



Verisimilitude in Young Adult Fiction: Catharsis within and through Anderson's *Speak*

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Abstract

*This article highlights the protagonist's journey in *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson towards finding an outlet to release the inner turmoil triggered by past traumatic experiences. Doing so, the paper sheds the light on the inner conflicts, as well as the major mechanisms of defense adopted by the protagonist. Just as importantly, by drawing on Kramer's art therapy theory, the study explains how art creation and creative writing helped the protagonist and the author, respectively, release pent up emotions through a symbolic form, making them one step closer to the verbal form of self-expression.*

I. TRAUMA IN ANDERSON'S *SPEAK*

Through the use Freudian psychoanalytic theories, the light is shed on the protagonist's journey, Melinda, in the realistic young adult novel, *Speak*, from trauma towards healing. Having a traumatized character, Melinda's inner conflict will be explained using Freud's drive theory. A further objective is to demonstrate the extent to which the adopted mechanisms of defense supported the protagonist reach a state of catharsis.

Moreover, due to the pivotal role of art (drawing) in Melinda's healing, the essay supports the use of art for therapy with reference to Kramer's Art Therapy Theory. Furthermore, using the same theory, and by taking into consideration the fact that the novel is an autobiographical one, the essays' objective digs deeper in this matter, and demonstrates the extent to which art (writing) may have supported the author's healing process.

This study is much more concerned with the issues that occur during the last two stages of Freud's

psychosexual development theory, and their effect on the development of personality, rather than the stages themselves. Freud explained the conscious and unconscious behavior of individuals as a result of a blockage that happens during any of these stages. In his psychosexual development theory, Sigmund Freud explains that humans experience blockages; these are traumatic experiences that trigger painful thoughts and feelings. In natural cases, individuals react to these feelings through natural mechanisms; that is, they face the problem and release these pent up emotions. Thus, these natural mechanisms block the pain, and the individual forgets about it later. However, in some cases, the natural mechanisms fail to block the pain, as a result, conflict among the mind's components (id, ego, superego) manifests, thus, neurotic mechanisms interfere. Such mechanisms do protect the individual but at the expense of triggering the manifestation of neuroses (Lipner et al. 2017, 2)¹, the following figure exemplifies the procedure:

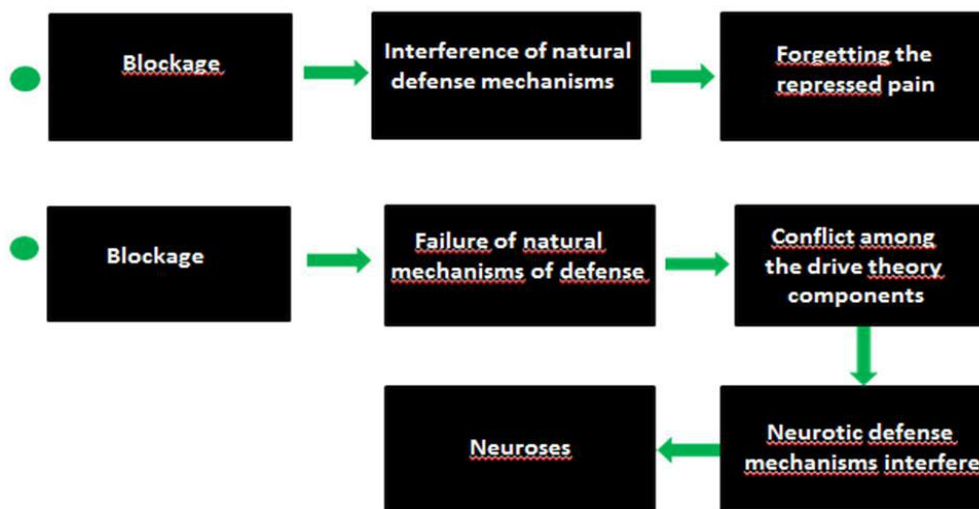


Fig.1: The Journey of Victims after Trauma when Natural versus Neurotic Mechanisms of Defense Interfere

