

Theo's Ambitions in The Case of Gabriel's Murder in Alex Michaelides' The Silent Patient

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Theo's Ambitions in The Case of Gabriel's Murder in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses Theo Faber's ambitions in the Gabriel's murder case in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*. This study aims to describe Theo's ambitions and the triggers of Theo's ambitions. This study uses the novel, *The Silent Patient* as the source of data. In answering the problems raised in this study, the writer uses a psychological approach and Ludwig Klages' psychological theory of personality. The approach and theory serve as a guide to analyze the data and reveal the phenomena of ambitions in the novel. The extrinsic approach used is psychological approach, because the research discusses the psychological side of the characters. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The results of this study show that there are two ambitions that arise in Theo's character, to know Alicia's personality and to help Alicia deal with her case. Theo is very interested in Alicia's personality and he pays attention and finds out how Alicia's personality is. Theo, who is responsible for Alicia, wants to help Alicia, so she can talk and solve her case. There are two triggers for Theo's ambitions, feeling guilty and being a psychotherapist. Theo's feelings of guilt towards Alicia appears because of his actions in the past triggers his ambitions to take care of Alicia. Because Theo is a psychotherapist, he is very self-confident, and his work triggers his ambitions for Alicia. Even though many things have happened to Theo's ambitions, Theo still struggles to achieve his ambitions. Theo proves that he has a high desire and motivation to achieve his goal of ambitions. Theo is finally able to achieve his ambitions, which is to help Alicia to want to be willing to speak up.

Keywords: *ambitions, triggers, therapy*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ambition is a desire or motivation that is committed to getting what someone wants, such as the desire of someone who is excellent to accomplish something in his life or do something to achieve good objectives with his wants (Moputi & Husain, 2018, p. 3). The English word "ambition" is derived from the Latin word "ambire," which means "to aspire or strive." Ambitio, or "ambition" in Latin, was initially employed by Roman politicians to gain support or votes, and was defined as a corrupt technique of obtaining accolades, bribes, and convictions. However, many people felt threatened by the presence of Ambitio from Roman politicians, so they switched to the concept of ambition as a positive connotation that defines an ideal or fight that may accomplish something wonderful with their big spirits (King, 2013, pp. 14–16).

Ambition is defined as a persistent and widespread desire for achievement, attainment, and accomplishment. In other words, ambition is a driving force behind achieving a desired goal, such as ideals, position, success, or wealth, that can inspire someone to do something and be a source of vigor and great strength in overcoming various difficulties and challenges that arise in the course of achieving their goals. According to Murray (1938, p. 444), the needs associated with ambitions are connected to the requirements for accomplishment, presentation, and acknowledgment. Every

single person needs to have a goal in mind that will guide them through their existence and help them accomplish something they want.

One of the novels which talks about ambition is *The Silent Patient* written by Alex Michaelides. This novel talks about the character of Theo who has ambitions. Set in a story of love and a tragic murder, the novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides is narrated from two points of view. The first point of view is the figure of Theo Faber, a forensic psychotherapist who applies for a job at a mental hospital because of his fascination with Alicia Berenson's story and intends to help her. Meanwhile, the second point of view is from Alicia Berenson's diary, which is shown explicitly on the sidelines of the first point of view. The leading case in the novel is the murder of Alicia's husband, Gabriel Berenson. In this case, Alicia is arrested for allegedly murdering Gabriel. A psychotherapist named Theo Faber plays a role in helping Alicia, who is nicknamed the "Silent Patient" and does not want to talk since six years into the murder case of her own husband. In the end of the story, Theo Faber is the mastermind and the reason why Alicia Berenson has dared to kill the husband she loves. It turns out that Alicia's husband has an affair with Theo's wife and makes her lose control of herself at that time.

The case that occurs in the novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides is closely related to psychological problems. In this research, a psychological approach is used which is based on the theory of Ludwig Klages who puts forward his theory about the structure of human personality. In the theory, Ludwig Klages puts forward several aspects of personality, one of which is about personality structure. Ludwig Klages proposes that people have three different personality structures that may be deduced from their actions. These personality structures are referred to as 1) Temperament, 2) Feelings, and 3) Expressive Power. Of the three elements put forward by Ludwig Klages, Temperament is chosen to support the analysis of Theo's ambitions. Temperament is comprised of visible qualities that a person has, both in terms of feelings and in terms of more formal attributes. A desire to accomplish anything, for example, is one of the intangible qualities that every person has. But still, when it comes to the means by which this desire might be accomplished, there are two distinct sorts of characteristics, which can be categorised as either Sanguine or Phlegmatic. This theory is in line with the character of Theo Faber who will be the main focus in this research based on his ambitions, given that Theo is the mastermind behind the murder case of Alicia's husband, Gabriel, his patient. Then it is Ludwig Klages' theory that will be used to support the analysis of Theo Faber's ambitions.

