



**A Psychoanalytic Analysis of the Character of Theo Faber in Alex Michaelides Novel Silent Patient**

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### **Abstract**

The research study aims to analyze the main character Theo Faber in the novel "The Silent Patient" written by Alex Michaelides through the perspective of Freud's (1923) theory of personality, discussed in his book, *The Id and The Ego*. Therefore, the researchers have examined the changes in the personality Theo Faber via Id and Ego at different stages. Moreover, this research study has examined the aforementioned character by analyzing it through Id including life (sexual) and death (aggression) instincts, which indicates the impulsive urges of Theo Faber. On the other hand, Ego is used to illustrate the rational decisions and acts of Theo Faber regarding the turmoil he has created due to his Id. Furthermore, the researchers have used qualitative method to get the desired objectives.

*Keywords:* Alex Michaelides, American Id, Ego, Freud's (1923) theory of personality Theo Faber, silent patient

Literature is a medium through which one can delineate one's creative thinking with amalgamation of aesthetic and artistic aspects. Literature not only describes fictional things rather it is a depiction of society. As according to Wilbur (1924), literature function is to showcase the picture of real life. It explores the real condition of a society. Moreover, he is of the view that literature reflects the reality of human life.

Similarly, there are different genres of literature which can serve as a platform for a writer to showcase his creative Ideas. These include short story, poem, film etc. However, the most in-demand lately is novel. Unlike, short story it is not a brief description of society rather it depicts a precise image of society and human. Comparatively, it is lengthy and contains several themes and content.

Likewise, the most discussed theme of a novel revolves around man himself and the conflicts in his life. By discussing so, a writer delves deep into mind of a man and provides a chain of reactions he performs in different stages. In this way, reader can get an Idea regarding the psyche of a modern man and things around him.

Among the novels which deal with psychological elements is the Alex Michaelides, a bestselling British-Cypriot author and screenwriter, debut novel "The Silent Patient" published in 2019. Apart from this, he has also written films including The Devil You Know. Moreover, his study in the field of psychotherapy has provided him a lot to showcase into a fictional shape, which is clearly evident in The Silent Patient, a thriller novel; encompasses the in depth psychological elements.

The Silent Patient is a thriller novel based on a murder story. Alicia Berenson, apart from being a famous painter, is a victim and murderer; at first seemingly has a perfect life with her husband, Gabriel, an in-demand photographer. They live in a most enticing place of London. However, one evening, everything falls apart; Alicia shoots Gabriel five times in the face. Subsequently, she never speaks anything, not even a word.

Her silence captures public Inquisition and they started criticizing not only Alicia but her works as well. Afterwards, Alicia is sent to a psychiatry unit (at the Grove). At that point, Theo Faber , a criminal psychotherapist, who desperately wanted to work with Alicia and treat her illness? His valor to get to know the truth behind the murder and makes Alicia to talk again suddenly opens up a new twisting path before readers. Theo is behind the murder, who inadvertently unlocks the repressed trauma of Alicia, which made her to kill Gabriel. Theo did this all; broke into Alicia's house, terrorizes her and reveals the truth because he was frustrated after knowing her wife, Kathy's affairs with Gabriel. His intention was to take revenge and inflict the same pain from which he was going through. The appealing story and conflicts of main character, Theo Faber , has grasped the attention of the researchers to analyze it via Freud's (1923) theory of personality.

Many developments have been made in the field of psychoanalysis. However, the first to work in this discipline was settled by the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud, in the early 1890s, who originate the psychoanalysis term. He originates the conscious, unconscious and subconscious study of human mind.

Freud's psychoanalytical criticism has become the most influential framework in the area of literature. It is mainly based on the different aspects of human psyche, which further on alternates the personality of a person altogether. Similarly, Freud (1923) in his book "The Ego and The Id" represents the psychoanalytic theory of personality development, which comprises of Id, Ego and SuperEgo. Id has been explained that part which lies in the unconscious of human psyche and encourages a person to fulfill his impulsive desires. As well as, it includes sexual and aggressive instincts. On the other hand, SuperEgo is described as a morality principal, which follows the strict norms of right and wrong. In contrast to both of the aforementioned extreme poles of human personality, Freud (1923) demonstrates the Ego as a mediator between the Id and SuperEgo. It lies in the conscious part of human psyche and works rationally.