II. MELINDA’S TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

By definition, a trauma is a severe shock or a highly stressful experience; it is an event that feels like an intense threat. One may either be involved in such trauma or may just witness it. Freud describes it as, “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield...There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus” (1922, 607). The trauma can be either acute; that is, as a result of a single incident like a natural disaster or an assault, or chronic; which is repeated for a long period of time such as the case of domestic abuse or violence. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth defines trauma as follows:

... in Freud’s text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor...so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (1995, 3)

Although the experience Melinda went through is without doubt a traumatic one, there are various signs that

can be noticed on the protagonist which further proves that she went through a traumatic experience. From the very first page of the novel, the reader notices the way Melinda describes herself, “I am Outcast” (Anderson, 1999, 8). Melinda’s traumatic experience made her, first of all, socially isolated. Extreme withdrawal or having an anti-social behavior is one of the main signs that characterizes trauma (Ambre, 2021). Hiding, in closets, was her personal way of isolation, “This closet is abandoned--- it has no purpose, no name. It is the perfect place for me” (Anderson, 1999, 9). She adds, “I want to leave, transfer, warp myself to another galaxy...My closet is a good thing, a quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts inside my head where no one can hear them” (Anderson, 1999, 32). Melinda is definitely well aware of her isolation; she grades herself an F in social life. Moreover, sleep disturbances is another characteristic of trauma (Newsom, and Dimitriu 2022), as she constantly kept repeating the fact that she wants to sleep; “My goal is to go home and take a nap” (Anderson, 1999, 19), “There’s not enough time for a nap” (Anderson, 1999, 20), “I just want to sleep” (Anderson, 1999, 47), “I want a nap” (Anderson, 1999, 48). Sleeping is her way of avoiding to think about the trauma, and also a way for isolation, withdrawal and at the same time her personal method for self-protection: “Research suggests that being able to sleep after a traumatic event can reduce intrusive trauma related memories and make them less distressing. Targeting sleep issues in the early treatment of trauma may reduce the risk of developing PTSD” (Newsom, and Dimitriu 2022). Instead of her ego’s aim for natural mechanisms to release pent up emotions, neurotic mechanisms interfered; leading to the denial and repression of the trauma, as a way for protecting Melinda at the cost of certain neuroses’ development. In addition, Melinda’s bad

academic performance can be a hint that something is wrong with her. Her grades were low since the first marking period, and they never seem to get better. Furthermore, having flashbacks about the stressful event is another sign of trauma: “The sharp edge of the flap cuts my tongue. I taste my blood. IT’s face suddenly pops up in my mind. All the anger whistles out of me” (Anderson, 1999, 43). Additionally, feelings of guilt and shame are further signs of trauma; “Following exposure to a traumatic event, people may experience a variety of emotions, such as fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, guilt, or shame” (Tull 2022), Melinda feels scared and ashamed: “me with an S maybe, S for silent, for stupid, for scared. S for silly. For shame” (Anderson, 1999, 57). The protagonist also has difficulty seeking help and trusting others; her lab partner David Petrakis, although she thinks that he is a good person, she can’t manage trust him. Melinda seems to have an internal conflict about whether or not she should trust him. She thinks of herself in terms of two versions; ‘Melinda One’ and ‘Melinda Two’ the former tells her to go, and the latter tells the opposite. McAloon explains the effect of trauma on decision making: “For this reason, people who have experienced complex trauma may display symptoms including...poor decision making and judgment” (2014). Melinda was afraid of David although he had no intention to hurt her. Her hesitation on whether or not to trust him seems to be similar to her hesitation to tell anyone about the rape: “I almost tell them right then and there. Tears flood my eyes. They noticed I’ve been trying to draw. They noticed. I try to swallow the snowball in my throat... But I want to tell them everything as we sit there” (Anderson, 1999, 42). She adds: “It is easier not to say anything...Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say” (Anderson, 1999, 11). With that being said, one may conclude that the teenage protagonist, Melinda Sordino, has gone through a traumatic experience, which directly led to the development of an inner conflict, further igniting mental neuroses.

