

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

08 MAI 1945 UNIVERSITY-GUELMA
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Letters and English Language

جامعة 8 ماي 1945-قالمة
كلية الآداب و اللغات
قسم الآداب و اللغة الانجليزية



Option: Literature

**Trauma and Recovery in Young Adult Literature: A Case study
of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999)**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture**

Board of Examiners

Chairwoman : Mrs. SAIDIA Imane (MA/A) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA
Supervisor: Miss MOUMENE Soumia (MA/A) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA
Examiner : Mrs. CHIHI Soraya (MA/A) Université de 8 Mai 1945 - GUELMA

Submitted by:

BOUSSAHA Selma

SAADANE Halla

Supervised by:

Miss MOUMENE Soumia

June 2022

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents who have always believed in me and shared my struggles. You are the best support that a person could ever have.

Thank you for everything.

To my dear supervisor Ms. Soumia MOUMENE. I truly appreciate your kindness and understanding.

Selma

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my mom, **Halima** and my dad, **Hacen**. I will never forget their support from my first day in life until now and all the people I love.

I would like to thank **Miss Moumene** for her support, encouragement and everything she did.

I would love to thank my friend **Selma Boussaha** for being the best partner ever.

Halla

Acknowledgments

We faithfully thank Allah for giving us the strength to fulfill this work

We would like to thank our supervisor Ms. Soumia MOUMENE for her guidance and patience. We are deeply grateful for her encouragement and constant support throughout the whole process.

We would like to thank the jury committee Mrs. SAIDIA Imane and Mrs. CHIHI Soraya for accepting to evaluate our work and providing the necessary feedback.

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to examine the representation of psychological trauma in young adult literature by analyzing Laurie Halse Anderson's controversial novel, *Speak* (1999). Furthermore, it highlights the role young adult fiction plays in providing its targeted readers with a credible depiction of this complex theme. The current study relies on contemporary trauma theory to examine the traumatic experience from the lens of Anderson's teenage protagonist, Melinda Sordino, by studying its disrupting impact on identity and language and stressing the use of silence and cynicism as primary protective coping mechanisms for this disruption. Moreover, it follows Melinda's resilient steps toward reclaiming her voice and identity and reaching post-traumatic growth. The study proves Anderson's ability to tackle the adversity of post-traumatic symptoms through her narrative and emphasizes her message about the importance of breaking silence at the level of individual and community. A close analysis of this novel reveals the ability of young adult genre to address relevant crucial topics that define the daily struggles these teenagers are silently enduring, and to enlighten and guide them through their journey toward adulthood. In addition, it deduces from Melinda's act of breaking silence and reclaiming her identity the possibility of mending the traumatic wound.

Key Terms: psychological trauma, young adult fiction, contemporary trauma theory, identity, breaking silence, post-traumatic growth, *Speak*.

Table of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
Table of Contents	IV
Introduction	1
Chapter I: Trauma in Young Adult Fiction.....	5
I.1. Exploring Trauma: Trauma Studies Between Past and Present.....	5
I.2. Trauma in Fiction	9
I.3. Trauma Portrayal in Young Adult Literature.....	14
I.4. Theoretical Framework: Selected Theories.....	19
Chapter II: Exploring Trauma in Laurie Halse Anderson’s <i>Speak</i>.....	25
II.1. Laurie Halse Anderson and <i>Speak</i> : A Disturbing Call of a Repressed Memory.....	25
II.2. Trauma and Identity: Lost Identity and Shattered Soul.....	28
II.3. Trauma and Language: Is Melinda’s Silence an Inability or Unwillingness?.....	33
II.4. Cynicism as a Coping Mechanism.....	40
Chapter III: Trauma Recovery in Anderson’s <i>Speak</i>.....	44
III.1. Recovery Through Art in Anderson’s <i>Speak</i>	44
III.2. Surviving Trauma: Resilience in Anderson’s <i>Speak</i>	50
III.3. Melinda Breaks Her Silence: Post-traumatic Growth in <i>Speak</i>	54
Conclusion	61
Works Cited	63
Arabic Abstract	
French Abstract	

Introduction

In an attempt to comprehend the complex world that lies between childhood and adulthood, a world that is filled with excitement, insecurities and even some painful experiences that mark this sudden transition, many authors tend to adopt young adult genre so they can fulfill this challenging mission. Unfortunately, trauma is one of the various experiences that teenagers are likely to undergo. Trauma is the experience of an overwhelming fright that haunts the victims and reshapes their identity, their perception of the world and their relationships. Since sexual trauma is one of the most prominent traumatic experiences among teenagers, it has become the main concern of many young adult works that embrace this issue as an inevitable reality, which requires recognition, understanding and resolution.

Laurie Halse Anderson's timeless novel, *Speak*, is acknowledged as one of the most realistic depictions of such a tormenting experience. It follows the story of a fourteen-year-old protagonist, Melinda Sordino, after being raped at a late-summer party by an older popular boy, Andy Evans. A typical scene that has been occurring over years in the American society as well as in other cultures, rape is still faced with the same reactions of silence, shame, denial or even blaming the victim. Thereupon, the current study seeks to carry out a deep examination of sexual trauma and to uncover its impact on the voice and identity of victims taking Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* as a case study, following the young protagonist's slow but steady steps toward recovery.

Recently there has been a renewed interest in young adult fiction. Such popularity has extended to film industry in which many young adult novels are adapted into movies. Accordingly, the selection of the present theme has been inspired by critics' and audience's fascination with this genre. Therefore, the study aims at stressing the role of contemporary

young adult novels in addressing serious and realistic issues and in conveying didactic and supportive messages through their representation.

Many young adult fiction writers prefer to deal with critical and sensitive topics that address the struggles of young adults such as sexual assault and its traumatic aftermath. This theme is perfectly represented in Laurie Halse Anderson's controversial novel, *Speak*. Consequently, this novel has been analyzed by many scholarly works whether in relation to young adult literature or to recent trauma studies.

In "Like Falling Up into a Storybook: Trauma and Intertextual Repetition in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*", Barbara Tannert-Smith considers *Speak* as an adolescent trauma narrative in which its author details the physical and psychological impact of a teenager's rape experience who perceives speaking as a danger and silence as the only solution to her dilemma (399). She tackles the novel's thematic as well as stylistic features of representing trauma and provides different interpretations of Melinda's responses and actions. Moreover, she follows Melinda's steps toward restoring her identity and self-worth. This work provides a number of theories and interpretations that help in analyzing Melinda's character.

Young adult novels have been harshly criticized over years either for being low-quality literature or for their bleak and bold depiction of reality through controversial topics such as suicide, crime, sexual violence and rape. However, Anna O. Soter and Sean P. Connors, in their article "Beyond Relevance to Literary Merit", argue that this genre actually has more to offer than what people believe. According to the writers, young adult literature does not only deal with themes relevant to adolescents but also reflects "a level of sophistication that invite serious interrogation" besides its treatment of crucial social issues (62). They assert that young adult literature is capable of provoking the reader to reflect on complex issues through its considerate social and political portrayal. They indicate that the struggles of adolescence are inevitable; still "we seek to grow no matter how afraid we are or

how painful the passage toward growth may be” (64). To be sure, these struggles are very much the common issues that confront young adults as they emerge from childhood. They are not, however, limited to the phase of adolescence. On the contrary, they are issues that “concern all of us as human beings, regardless of age” (64). In the same vein, the present work will analyze a controversial young adult novel and its examination of the issue of sexual assault. An issue that troubles not only teenage girls but also societies in general.

Cathy Caruth, in her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding traumatic experiences using texts of psychoanalysis, literature and literary theory and argues that these texts “stubbornly persist in bearing witness to some forgotten wound” (5). Thus, instead of giving an explicit clarification of the psychological dimensions of trauma, she aims at tracing in these texts the different profound stories and emphasizes the complex relation between knowing and not knowing (3). This influential work will provide a primary interpretation of the notion of silence in the novel.

The present study follows contemporary trauma theory in examining the themes of trauma and recovery as well as studying and interpreting the selected case study. Drawing from the traditional model as well as the pluralistic one, this study relied on different critics’ theories in reading Anderson’s *Speak*. The present work is divided into three chapters; one theoretical and two practical.

The first chapter provides a general overview of trauma theory in relation to young adult literature starting with a brief exploration of trauma studies and their influence on the literary field in general and the young adult genre in particular. It also provides a theoretical framework of the main clinical studies and theories that define the field of trauma. The second chapter addresses the representation of the theme of trauma in Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak* by analyzing its impact on identity and language and stresses the

protagonist's use of silence and cynicism as protective coping mechanisms. The last chapter tackles Melinda's recovery process from the traumatic experience by shedding light on the role of art as an alternative means of expression. Moreover, it studies Melinda's resilient steps toward breaking silence and reaching post-traumatic growth.

This study attempts to examine the representation of sexual trauma in Young-adult fiction and reach a deeper understanding of the complexity of a traumatic experience as well as the process of recovery. The research is conducted through a close reading of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* as a case study following Melinda Sordino's overwhelming experience and exploring the way trauma reshapes the individual's conception of the external world and the internal self by emphasizing its impact on identity and language. Hence, the current study focuses on investigating why it is difficult for traumatized people to express themselves and how the traumatized character, Melinda, manages her way through the haunting memories to reach post-traumatic growth. Thus, this work aims at answering the following questions: how can trauma affect identity? Is Melinda unable or unwilling to speak? How does Melinda cope with the traumatic experience? How does Melinda undergo the process of recovery? Does Anderson provide a credible representation of a traumatic experience?

Chapter One: Trauma in Young Adult Fiction

The first chapter aims to provide an overview of trauma theory by highlighting the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies and its representation in literature specifically young adult literature. It starts by exploring the evolution of trauma studies and the different perceptions concerning this term. The second section discusses the influence of trauma on the literary field and the different perspectives concerning its representation in fictional works. The third section examines the relationship between trauma and young adult literature and shows how this genre developed to treat more realistic and controversial topics. The last section highlights some of the major literary trauma theories moving between the traditional and modern models.

I.1. Exploring Trauma: Trauma Studies Between Past and Present

The term ‘trauma’ derives from the Greek word for ‘wound’. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2000), it was first used in English in 1693, when the second edition of *Blanchard's Physical Dictionary* described it as “a wound from an external source” (qtd. in “Trauma”). During that period, trauma was perceived as a physical injury. In “Introduction to Literary Trauma Studies”, Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja show that the dangers and malfunctions of industrial modernity traumatized many victims including those who had not been affected physically (2). However, Medical experts at that time such as the German neurologist, Hermann Oppenheim, (1889) who named this phenomenon “traumatic neurosis”, sought to explain all mental phenomena in terms of underlying organic, physical injury (2). It was not until the nineteenth century that the concept of psychological trauma began to emerge when Jean-Martin Charcot (1889), a French neurologist, stressed the importance of hysteria, which was defined back then according to Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (2015), as “an archetypal psychological disorder of women” (9), in comprehending trauma.

Moreover, his works inspired both his student, Pierre Janet, who is known according to Van der Hart et al. in their article, “Pierre Janet’s Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress,” as “the first psychologist to formulate a systematic therapeutic approach to post-traumatic Psychopathology” (379), as well as Sigmund Freud. These two rivals sought to explore the causes of hysteria by talking to patients and not just observing them.

While Charcot's research into hysteria influenced Sigmund Freud's early psychiatric practice, Freud's study began to take its own path in the 1890s, moving away from psychotherapy and toward the new discipline of psychoanalysis. According to Lucy Bond and Stef Craps in their book, *Trauma: The New Critical Idiom* (2020), Freud's book, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), written with Joseph Breuer, links traumatic hysteria to a repressed earlier experience of sexual assault (25). Afterward, with the twentieth century's events of World War I, Freud and other early psychoanalysts were confronted with the traumatizing experiences of soldiers returning from the battlefields. This caused his shift to a new perspective of understanding trauma as he realized the need to address the psychological effects of war. Thereupon, in his essay, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, Freud describes the warfare events as “excitations from outside powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (45). Thus, overwhelmed by the shocking events, soldiers were left without the psychological protections required to defend them from the atrocities of war (Bond and Craps 26). Hence, after various developments and shifts, the term trauma became known as a psychological injury or lasting damage done to individuals or communities by tragic events or severe distress.

The study of the lives of American veterans of the Vietnam War marked the origins of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis, and in 1980, it became officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a way of representing and explaining the suffering of these veterans so they can receive the needed treatment and support. Bond and

Craps affirm that this recognition was an extremely influential step because it gave trauma “official disease status” (37) for the first time, considering that all previously mentioned developments in trauma history have been accompanied by arguments regarding the victims' sincerity and the legitimacy of their disease. In addition, they believe that it also promoted “the first unified theory of trauma”, which was usually limited to a specific event or a group of people. Thus, awareness and knowledge of trauma increased with post-traumatic stress disorder as the “predominant model for diagnosing traumatic disorders” (37).

After decades of exploration, the common understanding of trauma settled on perceiving it as the response to extreme events so intense that it leaves lasting psychic damage. Therefore, as Roger Luckhurst explains in his book, *The Trauma Question* (2008), “the predominant popular connotations of trauma now circle around metaphors of psychic scars and mental wounds” (3). Nevertheless, its complexity has not yet been resolved. Trauma remains subject to controversy and debates whether in terms of meaning, nature, or symptoms. The complexity of trauma can manifest in its nature, as Richard Crownshaw states, in *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (2010), challenging and defying “witnessing, cognition, conscious recall and representation”(4). Bond and Craps describe the nature of trauma as slippery, “blurring the boundaries between mind and body, memory and forgetting, speech and silence, individual and community”, dynamic as it moves across disciplines, nations, ages, and genders, as well as contested due to its controversial nature (5).

