

**Gender Performativity and The Politics of
Silence: A Butlerian Analysis of Alex
Michaelides' The Silent Patient (2019)**

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Abstract:

This research article employs Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to examine Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019) with an exclusive focus on Alicia Berenson's silence as a rejection of the deep-seated social norms about gender. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity proposes that gender is performative, 'a performance' by the individual using one's actions and behaviors instead of being something innate, inherent or intrinsic. Butler's (1990) idea refutes the traditional and customary social norms that dictate the lives of males and females. *The Silent Patient* (2019), a psychological thriller, effectively delineates Butlerian gender performativity through a repudiation of customary societal norms by its complex characters. This research employs the Butlerian theory of gender performativity to probe Alicia Berenson's silence as a performative resistance and defiance against social constructedness of gender binaries and patriarchy led gender binarism. Using techniques such as close reading and textual analysis, it focuses on Alicia Berenson's silence and her complex character arc to show how her transgressive performance of gender is the unconventional act that subverts traditional feminine gender roles of emotional maturity and transparency expected from women in society. This article aims to contribute to the comprehension of contemporary literature's engagement with feminist gender theory by demonstrating the disruption of customary societal gender-based expectations in contemporary fiction through Alicia's silence, unconventional gender performativity and nonverbal articulation through painting.

Keywords: *Gender Performativity, Silence, Gender Binarism, Undoing Gender, Gender Trouble, Judith Butler, Alex Michaelides, The Silent Patient*

Introduction

Traditionally, societal perceptions bind gender to an individual's physical or physiological traits present at birth. One's biological sex, male, female, or intersex, serves as the foundation on which societies assign cultural and social differences to individuals, dictating their behaviours and attitudes as acceptable or not for the entirety of their lives. Judith Butler (1990), in her paradigm-shifting work *Gender Trouble*, inverts this notion as she chooses to characterize gender as performative: "Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 179). Her argument builds on Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) assertion that "One is not born, but rather becomes, [a] woman" (p. 283), which she puts forward in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), originally known as *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Beauvoir and Butler view gender as 'performative' rather than as sex allotted at birth on account of one's biology. Judith Butler's works, *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), have refined her theory of gender performativity (Szorenyi, 2022, para. 5) and helped transform the theoretical framework for the reception and reading of gender over the past three decades.

Socially constructed gender roles determine the rules for all to abide by. The members of society are expected to carry specific behaviour patterns, mannerisms, and attitudes, solely keeping their sex in view. These expectations inform the structural core of civilization. That is what Butler repudiates and probes in her treatise. Being thrust into a specific gender category purely based on one's biological sex not only dictates one's personality but also restricts options for the expression of self. Butler (1990) sets out to contest and dismantle the orthodox comprehension of gender and to describe the performativity of gender, e.g., masculinity to be performed by female bodies and vice versa. Performing gender comprises acting, dressing, speaking, and behaving, irrespective of the social expectations predicated on one's biological sex. The rigid code of social conduct and the confines of conventions, which compels individuals to conduct themselves in an inelastic and firm manner, is also discarded. Wearing pants was not acceptable for women in the United States before the 19th century, as the standard of that era was long skirts and wearing a man's clothing in public spaces was met with disapproval. As Encyclopedia Britannica (2019) says, "Pants as an acceptable everyday clothing option for women didn't truly catch on until the mid-20th century" (paras. 1-2).

Simultaneously, men adorning themselves with 'feminine' jewelry and makeup labelled them as 'weaker and unnatural' in the past, and the practice persists even now in some cultures in the modern world. The simplest example of gender roles is the colour association of pink for girls and blue for boys. In her works, Butler (1990) has refined the idea of gender being what one does, not who one is. Nasrullah Mambrol (2016) explicates the main Butlerian notion: "Performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender" (para.4). This Butlerian ideology of gender with its perspectives, serves as the foundation to the concept of gender performativity. It is the cornerstone of what later emerged as the queer theory. In literature, fiction, gender performativity is a widely employed theory that engages with varying representations of gender in characters focusing on their behaviors, manners and actions and demonstrating the practical application of Butler's theories in various fields.