III. MELINDA’S INNER CONFLICT: THROUGH FREUD’S DRIVE THEORY

Freudian drive theory states that human behavior is based on the interaction between the id, ego and superego. Throughout the whole novel, Melinda’s desire was to speak up; to reveal the secret she kept for too long. Immediately after the abuse, she sought help “I called 911 because I needed help” (Anderson, 1999, 74), but she never explained what happened exactly to the cops or anyone else. Her id’s desire to speak up manifests in various parts of the novel; “If there is anyone in the entire galaxy I am dying to tell what really happened, it’s Rachel. My throat burns” (Anderson, 1999, 9). Again, Melinda seems to be just

waiting for someone who really cares to listen to her and believes her so that she can tell him/her “They give me a handful of gift certificates... I almost tell them right then and there. Tears flood my eyes...But I want to tell them everything as we sit there” (Anderson, 1999, 42). Once again, Melinda expresses her Id’s desire to get rid of her pent up emotions and speak to anyone about the rape, “I should probably tell someone, just tell someone. Get it over with. Let it out, blurt it out” (Anderson, 1999, 56). Her id’s desire to tell someone further manifests in imagining scenarios which urge her to speak up: “Maya Angelou watches me... Maya wants me to tell Rachel” (Anderson, 1999, 82). Just like Maya Angelou’s poster, the imaginary cast of Oprah, Sally Jessy and Jerry was to push her speak up:

Oprah: “Let’s explore that. You said no... Didn’t you ever think of telling anyone?”

You can’t keep this inside forever...”

Jerry: “...Speak up...Melinda, I can’t hear you!”

My head is killing me. (Anderson, 1999, 88)

All of these scenarios stem from Melinda’s imagination; her id in particular, which is pressing hard on her to speak up as a form of catharsis. Melinda’s life deteriorated ever since her rape, speaking up about her trauma is a way which supports her survival. It is said that if these needs are not met, one may become angry, anxious or tense (Nickerson). In several passages, the reader can notice how often Melinda refers to her anger. The fact that she doesn’t satisfy her id’s needs is not helping her in any way other than causing her anxiousness, stress and anger, all left unexpressed. This anger can be seen in several passages: “I want to confess everything, hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else” (Anderson, 1999, 32), “The sharp edge of the flap cuts my tongue. I taste my blood. IT’s face suddenly pops up in my mind. All the anger whistles out of me like I’m a popped balloon” (Anderson, 1999, 43), “I bounce the yellow ball...bring down the power and the anger...” (Anderson, 1999, 91).

Now that one knows the protagonist’s id’s desires, and the consequences of not fulfilling these desires, one should move to the other components of the mind that is in conflict with the id, that is; the superego, guided by the reality principle and responsible for deciding what one should and shouldn’t do based on socially acceptable behavior. Its role manifests in preventing her from speaking up. She constantly repeats that she’s afraid, ashamed and she feels guilty. In this case, Melinda is influenced by rape culture; which will probably hold her responsible, making her feel guilty for the rape: “I want to confess everything, hand over the guilt...to someone else” (Anderson, 1999, 32), “Caught in an avalanche, pinned by worry, squirming

under the weight of doubt, guilt, fear” (Anderson, 1999, 84). In this passage, Melinda brings up her feelings of guilt projecting them onto other characters, “Like the whole guilt thing. Of course you know the minister feels guilty and Hester feels guilty, but Nathaniel wants us to know this is a big deal. If he kept repeating, she felt guilty, she felt guilty, she felt guilty, it would be a boring book and no one would buy it” (Anderson, 1999, 57). At the end of the novel, Melinda realizes that she shouldn’t feel guilty because it wasn’t her fault, “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” (Anderson, 1999, 105). In the TV show, Melinda imagined Sally Jessy also telling her that it wasn’t her fault: “He is to blame for this attack. You do know it was an attack, Don’t you? It was not your fault. I want you to listen to me...It was not your fault” (Anderson, 1999, 88). One may thus conclude; Melinda’s id is pushing her to speak up, but due to her superego, Melinda represses her feelings, because she thinks that society is going to blame her although she knows she’s not the one to blame. She thinks that they are either going to hold her responsible for the rape, or they are not going to believe her: “would you believe me? Fat chance” (Anderson, 1999, 64).

