

Summer 7-7-2022

## Final Master's Portfolio

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FINAL MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling  
Green State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English,

Individualized Track

July 5, 2022

Dr. Chad Duffy, Portfolio Advisor

Table of Contents

Analytical Narrative..... 3

Proposal: Building Contextually-Reflective Thinking for Successful Postsecondary Writing  
(Research and Analysis) ..... 8

Flips through Foucault: The Reversal of the Therapist-Patient Relationship in Michaelides' *The  
Silent Patient*..... 23

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5 July 2022

### Analytical Narrative

I started the coursework for this degree during the summer semester of 2019. At the time, I had just finished my first year of teaching English at a small rural high school. While I was uncertain if I would stay at that school for much more of my career, I applied to Bowling Green State University (BGSU) with the intention of being able to teach college courses often offered at high schools, such as First Year Composition or Introduction to Literary Studies. Wanting the flexibility of varying areas of study, and unsure of my ultimate career goals, I pursued the individualized track. Such a move made logical sense; I had an aptitude for learning that I had cultivated since before my undergraduate studies and earning the degree early in my career could open opportunities for advancement later.

Looking back, these beginnings seem distant and nearly naive; I truly had no concept of the changes that would come my way. Since then, I have taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts to students several grade levels behind benchmark expectations; I have taught in fully remote, hybrid, and in-person contexts; and now, I have left the teaching profession entirely. Such changes have forced much reflection pertaining to the pursuit of this degree along the way: why continue to commit the time and energy needed to the coursework, when many of my original goals and intentions are no longer applicable to my professional context? The answer, I found, was in the personal and professional advantages that an education from BGSU, regardless of my teaching context, could provide.

Courses such as the Composition Instructor's Workshop, Introduction to Literary Studies, Graduate Writing, and Teaching of Writing provided opportunities to research and apply practical teaching strategies to my then classroom. These courses taught me to see writing as an ongoing, recursive process to which there was no singular right answer or end. By exploring the process of writing through this lens, the importance of reflection was reinforced for me. I was able to try these strategies within my own writing work, and with my students' writing. I was amazed when my students began to successfully identify the purpose, task, and audience of an assignment without prompting; they knew that doing so would help them be successful throughout the writing process. This growth for me, however, was not easy. It required many hours of gathering sources, reading, critically thinking, responding, drafting, revising, and editing for consistency and clarity. With each assignment, however, I continuously bettered myself as a clearer communicator of complex thoughts. This instilled confidence in me; I could do difficult research. I could synthesize multiple sources and curate an original, thoughtful contribution to the ongoing academic conversations. Seeing these intellectual challenges be met with success was a great accomplishment in the midst of otherwise trying times.

With the flexibility that the individualized track provides, I was able to also explore my interests in literature and professional and technical writing. The literature courses such as *Women in the Domestic Thriller* and *British Domestic Noir: The Psychological Thriller at Home and Abroad* pushed me to think critically. When responding to texts, I had a greater appreciation for the complexity of literature, the moral truths they can reveal, and the modern societal issues to which they draw attention. My success in the Professional and Technical Writing and Research and Resources in Professional and Technical Writing Courses encouraged me to explore other career opportunities. As with much of the world, the past several years caused

many large changes in my life. My education through BGSU has been consistent during these times and has enabled me to make the most of my changes, serving as an advantage in personal and professional contexts. The pieces that I have included in this portfolio are the best examples of my dedication to the time and hard work for the coursework of this degree.

The first piece, “Proposal: Building Contextually-Reflective Thinking for Successful Postsecondary Writing,” came from the Graduate Writing course with Dr. Jordan. This is a reflection of the substantive research I regularly produced throughout the coursework of this degree. From the time I was in high school, I have always handwritten assignments before typing them for submission. I have always preferred to read physical copies of books or articles rather than their digital counterparts. I also knew that students who were leaving high school were doing so unprepared for their postsecondary education paths. I have a passion for finding and practicing strategies that can realistically help students successfully make the transition to postsecondary education. When tasked with addressing a gap in research related to writing, these personal experiences became the inspiration for investigating the differences between digital and physical literacy practices, and the differences between secondary and postsecondary expectations.

During my research, I recognized a pattern emerging: professors from the postsecondary space were lamenting students’ unpreparedness for contextual-reflective writing. In addition, learning about the differences between digital and physical literacy practices revealed a prime opportunity for students to practice contextual-reflective thinking. In knowing the different advantages that each mode of reading and writing can provide, students can make purposeful choices about their methods of research and writing. When accompanied with explicit reflection as to the students’ reasoning for their choices, students can practice the type of thinking needed for contextual-reflective writing in postsecondary education. The proposed study, coming from

personal experience with embodied literacy, and with students struggling with the transition to postsecondary success, advocates for a case study in which students' writing success is measured in comparison to their exposure to practical teaching strategies that engage contextual-reflective practices.

When I first wrote this piece, I was inexperienced in writing academic research proposals, particularly with the literature review. While I understood the purpose of a literature review is to effectively contextualize the new argument being developed, I did so through listing authors and their contributions. Using Dr. Jordan's and other peers' feedback, I reframed the literature review to better reflect the ideas that were relevant to the new research I was proposing. Adding specific examples of what contextual-reflective writing might look like, and the considerations that students would have to make, tightened the context of the literature review. The revised piece better reframed the different components of research and connected them in a more cohesive manner.

The second piece, "Flips through Foucault: The Reversal of the Therapist-Patient Relationship in Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*," was developed during the Women in the Domestic Thriller course. The recent expansion of the psychological thriller genre has been a dark, but exciting twist on the larger crime fiction label. As a lover of Golden Age mystery writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, these modern works are pleasurable, while also posing challenging, intellectual questions. The unstable psychological underpinnings of seemingly casual, everyday people draw attention to the nature of power dynamics at work in daily society. This piece was one of my favorite pieces to write, not only because of my interest in this type of literature, but because I am proud of the structure and the level of detail I was able to include. While some of the paragraphs are longer, each builds an individual, critical part of the

argument. Whereas some of my other work has focused primarily on my individual interpretation of a piece, this one couples that with the work of a known literary theorist, Michel Foucault. Putting modern works in conversation with his ideas of power and therapy proved a rewarding intellectual challenge. It is the best representation of my skills in analyzing literature in the modern context.