Alex Michaelides, in his psychological thriller novel *The Silent Patient* (2019), aptly portrays gender performativity through its non-conventional characters, a transgressive tone and a compelling writing style. It perfectly subverts the conventional perspective on gender behaviors. It mirrors Butler's (1990) theoretical constructs on gender performativity through two of the novel's central characters: Alicia Berenson, the protagonist, and Kathy Faber, the foil. Safitri et al. (2023) hail the novel is a thriller which delineates "psychological conditions and psychiatric disorders of characters" (p. 139). The novel's pragmatic inquiry into human conditions and complexities has enabled this literary work to serve as a framework for addressing numerous societal dilemmas, e.g., people afflicted with mental problems being regarded as mentally retarded and dismissed, society ignoring mental sickness as fake and the effects of abuse and trauma on young children and its manifestation in the future.

The Silent Patient (2019) depicts several characters with varying personalities and habits, some of whom are opposites of each other. Its non-conventional characterization aids us in assessing gender performativity in nuanced portrayal of characters like Alicia. The plot follows the life of Alicia Berenson, a renowned artist. She occupies the focal position in the novel after her husband's murder. Law enforcement officers discover Gabriel Berenson with five gunshot wounds to the face and bound to a chair in the living room. Meanwhile, Alicia is found with severe wrist lacerations, bleeding profusely onto her white dress, with her fingerprints on the gun. She is marked by some as the perpetrator and the cold-blooded spouse-killing monster, while others call her the victim of a tragedy. She opts for a non-conventional approach of

resorting to painting to express herself and presumably give her perspective on Gabriel's murder. Her inimitable artistic prowess allows her to create 'Alcestis', a dark and harsh self-portrait in which Alicia stands naked, with no expression and a paintbrush in her hand dripping blood from rotting and maggot-infected fruits. This approach completely derails the public's expectations of any enormous and clandestine revelation. In this haze of blurred truths, half-lies and biased opinions of the public Alicia remains silent. Her silence, in the face of societal gender-based anticipation of emotional maturity, is the act reflective of Butler's gender performativity.

This novel subverts conventional gender roles and simultaneously represents said gender roles through its characters, e.g., Alicia Berenson as a symbol of subversion of traditional gender roles and Kathy Faber as the true symbol of conventional gender roles. By the virtue of these elements, Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019) finds its place in a tradition of works that subvert traditional gender roles. They include Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), and Andrea Lawlor's *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* (2017). Butler's theory of gender performativity applies quite pertinently to Michaelides' characters and their peculiar traits, e.g., Alicia's silence after Gabriel's murder and Kathy's support for Theo throughout the novel. Conventional gender identities as sanctioned by society and gender performative identities and ideologies jostle for control in the personas of this novel's characters.

This study seeks employ Butler's scholarship on the construction of gender identity to analyze *The Silent Patient* (2019). It probes the enigmatic silence of Alicia Berenson following her husband's murder in the novel's exposition and aims to prove her 'silence' as a subversive performance against the conservative expectations of a patriarchal society. This research employs the Butlerian theory of gender performativity to read Alicia's silence as a performative resistance. It focuses on Alicia Berenson's silence and complex character arc to show how her silence is the unconventional act that subverts traditional feminine gender roles of emotional maturity and transparency.

Literature Review

Alex Michaelides conceives *The Silent Patient* (2019) as a psychological detective story, a kind he always wanted to write - being an avid reader of crime fiction and thus of Agatha Christie and her works, that made him into a writer from a reader (About-Alex Michaelides, 2022). The child of a Greek Cypriot father and an English mother, he was born on the

