

ANOREXIA NERVOSA AND ITS DEPICTION IN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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***Abstract:** This paper deals with the problem of food intake disorders (particularly anorexia nervosa) in the light of their depiction in intentional Czech and world literature for children and young people. In spite of the fact that food intake disorders endanger an increasing number of children and young people they are not a particularly frequent literary topic and, with the exception of texts based on the direct experience of their authors, are presented with the kind of stereotypes that lessen the aesthetic value and potential formative impact of this kind of literature. In the context of Czech literature for young people only Ivona Březinová has dealt with the topic of anorexia nervosa and bulimia, though she has remained faithful to the genre constraints of novels for girls (including the happy-end cliché). Greater inspiration comes from the world literary scene where the topic has been treated without taboo and with a sometimes shocking openness that, however, also has the potential for preventative instruction.*

***Keywords:** anorexia nervosa, literature for children and young people, Czech and world literature, formative impact*

In recent decades anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which are among the most common food intake disorders, have been arousing the attention not merely of the doctors and psychologists who encounter them in their surgeries, but also of sociologists and educationalists. Anorexia nervosa in particular, characterised by the refusal of food as the result of an obsessive effort to lose weight or to gain control over one's body (that is perceived in a distorted manner), has become a serious threat to prepubescent girls and, increasingly frequently, boys as well.

František Krch states that anorexia nervosa most frequently begins at an age of between thirteen and twenty, although girls as young as nine are prone to seeing their bodies as larger than they really are and to contemplating shaping their bodies to unhealthy extremes. An exaggerated interest among prepubescent children in the shape of their bodies is also undeniably associated with the media content they see, which influences them both directly and indirectly. The fact that in recent years warnings against unhealthy weight loss can be found on the pages of magazines for girls instead of the

fostering of the cult of emaciated models provides indirect confirmation of the fact that anorexia nervosa is ceasing to be perceived exclusively as an illness affecting merely specific groups of predisposed persons associated with a particular socio-professional status (models, ballet dancers, etc.)¹.

There are a good number of specialist titles on the subject of food intake disorders on the Czech book market. Fiction on this topic, however, also undoubtedly offers a useful insight into the issue and has an importance in the areas of prevention and therapy². Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are considered a culturally conditioned syndrome (Krch, 1999: 61), for which reason their literary depiction may both provide valuable feedback and act as a tool in changing attitudes and value and cognitive models. It is interesting in this regard to study the way in which anorexia nervosa is depicted in intentional literature for children and young people.

One of the first Czech authors to consider the issue of food intake disorders was Ivona Březinová³. As an experienced novelist she has begun to focus consciously on instructive literature. This type of literature, concentrating on depicting certain problem areas with the principal aim of interesting the reader in them, instructing them about them and playing an educational role, has been lacking in this country in preceding decades. There are, however, sophisticated and well-established models for instructive literature of this kind in world literature, from pop-up picture books for the youngest readers to texts of an essayistic nature.

Ivona Březinová's series *Holky na Vodítku (Girls on a Leash)* is a loosely connected trilogy with a shared artistic design concept (the comic-like, almost horrifyingly caricatured appearance of the books' heroines created by Slovak illustrator Jozef Gertli Danglár) and similar titling (*My Name is...*). One of the books is about a girl who falls into drug addiction (*My Name is Alice*), another becomes hooked on gambling (*My Name is Esther*), while the third book relates the problems of a girl with bulimia (*My Name is Martina*, 2003). Their stories also share a common structure – the plot is set in a sanatorium where the girls are sent after their problems in their everyday lives lead them to the very edge of the abyss. In retrospect they recall everything that preceded their desperate fall, and these diary passages, in which the origins and development of their situation are gradually revealed, are interspersed with entries outlining the current

¹ The September 2008 edition of the magazine *Top Divky* (the Czech version of the magazine *Mädchen*) is a good example of a rather conflicting impact on the adolescents it is aimed at. A two-page article featuring the cautionary tale of fourteen-year-old Nathalie and vivid photographic documentation of her battle with anorexia entitled "I Beat Anorexia!" is followed just a few pages later by slimming advice in the column "Whatever Makes You Feel Good" ("If you want to give yourself a treat without having a guilty conscience then don't eat ice-cream in a cone, but in a bowl instead. You can save (sic!) as such as 200 calories if you have a sorbet, a fruit or yoghurt ice-cream or a light version that tastes just as nice." "Bye, bye... vanilla custard! Yum! Fruits of the forest with vanilla custard is a divine dessert (around 190 kcal.) Careful! Play badminton for half an hour and the custard calories are gone!").