This inner conflict between the id’s demands and the superego has to be solved by the ego. In Freud’s drive theory, it is the ego’s responsibility to compensate between the id and the superego. As a result of this conflict; Melinda tries to show that something is wrong through her actions rather than words. Much like her lip biting; “I can’t stop biting my lips” (Anderson, 1999, 15), “I bit my lip clear through. It needs stitches” (Anderson, 1999, 75), and nail biting; “My nails are bitten to the bleeding point” (Anderson, 1999, 48), Melinda expresses her inner pain and struggles through self-harm; “I open up a paper clip and scratch it across the inside of my left wrist. Pitiful. If a suicide attempt is a cry for help, then what is this?” (Anderson, 1999, 50). Her physical hints of self-harm reflecting an inner conflict are not being received; although sometimes noticed by her parents, but not much effort is given to understand what’s wrong with Melinda. Instead of looking at Melinda’s wrist scratches as a cry for help, her Mother’s response simply was: “I don’t have time for this, Melinda” (Anderson, 1999, 50). Another form of expression that Melinda uses is art. She followed her art class teacher’s advice; “you must figure out how to make your object say something, express an emotion, speak to every person who looks at it” (Anderson, 1999, 13). The ego tried to express her id’s desires by finding an appropriate outlet. She directed her feelings through two outlets; physical harm to attract attention, along with her work of art.

IV. MECHANISMS OF DEFENSE ADOPTED BY MELINDA’S EGO FOR HEALING

Since the appearance of the psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms have been used as a reaction to an internal conflict. The purpose of which is to decrease this conflict within someone, such as through repression. Anna Freud identified ten major defense mechanisms, but the number has been increasing ever since by psychoanalysts (Bailey, and Pico 2022). Now that Melinda’s internal conflict has been explained in the previous section, it is crucial to explain what defense mechanisms Melinda’s ego has used to decrease the internal conflict within her, and the extent to which these mechanisms helped her solve her inner conflict. The protagonist was abused at 13 years old and was profoundly affected. Her behavior completely changed and she doesn’t recognize herself anymore; Melinda doesn’t communicate much and isolates herself most of the time. The defense mechanisms helped her deal with her trauma, and process what exactly happened to her as well as helped her decide future actions.

Avoidance and Silence: Most commonly, this defense mechanism is known as isolation or withdrawal. Avoidance is defined as isolating one’s self from people, places or situations that are associated with uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. For Melinda, ever since the traumatic event occurred, she chose isolation. She is no longer communicating as much as she was, neither with family members nor with friends or teachers. Her silence can be illustrated all over the novel:

Mr. Neck: “We meet again.”

Me: (Anderson, 1999, 11)

Melinda either gives short answers or none. In addition, much of her isolation is self-imposed, since she withdraws from social situations on purpose, preferring to spend time in closets, wherein she mostly sleeps. This isolation, at first may seem bad and unhealthy for the protagonist, but in fact, this isolation has its own benefits. Melinda needed this time to process her experience and decide herself what actions need to be taken rather than tell someone who would probably dictate on her what to do. Thus her silence was not as detrimental as much as it is beneficial. The entire freshman year gave her the time needed to increase self-awareness, and get the chance to observe and accept her thoughts and feelings. For the vast majority of the time, we can see Melinda having internal monologues as she reflects on her thoughts in each situation. This period of isolation offered Melinda the time for reflection, self-awareness and information processing. As it has been mentioned by Terry Eagleton, defense mechanisms are helpful for the individual, but it is

important that they are not adopted for so long otherwise they cause other problems (Anderson, 1999, 131).

In this essay, Melinda's isolation and silence is supported as it helped her speak up at the end as well as supported her healing process. When Andy attempted to abuse her again, Melinda shows the benefits of time that she took to think about her experience, and to know what is right and wrong, and she was finally able to defend herself. As much as the novel supports speaking up, from its title, it is also very crucial to take the time to heal, reflect and think about what happened. In short, Melinda's adopted mechanisms are great contributors to her healing process, allowing her to take the time for reflection and self-awareness.

