

Narrative Depths of Metafiction: Genre Subversion in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of metafictional techniques in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*, with a focus on how these strategies subvert traditional thriller conventions. Drawing on Patricia Waugh's concept of metafiction—particularly self-reflexivity and unreliable narration—the study conducts a close textual analysis to uncover how narrative form challenges reader expectations and genre boundaries. Findings reveal that Michaelides employs narrative ambiguity and layered storytelling to destabilize conventional notions of truth, identity, and authorship. By foregrounding its own constructedness, *The Silent Patient* exemplifies postmodern thriller fiction's capacity for genre innovation and critical self-awareness.

Keywords: postmodern metafiction, genre subversion, unreliable narration, intertextuality, psychological thriller

Introduction

Postmodern literature destabilizes fixed truths through fragmented narratives, self-referentiality, and ontological ambiguity, inviting readers to interrogate the constructed nature of reality. As Hassan (2001) posits, postmodernism resists singular definitions, favoring instead a fluid "experience" of multiplicity. While embracing intertextuality, fragmentation, and skepticism towards grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984), postmodernism rejects modernist ideals of objective truth. Within this paradigm, metafiction emerges as a subgenre that foregrounds its artifice, exposing narrative mechanics to critique storytelling itself. Patricia Waugh (1984)

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defines metafiction as fiction that self-consciously examines its relationship to reality, operating on dual levels: constructing a story while simultaneously deconstructing its conventions. Metafiction, with the subversion of linearity, and embedding intertextuality, decentralizes authority and positions readers as active co-creators of meaning. Patricia Waugh (1984) argues that metafiction operates dialectically. Metafiction invites the readers to question representation by a narrative that is constructed while unmasking its fabrication.

In the wake of postmodern literary theory, storytelling no longer aspires to convey fixed truths or singular meanings. Instead, fiction increasingly emphasizes fragmentation, self-awareness, and epistemological uncertainty, inviting readers to engage critically with the mechanisms of narrative itself. Metafiction—a narrative mode that foregrounds its own fictionality—operates within this tradition, exposing the artifice of storytelling while simultaneously constructing it. As Patricia Waugh notes, metafiction “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact” (1984, p. 2), compelling readers to question the very structures that define narrative authority and realism.

One contemporary novel that exemplifies these dynamics is Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019), a psychological thriller that entwines trauma, deception, and mystery. At first glance, the novel appears to conform to the thriller formula, following the case of Alicia Berenson, a mute painter accused of killing her husband, and her psychotherapist Theo Faber, who seeks to understand her silence. However, beneath its surface plot, the novel deploys a web of metafictional techniques that destabilize traditional genre expectations and foreground the instability of narrative truth.

The significance of this study lies in its attention to how *The Silent Patient* redefines its genre by incorporating postmodern metafictional strategies. While existing criticism has explored the novel through psychological, psychoanalytic, and trauma-focused lenses, there remains a conspicuous gap in scholarly engagement with its metafictional structure. This study addresses that gap by applying Patricia Waugh's theoretical framework to uncover how Michaelides manipulates narrative form to interrogate notions of objectivity, identity, and storytelling.

This paper applies Waugh's theory of metafiction to answer the following questions:

- Which metafictional devices does Michaelides deploy in *The Silent Patient*?

- How do these devices subvert genre expectations within the psychological thriller framework?

By analyzing elements such as unreliable narration, narrative layering, intertextual references, and self-reflexivity, this research situates *The Silent Patient* within the broader discourse of postmodern literary fiction and genre transformation.

Review of the Literature

Scholarly engagement with *The Silent Patient* has been diverse, focusing primarily on its psychological dimensions, thematic complexity, and therapeutic implications. However, little sustained attention has been given to the novel's metafictional strategies. This review synthesizes existing research to trace critical trends while establishing the need for a metafiction-focused analysis.