This research will discuss about Theo's ambitions and the triggers of Theo's ambitions. In this research will provide quotations from the novel that can prove Theo's ambitions and triggers of Theo's ambitions. Ludwig Klages's Temperament personality structure is used as a foundation that will be linked to the data from the novel.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research focusing on the descriptive interpretation of a word also an activity of collecting, analyzing, developing, modifying, elaborating, and refocusing as well as identifying validity Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2009, p. 7). Psychology study is conducted by identifying the actions of the characters. The data source used in this research is the novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, which was published in 2019. The novel totals 339 pages. The data collection technique done by reading the novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, marking and noting, identifying, and classifying.

In addition this research uses an extrinsic approach to analyze the data. According to Wellek and Warren's theory of literature (1948, p. 139), the extrinsic approach explains that literary studies develop from external aspects such as psychology, societal conditions, background, and biography. The extrinsic approach is suitable to be applied because the research discusses the psychological side

of the characters. Data Analysis Procedures in this research is, revealing the main problems, interpreting Theo's ambitions and the triggers of his ambitions, analyzing Theo's ambitions, and concluding the result of the analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Theo's Ambition

Theo Faber is one of the main characters in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*. He is a skilled psychotherapist and he is willing to leave his old workplace and move to work in a small hospital called The Grove because he has high ambitions to help a patient named Alicia Berenson. With his ambitions, Theo Faber is able to do anything to carry out his plans to achieve his goals, as seen in the quotation below.

I knew then and there I'd made the right decision in coming to The Grove. All my doubts vanished. I became resolved to stop at nothing until Alicia became my patient. There was no time to waste: Alicia was lost. She was missing. And I intended to find her. (Michaelides, 2019, p. 22).

Theo Faber is a skilled psychotherapist who has been waiting for the opportunity to work with Alicia for a long time. The quotation above is a proof that Theo has the opportunity to come to The Grove and Theo is very ambitious to be able to make Alicia as his patient. Theo's meeting with Alicia is a community meeting held in a long room with tall and barred windows. In a community gathering of about thirty people, Theo sees Alicia and takes notice of her.

After Theo Faber has made it to The Grove, he eventually seeks the advice of Professor Diomedes by going to his office one day. Due to the fact that Professor Diomedes is serving in his role as Clinical Director at The Grove, Theo engages in a lengthy conversation with him. The following excerpt demonstrates that in the middle of their lengthy conversation, Theo begins asking a few questions.

"I'm curious what kind of therapeutic work is being done with her. Is she in individual therapy?"
"No."
"Is there a reason?"
"It was tried—and abandoned."
"Why was that? Who saw her? Indira?"
"No." Diomedes shook his head. "I saw Alicia myself, as a matter of fact."
"I see. What happened?" He shrugged (Michaelides, 2019, p. 25).

Theo Faber's conversation with Diomedes is shown in the above statement, in which Diomedes states that Theo questions him about Alicia. Theo's line of inquiry reveals that he is interested in learning more about Alicia Berenson and her background. Theo is curious about the kind of treatment that Alicia is receiving, the circumstances surrounding it, what had taken place, and who were providing Alicia's care.

3.1.1 To Know Alicia's Personality

Theo's first ambition is to get to know Alicia's personality. In Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*, Theo looks ambitious to get to know Alicia's personality. Theo wants to know how Alicia's

personality is and why Alicia has such a personality. This section explains how Theo knows Alicia's personality and what Theo does, as in the quotation below.

*I looked through Alicia's file without much expectation...
I flicked through Diomedes's notes, ignoring his somewhat old-fashioned psychoanalytic interpretations, and focused on the nurses' handover reports of Alicia's day-to-day behavior. I read through those reports carefully (Michaelides, 2019, p. 31).*

The quotation above demonstrates that when Theo examines Alicia's archives, Diomedes also supplies his notes to him. Driven by his ambitions, Theo starts his method of getting to know Alicia's personality by browsing through the archives that are kept on Diomedes' office desk. These archives include information on Alicia. In spite of the fact that Diomedes had provided his notes, Theo's attention is solely concentrated on matters concerning Alicia. Theo demonstrates his ambitious personality by focusing more on his aims rather than competing against Diomedes' ancient psychoanalytic interpretation notes. He does not want to compete against something old-fashioned.