Mediterranean island of Cyprus on September 4th, 1977, his childhood influenced him immensely. His house had a small library where his mother collected books. The authors who impacted his writing were Charles Dickens, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood. His fondness for crime fiction was initiated by his older sister, who avidly read crime fiction. He would sneak into her room to gratify his appetite for novels like Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939). The joys of reading mystery novels gave way to a desire to create such a thrilling piece of literature. Michaelides' novel delineates the story of an eminent artist whose psychological plight is distorted, resulting in her taking her cheating husband's life. His writing style combines the "stream of consciousness" technique and dual-person narration. These narrative techniques are pivotal to the plot, and the simultaneous narration of the past and present form the bedrock of the whole scheme. These dual narratives progress simultaneously to disclose the identity of Gabriel Berenson's killer. Michaelides also had experience working in a secure psychiatric community for teenagers in North London and had studied therapy at a postgraduate level. Though he left without achieving the degree to become a writer, his knowledge was never wasted as he later incorporated his comprehension of the human psyche to create reliable and accurate characters entangled in severe psychological conditions.

There is a limited body of scholarly work available on *The Silent Patient* (2019) though the novel has accumulated considerable reviews and commentaries from fans and casual readers in online communities. This novel, with its complex and dynamic characters, serves as the perfect working ground for researchers seeking to prove the significance of a balanced and healthy childhood in moulding a well-shaped adult and the oppressive influence of trauma on childhood development. The novel's nuanced psychological realism makes it an impeccable resource for extensive psychological research. Mohammad Afzal Hossain (2021) probes Alicia's dynamic with her father after the death of her mother. He argues: "Alicia was a victim of psychic infanticide by her father. Her father did not kill her biologically but psychically" (p. 322). He explains how her childhood experiences with her father influenced her psyche and psychological stability, which eventually became a catalyst for the traumatic and tragic murder of her husband. It also depicts how her past trauma impacted her personal development: "The silence of Alicia is not induced out of any mental disorder but rather out of a realization of double recurrence of the same cycle of betrayal and not being loved" (p. 323). Thus, Alicia's silence and actions are the by-products of deep-rooted trauma from childhood relations and experiences. They also reflect the emphasis of this article's examination of the <https://journalsriuf.com/index.php/IJLL/index>

effect of early trauma on adult behaviour.

Ashraf et al.'s (2020) postmodernist reading of the novel is another insightful critique of the novel through the lens of postmodernism, focusing exclusively on Jean Francois Lyotard's concepts of metanarratives and mini-narratives. This paper shows that *The Silent Patient* (2019) embodies postmodernist characteristics by displaying the fragmentation of narratives, the complexity of truth, and the exploration of mental health conditions. It states, "The plot of the novel depicts postmodern characterization in the narrative who are subjected to a web of childhood maltreatment stories" (Ashraf et al., 2020, p. 452). It highlights the complexity of Alicia's character resulting from her traumatic experience by applying mini-narratives to challenge traditional storytelling. While psychological research is accessible on *The Silent Patient* (2019), concentrating on its varying meticulous components, there is an obvious scarcity of literary critiques. This study bridges the gap between the psychological research and the literary evaluation of this novel. Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity is utilized as the central theory to inspect the characters of this novel and their actions. The present study seeks to examine Alicia Berenson's character following the cold-blooded murder of her husband. It seeks to demonstrate that her silence serves as a defiance against the conservative demands placed on women by a patriarchal society, which expects them to be emotionally mature and forthright in all circumstances, regardless of the challenges they encounter.

Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler and the Performativity of Gender

Judith Butler is an eminent author and gender critic whose groundbreaking treatise *Gender Trouble* (1990) has immensely influenced the scholarship in queer theories and feminism. Her scholarship has been instrumental in reshaping how sexual identity and gender are perceived and constructed. She frames her text as a critique of the ingrained heterosexual framework, as pointed out by Ahmadi Asl et al. (2019). Gender is perceived in the traditional societal view as the binary system of classification that categorizes people into one of the two genders, male or female, distinguished based on anatomical differences. This categorizing system sets the boundaries that later develop into gender-specific rules, followed by the members of the society and is frowned upon when the females perform the masculine attributes and acts and vice versa. In the long run, these exact gender-specific rules evolve into norms that are generally expected of all and are considered the unspoken rules that must be