Sublimation: is one of the mature defenses adopted by emotionally healthy adults. It occurs when a person channels negative and unwanted urges to a productive outlet, such as positive, productive and creative activities. For Melinda, she isn't necessarily mature yet however, she was able to use a very healthy and beneficial defense mechanism; sublimation. Thanks to Mr. Freeman who helped her express each and every feeling through her work of art. Thus, instead of Melinda engaging in suicidal behaviors, she directed much of her emotions and focus towards art. Although sublimation can occur in any activity, Freud wrote of sublimation in the context of the production of art. He explains that artists express their own internal conflicts through the art material without the need for repression. Melinda was able to express her painful, emotions through her work of art using several symbols that refer to her inner pain and conflict, for instance, by putting a tape on the Barbie's mouth, Melinda can be referring to her inability to speak up, she further expresses, symbolically, the pain she was feeling through the knife and fork added on the bones. Her artwork is both socially accepted and very symbolic.

In Kristeva's theory, 'psychical significance', the release of negativity is at the heart of sublimation as a crucial part in the development of subjectivity, art and creativity (qtd. In Jones 2010, 3). One thus may conclude that sublimation has tremendously helped Melinda in her journey towards expressing herself vocally. It was a quiet, creative way of self-expression, which ended up being very beneficial. The period of making her artwork can be seen as a period of transition from silence towards speaking up and finding her voice again. This will be further explained and developed in the next section.

V. ART AS THERAPY: A STUDY OF THE PROTAGONIST'S AND AUTHOR'S HEALING PROCESS

Sigmund Freud's followers, Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer, relied on his psychoanalytic theory to develop the theory of art as therapy (Toblin 2015, 2). Freud, as a psychologist, relied on talk therapy to treat patients with mental disorders. He used verbalization, transference and sublimation on patients to reveal their internal conflicts. Once the psychoanalysis is complete, the patient directs his or her inner conflict towards a creative outlet; sublimation, wherein the patient, through artistic expression, reveals everything in the unconscious.

Naumburg, used his psychoanalytic theory as a base for her art therapy theory. She believed that verbalization and sublimation are important in the healing process, however, whenever there's a block, a difficulty in expression, she encourages them to express it through art. She believed that symbolic communication (art) enhances the process of verbalization, and boosts the patient's ability to be more verbally fluent rather than less, because patients could associate the images created and interpret them through words. While Naumburg's theory relied on Freud's verbalization and transference, that wasn't the case for Kramer's theory, instead it focused more on sublimation. Patients only needed guidance, technical assistance and emotional support from the therapist to strengthen sublimation and cope with their internal conflict (Toblin 2015, 2-7).

Melinda's Art Therapy for Self-expression: Drawing as a Means to Achieve Catharsis

The protagonist relies mostly on sublimation to express her inner conflict through her work of art. Melinda didn't use any words or verbal expressions to express herself; neither did she use transference in her healing process. In this case, according to Kramer, sublimation surpasses, and is of greater importance than verbalization and transference. Her therapy solely relies on expressive art; mainly her tree artwork. Since Melinda didn't get any professional help from a therapist, Mr. Freeman plays the role of her therapist, as he provides technical assistance and emotional support; the key notions in Kramer's art therapy theory.

Melinda successfully succeeded in expressing her inner conflict through her artwork; the resulting art object serves as a container for unconscious conflicts, recreating her inner conflict in form and content. As Kramer states, through the use of creative work, sublimation is crucial for verbalization and transference, as it fulfills the psychoanalytic goals of Freud (2015, 2). That is, one can interpret Melinda's inner conflicts and feelings through her

work of art rather than words. Liebmann in her book *Art Therapy and Anger*, demonstrates how the nonverbal means of art therapy provides a great outlet for the expression of thoughts and feelings that might be painful to be put into words. For Melinda, this was a great method for her to express her emotions of shame, silence, anger and fear. As Liebmann states, art therapy provides a lot of benefits for the patient; it offered Melinda another way of communication since it was too hard for her to speak, and provided her an opportunity to reflect on her issues “art therapy provides an opportunity for participants to reflect non verbally on the issues raised” (Liebmann, 1989, 18). Using art to express her feelings provided Melinda a feeling of safety, time of reflection and a way to observe herself and inner thoughts.