Without much feedback from the original instructor, I relied on peer feedback for revision. While the structure was strong from the original version, I realized that for this length of paper, the structure could easily get lost in the midst of other details. Focusing on making the structure explicit for the reader, I added headers at key shifts in the argument to enhance the tight argument already present. This reflects a large amount of growth from when I began this program. Before, I was unsure of the tools available to me and the need for me to guide the reader as best I can. Now, when writing, I regularly use headers, connecting phrases, and repetition of key words to signal and guide the reader through the development of ideas. Another area of revision for this paper was adding context to the academic sources used. Before, I viewed outside sources as those that can be sprinkled in to support what I was already proving. Now, I see the body of research already present as the starting point for my understanding, and how these sources can be used to shape the argument and enhance the reader's understanding of it.

My time completing the coursework for the Master of Arts degree in English has been one of growth and rewarding intellectual challenge. I am reinvigorated in my passion for literature and the ability of reading and writing to change mine and other's experiences in the world. While my professional goals have dramatically changed, this degree will continue to be a symbol of my dedication to quality work within the field of English, the critical thinking that will be useful in any context, and the societal truths that studying literature can reveal.



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Proposal: Building Contextually-Reflective Thinking for Successful Postsecondary Writing

## **Introduction**

At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, 3 million students graduated from United States high schools. Of these students, 69%, or 2.1 million students, would enroll in some postsecondary education program by the following October (“Immediate College Enrollment Rate” 1). Despite the large number of students making this transition, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that only 37% of all graduating seniors of the same year were labeled “proficient” or above in reading, a foundational skill for postsecondary success (“Reading Progress” 2). The large discrepancy between the number of students enrolling in postsecondary programs and those academically prepared to do so is concerning for educators on both sides of the secondary divide.

In an attempt to address the apparent gap in college-readiness for secondary students, the specific literacy skills that students were lacking needed to be identified so they could be targeted and strengthened at the secondary level. Professors expect students to read deeply and respond critically, creating an overarching call for students to be able to reflect the nuanced contexts of what they read and write in their assignments. To successfully accomplish this, students need to understand their audience, their purpose in writing, and their own contexts of writing and to reflect these considerations in their final product. This multi-layered understanding of how students are expected to respond at the postsecondary level needs to begin

to be addressed at the secondary level, promoting a smoother transition or greater success in the transition to future learning.

Due to the increase in technology access in schools across the nation, there is a natural space for students and teachers to practice contextually-reflective responding, while also addressing some of the overarching literacy concerns that students and educators carry. Rather than completing assignments in a given mode simply because “the teacher said to do it this way,” students could choose how they embody their literacy practices. For example, a typical assignment in high school might be a persuasive research-based essay about a relevant, divisive issue in today’s society. Teachers might require students to handwrite notes from their digital sources, create an outline that they will use to guide their writing, submit a rough draft, and then type and submit a digital final copy of the essay for grading. These are not bad steps to take, however, they do not require the student to think about why or how they should complete these steps other than it is required by the teacher. To build contextually-reflective thinking, students would be given the same assignment, but they would reflect on the purpose, task, and audience of their writing. Then, they would choose whether they should read their research as printed material or as digital material, whether they should take notes by hand or digitally, and if they should draft by hand or digitally, based on the purpose that each step serves in effectively reaching their purpose, task, and audience of the assignment. Putting the choice back into the students’ hands for an assignment, rather than only following the specific guidelines and modes that the teacher requires allows for greater reflection and purposeful accomplishment of writing tasks. This matching of context to audience or purpose is the beginning work of contextually-reflective responses expected at the postsecondary level. However, students cannot be expected

to master this skill immediately. As a result, to scaffold this kind of thinking, students would need to be taught self-regulation and self-reflective practices.

The “how” of teaching this way has yet to be explicitly explored. Though much research exists separately about the purpose or function of each mode of literacy and the current expectations of the postsecondary institutions, current studies often lack a pedagogical basis that would point towards explicit practices in the secondary classroom for the purpose of transitioning to postsecondary education. Doing so could encourage and enable practical contextually-reflective thinking for their writing assignments at the secondary level so that students would be better prepared for their postsecondary education paths. I propose a case-study that measures the effectiveness of explicitly teaching reflection practices in the area of embodied literacy to secondary students as a way to prepare them for the expectations of contextual writing and enable a smoother transition to post-secondary education.

### **Literature Review**

In order to assist students in their preparation for postsecondary education, one has to know the expectations of these higher education institutions first. What is it that postsecondary education institutions want students to be able to do when they enter the program? Stephen Aker and Kay Halasek began to answer this question in their article “Preparing High School Students for College-Level Writing: Using ePortfolio to Support a Successful Transition” when they had high school students submit written work to a digital portfolio and received feedback from both secondary and postsecondary educators to show the differences in writing expectations at each level (2). Aker and Halasek found that secondary teachers tended to see writing as fulfilling a basic structural formula that was applicable to all types of writing. However, postsecondary educators emphasized the context and specific choices related to the writer’s audience and

purpose when responding to the submitted work (Aker and Halasek 7). This call for contextually-responsive writing at the postsecondary level indicates one major area of discrepancy from the secondary level writing focus.

The same call for contextual writing is found across several researchers in this area. Susan Beck, in her article "Composition Across Secondary and Post-Secondary Contexts: Cognitive, Textual and Social Dimensions," calls for students in K-12 education to be "taught the convention of different discourses in ways that acknowledge the social contexts of these discourses, and how the appropriateness of a discourse varies depending on context" (323). Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle reimagine First Year Composition courses in their article "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies'" as one where "students are taught that writing is conventional and context-specific rather than governed by universal rules" (559). The overwhelming call for contextually-reflective responses from students at the postsecondary level guides the proposed instructional practices of this research and serves as the measurable, attainable goal for student improvement while in their secondary preparation.

The secondary level must then make a place for this contextually-reflective way of thinking and writing in order for students to make the successful transition to post-secondary education. For this to practically happen, the context of secondary education is taken into consideration. As the 2017 National Educational Technology Plan Updates notes, since 2010, "the conversation has shifted from whether technology should be used in learning to how it can improve learning to ensure that all students have access to high-quality educational experiences" (7). Technology and personal devices have nearly become a given in the classroom, though to varying extents and uses. Students are then presented with a choice. Should they take notes by

hand or by typing them during class? Should they read their materials digitally, or print them so they can physically annotate them? Should they hand write an outline for an essay and then type their draft? These questions, which each pertain to the potential use of technology as part of their context, create opportunities for students to reflect on the context that will influence their writing. Thus, present in the secondary classroom is an organic dual-context from which students can make rhetorical choices and practice the contextually-responsive thinking expected at the postsecondary level.

