A Separate Peace Essay, Research Paper

Breaking The Mold

In John Knowle’s, A Separate Peace, there is a transformation in all the key elements in

the book, from the rivers to the tree to the seasons to the characters. The transformation is

specifically seen in Leper, Gene, and Phineas. These three young men experience a change not just

because of the transitions through adolescence. These changes also come about because of the war,

the school, and an injury.

Leper Lepellier is a very odd young man. He is quiet and is finds himself always taken by

surprise. He really is not popular and that does not concern him in any way. Leper really has no

true friends at the Devon school, but talks to Gene. He entertains himself by collecting snails,

looking for beaver damns, and skiing. His personality does not allow him to depend on anyone for

help. As time progresses and the other boys start the winter session he decides to enroll in the war.

A couple of months later Gene receives a telegram from Leper saying he is in his “Christmas

location” (131) This is the first sign that Leper demonstrates that he needs people. He realizes the

happiness, fear and anger have to be shared with others. Leper then tells Gene “I escaped” (135)

and he says he did it to please himself. He is starting to realize things that are going on in the

world. He no longer lives in his bubble.

Gene Forrester is a quiet, envious, introverted, and lonely young man. His insecurities are

especially seen when Finny is around. There is a constant rivalry through Gene’s eyes between

them. He always chooses to compete or argue with Phineas. The first example of his competitive

personality is seen when Phineas asks him to jump out of the tree. Phineas says, “you were very

good, once I shamed you into it. .. I am good for you that way. You have a tendency to back away

from things otherwise.” and Gene states “you didn’t shame anybody into anything. I never backed

away from anything in my life.” (10) Gene would have never jumped off the tree if it were not for

Finny. Gene depends on Finny as his security blanket. As time progresses the rivalry increases and

the tension in Gene’s head is gets worse. When Gene can not take anymore of Finny and his

abilities his jealousy takes control and he jounces the limb. As a result, Gene makes him fall and

injuring his leg. When Finny falls it is as if all of Gene’s prayers have been answered. Finny has to

leave Devon for the rest of the summer session and part of the winter session. During this time

Gene finds out who he truly is. His transformation occurs, he finds himself making decisions on his

own, like when he chooses to go shovel snow on the railroad. Not just that but he also finds himself

not second guessing every move he makes. By the end of the novel he no longer sees Finny as a

demigod but a normal human being. After his transformation to a mature, confident adult he

states, “ I could see the amount of fear I had lived in.” (2)

On the other hand Phineas’s transformation is more of a lost than a gain. At the beginning

of the novel he is a confident , athletic, and a handsome young man. He is seen like super natural

God in the eyes of many, especially his peers and teachers. Gene describes Finny as “the essence of

this careless peace.” (17) Whatever Finny says to do people follow it. He created the Super Suicide

Society, made a winter carnival at Devon and invented the sport of Blitzball. This sport brought

about “his own athletic gifts to their highest pitch.” this right here demonstrated his godly abilities.

(31) Another example of his this inner confidence is when he breaks the swimming record. Gene is

the only one to witness Fiiny breaking the record. The thing is Finny does not want he broke the

record. Phineas knows his ability but wants to keep it a secret. When Gene pushes Finny of the tree

the beginning of the transformation occurs. It was as if his “godliness” was taken away when he

injured his leg. He came down to normal humanity with the fall, as if an angel lost its wings.

In conclusion, just things everything changes with time so do the characters in John

Knowles’s A Separate Peace. Gene, Phineas, and Leper find themselves growing up and

transforming from boys to men. Transitions through adolescence cause change and these boys

have plenty of to experience in the two sessions. Their attitude towards who they are and life in

general change.