followed. It is these rigid gender norms that later become the cultural essence, establish a historical pertinence and are accepted as attributes and customs that identify a culture. Stereotypes encircling the topic of gender include gender-specific jobs performed by the defined gender, e.g., females are responsible for acts or performances 'feminine' enough and often associated with things like obedience, submissiveness, fragility, beauty, innocence, support, and nurturing. Contrastively, males are responsible for the 'masculine' jobs related to strength, might, dominance, bravery, resilience, courage, and control. These stereotypes reflect the ideology of conventional gender roles. Males also regulate how gender is constructed by society and enforced through the pressure of societal expectations under the guise of uniformity between people. Butler (1990) observes in this regard: "The mark of gender appears to 'qualify' bodies as human bodies; the moment in which an infant becomes humanized is when the question, 'is it a boy or girl?' is answered" (p. 142). This is how societal recognition of gender becomes crucial in establishing a gender identity.

This context makes Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (1990) an even more paradigm-shifting development, which has altered the course of feminist literature and queer theory. Her theory of gender performativity encapsulates human actions and behaviours as the defining factors for gender recognition as opposed to the conventional view of the presence and absence of genitals for its determination. She asserts: "Gender is an identity tenuously constituted ... through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990, p. 179). Gender, according to Butler, is constituted by performing either feminine or masculine acts. Her thesis opposes the notion that gender is dictated by core essence or innate nature. Duignan (2025) explicates Butlerian thesis: "In particular, gender is not an underlying essence ... it is a series of acts whose constant repetition creates the illusion that an underlying nature exists" (para. 5). Gender performativity invites us to observe how gender is and can be performed in a multitude of ways that it is not a rigid box filled with fixed rules to be followed. Butler (1990) maintains that sex and gender are not considered separate in their construction by the society. She observes: "The distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (p. 11). She argues that the sex of an individual has no priority in comparison to their gender and vice versa, as both are the by-products of society and culture, and a subject's body can be defined by both gender and sex. Therefore, applying this logic, a woman can only be described as female by her actions. She also argues that the subject's gender is not natural and not an innate instinctive characteristic. As aforementioned, it is the result of repeated actions. In an interview, Butler asserts: "Gender is an

impersonation...becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits" (as cited in Mambrol, 2016, para. 4).

Elaborating on Butler's views, Nasrullah Mambrol (2016) opines: "There is no self-preceding or outside a gendered self" (**para. 3**). Butler (1993) explains this construction of gender selfhood in *Bodies that Matter*: "The 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within the matrix of gender relations themselves" (p. 7). Gender is a performative construct formed and shaped by societal norms, where the sense of 'I' is the product of gendered actions and social dynamics and not a pre-existing identity. These repeated actions and social dynamics collectively shape and sustain gender identity within the boundaries of culture and its norms. The performance of actions formulates the gender and societal construction of gender identity and generally dictates these layers of performance. A female, anatomically, will wear clothes reflective of the culture's views and having pertinent acceptable features, e.g., long dresses, floral patterns, jewelry, longer hair, pastels, and vibrant colours, depending on the environment in which she was raised. This femininity in the traditional and patriarchal world, along with its association with sexual desires, gives rise to the objectification and over-sexualization of young girls and females on purely anatomical aspects, e.g., the development of secondary sexual characteristics like breasts and hips. Alternatively, a male performing any of the above-mentioned performances attached to socially defined femininity is punished verbally through taunts or even physically in some parts of the world where cultural values are rooted in conservatism.

Judith Butler (1988), in one her early essays, contends that "gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time" (p. 520). It is something we do repeatedly not something we have. Therefore, these gender constructions can be destabilized through "breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (p. 520). Butler links gender identity to repeated acts or performances over time and they are not necessarily glued to a singular unchanging identity. Subversive or alternative performances can challenge and change any so-called inherent gender divisions and, in the process, can revamp the set societal norms. Moreover, society expects females to conform to the conventional feminine roles irrespective of external and internal conditions that ultimately affect their behaviours and attitudes such that "conformity to feminine roles leads women to behavioral patterns and lifestyle habits associated with femininity" (Esteban-Gonzalo, 2022, p. 1). Thus, her scholarship endeavors not only to analyze gender in a better way but also to eliminate the conservative binary system of

gender instead of proposing a progressive approach that dismantles patriarchy-driven gender roles.

