early experience of mistrust can have lasting effects on the child's future relationships and overall worldview. It may contribute to difficulties in forming secure attachments, challenges in trusting others, and a more pessimistic outlook on life.

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt is the second stage in Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory that happens during early childhood (18 months to 3 years). Erikson's

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage highlights the role of caregivers in supporting children's early attempts at independence. In this stage, children begin to assert their independence and develop a sense of autonomy.

When caregivers encourage children in their explorations and making choices, they allow them to promote a positive outcome and develop a healthy sense of autonomy. This positive reinforcement encourages children to feel competent and capable of mastering new skills and challenges. However, if caregivers are restrictive, critical, or dismissive of children's attempts at independence, children begin to doubt their abilities and feel ashamed of their desire for autonomy.

During the preschool years, from 3 to 6 years old, children enter the Initiative vs. Guilt stage. In this stage, children assert themselves more in social interactions and take on a sense of initiative in exploring the world around them. When caregivers provide encouragement and positive support during this stage, and recognize and nurture children's initiatives, such as their desire to learn or try new activities, it leads to healthy development of initiative and enhances their self-confidence and independence. This positive reinforcement encourages children to continue exploring and interacting with the world around them, laying the foundation for future learning and social interactions. However, if children's initiatives are overly criticized or restricted, they may develop feelings of guilt and hesitation in asserting themselves.

The next stage, Industry vs. Inferiority, occurs during the elementary school years, from 6 to 12 years old. This stage is marked by children's growing capacity to learn new skills and undertake tasks independently. As they engage in academic, social, and extracurricular activities, children begin to develop a sense of industry; a belief in their ability to accomplish tasks and achieve goals.

Success in these endeavors leads to a feeling of competence and accomplishment, enhancing their self-esteem and motivation to continue learning and exploring new challenges. Positive reinforcement from teachers, peers, and caregivers plays a crucial role in nurturing industry.

However, children who experience consistent failure or receive harsh criticism during the Industry vs. Inferiority stage may develop feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. When children's efforts are not acknowledged or are met with negativity, it can undermine their self-confidence and discourage them from participating in tasks or learning opportunities.

During adolescence, generally between the ages of 12 and 18, individuals go through the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage. In this stage, they explore their identity, values, and beliefs, and attempt to establish a sense of self. Success at this level creates a strong sense of identity, leads to a confident self-concept and a clearer direction for their future endeavors. While failure can lead to confusion and a lack of direction. Adolescents may struggle to define their identity clearly, experiencing confusion regarding their values, beliefs, and goals. This lack of clarity can manifest as difficulty in making important life decisions and forming meaningful relationships. (Cherry)

The 'Intimacy vs. Isolation' stage is also a part of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which typically occurs during early adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 40. During this stage, individuals aim to form meaningful relationships and connections with others. The successful navigation of this stage leads to the development of intimate relationships, such as friendships and romantic partnerships, and deep emotional bonds. Through these connections, individuals learn to trust, empathize, and share their lives with others. However, failure to establish or maintain intimate relationships during this stage may result in feelings of

isolation and difficulty in forming lasting connections.

During middle age, usually between the ages of 40 and 65, people encounter the conflict between generativity and stagnation. Generativity involves contributing to society and doing things that will benefit future generations, which can be achieved through meaningful work, engaging in community service, coaching others, or raising children. Therefore, achieving generativity fosters a sense of accomplishment and purpose, as individuals see that their efforts positively impact their community and leave a lasting legacy.

On the other hand, stagnation represents a sense of personal and societal stagnation or lack of growth. Individuals experiencing stagnation may feel unproductive, stuck in routines that no longer challenge or inspire them. This can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of missed opportunities to make a meaningful impact.

Integrity versus Despair represents the final psychosocial stage in Erik Erikson's developmental theory. This stage usually begins in late adulthood, around the age of 65 until death. During this stage, individuals reflect on their lives and face the conflict between integrity, characterized by a sense of accomplishment, wisdom, and acceptance of life, and despair, which is marked by regret, lack of fulfillment of goals, and a feeling that life has been wasted. Those who have successfully navigated earlier stages of life tend to develop a sense of integrity, finding meaning and satisfaction in their life's journey. Conversely, those who struggle with unresolved conflicts may feel despair and a sense of hopelessness about the past.

Each stage plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality and development across the lifespan, highlighting the importance of successfully navigating these psychosocial conflicts for overall well-being and growth.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided essential background information about *The Silent Patient*, laying the foundation for a deeper understanding of its characters, setting, and plot dynamics. Having introduced Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which outlines eight distinct stages that individuals go through on their journey towards self-actualization, we gain a valuable framework for analyzing the behavior of Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson. Considering this viewpoint, our aim is to unravel the complexities of their identities, shed light on their inner struggles, and explore how their past experiences and interactions shape their present circumstances.

