

Ayesha Ashraf* Saba Zaidi† Asim Aqeel‡

A Postmodernist Critique of Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

Abstract

This critique endeavors to analyze Alex Michaelides' novel The Silent Patient (2019) in the light of Lyotard's theoretical philosophy of postmodernism. Postmodernism is a contemporary movement that poses significant challenges to conventional assumptions of knowledge, rationality, truth, and objectivity. The concept of postmodernity also involves the discussion of a complex set of ideas and theoretical discourses which resist a fixed definition and final closure. Jean Francois Lyotard's theory of postmodern metanarratives versus mini-narratives was proposed and published in his The Postmodern Condition (1979). For this study, textual analysis as a research method has been used to trace the presence of postmodern characteristics in certain words, dialogues and conversations between the characters. The research ends with findings and recommendations for future research.

Key Words: Jean Francois Lyotard, Postmodernism, Metanarratives, Mininarratives, Intertextuality, Characterization

Introduction

The idea that postmodernism is a continuation of modernism or a break from modernism is controversial. However, the preface 'post' implies that postmodernism comes after modernism. In *Postmodern Culture* (1985), Hal Foster defines, "A resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition" (xii). Similarly [Taylor & Winquist \(2001\)](#) define:

Postmodernist critique amounts to a radical rejection and demystification of the foundationalist and consecrated categories of Western thought: for example, Reason, Self, Gender, Mimesis, God, Telos, and Nation. It cogently articulates its sense of the contingent, thus explaining human experience, not in terms of some principle beyond the reach of change and chance, but in terms of the variability and diversity of historical, local, and random forces (303).

Charles Jencks, a prominent postmodern theorist, is of the view that postmodernism represents both the conditions, i.e. a break with as well as a continuity of modernism. He states, "postmodernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence" (27). Like Jencks, Jean Francois [Lyotard \(1924–1988\)](#) was a postmodern French theorist who named the dominating discourses as metanarratives. His focus of interest was interdisciplinary "that included epistemology, the human mind, postmodern art, critical theory, film, time, the sublime, and a strong link between literature and politics" ([Ashraf et al. 124](#)). He wrote 26 books along with many research articles. His best known is *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, published in 1979. In his opinion, this current post World War world has insisted the world writers raise their voice against the dominant metanarratives.

[Alex Michaelides \(1977-\)](#) is a British author and screenwriter. His debut novel, *The Silent Patient*, is a psychological thriller that remained famous as a New York Times and Sunday Times bestseller. It deals with the issues of abusive and traumatic childhood: Alicia and Theo both are entangled in a destructive way on the basis of repressive memories which trigger complex psychical impulses. It shows that how past traumas ruled the characters to such an extent that transcendence became impossible when harsh memories are refreshed, albeit under new masks. The present study explores the novel from the perspective of the postmodern transformation of knowledge, culture, truth, objectivity in relation to modern logic. It evaluates the novel in terms of its postmodern response to

* Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Assistant Professor & Dean, Department of English Language and Literature, SBK Women's University Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

‡ Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Linguistics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

metanarratives with the help of mini-narratives.

Literature Review

This section of our research study provides a condensed survey of significant texts, written by the seminal authors, which informed our thinking. We have divided it into three sub-parts i.e., first part is based on the discussion on literary theory and its historical background, the second one is about the current debate of postmodernism in fiction while the third sub-part focuses on finding the gap in the existing research scholarship regarding our study.

Since postmodern culture is an outgrowth of modernism/late-modernism, therefore, a certain degree of familiarization with the modern era is necessary. It is a cultural movement of late nineteenth century that was also known as Age of Reason or Enlightenment era. Modernism aims to see the world as rationally ordered, that is moved towards progress through scientific and mathematical investigations. The logic of modernism was based on Ezra Pound's phrase "make it new" (Childs 3) that can be seen in the works like *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* by T.S.Eliot and James Joyce respectively. The shift from modern to postmodern condition occurred due to the disapproval of Enlightenment values by the prominent German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Moreover, World War Second brought a significant shift from modern belief on science and progress to a postmodern stance of ambiguity, uncertainty and destruction. And "In 1970, the talk would all have been of postmodernist literature" (Connor 12). This shift got its reflection in world literature and the writers began challenging metanarratives of war, peace, justice, democracy, and freedom etc. As quoted in the book *Postmodernism and Society*:

First apparently used in Spanish by Frederico de Onis in the 1930s, it is in the literary commentaries of Irving Howe, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan himself that the term gained currency in the 1950s and 1960s, then in 1980s, especially through the philosophical intervention of Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*. (1-5)

Roy in her study attempts to explore the character of Alicia in *The Silent Patient* as a hysteric subject in the light of femininity, from psychological perspectives of Jacques Lacan, Freud, and Juliet Mitchell. The researcher asserts:

Alicia's 'hysteria' does not represent her 'sacrificial' instinct but incarnates her revolt against repressive patriarchy; a reversal of the same patriarchal tool to dismantle its gender based binary constructions. It unfurls the gradual subversion of coded patriarchy that leads to the psychological pinning-down of the 'feminine'. (73)

Roy further argues that Theo Faber, Alicia's psychotherapist, understood and perceived her silence as a clue to "traumatic experiences, beginning from childhood to her husband Gabriel's murder" (75). However, Roy asserts "Theo himself carries a fractured childhood within him" (ibid).

The brief literature review emphasized that no particular research has been carried on the postmodern reading of *The Silent Patient*. This research study attempts to fill this gap.

Research Questions

1. How does the novel *The Silent Patient* challenge metanarratives of conventional fiction in the light of Lyotard's concept of mini-narratives?
2. To what extent does the novel *The Silent Patient* replace metanarratives through mini-narratives of intertextuality, memory and unconventional characterization?

Research Methodology

The present study contextualizes Jean-Francois Lyotard's theory of postmodern condition, proposed in his report entitled *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard states, "The term postmodern designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts" (7). He shows his mistrust of the hegemony of metanarratives as there does not exist a single or fixed meaning; rather, the multiplicity of interpretations are possible. Rivera-van Schagen, Judy, and Judith Rivera-van Schagen quote, "These

metanarratives, petits recits, as Peter Berry says, are provisional, contingent, temporary, and relative and provide a basis for actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances" (151).

This study uses textual analysis (content analysis) as a research method as "There is no such thing as a single, 'correct' interpretation of any text. There are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances" (McKee 4). Similarly, "According to Frey and Kreps (1999), the aim of Textual Analysis is to explain the content, function and structure of the message enclosed in a text. There are four main approaches of Textual Analysis; Content Analysis, Rhetorical Analysis, Performance Analysis and Interaction Analysis" (Salahuddin, Seher, Saba Zaidi, and Saman Salah 38). Weber defines, "Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message" (9).

Content Analysis and Discussion

The Silent Patient

Michaelides is a screenwriter for the films *The Devil You Know* (2013) and *The Con Is On* (2018). *The Silent Patient* is a shocking and intense psychological thriller. He combines elements of psychological sciences, Greek mythology, and crime. It creates a web of ambiguous clues for the reader, who is likely to enjoy untangling them by playing the role of a detective. The novel is based on the story of an artist couple where Gabriel is a photographer, and his wife, Alicia, is a painter. They have been married for almost seven years, but the narrator shocks the readers, in the beginning, by disclosing Gabriel's brutal murder by his wife. At the time of the incident, she was herself wounded and was also present around the dead body. Alicia gets silent for six years after the sudden horrific shooting of her husband. She is convicted of the crime and, therefore, sent to a forensic mental health unit. Theo Faber, Alicia's psychotherapist, becomes her last hope, who tries to uncover the truth and help her disclose it. The story is narrated from the point of view of Theo Faber, who keeps on commenting on Alicia and her mental state.

Alicia's trial becomes public quickly, and people start defining her as a cruel murderer who should be punished hard. She is charged with her husband's murder and is held by the court. While her litigation goes on, she paints a piece and names it "Alcestis" that is based on the story of a Greek heroine who sacrificed her life for her husband. Apparently, her painting stands in complete contrast to her own lived reality, but, later on, the similarities are found in both cases. During the litigations, Alicia's lawyer justifies the murder by linking it to her mental health history. He avails a forensic psychotherapist, Professor Diomedes, who affirms his argument by referring to her past mental health issues. In accordance with his opinion, the court gets lenient with Alicia, and she is sent to a psychiatric unit named "The Grove". The novel, in a way, draws the reader's attention towards the very important problem of mental health issues. The Grove is presented as a busy mental hospital with many patients who are suffering from several psychotic disorders, e.g. Alicia and previously Theo himself. During a long stay at The Grove, Alicia undergoes psychotherapy performed by some keen and efficient psychotherapists of a forensic hospital, who try their best to make her speak out the reality. However, from the trial till remand Alicia remains silent due to her pinching sense of guilt. In the forensic unit, she happens to meet the narrator of the novel and her psychotherapist Theo Faber. Alicia's life stories have been unfolded by the narrator by acquiring her personal diary that describes her childhood experiences as well as her marital relationship with her husband.