In the light of above mentioned theory, the researchers have critically analyzed the main character of the novel, *The Silent Patient*, Theo Faber, through Id and Ego. The Id highlights the inclination of Theo Faber towards his impulsive urges, including both sexual and aggressive instincts. However, in the end, researchers have discussed the Ego of Theo Faber that how he makes an alternative way to deal with his pinching guilt (SuperEgo) and chaotic situation he has created.

### **Literature Review**

A research article entitled *Mariam's Personality in Facing External Conflicts as Seen in a Thousand Splendid Suns Novel* conducted by Sumiati (2015) has discussed the external factors which triggers the external conflict of Mariam. The researchers have attempted to highlight the fluctuations in the personality of Mariam by analysis of Freud theory of personality which includes Id, Ego and SuperEgo. The external conflict of Mariam has been highlighted that how at one stage she falls for her impulsive urges. On the other hand, she is described as person under the command of SuperEgo, when she abides by the conventional norms of Pashtun's patriarchal society. However, at the end her Ego arises when she wants freedom.

Research study conducted by Zhang (2020) entitled "Psychoanalysis: The study of Freud's theory in personality psychology. The research paper demonstrates the similarities and contrasts of Freudian theory of personality with the other psychological theories. Moreover, this paper also aims at to describe the relationship of different psychologists with Sigmund Freud. All in all, the researchers have put his efforts to highlight the position and influence of Freud's theory of personality on other psychological theories and conclude it as a unique theory for subject.

Another research article "Psychoanalysis Ego Image by Freudian: Study of Psychology in the Main Character of the Tale of Hang Tuah" conducted by Pratiwi, Suwandi and Wardani, N (2019), provides the in depth analysis of Freudian theory of personality through the character of Hang Tuah particularly. The researchers have showcased his personality through Ego aspect.

Similarly, another research article Analysis Of Character's Personality In Novel UIId By Mahfud Ikhwan Using Sigmund Freud Psychoanalysis conducted by Septiadi, Andayani, Wardani (2019) have demonstrated the character's personality in novel UIId by Mahfud Ikhwan via a thorough application of Id, Ego and SuperEgo (Freud's theory of personality). The writer talks about the personal conflicts of character which make him alter his personality. With the application of Freud's psychoanalytical theory the conflicts of character can also be understood.

In a similar fashion, another research article The Id, Ego and Super-ego in PrIde and Prejudice conducted by Liang (2011) has evaluated the character of the protagonist Elizabeth Bennett via implication of Id, Ego and SuperEgo. This implication puts forward the critical study of Elizabeth personality that how she first abIdes by the class distinction of society where she posses a prejudice against Mr. Darcy. Afterwards, the development of Ego is followed when she prioritize her self-esteem which leads Mr. Darcy to realize his mistake. As well as, her Ego becomes a major reason for her happy marriage with Mr. Darcy....

### **Objectives of the Study**

In general the purpose of this study is summarized in two parts as follows:

1. To delve out the Id of main character Theo Faber in Alex MichaelIdes' novel The Silent Patient.
2. To investigate the Ego of main character Theo Faber in Alex MichaelIdes' novel The Silent Patient.

### **Methodology**

The method used in the research study is qualitative analysis and based on inductive reasoning. The researchers have analyzed the Alex MichaelIdes's novel "The Silent

Patient" from perspective of Freud's (1923) psychoanalytic theory of personality. The researchers have studied thoroughly and carried out the desired objectives by analyzing the fluctuations in the personality of the main character, Theo Faber , which changes at different stages of his life.

Freud's psychoanalytical criticism has become the most influential framework in the area of literature. It is mainly based on the different aspects of human psyche, which further on alternates the personality of a person altogether. Similarly, Freud (1923) in his book "The Ego and The Id" represents the psychoanalytic theory of personality development, which comprises of Id, Ego and SuperEgo. Id has been explained that part which lies in the unconscious of human psyche and encourages a person to fulfill his impulsive desires. As well as, it includes sexual and aggressive instincts. On the other hand, SuperEgo is described as a morality principal, which follows the strict norms of right and wrong. In contrast to both of the aforementioned extreme poles of human personality, Freud (1923) demonstrates the Ego as a mediator between the Id and SuperEgo. It lies in the conscious part of human psyche and works rationally.