This framework illustrates gender as performative based on the actions or performances of the subject. It presents an apt theoretical framework for analyzing Alicia Berenson's complex character, especially her silence, which can be read as a rebellion against traditional gender expectations. This article provides a penetrating insight into Alicia Berenson's character in light of Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity by analyzing her actions, behaviours and non-verbal articulation of self through art. The analysis explains in-depth the gender performativity in Alicia Berenson's character and contrasts it with Kathy Faber's adherence to the social constructedness of gender.

Analysis

Alicia Berenson's Subversive Gender Performativity

The Silent Patient (2019) is a noteworthy example of the enactment of Butler's theory in a fictional work. This analysis seeks to unearth the echoes of Butler's scholarship in the articulation of gender identity in the main characters of Michaelides' (2019) novel. Gender binarism expects the main female character to conform to the socially ascribed performance of femininity. She is expected to conform to the demand of being expressive and communicative about their trauma. Her refusal to do so may be seen as a 'lack' from this perspective. However, from a Butlerian perspective, this is not a failure or lack but rather a conscious subversion and resistance to the ascribed performance of femininity.

The Silent Patient (2019) is a psychological thriller that captures the reader's curiosity and critical engagement through techniques like stream of consciousness and parallel narration of the past and the present. This literary piece has been translated into over 40 languages and has won the Goodreads Choice Award for the best mystery and thriller in 2019. The novel follows the story of Alicia Berenson, a prominent and successful painter renowned for her artistic expertise and inimitable paintings. She is suspected of murdering her husband after which she goes 'silent,' with no care for the outside world. After being convicted, she is moved to Grove, a psychiatric facility, where she remains silent for six years, becoming a topic of significant media attention and daily gossip of people. Theo Faber, a forensic psychotherapist, is a fan of Alicia's work, who later becomes obsessed with the mystery surrounding her peculiar silence and the murder of her husband, Gabriel Berenson. Theo makes every possible effort to bring Alicia out of her shell of silence to unravel the

truth, and he communicates with her utilizing various methods. The one that seems to work is art, given that Alicia portrays her inner turmoil and state through her painting. Her art reflects her character's emotional complexity along with the deep-rooted childhood trauma that still haunts her. Through the parallel narration of the present from Theo's perspective and the past from Alicia's diary entries, the reader is immersed in a world of mystery that sustains their attention to the end. The enigma surrounding Gabriel's murder is deeply intricate, laden with complexities and psychological anomalies that extend far beyond surface perceptions. It is not merely a case of spousal homicide fueled by a momentary outburst of anger. This novel serves as the representation of the broader societal challenges faced by women, highlighting the pressures to conform to gender norms even in extremely psychological and emotionally distressful situations that would typically overwhelm individuals.

This study analyzes and explores Alicia's character, her emotional and mental complexities, and, most importantly, her silence after killing Gabriel. From the moment Alicia allegedly shoots Gabriel, she remains silent. This silence reflects the emotional and mental turmoil she is experiencing and is a non-conventional response. She retreats from the world instead of providing justification or expressing remorse for her act. This silence rattles many around her, including Theo, who wonders, "What is it that you can't say? Why do you have to keep silent?" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 144). It is not merely Alicia's refusal to defend herself but her unconventional approach that intrigues people. Instead of speaking, she chooses to make a statement through her creative art: "Alicia remained silent—but she made one statement. A painting" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 12). This self-portrait, which is inspired by Greek mythology, is titled 'Alcestris'. Evidently, her behaviour is set against the social construction of gender, which expects women to be expressive and emotionally delicate. Therefore, this behaviour goes against the grain of social construction of gender as exemplified by Butler's notion of gender performativity. Her subversion of social expectations provokes people's frustrations and anger toward her for maintaining her silence, which goes against the social constructs of the feminine traits of emotional transparency. *The Silent Patient* (2019) captures this collective frustration of the masses in response to Alicia's unconventional silence: "Why did she refuse to speak? What did it mean? Was she hiding something? Protecting someone? If so, who? And why?" (p. 14). This text hints that this mass social frustration with her silence stems from her radical disruption of traditional gender expectations.