² Child respondents have stated books as an important source of advice about food intake disorders in various pieces of research conducted recently. Compare with D. PRINOSILOVÁ. Awareness among primary school children of food intake disorders and dietary habits. P. KACHLÍK; M. HAVELKOVÁ; L. PROCHÁZKOVÁ. Food intake disorders – awareness and prevention among level two pupils at primary schools in Brno. Both papers in E. ŘEHULKA et al. *Schools and Health* 21. Available at: http://www.ped.muni.cz/z21/sbornik_06_obsah.htm.

³ Ivona Březinová (1964), a novelist writing for all age groups of reader. Her work for children and young people in recent years has focused systematically on previously taboo issues and difficult topics (for example the Romany question, drug dependence, ageing).

state of mind of the protagonists for the reader. Their diaries are a therapeutic tool that they are all forced to write as part of their treatment. The two structural strands are also differentiated from each other by the books' graphic design. The title characters of the books meet up at the sanatorium, with the main character of one book playing a minor role in another of the books in the series. This feature allows the author to see the individual characters at a certain distance (bulimic Martina, for example, reacts contemptuously to drug addict Alice, while Martina's behaviour is repulsive and incomprehensible from Alice's viewpoint). Březinová consulted specialist doctors about the given issue to avoid amateurish or journalistic simplification and stereotyping.

Martina is depicted as the victim of the upbringing provided by her mentally unstable mother who, after they have been abandoned by Martina's father, has one partner after another, puts her failures in life down to her being overweight, and fluctuates unsuccessfully between a variety of diets and uncontrolled gluttony. She prohibits Martina from eating sweet things so that she doesn't ruin her life by being fat, but is unable to give her daughter any kind of positive image of the future (she exposes her daughter to unpleasant harassment from her partners and arouses a fear of adulthood in her). The only way in which Martina can begin to develop her self-confidence is by controlling her body shape and weight. Out of spite she overeats, then loses weight, before finally overeating and making sure she loses weight again by vomiting:

„I started overeating out of spite, Mummy. You made all my decisions for me. It was like living life on a road full of signposts. Nothing but no entry signs and go this way or go that way. There was never ever any choice. Only food. It was an opportunity I just couldn't miss. It was nice to eat too much and know that I was the one controlling my body. I didn't care how. The main thing was that it was my own decision.” (page 25)

At the same time, however, Martina is faced with a growing hatred of her own body. She counters her mother's weakness, which she correctly feels to be the real cause of the accelerating roundabout of her failures in life, with her own ability to deny herself and lose weight. At the age of fourteen she becomes anorexic. The young girl's desperate attempt to get her mother's attention and remain in childhood (not, it is true, a carefree childhood, but at least far from the joyless reality of her mother's adult life) also lies initially behind her efforts to lose weight.

„My Name is Martina... and I'm Bulimic.” Her confession begins with an uncompromising admission, from which two convergent plotlines develop. The girl's mother is addressed through the diary that Martina writes from the sanatorium at the doctor's orders in the form of a letter. Martina attempts to explain to her mother the feelings and experiences that started her illness. The second plotline sees Martina at the sanatorium, and focuses primarily on the girl's battle with her illness – Martina's anorexia has culminated in bulimia.

The direct narrator is combined with the technique of the personal narrator. Martina's point of view and her inner perspective let us see things through the eyes of a girl struggling with illness, while the external perspective from which she is depicted provides a certain objectivisation of the subject of the narrative essential for the intended adolescent reader⁴. The chosen narrative situation is ideal for the creation of identification with the direct narrator, which is Martina herself. The fictitious recipient of this line

⁴ The information given in the imprint indicates that the book is designed for readers aged 14 and above.

of narration – Martina’s mother – also plays an important role in the acceptance process. The narration gains a stronger emotional charge and an impression of immediacy. The figure of the mother also serves as something of a sounding board against which Martina can define herself.

The narrative situation opened in this way could, however, detract from the important instructive dimension of the text, for which reason Martina’s soul-searching recorded in her diary often contains the mediated views of the doctors and other people around her:

„I don’t know. The doctor read my last entry and said that even I don’t know what I want. That I’m at odds with myself. That I want to punish you for your mistakes, but at the same time I’m actually glad that you’ve got them in the first place. Apparently I use your actual mistakes and the ones I just think you’ve got to justify my own failure. I really don’t know, Mummy. I just don’t know.” (page 37)

The retrospective structure is another important part of the narrative strategy, since it enables at least a partially objectivised view of the former situation.