Chapter Two

Journeys of Self: Exploring Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to identifying the application of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development to the two main characters of the novel *The Silent Patient*. The protagonists, Theo and Alicia, have experienced deep traumas that affect their lives today. While Theo struggles with his past experiences, which affect his relationships and decisions in the present, Alicia's traumatic events have silenced her, creating a mysterious and complex character. Their experiences can be viewed through the lens of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, where unresolved conflicts from earlier stages can influence one's ability to navigate later stages effectively.

2-1 Alicia Berenson

In the novel, Alicia Berenson's childhood experiences and challenges shape her current reality. From a young age, she has experienced significant traumas that continue to affect her life and can be viewed through Erikson's stages of development to gain insight into her psyche, behavior and relationships.

2-1 -1 Trust vs Mistrust

Analyzing Alicia Berenson's personality through Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development provides a comprehensive understanding of her character in *The Silent Patient*. The first stage of Erikson's eight stages of psychological development, which takes place during infancy, plays a crucial role in shaping one's ability to form secure attachments and develop a sense of trust in others.

In Alicia Berenson's case, her experiences in infancy and early childhood shaped her perception of trust and mistrust. Examining the quality of her relationship with her caregivers and

any early trauma reveals her development of trust or mistrust. Alicia's relationship with her mother was fragile and lacked any emotional connection. Given that Alicia's mother was mentally ill, she was unable to provide care and family support for her daughter, resulting in a lack of emotional nurturing and stability in Alicia's childhood.

Eva Rose tried to kill both of her daughter and herself in a car accident but Alicia survived while her mother succeeded in killing herself. This event had many effects on Alicia's mental health following her survival. One question that has been stuck in her mind since childhood, and to which she has not found an answer: "Why she strapped me into the passenger seat of her yellow mini and sped us toward that redbrick wall?" (Michaelides 53).

This lack of maternal care during infancy and early childhood contributed to Alicia's struggles with trust and attachment, shaped her psychological development, and affected her ability to form healthy relationships later in life "Trust, once lost, is hard to recover" (Michaelides 140). Thus, Alicia's early experiences, including a broken relationship with her mother and her mother's suicide, profoundly affected her ability to trust and form secure attachments.

Alicia Berenson's relationship with her father, Vernon Rose, is marked by emotional abuse and cruelty. Despite being her father, his neglect and hatred for her was evident throughout her childhood, even after her mother's death. Vernon's loyalty to Eva turns into bitterness towards Alicia, showing his inability to defend his child, instead abandoning her when she needed him most. One of the memorable moments in Alicia's harsh childhood with her father was the day he wished his daughter had died instead of his wife Eva, showing his lack of empathy and love for his daughter. His decision to end his own life in the attic further illustrates his neglect of his daughter, leaving her to suffer alone.

Alicia's father's actions, characterized by emotional abuse and his expressed wish for her to die, have affected her emotions and her ability to trust others, as she said: "I will never forget it. He killed me, she said daddy just killed me" (Michaelides 213). Because she grew up in an environment where her father was unable to protect and support her, a deep sense of betrayal and abandonment was created in her personality. This lack of trust thus extends beyond her relationship with her father to a general distrust of others, as she has learned to expect betrayal and rejection from those closest to her.

Despite childhood trauma, including parental neglect, Alicia found a ray of hope when Gabriel came into her life. In him she saw the possibility of healing and happiness, as she said: "He saved me - like Jesus" (Michaelides 56). Their relationship gave Alicia the opportunity to rebuild her trust in others and regain her sense of security and love. Although Gabriel won Alicia's trust, she remained suspicious of everyone around her, such as Jean Felix, who is both her close friend and her gallerist. Alicia seems to trust Jean Felix, as she relies on him for support. Jean, on the other hand, cares for Alicia and is committed to helping her. However, when Alicia begins to feel watched by an unknown person, her first suspicion falls on Jean, her closest confidant. This moment highlights Alicia's distrust of people, even those she loves.

Alicia's trust in her closest neighbor, Barbie Hellman, also appears to be limited, as she seems to see her as a neighbor rather than a true friend, despite Barbie's attempts to gain her trust. Although Alicia shared her concerns about being stalked by a mysterious man, Alicia's suspicions about Barbie prevented her from fully trusting her: "I don't know why I told Barbie. I don't like her and I don't trust her" (Michaelides 176). In addition, her relationship with her brother-in-law Max Berenson was fraught with tension and complexity. Alicia found it difficult to accept or trust him because of his repeated attempts to sexually assault her. He was the second person Alicia suspected

when she was being watched. These relationships provide insight into Alicia's relationship dynamics and the complexity of trust in her life.