Ashraf, Zaidi, and Aqeel (2020) provide an early postmodern reading of the novel, applying Lyotard's theory of mini-narratives to argue that the text resists grand narratives through fragmentation and intertextual motifs. Their focus on narrative multiplicity highlights the novel's subversion of authoritative truth, though they stop short of explicitly identifying these techniques as metafictional in nature.

Hossain (2021) applies the "container-contained" model by Bion and "holding environment" theory by Winnicott for studying Alicia's silence in the novel. Alicia was deprived of a nurturing environment in her childhood due to parental neglect and emotional abandonment. This ensued an unresolved trauma. Hossain suggests that the surrogate "container" of her marriage to Gabriel collapsed when Gabriel replicates the betrayal of her father. This triggered her murderous rage and subsequent mutism. The analysis connects Alicia's silence to her lack of trust in language and relationships. The study also highlights inadequate childhood containment and its consequent impact on adult communication. The study advocates for broader application of containment models and holding environment theory (Hossain, 2021).

Therapeutic function of storytelling has also been explored. Rana and Khan (2023), using principles from narrative medicine, interpret Alicia's art and silence as forms of nonverbal testimony. This aligns with Charon's (2006) framework of narrative competence, yet the study remains primarily clinical in its focus, with limited reflection on narrative form as an object of inquiry.

In contrast, Pratiwi and Pramesti (2022) apply literary psychology and PTSD theory to analyze Alicia's trauma responses, emphasizing her psychological fragmentation through artistic expression. Meanwhile, Akram, Khan, and Khadija (2024) incorporate attachment theory to examine maladaptive behavior in both Theo and Alicia. Together, these works enrich the psychological landscape of the novel but do not interrogate its narrative construction as a self-aware artifact.

Recent contributions have also approached *The Silent Patient* through stylistic and pedagogical angles. Faheem and Fayyaz (2025), for example, apply Leech and Short's stylistic framework to examine how linguistic features such as alliteration, assonance, and syntactic variation enhance suspense. Their findings support the novel's affective power but do not consider how these stylistic choices contribute to metafictional self-reflection.

In a pedagogical context, Anggriani, Sada, and Rosnija (2022) advocate for the novel's inclusion in English language learning curricula, citing its thematic accessibility and emotional depth. While valuable, their study evaluates content suitability rather than literary innovation.

Another area of exploration is the narrative medicine framework applied by Rana and Khan (2023). It highlights the therapeutic role of storytelling. The study interprets the art and silence of Alicia as nonverbal narratives reflective of her repressed emotions. Theo's narrative technique is aligned with Charon's principles of attention, representation, and affiliation. The study sums up that narrative competence can enable clinical therapists to reconstruct patients' lived experiences. It can transform silence into an opening and opportunity for psychological recovery (Rana and Khan, 2023).

A few scholars have touched on intertextual references and the influence of myth, notably Sherin (2024), who examines art therapy and deductive logic in connection with Greek tragedy. These insights gesture toward the novel's literary reflexivity but do not frame them within a metafictional tradition.

Collectively, these studies underscore the novel's psychological richness and therapeutic potential. However, the metafictional techniques that shape its structure—such as unreliable narration, nested storytelling, and genre disruption—remain underexplored. This study addresses critical oversight by analyzing how *The*

Silent Patient functions not only as a psychological thriller but also as a self-aware commentary on narrative authority and the construction of meaning.

Theoretical Framework

The study is rooted in Patricia Waugh's (1984) theorization of metafiction. Metafiction, a term coined by William Gass (1970), gained importance through Patricia Waugh's (1984) *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Waugh argues that metafiction signifies a literary strategy whereby fiction draws attention to its own status as a constructed narrative. This allows to interrogate the mechanics of storytelling. Waugh contends that metafiction also engages in a philosophical inquiry about how language, narrative, and truth intersect in fiction. When analysing linguistic relationships with language itself, it becomes an inescapable "prison house. Metafiction, therefore, explores this dilemma and reflects the increased cultural self-consciousness of society (Waugh, 1984). There are certain alternative names for metafiction, namely, "the 'introverted novel', 'antinovel', 'surfiction', 'fabulation', the 'reflexive fiction', the 'self-begetting novel', and so forth" (Dai and Huang, 2017).