Despite the growing number of students with access to technology, and thus dual-contextual spaces, the way technology is currently implemented does not often lend itself to the contextual-reflective thinking for which postsecondary schools are calling. In relation to current technological practices in education, the Office of Educational Technology found that as of 2017, “a digital divide separates many students who use technology in ways that transform their learning from those who use the tools to complete the same activities but now with a digital device (e.g. digital worksheets, online multiple-choice tests)” (7). As a result, students do not reflect or effectively understand the fact that different modes of learning are context-specific and may lead to varying successful outcomes of learning, depending on the purpose of the reading. They tend to complete assignments in the way or format that the teacher instructed without much thought as to the reason behind their actions.

Knowing that technology is an effective and natural area for students to begin practicing contextually-reflective thinking or responses, it must be applied to a specific skill set. For the purposes of this study, only the contexts of literacy, as applied to reading and writing, will be used to measure students’ progress towards a smoother transition to postsecondary education. Knowing that students are going to be expected to write in a contextually-reflective way in their

postsecondary education, they can begin to practice this type of thinking in their secondary classrooms that contain the dual-context of physical and digital reading and writing tasks. Each of these modes of reading and writing require students to make choices about how they choose to engage in their own learning. Carolyne King explains Abby Knoblauch's term "embodied rhetoric" as a way to describe the ways students always choose to enact the processes of meaning making of the world and other texts through their physical actions and contexts (96). Blewett, Morris, and Rule note this same fundamental belief that "reading and writing processes are fully environmentally contingent" (25). The awareness of these contexts allows students to make cognitive choices that align their contexts to their purposes in engaging in literacy practices and completing literacy tasks. Blewett, Morris, and Rule continue to extrapolate on the idea that reading and writing practices are always dependent on contextual factors: "through our purposeful attention to where reading and writing happens, we can better position our students to hone their composing environments responsively in order to create optimal outcomes" (25). While their research focused on the room or other environmental factors in which the practices of literacy were occurring, they lack the specific goal of transitioning these meta-analysis skills to the postsecondary expectations. Combining the ideas of Carolyne King, Abby Knoblauch, and Blewett et. al., I will use the term "embodied literacy" to describe the ways in which students choose specific contexts (print or digital) in order to practice and improve their literacy skills of reading and writing.

To effectively put this use of contextually-reflective responses into practical application of embodied literacy, the limitations and purposes of each context should be considered. For the embodiment of reading, both teachers and students should be aware that Lauren Singer and Patricia A. Alexander found that "when longer texts are involved or when the individuals are

reading for depth of understanding and not solely for gist, print appears to be the more effective processing medium” (1033). This is not to say that digitally reading is always wrong. As Theresa Schilhab notes, deep-reading on a screen is possible if one uses “concrete memorizing procedures” such as consciously generating key words. Short texts, as a result, that are read to get a cursory understanding of a topic (a definition of an unknown word, a specific fact or piece of information, or other Google-search-worthy texts) may lend itself well to digital reading due to its context and practical functions.

The different contexts and effects of digital or print reading was confirmed by Gemma Walsh in her study “Screen and Paper Reading Research - A Literature Review.” Walsh suggests that “reading complex, lengthy paper documents may aid contextual analysis and a deeper sense of learning” (171). While affirming the earlier research done in this area, she also posits the reason for such differences between the different embodiments of reading may be because the current electronic documents do not effectively use its own tools that separate it from being a paper document (171). Similar to the digital divide identified earlier, the use of technology for its full, original purpose instead of as a substitute to an already existing meaning-making process seems to be the best use of resources and contexts.

The contexts of embodied writing have similar clear distinctions of purpose and function to the differences between print and digital reading. Mueller and Oppenheimer’s 3 studies found that when taking notes, “laptop use facilitates verbatim transcription of lecture content because most students can type faster than they can write. Thus, typing may impair the encoding benefits seen in past note-taking studies” (1160). If one’s purpose in writing is to understand and process content at a deep level, using a device to do so would be a mismatch of embodiment and purpose. Writing or drafting digitally is best suited to documents that are being edited

continuously or shared with others. As Anne Mangen states, in “Modes of Writing in a Digital Age: The Good, the Bad and the Unknown,” “The endless malleability of a digitized text ensures that it can be smoothly revised and edited, at local as well as global levels.” Each mode has its strengths and when informed of these contexts, students are able to make the best contextually-reflective choice for their learning.

With these contexts in mind, practical teaching methods can be posited to aid in the preparation of students for their postsecondary educational careers. While students should be taught the limitations and strengths of each mode of embodied literacy, they must also be taught how to go through the decision making process. As a result, self-regulatory practices are needed as the skill set to enable the progress toward college readiness. Identified by Cecilia Le and Rebecca E. Wolfe as a “metacognitive [skill] or 21st-century [skill], self-regulation is “just as necessary for academic and career success and a rich civic life” (33). Le and Wolfe show how Portland YouthBuilders teach self-regulation by asking students to “cite specific instances when they notified people in advance that they would be late or prioritized their schedule in order to turn in assignments on time” (35). The continual act of reflection and use of reflection as evidence for a decision or behavior mimics the thinking process required of contextually-reflective writing expected at the secondary level.

Beyond the importance of reflection, Ron Duggins specifically suggests the use of P.O.I.N.T. to enhance meta-awareness of context while embodying literacy. The process of explicitly thinking through one’s perception, observations, integrations of information, new information processed, and the tactic of future action as a result of this reflection directly connects to the process of reflecting on one’s context and making a response explicitly informed



by this reflection (70). The structure of this strategy provides a concrete, practical way for teachers to begin this implementation at the secondary level.

Rather than refuting or countering this research, the case study I propose combines the various areas of research discussed: expectations of postsecondary education, the practical contexts of the secondary classroom, the contexts and strengths of different embodied literacies, and the use of self-regulation strategies to enable students to make contextually-reflective decisions and reflections. Doing so would enable a smoother transition to postsecondary expectations and would better prepare students at the secondary level for their futures.

### **Proposal**

The case study that I propose seeks to answer this question: How does the teaching of self-reflective strategies to secondary students about their embodied literacy choices assist in their transition to postsecondary expectations of contextually-reflective writing? A case study is an effective method, as it puts theory to the test of reality. With the goal being to find ways to help students make a large transition, if these practices do not work in reality, they are not achieving the goal and another study would need to be done.