The idea that Alicia Berenson created her own diary because she didn't trust anyone is a fascinating one. It really shows her deep sense of independence and the need to keep her thoughts and feelings to herself. Her diary must have been her safe haven, a place where she could truly be herself without fear of judgment or betrayal, especially after being watched by a stranger, as she mentioned in her diary, "Thank God I have this dairy to write in. It keeps me sane. There is no one else to talk to. No one I can trust" (Michaelides 183).

As events unfold, however, the trust that Alicia had placed in Gabriel becomes strained when she discovers his betrayal and remains silent after his murder. Thus, Alicia's trust issues deepen over time following her husband's failure. Looking at how Alicia's trust in Gabriel was formed and linked to her past experiences, it's clear that it affected her mentally and how the betrayal affected her trust in future relationships.

Following Gabriel's murder, Alicia maintained her silence, refusing to divulge any details about the crime despite being accused of his killing and deemed insane; "She answered no question. 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 12). When she was admitted to the Grove psychiatric hospital, numerous psychotherapists were intrigued by her case and tried to persuade her to communicate, hoping to elicit a narrative of the murder. For that, Alicia's silence and refusal to respond to therapy sessions can be interpreted as a distrust of people.

Then psychotherapist Theo Faber, who had taken a keen interest in Alicia's case, was given the opportunity to treat her, where he spent a great deal of time and effort trying to understand

Alicia's past and unravel the reasons for her mutism. He engages in various therapeutic techniques and interventions, such as analyzing her artwork and exploring her childhood home, all in an attempt to break her silence and help her heal. Despite Theo's efforts to connect with and help her, Alicia remains guarded and resistant, revealing her underlying distrust. While she may have shared some information with Theo, her overall demeanor suggests a lack of complete trust in him, possibly due to past experiences of betrayal or abandonment.

In analyzing Alicia's character through the Trust vs. Mistrust stage, it's clear that her early experiences significantly shape her ability to trust others and the world around her. The narrative highlights how her past experiences, particularly her parents and her husband's betrayal, affect her ability to trust.

2 -1-2 Identity vs Role Confusion

Erik Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion can be used to analyze Alicia Berenson's character in *The Silent Patient*. According to Erikson, at this stage development depends mostly on what happens to the individual. While adolescence is a stage in which one is neither a child nor an adult, life certainly becomes more complex as he tries to find his own identity, struggle with social interactions, and deal with moral issues. Thus, the individual's task is to discover their identity. If he does not pass this stage, he will experience role confusion. Analyzing Alicia's past traumas and current events provides insight into her identity formation and the challenges she faced in defining herself.

Alicia's parents played a significant role in shaping her identity, particularly her mother's suicide and her father's emotional neglect, which serve as critical factors in the development of her identity, as her psychotherapist Theo confirmed: "I know how damaging your childhood was. It's important to understand how serious this is. What your father said is tantamount to psychic murder.

He killed you" (Michaelides 216). Their influence, together with the traumas she experienced, affected her identity and contributed to the challenges she faced in defining herself.

Furthermore, Alicia's struggle with role confusion is evident in her inability to fully integrate her past traumas into her present life. She struggles with conflicting identities and roles, particularly as a wife, artist and patient. This internal conflict causes confusion and disorientation in her life, mirroring the challenges people face during this Identity Formation stage. This can be seen in her relationships and how she directs them in the midst of her inner turmoil.

Alicia's experiences with Gabriel highlight moments of role confusion as she confronts conflicting expectations and demands placed on her. In her relationship with Gabriel, Alicia struggled as a wife to balance her desires and needs with the expectations he placed on her, whether consciously or unconsciously, for example, Alicia pretended to be healed from her past trauma in order to meet Gabriel's expectations. She also felt the need to pretend to be mentally ill to please her husband: "I'd do anything to keep him - even pretend I'm crazy when I know I'm not" (Michaelides 182), especially if he already thought she was imagining things and mentally ill. This dynamic lead to an internal conflict as Alicia tries to conform to Gabriel's expectations while at the same time striving to maintain her own autonomy and sense of self.

Alicia's identity as an artist is woven through her personal struggles and serves as a conduit for her inner turmoil and trauma. Through her extraordinary painting skills, she conveys her deepest feelings, fears and experiences. Her art serves as a means of communication and self-discovery, expressing repressed emotions and delving into personal experiences, emphasizing themes of creativity and exploring repressed emotions as her gallerist Jean-Felix announced: "It shows you what was on Alicia's mind" (Michaelides 125).

Moreover, the significance of her art lies not only in its aesthetic value, but also in its function as a window into Alicia's psyche, providing insights into her emotional state and the events leading up to her alleged crime. Thus, Alicia's art becomes more than a form of self-expression; it becomes an essential tool for understanding her character and unravelling the mystery of her silence, as Jean-Felix mentions: "If you really want Alicia to talk... give her some paint and brushes" (Michaelides 128). Through her artistic journey, Alicia Berenson was able to discover her identity, as her artwork played a significant role in shaping her sense of self and purpose.