Waugh's approach foregrounds two central metafictional strategies: self-reflexivity and unreliable narration, both of which are crucial to understanding *The Silent Patient*. Self-reflexivity refers to the narrative's overt acknowledgment of its own artifice and constructedness. In Michaelides' novel, this is evident through Theo Faber's introspective first-person narrative, which often blurs the line between objective recounting and personal interpretation. For instance, when Theo reflects, "We're all crazy, I believe, just in different ways" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 22), he not only questions Alicia Berenson's mental state but also implicitly exposes the limitations of his own subjectivity as narrator. This moment draws attention to the mediation of experience through narrative voice, a key feature of metafictional form. The second technique, unreliable narration, disrupts the reader's trust in the narrator's perspective. Waugh emphasizes that such narrative instability is not simply a character flaw but a structural device that compels readers to interrogate the text's authority. In *The Silent Patient*, Theo withholds information, omits key motivations, and reveals conflicting truths as the plot progresses. It is only in the final chapters that readers learn he had been directly involved in Alicia's trauma—an unsettling revelation that reframes his earlier narration as manipulative. This

technique aligns with Waugh's assertion that metafiction "questions the process by which fictions are constructed and perceived" (1984, p. 6).

In addition to these strategies, Waugh identifies the role of intertextuality in metafiction. Rather than existing in isolation, metafictional texts often draw upon literary and cultural traditions to comment on their own place within them. The *Silent Patient* echoes the myth of Alcestis, invoking classical tragedy to deepen its themes of sacrifice and voicelessness. Alicia's painting—titled "Alcestis"—functions not only as a symbolic representation of her emotional state but also as a metafictional mirror that invites readers to interpret the story through a mythological lens.

Waugh's framework is particularly relevant in analyzing psychological thrillers that resist closure and narrative coherence. In such texts, meaning is co-created through the reader's interpretation. This aligns with postmodern skepticism toward grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984). Michaelides structured his novel as a puzzle of overlapping timelines, fractured memories, and partial testimonies. Each of these elements contribute to eroding narrative uncertainty.

Metafictional Techniques and Elements in "The Silent Patient"

In **The Silent Patient** by Alex Michaelides, there is no explicit use of the breaking of the fourth wall, where characters directly address the reader or acknowledge their existence within a work of fiction. The novel primarily follows a traditional narrative structure, with the protagonist, Theo Faber, as the first-person narrator recounting events without directly engaging with the audience. Instead of breaking the fourth wall, the novel focuses on other metafictional techniques and elements, such as self-reflexivity and an unreliable narrator, to create a compelling and thought-provoking narrative. The self-reflective mode of storytelling in *The Silent Patient*, specifically, amplifies the artifice of fiction, compelling its readers to continually reassess what they assume to be real. As Fowles (1971) suggests that "self-reflexive nature of experimental metafiction will leave it open to critical attacks. Yet metafiction is simply flaunting what is true of all novels: their 'outstanding freedom to choose'" (p. 46). Through Theo's introspective narration and his emotional involvement in Alicia Berenson's case, readers are drawn into the complexities of the plot, questioning the reliability of the information presented and contemplating the blurred lines between reality and perception. While *The Silent Patient* may not incorporate the

breaking of the fourth wall, its skillful use of other metafictional elements contributes to the novel's gripping and layered storytelling. Beyond its enthralling story, the novel also employs an intricate narrative structure and metafictional elements that challenge conventional storytelling. The *Silent Patient* organizes its narrative elements to reveal its own fictionality and how it operates on two levels: telling a story and critiquing its own storytelling process.