Mininarratives

The Silent Patient depicts a postmodern disillusionment with the so-called metanarratives or grand narratives with respect to conventional fiction. The characters are in search of a new epistemology that gives a different meaning to their lives by believing in mini-narratives (petit narratives). According to Lyotard, social communication takes place as a result of language games/moves, which are known as metanarratives. On the other hand, Lyotard's concept of mini-narratives focuses on the importance of respecting the differences between language games. The detailed content analysis of the novel highlights the presence of mini-narratives as a postmodern response to metanarratives.

Intertextuality

The Silent Patient, as a postmodern text, exhibits pluralism in reading, multiplicity in meaning and subjective interpretation. It refers to the metaphorical revision of the tragedy of Alcestis, the Greek mythology. Alcestis is a devoted wife who sacrifices her life for the sake of her husband, but later on, she is brought back to life by Hercules. She gets permanently silent due to the tragedy. This intertextual reference adds another literary dimension to the story, and it also differentiates the novel from other conventional psychological thrillers. Victor [Burgin \(1986\)](#) comments on the open-ended nature of intertextuality that constructs a text that is “made up of endlessly proliferating meanings which have no stable point of origin, nor of closure. In this concept of ‘text’, the boundaries which enclosed the ‘work’ are dissolved; the text opens continuously into other texts, the space of intertextuality” (73). Alicia paints a picture and names it “Alcestis” that is interpreted by her psychotherapist and forensic professionals along with her diary excerpts. This leads them to know about her life by drawing parallels to the Greek tragedy despite her constant verbal silence.

The Silent Patient challenges the metanarrative of verbal/oral talk by placing the silence as a strategy to convey meanings that make it a significant ally of speech in the entire therapeutic process. The text writes, “Alicia remained silent—but she made one statement. A painting. The painting was a self-portrait. She titled it in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas in light blue Greek lettering. One word: Alcestis” (12). On the other hand, Theo’s visits the art gallery in order to observe Alicia’s all paintings and to decipher the allusions in her art. For instance, her latest painting, “Alcestis”, reveals the reason why she preferred to stay silent after Gabriel’s murder. Through intertextuality, Michaelides fuses his psychological thriller with Greek mythology while also examining contemporary issues such as mental health, abuse, the flawed professional and funding policies regarding psychological health units. The frequent references to Alicia’s diary excerpts in the novel provide another intertextual connection that raises the suspense and thrill of the story. The diary also mentions the play “Alcestis”, which Alicia and Jean-Felix happen to watch as an opportunity to bid farewell to each other forever. Alicia feels quite relatable to the female heroine of the play, who has experienced a similar injustice.

Alicia, at times, behaves like a non-speaking subject who knows how to express her rage and inner thoughts through her paintings and silence later on. In her sessions, Alicia remains silent throughout, which seems a challenge to Theo, and he tries to come up with a better plan. “Psychoanalysis has understood silence either as a defence, a symptom or as a necessary punctuation, but it is more intensely a part of language than these explanations would suggest” ([Gale & Sanchez 205-220](#)). Due to her persistent silence, she was given an opportunity to paint and “Alicia had painted a redbrick building, a hospital—unmistakably the Grove. It was on fire, burning to the ground. Two figures were discernible on the fire escape. A man and a woman escaping the fire” (163). The woman was she herself, and the man referred to Theo.

The Diary of Alicia

Another mini-narrative that challenges the conventional model of the novel is the revelation of the story through chunks of letters in the form of diary. Alicia’s journal/diary reveals her severe depression, for instance, the very incident when she thinks that she is being watched. She feels that a man regularly spies their house so, she informs Gabriel about the stalker. He believes that she is fantasizing about such visuals; however, Alicia, out of fear, begins to show signs of depression and paranoia. For her safety, she decides not to go out for three days, but Gabriel, however, convinces her to attend a dinner invitation by Max. At the restaurant, Alicia expresses her doubt that the stalker could be Max himself, but Gabriel disapproves of her allegation. Later on, she hears someone barging in, and she supposes that the prying man has entered their house.