When Theo focuses on reading Alicia's file, Theo notices that Alicia has a passive behavior. Alicia does not try to interact and if no one speaks to her she never starts a conversation. Theo found out the facts that happen to Alicia. According to Theo, there is an incident that interests Theo and stood out. What happens when Alicia is just starting out at The Grove is revealed, as in the quotation below.

*The file revealed little. When she was first admitted, Alicia slashed her wrists twice and self-harmed with whatever she could get her hands on...
Alicia made no effort to interact with patients or staff, remaining withdrawn and isolated, and for the most part, the other patients had left her alone" (Michaelides, 2019, p. 32).*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Theo finds little evidence of Alicia's personality from the many records in her archives. Theo has not found anything specific about Alicia's personality in the archives while reading the files. Theo's slow demeanor in finding some of the notes he needed was a patient one in reaching a goal. According to Bennett (2005, p. 189), being patient is one of the steps to fulfill someone's ambitions and desires. With patience, ambitious people can get what they want.

3.1.2 To Help Alicia to Face Her Case in The Court

Besides knowing Alicia's personality, Theo's second ambition is to help Alicia to face her case in the court. In Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*, Theo heavily participates in Alicia's case. Theo, who from the beginning wants to be able to make Alicia his patient, until Theo makes Alicia his patient. Theo has a great responsibility to care for and help Alicia. People who lack ambitions like Theo, will give up if their patient is Alicia. Theo is a different psychotherapist, even though it is not easy to face a person like Alicia, Theo never gives up, as proved in the quotation below.

In this case, there would be no talking. No listening. The information I needed would have to be gathered through nonverbal clues, such as my countertransference—the feelings Alicia engendered in me during the sessions—and whatever information I could gather from other sources. In other words, I had set into motion a plan to help Alicia without actually knowing how to execute it. Now I had to deliver, not just to prove myself to Diomedes, but, far more important, to do my duty to Alicia: to help her (Michaelides, 2019, pp. 29–30).

The evidence in the quotation above shows that Theo has difficulty treating Alicia as his patient, and that does not make him give up realizing his ambitions. According to Bennett (2005, p. 189), the hard work and patience of an ambitious person can produce the desired result. Theo really needs information that comes out directly from Alicia, but Alicia does not give any response at all during the therapy session. Theo thinks that from other sources, Theo can get additional information. With Theo's Ambitions. Theo begins to devise a plan to help Alicia. It is not easy to carry out his plan, but Theo remains firm in his belief in helping Alicia.

Theo has a therapy session for the first time since the dose of drugs on Alicia was reduced. However, everything stays the same. Alicia remains silent and is reluctant to talk when Theo asks Alicia questions. During the therapy session, Alicia's eyes keep staring at Theo's eyes which makes Theo uncomfortable with this. Fifty minutes pass, Theo and Alicia remain silent and stare at each other for a while until Theo stops the therapy session, but Theo throws words at Alicia, as seen in the quotation below.

Alicia lowered her head and stared at her lap. I hesitated. I lost control of my reserve. I lowered my voice and spoke from the heart. "I want to help you, Alicia. I need you to believe that. The truth is, I want to help you see clearly."(Michaelides, 2019, p. 64).

It is proved in the quotation that Theo is very careful in carrying out therapy sessions with Alicia. Communicating with Alicia is not easy. Theo has to be gentle and caring so Alicia can trust and start opening up to Theo. Gaining Alicia's openness and trust in Theo, Theo utters words explaining that Theo wants to help Alicia. To be able to carry out the main goal of Theo's ambitions, Theo hopes that Alicia will be able to respond to him. Theo's words are a strategy used by Theo during therapy sessions to realize his ambitions to help Alicia's case come to light.