Self-Reflexivity

In *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, self-reflexivity is utilized through various elements and techniques that draw attention to the construction of the narrative and the role of the author. Throughout the novel, the protagonist and narrator, Theo Faber, reflects on his own role as a psychotherapist and the challenges he faces in treating Alicia Berenson. He contemplates the complexities of his profession, and the ethical dilemmas involved in understanding his patient's psyche. This self-reflexive aspect highlights the author's exploration of the therapist's perspective. This is evident in the musings of Theo, "As a psychotherapist, it was obvious to me that she had suffered a severe trauma surrounding Gabriel's death; and this silence was manifestation of that trauma" (Michaelides, 2019, p.15).

As the narrative unfolds, readers gain insight into Theo's process of documenting his interactions with Alicia and the events surrounding her case. As a self-aware narrator, he acknowledges his role as a narrator shaping the story and the impact of his interpretations on the reader's understanding. Even his perception of the self and Alicia are reflective of his self-awareness as a narrator. Theo writes, "We're all crazy, I believe, just in different ways. Which is why-and how- I related to Alicia Berenson" (Michaelides, 2019, p.22).

Simultaneously, Alicia's art serves as a self-reflexive element in the novel, as it reflects her inner emotions and psychological state. Theo critically analyses her paintings, acknowledging the limitations of his interpretations and the subjective nature of art analysis. The reflective process runs through the fabric of the narration, "I stared at the painting, staring into Alicia's face trying to interpret the look in her eyes, trying to understand – but the portrait defied me. Alicia stared back at me- a blank mask- unreadable, impenetrable. I could divine neither innocence nor guilt in her expression" (Michaelides, 2019, p.12). Overall, *The Silent Patient* incorporates self-reflexivity through Theo Faber's introspective narrative and examination of his

role as a psychotherapist and storyteller. These instances draw readers' attention to the construction of the narrative and the author's contemplation of the characters' motivations, enhancing the overall metafictional essence of the novel.

Unreliable Narration

In *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, the use of an unreliable narrator adds depth and complexity to the narrative, leading readers to question the credibility of the protagonist and his interpretations. Theo's subjective notions demonstrate his unreliable narration. He introduces himself in the third chapter, and since then there is frequent usage of the pronoun 'I'. As the primary narrator, Theo Faber is deeply involved in the case of Alicia Berenson, and his emotions and personal biases influence his perspective. He becomes obsessed with solving Alicia's mystery and is emotionally invested in her treatment. This subjectivity raises doubts about the accuracy of his observations and conclusions. His observations and narration are rooted in his personal trauma. He explicitly confesses, "I had internalized my father, interjected him, buried him deep in my unconscious. No matter how far I ran, I carried him with me wherever I went. I was pursued by an infernal, all with his voice – shrieking that I was worthless, shameful, a failure" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 19).

Throughout the novel, Theo withholds certain information from other characters and the readers, creating an aura of mystery and suspicion. As he gradually reveals critical details, readers must reevaluate their understanding of the events, questioning the reliability of his narration. In chapter seventeen part four, the reader finds out through Theo's narrative that there had been an attempt to murder Alicia; however, in chapter three part five, the reader discovers that no one else but Theo had attempted to murder Alicia. As Inspector Allen reads Alicia's diary, the reader discovers in Alicia's words that Theo, "was scared – of the sound of my voice ... he grabbed my wrist ... and stuck a needle in my vein" (p. 19).

Apart from Theo's narration, the novel occasionally incorporates the perspectives of other characters. These perspectives may also be coloured by their own biases, making them unreliable sources of information. The reader is informed in chapter two of the novel, "Diomedes was saying Alicia was mad" (p. 14). Whereas, in part five, Alicia's diary discloses her opinion, "I thought I was crazy at first. It was easier to think I was crazy, than believe it was true. But I'm not crazy. I'm not" (p. 321). *The Silent Patient* also introduces the readers to an unreliable narrator, Alicia Berenson,

an artist convicted of murdering her husband, Gabriel. The enigma lies in Alicia's muteness following the crime, and we depend on her journal entries to gain insight into her thoughts and emotions. However, as the plot unfolds, doubts emerge regarding Alicia's credibility. The inclusion of her journal entries becomes a narrative within a narrative, adding a metafictional layer to the novel. Through her journal, Alicia is not only telling her own story but is also shaping her own reality, causing us to question the boundary between truth and fiction.