„Then I began to get my strength back, but I was gripped by the fear that I would start putting weight back on and all my effort would have been in vain. I didn’t see my emaciated bony body or notice my sunken cheeks and pointy nose. I still thought I was fat.” (page 104)

How successful is the author in relation to the functional aspect of the text? She describes the aetiology of anorexia and bulimia (the fear of growing up, adopting the mother’s negative self-assessment, the difficult relationship with the mother in an incomplete family) and the course of treatment credibly, with realistic and naturalistic details. These passages can be said to be highly informative, while preserving the value and, most importantly, the emotional impact of a work of literature. The plot resolution, however, is more problematic. The determining element in the protagonist’s recovery is a young therapist who is training at the sanatorium, and who falls in love with the girl. This way of resolving a conflict situation may be considered dangerous – food intake disorders are illnesses that demand considerable effort during treatment on the part of the patient, and the implausible ending rather undermines the valuable informative and educational nature of the prose. Březinová’s pioneering choice of a serious topic and the extra-textual signals used (the rather repulsive and caricatured portrait of the girl on the cover) would seem to contradict the cliché of the novel for girls, though the happy ending remains in complete agreement with its conventions.

The contextual situation in which the prose is set is also interesting. In the light of the other stories in the *Girls on a Leash* trilogy, anorexia and bulimia are perceived more as dependence (leading to criminality, what’s more, as the girl’s bulimia is uncovered only after Martina steals from a food store in order to satisfy her compulsive desire for food) than illness. Rather greater demands must be made of “instructive” literature, whose primary role is informative and formative. The aesthetic function of the text is required, first and foremost, to attract and subsequently retain the reader’s attention, to engage the reader’s emotions and to get the reader thinking about the given issue. As far as this goes Ivona Březinová’s writing performs this role successfully.

In the context of Czech fiction for young people, anorexia nervosa also appears as the central topic of the book *Strípky mých lásek (Fragments of My Loves)* by the

popular novelist Lenka Lanczová⁵ (1999). The sixteen-year-old protagonist Edita, hurt by rejection by a boy she has fallen for, decides to lose weight radically. She ignores her body's warning signs and gradually develops anorexia nervosa. Her motivation to begin treatment is a new relationship with a boy named Adam, who – having experienced a tragedy with anorexia in his own family – gives the girl an ultimatum.

Lanczová tells Edita's story from the viewpoint of a direct narrator, offering the reader only the point of view of the ill protagonist. This narrative situation makes it easier to identify with the girl, though hinders the explicit educational impact of the text. Her description of the illness is divested of the dimension of inner drama (experienced, for example, by the protagonist of Březinová's prose or the narrators of books of a confessional nature) and is restricted to a copybook characterisation that is not particularly convincing. How is one to believe in an anorectic heroine who, in spite of a long list of physical failings (including weakness caused by hunger, vomiting, missed menstruation and sensitivity to the cold), has not lost her appetite for sex?

The author has taken on a serious social topic while remaining stuck in the rut of undemanding reading for girls, and has distorted her depiction of the illness by proving unable to escape the triteness of a rather cheap form of the novel for girls. Her prose can, in spite of this reservation, be accepted as a text that may draw attention to the subject of anorexia nervosa.

Jacqueline Wilson's⁶ *Girls under Pressure* (1998, Czech 2002) has also been published in a Czech translation, and is one of a loosely connected series about adolescent Ellie and her friends. Ellie begins to worry about her figure and tries to overcome her perceived fatness first with a drastic diet, and later by induced vomiting, although she is aware of the risks of her actions, as she has read about anorexia nervosa and bulimia in magazines. Ellie only sees the light when she is confronted by another girl at school suffering from the same illness.

Wilson shows convincingly how easy it is to develop unhealthy habits. She preserves the educational potential of the text by letting her protagonist (who is also the narrator of the book) herself come to her own realistic assessment of the situation.