Alicia's status as a patient increases her struggle against identity exploration and role confusion. As a patient, Alicia struggles not only with her external perception of her condition, but also with an internal struggle against guilt, responsibility and loss of freedom. Her silence, a defense or coping mechanism, also becomes an obstacle to her own healing process as she navigates the complexities of her mental state and tries to regain control of her story.

In conclusion, Alicia's conflicting roles as wife, artist and patient are central to her struggle in *The Silent Patient*. As a wife, she navigates the complexities of her marriage, even as she copes with trauma. As an artist, her creative expression is intertwined with emotional turmoil. As a patient, she struggles with her mental health issues and their impact on her identity. These conflicting roles exacerbate Alicia's internal conflict and the challenges she faces in reconciling her past and present realities.

2 -1-3 Intimacy vs Isolation

In *The Silent Patient*, the stage of intimacy versus isolation is central to understanding Alicia Berenson's individuality and behavior. Examining Alicia's personality through this stage requires an analysis of her relationships, interactions and emotional responses, as it is consistent with Erik

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which emphasizes the conflict between forming close, loving relationships and experiencing isolation throughout young adulthood.

Alicia's childhood traumas have contributed to her current isolation and fear of intimacy. Her past experiences have created a protective barrier around her, making it difficult for her to trust others and difficult for her to make meaningful connections. As a result, Alicia retreats into isolation to avoid the potential hurt and disappointment that comes with being close to others.

Alicia's inability or unwillingness to communicate effectively suggests a barrier to forming intimate connections with those around her. Growing up in a family where trust was shattered and safety was elusive, Alicia learned to rely on herself for protection. The relationships she formed were often fleeting and superficial as she struggled to let anyone get too close. The fear of being hurt again became a constant companion, leading her to retreat into solitude as a means of self-preservation.

Despite Alicia's struggle with intimacy and her difficulty in forming deep relationships, Gabriel's support and understanding gave her a sense of security and comfort, as she said: "I'd rather be alone than with the wrong person. That's why I never had any serious relationships before Gabriel" (Michaelides 134). His devotion and care created a safe space for Alicia to gradually work through her issues and begin to trust and connect with him. Thus, Alicia's trust in Gabriel suggests a deep level of connection and intimacy between them, further reinforcing the perception of their relationship as loving and supportive.

Alicia and Gabriel's intimacy remained stable throughout their marriage, but everything changed when a mysterious stranger entered their lives. Alicia's experience of being watched created a sense of fear that affected her sense of security with her husband;" I saw it now. I would never be safe. Never be loved" (Michaelides 255). This emotional distance not only affected her

intimacy with Gabriel, but also strained their communication and mutual trust. The presence of the Watcher created a barrier between them, as it was difficult for Alicia to feel connected and understood by her husband during this time, leading to her isolation from him.

Alicia's retreat into silence after the crime and the discovery of her husband's betrayal shows the depth of her emotional turmoil. The trauma inflicted by such betrayal created a sense of isolation, prompting Alicia to retreat from the world as a coping mechanism as cited: "I remained silent. How could I talk? Gabriel had sentenced me to death "(Michaelides 255). By refusing to communicate with others, she creates a barrier between herself and the outside world, which intensifies her feelings of detachment and despair. In this state of emotional distress, Alicia struggled to trust others or to find comfort in interpersonal relationships, further perpetuating her sense of isolation.

Furthermore, Alicia's silence continued after her admission to the Grove, and her isolation at the Grove manifested itself in various situations, such as her tendency to retreat into solitude during meetings and her avoidance of engaging with others. Her refusal to attend therapy sessions is a clear manifestation of her isolation, indicating her reluctance to engage with others and express her thoughts and feelings. This behavior stems from her fear of intimacy, as being open in therapy sessions would require her to be honest and reveal her feelings, which she has difficulty doing due to her traumatic past.

Alicia's isolation at the Grove was quite pronounced. She was physically and emotionally distant from the other residents, with her cabin located far from the main gathering areas as quoted "Alicia made no effort to interact with patients or staff, remaining withdrawn and isolated and for the most part, the other patients left her alone"(Michaelides 37). Despite being surrounded by

people, she struggled to form meaningful connections and often felt excluded from group activities, like refusing to participate in art sessions even though she was a talented painter.

During the six years of Alicia's silence in the Grove, many psychotherapists tried to help her communicate again, unable to break her silence. Despite their efforts, Alicia remained withdrawn and unable to express herself, highlighting the challenges she faced in reconnecting with others. This demonstrates her difficulty in forming intimate relationships and her emotional isolation.