There are different ways in which art therapy can be used with anger as observed by Liebmann (Liebmann, 1989, 16-18), for instance through a symbolic painting, one can achieve catharsis. Melinda used art to depict her inner conflict as a form of catharsis, a very positive and creative outlet. She was able to express her anger in a symbolic way; wherein each and every object in her artwork symbolized something about her feelings. Her overall artwork is composed of a Barbie’s head, turkey bones, a knife and a fork, which symbolizes being trapped and attacked. The turkey carcass represents Melinda who is suffering from the pain of her trauma; the bones are raw and exposed which is how Melinda feels. The Barbie’s head has tape over its mouth symbolizing her inability to talk and communicate with anyone about how she feels. The knife and fork represent the threat around Melinda coming from Andy or peers. Malchiodi stresses that each object created by the patient is not random, but represent something about them; “when children draw pictures, unconscious and conscious symbols are selected purposefully. Children create or choose symbols which either possess or are assigned specific traits or attributes” (2015, 155).

This method of self-expression through art has been noted to be very beneficial for children who have been abused. Liebmann throughout the book supports the idea that angry silenced children can find their voice through the symbolic means of art. In *Speak*, Mr. Freeman encourages Melinda to “be the tree” (Anderson, 1999, 82), instead of bottling up the anger inside her; “The next time you work on your trees, don’t think about trees. Think about love, or hate, or joy, or rage whatever makes you feel something, makes your palms sweat or your toes curl. Focus on that feeling...” (Anderson, 1999, 68), “You’re a good kid. I think you have a lot to say. I’d like to hear it” (Anderson, 1999, 68). He didn’t try to impose anything on her, but he trusted her sense on what she needs to do with no direction and no expectation, Melinda also trusted the therapeutic process,

enabling her to feel comfortable in accessing further help. As discussed by, Liebmann, the anger of abused children is routinely directed inwards especially through self-harm by girls. That is exactly how Melinda was expressing her anger as she constantly bites her lips and nails until they bleed and also her attempt to suicide when she cut her wrist. Art therapy provided a healthy outlet and catharsis for Melinda’s emotions. In her book, *Handbook of Art Therapy*, Malchiodi, an art therapist, explains how art and drawings can be used in the healing of clients with short term trauma like children of sexual abuse. She mentions that art therapy is increasingly being used compared to other forms of therapy as this creative process that relies on nonverbal communication encourages personal growth, self-understanding and emotional reparation as well as finding relief from trauma. Thus the focus is not on the aesthetic side of the work, but on the therapeutic needs of the patient. Malchiodi has been analyzing children’s drawing or adults’ art expression to determine whether they had an emotional problem or experienced abuse or trauma. Melinda’s artwork provided a window to her problems and traumatic memories, the tree also symbolizes Melinda’s journey of growth towards speaking up. Art represents another language for Melinda to share her feelings and thoughts. In addition, art therapy serves as a catalyst for the interaction between Melinda, who is like a client, and Mr. Freeman, like a therapist. Their relationship was healthy for Melinda’s growth due to Mr. Freeman’s encouragements since the first session. He had a very positive impact on her, and art class was very effective and crucial for Melinda to speak up. He was able to make her feel safe and free to express herself, that’s why Melinda trusts him as she confesses everything in the end. She was finally able to find relief from the terrors of her experience and regain the courage and power over herself and her environment. Malchiodi further stresses the importance of art therapy to heal victims of abuse; “sexually abused children are characteristically silent victims...they often hesitate to voice their internal distress...Art therapy can offer children substantial opportunities for healing, initially by facilitating communication” (2011, 152). She supports art therapy as it assists sexually abused children and allows them to create images that communicate their internal thoughts about themselves and the world. Art creation can further motivate them to find other ways of releasing anger, such as through the use of words.