Taking in account the above mentioned theory, the researchers have critically analyzed the personality of main character, Theo Faber , with the help of Id and Ego and explained the fluctuations in his personality throughout the novel.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Lately psychological aspects are being interwoven in the literary texts in order to represent the insight of human psyche and the way modern is carrying himself. Whether it be a literary piece about an immigrant or just an ordinary man, it delineates not only reflects the incredible stories or plot rather they provide an insight to human mind.

Similarly, “Silent Patient” like many other literary works has grasped the readers’ attention towards the fluctuations in human personality which includes Id and Ego. MichealIdes () demonstrates the personality changes that how a psyche alternates the personality altogether through which the flaws of human nature has also explained.

Throughout the novel one can find Theo (the protagonist of the novel) constantly under pressure by both Id and Ego. The process of constant struggle of his personality at first highlights the development of Id that how he succumbed at the hands of his surging impulsive urges whether it was sexual or something devastating.

## **Id**

The Id is the primitive and instinctive component of personality. It consists of all the inherited (i.e., biological) components of personality present at birth, including the sex (life) instinct – Eros (which contains the libIdo), and the aggressive (death) instinct - Thanatos. (Freud, 1923). Id is the part of unconscious of human mind which drives a man towards impulsive urges. Similarly, both sexual and aggressive instinct can be seen in the character of Theo Faber . His Eros or sexual instinct generates when he saw Kathy at bar though he is there along with his girlfriend but still he gets attracted towards her appealing beauty. This can be understood from the following instance of the text “it was like an electric shock. I remember her long black hair, piercing green eyes, her mouth” (MichealIdes, 2019, pg. 52)

From the above mentioned instance readers can get an Idea of the attraction of Theo towards Kathy that is the moment where his Id started developing. Moreover, Theo further expresses his impulsive desires for Kathy “I wanted to pull her close, feel her lips and the heat of

her body against mine” (MichealIdes, 2019, pg. 54) this instance gives clear evidence of Theo’s Id that how his lustful eyes are upon Kathy.

Moreover, Id also generates pleasure principle according to which every desire should be fulfilled immediately regardless of its consequences. Theo also did same; he followed his Id and satisfied his wishful desires “I broke my reserve and pulled her towards me” (MichaelIdes, 2019, pg. 54)

In a similar fashion, the aggressive instinct can also be found in Theo’s character particularly when he came to know about his wife, Kathy’s affair with Gabriel. Rather than sorting out such a sensitive matter rationally, he started following his wife and then Gabriel.

Subsequently, he gets so enraged that all he wants is to take revenge and spill the beans to Gabriel’s wife, Alicia, whom he thought is an innocent lady and should be aware of her husband hypocrisy. In order to do this, he, one evening, broke into Gabriel’s house to frighten her wife and him "That night, Theo broke into the house and tied me up..... I couldn't see his face" (MichealIdes, 2019, p.322). At first he tied his wife to a chair and then his Gabriel when he came home without sensing any kind of danger. Theo hit him and tied him up as well and revealed his reality to his Alicia "I knew Gabriel was coward.... I've ever had" (MichaelIdes, 2019, p.324). He started terrorizing them and gives them a choice to decide who would die on which Gabriel respond selfishly "I don't want to die" (MichaelIdes, 2019, p.324) which arose Alicia's buried trauma "Inside my body, every cell deflated;....from a flower" (MichaelIdes, 2019, p. 324) though Theo never thought that Alicia would ever kill her husband but he keeps on terrorizing them to death even he shot a bullet at ceiling just to mitigate the aggression inside of him. After bursting out anger over Gabriel he untied Alicia and went away. However, it starts a new

devastating chapter in his life when Alicia shot her husband several times. Theo did this whole thing without even thinking because at that point his personality was overwhelmed by death instinct and he wanted to satisfy himself rather he destroyed Alicia's life forever.

### **Ego**

"Ego is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse" (Freud, 1923). Ego has been demonstrated as a mediator between the Id and SuperEgo, which lies in the conscious part of human psyche and works rationally. It is a part of human personalities which suppresses the commotion from both the extreme poles of human personality i-e, Id and SuperEgo, and establishes an alternative way.