Theo Faber, the psychotherapist, gets a job at the Grove, where he devotes himself to Alicia's case, driven by his keen interest in her silence. Theo sees this as an opportunity to break through her emotional isolation and to establish intimacy with her, announcing "I want to help you_ I want to help you see clearly" (Michaelides 251). He focuses on building trust through empathy, encouraging Alicia to talk about her past trauma while using art therapy to allow Alicia to express herself without words.

Additionally, he explores Alicia's past through regression therapy in which he addresses her childhood traumas that may have contributed to her silence. Despite Theo Faber's efforts to treat Alicia Berenson and form an intimate connection with her, Alicia remains emotionally isolated from him throughout much of the treatment process.

In conclusion, analyzing Alicia Berenson's character through the stage of Intimacy versus Isolation in *The Silent Patient* illustrates the impact of past trauma on her ability to form intimate relationships. Her experiences of childhood trauma and adult betrayal have led her to retreat into isolation as a means of self-preservation.

2 -2 Theo Faber

Theo's character can be analyzed through Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, which are industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, and intimacy versus isolation. These stages help us to see Theo's character as influenced by his past traumas and his aspirations as a psychotherapist.

2 -2-1 Industry Vs Inferiority

Theo Faber's character in *The Silent Patient* can be analyzed using Erik Erikson's Industry vs. Inferiority stage, the fourth stage of psychosocial development. At this stage the individual is able to learn, create and accomplish many new skills and knowledge, thus developing a sense of industry. If he suffers from unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among his peers, he could face serious problems with competence and self-esteem. Therefore, Analyzing Theo's actions and relationships help to understand how his professional commitment reflects industry, while his unresolved problems evoke feelings of inferiority.

Theo's childhood and his relationship with his parents are key aspects that shape his character. From a young age, he was raised by an abusive father who was emotionally distant and neglectful. "When I asked my mother why my father was usually so angry with me, she responded with a dejected shrug and the question, "How should I know? Your father is totally crazy" (Michaelides 19). He also lacked protection from his mentally ill mother. Theo's early life was marked by violence and lack of parental care, which left a void in Theo's life and contributed to his feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

Throughout the novel, Theo's character development illustrates a poignant struggle with feelings of inferiority that are rooted in his traumatic childhood. His turbulent relationship with his parents affects his behavior, self-perception and interactions with others. In particular, his father's emotional neglect and absence during Theo's formative years. As quoted: "In my case, I grew up

feeling edgy, afraid; anxious. This anxiety seemed to predate my existence and exist independently of me. But I suspect it originated in my relationship with my father, around whom I was never safe” (Michaelides 19). This may have led to his feelings of worthlessness and inferiority, which continued into his adult life.

Theo's adult experiences, particularly at university, are intertwined with his turbulent childhood in which he suffered from feelings of inferiority. The challenges he faced during his childhood intensified these inner feelings, affecting his self-esteem and his interactions with others. This struggle with feelings of inferiority and worthlessness led to a loss of hope in life and depression, as Theo explains: “I was pursued by an infernal, relentless chorus of furies. All with his voice – shrieking that I was worthless, shameful, a failure” (Michaelides 20). As Theo makes his way through college and into adulthood, these intense feelings reach a breaking point, leading him to attempt to end his life.

Ruth, Theo Faber's psychotherapist, played a pivotal role in his life during this difficult time, providing professional guidance and compassionate support that enabled him to overcome feelings of inferiority and depression. Under Ruth's mentorship, Theo not only overcame his personal struggles, but also discovered his potential and passion for psychotherapy. He was motivated to pursue a career in the field by the transformative benefits of therapy, “Psychotherapy had quite literally saved my life” (Michaelides 21). This underlines the significant impact of competent therapy on mental health and career goals.

Theo's pursuit of industry is reflected in his work as a psychotherapist, he is committed to his profession and strives to progress and succeed in it. He consistently works hard, remains diligent and perseveres in his goals as he demonstrates his commitment to using psychotherapy to improve

the lives of others. Theo embodies the spirit of industry by devoting time and energy to his work, striving for perfection and making a positive impact on the wellbeing of his patients.

Although Theo was able to overcome most of his traumas and was committed to his work as a psychotherapist, his feelings of inferiority were evident in his relationships, especially with his wife Kathy. Theo, who was a caring and loving man, was married to Kathy, a successful actress. Throughout the novel, his descriptions of his feelings towards his wife reveal his feelings of inferiority and lack of confidence in their relationship. While Theo's difficulties in his work as a psychotherapist emphasize his feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, especially in contrast to Kathy's glamorous profession, Kathy's acting career shows her charisma and confidence. Theo is shyer than Kathy, who has a more outgoing personality, which exacerbates Theo's concerns because he thinks Kathy is more confident than he is.