Marliese Arold⁷ has written about food intake disorders in her novel *Completely Weightless – Miriam is Anorexic* (1997, Czech 2002). Miriam is full of complexes and worries, and sees the cause of her problems as lying in her figure. She escapes into her dreams and creates a planet called Orchid, which is a projection of her longing for happiness, love and harmony. Her constant battle with her appetite, which her desire to lose weight begins to win, is accompanied by her pride in her initial successes.

„*I suppressed my hunger. I won the battle with greed. I controlled my body. It did what I wanted it to.*” (page 47)

⁵ Lenka Lanczová (1964), a popular author of novels for girls. She began publishing in the nineteen nineties, and her several dozen books are characterised by the structural and linguistic clichés of trivial literature. She has proved attractive to readers largely due to her openness (on matters of sex, the lifestyle of the young).

⁶ Jacqueline Wilson (1945), a British novelist and author of several dozen novels and series of novels for children and young people.

⁷ Marliese Arold (1958), a German novelist who began to write after studying librarianship (focusing on children's literature). Her work focuses systematically on delicate issues. The titles *Veronica Takes Ecstasy*, *I Want to Live – Nadia is HIV Positive*, *So Much Joy and Love – What It Was Like the First Time* have been published in Czech translation.

Miriam's feeling of superiority engendered by her strong will that has forced her to starve herself stands out particularly sharply in contrast to her own family:

„I was surrounded by weak people in my family. Mum was incapable of asserting herself. Dad secretly sought happiness with another woman (...). Half-heartedness, great plans that gather dust. Lots of talk with nothing behind it!” (page 52)

Miriam loses a realistic view of her body and the world around her. Not even the fate of her seriously ill schoolmate Silke, who is dying of cancer, forces Miriam to look at herself with any detachment and begin to appreciate life. She lies and cheats just to avoid food. She is taken to hospital after physically collapsing, and here her story ends – seemingly without resolution – in the ambulance.

The prose can be considered one of the most successful fictional explorations of the thinking of anorexics. The well thought-out work with the narrator contributes to this, with layering of the speech line of the direct narrator (differentiated typographically in the text) into the primary plot current and the innermost flow of the girl's thoughts, dreaming and (progressively predominant) indiscriminate self-accusation.

„Biscuits, those damned biscuits! I should never have eaten them! But I only did it because of Bobby! I would have offended him if I'd refused them! *Feeble excuse! You greedy fool, you would have taken them from anyone! You were just waiting for a chance to stuff yourself again. You haven't got any willpower, you're weak, admit it!* It really was just because of Bobby! *Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it. You could have taken them and just pretended to eat them. That would have done. But you ate them you fat pig. And they tasted good, didn't they!*”

By leaving the ending open and merely following her heroine as she falls into the clutches of her illness, the author makes her prose far more alarming and increases its potential impact in the preventive battle against food intake disorders. The death of young Silke, full of thirst for life, of cancer presents a cautionary parallel to the possible fate of Miriam, who won't face up to the possibility of death even as she herself embarks on the journey to self-destruction. The plot trick of the death of one of the minor characters is intended to convince us of the fine line between life and death; in this way the threat of death can also be applied to the protagonist of the novel Miriam. An unambiguous conclusion is replaced by a matter-of-fact and purely informative post-script giving a concise summary of possible causes, symptoms, consequences and treatments of food intake disorders.

Texts based on the individual experiences of their authors represent a specific group of books. The same criteria that apply to ordinary works of fiction cannot be applied to texts of this kind, since they are frequently a product of or means of therapy, and their greatest value lies in the authenticity and immediacy with which they portray the given issue. Two works of this type have appeared in Czech literature on the topic of anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

The rather complicated title of Martina Kopřivová's⁸ undisguisedly autobio-

⁸ Martina Kopřivová (1983) began writing while studying at a Business Academy, and now owns a modelling agency. She began writing *The Confession of a Model* at the age of 18 based on her own experiences. It was re-issued in 2007 with additional notes from the viewpoint of the author's mother. Other works are also based on the author's own experiences: *Companion* (2005) is set in Prague's nightclubs, which the author got to know as a disk jockey; *Bruno's Cocktail – A Trip from the Bottom to the Bottom* (2006) is a variation on *The Confession of a Model* and describes the fortunes of a young man who abuses anabolic steroids in the search for the perfect body. An intimate knowledge of the environments in which these books are set and the appeal of their subject matter make up for Kopřivová's shortcomings in the areas of artistic invention and stylisation.