Participants of this study would be a control group of graduating seniors who have not received self-reflective strategy instruction. The participating seniors should be college-minded, but academically under-prepared, as measured by teachers' perceptions, classroom grades, and achievement on standardized testing scores. In addition, the experimental group would be of the same demographics, but would receive the self-reflective strategy instruction. Note will be made of the specific demographics of each group, such as the desire to go to a postsecondary institution, the history of academic achievement, the types of institutions each group attends, and the history of those institutions' respective enrollment and retention rates. These factors need to

be considered in order to tell if there is a noticeable difference in students' preparation for postsecondary demands as a direct result of the reflective strategy instruction.

During the experimental groups' senior year, the teachers would first explicitly teach students the contexts and limitations of reading physical texts, reading digital texts, writing by hand, and digitally writing (Blewett et al. 25; Singer and Alexander 1033; Mueller and Oppenheimer 1160). Comprehension checks in the form of recall, multiple choice, true-false questions, or short answers will be used to first ensure students' understanding of this information; information that is not understood cannot effectively be used in decision-making processes. Once this knowledge is understood, teachers would continuously provide students with the choice to read or write in print or digital modes.

From this point on in class, students attempt to answer three key questions:

1. What is the goal in accomplishing this task or reading?
2. Who is the audience?
3. What tools and resources do I have to best accomplish this?

In order to structure student's reflection, Duggin's P.O.I.N.T. structure would be used (70). As a modification of Duggins model, P would become "Purpose" rather than "Perspective" in order to allow students to become explicitly aware of the goal of the assignment or reading. Students would then make the choice that matches their context with their goals of embodied literacy (Le and Wolfe 35). Students and teachers would work together to track the number of times teachers give the choice of literacy modes, students' reflections and consequent decisions, and finally the results of students' success in using that form of embodied literacy to accomplish their articulated goal. This would give the necessary data for tracking the extent to which the teaching

practices were used and the extent to which students took the decision seriously as well as their results on their immediate learning.

Both groups of graduating seniors would then be contacted again following the completion of their first semester of postsecondary education. Students would be asked to reflect on the practices they experienced in the secondary setting and to rate their level of preparation for postsecondary demands (Le and Wolfe 33). Professors would be contacted to get qualitative data as to students' level of preparation for their expectations. In addition, data would be collected as to if and why students choose not to continue their postsecondary education following the first semester. Finally, students' achievement grades following their first semester would be recorded to have some quantitative evidence as to objective levels of preparation based on the postsecondary evaluation of academic success.

This information would be brought together and examined for any patterns or trends relating to students' awareness of embodied literacy practices and the expectation of contextually-reflective writing as they transitioned to postsecondary education. This method of teaching would be compared to other concurrent practices of preparing students for postsecondary expectations to evaluate its effectiveness relative to other potential practices. I hypothesize that the explicit teaching and use of reflective strategies in the secondary classroom in regards to embodied literacy practices will better prepare students for their likely upcoming postsecondary transition; they will have been exposed to this type of critical thinking about context previously and would be more likely to transfer this skill to the new context. These results will give continued information as to what secondary teachers can do to assist in the transition of students to postsecondary expectations, always working towards doing what is best for students' practical futures.

## **Discussion**

This proposed study would attempt to assist students in making their transition to postsecondary education through the teaching of reflective strategies in relation to students' embodied literacy choices. As the growing body of research shows a gap between secondary and postsecondary literacy skill expectations, studies that begin to bridge this gap attempt to better align the goals and practices of students' continual educational experiences (Aker and Halasek 7; Beck 323; Downs and Wardle 559). As this study would require the participation of both sides of the secondary divide, it could also serve as a way to open communication between these two contexts for future concerns and research. This study would combine several robust areas of research, confirming much of the past work completed. Utilizing this information with an explicit pedagogical bent and goal of transitioning to post secondary contexts adds to the field in an innovative and practical way to enact meaningful change in students' learning.

While this study attempts to control many aspects, its design inevitably creates contextual limitations. The results of the study could be skewed by the extent of implementation and fidelity to reflection-strategies used in the secondary setting. Further, the collection of qualitative data is over a year's time and this may increase the chance of not receiving the necessary information from students. As with many qualitative studies, the type and variety of feedback can be influenced by any number of factors that cannot always be identified or accounted for. Despite these potential limitations, this study has the opportunity to provide information that assists students make a successful transition to their next phase in life. With this at stake, the research should still be carried out, noting these limitations of context and factoring these considerations into the design and interpretation of the study and its results.

## **Conclusion**

This study could be submitted to *The High School Journal* for publication through the University of North Carolina School of Education. This journal seeks to investigate “issues of relevance to secondary students, teachers, and schools. . . including issues related to counseling and the transitions to and from high school” (“Submissions”). This study being included in *The High School Journal* also gives the opportunity for it to be found and accessed by its intended audience: secondary educators and post-secondary first year writing educators. As this study is primarily concerned with the actions of secondary educators and students, as well as being solely focused on the transition out of high school, this journal is a prime fit.

Moving forward, if others implement similar techniques and are able to record results in students’ transition to postsecondary education, their results should also be submitted for comparison. If a trend can be established as to the impact of this teaching technique on students’ success, others may be able to continue the good work of assisting students’ transition to post-secondary writing with success. Given the concerning discrepancies between students’ expected literacy proficiency and their reality, studying and implementing methods that could be practically used for students’ later success is vital work for educators today.

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Flips through Foucault: The Reversal of the Therapist-Patient Relationship in Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*

Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* tells of Alicia Berenson, who murdered her husband six years ago and has yet to speak since. Seeking to help cure and treat Alicia is psychotherapist, Theo. Given his position as a psychotherapist in an institution, he naturally has control over the female patient, establishing clear lines of male and female authority. French philosopher and literary critic Michel Foucault was primarily interested in studying how power is used to create and maintain control. His works and theories have been largely used in literary analysis to understand and interpret power dynamics between characters and in their environments.

The power dynamic inherent in Theo and Alicia's therapist-patient relationship prompts using Foucault's *Psychiatric Power* as a framework for interpretation. In the traditional sense, Theo and Alicia fill their roles as therapist and patient. However, the similarities between Alicia and Theo open the door for substitution and interchangeable Foucauldian roles, leading to a complete reversal between Alicia and Theo in their therapist-patient relationship. This reversal, which places a female in a position of power over a male, operates counter to the common narrative of male dominance. Although the reversal of Foucauldian roles in the therapist-patient relationship between Alicia and Theo in Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient* subverts the male medical authority at work, it is ultimately not enough to overcome it.