After reading this incident in her diary, Theo formulates several questions in his mind regarding that man who chased Alicia. His doubt was on his colleague, Christian West; therefore, he confronts him, who admits that he had once treated Alicia after the death of her father. He says that he did so as a favor to Gabriel, who happened to be his school friend. Christian describes Alicia as psychotic, referring to her allegation of being watched as “Pure fantasy. I should have thought that was obvious” (195). Alicia had made the same allegation in the past as well when she was living with Gabriel in Hampstead. At that time, she accused a man of watching and chasing their house, but, upon

investigation, that man was found blind. Christian mentions that her suicide threats were also baseless and reflected her urge to get her husband's attention. Theo also visits Cambridge to meet Alicia's cousin Paul and asks him about the prying man, but he expresses his doubts, "She wasn't right in the head" (210). These signs reflect her severe depression and anxiety towards a feeling of being abandoned or harmed by someone.

Theo relates Alicia's depression to that of her mother Eva, and her diary also describes her as being somewhat similar in her mental status to her mother. The evidence that both of them attempt to end their lives in suicidal ways proves the similarity. Eva hits the car in the wall when Alicia is sitting beside her, and, likewise, Alicia murders her husband first and then tries to cut her own wrists. She says, "Gabriel was a traitor, the broken-hearted faced the betrayer and noticed Gabriel had a tyrant's eyes, my father's eyes.... That's the truth. I didn't kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger" (263). These lines show the deep impact of her father's negative presence on her mind, and, in Gabriel, she sees that and gets uncomfortable.

Paul also describes how her father, Vernon, had wished her death in the car crash instead of Eva. He stated, "I understood now why *Alcestis* had struck a chord with Alicia. Just as Admetus had physically condemned Alcestis to die, so had Vernon Rose psychically condemned his daughter to death" (214). Similarly, her childhood maltreatment is relatable to Theo; also, that is the reason that he urges Alicia to communicate, and the text shows that, during the forthcoming sessions, she starts opening up about her expressions. The fears, "We were crashing through every last boundary between therapist and patient" (222). Alicia describes in her diary that her mother, Eva, had suffered psychotic issues and had attempted to commit suicide while driving by hitting her car to a brick wall. Eva dies, but Alicia survives, and the painful memory in the form of flashbacks remains with her for the rest of her life. Alicia gets fearful of the idea that she may, one day, become mad like her mother, and her doubt becomes evident when she paints Gabriel on the cross. Alicia's diary also describes the immense love that exists between her and her husband, who happens to be a supportive husband, regarding her love for painting. Therefore, upon realization of her guilt that she had killed her husband, she slits her wrists. She writes about it in her diary as:

I used to think it was suicide. Now I think it was attempted murder. Because I was in the car too, wasn't I? Sometimes I think I was the intended victim—it was me she was trying to kill, not herself. But that's crazy. Why would she want to kill me? The truth is we're all scared. We're terrified of each other. I'm terrified of myself—and of my mother in me. Is her madness in my blood? Is it? Am I going to? (59)

Fragmented Relationships

The novel blurs the boundaries between love/hatred through the depiction of unconventional and fragmented relationships exhibited by husband-wife, father-daughter, sister-brother and mother-daughter. For instance, there seems to exist a genuine love bonding between Alicia and Gabriel but yet they often fought with each other. The novel shows that on one occasion, there is seen a heated discussion between them on the idea of having a gun in the house. It expresses that Alicia used to spend her days mostly in cafes with air conditioning just to escape the unbearable heat. Since they are unable to afford air conditioning, she decides to buy a fan, but Gabriel disapproves of the idea on the pretext that its noise will disturb his sleep. However, Alicia takes the fan with her and even uses it while she paints. Her diary also describes her deep fear of becoming a mother that is caused by her childhood trauma, and it has made her feel like she can never become a good mother. In spite of Gabriel's idea of having a baby, she doubted that she would eventually turn out to be like her mother.