Theo's pre-existing feelings of inferiority were heightened by the discovery of his wife's betrayal. Kathy's betrayal added inadequacy to Theo's fragile self-esteem, making him feel even more unworthy and undeserving: "I thought, this had to happen, it was inevitable _ I was never good enough for her, I was useless, ugly, worthless, nothing _ she was bound to tire of me eventually _ I didn't deserve her"(Michaelides 81). Theo's feelings of inferiority were deepened after the betrayal for many reasons, such as comparing himself to the person his wife was seeing, which led to an increase in his feelings of inferiority.

As Alicia Berenson's psychotherapist, Theo's professional role is to create an environment that supports her personal growth and development, enabling her to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve self-confidence. Theo's professionalism is demonstrated through a number of actions, including creating a safe therapeutic environment in which Alicia is free to explore, setting realistic therapy goals, offering advice to increase Alicia's self-esteem, and modifying

therapeutic modalities in response to Alicia's development. Theo's commitment is evident in his attempts to support Alicia in discovering herself, developing her resilience and facing various struggles, as he outlined: "I wanted to help start her up again _ help Alicia tell her story, to heal and get well. I wanted to fix her" (Michaelides 17).

In conclusion, Erik Erikson's stage of inferiority towards industry is closely paralleled by Theo's portrayal in *The Silent Patient*, offering a comprehensive examination of the long-term consequences of childhood trauma on adult relationships and identity. Theo's journey illustrates the complexity of human development as he moves from a difficult childhood to a professionally and personally challenging adulthood. Theo's persistent feelings of inferiority, exacerbated by his tumultuous marriage to Kathy, illustrate how childhood memories affect adult self-perception, even when he is successful in therapy and at work.

2 -2-2 Identity vs Role Confusion

Analyzing the character of Theo Faber in *The Silent Patient* through Erik Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion stage allows us to explore Theo's character, especially with all the pressures from society and his personal conflicts. This perspective helps us to understand Theo's internal struggles and external influences as he works to establish his identity while managing the expectations of society and his career.

Theo's past experiences, his mother's mental illness and his father's abuse, created a sense of emptiness and loss that drove him to search for a sense of belonging and meaning in his life. His adult identity struggles were influenced by his childhood traumas, particularly during his university years when he faced challenging situations of self-discovery.

During his university years, Theo faced many challenges as he struggled to understand himself and form his identity. When he met psychotherapist Ruth, who played a crucial role in guiding him through his self-discovery process, Theo's self-development took a positive turn. As he proclaimed: "Thanks to a successful therapeutic intervention at a young age, I was able to pull back from the brink of psychic darkness" (Michaelides 22). Ruth's expertise and support helped Theo to navigate his inner struggles and confront his past traumas as he began to unravel the complexities of his identity and gain a deeper understanding of himself, making this a pivotal moment in his personal growth and development during his university experience.

Studying psychotherapy was a transformative experience for Theo in shaping his identity; "the talking cure was central to whom I became _ in a profound sense, it defined me" (Michaelides 22). As Theo studied the complexities of the human mind and emotions, he gained insights that not only enhanced his understanding of others, but also deepened his self-awareness. This knowledge and introspection played a crucial role in Theo's personal growth and the development of his own identity.

In addition, the therapeutic process allowed Theo to explore his feelings, thoughts and experiences in a safe and supportive environment, which ultimately helped him to understand himself better and, as he said, to make progress in his journey of self-discovery and personal growth: " I was on a quest to help myself "(Michaelides 18).

Theo's choice to become a psychotherapist reflects his strong desire to understand human behavior and to help others in need. Through his work, he is constructing a way of seeing himself and where he fits into society, using his profession as a means of not only understanding individuals, but also making a positive contribution to society: "I am a forensic psychotherapist and used to working with some of the most damaged, vulnerable members of society" (Michaelides

17). Theo's career path allows him to channel his empathy and knowledge into a meaningful vocation aimed at helping those who seek guidance and support in navigating the complexities of human emotions and experiences.

Theo's commitment to understanding and helping Alicia communicate again reflects his own search for meaning and purpose. His involvement in Alicia's case serves as a mirror for his self-discovery and introspection; “Her silence was like a mirror – reflecting yourself back at you “(Michaelides 79). As Theo tries to unravel the mysteries behind Alicia's silence, he comes to understand himself and his unresolved traumas. In this way, his experience of treating his patient Alicia helped to shape his sense of identity as he renewed his direction in life.

The protagonist struggles with different roles and identities throughout the novel. He presents himself differently to different people, hiding his true intentions and motivations. He switches between the roles of psychotherapist, protector and even killer, each with its own set of behaviors, motivations and secrets, highlighting his struggle to establish his identity amidst societal expectations and personal desires. These shifting identities create complexity as the reader attempts to unravel the true nature of his character, which makes the novel compelling and interesting.