Same can be seen in the personality of Theo Faber , when he sees Alicia Berenson on press being prosecuted for the unsympathetic murder of her husband, Gabriel, that is the point where Theo's SuperEgo starts pinching him in the form of guilt for the tumult he has created under the influence of Id "And when the story was all over the press..... I felt a deep sense of personal responsibility; and the desire to expiate my guilt" (MichaelIdes, 2019, p.329).

Instead of going to police and confess everything that had happened on the night of murder; Theo adopts an alternative way to deal with this hubbub. It is the stage, where his Ego develops and he started taking decision rationally. As well as, he wants to relieve himself from guilt and makes amends.

In order to do this, he started working as a psychotherapist of Alicia at the Grove "Nearly six years after.... I followed my gut and applied for the job" (MichaelIdes, 2019, p.15). The aforementioned instance highlights the desire of Theo attempting to atone for his misdeeds even

after six years of that incident. Despite every hurdle, he was determined to explore the truth behind murder. Moreover, his determination leads Alicia to talk again "Alicia's lips moved slowly, painfully...'What...' she whispered" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 276) Similarly, by investigating the clues from her case study enabled him to find the major loophole behind the murder " that night in Cambridge, I finally understood.... deeper origins than my actions" (Michaelides, 2019, p.329). This instance depicts the real reason behind murder, the trauma Alicia has since her childhood due to her abusive father. Consequently, it arose when she got to know the duping nature of Gabriel.

Considering the above discussion, it can be said that all the efforts that Theo did after the incident of murder falls into the category of Ego because he took every decision rationally. He made Alicia to talk again and scrutinize the truth. He took altogether a different way which neither lays in Id nor SuperEgo.

### **Conclusion**

Recently, many novels depict the psychological journey of characters. Same has been explored in this research study which is based on the application of Freud's (1923) theory of personality, on the main character, Theo Faber . "The Silent Patient" is a thriller novel, which has captured the attention of readers on a wide scale. It portrays the internal conflict of a person, deprivation, disappointments and betrayal.

The researchers have employed the Freud's (1923) theory of personality on the main character, Theo Faber, by discussing his Id and Ego. Id is a pleasure principal, including both life (sexual) and death (aggression) instincts. This is the part of human psyche, which generates

irrationally and leads him to fulfill his desires. This is explicitly highlighted by researchers, particularly when Theo despite having a relationship with another girl, develops his sexual urges for Kathy. Moreover, it becomes more evident when he gets indulged in a sexual relationship with Kathy. In addition, his death instinct also plays its role; after knowing Kathy's affairs with Gabriel. In order to satisfy his anger, he broke into Alicia's house and frightened her. Moreover, he also knocks down Gabriel and tied both of them. Also, he reveals the reveals Gabriel betrayal to her. Consequently, it arises the buried trauma of Alicia and she shoots her husband five times in the face.

Similarly, Ego is a mediator between the Id and SuperEgo. This part enables a person to take decision rationally. As a result of his Id, Theo's guilt starts pinching him when he sees Alicia all over press being prosecuted for the murder. That is the point, where Theo realizes his mistake and starts endeavoring to makes amends. He becomes a psychotherapist of Alicia at the Grove and treats her, in order to know the real reason behind that murder. In spite having a lot of hurdles, he succeeded in examining the reason which leads Alicia to take such a horrible step. As well as, he makes Alicia to talk again. This is the part where he is following the leads of his Ego and makes an alternative way to deal with all the mess he has created.

Freud's psychological theories have a remarkable position not only in sphere of psychology but in literature as well. Likewise, the theory of personality has helped to comprehend the perturbation and inner conflicts of a man. Moreover, such compartmentalization of human mind assists how to develop a balance personality. Lately, many novels are focusing upon the disclosure of flustered personality and inner conflicts of a man in order to provide a

wide view regarding the difficulties faced by a man himself due to his own desires and external factors (society) as well.

This research article provides the interpretation of novel "The Silent Patient" through analysis of Freud's 1923 theory of personality, highlighting the changes in the personality of Theo Faber, via Id and Ego. However, this novel can further be interpreted in a lot different perspectives i.e., Caruth's (1996) personal trauma model and Carl Jung theory of anima and animus.

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