On the other hand, as the plot unfolds, Theo's emotional state becomes increasingly unstable due to his obsession with Alicia and his eagerness to uncover the truth. This instability raises doubts about his ability to maintain a rational and objective perspective even Yuri who is the head psychiatric nurse at the Grove suggested to him "Let me give you some advice, Go home to your wife. Go home to Kathy, who loves you... And leave Alicia behind" (p. 50). The emotional instability of Theo is observable in the diary of Alicia Berenson where she writes, "he said the same words- the exact same phrase he'd used at the house, burned into my memory: 'I want to help you- I want to help you see clearly'" (p. 321).

In addition to the journal entries, Michaelides introduces the character of Theo Faber, a psychotherapist determined to help Alicia regain her voice. Through Theo's perspective, we gain access to the outside world and a new lens through which to view Alicia's story. This multi-perspective approach adds depth to the narrative, inviting readers to question the reliability of each character's account and challenging us to consider the potential subjectivity of storytelling. Theo's personal life and struggles are interwoven with Alicia's story, further complicating the narrative. He becomes emotionally invested in Alicia, blurring the boundaries between therapist and protagonist. This emotional entanglement serves as a self-aware commentary on the impact of storytelling and the potential for a narrative to consume its creators.

By incorporating an unreliable narrator, *The Silent Patient* blurs the line between truth and deception, challenging readers to piece together the puzzle and critically evaluate Theo's interpretations. This metafictional technique adds layers of intrigue and suspense to the psychological thriller, compelling readers to question their assumptions and engage deeply with the unfolding mystery. For Theo, Alcestis "The painting was a self-portrait" (p. 10), whereas he also interpreted, "There was something about the picture that defied interpretation" (p. 259). Hence, the

manipulation of narrative control is akin to a magician's sleight of hand. Michaelides draws our attention to one aspect while diverting it from another, artfully constructing a web of deceit that eventually unravels, leaving readers in awe of the author's craft.

Playful Use of Genre Conventions

Furthermore, in *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, the playful use of genre conventions is evident in the novel's approach to the psychological thriller genre. While the book adheres to many typical elements of the thriller genre, it also subverts certain conventions, creating unexpected twists and turns that challenge readers' expectations, as a thriller turn of events is recorded in Alicia's diary in part five chapter three, "Theo just left,' inspector read, 'I am alone. I'm writing this as fast as I can..." (p. 339).

Psychological Thriller.

The novel initially follows the familiar setup of a psychological thriller, with Theo Faber as the determined psychotherapist trying to unravel Alicia Berenson's mystery. Readers may expect a straightforward investigation of Alicia's silence and the events surrounding her husband's murder. However, as the story progresses, unexpected revelations and plot twists subvert these initial expectations and motive of Theo Faber about Alicia, "There was no time to waste: Alicia was lost. She was missing. And I intended to find her" (p. 32).

While *The Silent Patient* presents elements of a traditional psychological thriller, it delves deeper into the characters' psychological complexities. The novel goes beyond mere suspense and incorporates introspective explorations of the characters' minds, making it more than just a standard thriller like "Murderous rage, homicidal rage, is not born in the present. It originates in the land before memory, in the world of early childhood, with abuse and mistreatment at a young age, which builds up a charge over the years, until it explodes- often at the wrong target" (p. 44). Diomedes in part four chapter eighteen also expresses his opinion on psychological issues and human limitations "Our job is to help them heal. But we are not God" (p. 310).