graphical *Everyone Has to Work it Out for Themselves. The Confession of a Model. Compulsory Reading for Teenagers and Their Parents* (2004) provides the key to its interpretation. The three-part title encapsulates the principal ideas and topics of the prose surprisingly well, even if its composition falls into just two parts. The first of these, entitled *Anorectic*, shows its protagonist Tamara, who has been engaged in modelling since the age of thirteen with the support of her parents, who are driven by their own unfulfilled ambitions and the vision of large earnings. The naïve and complacent girl suffers the first blow when a modelling agency hints that she should lose weight. Her starving herself leads to anorexia, thankfully diagnosed in time. The emaciated girl faces another bitter obstacle when her agency stops using her due to her anorectic appearance. The same trigger that began her illness leads paradoxically to recovery. Tamara regains her health during the holidays with the help of her parents, though she will continue to feel stigmatised by some of the consequences of her anorexia. The second part of the book, with the revealing title *Sebastian*, follows the girl's various successes and failures in the modelling business and describes her love affair with an older man. The prose concentrates primarily on portraying the world of models and the fake veneer of their work, and provides a warning against the blackmailing practices in which the agencies engage – from this viewpoint the girl's illness is merely one of the many aspects making up her experiences of life up to this point.

The evidently confessional nature of the book is rather undermined by the fact that the direct narrator describes her experiences from an unspecified distance in time and space, thereby somewhat detracting from the illusion of immediacy. The separation of the “experiencing I” from the “narrating I” cannot be said to have the desired functional aspect either, as the principal character in the role of the narrator does not undergo any inner transformation of any kind, but remains the same superficial hard done-by little girl that she was at the beginning. The function of recognition cannot be performed through this text in relation to the topic of anorexia nervosa. The author's lack of talent for stylisation and compositional gradation is also detrimental to the prose.

A more sophisticated look into anorexia nervosa is provided by Petr Vomastek's *Diary of an Anorectic* (2000). The author returns to his difficult adolescence, when as a student at a prestigious grammar school in Prague he developed a number of signs of anorexia. His prose is almost a detective investigation into the causes of his anorexia, which he associates with his own perfectionism and his conflict with his authoritarian mother. The thread of diary entries and correspondence is commented on and confronted at a later date with the author's subsequent views. The chronologically arranged entries on day-to-day events are also interspersed with the author's own poetry. These diary entries and authentic correspondence are touching in how the banalities of everyday life are elevated into events in their own right. The writer's vulnerability is clear from these diary entries, which betray a certain insecurity in spite of the affectedness of their style, which itself provides perhaps unwitting evidence of the author's intellectual tendencies.

What differentiates Vomastek's book from other testimonies of its kind? First and foremost the way in which it attempts to bring his agonising ordeals and experiences down to a universal level, to uncover their hidden motivation and to verbalise them, not infrequently in the form of similes or metaphorical images that are subsequently decod-

ed and given a more specific form. „Sometimes one can take an attitude to one's needs as if they were an unwanted child, and neglecting them becomes more than just a habit. Or perhaps one rejects them altogether. When you reject a child (sic!) in all probability (sic!) its screaming grows at first to an unbearable level, but gradually it becomes exhausted, weakens, and finally dies. (...) An anorectic begins to care for another child to the detriment of his own ousted – rejected – needs. A child that fascinates him, that is so appealing to him that he wouldn't mind (sic!) giving his life for it. (...) I adopted the need to run as my new idol. That was what I devoted every ounce of care to. (page 90)

These efforts come to a climax in the chapter Interpretation with an attempt to treat anorexia nervosa symbolically as a difficulty in accepting the surrounding world, “unintegrated hunger and the inability or repugnance for integrating proprietary desires or having anything to do with them at all.” The author also gives a detailed description of the paths that lead to his recovery, combining specialist medical care (hospitalisation) with various methods of autogenous training (generally based on popular psychological literature).

Although no specified or explicit addressee figures in the text we can feel its projection in a number of linguistic devices, such as frequent rhetorical questions and apostrophes opening the individual subchapters, or in the commentary he uses to annotate his previous statements. *Diary of an Anorectic* is fragmented in conceptual, compositional and functional terms. Its initial confessional nature and memoir plotline places the book in the category of fiction, a status not contradicted by the therapeutic dimension to the writing acknowledged at the end: „I have realised that this book is first and foremost an attempt to come to terms with what was probably the most profound episode of my life so far. I kept writing, and as the work progressed I realised that it really wasn't about anorexia nervosa, but was more of a discussion of a dramatic episode in the life of its author.” (page 234). The text, full of references and quotations from specialist, popular and classical literature is, however, arranged in accordance with the conventions of educational literature (including a list of sources from which the author has drawn), and the original fictional intent is overshadowed by the author's fore-mentioned attempt to place his own story within the framework of standard models (based on specialist literature) and, in contrast, to derive certain generalities from his own story.

