

Psychological Concealment and Identity Formation in Michaelides' The Silent Patient and Lehane's Shutter Island

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Abstract- Modern psychological fiction tends to dig into how hidden experiences shape who people become. This study looks at how psychological concealment and identity play out in Alex Michaelides' The Silent Patient and Dennis Lehane's Shutter Island, using Freudian psychoanalysis as a lens. The focus is on how repressed memories and inner conflicts drive characters' understanding of themselves and the worlds they live in. Through close reading, the study explores how these novels tackle repression, defence mechanisms, and unconscious struggles. What stands out is that concealment isn't just about keeping secrets but it's about rebuilding identity from the inside out. Alicia Berenson's silence and Andrew Laeddis' split identity show two ways people deal with experiences they can't face. Both stories illustrate how the unconscious mind can twist self-perception and reality. By looking at these two thrillers side by side, the study shows that both authors treat identity as something fragile and shaped by what's buried inside. Overall, this research adds to literary studies by showing that psychoanalytic criticism still matters when we're trying to understand modern stories about memory, identity, and psychological survival.

Keywords: Psychological Fiction, Psychoanalysis, Identity, Repression, Memory, Unconscious

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary psychological fiction often moves beyond external conflicts to examine the hidden processes that influence human behaviour and identity. Unlike traditional narratives that primarily focus on visible actions, psychological novels explore the relationship between memory, perception, and the unconscious. They frequently represent characters whose understanding of themselves is shaped by

experiences that remain partially hidden or psychologically inaccessible.

Alex Michaelides' The Silent Patient (2019) and Dennis Lehane's Shutter Island (2003) are significant examples of this literary tendency. Although both novels are structured around mystery and investigation, their deeper concern lies in the psychological construction of identity. The central conflicts in these works emerge not only from external events but from the characters' struggles with concealed aspects of themselves.

In The Silent Patient, Alicia Berenson's refusal to speak after the murder of her husband creates the foundation of the narrative. Her silence becomes a psychological barrier that separates her inner experience from the external world. Rather than functioning only as a mystery element, Alicia's silence represents an unresolved psychological condition shaped by hidden memories and emotional conflict.

Similarly, Shutter Island presents identity as a psychologically unstable formation. Andrew Laeddis creates the identity of Teddy Daniels as a means of avoiding painful awareness of his past. His investigation of the island gradually becomes an exploration of his own fragmented consciousness. Lehane's narrative demonstrates how the mind may reconstruct reality when direct confrontation with suffering becomes impossible.

Existing studies of these novels have mainly focused on narrative techniques, unreliable narration, and psychological suspense. However, limited attention

has been given to the relationship between concealment and identity formation in both works from a comparative psychoanalytic perspective. This study addresses this gap by examining how concealed experiences influence the characters' construction of selfhood.

The research applies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concepts of repression, the unconscious, and defence mechanisms. Freud's framework is useful because both novels present characters whose actions are influenced by psychological forces beyond conscious awareness.

This study argues that psychological concealment in *The Silent Patient* and *Shutter Island* functions as an unconscious reconstruction of identity. The characters do not merely hide information; they reshape their sense of self in response to experiences that cannot be easily accepted.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse psychological concealment as a process of identity formation in the selected novels.
2. To examine the role of repression and unconscious conflict in character development.
3. To compare how Michaelides and Leane represent fragmented identity through psychoanalytic perspectives.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its research methodology. The primary texts selected for analysis are Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* (2019) and Dennis Leane's *Shutter Island* (2003). The research uses close reading to examine character construction, narrative representation, and psychological symbolism.

The analysis is guided by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Three Freudian concepts form the theoretical foundation of the study: repression, the unconscious mind, and defence mechanisms.

Repression explains the process through which painful experiences are excluded from conscious awareness but continue to influence behaviour. The concept of the unconscious helps examine how hidden psychological experiences shape identity. Defence mechanisms provide a framework for understanding how individuals protect themselves from emotional distress through psychological strategies.

The study does not attempt to diagnose fictional characters. Instead, it examines how psychological concepts are represented through literary techniques. The analysis focuses on how concealment operates within the narratives and how it influences the formation of identity.

III. FINDINGS AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Silence and the Hidden Self in *The Silent Patient*

Alicia Berenson's silence represents the central form of concealment in Michaelides' novel. Her refusal to speak transforms silence into a psychological symbol. While other characters interpret her silence as mystery or resistance, the narrative gradually reveals that it reflects a deeper conflict between memory, trauma, and self-expression.

From a Freudian perspective, Alicia's silence can be understood as a manifestation of repression. Her inability to communicate suggests that certain experiences remain beyond conscious expression. The silence does not indicate the absence of psychological content; rather, it reveals the presence of emotions and memories that have been pushed away.

Michaelides presents identity as something divided between public appearance and private experience. Alicia is known externally as a successful artist, yet her internal psychological reality remains concealed. This contrast demonstrates that identity contains hidden dimensions that cannot always be observed through external behaviour.

The novel therefore presents concealment as a protective psychological response. Alicia's silence separates her from painful awareness while

simultaneously revealing the psychological conflict beneath her external identity.