**Using Foucault to Interpret Traditional Therapist-Patient Roles**



In order for the reversal of roles between Alicia and Theo to be understood, the traditional roles originally fulfilled must first be explained. Michael Foucault's *Psychiatric Power* outlines the conditions of traditional roles in modern psychiatric asylums. Foucault claims that in order for therapy to be successful, "the basis of which someone who is considered ill ceases to be so," a dispersion of power is necessary, reinforcing the authority of the doctor as the holder of the objective "medical gaze" (3). In this regard, Theo, as a trained psychotherapist, and as the one treating Alicia is a fitting subject for the role of doctor. These traditional roles are also reinforced by the genre of this piece. Elena Avanzas Alvarez notes in her article "The Subversion of the Male Tradition in Crime Fiction: Liane Moriarty's *Little Lies*" that "crime fiction has traditionally been considered a masculine literary genre due to the centrality of the male" (181). By using Theo as the doctor and primary narrator, the traditional roles are reinforced by Foucault's interpretation and the norms of this genre.

Not only is his profession that of a psychotherapist, but he also fulfills the physical description of a Foucaultian authoritarian doctor. For this characteristic, Foucault borrows from François Fodéré's *Traité du Délire*, a pivotal text that enabled psychiatry to become an individual specialty of the medical field. Foucault, using Fodéré, claims that an authoritarian appears as "dark hair, or hair whitened by age, lively eyes, a proud bearing, limbs and chest announcing strength and health, prominent features, and a strong and expressive voice" (4). These features are precisely the ones used by Alicia to describe and later recognize Theo. When describing the man watching her house, later revealed to be Theo, Alicia says he is "tall, well built" and "wearing a dark shirt, trousers, black sunglasses, and cap" even though "most people are wearing shorts and T-shirts and light colors" during this time of year (Michaelides 207; 210). His clothing standing out from the others reinforces his distinct position among peers, indicating

his traditional role of authoritarian. Further, when Alicia describes her identification of Theo as the man who was in her house, she says, “I recognized his eyes, not just the color but the shape. And the smell of cigarettes and smoky aftershave. And the way he formed his words, and the rhythm of his speech” (Michaelides 307). Alicia’s focus on Theo’s eyes, structure, and voice as the points of recognition parallel the description given by Foucault. Aside from his literal role as Alicia’s doctor, Theo’s physical characteristics empower him to hold the objective medical gaze over her.

Similar to Theo’s entire fulfillment of the traditional position of power, Alicia meets the descriptions of the traditional patient. Foucault shows that “what characterizes the madman, that by which one ascribes madness to him, is the insurrection of a force, of a furiously raging, uncontrolled and possibly uncontrollable force within him” (7). When Theo first mentions Alicia, he says she “was thirty-three years old when she killed her husband” (Michaelides 5). This brutal act of violence would be evidence of the “uncontrollable force” Foucault describes, so uncontrollable that she could not help but take the life of a loved one. Alicia’s violent outburst is reinforced as a pattern by her behavior at the Grove. In the second session with Theo, he describes that Alicia “leaped from the chair. She threw herself toward me, hands outstretched like claws” (Michaelides 76). When Alicia reflects on this incident in her diary she says “something in me took over, some kind of wild animal instinct. I wanted to kill him” (Michaelides 307). This unnamed passion, which leads to her being continually subdued by medication, confirms the belief that Alicia is the madman of the asylum, who needs the authoritarian doctor, with his dispersion of power, in order to be cured and for therapy to be successful.

With the fulfillment of these traditional roles in place, Foucault's identification of the four parts of successful therapy—power, force, the event, and truth—become crucial to organizing and understanding the therapist-patient relationship between Theo and Alicia. Foucault explains that the power of an asylum, sourced in the doctor and dispersed through the other staff members, enables “a degree of order, a degree of discipline, and regularity” that are necessary “for the very constitution of medical knowledge, since exact observation is not possible without this discipline” and is “the condition for permanent cure” (2-3). Theo's assertion of power over Alicia is two-fold. Within the asylum, Theo is Alicia's psychotherapist, a position that is reinforced by the staff members such as Yuri and Christian who also interact with Alicia as a patient. Alicia's medication is lowered by Christian at Theo's suggestion, a form of control over her mental state (Michaelides 65). In one of Theo and Alicia's sessions, Alicia pounds on the door, attempting to get the attention of Yuri, a staff nurse. Theo explains that “Yuri threw open the door. He looked relieved not to find Alicia strangling me on the floor” (Michaelides 93). In this sense, Yuri is acting in a way that is ready to protect Theo as the therapist from Alicia, the patient. Further, Theo's assertion of power over Alicia extends beyond the asylum. When discovering that his wife was having an affair with Alicia's husband, Gabriel, Theo begins watching their house obsessively. After following Gabriel from his meeting with Kathy, Theo's wife, Theo says he “walked back to the house where Kathy's lover lived. I stood there for an hour, watching” (Michaelides 303). This distanced approach—present, but never fully identified—mimics the objective observation Foucault attributes to medical authority. Thus, Theo's power within the asylum as a psychotherapist is foreshadowed by his earlier assertion of power by watching Alicia in her home.

Foucault describes force as the “mad person who is to be brought under control” through the “confrontation of two wills, that of the doctor and those who represent him on the one hand, and then that of the patient.” This is best seen in Alicia’s refusal to speak as a patient, and Theo’s insistence, as a doctor, that she should do so (7; 10). Alicia’s silence, starting after the murder of her husband, is what Theo intends to break in order to “help her start up again—help Alicia tell her story, to heal and get well” (Michaelides 12). Earlier attempts to get Alicia to talk and her refusal to do so are seen as a failure on the part of the therapist (Michaelides 31). In her article “The Silent Patient,” psychoanalyst Evelyn Liegner notes that silence can have varying meanings in psychotherapy, saying that “it is necessary to differentiate between silence as a resistance and silence as communication. If we understand that resistance is anything that interferes with communication on the part of the patient, we will be less liable to engage in a power struggle with a supposedly recalcitrant patient” (70). Here, it is clear that Alicia’s silence is that of resistance. She has communicated through art and small nods that prove she is capable of communication, but refuses to do so. Thus, two wills are at work: Theo’s, representative of the medical authority who wants Alicia to talk, and Alicia’s, the patient or “madman,” who refuses to do so. During Alicia’s first meeting with Theo, Theo begins by saying “I asked Professor Diomedes if we might talk, and he kindly arranged this meeting” (Michaelides 35). Alicia’s refusal to participate or to give any reaction is further noted as resistance by Theo stating “Normally we would start with many months of talking. In an ideal world, Alicia would tell me about herself, her life, her childhood. I would listen, slowly building up a picture until it was complete enough for me to make accurate, helpful interpretations” (Michaelides 35-36). Yet, the two continue to sit in silence for the remainder of most psychotherapy sessions, representing two wills confronting each other without resolution or a move towards a cure.

