

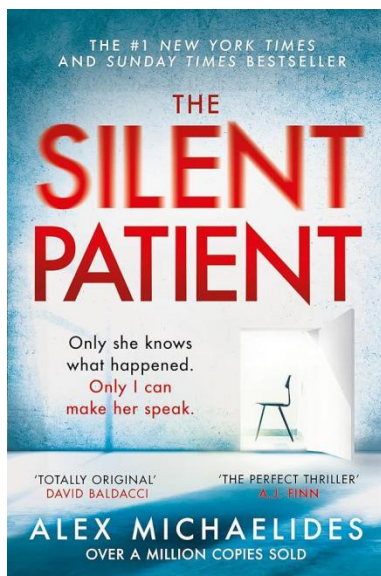


Review of *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides

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Alex Michaelides' novel, *The Silent Patient*, is in the psychological thriller genre, which is often characterised by its intricate exploration of the human mind, the presence of unreliable narrators, and a relentless focus on suspense and mystery. This novel exemplifies these characteristics, making it a compelling and immersive work in the psychological thriller genre. This novel deeply engages with the subject of mental health and therapy, a common theme in psychological thrillers. It explores the profound impact of trauma on mental health, the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions, and the ethical and emotional complexities of therapist-patient relationships. The therapist's role as a central character further emphasises the psychological depth of the story, as his motivations and actions are scrutinised, contributing to the intricate web of the narrative. Theo Faber, who was the psychotherapist in this novel, plays the dual role of a detective and psychiatrist as he endeavours to unravel the enigma behind Alicia's prolonged silence and the murder of her husband, Gabriel. The narrative explores the symbiotic relationship between psychoanalysis and detective work. Theo's journey involves uncovering deep-seated motives, deciphering subconscious cues through art therapy, and observing nuances in Alicia's behaviour. This fusion of psychological insight and cognitive skills, like detective skills, leads to a revelation of the profound complexities of human psychology in Theo's patient, Alicia.

In the psychological thriller novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, Theo Faber is a psychotherapist who takes a keen interest in the case of Alicia Berenson, a woman who has been accused of murdering her husband, Gabriel. Theo Faber becomes entangled in a complex criminal case. He is a passionate therapist, motivated by a genuine desire to help his patient, Alicia Berenson, who has fallen into a self-imposed silence following a murder accusation. Theo's understanding of trauma is a key aspect of his character because he draws inferences from his careful study of material evidence like Alicia's diary and also through interviews. He recognises that Alicia's silence is a manifestation of severe trauma, and he delves into the complexities of her past and psychological state to uncover the truth behind the murder.

Theo decides to help Alicia Berenson, and the very first thing that he writes down on his notepad is the word "childhood" because he felt that he needed to understand not only the events of the night Alicia killed her husband but also the events of the distant past because he felt that what happened in those few minutes when she shot her husband might reflect the 'murderous rage' so he felt that childhood experience or trauma might shape her behaviour. Theo realised that Gabriel had chosen Alicia's death over his own, a realisation that led Alicia to a series of revelations. Again, she felt that she had been betrayed by her father. "Gabriel had a tyrant's eyes, my father's eyes." (Michaelides 326). After the murder, Alicia becomes silent as she realises that her father has once again betrayed her. Here, Theo's ability to create an accurate psychological profile of Alicia through critical thinking and deductive reasoning plays a vital role in the investigation.

Theo interviews Alicia's relatives, including Paul, Max, and Felix. To gather clues, he also conducts interviews with people who know Alicia and Gabriel. Meanwhile, as a therapist, he interacts with Alicia during therapy sessions to explore her inner thoughts and feelings, gradually revealing her suppressed motives. Through many interviews, Theo learned that when Alicia was a child, she overheard her father wishing she was dead instead of her mother in the car. Theo, a psychiatrist, believes that she developed a sense of being unloved, unwanted, and betrayed. When Alicia meets Gabriel, she feels she has found a replacement for her father figure, who would love her this time, protect her, and not betray her. In her diary, Alicia writes, "He saved me like Jesus... Gabriel is my whole world and has been since the day we met" (Michaelides 70). However, her murder of her husband stems from her suppressed childhood experiences, as her subconscious mind harboured a desire to kill her father in retaliation for his betrayal. This desire comes out in an ugly way once Alicia finds out about Gabriel's betrayal.

Theo pays close attention to Alicia's body language, facial expressions, and previous arts. Theo Faber employs a systematic and rational approach to solving complex issues, and his method is more grounded in psychological understanding. He also employs deductive reasoning to interpret Alicia's paintings, gathering enigmatic information about the murder and silence. Theo encourages Alicia to paint because he recognises that art is Alicia's means of expression, revealing her suppressed emotions and motives. Theo arranged a dedicated room for her artistic endeavours. This separate room aimed to create an environment in which she could express herself comfortably and without worrying about external judgements.

Alicia drew the crucifixion of Jesus Christ before she murdered her husband. When Theo combed through all the files pertaining to Alicia's past life, he found out that prior to Gabriel's entry into Alicia's life, Alicia led a life of drug parties. This reveals that Alicia even sees him as her saviour because, in her work, she gives Jesus Gabriel's face, which shows that she sees him as the one who saved her from the psychic darkness. However, upon discovering her betrayal, she becomes triggered and proceeds to kill him. Following this incident, she remains silent, akin to Alcestis in Euripides' play, a Greek mythical tale.

Theo, as a therapist, uses his understanding of body language and facial expressions to glean insights into Alicia's emotions and thoughts. For example, when Alicia paints a haunting self-portrait, he predicts that it signifies her inner turmoil because she named the painting Alcestis. Alcestis is from Greek mythology. Alicia's Alcestis is a self-portrait of herself naked, her brush red with paint or blood. In the painting, Alicia looks out at the viewer with her mouth open, but she is mute.

Theo interprets the story of Alcestis, and he relates Alcestis as Alicia because, according to Greek mythology, Admetus, the husband of Alcestis, was condemned to death by fate, but Apollo offered a loophole by saying that Admetus can escape death if he is able to persuade someone else to die. Admetus' parents refused to die, but Alcestis stepped forward and volunteered to die for her husband, an offer she

didn't anticipate Admetus would accept. Alcestis proceeds to die, but Hercules saves her and brings her back to the land. She comes alive again, and Admetus is moved to tears by the reunion with his wife, but Alcestis remains silent after her arrival. Theo realised that, just as Admetus had psychically condemned Alcestis to death, Vernon Rose, Alicia's father, had also done the same for his daughter. Alicia told me, "He killed me" (Michaelides 272).

Theo's patience plays a crucial role in gaining Alicia's trust. He acknowledges the pain and trauma she has experienced. *The Silent Patient* is a blend of myth and psychology, that reveals the mysteries of the human soul and the profound role of art in unlocking the secrets hidden within, as well as the unexpected twist at the end of the journey of Alicia after Theo encounters.

Reference

Michaelides, Alex. *The Silent Patient*. Hachette UK, 2019.