Alicia's diary also reveals that she was once sexually assaulted by Max, Gabriel's brother, who warns her to stay quiet about his inappropriate behavior. The character of Max has been shown as a complete contrast as outwardly, he appears to be noble, helpful and kind but later on, he is involved in disrespectful acts towards his brother Gabriel and his wife. In her diary, Alicia narrates the incident of Gabriel's death when she explains that one day, she was busy painting that she noticed a masked man. He was standing right behind her, who also attacked her and dragged her from her studio to the kitchen. As soon as Gabriel's arrived, this masked man bashed his head with the butt of the gun before and shot him six times afterwards. Theo doubts her story as it lacks consistency with the police report.

For instance, contrary to her claims, Alicia was not found tied up, and Gabriel had been shot five times only. Theo shares her story with professor Diomedes, who states, “Alicia has cast herself as the victim and this mystery man as the villain. Whereas in fact Alicia and the man are one and the same. She killed Gabriel” (236).

Her condition is revealed through the mouthpiece of Theo, who notices the abnormal responses of Alicia regarding her therapy sessions. He relates her present behavior to her tragic childhood effect; therefore, he decides to know about her. He visits Alicia’s cousin Paul who tells him about her father’s harsh behaviour towards her. He discloses that, after the terrible road accident that killed Alicia’s mother, her father said, “My poor girl, my Eva...Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn't Alicia die instead?” (221). These bitter memories have stayed in her mind permanently, and, thereafter, Theo also undergoes different problems while conducting therapy sessions with her. She starts blaming herself for her mother’s death. The text reveals that Alicia was orphaned at a very early age, and her childhood is mainly characterized by the abandonment factor. Alicia remains silent; therefore, the narrator, Theo, strives hard to find all the necessary details regarding her childhood, her family, friends, and her paintings. During a visit to Alicia’s parents’ house where she had spent her childhood, as Theo narrates, “This was the house where Alicia had been born. It was where she spent the first eighteen years of her life. Within these walls, her personality had been formed: the roots of her adult life, all causes and subsequent choices were buried here” (140). He also shows his interest to know her marital life.

Postmodern Characters

The plot of the novel depicts postmodern characterization in the narrative who are subjected to a web of childhood maltreatment stories. They suffer a lot from issues like a childhood memory, domestic violence, neglect, psychological abuse, and molestation etc. Theo and Alicia are two significant characters who are coping with various emotional, psychological, behavioral, sexual and social disorders. The novel depicts that as maltreated children, they are developed into unconventional selves upon turning into adulthood. Moreover, childhood violence represents a mini-narrative of transformation of these characters from being victim to a victimizer later on.

Alicia

Alicia, despite being a famous artist, is characterized by many identities and she seems indulged in negative feelings such as revenge emotions, family/childhood traumas, relationship confrontations, repressive behaviors and communication gap. Her character cannot be defined by a fixed definition or metanarrative; rather, she acts differently in different situations. As Linda Nicholson in her book *Feminism/Postmodernism* comments on the same aspect, she states, “In Lyotard’s view, a metanarrative is meta in a very strong sense. It purports to be a privileged discourse capable of situating, characterizing, and evaluating all other discourses” (22). But the content analysis of *The Silent Patient* reveals that her tragic past makes her a fragmented character, and she exhibits clear differences in her mental, physical and social behavior that shapes her outer personality. However, she has a blind trust in others that is why Jean-Felix suggests she stay alert, “You’re way too trusting. The people around you ... you trust them. Don’t. Don’t trust them” (178). As her psychotherapist, Theo Faber, feels her pain as he says, As I watched, I felt increasingly sure I had to do something to help her. She was deceived and wounded betrayed... I had no choice. I had to help her ([Roy 256](#)).

On the very first day of his job at the Grove, Theo attends a group therapy session, and he sees the miserable state of Alicia, who looks very thin. Moreover, she looks heavily sedated and unable to understand what was happening around her. At this point, he decides to treat her, “There was no time to waste: Alicia was lost. She was missing. And I intended to find her” (29). He, therefore, requests Professor Diomedes to allow him to conduct therapy sessions with Alicia. Textual analysis shows that Diomedes is totally hopeless regarding Alicia’s case because he describes her as an unreceptive patient. Nonetheless, Theo still thinks that he will be able to bring a positive impact on her mental health, and he starts the therapy sessions. In spite of his numerous efforts to help her, Alicia fails to communicate. Alicia chooses to remain silent due to a lack of trust that has been internalized in her personality. The text writes her negative feelings towards Theo, “You can't help me, her eyes shouted.