If Alicia is the “madman,” Theo is the “doctor” and success, or the therapeutic process is contingent on Alicia finally verbally breaking her silence, then “the event” that Foucault outlines must be when Alicia finally does begin to talk. This “scene of confrontation” is that which Foucault says involves “provoking a conflict between the fixed idea to which the patient is attached and the fear of punishment” (11). Further, the scene is considered a success with “the victory of the doctor’s will over the patient’s will” (11). This seems to be the failures of previous psychotherapists with Alicia. In seeing her silence as resistance, rather than communication itself, no progress has been made. The previous doctors’ will did not overcome Alicia’s own. Similarly, Theo, facing an aggravated staff concerned with the safety of the others in the building, has been told to no longer see Alicia. He continues to do so, and after explaining that he understood Alicia’s troubled childhood with her father, desperately pleads “Alicia. This is our last chance. I’m sitting here without Professor Diomedes’s knowledge or permission. If I keep breaking the rules like this for your sake, I’m going to get fired. That’s why this will be the last time you see me. Do you understand?” (Michaelides 258). Slowly, Alicia finally whispers “what” (Michaelides 258). With Alicia’s silence finally broken, it seems her will has conformed to that of Theo’s. Here, indeed, this small utterance causes Theo to cry “of disbelief, excitement, and gratitude,” as he has achieved victory in the confronting of wills with Alicia (Michaelides 258). In this way Alicia’s stubborn will to keep silent is given in to Theo’s will for her to talk, resulting in the victory of the event that Foucault describes.

Foucault’s final stage of treatment is that of “the truth.” Here, “the process of the cure is effectuated, accomplished and sealed when truth has been acquired through confession in this way, in the effective moment of confession, and not by piecing together a medical knowledge” (11). Alicia’s telling of her story fulfills this on several accounts. First, there is no medical

diagnosis of Alicia. Although Christian repeatedly refers to her as “borderline,” this label is dismissed by not only Theo, but coworker Indira as well, who says “I don’t feel umbrella terms like *borderline* are particularly helpful. They don’t tell us anything very useful at all” (Michaelides 72). Thus, Alicia remains without any specific medical diagnosis. Further, once she begins talking, she tells Theo a version of what happened the night Gabriel was murdered, repeatedly conforming to Theo’s will, and seemingly being “cured” from her previous wild condition. Even though Theo believes Alicia lied during her telling of the story due to her “obvious inconsistencies and inaccuracies” her talking was the primary condition of her success (Michaelides 281). Further, as a result of her lying, Theo later injects Alicia with morphine, putting her in a coma. This injection prompts Alicia to write her final diary entry where she reveals the entire truth of Gabriel’s murder confirmed by Theo’s account of the entire night. Alicia confesses that she did shoot Gabriel, saying, “That’s the truth. I didn’t kill Gabriel. He killed me. All I did was pull the trigger” (Michaelides 312). This confession, fraught with its own complications, does function as Alicia’s “truth” brought about after the “confrontation of wills” and her submission to Theo’s will for her to talk. With the truth admitted, Foucault’s description of the psychiatric process is completed in the traditional roles of Alicia as patient and Theo as the doctor of power and authority.

### **The Reversal of Foucault’s Therapist-Patient Roles**

These roles, as secure as they may seem, are not however, without complication. Theo and Alicia switch roles in their therapist-patient relationship. The grounds for this reversal are first based in the parallel lives Theo and Alicia have lived. Both faced an abusive father in some regard and both attempted suicide when they were young. Theo states that as a result of his father’s probable untreated mental illness, his own childhood was “dominated by hysteria and

physical violence: threats, tears, and breaking glass” (Michaelides 15). Similarly, in Alicia’s childhood, following the death of Alicia’s mother, her father says “Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn’t Alicia die instead? (Michaelides 255). Alicia internalizes this by saying “He killed me” (Michaelides 255). These traumatizing histories are paralleled further by the attempted suicides. After going to college, Theo was “unable to go out, socialize, or make any friends” (Michaelides 16). He turned to paracetamol and attempted to take his life by overdosing. This unsuccessful attempt resulted in vomiting and realizing that he did not want to die, turning instead to therapy for help. Parallel to this instance, when Christian West admits he had previously treated Alicia, he says “Alicia had suicidal behavior but I don’t think she really intended to die. She was too narcissistic to ever really want to hurt herself. She took an overdose, more for show than anything else” (Michaelides 234). These clear parallels, including the means and outcomes of their troubled childhoods, establishes the foundation for their shifting roles. Since the two are clearly linked due to their similar experiences, the roles of therapist and patient become unstable.

The similarities between Theo and Alicia continue into adulthood. Both have spouses that are unfaithful to their original wedding vows. The specific reversal of roles between Theo and Alicia is confirmed by the fact that their respective spouses were unfaithful with each other. While this connecting fact is known only to Theo until the end of the novel, Theo is open about the fact that his wife is unfaithful throughout its entirety. After finding evidence of his wife’s infidelity, Theo says “You don’t need a psychotherapist to suspect that Kathy had left her laptop open because—unconsciously, at least—she wanted me to find out about her infidelity” (Michaelides 95). Theo reveals that Kathy is having an affair with Alicia’s husband, Gabriel, by revealing he was simply following the man he saw with Kathy, which led him to seeing Alicia’s

home, although he was not aware of her identity at the time. Theo continues to watch the house, leading to this scene that he describes: “she caught sight of my reflection in the window. I think she saw my knife first. She stiffened and slowly turned around. Her eyes were wide with fear. We stared at each other in silence. This was my first time I came face-to-face with Alicia Berenson” (Michaelides 304). This crucial point of identification, where Theo is able to empathize with having an unfaithful spouse, enables the switching of roles between the two characters. This reversal of roles follows the interpretation of Foucault by Foucault theorist and psychiatrist John Iliopoulos in his article “Foucault’s Notion of Power and Current Psychiatric Practice.” Here, he says “For Foucault, ruptures, breaks, and discontinuities emerge as a result of a challenge to the underlying rationality that sustains power. When the rules, logic, and meaning that permeate power relations are questioned, then these relations are overturned and power undergoes radical reversals” (50). As a result, the very existence of the power relations previously defined, coupled with the parallel lives of Alicia and Theo that beg the question of why Theo is given power and Alicia not, enables the complete role reversal.