Whodunit Mystery

This novel's genre play also involves combining psychological themes with elements of a whodunit mystery. A whodunit is a literary work about a murder that keeps the identity of a murderer concealed and reveals at the end. In this novel, the narrative oscillates between the pursuit of the truth and the psychological exploration of the characters' mind. This blending creates a multi-layered and engrossing reading experience. In chapter three Theo muses, "You become increasingly comfortable with madness – and not just the madness of others, but your own. We're all crazy, I believe, just in different ways" (p. 22). Hence, opening the deeper recesses of the character's psyche along with his pursuit of truth. Moreover, the novel introduces Theo Faber, a psychotherapist determined to unravel Alicia's silence and uncover the truth about what really happened on that fateful night. As Theo delves deeper into Alicia's enigmatic past and intricate artworks, he becomes increasingly obsessed with revealing the hidden secrets that lie within her mind (Hussain, 2021). By playfully using genre conventions, *The Silent Patient* maintains the suspense expected of a psychological thriller while weaving in deeper psychological themes. This approach enriches the narrative, making the novel more than just a typical whodunit, and elevates it to a thought-provoking and engaging work of metafiction within the thriller genre.

Nested Narrative

Furthermore, nested narratives are skillfully utilized, in the novel, to add depth and layers to the storytelling. The novel has used multi layered storytelling. This includes the storyline that presents Alicia's past through her diary entries along with the investigation by Theo. Alicia's art reveals the process of creation as an attempt and tendency to reshape memories. The novel's metafictional exploration blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction; this becomes a central theme of the novel. For arriving at the truth, the reader must pay attention to Alicia's words, which are elusive till the climax of the story.

A significant portion of the novel is devoted to Alicia Berenson's diary entries, which offer insights into her past and the events leading up to the fateful night of her husband's murder. These entries are presented as a separate narrative within the main storyline, creating a nested narrative that enhances the mystery surrounding Alicia's silence. The prologue in the novel opens with Alicia's entry in the diary, "I

don't know why I'm writing this" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 1). She is not sure of what to call it. "It feels a little pretentious to call it a diary" and "calling it a 'journal' sounds too academic" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 1). It is given no name, but it is imbedded in the narrative as a part that will keep all the madness away and help gain some reliability through a nested narrative; Alicia writes that in her diary "No crazy thoughts allowed" (p. 3).

As the primary narrator, Theo Faber leads the present investigation into Alicia's case. His exploration of Alicia's past and his sessions with her are intertwined with his personal life and emotional struggles. This nested narrative brings together Theo's perspective with Alicia's past, offering readers a more comprehensive understanding of the characters and their motivations. Theo commits a "professional transgression in dealing with Alicia" when he approaches her family, which was unorthodox for a psychotherapist. There Theo mentions that his "fate was already decided – like in a Greek tragedy" (p. 45).

The use of nested narratives in *The Silent Patient* allows readers to piece together the puzzle of Alicia's silence and the events leading to her husband's murder from multiple angles. This technique creates a compelling and engaging narrative, immersing readers in the complexities of the characters' lives and motivations. The novel's narrative structure operates like a jigsaw puzzle, with Michaelides cleverly fragmenting the plot and presenting readers with seemingly disparate pieces. As the story progresses, these pieces gradually fall into place, revealing a coherent and shocking whole. This fragmented approach keeps readers engaged, actively piecing together the story alongside the characters, experiencing the thrill of discovery and revelation as the narrative unfolds.

Nonlinear Narrative

Within the nested narratives, the use of nonlinear narratives enhances the suspense and intrigue of the story by presenting events out of chronological order. The novel incorporates flashbacks and shifts in time to reveal crucial information at strategic moments. Alicia starts writing the diary before the murder of Gabriel. Alicia writes, "I'd never have started writing this, if it weren't for Gabriel" (p.1). Her diary entries lead us into the instance of Alicia's mother's death, Alicia's visit to the "Camden market", her "date nights" with Gabriel, and her hatred for a "gun in the house" that was later used as the weapon for murder (p.63-127).