3.2 Fragmented Identity in Shutter Island

In Shutter Island, concealment operates through the creation of an alternative identity. Andrew Laeddis' transformation into Teddy Daniels represents a psychological division between reality and perception.

Unlike Alicia, who conceals through silence, Andrew conceals through reconstruction. His mind creates a version of reality that allows him to avoid direct confrontation with unbearable memories. The identity of Teddy Daniels provides a sense of purpose and control, replacing a painful self-understanding with a more acceptable one.

Freud's concept of defence mechanisms explains this psychological process. Andrew's constructed identity functions as protection from emotional collapse. However, because the identity is based on avoidance, it creates further psychological conflict.

Lehane's novel suggests that suppressed experiences cannot be permanently removed. Although Andrew creates an alternative reality, fragments of his hidden memories continue to emerge. The conflict between his constructed identity and suppressed reality becomes the central psychological tension of the novel.

3.3 Comparative Analysis: Concealment and the Construction of Identity

The comparison between *The Silent Patient* and *Shutter Island* reveals that both novels represent concealment as a psychological process connected with identity formation. Although Michaelides and Lehane employ different narrative strategies, both authors explore how individuals create protective versions of themselves when faced with experiences that challenge psychological stability.

Alicia Berenson and Andrew Laeddis demonstrate two different forms of psychological concealment. Alicia's silence represents withdrawal from communication, where hidden experiences remain inaccessible to others. Andrew's alternate identity

represents reconstruction, where the individual creates a different understanding of reality. Despite these differences, both characters experience a separation between their conscious identities and suppressed psychological experiences.

The novels also differ in their treatment of memory. In *The Silent Patient*, memory functions as a hidden influence that shapes Alicia's emotional condition and inability to communicate. In *Shutter Island*, memory becomes the central force behind Andrew's fractured identity. His inability to integrate painful memories results in the creation of an alternative self. Through these contrasting portrayals, both authors suggest that identity is not a fixed or completely conscious formation. Instead, identity develops through an interaction between remembered experiences, suppressed emotions, and unconscious psychological processes.

The significance of concealment in these novels lies in its dual function. It provides temporary psychological protection while simultaneously creating internal conflict. The characters attempt to escape painful realities, but their hidden experiences continue to shape their identities. Thus, concealment becomes both a survival mechanism and a source of psychological instability.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *The Silent Patient* and *Shutter Island* use psychological concealment as a method of exploring the complexity of human identity. Through Freud's psychoanalytic framework, both novels reveal that individuals are influenced by unconscious experiences that exist beyond immediate awareness.

The central argument emerging from this analysis is that concealment is not simply an act of hiding information. Instead, it represents an unconscious attempt to reorganize identity in response to psychological conflict. Alicia's silence and Andrew's constructed identity function as protective mechanisms that allow them to manage experiences they cannot directly confront.

This interpretation contributes to existing discussions of psychological fiction by shifting attention from the mystery of hidden information to the psychological reasons behind concealment. The important question within these narratives is not only what the characters hide, but why their minds require concealment.

Freud's concept of repression is particularly significant in understanding both characters. Repression explains how painful experiences may be excluded from conscious awareness while continuing to influence thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Alicia's silence and Andrew's divided identity demonstrate the lasting impact of suppressed experiences.

The study also highlights the relationship between memory and identity. Both novels challenge the idea that identity is completely stable by presenting characters whose sense of self changes according to their relationship with past experiences. The self is represented as a psychological construction shaped by both conscious understanding and unconscious influence.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis demonstrates how contemporary psychological fiction continues to engage with psychoanalytic concerns. Although written in different periods and narrative styles, both novels explore themes traditionally associated with psychoanalysis: repression, fragmented identity, and the struggle between reality and perception.

However, this study recognizes that psychoanalysis is one interpretive approach among many. Trauma theory, cognitive approaches, and narrative studies may provide additional perspectives on these novels. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how Freudian analysis reveals important connections between concealment and identity formation.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined psychological concealment and identity formation in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* and Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The analysis demonstrated that both novels represent concealment

as a psychological process through which individuals respond to unresolved internal conflicts.

The study found that concealment operates beyond its role as a narrative mystery device. In both novels, hidden experiences influence the characters' identities and shape their perception of reality. Alicia Berenson's silence and Andrew Laeddis' alternative identity reveal different psychological strategies for managing painful experiences.

The comparative analysis showed that both authors present identity as a complex and unstable formation influenced by memory, repression, and unconscious conflict. The characters' struggles emerge from the tension between their conscious understanding and the realities they attempt to suppress.

By applying psychoanalytic criticism to contemporary psychological fiction, this research highlights how literature represents the hidden dimensions of human experience. *The Silent Patient* and *Shutter Island* demonstrate that understanding identity requires attention not only to visible actions but also to the unconscious processes that shape human behaviour.

Ultimately, both novels suggest that concealed experiences cannot be permanently separated from identity. The process of confronting hidden aspects of the self becomes essential for psychological recognition and self-understanding.

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