In conclusion, analyzing Theo Faber's character through Erik Erikson's Identity and Role Confusion stage offers an understanding of his identity development and self-discovery amidst personal challenges and societal pressures. Through his experiences, struggles and relationships, Theo navigates the complexities of his identity and ultimately finds meaning and direction in his role as a psychotherapist. His commitment to understanding others mirrors his own search for meaning, leading to his personal growth.

2 -2-3 Intimacy vs Isolation

Theo Faber's character in the novel can also be analyzed through Erik Erikson's stage of intimacy versus isolation. In the first stage of adulthood, the individual searches for companionship and love. As he tries to find mutually fulfilling relationships, primarily through marriage and friends, he also generally begins to start a family. If negotiation is successful at this stage, the individual can experience intimacy on a deep level. If it does not work, isolation and distancing from others may occur. Throughout the novel, Theo's relationships with various characters reflect his exploration of intimacy and isolation, highlighting the tension between forming intimate connections and facing the fear of being alone.

During his university years, Theo experienced isolation as he was disconnected from his peers because of his traumatic childhood experiences, which have left him scarred and socially withdrawn; "Immobilized by fear, I was unable to go out, socialize, or make my friends. I might as well have never felt home" (Michaelides 19). As a means of coping with his feelings of isolation, Theo turns to marijuana, further isolating himself from his surroundings "It become my best friend, my inspiration, my solace"(Michaelides 72).

Theo builds a strong relationship with his psychotherapist, Ruth, through consistent sessions and genuine communication. Ruth's empathy, understanding and guidance provide Theo with a safe space to explore his feelings and vulnerabilities, enabling him to break down the walls of isolation he had built around himself. "She remained the one constant in my life" Theo says, "through her, I internalized a new kind of relationship with another human being" (Michaelides 21). Thus, Theo's transformation shows how therapy and connecting with others can help to overcome isolation to start social interaction.

As Theo opens up to Ruth, he begins to confront the issues that have contributed to his isolation, such as past traumas or unresolved conflicts. Through this therapeutic process, he learns

healthier ways of relating to others. Ruth's support and encouragement enables Theo to take risks in forming intimate relationships outside of therapy, bridging Theo's gap between his isolated existence and the possibility of meaningful relationships.

Theo's emotional growth after overcoming his complexes deepened his relationship with Kathy, who became his wife. Their marriage was strong as they shared their feelings and supported each other through life's challenges, fostering a sense of intimacy in their relationship, as quoted "I felt such humility and gratitude for every second we spent together. I was aware how lucky, how incredibly fortunate I was to have such love, how rare it was" (Michaelides 48). This mutual dependence and emotional connection strengthened their closeness to each other.

Theo's strong attachment to Kathy stemmed from his fear of being alone after developing an intimate relationship with her. Even upon discovering her betrayal, he hesitated to confront her due to his deep-seated fear of losing her as he said: "She was my life _ and I wasn't ready to give her up. Not yet, though she betrayed me, I still loved her" (Michaelides 82). This fear of isolation after forming intimate connections highlights Theo's vulnerability and the significance of his relationships in combating feelings of loneliness.

Throughout the story, Theo's interactions with his patients, especially with Alicia and the people around him, illustrate his quest for emotional closeness and genuine relationships. His dedication to understanding and helping Alicia overcome her silence demonstrates his commitment to forming intimate connections. Despite facing challenges and uncertainties, Theo persists in his efforts to treat Alicia's silence which highlights his willingness to connect with her.

Finally, Theo's isolation at university as a result of his childhood trauma affected his interactions with others. However, after receiving treatment from psychotherapist Ruth and forming a close relationship with her, Theo was able to overcome his barriers and form intimate

relationships, including with his wife Kathy. Moreover, this transformation extended into his professional life, where he developed meaningful relationships with his patients, particularly Alicia, in whom he took a special interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber's characters using Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages provides us with an understanding of their personalities and behavior in *The Silent Patient*. Their unresolved childhood traumas and parental neglect deeply shape their adult lives, highlighting how unresolved issues from the past can negatively manifest in later stages of life, demonstrating the impact of early experiences on one's life into adulthood and beyond, as untreated psychological struggles can resurface in detrimental ways down the road.

General Conclusion

In this dissertation, we analyzed the first mystery and successful novel by Alex Michaelides, *The Silent Patient*, which was first published in 2019. It is an interesting psychological novel that shows the roots of people's traumas and their effects on people's lives. In the novel, the two main characters Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber suffered from their unresolved childhood traumas that affected their adulthood, relationships, behavior and personality.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which consists of eight stages of development, is the appropriate theory we chose to analyze the complicated characters of Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson. This study explored the personalities of the main characters and analyzed them according to these eight stages of psychosocial development. Therefore, their traumas have been analyzed psychologically with reference to their past experiences in order to discover the effects of these traumas on their lives.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, a comprehensive analysis of the novel *The Silent Patient*, was provided to address its details and help the reader understand its background information. This analysis included an exploration of the novel's setting, plot, and a detailed examination of the main characters, Alicia and Theo, along with their partners, to clarify their roles and motivations within the story. Additionally, the theoretical framework used in the analysis, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, was presented to examine the psychological journeys of the characters within the narrative.