Both the compositional and linguistic plan of the text appear problematic in relation to the adolescent recipient. The authentic diary material may be deliberately unedited, but a large number of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes also appear outside these passages and create an unintentionally comic contrast to the author's vocabulary containing a plethora of specialist terminology.

Vomastek's prose may prove useful to readers who are not seeking an attractive story full of plot twists, but are more interested in the broader contexts of anorexia nervosa.

The best prose among such autobiographical accounts can be found in *I Know What Air Tastes Like* (2003, Czech 2005). The Danish author Maria Hirse gives an open account of a difficult stage in her life under the subtitle *The True Story of a Model's Battle with Anorexia Nervosa*. As the winner of a beauty context in Denmark she obtains an attractive position in Japan. A few innocent unwitting remarks start a vicious circle of dieting that gradually begins to destroy both Maria's career and her health. Slimming,

as her only goal or interest in life, slowly isolates her from her friends and the exhausted model returns to Denmark, where her mother urges her to go into hospital:

„I felt like I was split in two – one Maria was the sensible one who wanted life to be like it was before, and the second, new, Maria, tried to fit everything into patterns and kept a strict watch on every movement I made.” (page 44)

The turning point in Maria's life proves to be a nightmare in which she experiences an intense fear of death for the first time, and she finally makes a conscious decision to fight her anorexia. The young woman finally makes up her mind, however, only after losing some attractive work and a relationship.

The author's prose, written in a consistently confessional tone, provides open and shocking descriptions of the destruction and self-destruction of a gradually failing organism free of taboos of any kind. These raw descriptions are not, however, presented in a cheap or sensational tone, but increase the credibility of the narrator, who does not withhold even the most degrading moments or problems in intimate coexistence accompanying her illness. In the epilogue to her book, the author gives a brief recapitulation of the subsequent eleven years of her life. Her bitter experience of anorexia induced her to embark on further studies leading to the profession of psychotherapist. She wrote the book both as a definitive full stop to the anorectic period of her life and as a warning to others:

„Over the course of time I realised that one must love oneself in order to love others. I was under the false impression that I could find self-belief in other people admiring my appearance. But self-confidence is not the same as belief in oneself, and I would like to ask everyone reading this book to look after the child that can be found inside them.”

Other titles in translation have also appeared on the given topic, though their focus and editorial conception go beyond the confines of non-intentional literature for children and young people.⁹

While food intake disorders are treated exclusively as the subject of novels for girls in Czech literature for the young, with the result that the issue is restricted to gender stereotypes, we can find works of world literature for children and the young that target a wide group of readers – not merely girls, but also boys of all age categories (the majority of these novels are, of course, addressed at readers aged twelve and above). There are also differences in the level of openness with which this sensitive issue is treated and in the degree of unglamourised reality (including death) to which their protagonists and, thereby, their child readers are confronted.

Here we might mention, for example, the novel *Skin* (2004) for children aged twelve and above by the American author Adrienne Maria Vrettos. The fourteen-year-old protagonist Donnie, from whose perspective the story is told, describes retrospectively his older sister Karen's lost battle with anorexia. The viewpoint of the uninitiated, who reconstructs an image of the illness through initially insignificant details, copies the path to knowledge undertaken by the recipient of the text. The novel does not, however, restrict itself merely to the issue of anorexia. The conflicting emotions that Donnie feels

⁹ For example the book published in 2006 by the publisher JOTA in Brno by Jo and Alice Kingsley *Alice in the Looking Glass (A Mother and Daughter's Experience of Anorexia)*, written after a time interval from the viewpoint of a mother and her ill daughter.

towards his sister, both while she is alive and after her death, finally spark off an identity crisis in Donnie himself. The author thereby expands her novel to take in additional issues relating to fundamental existential areas.

The French novelist and dramatist Arnaud Cathrine, who writes for both children and adults, also chooses a boy as his protagonist in his attempt to delve into the essence of anorexia. Florian, hero of his novel written in the form of a diary *La vie peut-être* (*Life Perhaps*, 2006), cannot come to terms with the death of his best friend who has died of anorexia. At the psychiatric clinic where the girl's life ended, he tries to understand in retrospective the circumstances and course of the girl's illness.