Theo, a forensic psychotherapist who is obsessed with treating the silent Alicia, identifies her as an enigmatic specimen of rejection of traditional gender roles: "Alicia stared back at me—a blank mask—unreadable, impenetrable. I could divine neither innocence nor guilt in her expression" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 14). Her deliberate concealing of any emotions makes her almost unreadable and flouts what is expected of her. The non-conventional course of action exhibited by Alicia goes against every standard societal expectation of a woman. In the patriarchy-driven construction of gender, females are expected to put others' emotional needs before their own. This perspective aligns with the traditional view of women having innate nurturing and empathic traits. Alicia's behaviour and silence are a direct challenge to these conventional gender expectations from women as emotionally mature and transparent for the sake of others over themselves. Michaelides' narrative detects a peculiar beauty in the void left behind by her silence, stating, "There was simply silence" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 15). Her silence appears to be more unsettling and subversive than the violence she allegedly committed earlier. It threatens the conventional gender roles as it subverts their foundation. Stereotypes regarding gender-specific expectations about roles shape a society's primary substructure. Judith Butler (1990) contends that gender is constructed continuously performed, not innate to the person. These acts or 'performances' create an illusion of a stable gender identity. Alicia's silence and her retreat into seclusion not only disrupt the expectation of emotional transparency from women but also subvert the rigidity of traditional gender norms. The novel describes her norm-subverting coldness and lack of remorse throughout the trial: "She didn't cry once throughout the trial—a fact made much of in the press—her face remaining unmoved, cold. Frozen" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 15). Her resistance and refusal to comply with the societal gender norms and abstinence to displaying any emotion in this current situation challenge how traditionally femininity is constructed and performed. Her actions embody a total repudiation of the "univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system" (Butler, 1990, p. 22).

While Alicia repudiates the conservative gender binarism, Kathy Faber, Theo's wife, is an immaculate incarnation of the traditional gender roles. Kathy adheres to the stereotype of a lovely, supportive wife who prioritizes her spouse's needs over hers. Theo appreciates Kathy's unwavering subscription to the constructed gender roles: "I felt such humility and gratitude for every second we spent together. I was aware how lucky, how incredibly fortunate I was to have such love" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 47). Theo, who serves as the novel's

device for articulating the social construction of gender binaries, quickly notes the dissimilarities of the conventional Kathy and unconventional Alicia: "It's hard to imagine two women more different than Kathy and Alicia" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 47). Kathy's traditional role is rooted in her repeated behaviours about traditional norms, and therefore, it naturalizes the traditional binarism promulgated by society. Alicia, on the other hand, enacts a subversive repetition" through "possibilities of intervention [which] present the immanent possibility of contesting them" (Butler, 1990, p. 147). Alicia's actions are born out of her resentment of her father's actions after the death of her mother, which, in the long run, impacted her personal growth into an adult. Her anger turns into a rage, as seen in her repeated subversion, which contests the gender norms: The novel relates "murderous rage" to Alicia's early childhood when she suffered "abuse and mistreatment" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 36). Therefore her subversion stems from her childhood traumas which is present deep in her memory and dilates her actions. Contrastively, Kathy, serving as an emotional support system for her husband, is the epitome of love and nurturing. Alicia's use of the art of painting is an example of alternative gender performances. She employs it as her method of self-expression and justification over verbally announcing her innocence and emotions, which adds depth to her character and enhances her subversive complexity. Her use of art as a communicative tool reinforces the idea that gender identity is not fixed but continuously performed and contested.