In the second chapter, we selected three suitable stages for each character. Firstly, we analyzed Alicia Berenson's character through three stages of psychological development: trust vs. mistrust, identity vs. role confusion, and intimacy vs. isolation. Our analysis revealed that Alicia generally did not successfully manage these stages due to her past experiences. Alicia's mistrust of others stems from her past traumas, particularly her relationship with her caregivers, and her trust

in her husband was shattered after his betrayal, deepening her inability to trust. Her identity formation was impacted by her past experiences, and she struggled with role confusion as both a wife and a patient, although she succeeded in defining herself through her art. Alicia's traumas created a fear of forming intimate relationships, leading her to retreat into isolation as a means of self-protection.

Secondly, we analyzed Theo's character through three of Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development: industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, and intimacy vs. isolation, to understand the effects of Theo's traumas on his character. Theo's deep feelings of inferiority in adulthood, particularly during his university days, stemmed from his traumatic childhood. These feelings resurfaced in his relationship with his wife despite receiving treatment. However, his industry was evident in his commitment to his work as a psychotherapist. Theo struggled to shape his identity in adulthood due to his past experiences, but with Ruth's help and through studying psychotherapy, he succeeded. This process allowed him to examine his mental issues and discover more about himself, particularly when treating his patient Alicia Berenson. Theo faced isolation during his adult years until Ruth, his psychotherapist, assisted him in confronting his traumas. This support enabled him to establish close relationships with his wife, friends, and patients.

It can be concluded that both Alicia and Theo, the main characters of the novel, share a significant similarity that has affected their lives. They both experienced trauma as a result of their upbringing, parental neglect and abuse, which led to difficulties in coping with some stages of psychological development, particularly in the early stages, which affected their adulthood and their lives as a whole.

The significance of this research lies in demonstrating the importance of nurturing and supportive upbringing for children. By offering them a sense of security, trust, and fulfilling their mental needs, we can cultivate an independent and self-actualized generation. This foundational support plays a pivotal role in shaping their future and promoting a positive outlook on life.

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Résumé

Cette étude présente une analyse psychologique du roman *Dans son silence* d'Alex Michaelides, en se concentrant sur les personnages principaux, Alicia Berenson et Theo Faber. L'objectif de cette étude est d'analyser les personnalités des protagonistes et de révéler les effets négatifs des traumatismes de l'enfance sur leur vie. Dans cette thèse, nous appliquons la théorie du développement psychosocial d'Erik Erikson, composée de huit étapes, aux personnages principaux en utilisant une méthode qualitative. L'analyse révèle qu'Alicia et Theo ont eu du mal à traverser la plupart des étapes en raison de leurs traumatismes d'enfance, entraînant des problèmes tels que la méfiance, les luttes d'identité, la confusion des rôles, l'isolement et le silence pour Alicia, et des sentiments d'infériorité et d'isolement pour Theo. L'étude indique que les deux personnages partagent l'expérience du traumatisme de leur éducation, ce qui affecte leur capacité à progresser à travers les étapes du développement psychologique.

Les mots-clés : *Dans son silence*, analyse psychosociale, traumatismes infantiles, développement psychologique.

ملخص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نفسياً لرواية «المريضة الصامتة» لأليكس ميكاليديس، مركزة على الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين أليسيا بيرينسون وثيرو فابر. الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تحليل شخصيات الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين والكشف عن الآثار السلبية لصددمات الطفولة على حياتهم. في هذه الأطروحة، قمنا بتطبيق نظرية إريك إيريكسون للتطور النفسي الاجتماعي التي تتألف من ثماني مراحل على الشخصيات الرئيسية باستخدام المنهج الكيفي. يكشف التحليل أن أليسيا وثيرو واجها صعوبات في معظم المراحل بسبب صدمات طفولتهما، مما أدى إلى مشاكل مثل عدم الثقة، وصراعات الهوية، والارتباك في الدور، والعزلة، والصمت بالنسبة لأليسيا، ومشاعر الدونية والعزلة بالنسبة لثيرو. تشير الدراسة إلى أن كلا الشخصيتين تتشاركان في تجربة الصدمة النفسية الناجمة عن تنشئتهما، مما يؤثر على قدرتهما على التقدم خلال مراحل التطور النفسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المريضة الصامتة ، التحليل النفسي الاجتماعي ، صدمات الطفولة، التطور النفسي.