Post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma have become common terms of diagnosis starting as a western notion, then expanding across cultures to include different aspects of the traumatic experience. Consequently, the widespread recognition of the term and its shift from professional to popular discourse in social life has caused “a loss of specificity in its meaning and application” (Bond and Craps 4). The scope of trauma has widened to include several

distressing events of the individual psychic suffering and not only those upon which the theory was built. For instance, such distressing events include the everyday trauma that women and children are exposed to, racial oppression and inequality throughout history, natural and technological disasters, community violence, life-threatening illnesses, and even global crises such as the coronavirus pandemic and “lockdown trauma” (Davis and Meretoja 1). Accordingly, in some cases, the event might seem ordinary to others who tend to judge victims and accuse them of overreacting. However, the interpretation of the traumatic experience might differ from one person to another. In his book, *Remembering Trauma* (2003), Richard McNally suggests three important variables in defining trauma: “an objectively defined event, the person’s subjective interpretation of its meaning, and the person’s emotional reaction to it” (78). Thus, the individual's subjective experience of the incident and the personal meaning deduced from it is what decides if something is traumatic.

The concept of trauma has been evolving over history to include a wide range of new perspectives and forms; this therefore what makes it difficult to select particular types. Judith Herman in her influential book, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (2015), gives the general categorization of trauma as natural trauma and man-made trauma. While natural trauma can generate everyone’s sympathy, she considers man-made trauma to be more controversial since it categorizes people into victims and perpetrators and thus creating a bias when dealing with trauma (7). A more specific categorization of trauma can be addressed according to the social context of the event or its severity. The “Trauma-Informed Toolkit” divides trauma into interpersonal such as childhood abuse, sexual assault, historical trauma, and domestic abuse. External trauma however includes war, the sudden death of a loved one, accidents and natural disasters (36). In terms of the severity of traumatic events, trauma is perceived in three different types. The first one is acute trauma which can be caused by a single extreme event. Chronic trauma on

the other hand is the result of a prolonged exposure to an extreme event. The third type is complex trauma, which occurs after experiencing several and varied traumatic events (Leonard).

I.2. Trauma in Fiction

With the growing interest in trauma studies and literature as a medium for reflecting reality, many works of fiction over the past few decades have included a wide range of themes about different traumatic experiences. Thereby, trauma became a significant part of literary criticism, especially in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* and their notion of the unrepresentability of trauma. In *Trauma Fiction* (2004), Anne Whitehead views this widespread appeal to trauma novels as a response to post-war and post-colonial legacy such as the Holocaust and slavery. In addition to these two features, another contributing element is the adoption of postmodern techniques to convey the complexity of memory and traumatic event (82). Aiming to represent what Khan Touseef Osman describes in "Trauma and Fiction: Representational Crises and Modalities" as a "world that has not been comprehended by the self and a self that has been alienated from the world" (161), these psychic trauma novels attempt to capture the shades of suffering after enduring horrible events and to give victims a voice in these novels and trigger readers' empathy towards them. Hence, such works are expected to give a credible depiction of suffering instead of a distant observation of the event. Yet, this is not an easy task.

The adequacy of fictional representation of different human experiences and dilemmas has been constantly questioned. Accordingly, when it comes to trauma, the question of how can something imaginary do justice to such a profound and complex subject remains problematic. This is what Anne Whitehead refers to as "paradox or contradiction" (3) when she describes the term trauma fiction. Therefore, a variety of views appeared

concerning this issue. One view is related to the literary value of these novels; in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that trauma novels should contain a high level of sophistication and difficulty to portray the complexity of trauma instead of easily consumed works (25).

Another view is what Robert Eaglestone calls ‘the right to write’, in his work “Trauma and Fiction”, when he raises questions about the way fiction might appropriate trauma, which needs more than “an interesting, thoughtful and moving” work (291). In her review of Laurie Vickroy’s *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Janice L. Doane states that while theorists like Kali Tal and Lawrence Langer insist that the only authentic trauma tales that can depict the horrors of trauma are those offered by survivors' direct testimony, Laurie Vickroy believes that trauma narratives can also be “as ‘authentic’ as the ‘direct testimony’ of survivors” (523).

In fact, the impact of trauma on fiction appears on both thematic and stylistic levels. According to Osman, trauma fiction challenges narrative conventions as it moves beyond the traditional narrative techniques to adopt new ones that suit the context of trauma, and by that it “highlights the fragility of these conventions under the weight of trauma” (166). In order to reveal the chaotic world of trauma to the reader, these novels implement some unique features that mimic the internal struggles of victims such as the fragmented narrative voice. Fragmentation can be both thematic and stylistic as it provides what Vickroy calls “shifts in time, memory, affect, and consciousness” (*Trauma and Survival* 28) and shows how trauma breaks the rules of temporality and chronology. In addition to fragmentation, features like intertextuality, non-linearity, and repetition are also considered “conventional narrative modes” that mirror the impact of trauma (Whitehead 84).

Trauma narratives have expanded to include the various extreme events that surround people's lives throughout history. Stories about war, colonialism, slavery, sexual abuse, and wounded childhood have found a way to be heard and grasped by others through literature.

When talking about the literary portrayal of the barbaric history of slavery and its dehumanizing effects, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) has always been a subject of discussion. Based on a true story, the novel follows the story of Sethe, an African American woman who escaped enslavement but when she is caught, she threatens to kill her four children and ends up killing only her two-year-old daughter in order not to return to slavery. The protagonist's personal experience highlights the reality of many other African slaves who are suffering from the destructive social institution of slavery in America, thus linking both personal and collective perspectives of slavery. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra argues that this kind of cultural narrative plays a critical role in the development of empathic unease, noting that fiction writers' imaginative freedom can produce "thought-provoking, at times disconcerting events" that allow readers to approach historical suffering from a sympathetic, yet reflexive, perspective (20).

After the Second World War, a tendency to tackle the horrors of war and its scarring effects overwhelms contemporary fiction. One of the various depictions of war trauma is Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998). After her interviews with veterans and visits to war cemeteries in France, Barker was inspired to write a novel about the impact of war that spans three generations as she wonders if the inheritance of this traumatic memory will come to an end. The story is set in the present, where Barker explores what the First World War means to us now and investigates what it means to remember it while it fades from the living memory. According to Whitehead "Barker writes a history in which the present is overshadowed and haunted by the unresolved effects of the past" (16). In *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (2009), David Waterman examines Barker's depiction of the traumatized individuals'

experience of time since the concept of recovery is dependent on a “constantly flowing stream of time” (5). He asserts that in this work “time seems to be stuck in a continuous present” (5) due to the ongoing transition of time and the recurring of previous memories.

Moving to a more personal aspect of trauma, Margret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988) explores the entangled relationship between trauma, identity, and culture. This novel provides a close look at how trauma shapes the protagonist’s social identity through what Laurie Vickroy in her study, “Seeking Symbolic Immortality: Visualizing Trauma in *Cat’s Eye*,” describes as the “fragmenting, isolating, and dissociative elements of traumatic experience” (29). Published in 1988, the novel tells the story of Elaine Risley a painter who returns to Canada for a retrospective show of her art where she recalls some childhood memories. Being bullied by a group of friends including her best friend, Cordelia, to a point where she nearly lost her life, Elaine dissociates from the past and the painful memories but the feelings of mistrust remain part of her identity and influence many of her relationships. Another important aspect of this novel is the way Atwood emphasizes the relation between art and trauma by demonstrating the role of art in releasing the deep unconscious expressions and the role of trauma in shaping Elaine’s “artistic vision and forms of expression” (qtd. in “Seeking Symbolic Immortality” 131). Unlike common trauma fiction, Atwood deals with “less extreme context” and highlights the existence of trauma in ordinary, but disturbing scenarios of human growth and creative survival (“Seeking Symbolic Immortality” 131).

Developments in trauma and specifically ‘trauma theory’ has grown significantly since the 1990s. Many contemporary critics have stated their concern about trauma theory becoming a field and restricting trauma fiction into a rigid method and “thereby losing the capacity for self-reflection and the original investigative or ethical impulse” (Bond and Craps 103). Therefore, these critics have been calling for a liberated depiction and for a diversity of techniques, experiences, and even perspectives that allow further expansion and development

of trauma fiction. In terms of techniques, Allan Gibbs, in *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (2014), criticizes the repetition of traditional narrative techniques in many works over decades, and calls for “new approaches to break this circle” (244). He promotes innovative writing on trauma that goes beyond “what have become the tired techniques of postmodernism” (244) to adopt new aesthetics such as traumatic metafiction, neo-realism, and neo-naturalism. He also points out the role of criticism in constraining representational possibilities by allowing and so encouraging writers to choose a narrow range of aesthetic options. He contends that “a more flexible and responsive criticism will also help to free writers from what they currently perceive as approved ways of representing trauma” (246). Hence, he calls for both theory and criticism to be able to accurately represent the reality of literary production and expand the possibilities for future authors.

In the same vein of breaking conventions, the shift from a Eurocentric view of trauma to regarding it as a universal phenomenon by tackling a variety of traumatic experiences of non-Western and minority groups became necessary. As Cathy Caruth states, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures” (11). Since human suffering is universal “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own... history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (24).

Another form of change appears in the shift from a biased study that focuses on victims to a more neutral examination that includes the perpetrator’s trauma. The notion that perpetrators are traumatized by their own actions and decisions is highly controversial when it is perceived from a moral perspective. However, according to Michael Rothberg, in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of Decolonization* (2009), trauma is not limited to one category, “it emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence or good and evil” (90). Hence, this view aims for the observation of

trauma as a “morally neutral psychological category”, without the superiority of one traumatized subject over the other (Bond and Craps 119).

I.3. Trauma Portrayal in Young Adult literature

Young Adult literature refers to a set of literary works targeted at readers aged from twelve to eighteen with stories that revolve around young adult protagonists as it explores themes relevant to their coming of age journey. If we compare it to other genres, this one is relatively recent considering that it has emerged after acknowledging the existence of adolescents themselves in 1904 by the American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, in his work, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*. According to Michael Cart, in his book, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (1996), this separate phase that lies between childhood and adulthood was “still foreign in a society accustomed to seeing children become adults virtually overnight as a result of their entering the full-time workforce”. Thus, Cart adds, “until 1900 we were a society with only two categories of citizens: children and adults” (1).

Due to the psychological as well as sociological and technological advances, youth culture emerged and the teenage market was embraced by a wide variety of disciplines including literature. In *Campbell's Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature*, Patty Campbell points out the efforts of female librarians in the emergence of this genre, as they decided to create a separate section for teenagers noting that they had been providing them with special services even before the existence of this section (5). She indicates that “the earliest documented use of the term young adult for teen books” was in 1937, yet it was until 1958 that this term came into general use (5). Thereby, it became the most suitable term for this category since it gives its targeted audience a sort of maturity and freedom.

The acknowledgment of this genre paved the way for many prominent novels that tend to depict the real-life struggles and conflicts of teenagers. Some of them are written primarily for teen audiences such as S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) which according to Chris Crowe, in his article "Young Adult Literature," "established the realistic novel for the teenage book market" (121). However, other works are not specifically meant for adolescents, but appeal to them either by their theme or by the age of the protagonist such as J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974). In "Adolescent Literature: Changes, Cycles, and Constancy", W. Geiger Ellis states that during the 1950s most adolescents' books were didactic, "presenting characters who moved through predictable plots and reasonably safe settings" (94) which did not attract the attention of many readers.

The 1960s, on the other hand, marked the transition of adolescent literature to a relevant and more realistic representation with no restrictions or rules as they dealt with serious issues and addressed taboo concepts (94). Therefore, the genre gained more attention, and more young adult books were being published, but the increase in quantity was not followed by an increase in quality. The genre back then was perceived as low art and it was until 1997 with the publication of J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* novel series that this genre started to gain proper public and critical recognition. In "Young Adult Literature: Reality on The Page", Chelsea Elmore states that these series were followed by an array of dystopian fiction that presents a selective mimetic portrayal of modern life (4) such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009), and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011), inspired, by their turn, movies adaptation. Meanwhile, she indicates that problem novels genre such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), and Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017) have gained

significant recognition as it continues to embrace relevant social issues and provide readers with a “secondhand and therapeutic experience” (38).

The popularity of young adult literature nowadays is undeniable. With the diversity of its themes and the bold and realistic depiction of teenagers’ real-life struggles, this genre became a refuge for many teenagers and a target for criticism and debates of many critics. Its works often combine both thematic and stylistic aspects of the novel to cope with the emotional changes that teenagers experience while crossing this invisible line into adulthood, which can be an exciting as well as a dreadful experience. Thus, this genre manages to capture these feelings and experiences in a way that makes it reach beyond its targeted young audience to gain the attention of adults who also can enjoy such stories that act as a window into the hidden and complex parts of the world of adolescence. The growing popularity of young adult genre was not limited to the public sphere; it has also succeeded to be an academic concern. Many authors and critics have been calling for its integration into the curriculum in order to encourage students to read more by providing them with works that reflect their daily conflicts. According to Patricia M. Hauschildt, in “Worlds of Terrorism”, it is teachers’ responsibility “to help students better understand the world in which they live by facilitating an examination of, or inquiry into, topics that confuse, create fear, raise questions and baffle world leaders”(18).

Many recent young adult novels tend to discuss certain social issues that are considered taboos. Jeffrey S. Kaplan in his article, “Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century,” states that recently perspectives have changed, “the world of young adult literature is being transformed by topics and themes that years ago would have never been conceived” (11). Nevertheless, the idea of breaking the taboo in this genre can be misleading since not all topics can be appropriate to such a young audience. Considering how their thoughts and identity could be affected easily during this sensitive phase, young adult literature, according

to Karen Coats in her article, “Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory,” can exert “a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation” (315). However, this influence could be used in a positive way. Despite their extreme content, certain topics require the awareness of these teenagers as a necessity of the reality they are living. Moreover, the aim of providing them with a more realistic world to reflect upon is to make them reconsider their choices or even help them to resolve some inner conflicts. Therefore, the selection of topics addressed in these novels should be based on the reasonable need of these teenagers and not merely their desires and interests.