3.2 Triggers of Theo's Ambitions

In *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, one of the main characters, Theo Faber, a psychotherapist, has the ambitions to solve a Gabriel is murder case through Alicia Berenson, who is suspected of being the perpetrator of Gabriel's murder. Starting from before entering a small hospital called The Grove, until when Theo Faber is already in The Grove and becomes Alicia's psychotherapist, Theo has strong ambitions in the Gabriel is murder case. Over time Alicia's therapist period, many factors that trigger Theo's ambitions are getting bigger every day, as explained in this quotation "*I feel she needs someone to take care of her.*" *Indira smiled at me. "And now she has someone. She has you."* (Michaelides, 2019, p. 61)." As the quotation explains, Indira supports Theo's ambitions to help Alicia. According to Bennett (2005, p. 51), people with good ambitions should be appreciated and supported because they will show energy, enthusiasm and optimism in continuing their ambitions. When Christian underestimates Theo and disagrees with his ambitions to try to make Alicia able to speak again, there are still other people like Indira who always supports and convinces Theo about what Theo is doing. Indira believes that Theo is able to care for Alicia so she can speak again, and Indira believes that Alicia needs Theo to help her. Although people who have ambitions are sometimes belittled by others, with the support of others, it can strengthen one's ambitions. Indira's words fuel Theo's even higher ambitions to continue to help Alicia during her therapy.

When Theo explains what has happened to Alicia's attack during the therapy session, and Theo also explains that Alicia's actions are not negative. Christian, who listens to Theo's ideas, actually disagrees and underestimates everything Theo says. Christian convinces Diomedes that Theo's way is all wrong and can have a bad effect on Alicia. Christian does not like everything Theo does and ignores it to the point that it seems to demean Theo, but this is different from Diomedes' response, as shown in the quotation below.

Christian's unfriendly, narrow gaze told me that there was nothing I could contribute. Diomedes, however, eyed me more thoughtfully. "It hasn't put you off, Theo, what happened?" I shook my head. "On the contrary, I'm encouraged."(Michaelides, 2019, p. 68).

Based on the above quotation, the incident of Alicia attacking Theo and several people disagreeing with Theo's actions do not make Theo's ambitions become less. Diomedes, who convinces Theo whether Theo is capable of continuing therapy with Alicia, becomes one of the triggers for Theo's ambitions. Being belittled, blamed, rejected, and challenged makes Theo's ambitions grow. Theo is increasingly enthusiastic and curious about Alicia's other reactions after reducing the dose of the drug Theo suggests. There is nothing to be afraid of for Theo because he believes that he can. According to Bennett (2005, p. 186), people who have ambitions have a very high sense of enthusiasm, so no matter what happens, people who experience difficulties will still be passionate about achieving their desires.

3.2.1 Feeling Guilty

Theo's first trigger for ambitions is to feeling guilty for Alicia. Theo's ambitions for Alicia in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* increases because there is a trigger. Theo, who is responsible for taking care of Alicia, does not want to stop caring for Alicia because Theo feels guilty for Alicia. This section explains that Theo's trigger for ambitions is feeling guilty towards Alicia. What Theo feels, can be seen in the quotation below.

I didn't reply. Yuri gave me a funny look and left. I was alone. Idiot, I thought to myself. You idiot. What was I doing? I'd pushed her too far, too hard, too soon. It was horribly unprofessional, not to mention totally fucking inept. It revealed far more about my state of mind than hers (Michaelides, 2019, pp. 79–80).

The quotation above shows that Theo talks to himself and feels guilty. Theo feels guilty because he corners Alicia too much in the therapy session. Because Theo gets carried away, he becomes out of control with the statements and questions that are asked of Alicia. With a passionate feeling, Theo immediately shoots a sensitive question at Alicia, and it causes a significant reaction from Alicia. It is because of this feeling of guilt that triggers Theo's ambitions to be more careful in subsequent therapy and not to be too harsh in giving questions or statements to Alicia. This feeling of guilt does not make Theo stop being ambitious for Alicia. Instead, Theo understands better how to deal with Alicia next.

When it is raining heavily at noon, Theo is waiting for Alicia in the therapy room. Not long after, Yuri brings Alicia into the therapy room. Theo pays attention to Alicia's condition, and her condition is apprehensive because Christian has fed her too many drugs. Alicia looks like she is losing

her mind. Alicia sits opposite Theo, but Alicia still does not show any reaction until Theo finally speaks, as proven in the quote below.