Look at you, you can barely help yourself. You pretend to know so much and be so wise, but you should be sitting here instead of me. Freak. Fraud. Liar. Liar” (72). The content analysis shows that Alicia is a perfectionist with respect to her art of painting because it pleases her. On the other hand, she even fights with her husband when she feels uncomfortable due to hot weather. She buys a fan despite being warned by her husband, Gabriel. The text demonstrates that she selfishly carries her cooling fan with herself and does not give Gabriel a chance to enjoy it. Joy comments on Lyotard's perspective as, “Mini narratives employ a bad logic and have the potential to disrupt the existing language game. This logic becomes “bad” only in terms of the liberal humanistic world view. The present-day world regards it as a “different” logic. Thus it perpetuates plurality which in turn causes the end of every kind of monologic method of thinking” (32).

The novel demonstrates that Alicia harbours a feeling of deep rage in her personality that pours out on various occasions. For instance, when Alicia is probed by Theo, then her trauma gets refreshed, and she becomes revengeful. She writes in her diary about it, “I wanted to kill him, kill or be killed—I leaped on him and tried to strangle him and scratch his eyes out, bash his skull to pieces on the floor” (72). These lines show her aggressive behavior as well as the vulnerability of Theo as a psychotherapist. Her behavior represents a language game that is “the object of a contract, explicit or not, between the players”. (*Postmodern Condition* 10) Due to her aggressive behavior, she is put to sedative treatment, but Theo asks Dr Christian to lower her dosage so that he can make her communicate to him. However, his strategy fails because she attacks him during a therapy session, and her offensive behavior is taken as a consequence of a change in medication. Theo and Indira remain optimistic, and they look onto this matter differently; rather, they consider Alicia's aggressiveness as a sign that she is willing to go for therapies.

Theo Faber

Like Alicia, Theo Faber keeps on moving to and fro between good and bad character type, i.e. hero and villain. The last part of the novel reveals that Theo follows his wife's lover and finds out that he is a married man, but his wife is unaware of his extramarital affair. He keeps on watching the stranger's house, and he eventually plans to reveal the man's affair to his wife. He hides his identity by wearing a black mask and a pair of gloves, and finally, he enters the woman's house. However, by withholding this information until the final chapter, the author creates suspense and thrill in the audience. Theo's hypocritical character is revealed when he tries to help Alicia only to cover up his tricks regarding Gabriel's murder. By the end, Theo injects Alicia with morphine in order to induce an artificial coma so that she cannot disclose his evil side to the world. After few days, Alicia gets wounded and admitted to hospital while Theo notices that her arm's condition suggests that she was injected with a dangerous dose of morphine. He suspects Christian, who has a long relationship with her when she was brought to Grove; Theo doubts that Christian tried to murder Alicia in order to conceal some secret. Textual analysis reveals that in the very first session with Alicia, Theo identifies her phobia and insecurity related to different aspects of her life. She looks weak internally as well as externally; she could not even bear the seasonal heat of the weather; hence, she used to go to a café and get cool air. He is clever enough to relate her phobia to her distant past, in particular, the car accident on 18th July. The diary contains her murder confession, where she describes how Theo had forced her husband's death. He asked Gabriel to choose either his life or Alicia but later chooses his life at the expense of his wife's. His choice takes Alicia back to her childhood memory when her father chose to murder her and save his wife, Eva. Despite Theo leaving both of them alive, the flashback of childhood trauma drives Alicia into angst, and she kills her husband in cold blood. Although she admits her crime, she also wants that Theo should also be punished for playing with her emotions. She discloses every detail about Theo in her diary and hides it before passing out from the lethal morphine injection.