The positive aspect of this concept of daring and bold depiction lies in its capacity to create a thought-provoking reading experience about important complex issues. An example of a reasonable reflection on teenagers’ unfortunate but undeniable social reality is sexual violence and its traumatizing outcome. Although it can be a sensitive topic, rape is a painful scar in the life of many teenagers across cultures and in American society in particular. According to Victor Malo-Juvera, in his study, “The Effect of Young Adult Literature on Adolescents’ Rape Myth Acceptance,” rape is a serious concern in American society, especially among adolescents as both victims and perpetrators (21). He proclaims that “crime reports collected by law enforcement agencies in 12 states showed that adolescents under the age of 18 represented 67% of reported sexual assault victims” (20), arguing that the spread of this phenomenon is “a product of a rape supportive culture” (21). Therefore, it is logical for young adult literature to discuss this alarming issue and raise the awareness of teens as well as adults who often misunderstand the traumatic responses that follow such a terrible experience as typical adolescent angst or rebellion.

The severity of sexual trauma had been undermined for a long time, same as many other issues related to women. Herman argues that for most of the twentieth century, the expansion of knowledge about traumatic disorders was due to the study of war veterans. Yet

with the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, people recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are those of women in civilian life (28). It was a difficult battle to get society to recognize the seriousness of sexual traumas and abuse that women face at home and in public. Hence, Feminists had to strive to raise public awareness of sexual trauma. Through their efforts, it became an acknowledged area of research, and initiated a new social response to victims. Consequently, several rape crisis centers started to provide practical, legal, and emotional support to rape victims (31). Thus, the recognition of sexual trauma "created a new vocabulary for explaining suffering and for approaching it both as an injury that requires treatment and as a resource that can be mobilized to claim rights" (Davis and Meretoja 3), allowing thereby those who have been silenced and disempowered to reclaim their voice.

Trauma is not limited to adults; it has been an inevitable reality in the lives of many children and teens. Thereupon, young adult novels are meant to depict trauma and suffering through the lenses of their young readers so they can absorb it correctly and improve their comprehension and awareness. These works show how sexual trauma affects a person's psychological state and indicate how readers might identify and empathize with those traumatized people who tend to feel "utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life" (Herman 51-2). Therefore, those who feel supported after the event through family, friends, or spiritual connections and who had a chance to talk about and process the traumatic event are often able to accept this experience as part of their growth ("Trauma-informed" 9).

Sexual trauma and young adult literature share some commonalities. For instance, they both have an interesting history of development through which they had to strive to obtain the needed attention. Moreover, they both embraced marginalized subjects related to

women and children. Hence, these two subcategories are entangled whenever trauma is examined as part of the growing-up process of many young adults.

I.4. Theoretical Framework: Selected Theories

Theories about trauma and its representation have been shaped through time to cope with the recent findings and events. Starting from the traditional model that represents the basic step toward understanding trauma theory, and moving to newly emerged theories that tend either to follow the same path and contribute to it or to break from this conventional view and call for new possibilities.

A fundamental contribution to the development of trauma studies is Judith Herman's book, *Trauma and Recovery*. This book as she describes is "the fruit of two decades of clinical work" (2). Through the deep clinical observation and interaction with a variety of traumatized patients, mainly "victims of sexual and domestic violence, [...] combat veterans and the victims of political terror" (2), she gives a clear guidance for comprehending the psychological aspects of traumatic experiences and the process of recovery while emphasizing the influence of political context. In addition to victims, Herman highlights the situation of witnesses who are also "subject to the dialectic of trauma" (2) stating that they may not only find difficulty processing the event but they also face the pressure of speaking about the atrocities and risking their credibility (2).

In her influential work, Herman tackles the complexity of post-traumatic stress disorder and classifies its symptoms into three categories. The first category is 'hyperarousal', which includes the acts of being constantly alarmed of any potential threat. The second category is 'intrusion', which reflects the haunting and intrusive nature of the traumatic incident. The third category is 'constriction', in which the victim becomes powerless and frozen in the face of atrocities (35). In the second part of her book, she states

three basic stages in the process of recovery: “establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community (3). In order to support her findings, she provides testimony of survivors who are capable and willing to share their experiences.

Humanistic studies of trauma were developed in the 1990s with the works of Cathy Caruth (1991, 1995, 1996), Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub (1991), in addition to Geoffrey Hartman (1995). The previously mentioned trauma figures shaped the initial understanding of literary trauma through perceiving the close interrelation between trauma and literature. Similarly in his work, “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies”, Geoffrey Hartman states, “a theory emerges focusing on the relationship of words and trauma and helping us to ‘read the wound’ with the aid of literature” (537). These critics relied on the ‘Freudian theory’ in order to develop a model that shows how suffering is unrepresentable and how traumatic experiences challenge the limits of language and psyche.

In her traditional trauma model influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytic studies, Caruth explains that trauma disrupts consciousness and challenges the limits of language by preventing direct linguistic representation. Her theory focuses on ‘dissociation’ and ‘latency’ as two major features of the traumatic experience. Caruth explores the aspects of suffering and ensures that trauma is an unassimilated event that tends to manifest itself through ‘fragmentation’ or ‘dissociation’. This inherent dissociation determines the intensity of the incident and its impact on the psyche. Moreover, this approach highlights ‘belatedness’ as a component of trauma's temporal structure. In other words, trauma is identified by a “delayed response to a traumatic experience that cannot be processed at the time of occurrence and emerges as intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares” (Davis and Meretoja 3-4).

In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Caruth defines trauma as a wounding experience, though being “unclaimed” by cognition and language, it attempts “to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). She indicates that trauma is “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (61). Thus, the victim becomes stuck in the delayed experience of the event that continues to surround awareness. She explains that what determines trauma then is not “the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past”, but rather its belated effect that “returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). The event may not be obvious in the conscious, yet it is there and saved beyond comprehension, and it continues to cause suffering.

Caruth emphasizes the intersection of literature and psychoanalysis claiming that they are both interested in “the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing” (3). Vickroy states that Caruth’s analysis and “observation of how trauma eludes comprehension suggest how narrative can simulate this for the audience and bring them closer to the victims’ position of uncertainty” (*Trauma and Survival* 8). Caruth integrates both psychoanalysis and neurobiology by adopting the clinical studies of Judith Herman and the psychiatrist, Bassal van der Kolk. This latter claims that the neurobiological response to trauma provokes a “speechless terror” that prevents coherent and conscious narrative recall in memory because “the event cannot be organized on a linguistic level” (qtd. in “Trauma Studies” 364). Because the traumatic experience penetrates the psyche in a unique way and produces an unusual memory that defies narrative representation, the unique remembering process results in approximate remembering but never absolute knowledge (“Trauma Studies” 364).

This canonical model laid the foundation for further trauma studies and triggered different perspectives and criticism. The historian, Dominick LaCapra, criticizes the way Caruth perceives the two concepts of event and experience, claiming that these two must be

distinguished and “one reason the distinction is important is that a person may take part in the event without undergoing the experience of trauma’ (112-3). He also criticizes how she overemphasizes the concept of repetition or what he calls the “excessive fixation on the symptomatic acting-out of trauma” rather than the healing process of “working through”. Stating that if the past were uncontrollably relived, “it is as if there were no difference between it and the present” (119), thus the distinction between past, present, and future would collapse.

With the historical and intellectual changes, new perspectives on trauma theory have emerged and the tension within trauma theory has intensified. In an attempt to break from the conventional model that relies upon a single psychological theory, a new pluralistic model that calls for a more dynamic and diverse view of literary trauma theory appeared. In addition to Balaev, this model includes the criticism of Ann Cvetkovich, Greg Forster, Amy Hungerford, and Naomi Mandel. Although influenced to greater or lesser degrees by the foundational Freudian concepts of trauma, these critics extend a critical analysis beyond the conventional approach by emphasizing the cultural dimensions of trauma.

Theoretical pluralism includes various representations and moves beyond the dominant model of unrepresentability to include alternative theories that address the manifold responses and representations of trauma and memory in literature. The plurality of psychological theories in this model is built upon the works of Laurence Kirmayer, Frederic Bartlett, Craig Piers, and Colin Ross.

In her work “Trauma Studies”, Michelle Balaev challenges the unspeakable notion of trauma by considering it one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature. She provides a new perspective by stressing the role of two elements: the diversity of narrative expression and the cultural dimension of trauma. According to this

model, “the effects of trauma on identity and memory are defined as an interplay of external and internal forces, as well as individual character qualities and cultural variables, which leads to a greater understanding of the connections between the individual and collective traumatic experience” (366). Instead of the classic model’s view of memory as a fixed storehouse, memory is understood as a dynamic process of reconstruction and the traumatic past is rebuilt in moments of remembrance forming new knowledge about the self and external world (366).

Balaev stresses the role that cultural factors play a major role in determining the value of a traumatic experience by adopting the argument of the psychiatrist, Laurence Kirmayer. This latter argues in her that traumatic memories are governed by social and cultural aspects that “influence what is viewed as salient, how it is interpreted and encoded at the time of registration, ... what is socially possible to speak of, and what must remain hidden and unacknowledged” (qtd. in “Trauma Studies” 367). Therefore, the disruptive nature of traumatic memory does not necessarily prevent retrieval and assimilation into identity. Because the present-day recollection process is shaped by cultural and historical conditions that influence knowledge and narrative recall of the past, this moves the focus to external, cultural aspects that influence the meaning of a traumatic experience (367).

In 2003, another clinical study has emerged to challenge Caruth’s model with the publication of Richard McNally’s book, *Remembering Trauma* (2003). In this book, McNally criticizes Caruth’s notion that emphasizes the unclaimed nature of the traumatic memory and its resistance of linguistic representation, arguing that most victims are capable of remembering the traumatic event as he states, “a failure to think about something does not entail an inability to remember it (amnesia)” (2). In his work, “Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory,” Joshua Pederson summarizes McNally’s

main arguments as follow: “traumatic amnesia is a myth, and while victims may choose not to speak of their traumas, there is little evidence that they cannot” (334). Pederson supports McNally’s claim explaining that if “the science of trauma changes, the literary theory of trauma must change too” (34).

Pederson also adds in “Cognitive Approaches to Trauma and Literature” that McNally opposes Herman and Van der Kolk description of trauma upon which Caruth’ model is built (220). He asserts that it is not possible to prove the absence of the information in the person’s memory, therefore we cannot claim if the victims are unable or unwilling to recall and speak about the event (McNally 184). Through integrating contemporary clinical findings in psychology and neuroscience, “his alternate model suggests that the traumatic experience is deeply etched and perhaps even preternaturally detailed” (“Cognitive Approaches” 220).

This thesis relies on a combination of these contemporary trauma theories and clinical studies to examine Laurie Halse Anderson’s traumatized protagonist, Melinda. Moreover, this work aims at analyzing the different symptoms, responses, and coping mechanisms that she has adopted, as well as explore the external and internal factors that influence both her perception of the extreme experience and her process of adaptation and recovery. The study starts by applying Caruth’s notion of the ‘unspeakable’ to Melinda’s primary response and then proceeds to perceive the prolonged silence from McNally and Balaev’s opposing models. Moreover, Judith Herman’s book, *Trauma and Recovery*, is used to analyze the post-traumatic symptoms and responses of the protagonist and to point out the necessary elements of recovery.

Chapter Two: Exploring Trauma in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*

This chapter seeks to study the traumatic experience from the perspective of Laurie Halse Anderson's teenage protagonist, Melinda Sordino. The first section gives an overview of the controversial novel, *Speak*, and the story behind its publication. The next two sections explore the theme of trauma in relation to identity and language due to the vital role that they both play in the novel as well as in the realistic life of its targeted audience. The last section discusses the bleakly ironic voice of Melinda as a form of coping mechanism.

II.1. Laurie Halse Anderson and *Speak*: A Disturbing Call of a Repressed Memory

Published in 1999, Laurie Halse Anderson's controversial novel, *Speak*, which is usually referred to as a trauma novel or young adult problem novel, is a story written by an adult from the perspective of young adults. With a confessional and conversational narrative style, the novel discusses one of the silenced taboo topics that can affect teenagers' lives and gives a closer look at their thoughts, daily struggles, and tumultuous life during high school. Consequently, the book has faced huge criticism and was banned in many schools because of its problematic subject matter. According to the 'American Library Association', *Speak* had been one of the top 100 challenged books between 2000 and 2009 (Kendall).

Alongside the growing criticism, the novel has achieved incredible success, as it became a New York Times Best-Seller the year it was published. *Speak* is a multiple award-winning book, mainly the Golden Kite Award and 1999 National Book Award Finalist for Young People's Literature ("Science Leadership"). In addition, it was published in sixteen languages ("Book reports") and was adapted into a movie in 2004. This widespread appeal is credited to its realistic mirroring of the difficult but not impossible journey of finding voice and reclaiming identity during the hardship, which relates to the lives of many adolescents.

In her paper, "Like Falling Up into a Storybook," Barbara Tannert-Smith explains, "the commercial success of *Speak* indicates that it "speaks" to its teen readers in their own

language” (397), making this relatable story more appealing. She explains that Anderson manages to mimic the way teenagers speak and interact “which is not surprising given its author’s claim that she researched her novel by visiting the twin touchstones of suburban adolescents: Taco Bell and The Mall” (397). Consequently, many teachers and critics have called for the integration of this novel into high school curriculum thinking that the moral of the story could be helpful for those who are going through a similar experience. Among them is Janet Alsup who argues, in her article “Politicizing Young Adult Literature: Reading Anderson’s “Speak” as a Critical Text”, that teaching *Speak* can be beneficial to these young readers as “they might even begin to acquire a mature "narrative imagination" that will help them be better citizens and more empathetic human beings” (166).

Laurie Halse Anderson is an American writer who was born in 1961 in New York. She started her writing career in the 1990s. Her first book, *Ndito Runs*, was published in 1996, and in 1999, she published her most remarkable work, *Speak*, through which she became New York Times bestselling author. The National Coalition Against Censorship and the National Council of Teachers of English have both honored her for her fights for intellectual freedom. Moreover, she is a member of RAINN's National Leadership Council where she speaks out against sexual violence on a regular basis (“Mad Woman”).