With the parallels between Theo and Alicia opening the possibilities of role reversal, it then becomes clear how Theo could be seen as the patient and Alicia as the doctor. Theo reveals his unstable characteristics that lead to viewing him as a patient. When Theo first sees his wife with another man, Theo says “I lurched off, going nowhere. I walked round and round like a madman” (Michaelides 243). This telling identification is later continued by Theo’s actions that happen chronologically after this event. Early in the novel, after admitting that he smokes cigarettes, but is attempting to stop, Theo says, “Psychotherapists tend to view smoking as an unresolved addiction—one that any decent therapist should have worked through and overcome” (Michaelides 19). This observation implies that not only is he not a decent psychotherapist, since



he has yet to quit this habit, but also that he still has some unresolved issues. Professor Diomedes confirms this interpretation of Theo's smoking by saying "You know that joke, about why you can't be a therapist and smoke? Because it means you're still fucked up" (Michaelides 67). This indicates Theo's unstable mental health that embodies itself in his obsessive pursuit of finding and treating Alicia. Theo's "uncontrolled raging" as a patient is different from that of Alicia's in that Alicia is physically forceful and violent. Theo, however, matches Foucault's description of a madman psychologically. After first seeing Alicia at the Grove in the context of group therapy, Theo makes this statement: "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 27). This obsessive nature that sets the precedent for Theo's overstepping of bounds during psychotherapy sessions with Alicia, identifies the "raging" indicative of Foucault's definition of a "madman," confirming his psychological role of patient.

Alicia then serves as a doctor to Theo on a psychological level. Whereas Theo meets the physical requirements of the doctor Foucault describes, Alicia meets the psychological. The function of medical authority granted to the doctor Foucault describes is to reach the "condition of the medical gaze, of its neutrality, and the possibility of it gaining access to the object" (2). In this regard, Alicia is the only fit doctor for Theo because she alone knows the objective truth of what he has done. Alicia writes in her final diary entry that the reason she finally tells of what happened, the account of which is confirmed as true based on Theo's admission, is "so he won't get away with it" and as a result, she has "got to finish the story" (Michaelides 308). As the only one privy to the knowledge of the night, and the opportunity to use that knowledge slipping away, Alicia must write it for others to find. Yet, at the time of her and Theo's psychotherapy sessions, she was the only fit candidate to achieve the objective medical gaze over Theo. This

reversal of roles is performed during the psychotherapy sessions. Alicia, in remaining silent, pushes Theo to cross boundaries and explore parts of his life he wouldn't necessarily do otherwise. For example, while Alicia remains silent despite Theo's probing, he says "Love includes all types of feelings, doesn't it. Good and bad. I love my wife—her name is Kathy—but sometimes I get angry with her. Sometimes. . . I hate her" (Michaelides 93). This confession about the troubled state of his own marriage sounds more like a patient in session than like a doctor helping another. In this way, Alicia's silence operates as a way to prompt Theo into talking, creating a space for his therapeutic process.

This interchange of roles is further confirmed once Alicia starts talking. Theo describes the session after Alicia first spoke: "I told her about my father, and growing up in that house; she seemed curious to know as much as possible about my past and what shaped me and made me who I am. I remember thinking, there's no going back now. We were crashing through every last boundary between therapist and patient. Soon it would be impossible to tell who was who" (Michaelides 265). This open admission of role reversal is sealed when Alicia starts to tell a version of the night Gabriel was murdered. After going outside with the other patients, Alicia and Theo come back to Theo's office. Theo remarks that "Alicia had already sat down—but not in her chair. She was sitting in my chair" (Michaelides 277). This symbolic gesture of trading places not only confirms the role reversal of Alicia and Theo, but also shows that Alicia explaining her story is a type of therapy for Theo, a confrontation that he needs in order to be on a path to a cure.

With the new roles of Alicia as doctor and Theo as patient established, Foucault's four main elements of modern psychiatric asylums—power, force, the event, and truth—are also reversed. Since Alicia can now be viewed as the authority figure, power is reimagined through

her hold over Theo. Alicia establishes this power first through her silence and secondly through her speaking. As Theo is an employee of the Grove, which is in danger of being closed, he is well aware that Alicia speaking would be good for the center and for his career. After Alicia's first physical outburst during a psychotherapy session, the staff meets to discuss the safety concerns of continuing psychotherapy with Alicia. Theo realizes this practical possibility: "Alicia Berenson was a famous patient, and a powerful bargaining tool with the Trust. If we could demonstrate progress with her, we'd have a much stronger hand in saving the Grove from closure" (Michaelides 82). As a result, Theo's physical role of doctor, and the institution that makes him such, is dependent on Alicia speaking. By remaining silent, Alicia is able to maintain control over both Theo and the institution, operating as an authoritarian figure. This power becomes concentrated in her psychotherapy sessions with Theo once she does begin to speak. Theo recognizes her control by saying "Something in the way she was tilting her head was almost coquettish, and the beginning of a smile was forming at the corner of her mouth. She's enjoying this, I thought, Having me in her power" (265). Having established and maintained power through silence, Alicia also uses her speech—what, how much, and when she tells information—to create a disciplinary order between herself and Theo.

Further, with Alicia in a power position, Foucault's notion of force is seen as the confrontation of will between Alicia and Theo. However, instead of being in terms of Alicia being silent or vocal, the confrontation of wills when Theo is the patient is centered around Alicia wanting Theo to be held accountable for his actions and Theo refusing to face any consequences. Alicia admits that she lied to Theo when telling a version of what happened the night of Gabriel's murder with this intention: "I wanted him to know that I knew. So I lied about the way Gabriel died. As I was talking, I could see he knew I was lying" (Michaelides 308). This

indirect confrontation, accomplished through social cues and unspoken truths, is psychological in nature, rather than physical, following the pattern established by the role reversal. Ultimately, this confrontation results in Alicia stating that there was “something in [Theo’s] eyes I’d never seen before. Fear. He was afraid of me—of what I might say. He was scared—of the sound of my voice” (Michaelides 308). In the traditional roles and dispersion of power, Alicia’s speaking indicates a victory of the doctor’s will over the patient’s. However, through the lens of the role reversal, Alicia’s utilization of her voice not only confirms her position of authority, but also challenges Theo’s will to escape the consequences of his actions, acting as the force element of Foucault’s modern asylum.

