

Symbolization in speak by laurie halse anderson essay



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In Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, trees symbolize Melinda's growth throughout her life to stay sane and pass the horrific time of her life.

Depression is her first phase, when she starts to paint the trees that were hit by lightning. It is also shown by her not talking to many people. She starts to realize that she cannot be perfect when she imagines a beautiful oak tree but really cannot carve it properly. Her third phase comes when the trees outside her house has a few sick branches and she decides to let go of the present Melinda who is not letting her grow and nurture the old Melinda, the one before the party, the fun and outgoing one.

The last phase, and tree was the one she drew for the last art project, it was a living, and breathing tree which was when she finally realized that she can stop punishing herself for happened because it was not her fault. In Laurie H. Anderson *Speak*, Melinda started off as a mute, scared girl but slowly regained her voice by expressing herself through the art of trees. Through the art of drawing trees, Melinda comes out of depression and guilt and becomes a more positive person. First, Melinda's phase of depression takes her to her art class, as an escape from reality and the harsh comments thrown at her.

At first she was hesitant about drawing trees for her art project but when she started, her first few were all hit by lightning and nearly dead, which symbolize her fearful emotions. Although she tried to talk, no one listened to her. " I can't tell them what really happened. I can't even look at that part of myself" (p. 28). That is, she could not tell them anything because she was afraid of being judged. Since she judges herself; she thinks others will definitely judge her the same way. Yet her secret was hurting her so much

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she could feel it throughout her body. There's a beast in my gut. I can hear it scraping away at the insides of my ribs" (p. 51). Her depression was hurting her emotionally, physically, and socially. First it was hurting her emotionally because every time she wants to relax and calm down she remembers the night of the party when she was raped and her nightmares haunt her every day. At the same time, physical depression is also clear on her face because it is getting harder for her talk; also she always had a sore throat and raw lips which indicate that she is not taking good care of herself.

Similarly the incident caused her to be isolated socially because she isolated herself from school events and is always in her closet where she is alone. Overall there are many challenges that are faced by her during the first few months of school after the incident, but she waits for the opportunity to find her voice. The second phase is when she imagines something but cannot carve it. She imagines a big old oak tree with scarred trunk and thousands of leaves reaching the sun, which represent her ambitions that are crushed after being raped. As she tries to carve it looks like a diseased tree.

Even though she tries again and again, the tree is never perfect. She first realizes that she can never be perfect but only act the part when she compares herself to her parents. " I'm just like them- an ordinary drone dressed in secrets and lies" (p. 70). The big oak tree in her mind is perfect but she cannot really carve it properly relating her to the tree because she cannot express herself the way she wants to. Specifically when she explains what her tree looks like, she says that it is dead and lifeless. " But when I try to carve it, it looks like a dead tree, toothpicks, a child's drawing.

I can't bring it to life. I'd like to give up. Quit" (p. 78). In other words she says that it looks dead because she takes a passive approach toward herself after the incident which eventually blocks her creativity and she draws what she feels - lifeless. Also she says that she cannot revive the tree similarly her not being able to revive herself. She wants to try but every time she does she wants to quit. She starts to believe herself after this phase but still has her doubts. Above all, the phase shows a change in Melinda but not a significant one, but works to enjoy her.

As she grows she discovers more of what she is capable of. Now she realizes that even though she is going crazy, she is still alive. Above all, she does not want to hide anymore and is not afraid to come out of her shell of guilt. " I don't want to hang out in my hidey-hole anymore. I don't feel like hiding anymore" (p. 191-192). She comments about not wanting to go back to her closet because she is not afraid of what might happen to her. In the same way she says that she, in no matter what condition, is still alive and breathing. " I have survived, Confused, screwed up but still here" (p. 88). She is happy that she survived and that it does not matter if she is frustrated, she still has to stay for the ones who love her. In order which she has to take care of the old Melinda she was and let go of the Melinda she was after the party. After this realization she understood that she is not perfect but she can grow to love those imperfections. As she crosses the path of depression and understands that she needs to love herself that she can have the same freedom she had before the party. " It wasn't my fault. He hurt me. It wasn't my fault. And I'm not going to let it kill me.

I can grow," (p. 198). She first understood that she has to stop hurting herself and everyone around her because it was not her fault that she got raped that night. Also she understands that she has to stop the incident from taking away her sanity and help her live her life to its fullest potential. Finally she understands that she can grow because she was not guilty for what happened. When she draws the tree, she wants to add a bird signalling to flight out of her long journey. " I practice birds... I draw them without thinking-flight, flight, feather wing.

Water drips on the paper and the birds bloom in the light of their feathers expanding with promise" (p. 197). First she says that when she draws them, the only words that come to her mind are flight, feather and wings. She has the word flight in her mind because she realizes that she is free. She later comments on how the feathers expand in promise relating to her because she can now start over with a new beginning. After going through this tender and tough time she finally finds her voice and regains her confidence; as she stopped the harsh and harmful comments thrown at her by her peers.

Expressing oneself through art can help a person emotionally and physically. Similarly, Melinda resorts to art, to help her through this delicate and emotional time during her freshman year of high school. Melinda went through many phases while her first year of high school. At first she was depressed and hurt, but then slowly understood that she could not be perfect, later discovered who she really was and lastly feels the satisfaction when she understands that it was not her fault. Ultimately she grows, like a tree, emotionally, and forgives herself for what happened. " The bruises are vivid, but they will fade" (p198).

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