Anderson revealed in many interviews that the idea for *Speak* came to her in a “very vivid nightmare” (Anderson). In her nightmare, a girl is sobbing, but Anderson did not know why, so she decided to write about it stating, “Clearly I had something I needed to process from my own soul” (Anderson). She added that in order to do so, “armed with a pen, I can fight back, slicing through the metaphor and symbolism to find the small, scared part of me that needs some reassurance” (“Speaking Out” 25). As she started writing, the voice of Melinda took shape and began to speak. Anderson felt compelled to tell Melinda's story due to the recurring nightmares that needed to be expressed. Later on, the author found the

courage to confess that *Speak* is based on a similar personal experience of rape when she was thirteen admitting that she knows what it feels like to be voiceless but silence is not the best response. Thus, through her work, she encourages survivors to speak out (Grinberg).

Anderson's *Speak* is a timeless novel about a devastating and timeless issue that haunts women across cultures, yet continues to plague American society in particular. In a diary format, the novel tells the story of a fourteen-year-old girl called Melinda Sordino. Melinda went to a summer party and that night she called 911 without telling anyone why. As a result, all her peers become frustrated by her behavior and stopped talking to her without asking for the reason thinking that she did that to ruin the party. Time passes as she retreats into silence, becomes friendless and isolated and nearly stops talking at all. She starts High School as an outcast with a heavy secret. She falls into a deep depression, ignoring her looks, biting her nails and her lips, skipping classes, and perceiving everything around her with a sarcastic look. Her parents do not take her seriously, as they ignore all of these signs and keep scolding her for her low grades.

As the novel progresses, Melinda discovers an abandoned janitor's closet at school and decides to make it a hiding place where she can sleep peacefully. The only way that Melinda can feel comfortable expressing herself is through Mr. Freeman's art class where she was assigned a tree project and throughout the novel, she was trying to draw the perfect tree. Eventually, she admits what really happened that terrible night. Melinda was raped by an upperclassman, Andy Evans, who attends the same high school and is still considered a threat. After facing the reality, her process of recovery begins and she starts standing for herself and decides to tell the truth to her former friend, Rachel, in order to protect her. Andy attempts to attack her again in her janitor's closet but this time she was strong enough to defend herself and expose his deeds giving voice to other girls who suffered because of him.

At the end of the year, her tree is finally completed and she decides to share what has happened to her with her art teacher, Mr. Freeman.

Anderson took a brave step to talk about something that has been always silenced and stigmatized. Hence, through this realistic depiction, Anderson aims at pushing teenagers with similar experiences to assert their voices, identities, and power. She also highlights through this novel the necessity of raising the awareness of both parents and teachers so that they would be able to identify those who are suffering around them and guide them to overcome their struggles. Anderson herself asserts that she is “most proud of the impact of *Speak* because it has helped so many survivors find the courage to talk about what happened and start to heal and grow” (Kaywell and Anderson 81). She has received letters, emails and responses many of which are from sexual assault survivors, and young people struggling with depression expressing their appreciation for this relatable story.

II.2. Trauma and Identity: Lost Identity and Shattered Soul

The psychological distress that emerges from trauma affects several crucial elements of the individual well-being including identity. This latter can be influenced by several external factors and experiences. According to Muldoon et al. in their article “The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma: Social Identity Pathways Associated with Divergent Traumatic Responses” social identity is built on “a sense of belonging, experiences of support, trust, and solidarity directly linked to a sense of shared identity” (323) which contributes, in its turn, to the formation of personal identity. However, these elements may no longer seem plausible for some traumatized individuals, since their perception of themselves and the world around them is shaped by the traumatic experience.

The stressful experience of adolescence is universal. However, the construction of a positive and coherent identity during this phase is necessary. In *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications* (2011), William Crain refers to Eric Erikson’s eight stages of

development and points out that during the fifth stage (12- 18 years), adolescents are faced with crises of 'identity versus role confusion' where peer pressures and decisions about future and social commitments become worrisome and disturbing. He adds that they are in a constant search for who they are and their place in "the larger social order" (299). Thus, the ongoing struggle to fit in and attain a place in the adult world, and form an identity within this chaotic phase is considered a challenge to these young people and mere dramatic angst to their parents. Yet, what if behind this apparent angst hides a deep, painful, haunting scar? This is best portrayed through the story of Laurie Halse Anderson's protagonist, Melinda Sordino, a silent traumatized and isolated girl with a shattered identity.

Melinda used to be a cheerful happy girl among a group of friends whom she calls "plain Janes". One night as they are having a sleepover at Rachel's house, they decide to go secretly to a cheerleader party "with beer and seniors and music" (*Speak* 133). Melinda ends up being drunk, so she heads to the woods in order to avoid the crowd where she meets a good-looking senior who takes advantage of her drunk and naïve state. Melinda is dizzy and powerless, she cannot defend herself, scream for help or even say no; "I didn't answer. I didn't know. I didn't speak" (135). Herman explains this passive reaction stating, "At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. The human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized" (33). After being raped, she realizes that she has to call the police. Yet, she finds herself unable to speak and as everything becomes chaotic, she leaves without telling the police or her friends what happened, "I walked home to an empty house. Without a word" (*Speak* 136). Her parents are not home when she needs them the most so she spends the night alone not able to process this overwhelming situation.

Trauma, according to Michelle Balaev's analysis in his work, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" is "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts

previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society”(15). If these traumatic responses persist for more than one month, the individual is more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder. Its diagnostic criteria consist of the occurrence of a socially defined severe traumatic event, in addition to a set of symptoms. These symptoms according to Herman are defined in three categories. ‘Hyperarousal’ is “the first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder” (35). After the traumatic experience, victims like Melinda tend to be on a permanent alert, expecting danger at any moment. This is apparent in the way Melinda becomes cautious of people around her, such as when she turns down David’s offer for pizza thinking to herself, “The world is a dangerous place. You don't know what would have happened. What if he was just saying his parents were going to be there? He could have been lying. You can never tell when people are lying. Assume the worst. Plan for disaster” (*Speak* 132).

The second category is ‘intrusion’, which represents the re-experiencing of the event long after the danger, reflecting how the victim’s life is stuck at the moment of adversity. This explains the intruding flashbacks, nightmares and constant reminders that Melinda is constantly suffering from, “which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event” (Herman 37). The last category is ‘construction’. This one deals with the helpless and powerless response of traumatized victims to danger, when their “system of self-defense shuts down entirely”, performing the “analogous states” of animals, “who sometimes “freeze” when they are attacked” (Herman 44); such as when Melinda meets her attacker outside school. Melinda completely freezes like a rabbit, when she comes face to face with Andy; “I stop on a frozen puddle. Maybe he won't notice me if I stand still. That's how rabbits survive; they freeze in the presence of predators” (*Speak* 96-7). These symptoms continue to include different forms of responses such as numbness, withdrawal, and denial, and through time, they become the defining features of the victim’s identity.

The heavy burden of trauma deprived Melinda of her sense of identity. Her narrative reflects the impact of rape on her fragile identity which became fragmented and alienated as she herself states how she used to be “a one-piece talking girl” (*Speak* 97) before the incident with a vivid soul similar to her “happy, driven and aerobically fit”(24) friend Heather. Hence, by observing her she wonders: “Have I changed that much in two months?” (24). Even her father admits this sudden change arguing that she used to be “a sweet, loving little girl last year” (114), however, she is now a stranger to others and to herself. Not being able to construct meaning from the world around her or accept the girl she becomes, Melinda only wishes to disappear or “erase” herself: “I wash my face in the sink until there is nothing left of it, no eyes, no nose, no mouth. A slick nothing” (45). In “Melinda’s Closet: Trauma and the Queer Subtext of Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*,” Don Latham comments on Melinda’s confusion, stating that when “confronted by feelings of alienation from her former self and feelings of unease with her current, fragmented self, Melinda at times wants to erase her identity completely”(374). Thus, unable to confront and adjust to her current state, Melinda keeps holding onto the memories of her former self, knowing that there is no way back but hoping for one anyway.

This feeling of alienation and discomfort is best shown in the way she perceives her reflection in the mirror after the incident; “Who was that girl? I had never seen her before” (*Speak* 136). Later on, she continues to avoid her reflection by hiding the bedroom mirror in the closet and covering the other one with Maya Angelou’s poster. Not being able to confront herself in the mirror indicates how feelings of shame and guilt for not saying ‘no’ and protecting herself torment her. However, when she goes shopping with her mother she finds the three-way mirror in the dressing room with its multiple distorted reflections appealing. This according to Tannert-Smith “replicates her image to infinity and so better reflects her

sense of shattered subjectivity” (399), thus revealing how she no longer considers herself as a unified self.

Melinda’s loneliness has a role in shaping her identity, especially during a time when she is in need of support but no one is there to listen. Being judged and ostracized by her old friends and peers, whom she longs to talk to, contributes to her tormenting low self-esteem, which appears frequently in the novel, such as when referring to herself as an ‘outcast’, a ‘clanless’, or a ‘wounded zebra’. Melinda constantly criticizes herself for being friendless, showing how she relates her self-worth with peer acceptance, “I have no friends. I say nothing. I am nothing” (*Speak* 116). Her struggle with socializing starts at the beginning of the novel when she could not figure out where to sit in the empty bus and eventually her fears of being the only one sitting alone are realized. Melinda does not like being alone, yet she does not want to associate with others either for a lack of trust or fear of being turned down which would add further injuries to her wounded self. This contradiction confirms Balaev’s argument about the way trauma novels manage to represent how the traumatic event “disrupts attachment between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments” (“Trends in Literary Trauma Theory” 149-50).

Wishing to be alienated and invisible to everyone and constantly searching for a spot to hide shows how her social identity is affected by the rape. Her first hiding attempt is her visit to the hospital claiming that the hospital is “the perfect place to be invisible” (*Speak* 111). Eventually, she settles on the janitor’s closet in her High School, as she comments, “this closet is abandoned it has no purpose, no name. It is the perfect place for me” (26). It becomes her secret place, where she collects her drawings and skips class to take naps because she cannot sleep properly at home. She considers it a safe refuge for her and her creeping thoughts: “My closet is a good thing, a quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts

inside my head where no one can hear them” (51). Another wish for maintaining invisibility appears when she is around the senior who raped her, whom she refers to as ‘IT’ or ‘Beast’.

Although it is not the place of the incident, Melinda’s high school is considered a constant reminder of what happened since it is full of people associated with that night and mainly her perpetrator. Anderson sheds light on the hypocritical world of high school by exposing their lies and the way its atmosphere causes more pressure than comfort. Melinda states a list of lies that she frequently hears and which contradict the real life of high school, such as “we are here to help you” (*Speak* 5), and “we want to hear what you have to say” (148). She cannot feel the sincerity in the principle’s and guidance counselor’s words, “while I wait for another lecture from my guidance counselor about not living up to my potential. How does she know what my potential is? Potential for what? When she talks blah blah, I usually count the dots in her ceiling tiles” (68). This shows how she lost trust in the school’s authority that cares only about grades and treats students as rebels who need discipline instead of providing the necessary guidance during this critical stage.

II.3. Trauma and Language: Is Melinda’s Silence an Inability or Unwillingness?

The crucial relationship between trauma and its articulation has been the center of debates throughout the history of trauma theory. Language plays a vital role in the healing process for most victims. Yet, it is always difficult to express what happened through words because of the nature of the trauma itself as well as other contextual factors that influence the process of expressing the extreme event. Therefore, different studies and interpretations have been aiming to comprehend the complex paradox of trauma and language. This, according to Leigh Gilmore, in her book, *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001), what makes language “bears a heavy burden in the theorization of trauma” (6), it acts as a tool for determining the severity of the traumatic incident and tracking the healing process.

Silence plays a significant role in Anderson's novel. It embodies the tormenting impact of the traumatic event on the individual and serves as a way of resistance, a coping mechanism, and a refuge. Melinda's primary and immediate response to the extreme event is her inability to talk to the police or anyone else. A complete silence possesses her for she is not being able to process, let alone confess what has just happened. This is illustrated in the way Melinda finds difficulty speaking with adults around her, "Every time I try to talk to my parents or a teacher, I sputter or freeze. What is wrong with me?" (*Speak* 50). The traditional conceptualization that launched trauma theory insists on the impossibility to speak about trauma, which formed the basic understanding of trauma in relation to language. Consequently, many studies have adopted this model and as Gilmore states: "something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency" (6). This view indicates that later on, the victim's silence prolonged due to the repetitive intrusive past that overwhelms the present, and "the damaged psyche takes refuge in a pervasive numbness and speechlessness that serve to disconnect the self from emotions and external stimuli" (Tannert-Smith 398). This can serve as a possible interpretation of her silent response as she indicates, "the whole point of not talking about it, of silencing the memory is to make it go away. It won't. I'll need brain surgery to cut it out of my head" (*Speak* 82). Each time her memory recalls the incident, she tries desperately to escape even though she knows it is impossible, "even if I dump the memory, it will stay with me, staining me" (51). This is according to Caruth what it means to be traumatized. It is "precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4-5).

One of Melinda's various responses to her traumatic experience is denial. She continues to live in numbness refusing to admit what has happened even to herself. She

questions these intrusive memories “was I raped?” (*Speak* 164) and then immediately wishes to banish them away, “My head is killing me, my throat is killing me, my stomach bubbles with toxic waste. I just want to sleep. A coma would be nice. Or amnesia. Anything, just to get rid of this, these thoughts, whispers in my mind” (165). When some girls blame her for what happened at the party she protests silently:

You don't understand, my headvoice answers. Too bad she can't hear it. My throat squeezes shut, as if two hands of black fingernails are clamped on my windpipe. I have worked so hard to forget every second of that stupid party, and here I am in the middle of a hostile crowd that hates me for what I had to do. I can't tell them what really happened. I can't even look at that part myself. (28)

This shows how tormenting and haunting a traumatic memory can be. For instance, when she was asked to choose verbs to translate in Spanish class, she selects the verbs that describe her state: “to hide, to forget, to escape” (51).