By employing nonlinear narratives, *The Silent Patient* keeps readers engaged and guessing, as crucial pieces of the puzzle are unveiled in a non-sequential manner. This metafictional technique heightens the suspense, making the novel a gripping psychological thriller that challenges readers to piece together the fragmented narrative to understand the truth behind Alicia's silence. The non-linear narrative structure plays a pivotal role in building suspense and capturing readers' attention. Michaelides employs alternating chapters between present events and Alicia's past, leading up to the night of the murder. This back-and-forth style serves two purposes: first, it creates a sense of immediacy in the present events, and second, it allows readers to understand the causative factors leading to the pivotal moment in Alicia's life. The interplay between past and present emphasizes the interconnectedness of events, revealing how actions and choices from the past continue to haunt the present.

Interplay of Fiction and Reality

Additionally, the interplay of fiction and reality is a prominent metafictional element, in *The Silent Patient*, that blurs the lines between the constructed narrative and the actual world. The novel skillfully employs a postmodern metafictional technique, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. *The Silent Patient* challenges the traditional notion of a linear narrative and explores the complex interplay between author, reader, and text. "In *The Silent Patient*, two narrators, an artist named Alicia, and a psychotherapist named Theo, tell two merging stories" (Daher-Nashif, 2021). This novel not only tells a gripping story but also invites readers to reflect on the nature of storytelling itself. The novel explores the notion of truth and illusion, particularly concerning the protagonist Alicia Berenson's art and her connection to reality.

Alicia's paintings play a significant role in the narrative, reflecting her emotional state and inner turmoil. The novel questions whether her art is a representation of reality or a creation of her imagination, blurring the boundaries between fiction and the truth. Theo Faber expresses his view of the painting 'ALCESTIS' as "Alicia's sole communication, her only testimony" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 44). Furthermore, the painting becomes the case for a reflection of the Truth as the painting "Alcestis" becomes a looking glass for the truth behind Alicia's silence, "a shape burst forth from the shadows...the figure of a man. A man – hiding in the dark. Watching. Spying on Alicia" (p. 259).

Intertextuality

The novel also incorporates intertextuality as a metafictional technique, where it refers to and draws upon other literary works to enrich the narrative. While the specific textual references are not overtly mentioned, the novel subtly weaves elements of Greek mythology and classic literature into the story. *The Silent Patient* includes allusions to other literary works, adding depth and intertextuality to the narrative. Professor Diomedes in the Grove believes in treating patients with Music. He finds music to be the most effective therapeutic tool. "He paused to recite in a lilting, musical tone: Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast" (p.3). The famous line is an allusion to William Congreve's play *The Mourning Brid* (1697). The name of the protagonist, Alicia Berenson, appears to be an allusion to the Greek poet Sappho and her famous poem "Ode to Aphrodite," where Sappho addresses the goddess of love. The novel draws a connection between Alicia and Sappho, hinting at the tragedy reminiscent of Greek mythology in "We like to think of ourselves as emerging from this primordial fog with our characters fully formed, like Aphrodite rising perfect from the sea foam" (p. 17).

Moreover, the novel explores themes of tragedy and psychological turmoil, which resonate with the tragic elements present in Greek mythology. Alicia's story unfolds as a complex and enigmatic tragedy, mirroring the themes often found in classic literature like work of Euripides' *Alcestis*. Alicia names her painting which she draws after killing her husband as 'Alcestis'. "Alcestis is the heroine of a Greek myth. A love story of the saddest kind. Alcestis willingly sacrifices her life for her husband, Admetus, dying in his place when no one else will" (p.11). By incorporating intertextuality, *The Silent Patient* pays homage to literary traditions, adding depth and layers to its psychological thriller narrative. The subtle allusions to Greek mythology and classic literature contribute to the novel's metafictional essence, engaging readers in a thought-provoking exploration of love, loss, and human nature.