In the end, Theo pretends to collect Alicia's belongings, but, in fact, he is worried about her diary. However, he is convinced that Alicia will never mention his involvement in Gabriel's murder. Jean-Felix happens to find the diary stuffed in one of her paintings, and he gives it to the police. It reveals that Gabriel had an affair with Theo's wife, Kathy. Theo, out of revenge, goes to Gabriel's house and ties him up and forces him to choose anyone from his life or that of his wife. Gabriel chooses his own life, and then Theo frees Alicia, who takes the gun and kills Gabriel. Her diary proves that Theo was a

guilty of Gabriel's murder as Alicia herself, but Theo blames her unstable mental health as responsible for the murder. Ultimately, Theo's effort towards self-preservation is revealed that he chose to work at the Grove just to rid of any evidence against him. The role of Theo shifts from being a psychotherapist to a detective as Max says, "You sound more like a detective than a psychiatrist" (128). To his surprise, all her relatives, like Lydia Rose, her aunt, and Max, her brother-in-law, refuse to cooperate with him on any matter. However, he provokes Alicia's nurse, Yuri, to reveal any significant information about her, as he has been taking care of Alicia for the last six years. However, Yuri discourages Theo by suspecting him that he is attracted to her beauty and has no intention to treat her. She is further excluded after the murder incident when the judgmental behavior of society hits her hard. She has been disowned by not only her next of kin but also the head of the psychiatric hospital, who has lost interest in her as a patient.

Theo describes his wife and Alicia, "It's hard to imagine two women more different than Kathy and Alicia. Kathy makes me think of light, warmth, color, and laughter. When I think of Alicia, I think only of depth, of darkness, of sadness" (51). However, he is sympathetic towards her and thinks about her differently. Another psychologist, Ruth, calls this forced exclusion and abandonment the "pain of not being loved" (90).

Conclusion

The present study analyzed *The Silent Patient* as a postmodern text in the light of Lyotard's theoretical concept of mini-narrative. The study has found various characteristics such as intertextuality, multiple stories, unconventional characters and psychological issues of the new age, i.e. postmodern condition. It has proved that mini-narratives replace metanarratives in the postmodern age, particularly in fiction. Intertextuality is one such mini-narrative that connects the novel with different texts, thus challenging the ultimate autonomy of its independent status. Likewise, the mininarrative of multiple stories divides the themes of the novel by portraying sociological as well as the psychological impact of bullying, childhood abuse, parenting, mental anxiety and depression, marital conflicts and social pressures in the life of the characters. Similarly, unconventional characters display negative as well as positive personality traits and cannot be placed in the clear cut categories of hero/heroine or villain. This study is significant for the teachers, researchers, students to understand literature from various dimensions in the light of postmodern understanding. In future, the selected novel as a representative of postmodern metafictionality can be further studied by researchers.

References

- Ashraf et al. (2020). "Language and Power Discourse in Zulfikar Ghose's Poetry Through Lyotard's Deconstruction of Metanarratives." *International Journal of English Linguistics* 10.4
- Boyne, R., & Ali, R. (2016). *Postmodernism and Society*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2017. Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. Taylor & Francis,
- Burgin, V. (1986). *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. New York: Humanities Press International.
- Connor, S. (2004). *The Cambridge companion to postmodernism*. Cambridge University Press,
- Foster, H. (1985). *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto.
- Gale, J., & Beatriz, S. (2005). "The Meaning and Function of Silence in Psychotherapy with particular reference to a Therapeutic Community Treatment Program." *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, vol.19, no.3, pp.205-220, DOI: [10.1080/02668730500238218](https://doi.org/10.1080/02668730500238218)
- Halse, J. (2006). *Framing the text: an investigation of collage in postmodern narrative illustration*. Diss. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University,
- Joy, D. (2019). "Paralogy of Petit Narratives: a Lyotardian Reading of James Cameron's Titanic." *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 7 ~ Issue 4 pp.:31-38
- McKee, A. (19th December 2020). "A Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis." *Metro Magazine*, 2001, pp.1-24, <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/41993>. Accessed on
- Michaelides, A. (2019). *The Silent Patient*. Celadon Books New York,
- Nicholson, L. (2013). *Feminism/Postmodernism*. *Routledge*,
- Roy, S. (March 2020). "The Unabated 'Silence': Reversal of the Hysterical Subject in *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides" *Literary Voice*, , pp.72-79.
- Salahuddin, S., Saba, Z., & Saman, S. (2018). "Survival of the Fittest: A Textual Analysis of Juno and the Paycock: A Textual Analysis of Juno and the Paycock." *Erevna Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, vol.2, no.1, pp.34-46.
- Taylor, V., & Winquist, C. (eds.). (2001). *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. London: *Routledge*.
- Weber, Robert Philip. *Basic Content Analysis*. No. 49. Sage, 1990. p.9.