Melinda used her work of art as a stepping stone towards self-expression. Being able to express herself through art, Melinda was encouraged to use words. Seeing her final work of art in front of her in the end, Melinda gets emotional and starts crying as she thinks the work reflects exactly her emotions. Melinda finally feels relief; “The tears

dissolve the last block of ice in my throat. I feel the frozen stillness melt down through the inside of me, dripping shards of ice that vanish in a puddle of sunlight on the stained floor. Words float up” (Anderson, 1999, 106), at this stage, Melinda finally feels that she is able to use words in the very end of the novel, “Let me tell you about it” (Anderson, 1999, 106). In his book *Self-Healing Through Visual and Verbal Art Therapy*, Simon explains, “When adults and children draw freely in an apparently thoughtless or aimless way, ideas occur from their unconscious associations to the lines and shapes” (2005, 35). Melinda’s drawing reflects what is happening in her unconscious mind, the trauma that was haunting her, the pain she felt inside, the blocks in her throat and the anger and fear she repressed.

Anderson’s Art Therapy: Writing as a Means for Self-expression and Reflection

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson is not just a work of fiction that Anderson was inspired to write out of the blue of course, as is the case for many or most novels, much of it, or even the idea itself can be said that it stems from her personal life. In this section, the focus is not on the literary psychoanalysis of the character, Melinda, as it has been in the previous section, but on Anderson’s psyche herself. This section highlights Anderson’s psychological motive behind writing *Speak*, and the extent to which fiction writing may be viewed as a medium for achieving catharsis.

Much of Anderson’s personal experiences and trauma can be reflected in her work. As a teenager, Anderson was raped, and she never talked about that until 2019, when her memoir *Shout* was published. From Anderson’s interviews about how she was inspired to write *Speak*, one can deduce that everything started with a nightmare. However, the question to be asked is: do dreams mean anything at all? This has been a question of debate for psychologists; as a result, they were divided to two over the function and meaning of dreaming. Some psychologists believe that dreaming doesn’t necessarily mean anything, and is nothing more than a random brain activity that occurs while sleeping. Others, such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung believe that dreams can reveal someone’s deepest unconscious wishes and desires. This study supports the second group of psychologists who believe that dreams reflect people’s unconscious desires. Being a great contributor in psychology as well as the founding father of psychoanalysis, Freud is also the founder of dream interpretation. He used dream analysis as a therapeutic technique with patients, after the publication of his theory of dream interpretation, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which Freud conducted a self-analysis of his own dreams. Despite the fact that Freud believed that there are several

roads to the unconscious mind, he viewed dreams as “the royal road” to this latter, which led him to develop dream analysis or dream interpretation. He believed that the deep meaning hidden in each person’s dreams reveals a lot about someone’s psyche. If we would view Anderson’s experience from Freud’s theory of dream interpretation, her dream would definitely be more than just a random one. Her experience can also follow the steps of the above mentioned figure of Freud’s theory, from the occurrence of a blockage until reaching a state catharsis, if there is any. Much of Melinda’s story is similar to Anderson’s real life experience.

Anderson during the latency stage of Freud’s development theory has experienced a blockage. Instead of developing natural defense mechanisms by speaking up and releasing pent up emotions, Anderson developed neurotic mechanisms very similar to Melinda’s; silence and sublimation. This can be deduced from Anderson’s speech: “I was raped when I was 13 and it took me exactly 23 years. The person I told first was my therapist.” (qtd. In Block, 2019). Moreover, sublimation is another defense mechanism adopted by Anderson’s ego for the purpose of helping her release her emotions in a positive and creative way; this defense mechanism is going to be further discussed when Anderson used writing *Speak* for cathartic purposes.

Anderson’s Dream Interpretation: A Stimulus to Write Speak

According to Freud, dream interpretation is considered as the royal road to the unconscious mind. In this case, much of Anderson’s unconscious desires and wishes can be interpreted from her dream.

For Freud, ideas are represented by symbols in dreams. He believes that dreams contain both manifest and latent content; the former includes information from the dream as the dreamer remembers it, however the latter represents the repressed, symbolic meaning embedded within the dream. In dream analysis, people share their manifest content with the therapist, and based on specific symbols from the dream, the therapist will be able to clarify the latent content. Thus, Anderson’s dream, mentioned above, represents the manifest content. There are few details in her dream that may symbolize something about her unconscious mind and bottled up emotions. According to Gabrielle, crying dreams can be a sign of bottled up emotions. Anderson is well aware of this fact, in her interview on YouTube she says: “My recurring nightmares all the time are usually a sign that I’m not dealing with something and so I write about them”. For Anderson, the thing that she was holding back and avoiding to deal with

for a very long time was her traumatic experience of being raped.