Self-Reflexivity Instead of Authorial Intrusion

It is evident in *The Silent Patient*, that the use of authorial intrusion, where the author inserts themselves into the narrative, is not explicitly present. The novel is based on a third-person limited perspective. The focus is on the protagonist, Theo

Faber, who is also the primary narrator. There is no authorial intrusion and no breaking of the fourth wall.

The novel follows a traditional third-person limited perspective, with the focus on the protagonist, Theo Faber, as the primary narrator. The author does not directly address the reader or intervene in the narrative as a distinct presence. Instead of authorial intrusion, the novel primarily relies on other metafictional techniques and elements, such as self-reflexivity, an unreliable narrator, and the playful use of genre conventions, to craft its intriguing narrative. The suspenseful storytelling is the product of these elements. Authorial intrusion is not a prominent feature in the novel, yet the novel utilizes other elements in combination to create a compelling work blurring fiction and reality. These tools also help to illuminate the process of storytelling and also provide a narrative quilt to refashion itself. Patricia Waugh suggests, "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984, p. 2).

Intricate Narrative Structure

Michaelides has skillfully crafted a narrative structure that challenges conventional storytelling. His narrative structure investigates the nature of truth, act of creation, and deception. The use of the unreliable narrator, multi-perspective exploration, fragmented narrative and the illusion of control provide the reader a thought provoking and immersive reading experience.

Metacommentary

There is metacommentary with unreliable narration in the novel. The reader is constantly questioning the truthfulness and reliability of the narrator's account of events. This meta-commentary challenges traditional narrative and genre conventions. Furthermore, irony is a key postmodern element that can subvert reader expectations by genre subversion.

Readers' Response

The *Silent Patient* influences the reader's response by challenging the conventional understanding of the novel. Metafiction builds critical thinking because it disrupts the illusion of reality created in fictional works.

Conclusion

Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* stands as a compelling instance of how metafictional strategies can be embedded within the framework of a commercial psychological thriller to produce a deeply self-conscious narrative. Rather than functioning solely as a suspenseful tale of trauma and revelation, the novel constructs a complex interplay between form and meaning, where unreliable narration, layered textuality, and intertextual resonance work to destabilize conventional notions of truth and narrative authority. By revealing Michaelides' use of self-reflexive fracture, this study shows how best-selling thrillers can mobilize postmodern critique and challenge the reader's trust in both character and form.

The novel's greatest innovation lies in its ability to subvert the expectations it initially cultivates. The apparent realism of the therapeutic setting, the logical structure of the murder investigation, and the confessional tone of Theo's narrative are all ultimately exposed as narrative performances. These strategies transform *The Silent Patient* into a literary site where fiction interrogates itself, refusing to offer easy resolutions or stable meaning. In foregrounding its own constructedness, the novel positions the reader not as a passive observer but as an interpretive agent, invited to navigate—and perhaps reconstruct—the fractured narrative terrain.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the insights uncovered through this metafictional reading, further inquiry might expand the critical horizon in several directions. A comparative study of metafictional techniques in contemporary thrillers—such as Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* or Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*—could illuminate whether the patterns observed in *The Silent Patient* are idiosyncratic or indicative of a broader trend in genre evolution. Additionally, future research might investigate how metafiction operates differently across cultural contexts or within multilingual thrillers,

potentially revealing how narrative self-awareness functions within varying literary traditions.

Another productive line of inquiry would be to explore the relationship between trauma and narrative unreliability across novels where silence, memory distortion, or fragmentation play central roles. Studies situated at the intersection of narratology, trauma theory, and postmodernism could further unpack the ethical dimensions of narrative control in psychological fiction.

Limitations

This study is focused on a single text; hence, the study cannot be considered a representation of the psychological thriller genre. Therefore, it must be approached with caution for further research.

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