While in a different scene, Melinda expresses her need to speak up “I want to confess everything, hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else” (*Speak* 51). Another indicator of her need to speak is her interpretation of the symbolism in Nathaniel

Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), showing how she perceives things from the lens of her own experience, “Hawthorne wanted snow to symbolize cold, that's what I think. Cold and silence. Nothing quieter than snow. The sky screams to deliver it, a hundred banshees flying on the edge of the blizzard. But once the snow covers the ground, it hushes as still as my heart” (130). This conflict according to Herman between “the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (1).

Victims such as Melinda are torn between “the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy” (1), not being able to decide which one would be less harmful.

The traumatic experience indeed tends to create a speechless victim. However, the assumption of this response as absolute and inescapable has always been debatable. According to McNally, psychologists often “mistake survivors’ unwillingness to talk about or recall trauma for an inability to do so” (“Cognitive Approaches” 220). He suggests that victims may choose not to speak because of personal reasons. Therefore, “We cannot tell the difference between unavailability of the memory trace and refusal to disclose the abuse” (184). This theory implies that Melinda chooses silence and denial as a safe path because it is easier to pretend that nothing has happened than to admit it. Her silence starts as a response to the shocking event but later on develops to be a choice. She finds more comfort in silence believing that no one would listen or believe her story such as when she explains, “It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it. All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say” (*Speak* 9). Even for some traditional theorists, silence can be a choice for some victims; in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991) Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argues, “The speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening to themselves” (58).

When she is forced to speak up, Melinda immediately uses silence as a shelter. For instance, when her social studies teacher obliges her to read her report, she considers that a form of oppression: “there is no way they can punish me for not speaking. It isn't fair. What do they know about me? What do they know about the inside of my head?” (*Speak* 157). Thus, inspired by the suffragettes, she feels the need to stand up for herself and fight for her opinion, so she writes on the board: “No one should be forced to give speeches. I choose to stay silent” (156). Melinda becomes attached to silence thinking it would be the safest solution, as she contemplates, “Lawyers on TV always tell their clients not to say anything.

The cops say that thing: “Anything you say will be used against you” (157). Melinda uses silence as a coping mechanism that helps her collect the fragmented pieces and she considers it a safe zone that protects her from distress. However, to what extent would silence be helpful?

Melinda’s social insecurity derives from the lack of support that she witnesses whether from her parents or friends. These social factors according to Balaev’s view, can determine why victims like Melinda prefer silence (“Trauma Studies” 366). Her parents refuse to listen to her implicit calls for help and interpret these symptoms as a childish cry for attention such as when her mother sees her scratched wrist and instead of questioning what happened, she says, “I don’t have time for this, Melinda” (*Speak* 88). Lack of communication within the family makes things more difficult for the traumatized individual. In this regard, Melinda reveals the total absence of communication between her family as she states, “my family has a good system. We communicate with notes on the kitchen counter” (14). Melinda does not find the needed comfort within her family that seems to be falling apart as she indicates: “I can’t believe we have to keep playacting until I graduate. It’s a shame we can’t just admit that we have failed family living” (70). For that, she distances herself believing that her words will not reach, “Would you listen? Would you believe me? Fat chance” (114).

Melinda’s bad experience with friendship, and the school environment in general, contribute to her depression. She becomes friendless after ruining the summer party and despite her desire to push everyone away, she desperately seeks for friends especially those who abandoned her, “If there is anyone in the entire galaxy I am dying to tell what really happened, it’s Rachel” (*Speak* 5). Throughout the novel, there are numerous instances when Melinda clearly states her desire to confess if she only finds an empathetic listener. When her parents show her that they become aware of her interest in drawing she thinks about opening up to them instantly, “I almost tell them right then and there. Tears flood my eyes...This isn’t

going to be easy... But I want to tell them everything as we sit there by our plastic Christmas tree” (72). This indicates Melinda’s need for affection and support in order to speak.

However, the lack of genuine interest in understanding their daughter’s plight prolongs Melinda’s state of silence and pushes her to think that her feelings and her voice are not valuable.

As time passes, Melinda’s silence becomes intense as she confesses, “it is getting harder to talk. My throat is always sore, my lips raw” (*Speak* 50). She finds it more difficult to escape the consuming thoughts of guilt for not saying “no” to her attacker and failing to protect herself. Melinda’s feelings of shame for being raped is apparent in the way she projects Hawthorne’s symbolic use of the letter ‘A’ on herself by choosing the letter ‘S’ instead as she explains, “S for silent, for stupid, for scared. S for silly. For shame” (101). In their chapter, “Helping People Cope with Trauma,” Beverley Raphael and Lenore Meldrum clarify why victims struggle with such feelings stating, “the perception that a person did not handle the event as they felt they should have is a possible complication. There is a particular burden of stress associated with personal perceptions of failure in a traumatic situation” (7), which perfectly explains Melinda’s weak and defeated state. She decides that silence would be the perfect solution to all these feelings that are “chewing [her] alive like an infestation of thoughts, shame, mistakes” (125). Thus, she believes that releasing this inner turmoil would cause problems more than a relief for she has no power to face the consequences. Similarly, Tannert-Smith argues that Melinda perceives speaking as a threat. Thereupon, “she retreats into the speechless terror of trauma” (399). In “Melinda and Merryweather High”, Robyn L. Schiffman asserts that Melinda’s muteness is not only a function of her literal inability to speak but also of her need to blend in and not cause any more trouble, even among the staff at school (50).

Cultural characteristics and societal attitudes may interfere with the expression of feelings. In her book, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (2006), Naomi Mandel rejects the claim that perceives silence as inability. Instead, she considers it a choice that can be shaped by the interference of cultural elements stating, “silence and forgetting are as much a strategic and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the product of the subjugating culture’s demands and requirements” (172). This idea is further examined by Beverley Raphael and Lenore Meldrum as they emphasize the role of cultural factors affirming that instead of showing support, some cultures believe that if something happens to you it is your fault (8). In Melinda’s case, speaking is not an option since there is no one to bear witness to her testimony. Silence, along with several other symptoms are clear signs that there is something wrong with her. As Lisa Detora states in “Coming of Age in Suburbia: Sexual Violence, Consumer Goods and Identity Formation in Recent Young Adult Novels;” “through a judicious admixture of language and silence, Melinda both conceals and reveals her experiences” (27) but no one cares to notice these silent signs of seeking help. Through constant neglect and rejection, the people that surround her have contributed to the severity of her trauma.

If victims themselves find difficulty expressing their trauma, how can authors use language to represent something that seeks to defy language and representation? For Caruth, the painful experience that the mind is unable to process properly indeed limits the victim’s ability to deliver it easily. Yet, she asserts that imaginative literature can “speak” trauma when normal, discursive language cannot through the use of different stylistic elements that project the traumatic experience (Pederson 334). Thus, the intensity of the topic necessitates distinct narrative styles that provide readers with an insight into the traumatic experience.

The trauma paradigm requires using a number of narrative techniques to facilitate the representation of trauma and its different implications. For Vickroy, trauma narratives do not

only present trauma as a subject matter; they also manage “to incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures of these works” (“Trauma and Survival” xiv). Throughout the novel, Anderson implies some structural features, which allow according to Detora “for gradual revelations of a dangerous secret in the course of a linear series of events, reinforcing the truth of the narrative by superimposing a fragmented narrative of trauma on a linear narrative” (26). This fragmented and jumpy narrative is meant to mimic Melinda’s trauma and validate the resistance of trauma to linguistic representation (26).

Another structural feature that characterizes Anderson’s narrative is “the careful balance between language and silence that characterizes Melinda’s communication” (Detora 26). The gaps in narration and empty spaces in writing are meant to reflect Melinda’s silent responses and reactions. Instead of directly describing her physical reaction to the situation, Anderson leaves a blank space in the middle of the text to give a more credible description of her reaction and allows the reader to imagine the situation from both perspectives. The silence in narrative might disguise direct verbal confession, yet it displays a creative and stylistic depiction of the scenes and provokes the reader to regard and reflect on this element at both thematic and stylistic levels.

II.4. Cynicism as a Coping Mechanism

Teenagers often tend to be cynical. On their journey to maturity, they usually gain an insight into the dark aspects of life as they start spotting the flaws in the life of adults so they decide to form their own identity apart from the values imposed on them by parents and teachers. Thus, according to Mills Candice M. and Keil Frank, in their article “The Development of Cynicism,” in order to protect themselves from disappointment and deceit “children must eventually acquire some degree of cynicism as they move toward the adult practice of taking things with a grain of salt” (385). However, excessive cynicism in most

cases can be perceived as a passive coping mechanism that conceals a sheltered psychological trauma.

Traumatic stress involves some coping processes that differ from one person to another. In “Coping Styles in Persons Recovering from Substance Abuse,” Valtonen et al. perceive coping as a set of behavioral and cognitive strategies a traumatized person employs in order to avoid the negative impact of distress which makes it a “tool that lends itself to the analysis of complex human phenomena” (58). Thus, it can take the form of many unconscious and conscious strategies adopted by the individual to manage unstable and untrustworthy situations, such as withdrawal and avoidance, silence, denial, and numbness.

Just like silence, cynicism is Melinda’s unique way of handling the heavy experience of rape and social rejection. She becomes perceptive to the different realities and lies around her. She criticizes and mocks everyone thinking they are living in a fake world where only she can see the truth. Even though she describes herself as an outcast, she does so while also expressing contempt towards other students as she classifies them into clans “Idiot Savants”, “Human Waste”, “Suffering Artists”, and “Future Fascists of America” (*Speak* 4). According to Alice Trupe in her book, *Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature* (2006), Melinda’s sarcastic comments follow the school hierarchy exhibiting a typical adolescent rejection of authority figures. Either by nicknaming them such as her social studies teacher, Mr. Neck, and her English teacher ‘Hair Woman’ or by mocking their beliefs and behaviors (46). She even mocks her school’s lack of identity, as she comments, “we are no longer the Tigers because the name shows "shocking disrespect" for an endangered creature” (49).

Cynicism in some cases emerges as a result of an extreme situation that shakes a person’s belief in others. Alongside her tormenting feelings of guilt and shame, Melinda holds a disappointment in the ‘grown-up world’ and the idealistic vision of maturing. This disappointment is manifested through internal cynical comments. Melinda’s cynical vision

covers everything and everyone including herself, especially when she criticizes her friendless and lonely life at high school: "I'm the only one sitting alone, under the glowing neon sign which reads, "Complete and Total Loser, Not Quite Sane. Stay Away. Do Not Feed" (*Speak* 128). She even describes her alienation in a sarcastic way, "I Just thought of a great theory that explains everything. When I went to that party, I was abducted by aliens. They have created a fake Earth and fake high school to study me and my reactions. This certainly explains cafeteria food" (42). Therefore, despite her desire for belonging, she decides to withdraw and ridicule herself and others from afar and disappoint herself as a way of maintaining safety.

Melinda uses cynicism to escape any uncomfortable situation. For instance, whenever her parents start scolding her, she protects herself through her inner sarcastic plot. The same goes when they have a meeting with the principal and the Guidance Counselor. Melinda refuses to talk with the certainty that no one will believe her if she did. Instead, she mocks this uncomfortable situation:

Mother and Father apologize. They sing a show tune: "What are we to do? What are we to do? She's so blue, we're just two. What, oh what, are we supposed to do?" In my headworld, they jump on Principal Principal's desk and perform a tap-dance routine. A spotlight flashes on them A chorus line joins in, and the guidance counselor dances around a spangled cane. I giggle. (115)

Melinda feels detached from her parents. This is apparent in the way she criticizes her family's disconnection and failure: "My family doesn't talk much and we have nothing in common, but if my mother cooks a proper Thanksgiving dinner it says we'll be a family for one more year" (58). The dysfunctional family environment that lacks affection and support contributes to her passivity and helps in shaping her cynical view.

Melinda adopts this cynical attitude as an emotional protection. However, cynicism can be damaging. It is considered an illusion, a tool for ignoring pain instead of a step to change and moving forward. According to Paul Rogat Loeb, in his book *Soul of Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time* (1999), the passivity of cynical people can lead to “a sense of isolation, loneliness and depression because it blocks the expression of emotions which is a basic need of growth and self-fulfillment” (7). In “Ash Wednesday: The Effects of a Fire”, Alexander McFarlane and B. Raphael state that cynical people see life narrowly and negatively, which prevents them from seeing the positive aspects of events and relationships with their family and friends. Thus, it affects the social life of the traumatized individual and hinders the healing process (341).

Anderson uses the element of sarcasm in a way that entertains the reader but at the same time tries to convey that something is really wrong with Melinda. What is interesting about this character is that her sarcastic expressions are all internal, as a need to distort reality rather than hurting others. The way she perceives some people with a pathetic look reflects how she feels about her own situation such as when she describes Mr. Neck: “I bet he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder” (*Speak* 7). Eventually, as she moves towards recovery, she becomes less cynical when she starts viewing things with a mature look.

To conclude, this chapter explores the way Anderson’s controversial novel manages to capture the disruption caused by the traumatic event at the level of identity and language by emphasizing the impact of psychological and social factors on this process. Melinda Sordino, with a cynical voice that hides a deeply injured little girl, represents the story of many other teenage girls who lost their voice, identity, innocence and trust in their coming of age journey.

Chapter Three: Trauma Recovery in Anderson's *Speak*

This chapter aims to provide a thorough analysis of Melinda's recovery process by shedding light on the stages and factors that she had to consider in order to heal her wound. The first section deals with the therapeutic role that art plays throughout Melinda's healing journey. The next section explores the concept of psychological resilience and its manifestation in the novel. Finally, the last section tackles the notion of post-traumatic growth and the long-awaited act of speaking up and explains their importance in the recovery process.