The dream Anderson had was coming from her unconscious mind due to the extent of repression and silence that lasted for so long. Her unconscious, through symbolic dreams, started to leak some of her deepest urges, desires and need to speak up. Anderson knew exactly what she had to do to free herself from those pent up emotions. She woke up and began writing the novel *Speak*, revolving around the traumatized, silent character, Melinda. In this case, much like Melinda, Anderson went for the defense mechanism of sublimation. She used art writing as a first step for self-expression and healing when she wasn't able to utter a single word.

Did Anderson Write *Speak* for Therapeutic Purposes?

Kramer is one of the founders of Art Therapy Theory, highly relies on Freud's sublimation theory. Kramer's theory solely relies on the use of sublimation to express one's inner conflicts and issues, patients only needed guidance, technical assistance and emotional support from the therapist. In Anderson's case, her unconscious mind acts like a catalyst for her art therapy. The nightmare can be viewed as a stimulus encouraging her to act and do something about her trauma, the dream symbolizes her strong desire for speaking up and releasing her repressed emotions. She didn't try to ignore her feelings, but decided to start writing and releasing them in the form of fiction. Anderson is well aware of the importance of using writing for self-expression, therapeutic purposes and eventually healing process. She believes that after a trauma, one has to start to process the trauma and know well their own experience, way before sharing it with anyone. In her interview on YouTube, she says: "this where art comes in right, this is where writing and drawing and making music...start to express for yourself what your feelings are, and then you can find that safe person...".

In her novel *Speak*; one may be able to notice that much of Anderson's life is projected on the character Melinda. Since it may have been challenging for Anderson to verbalize her experience at the time, she started with self-expression through fiction. Anderson created a character that went through the same experience as hers, at the exact same age and used the same defense mechanisms, or reaction to the trauma she used herself. Much like Melinda, Anderson chose silence and avoidance, however, her inner unconscious strong desire to speak up was always there, but repressed with feelings such as fear or shame, "When it happened to me, I was so afraid to say anything" (Anderson). She thought that art creation was a great start for Melinda towards achieving catharsis, and she used art herself as a first step of self-expression, however, instead of

drawing, Anderson chose writing. Although Anderson's journey towards speaking up was much longer than the character she created, but both achieved catharsis, through the art medium.

The idea of projecting one's personal life as well as desires and wishes upon fictional stories is not a novel one, Wellek and Warren explain that: "People may model their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines" (qtd. In Goksen, 2015, 252), "most themes, represented by the authors might be the signs of their own personality traits" (Goksen, 2015, 252). Wellek & Warren add, "... writers often document their own cases, turning their maladies into their thematic material" (qtd. In Goksen, 2015, 252).

One may thus conclude that writing has been a very beneficial tool as a first means for self-expression and self-healing. Many studies support the great contribution of expressive writing in therapy, Tartakovsky states, "Writing can be beneficial for all of us, because it can be therapeutic. One of the most powerful parts of therapy is cultivating the ability to observe our thoughts and feelings," Siegel Acevedo adds, "But what may be difficult to express out loud can be readily given voice through writing". A great example of art being used as a therapeutic means for achieving catharsis is in this case the work of art; *Speak*.

However, if Anderson used writing for therapeutic purposes in *Speak* and, for instance, so had been the case in regards Small's Memoir *Stitches*; that is, both had been used as a means to release pent up emotions when words don't seem to be an option in physical and emotional abuse respectively, one may thus ask the following question, not for the purpose of making overgeneralizations though, but for explorational ones: "to what extent does the creative writing of fiction thematizing in trauma represent a means for releasing repressed thoughts and for achieving catharsis?". Certainly, biographies sometimes aren't always an option, as they themselves, depending on the time period, may not, of course, provide the critic everything about an author and this latter's intention for writing.

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