

Silent Patient Discussion Questions

by Alex Michaelides

Author Bio: (from *Fantastic Fiction & Macmillian*)

Alex Michaelides was born and raised in Cyprus. He has an M.A. in English Literature from Trinity College, Cambridge University, and an M.A. in Screenwriting from the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. He wrote the film *The Devil You Know* and co-wrote *The Brits are Coming*.



The Silent Patient was his first novel. It spent more than a year on the New York Times bestseller list and sold in a record-breaking fifty countries. He lives in London.

Characters:

- **Alicia (Rose) Berenson** – (39) – Artist. Painter. Husband was Gabriel. She shot and killed him 6 years ago (when she was 33). She has not said a word since his death. “Alcetis” was the painting she made after he was killed. Alicia was institutionalized at the Grove after her husband’s murder. Has had mental health problems since childhood. Mother died in a car crash (possible suicide) when Alicia was small. Alicia was in the car. Father, Vernon, killed himself years later (hanged).
- **Theo Faber** – (42) – Psychotherapist at the Grove. Had an abusive father. Went to therapy himself while in college with a woman named Ruth which saved his life. Wife is Kathy, an actress.
- **Alcetis** – Greek myth. Alcestis sacrifices her life for that of her husband, Admetus, by dying in his place. Myth of self-sacrifice. She is returned/rescued from Hades, but never speaks again.
- **Gabriel Berenson** – (44) – Artist. Photographer. Was married to Alicia for 7 years. Alicia killed him.
- **Max Berenson** – Alicia’s lawyer. Gabriel Berenson’s brother. Married to his receptionist, Tanya.
- **Stephanie Clark** – Manager of the Grove.
- **Lazarus Diomedes** – Professor of forensic psychiatry at Imperial College & Clinical director of the Grove, a secure forensic unit in London. Known for unorthodox therapies. Prefers group therapy. Music is his passion.
- **Kathy Faber** – Theo’s wife, an actress. She has dual citizenship, British & American, but acts more American.
- **Rowena Hart** – Alicia’s art therapist at the Grove.
- **Barbie Hellman** – Alicia’s Neighbor. Heard the gunshots the night of the murder. American.
- **Jean-Felix Martin** – Managed a Soho gallery which carried Alicia’s works. Knew Alicia from art school.

- **Lydia Rose** – Alicia’s aunt. Raised Alicia after her mother’s death in a car accident.
- **Paul Rose** – Alicia’s cousin & Lydia Rose’s son. Grew up with Alicia after her mother’s death. Gambling problem. Still lives with his mother in the house he and Alicia grew up in.
- **Indira Sharma** – Consultant psychotherapist at the Grove.
- **Christian West** – Psychiatrist at the Grove. Married with a daughter. Theo does not like him. Knew Alicia before the murder. He was an old friend of Gabriel’s. Did not testify at the murder trial.
- **Yuri** – Head psychiatric nurse at the Grove.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This story is told by using pieces of Alicia’s diary and also through narration by Theo, with both past and present intertwining. Did having the two timelines work or did you find it confusing? Why or why not?
3. The story begins with the revelation that Alicia murdered her husband. Why do you think the author made this admission at the very start?
4. How would you describe Alicia Berenson and the life she has led up to the time she kills her husband? What was your initial sense of why Alicia refused to speak?
5. Alicia’s diary plays a key role in the book. What purpose do you think it serves? And does your perception of Alicia change the more you read?
6. Alicia’s silence is related to the Greek myth of Alcestis. Why do you think the author included this reference to Greek mythology, and what does it add to your experience of the story? How do you feel about the story of the myth?
7. Theo’s motives for working with Alicia are complicated. Do you think he wanted to help her? Or did he want something else?
8. Both Alicia and Theo had difficult childhoods. Early on, Theo says no one is born evil. That who we become depends on the environment into which we are born. By the end of the novel he appears to change his mind, saying that perhaps some of us are born evil, and, despite therapy, we remain that way. Which do you think is true? Why?
9. Do you think the world of a psychiatric unit was convincingly portrayed? How do you feel about Diomedes and the other psychiatrists?
10. The author once took a post-grad course in psychotherapy and subsequently spent a couple of years working part-time in a psychiatric unit like the Grove. What does Michaelides mean when, in 2018, he said in an interview with the Bookseller...“I saw how the world of psychotherapy might be the perfect modern setting to reimagine [Alcestis] story and explore its themes of death, guilt and silence.”

11. This book plays with the idea of trustworthiness, with characters seeming reliable one moment and unreliable the next. What were the elements that made you trust certain characters or not?
12. How did you feel about the dynamic between Theo and Alicia and between Theo and Ruth as therapist and patient? What lines should or shouldn't be crossed in these relationship? What power dynamics are at play here?
13. We never enter Kathy's mind in the book. Do you have any sympathy for her?
14. How did you feel about Theo and Kathy's marriage? What are your thoughts on how their relationship is resolved?
15. What do you think of Theo, initially, as he begins to work with Alicia? What do you come to understand about him, and his motivation, as the book unfolds? In what way does your view of Theo change?
16. Were you shocked by the big reveal at the end? Or did you see it coming? When did you figure out the twist and what were the clues that led you there?
17. What do you think happens at the end of the book? The last line is ambiguous.
18. Who do you think is to blame for Gabriel's death?
19. Michaelides has written another book, "The Maidens." Will you read it?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/m/alex-michaelides/>
- Lit Lovers – <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11466-silent-patient-michaelides?start=3>
- MacMillan – <https://us.macmillan.com/author/alexmichaelides>
- Novelist – <https://web-b-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=4&sid=769a4d52-b34c-493c-8061-72b3d3bcf2c8%40sessionmgr101&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10755027&db=neh>

Alex Michaelides' Books

Novels

- The Silent Patient (2019)
- The Maidens (2021)

If you liked Silent Patient, try...

- Sometimes I Lie – Alice Feeney
- The Blind – A.F. Brady
- The Patient – Jasper Dewitt
- The Second Sister – Claire Kendal
- Before She Knew Him – Peter Swanson