III.1. Recovery through Art in Anderson's *Speak*

Trauma recovery is the process through which survivors are able to regain control and move on with their lives after the traumatic event. Although it does not result in a complete break from the traumatic memory, the recovery process implies adapting to this memory. According to Judith Herman, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections" (133). Therefore, recovering from traumatic events is considered a challenging mission for survivors; it is a complicated, demanding, and long process, yet not impossible (Herman 267). In her work, "The Art and Science of Therapeutic Innovation," Meg Jensen states, "it is important to note that despite the overwhelming statistics on traumatic suffering across the world, the normative response to a terrifying event or events is, in fact, recovery" (247-8). Jensen's view indicates the possibility of moving forward in spite of the adverse nature of the traumatic experience.

The common conception about trauma constraining the capacity of linguistic manifestation necessitates the search for other forms of expression. Accordingly, many survivors decide to display their emotions through creative artistic expression. Art acts as a

medium for the external embodiment of inner distress. In “‘Be the Tree’: Classical Literature, Art Therapy, and Transcending Trauma in *Speak*”, Jessi Snider explains, “Language and communication fail, but silence and miscommunication, exacerbated by grief, also open a space for art to speak precisely because art is a medium that does not attempt to anchor meaning” (306). Although not as explicit as words, art acts as a decent and more profound tool of expression for many silent victims.

In their book, *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (2013), Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin argue that with the recognition of art as a viable means of reflecting pain and suffering, trauma studies have underlined the use of different forms of art as a healing device due to “the way in which it draws attention to what has been silenced” (2). Recently, research in art therapy is thriving. Patients tend to create vivid symbolic artworks and each one of them tells a different story. When asked about his experience with artistic expression, a veteran in art therapy treatment states, “there seems to be a language barrier we create when confronting issues of trauma. I think, through art, we basically are constructing a bridge to better understand our psychological wounds ...I believe [art therapy] to be an excellent medium to reach intangible emotions” (qtd. in King 7). Therefore, art therapy seems to offer a more adequate treatment that fits the nonverbal nature of trauma.

Amidst its various themes, *Speak* is considered a story of survival and hope. Barbara Tannert-Smith, in her article “Like Falling Up into a Storybook: Trauma and Intertextual Repetition in Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*”, describes this novel as one of those young adult works that centralize its adolescent protagonists’ healing journey “as part of a larger coming of age trope” (396). In other words, Anderson’s *Speak* is an influential story that describes a teenager’s struggle for reclaiming her self-worth and shaping her new identity after a life-changing crisis creates a sense of hope and a healing impact on its reader.

Throughout the novel, art becomes Melinda's main tool of self-expression. Unable to manifest her pain or express her emotions in language, she finds a way to release her repressed suffering by creating non-linguistic artworks, and that was after hearing Mr. Freeman's words that according to Alice Trupe in *Thematic Guide To Young Adult Literature*, "promotes artistic expression as a survival skill" (Trupe 45). As he states, "this is where you can find your soul, if you dare. Where you can touch that part of you that you've never dared look at before" (*Speak* 10). Mr. Freeman assigns a project in which the students need to choose an object to work on for the whole year and as he explains, "you must figure out how to make your object say something, express an emotion, speak to every person who looks at it" (10). A sudden excitement possesses Melinda for the first time after that terrible night: "My stomach flutters. Can he really let us do this? It sounds like too much fun" (10). To Melinda, this project reflects her desperate need for something that talks on her behalf and conveys her story without having to tell it out loud. Consequently, art becomes the only class that she truly enjoys, "Art follows lunch, like dream follows nightmare" (9) and one of the few places where she feels safe (160).

Her artworks, throughout the school year, reflect her progress from despair to hope. In the beginning, she draws dark, stiff, and unnatural works, "I've been painting watercolors of trees that have been hit by lightning. I try to paint them so they are nearly dead, but not totally. Mr. Freeman doesn't say a word to me about them. He just raises his eyebrows. One picture is so dark you can barely see the tree at all" (*Speak* 30-1). These dark colors are often interpreted in art therapy as fear and suffering. Mr. Freeman reads the pain in her dark work, especially in the turkey bones sculpture with the attached Barbie doll head and the tape over its mouth that projects her trapped, lonely, and isolated self. As time passes, her works become brighter and she eventually succeeds to create the imperfect but meaningful tree that satisfies her, showing how she is now able to appreciate her works. Her attachment to art is

reflected in her janitor's closet which contains all of her drawings. Through time, her closet becomes a brighter place, reflecting the growing brightness in her soul.

In art class, Melinda explores many artistic features that project her psychological state. For instance, she becomes fascinated with Cubism, as she states: "the next chapter steals my breath away. It takes me out of the room. It confuses me" (*Speak* 119). According to Tannert-Smith, Melinda embraces Cubism's "multidimensional representation" that portrays more than what is on the surface (399). Consequently, she projects this style on her drawings as well as on herself and she starts to perceive her reflection in the mirror as "a Picasso sketch" with her body "slicing into dissecting cubes" (*Speak* 124); reflecting the hidden fragmented and dissociated image of herself. Melinda feels as if there are two Melindas fighting inside her. One of them wants to have fun and be normal representing her former self and the other one is the post-traumatic cautious version. Accordingly, Robyn L. Schiffman in her article, "Melinda and Merryweather High: Parallel Identity Narratives in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*," links the internal clash of two different personalities to this artistic style suggesting, "Picasso's Cubist refraction comes to represent the many Melindas in the novel who all comprise just one" (52). While these two voices are arguing in her head, she wonders which one of them is the real Melinda.

The lack of communication and social interaction pushes Melinda to figure out her own way of survival. Dori Laub and Daniel Podell in their article, "Art and Trauma," contends, "in art and literature a connection can be restored that can oppose and defy the abandonment of listening and communication" (993), and this shows that art can fill the void caused by silence and neglect. Due to its "indirect and dialogic nature" (933), the artwork that emerges from trauma can portray the pain and suffering of survivors while giving them the opportunity to repossess and restore their lost voice and identity (993). Furthermore, it "aids survival (as well as recovery) by widening one's vision and offering alternative perspectives

and ways of seeing things” (998). In other words, art becomes a way of releasing the long-repressed emotions and maintaining a unique style of expression that implicitly communicate their story.

Art plays a vital role in Melinda’s healing journey considering that she does not receive any professional help or proper support from adults around her except for Mr. Freeman. As his name indicates, Mr. Freeman is a “free-spirited artist” (Trupe 45) who gives the impression of an art therapist. However, as it is indicated in Donalyn Heise and Lisa Kay’s article “Trauma-Informed Art Education: Caring for Learners and Each Other,” art teachers’ main focus is teaching, they “are not clinical therapists, but they are in a position to help children cope with adversity by utilizing the therapeutic properties of art education” (1). Snider explains that Melinda considers the art classroom to be safe and comfortable because it is the only place where she is not forced to speak. Thus, instead of a confession, Mr. Freeman asks for an artistic revelation of her repressed emotions by teaching her how to speak the language of art and how to manipulate her creativity (304). The following is an example of how Mr. Freeman comforts Melinda when he states “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” (*Speak* 122). He also states that self-expression is an important part of survival that many adults seem to neglect (122). Mr. Freeman appears to be the only adult around Melinda that cares about the feelings and struggles of students. He refuses to see them growing up with no passion or emotions so he insists on using art to sort their confusion.

Trees and plants symbolize Melinda’s growth and strength, from the tree that she consistently draws to the one growing in the yard. In the beginning, she starts drawing dark and gloomy trees that reflect her inner anguish. With the constant guidance and encouragement from Mr. Freeman, she gains more confidence and starts to put more effort

into her artworks. Even her former friend Ivy praises her drawings: “you're better than you think you are” (*Speak* 146). Following Mr. Freeman’s instructions on how to draw a creative tree: “Breathe life into it. Make it bend— trees are flexible, so they don’t snap. Scar it, give it a twisted branch— perfect trees don’t exist. Nothing is perfect. Flaws are interesting. Be the tree” (153), she learns how to embrace her own scars and imperfections and proceeds to grow a more resilient and flexible version of herself. Eventually, she manages to create a tree full of hope: “My tree is definitely breathing; little shallow breaths like it just shot up through the ground this morning...Roots knob out of the ground and the crown reaches for the sun, tall and healthy. The new growth is the best part” (196). This description reflects Melinda’s own growth and renewed self that has emerged from loss.

Melinda starts high school in an unpleasant way; she is traumatized, ostracized and even bullied. Yet, she finds solace in art class where she is introduced to a new way of self-expression that does not demand speaking. It was through her artworks and Mr. Freeman’s guidance that she was able to place the shattered pieces of her experience together. Although she was not able to draw good trees at the beginning, Melinda does not give up and she keeps trying until she reaches a satisfying result, which shows how art is capable of “fostering resilience” (Heise and Kay 1). These artistic works are considered a proof of her struggle and an attempt to reclaim the lost identity as Laub and Podell indicate: “in creating a holding witnessing ‘other’ that confirms the reality of the traumatic event, the artist can provide structure and presence that counteracts the loss of the internal other” (933). When she is working on her final tree, Melinda is actually drawing an end to her suffering by reconciling with herself and shedding tears through which she releases her deeply held emotions. Eventually, when she hands her final project, Melinda is finally ready to tell her story.

III.2. Surviving Trauma: Resilience in Anderson's *Speak*

In "A Constructive Narrative Perspective on Trauma and Resilience," the psychotherapist, Don Meichenbaum, argues, "In the aftermath of traumatic experiences, some 75% of individuals will be affected, but they go on to evidence resilience" (429). Resilience is often perceived as a positive alternative response to adversity rather than developing a post-traumatic stress disorder. However, According to Michael Ungar in his article, "Resilience, Trauma, Context, and Culture," resilience may co-occur with symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (256). This is best manifested through Melinda's journey toward recovery. After her rape, she experiences several symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet, through time, she starts to reflect positively on her life moving from denial to acceptance. As Jeanne McElvaney describes in her self-help book, *Healing Insights: Effects of Abuse for Adults Abused as Children* (2013), "there is a moment in our healing journey when our denial crumbles; we realize our experience, and its continued effects on us won't "just go away". That's our breakthrough moment. It's the sun coming out to warm the seeds of hope so they can grow our personal garden of empowerment" (Goodreads). Therefore, Melinda's resilience in the face of the overwhelming thoughts and feelings is a primary sign of recovery and a protective factor that constrains the aggravation of post-traumatic symptoms.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or life-changing experiences, especially through mental, emotional and behavioral adjustment to external and internal demands" ("Resilience"). That is to say, resilience is the capacity to reclaim oneself after a traumatic experience by adjusting to the destruction caused by the event instead of being crushed beneath it. Although at beginning of her experience, Melinda is far from developing a successful adaptation, she finds it difficult to face anything that reminds her of that night even

her reflection in the mirror. Yet, despite the devastating thoughts of escaping her current situation, she is desperate to recapture her own normal life instead of giving up. Later on, she learns that she has to cope with her new reality. She starts mastering her trauma and using its impact as a means of survival by constructing meaningful artistic expression from her pain. Through art, she manages to hold onto something unique and meaningful. It is a place where her efforts are appreciated, and a medium to bond with her former friend, Ivy. Her interest in trees moves beyond her art project and reaches to the plants and the process of growth in general. She starts cleaning her house's yard with the help of her father and "together they begin fostering new growth" (Trupe 46). Through this yard work, she tries to reconnect with her father once again and pushes herself to speak to him: "I rake the leaves out of my throat" (*Speak* 168). Although it may not seem like a very close interaction, it is considered a positive step toward restoring the family relationship.

When observing her yard, Melinda seems to relate to the sick tree. She feels the pain of the tree being trimmed "He is killing the tree...The tree is dying" (*Speak* 187); yet her father explains that this process is necessary for saving it, "those branches were long dead from disease. All plants are like that. By cutting off the damage, you make it possible for the tree to grow again" (187). Thus, she understands that although it can be painful, she has to get rid of her own dead branches in order to recover. This symbolic reproductive process is also apparent in the way she describes her pre-traumatized self as a seed waiting to thrive again, "I dig my fingers into the dirt and squeeze. A small, clean part of me waits to warm and burst through the surface. Some quiet Melinda girl I haven't seen in months. That is the seed I will care for" (188).

Another factor that aids Melinda to regain her strength is sports. She discovers her skills in both basketball and tennis. When she plays against Nicole, she appears as a strong opponent. This boosts her confidence and allows her to see her own capacities and admit that

she is “tough enough to play and strong enough to win” (*Speak* 170). As she begins to enjoy the outside world again, Melinda realizes that staying isolated in her closet is no longer helpful: “I have to stay away from the closet, go to all my classes. I will make myself normal” (125). In fact, the closet gave her a space to reflect on herself and time to process her experience. But now, she is ready to emerge from her safe cocoon, “I don't want to hang out in my little hidy-hole anymore” (192). By stating that she does not “feel like hiding anymore” (192), she shows that she finally maintains the confidence and strength to face her fears.

Melinda's resilience is triggered by her own will to survive. Yet, one cannot deny the role that social factors play in either hindering or pushing a person to maintain resilience. According to Orla T Muldoon et al., in their article “The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma,” negative responses to trauma are more visible when trauma threatens important social identities. However, being able to preserve these valued social identities or form new ones results in resilience (311). Thus, “social identities can be antecedents, mediators, and outcomes of trauma experiences” (312). After the event, Melinda loses connection with her family and all her friends. Her isolation and social rejection contribute to the severity of her trauma. During these miserable times, Melinda gains hope and courage through the words of Mr. Freeman who unlike the rest of the teachers seems to understand what his students truly need as they are going through a critical phase full of emotions and struggles: “This guy is weird. He must see it, he must know what we are thinking” (11). Gradually, she becomes able to form a new social identity with Mr. Freeman and her classmate David, as well as restoring the relationship with her father and her former friend Ivy. According to Herman, recovery is achieved through survivors' ability to reclaim their sense of empowerment and create new connections (133). Therefore, Herman acknowledges that “recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (133). Melinda realizes the

importance of connecting with people and wishes for a true friend who is willing to listen to her story and help her find the happy teenager that she used to be.