The contrast between Kathy and Alicia mirrors the basic strands of Butler's theory. Kathy adheres to gender binarism through her set of repeated behaviours. Alicia seeks to subvert it through her set of subversive performances. While Kathy prioritizes her husband's comfort and needs over hers, Alicia's performance is more like that of her own dead husband, Gabriel, who is a central figure in the mystery surrounding her silence. Alicia has physical and violent outbursts that contrast heavily with conventional femininity: "Apparently Alicia became violent—she smashed a plate and tried to slash Elif's throat with the jagged edge" (p. 36). This aggression challenges societal gender binarism. As much as Alicia's complex character shows her violent and silent self, Kathy's submissive and supportive character highlights their differences in personality and mental stability. While Alicia is stained by her childhood trauma, a crucial aspect of the plot, Kathy is Theo's emotional bedrock. As mentioned before, he feels immense gratitude for their time together. It highlights and reinforces Kathy's nurturing and caring role in his life, embodying the conservative expectations of women as emotional anchors.

An additional standpoint comes from Alicia's role as both a victim of her circumstances and as a perpetrator of violence, which becomes the cause of her deviation from societal gender norms as the author writes: "Alicia was found alone with Gabriel's body; only her fingerprints were on the gun" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 14). The duality of her character also delineates another representation of the repudiation of gender norms, as she becomes the perpetrator after the abuse, she suffered instead of being compromising and forgiving of her abusers. At the same time, Kathy's constant repeated behaviour throughout the story strengthens her position as the perfect depiction of traditional gender roles of women in a person, without deviating off anywhere. Her loyalty is emphasized through her marriage to Theo in the text: "We were married in April, in a small registry office off Euston Square. No parents invited. And no God" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 47). This statement and her choice show her commitment to their relationship, reinforcing traditional expectations of devotion from women.

Alicia and Kathy's respective gender performances, through their repeated behaviours, present a gender identity which achieved through repeated performances instead of being innate. Li He (2017) writes: "Gender identity, its construction needs the actions of body" (p. 685). It explicates that forming a secure and stable gender identity requires repeated performance of actions. Alicia, with her 'silence,' depicts non-feminine and unconventional approaches to many life situations that many females were facing in the past and are struggling with in the present time. Alex Michaelides (2019) delineates the difference between Kathy and Alicia through Theo's point of view: "Kathy makes me think of light, warmth, color, and laughter. When I think of Alicia, I think only of depth, of darkness, of sadness" (p. 48). The symbolic representation of both in contrasting colours puts Kathy and Alicia on opposite sides of gender binarism. In the process she carries out on an individual level an "undoing of gender" (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018, p. 14). Alicia's character challenges traditional gender norms through her silence, complexity, and defiance, while Kathy embodies the caring and nurturing attributes society associates with women. This contrast in their personalities ultimately enriches the varied nature of gender performances. Alicia's norm-subverting silence aligns with the basic tenets of Butler's scholarship. By subverting the expectations associated with her gender, she establishes the notion that gender is not innate or fixed but stems from performances and contestations. Her silence and art, thus, serve as expressions of a radical disruption of binarism.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed Alicia Berenson's character in view of Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity. *The Silent Patient* (2019) is a thriller novel that uses narrative techniques to create suspense by simultaneously delineating the past and the present. It grips the readers through its psychological elements, realistic characters, and plot twist. The author's unconventional utilization and portrayal of trauma through Alicia's character present a delineation of Butler's gender performativity and the subversion of traditional gender norms that it causes. Alicia's unique response to Gabriel's murder is not only physical but also symbolic. It is the rejection of the society that failed to protect her in her childhood and its conservative gender-specific expectations. This study provides us with a comparison between the contrasting characters of Alicia Berenson and Kathy Faber that highlights the rebellious attributes present in Alicia's personality and the deviation from conventional feminine gender roles of emotional maturity, transparency, nurture, loyalty, and submission. Gender performativity challenges the traditional understandings of gender and identity. In accordance with the above analysis, we can infer that Alicia resists societal gender norms and has a performative gender identity, aligning her with Butler's theory.

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