*Eventually I spoke. Loudly and clearly, to make sure she understood.
"Alicia. I'm sorry you were put in seclusion. I'm sorry you had to go through that." ...
She held out her trembling hand toward me. She was clutching something—a small
leatherbound notebook. ...
I opened it and thumbed through the pages. It was a handwritten diary, a journal.
(Michaelides, 2019, pp. 179–180).*

The quotation above proves that Theo says to Alicia that he feels guilty for Alicia because his efforts to continue to help Alicia are stopped by Diomedes due to the incident when Alicia attacks Elif because she provoked by Elif. Theo feels guilty because he could not take care of Alicia at that time, which results in Alicia having to be locked up and given high doses of drugs again. However, suddenly Alicia has a reaction beyond Theo's expectations. Alicia gives Theo her diary out of the blue. Alicia's behaviour makes Theo's enthusiasm and ambitions return because Alicia begins to show an open attitude toward Theo. Because of this, Theo is ambitious to continue the therapy sessions without Diomedes's knowing. According to Pettigrove (2007, p. 57), people with high ambitions are afraid that they will fail, and they will feel that their ambitions are not being fulfilled. Therefore, they will still carry out their ambitions if they have the chance.

3.2.2 Being a Psychotherapist

The second trigger for Theo's ambitions is being a psychotherapist. In Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*, Theo becomes even more ambitious because of a trigger. Theo, who is responsible for caring for Alicia, feels capable because Theo works as a psychotherapist. This section explains how the trigger for Theo's ambitions is Theo's confidence as a psychotherapist in dealing with Alicia's problems, as proved in the quotation below.

*As a psychotherapist, I thought it obvious that she had suffered a severe trauma
surrounding Gabriel's death; and this silence was a manifestation of that trauma. ...
Without wishing to sound boastful, I felt uniquely qualified to help Alicia Berenson. I'm a
forensic psychotherapist and used to working with some of the most damaged, vulnerable
members of society. And something about Alicia's story resonated with me personally—I
felt a profound empathy with her right from the start (Michaelides, 2019, p. 8).*

The above quotation proves that Theo feels he can handle Alicia because he is a psychotherapist. According to Pettigrove (2007, p. 56), for a desire to be considered as ambitions, a person must have the ability to make it happen. By becoming a psychotherapist, Theo is able to analyze Alicia, and he feels that he knows the suffering Alicia is experiencing. Theo's feeling as a psychotherapist who is pretty qualified and used to working as a psychotherapist triggers his ambitions towards Alicia. Even before Alicia becomes Theo's patient, Theo already knows Alicia's shortcomings.

When Theo visits Diomedes, Theo tells Diomedes that Alicia needs to lower her medication. Theo says that if Alicia does not lower the dose of her medication, it will be very difficult to reveal her feelings. Diomedes is unsure about Theo's statement, but Diomedes realizes that the dose of Alicia's drug is very high. Diomedes suggests Theo to speak directly to Christian, who is the head of

Alicia's care team. Even though it is not easy for Theo to talk to Christian, Theo is still ambitious and asks Diomedes for help. Finally, Diomedes warns there are risks if he lowers the dose of Alicia's medicine, as explained in the quotation below.

Diomedes wagged his finger at me. "Don't forget she was highly suicidal when we first brought her here. She made numerous attempts to end her life. And the medication keeps her stable. It keeps her alive. If we lower the dose, there's every chance she will be overwhelmed by her feelings and be unable to cope. Are you prepared to take that risk?" I took what Diomedes said seriously. But I nodded. "It's a risk I believe we need to take, Professor. Otherwise we'll never reach her."(Michaelides, 2019, p. 56).

The quotation above shows that Diomedes warns Theo about Alicia's shortcomings. Diomedes explains in detail to Theo the impact that will occur if lowering the dose of Alicia's medication, and Diomedes questions Theo's readiness to take the risk. Theo, who hears Diomedes' words thinks that this is the trigger for his ambitions because Theo has already understood the work of a psychotherapist, but Diomedes questions him. Diomedes's words make him not give up on achieving his ambitions. Since Theo is a psychotherapist, he feels confident about his actions. Theo knows very well that if Alicia's medication dosage is not reduced, it will be difficult for him to carry out his ambitions.

4. CONCLUSION

In *The Silent Patient*, the writer finds that Theo has ambitions that are caused by some triggers. There are two kinds of ambitions Theo has; to know Alicia's personality and to help Alicia to face her case in the court. Eventually, Theo Faber succeeds in carrying out his ambitions as an ambitious psychotherapist working on treating his patient, Alicia Berenson. Theo manages to get Alicia to speak after Theo's many attempts. The result of Theo's ambitions is that finally Alicia is willing to speak. Theo is instrumental in Alicia's healing, and when Alicia manages to speak, Theo is satisfied with his achievement.

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