One of Melinda's bravest moments is when she writes a list of the boys to stay away from in the bathroom starting with the name of her perpetrator, Andy Evans. In the beginning, she believes that she has no chance against him and that no one would believe her considering his popularity in their high school. Yet as soon as she starts building her strength, she decides to fight back through this implicit way in order to warn others, especially her ex-best friend, Rachel, who started dating him. Later on, Melinda is astonished to see the several comments of girls who were victimized by him and who did not find the courage to tell their stories but found a chance through the list that she has created. She feels overjoyed by these sudden confessions, "there's more. Different pens, different handwriting, conversations between some writers, arrows to longer paragraphs. It's better than taking out a billboard. I feel like I can fly" (*Speak* 186). Knowing that she is not the only victim gives her social support and more credibility. Thus, now she is confident enough and willing to retreat from her frozen state.

When her previous implicit warnings for her friend fail, Melinda decides finally to break her silence and tell Rachel about her rape. According to Elaine J. O'Quinn, in her article, "Between Voice and Voicelessness: Transacting Silence in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*", Melinda felt a "moral obligation" to protect Rachel because she needs to care for others in order to be able to care for herself (57). Hence, "what has been an isolated, private dilemma suddenly attains a community dimension" (O'Quinn 57) when she realizes through Rachel's situation and the bathroom list that this is no longer a personal concern and that by telling the truth she might be able to save other girls from having the same experience. Although Rachel does not believe her, Melinda feels relieved by doing the right thing for her friend as well as for herself by telling the secret that has been haunting her for months.

III.3. Melinda Breaks her Silence: Post-traumatic Growth in *Speak*

Traumatic experience is generally viewed as a passive obstacle that handicaps victims and prevents them from resuming their lives. In “Posttraumatic Growth in Trauma Recollections of 9/11 Survivors” Sharon Dekel et al. contend that recently, scientific attention has shifted from “the negative psychological implications of exposure to traumatic events” to considering the positive aspect of growth that results from suffering (317). Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun in their article, “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence,” define posttraumatic growth as “the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises” (1). It is related to the proper adjustments to the unfortunate circumstance that leads survivors to reflect on their life before and after the incident and learn from it.

Posttraumatic growth is considered to be different from resilience. Resilience focuses on adapting to the change and mastering the new situation in order to restore the same previous normal life. Whilst post-traumatic growth is about the positive change resulting from trauma whether in previous ways of thinking, values, or priorities rather than the mere restoration of the pre-trauma state of functioning (Muldoon et al. 317).

After learning how to survive and adapt to her stressful crises, Melinda experiences a more mature and wise version of herself as she goes through a continuum of positive changes where each one gives her power and courage to face the next challenge. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, post-traumatic growth can be manifested through five factors: an increased appreciation for life and changed priorities, more sincere relationships, a reinforced sense of personal strength, recognition of new possibilities, and development in the spiritual life (6). By projecting these factors in the novel, it is evident that Melinda exhibits some of these positive changes.

An important aspect of posttraumatic growth is developing a sense of a greater appreciation of the “changed sense of self or the changed life trajectory following trauma” (Muldoon et al. 317). This appreciation of one’s life is “a marker of positive adaptation and well-being” (Dekel et al. 325). Although she yearns for the life and cheerful personality that she used to have, Melinda learns how to appreciate the small things around her and cherish her strong, undefeated self. This is demonstrated in her satisfaction with the imperfect but genuine tree that she finally succeeded to draw and stating that “It doesn't need anything...It isn't perfect and that makes it just right” (197). Moreover, she develops awareness and a sense of clarity about what she should prioritize. As Tedeschi and Calhoun affirm: “a radically changed sense of priorities can accompany the increase in appreciation for what one still has” (6). Accordingly, Melinda decides to prioritize and cherish herself. In this regard O’Quinn observes that “rather than allowing herself to be defined by others, she determines to be driven by a more willful, creative understanding, a condition we know is imperative to growth” (55). After reconciling with herself, she is now able to maintain inner calm and a hopeful and promising soul.

Instead of being stuck in that painful event, many survivors decide to focus on the new opportunities and possibilities that follow the struggle. In this regard, Tedeschi and Calhoun confirm that “Posttraumatic growth can also be seen in the individual's identification of new possibilities for one's life or of the possibility of taking a new and different path in life” (6). Despite her loss, Melinda is now able to reconsider the different aspects of her life and recognize her strength and weaknesses. During her journey, she develops a wise and insightful vision of her life as well as of those around her. In addition, she gains creative artistic skills, which could have been different if she did not have a story to tell.

After facing an extreme event, survivors’ definition of fear changes since everything that they considered once a struggle seems now to be nothing in comparison to what they had

gone through. According to Herman “the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor” (133). Thereupon, throughout the novel, Melinda gradually learns how to stand up for herself. Instances that show that are numerous like when she refuses to give an oral presentation, when standing up to Heather, or when she goes back to the place where she was raped. Melinda’s sense of personal strength increases as she accepts what she has faced: “IT happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding. Andy Evans raped me in August when I was drunk and too young to know what was happening. 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” (*Speak* 198).

As the novel progresses, Melinda herself is amazed by her sudden change, “I'm on a roll. I'm rocking. I don't know what it is; standing up to Heather, planting marigold seeds, or maybe the look on Mom's face when I asked if she would let me redecorate my room. The time has come to arm-wrestle some demons” (*Speak* 180). Yet, the major turning point is when she faces the same frightening situation once again but this time she is no longer a weak terrified rabbit. When Andy attacks her again in the closet, “A sound explodes from [her]” (194), and she is finally able to say “no” as she fights back without hesitation. Herman states that one of the positive changes experienced by rape survivors is the increased sense of self-reliance, valuing personal perceptions and feelings, and being prepared to handle future threats and distress (69).

Positive changes can be also manifested at the level of social relationships. During hardships, people tend to experience closer relationships with those who show them support. This was a point of struggle for Melinda, since those whom she used to consider close did not show any support or care. However, this experience is an eye-opener because she learns how to choose her friends carefully and avoid shallow relationships by putting an end to her fake friendship with Heather. She realizes that she deserves better treatment and better people

around her. Nevertheless, this does not stop her from building new connections because “the experience of deeper and more meaningful relationships can occur along with the loss or disappearance of other relationships” (Tedeschi and Calhoun 6). She establishes more genuine relationships with David and Ivy which does not seem forced in the novel but instead shows “a natural progression of Melinda’s growth and newfound identity” (Schiffman 52). An increased sense of sympathetic connection to others who suffer is shown when she decides to leave some of her things in the closet: “Who knows, some other kids may need a safe place to run to next year” (*Speak* 192). This indicates how much she has grown as an insightful and perceptive person.

Since the concept of post-traumatic growth revolves around the qualitative change that goes beyond the pre-traumatic functioning (Tedeschi and Calhoun 4), the act of breaking silence is considered a radical transformation in the life of Melinda. Her realization of the importance of the spoken words, besides her ability to maintain her voice gradually and be able to use it firmly and at the right time shows how much growth she has gone through.

Melinda’s silence emerges as an immediate response to her traumatic experience. However, her attachment to silence becomes intense to the point of perceiving it as a choice and a right. When she refuses to give an oral presentation, her lab partner, David, explains the necessity for speaking: “The suffragettes were all about speaking up, screaming for their rights. You can't speak up for your right to be silent.....don't expect to make a difference unless you speak up for yourself” (*Speak* 159). David, According to O’Quinn represents “the efficacy in the act of speaking up” (56). Indeed, in the novel, he is a model for confidence and strong character since he is not afraid to stand for what it is right. In her reading of Melinda’s silence, O’Quinn emphasizes the difference between “being silent and being silenced” (54). Thus, survivors like Melinda need to distinguish these two confused concepts.

Throughout her silent struggle, Melinda communicates her needs through different methods. Either through, notes on the refrigerator, sending anonymous letters, or the bathroom list. Although these methods seem to be safe and sometimes helpful, she realizes that eventually speaking up is the only available path to recovery. Yet, what she lacks is someone who makes her feel heard and accepted which would give her comfort and strength while confronting the tough emotions that she has been avoiding.

The recovery of survivors is always related to their ability to talk and release their feelings about their trauma. In “Helping People Cope with Trauma,” Beverley Raphael and Lenore Meldrum argue that “one of the values of talking through the traumatic event is enabling the person to master, in retrospect, what has happened” (12). However, in order for survivors to articulate their trauma, they first need to face and accept what happened and build “a sense of trust” (17) or what Herman calls “establishing safety” (3). In doing so, trauma survivors can be able to tell their story and release their emotions without the constant fear of being judged or disbelieved.

“The working-through process” of survivors usually involves facing the adverse event in order to master and accept what has occurred (Raphael and Meldrum 7). This is what Melinda seeks when she rides her bike and unconsciously ends up in the place where she was raped. Therefore, she finds the courage to face her fears and return to the place that she once wished to banish from her memory, “I have survived. I am here. Confused, screwed up, but here” (*Speak* 188). Thus, she stands there seeking answers to her creeping questions and wishing to settle things for good so she can emerge again as a pure and cheerful version of herself.

Gradually, Melinda is able to establish a sense of trust with her art teacher. To Tannert-Smith, Mr. Freeman represents “her only sympathetic interpretive community” (400) considering that he is the only one who recognizes her suffering by reading the pain in her

artwork. Feeling understood, Melinda starts to loosen her silent defenses around him. This is apparent in her surprised reaction when she was able to talk to him freely in their discussion on how she must put feelings in her work: “but you said we had to put emotion into our art. I don't know what that means. I don't know what I'm supposed to feel.” My fingers fly up and cover my mouth. What am I doing?” (*Speak* 122). Since he is able to see through her artwork that there are things left unsaid, he offers to listen to her story, “If you ever need to talk, you know where to find me... You're a good kid. I think you have a lot to say. I'd like to hear it” (123). Eventually, after reconciling with herself she realizes that the right time for her to tell her story has come: “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” and she finally opens up to the only person who was willing to listen “Let me tell you about it” (198). Sharing her story shows her impressive progression. Don Meichenbaum states that when resilient individuals share their stories with whom they truly trust, they “establish and nurture a social supportive network as they transform from being a victim, into being a survivor, and ultimately into becoming a thriver” (14). Therefore, Melinda decides to give her story the closure that her resilient self deserves and she eventually becomes a model for other girls who are struggling in silence.

Due to its relatable story and strong message, many teachers and critics argued for the necessity of teaching *Speak* and introducing it to the lives of teenagers who can either identify with the story or gain essential knowledge about such a realistic topic. According to O'Quinn, Anderson's insightful novel, *Speak* (1999), can be very informative to those young readers: “had such a story been available to me when I was Melinda's age, I'm certain my understanding of how we create ourselves in an unpredictable world would have been changed considerably” (55). She describes this novel as a reminder of women's long struggle with the oppressive act of silence and an example of the influential novels that tend to stress

the empowerment of women by depicting them as “active agents in the troubling situations of their lives and not mere victims” (55). Moreover, she indicates that *Speak* acts as a guide for teenagers to understand and adjust to their current life experiences by providing relatable stories and characters unlike the typical and merely aesthetic novels that have been taught in schools. She affirms, “Books such as *Speak* can free our students from such limited reading experiences. They can enhance an understanding of the power of self-creation by providing a knowledge of the world that opens up possibilities” (58). Hence, these kinds of stories that provide a hopeful closure might encourage many traumatized and silenced teenagers to share their own stories and heal their wounds.

In conclusion, Melinda’s journey toward recovery was a daunting and challenging experience. What characterizes Melinda is her ability to make her own way to recovery without any professional help or support except for Mr. Freeman’s therapeutic art class. She discovers through art a way of survival and adaptation. Although it is difficult to accept this tormenting change, she realizes the necessity of moving from being a defeated victim to a resistant survivor. Hence, instead of making trauma a central aspect that controls her life, she manages to cope with the traumatic memory and find comfort in the imposed isolation where she has plenty of time to reflect upon herself, process what happened, and start collecting the fragmented pieces to reclaim her identity and her voice. Eventually, she is able to reach a level of maturity and growth to think about herself and others and learn how to stand up and defend herself. Thus, after confronting her fears and adjusting to her new self, Melinda is finally ready to tell her story.

Conclusion

The concept of trauma has gone through a long journey from being perceived as a physical wound to becoming a psychological damage that can result from a variety of subjective life experiences. It has been a crucial notion that caused confusion and misunderstanding in the lives of many individuals and despite the development of trauma studies and the emergence of many theories that made it a prevailing concept at both clinical and public levels, many people are still ignorant about the severity and the damaging impact of this phenomenon.

Due to its adverse nature, trauma has witnessed a great appeal from different fields including literature. This latter has always aimed at depicting the struggles that surround the lives of individuals regardless of their age. Young adult literature in its turn has developed to tackle the universal struggles and tragedies of the critical phase of adolescence including sexual trauma that results from rape and sexual violence. Such interest causes a huge debate about the appropriateness of these topics for its young readers and the ability of this genre to represent the complex world of trauma each time a work is published.

Laurie Halse Anderson's contemporary young adult novel, *Speak* (1999), is an example of such works which fuelled this controversial debate. The novel highlights the theme of sexual trauma through the story of the fourteen-year-old protagonist, Melinda Sordino. Accordingly, this study examines the way Anderson's novel addresses the psychological and social aspects of sexual trauma by observing its portrayal of post-traumatic symptoms and the mechanisms chosen by the protagonist to cope with them. In addition, it seeks to trace the main steps and stages of the recovery process.

Anderson's inspiration to write this novel came from a disturbing nightmare that appears later on to represent her own long-repressed memory of her experience with sexual assault. The novel gained a huge appeal due to its realistic story that relates to the chaotic life

of many teenage girls. The analysis of the novel highlights through different theories and interpretations the disruption caused by the traumatic event on the identity and the language of Melinda. The extreme events tend to shatter the fragile identity of the adolescent victim. Melinda is unable to reclaim her cheerful and innocent self or accept the new scarred and fragmented self. Another affected aspect is the language. Melinda loses her voice in the face of the shocking event. As she becomes unable to articulate what happened, she retreats to a safe and less threatening state of silence. The external social factors of neglect, miscommunication, and isolation along with the external factors of guilt, fear, and shame added to the severity of this experience. Hence, in order to cope with her harsh reality, Melinda proceeds to perceive her life from a cynical perspective.