The confrontation of wills must be resolved, as Foucault notes, with a scene or event in which the doctor’s will triumphs over that of the patient’s. This is also seen when interpreting Alicia as the doctor. While Alicia’s speaking confronts the will of Theo, it results in Theo injecting Alicia with morphine, rendering her speechless and in a coma. In this disabled position, it may seem as if Theo’s will is victorious. However, it is the injection that prompts Alicia to write and hide the final diary entry, incriminating Theo and forcing him to face the consequences of his actions. Alicia begins the diary entry by saying “Theo just left. I am alone. I’m writing this as fast as I can. I haven’t got much time. I’ve got to get this down while I still have strength” (Michaelides 307). This shows that her writing is a product of Theo’s reaction to the confrontation. Further, the rest of the diary entry exposes Theo’s breaking into Alicia’s home and the hostage situation he created, resulting in Alicia’s shooting of her husband. This diary entry, unknown to Theo, is found “wedged in the back of the painting” of Alicia’s that Theo hated and did not look (Michaelides 322). When the police inspector finds Theo in the last chapter of the novel and begins to read the entry to him, Theo realizes this could be dangerous: “I hadn’t read

that entry. It was the incriminating evidence I had been looking for—and it was in the wrong hands” (Michaelides 323). As the inspector continues to read the entry, Theo realizes his fate, confirmed by the inspector who says “I thought it best not to announce the intention of my visit on the doorstep. But the fact is, this puts things in a rather different light” (Michaelides 323). As a result of the confrontation of wills between Theo and Alicia, the event of injection and writing prompt a victory for Alicia; Theo is exposed and held accountable for his actions, confirming her will as authoritarian over the madman.

The last stage of Foucault’s modern psychiatric asylum, “the truth,” is also found when viewing Theo as the patient and Alicia as the authoritarian doctor. Similar to Alicia’s confession through the final diary entry, Theo confesses all of his actions through the use of first person narration in the novel. From the beginning of his narration, Theo readily acknowledges the presence of an audience who is reading and interpreting what he has written. When introducing himself and the novel, he says “And you might well accuse me of being biased” and “But let us not forget” (Michaelides 5; 6). The references to the reader are continued once Theo describes a session with Alicia and he says “As you will see, it’s an incredible story—of that there is no doubt. Whether you believe it or not is up to you” (Michaelides 262). The unnamed “us” and “you” indicate that Theo knows he is sharing information about his actions to another. Thus, when he explains his reasoning for getting involved with the case and his extreme steps of putting Alicia in a coma, it is done with the intent of confessing. Theo says “When the story was all over the press and Alicia was on trial for murder, I felt a deep sense of personal responsibility, and the desire to expiate my guilt and prove that I was not responsible for what happened. So I applied to the job at the Grove (Michaelides 314). This confession of motives is followed by a confession of action: “I was forced to take action, to silence Alicia forever. I had Christian take

the blame—a poetic justice, I felt. I had no qualms about framing him”. . . “injecting her with morphine was the hardest thing I’ve ever done” (Michaelides 315). This admission, delivered to the reader following the victory of the event by Alicia completes Foucault’s model of psychiatric asylums.

### **Conclusions**

With all stages and roles of Foucault’s modern psychiatric asylum filled and reversed, it would seem that Alicia was able to maintain her victory through the use and withholding of her voice. While her control and authority in the novel certainly speak for a level of agency and independence, she is left with a final consequence and Theo’s repercussions are ambiguous at best. As a result, Alicia’s fulfillment of the authoritarian role subverts, but does not overcome the male medical gaze. This subversion of male tradition is not exclusive to *The Silent Patient*. As Elena Avanzas Alvarez notes in “Subversion of the Male Tradition: Liane Moriarty’s *Little Lies*,” “This insistence on the male figure has historically left little space for female characters, who have been assigned marginal roles as femme fatales or victims, who, by opposition to the male detective have represented moral disorder and chaos” (181). As a result, Alicia’s ultimate silence is evidence of the beginnings of what Alvarez of a counter narrative to what Alvarez has described. The fact remains that though interchangeable on multiple levels, Theo is privileged to a world that prioritizes the physical fulfillment of traditional roles over the psychological reversal, regardless of the injustice that may create. This does not diminish the wrong doing of Alicia. She admits as much when Theo came to inject her and she did not resist: “He grabbed my wrist and stuck a needle in my vein. I didn’t struggle. I didn’t fight back. I let him do it. I deserve it—I deserve this punishment. I am guilty—but so is he” (Michaelides 308). Rather than looking for an excuse for her actions, Alicia accepts her fate as just, hoping the same will find him.

However, while Theo is assumed to be arrested, he is still able to speak on his own terms, a privilege taken from Alicia. When Theo injects Alicia, he says “that she didn’t die, but is asleep, is better—this way I can still visit her every day and sit by her bed and hold her hand. I haven’t lost her” (Michaelides 315). This possessive attitude reflects the way in which the male medical authority is not overcome, and injustice being the result of such tyranny. Even the narration of this novel is done on Theo’s terms. Alicia’s diary is revealed to the reader when Theo renders it necessary and has essentially appropriated her story as his own. Thus, the male medical authority is certainly subverted by Alicia’s position of power in the reversal of roles, but it is not overcome, leaving Alicia speechless.

The dynamic between Alicia and Theo as patient and therapist is fraught with complication. Michael Foucault’s *Psychiatric Power* begins to help organize and identify the nature of their blurred roles. In the traditional sense, Theo functions as the authoritarian doctor over Alicia, the madman patient. Theo confronts Alicia’s refusal to speak, and in doing so provides the conditions necessary for her to do so, creating a victory of his will over hers. This speaking eventually leads to a confession, allowing the truth of the patient to be known. In addition, due to the parallel lives of Alicia and Theo, these roles are unstable and lead to a complete reversal in which Alicia functions as the doctor and Theo as the patient. Alicia’s control and power over Theo force a confrontation of wills that culminates in his admission to the reader. These reversals show that females are capable of holding positions of power, but cannot do so effectively or safely in the context of a world that privileges physical, traditional, male authority. Readers are left with all the answers, but no justice, proving that knowing may not be enough to create effective change in the patriarchal society.

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