Despite the severe and disrupting nature of the traumatic experience, Anderson's novel offers an optimistic vision for the teenage readers by following Melinda's recovery process. Melinda discovers through 'art' an alternative way of expressing her repressed emotions and thoughts. Her Art teacher, Mr. Freeman, represents her only supportive community for he is the only one who notices her struggle and offers to hear her story without violating her choice to remain silent. With the therapeutic impact of 'art', Melinda starts to show some resilient actions that reflect her acceptance and adaptation to her new reality. Eventually, she is able to break her silence and reach post-traumatic growth.

The issue of the representability of trauma in fiction remains the central debate in trauma theory. Despite the different claims about the impossibility of representing this issue, Anderson's novel provides a credible depiction of the different emotions and thoughts that define the traumatic experience of many adolescents. The empowering message of the novel promotes the possibility of recovery and moving from being a voiceless victim to a resilient survivor. This strong and influential message can inform and guide many teenagers throughout their own experiences with trauma and suffering in general.

Works Cited

- Alsup, Janet. "Politicizing Young Adult Literature: Reading Anderson's 'Speak' as a Critical Text." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2003.
- Andermahr, Sonya, et al. *Trauma Narratives and Herstory*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013.
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. S.L., Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. "Interview on Speak." *YouTube*, 5 Jan. 2012,
<https://youtu.be/MJU7b3C8QMk>.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. S.L., Virago Press Ltd, 2019.
- Balaev, Michelle. "Trauma Studies." *Companion to Literary Theory*, edited by David H. Richter, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2018. 360-371.
- Balaev, Michelle. "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2008, pp. 149-66.
- Barbara Tannert-Smith. "'Like Falling up into a Storybook': Trauma and Intertextual Repetition in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2010, pp. 395-414.
- Barker, Pat. *Another World*. Penguin Book, 1998.
- Breuer, J, and Sigmund F. *Studies on Hysteria*. Basic Books, 1985.
- Bond, Lucy, and Stef Craps. *Trauma: The New Critical Idiom*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020.
- Campbell, Patricia J. *Campbell's Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature*. Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2010.
- Cart, Michael. *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*. S.L., Ala Neal-Schuman, 2020.

- Grinberg, Emanuella. "Laurie Halse Anderson's "Speak" Turns 15." *CNN*,
 edition.cnn.com/2014/04/12/living/laurie-halse-anderson-speak/index.html. Accessed
 22 May. 2022.
- Coats, Karen. "Young Adult Literature: Growing Up in Theory," Routledge, 2011, pp.315-29.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University
 Press, 1995.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, Johns
 Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Crain, William. *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. Pearson, 2011.
- Crowe, Chris. *Young Adult Literature: What Is Young Adult Literature? The English
 Journal*, vol. 88, no. 1, 1998.
- Crownshaw, Richard. *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and
 Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010.
- Davis, Colin, and Hanna Meretoja. *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*.
 Routledge, 2020.
- Dekel, Sharon et al. "Posttraumatic Growth in Trauma Recollections of 9/11 Survivors: A
 Narrative Approach." *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, vol 21, no. 4, 2015. 315–324.
- Detora, Lisa. "Coming of Age in Suburbia: Sexual Violence, Consumer Goods and Identity
 Formation in Recent Young Adult Novels." *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1,
 2006, p. 24.
- Doane, Janice L. "Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction (Review)." *MFS Modern
 Fiction Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2004, pp. 522–524, 10.1353/mfs.2004.0025. Accessed
 12 Apr. 2022.
- Dominick, LaCapra. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press,
 2001.

- Eaglestone, Robert. *Trauma and Fiction*. Routledge, 2020.
- Elmore, Chelsea. "Young Adult Literature: Reality on the Page". Southeastern University, 2017.
- Ellis, W. Geiger. "Adolescent Literature: Changes, Cycles, and Constancy." *The English Journal*, vol. 74, no. 3, 1985, pp. 94–98.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Laub Dori. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Routledge, 1991.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The International Psycho-analytical Press, 1922.
- Gibbs, Alan. *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- Gilmore, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Hart, Onno van der et al. "Pierre Janet's treatment of post-traumatic stress." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, 1989, pp. 379-395.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies." *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1995, pp. 537–63.
- Hauschild, Patricia M. "Worlds of Terrorism: Learning Through Young Adult Literature". *The Alan Review*. 2006.
- Hayn, Judith A., et al. "Young Adult Literature Research in the 21st Century." *Theory into Practice*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2011, pp. 176–81
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850. Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Power*. Basic Books, 1992.

- Heise, Donalyn, and Lisa Kay. "Trauma-Informed Art Education: Caring for Learners and Each Other." *Translations*, no. 4, 2021.
- Hinton, S E. *Outsiders*. S.L., Viking Children's Books, 2019.
- Jensen, Meg. *The Art and Science of Therapeutic Innovation: The Art and Science of Trauma and the Autobiographical: Negotiated Truths*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Kaplan, Jeffrey. "The Research Connection- Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century: Moving beyond Traditional Constraints and Conventions." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1 Dec. 2005.
- Kaywell, John F., et al. "A Conversation with Laurie Halse Anderson." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol.52, no. 1, 2008, pp. 78-83.
- Kendall, Jennifer. "Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson." ThoughtCo, Feb. 16, 2021, [thoughtco.com/speak-by-laurie-halse-anderson-627386](https://www.thoughtco.com/speak-by-laurie-halse-anderson-627386).
- King, Juliet L. *Art Therapy, Trauma and Neuroscience: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2022.
- Kirmayer, Laurence J. "Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation." *Tense Past: Cultural essays in trauma and memory* 1996, pp.173–98.
- Latham, Don. "Melinda's Closet: Trauma and the Queer Subtext of Laurie Halse Anderson's Speak." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2006, pp. 369–382.
- Laub, Dori, and Daniel Podell. "Art et Trauma." *Le Coq-Héron*, vol. 221, no. 2, 2015.
- Leonard, Jayne. "What Is Trauma? Types, Symptoms, and Treatments." www.medicalnewstoday.com.
- Loeb, Paul Rogat. *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time*. Martin's Griffin, 1999.

- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London; New York, Routledge, 2008.
- Malo-Juvera, Victor. "The Effect of Young Adult Literature on Adolescents' Rape Myth Acceptance." 2012.
- Mandel, Naomi. *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America*. University of Virginia Press, 2006. .
- McFarlane, A. C., and B. Raphael. "Ash Wednesday: The Effects of a Fire." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1984, pp. 341–351.
- McNally, Richard J. *Remembering Trauma*. Cambridge, Mass. The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Meichenbaum, Donald. "A Constructive Narrative Perspective on Trauma and Resilience: The Role of Cognitive and Affective Processes." *APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology: Foundations in Knowledge, vol 1*, pp. 429–442.
- Mills, C. M., and F. C. Keil. "The Development of Cynicism." *Psychological Science*, vol.16, no. 5, 2005, pp. 385–390.
- Muldoon, Orla T., et al. "The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma: Social Identity Pathways Associated with Divergent Traumatic Responses." *European Review of Social Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2019, pp. 311–348.
- O'Quinn, Elaine J. "Between Voice and Voicelessness: Transacting Silence in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1 Sept. 2001.
- Osman, khan T. *Trauma and Fiction: Representational Crises and Modalities*.2017.
- Paul Rogat Loeb. *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time*. New York, St Martin's Griffin, 1999.

- Pederson, Joshua. "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory." *Narrative*, vol. 22 no. 3, 2014, p. 333-353.
- Pederson, Joshua. 'Cognitive Approaches to Trauma and Literature'. *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*. Routledge, 2022.
- Raphael, Beverley, Leonore Meldrum. "Helping People Cope with Trauma." *Coping With Trauma: The Victim and The Helper*, edited by Rod Watts and David J. de L. Horne, Australian Academic Press, 1994, 1-20.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Schiffman, Robyn. "Melinda and Merryweather High: Parallel Identity Narratives in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 40, no. 1. 2012.
- Snider, Jessi. "'Be the Tree': Classical Literature, Art Therapy, and Transcending Trauma in *Speak*." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 45, no. 4, 29 Mar. 2014, pp. 298–309.
- Soter, Anna O., and Sean P. Connors. "Beyond Relevance to Literary Merit Young Adult Literature as 'Literature.'" *The ALAN Review*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1 Sept. 2009, 10.21061/alan.v37i1.a.10. Accessed 28 Apr. 2019.
- Stanley Hall. *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education. Vol. 1*. New York; London, Appleton, 1931.
- Tannert-Smith, Barbara. "'Like Falling Up into a Storybook': Trauma and Intertextual Repetition in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 35 no. 4, 2010, pp. 395–414, 10.1353/chq.2010.0018. Accessed 16 Apr. 2019.

Tedeschi, Richard G., and Lawrence G. Calhoun. "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence." *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–18.

Morison, Toni. *Beloved*. *Vintage*, 1987.

Trupe, Alice. *Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature*. Greenwood Press, 2006.

Ungar, Michael. "Resilience, Trauma, Context, and Culture." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 14, no. 3, July 2013, pp. 255–266.

Valtonen, Kathleen, et al. "Coping Styles in Persons Recovering from Substance Abuse." *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2006, pp. 57–73.

Vickroy, Laurie. "Seeking Symbolic Immortality: Visualizing Trauma in Cat's Eye". (2005).

Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. University of Virginia Press, 2002.

Waterman, David F. *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality*. Cambria Press, 2009.

Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

"Healing Insights Quotes by Jeanne McElvaney". Goodreads.Com,

2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/24932844>.

"IRP: Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson — Science Leadership Academy @ Center City."

Scienceleadership.org, scienceleadership.org/blog/irspeak_by_laurie_halse_anderson.

"Laurie Halse Anderson | Mad Woman in the Forest." *Madwomanintheforest.com*,

[madwomanintheforest.com](https://www.madwomanintheforest.com).

'Trauma'. Oxford English Dictionary, second ed, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, n.p.

'Trauma-Informed: The Trauma Toolkit'. *Canadian Council for Refugees*, 2013,

[ccrweb.ca/en/trauma-informed-trauma-toolkit](https://www.ccrweb.ca/en/trauma-informed-trauma-toolkit). Accessed 9 June 2022.

"Resilience." APA Dictionary of Psychology. [Dictionary.Apa.Org](https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience),

2022, <https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

---. "Speaking Out." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1 May 2000,
10.21061/alan.v27i3.a.5. Accessed 28 Apr. 2020.

"Speak | Book Reports." *Bookreports.info*, 2009, www.bookreports.info/speak-summary.

المخلص

تسعى هذه المذكرة إلى مناقشة إشكالية تمثيل الصدمات النفسية في أدب المراهقين من خلال تحليل رواية "تحدث" (1999) المثيرة للجدل للكاتبة لوري هالس أندرسون. سلطت الكاتبة الضوء على أهمية الدور الذي تلعبه روايات الشباب في مساعدة قراءها المستهدفين من خلال تصوير موثوق لهذا الموضوع الحساس. تعتمد الدراسة الحالية لنظرية الصدمة المعاصرة فحص تجربة الصدمة من خلال تجربة بطلة الرواية ميليندا سوردينو ومن خلال دراسة تأثيرها المربك على الهوية واللغة والحرص على استخدام الصمت والسخرية كآليات وقائية أولية لمواجهة هذا الاضطراب. بالإضافة أنها تتبع خطوات ميليندا المرنة نحو استعادة صوتها وهويتها والوصول إلى نمو ما بعد الصدمة. تثبت الدراسة قدرة أندرسون على معالجة شدة أعراض ما بعد الصدمة من خلال سردها وتؤكد رسالتها حول أهمية كسر الصمت على مستوى الفرد والمجتمع. يكشف التحليل الدقيق لهذه الرواية قدرة أدب المراهقين على معالجة الموضوعات الحرجة التي تحدد الصراعات اليومية التي يتحملها هؤلاء المراهقون بصمت، وتوعيتهم وإرشادهم في رحلتهم نحو مرحلة البلوغ. كذلك، فإنه يستنتج من سلوك ميليندا المتمثل في كسر الصمت واستعادة هويتها إمكانية علاج جرح الصدمة الأليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمات النفسية، أدب المراهقين، نظرية الصدمة المعاصرة، الهوية، كسر الصمت، نمو ما بعد الصدمة، تحدث.

Résumé

Cette thèse vise à examiner la représentation du traumatisme psychologique dans la littérature pour Jeunes adultes en analysant le roman controversé *Vous Parlez de ça* (1999), de Laurie Halse. La présente étude adopte la théorie contemporaine du traumatisme pour examiner son expérience du point de vue de l'héroïne adolescente, Melinda Sordino, à Anderson, en étudiant son effet déroutant sur l'identité et le langage et en veillant à ce que le silence et le cynisme soient utilisés comme principaux mécanismes de prévention pour contrer ce trouble. De plus, elle fait suite aux mesures souples prises par Melinda pour rétablir sa voix et son identité et atteindre une croissance post-traumatique. L'étude démontre la capacité d'Anderson à aborder la gravité des symptômes de stress post-traumatique à travers son récit et souligne son message sur l'importance de briser le silence au niveau individuel et communautaire. Une analyse précise de ce roman révèle la capacité de la littérature des jeunes à aborder des sujets critiques pertinents qui définissent, sensibilisent et guident silencieusement ces adolescents dans leur cheminement vers l'âge adulte. Elle déduit également du comportement de Melinda de briser le silence et de restaurer son identité la possibilité de réparer la blessure douloureuse.

Mots Clés : traumatisme psychologique, littérature pour Jeunes adultes, la théorie contemporaine du traumatisme, identité, briser le silence, croissance post-traumatique, *Vous Parlez de ça*.