The French novelist Anne Percin wrote her novel *Point de côté* (2006) for young people aged fourteen and above. Her book considers the crisis affecting her eighteen-year-old protagonist Pierre, whose twin brother died tragically in a car crash seven years earlier. His parents have been destitute since that time and Pierre, who cannot come to terms with the fact that he survived, hates himself. A vicious circle of self-accusation and suppressed doubts about his sexual orientation lead to anorexia nervosa. Only when the boy admits his homosexuality and unexpectedly finds love does he overcome his subconscious desire to die.

The most important of the fiction available in the Czech language are the books that manage to provide a look into the heart of the sufferer. It is these strange obsessions, the insurmountable anxiety associated with situations in which people suffering from food intake disorders come into contact with food, and the preoccupation with food that makes the sufferer seem absurd, strange or repugnant to those around them, that needlessly distance them from their families and friends and frequently lead to complete social isolation. The literary depiction can take the place of direct experience with anorexia and help both the healthy (as a means of prevention and in helping them better understand the ill people with whom they come into contact) and the ill, for whom they provide a "look in the mirror" and a parallel to their own feelings and situations. In this regard the prose of Ivona Březinová and Marliese Arold should be singled out for particular mention. Both these authors display a familiarity with the subject and go beyond the superficiality of "copybook" characterisations of the phenomena they describe.

A second desirable element to instructive literature of this kind is its ability to convey instructions (to a greater or lesser extent implicitly) or induce a reaction. The majority of the texts given here have a declared instructive aim. This element can be seen most commonly in prose based on autobiographical events, in which the authors take advantage of their own experiences to give difficult stages of their illness retrospective meaning by sharing what they have gone through, giving their experiences a more universal dimension, and providing a warning. Of the books available in the Czech language, I would single out Petr Vomastek's *Diary of an Anorectic* in particular in this regard, which may inspire a detailed analysis of the inner states of the writer and the paths of therapy he elected to take. Martina Kopřivová's book, in which the parents stand in the way of their daughter's hospitalisation, on the other hand, would seem to be of debatable value in this regard. No matter how much Kopřivová emphasises the fact that her life was in danger, the way in which she describes the course of her treatment (including the parental conspiracy with their daughter to deceive the doctors) tends rather to trivialise her depiction of her illness. The testimony by Maria Hirse is of greater use

to the reader not merely in its conscious effort to overcome auto-stylisation (in contrast to the self-centred Koprivová and her unsurpassed hard done-by attitudes) and provide an objective, if personal, view of the illness, but also in its undeniably greater artistic value, from which its emotional effectiveness also develops.

There are at least a few works that are available for the purposes of use in school in a number of educational areas covered by the universal educational programme or that can be recommended within the wider extracurricular educational context. The literary production available in the Czech language, however, still lacks the kind of instructive literature on the given topic aimed specifically at children that forms a natural counterpart in foreign literature to works of fiction. The second stumbling block here is the fact that the majority of fictional works on the subject of food intake disorders published in this country fall neatly into the category of books for girls. It is likely that boy readers avoid literary depictions of the topic precisely because of this close connection with a specific genre. An important task for the teacher who wants to use books as an ally and a means for improved awareness and prevention should be motivational work with the text in order that all the pupils at least become closely acquainted with the issue of food intake disorders through their literary depiction and take an educated approach to them.

OBRAZ MENTÁLNÍ ANOREXIE V UMĚLECKÉ LITERATUŘE PRO DĚTI A MLÁDEŽ

Abstrakt: Příspěvek se zabývá problematikou poruch příjmu potravy (zejména mentální anorexie) ve světle jejich zobrazení v intencionální české i světové literatuře pro děti a mládež. Navzdory tomu, že poruchy příjmu potravy ohrožují stále širší okruh dětí a mládeže, nepředstavují příliš frekventované literární téma a s výjimkou textů vycházejících z bezprostřední životní zkušenosti autorů jsou ztvárňovány se stereotypy, které snižují estetickou úroveň i potencionální výchovný účinek této literatury. V kontextu české literatury pro mládež se tématu mentální anorexie a bulimie chopila pouze Ivona Březinová, která však setrvala v žánrovém zajetí dívčího románu (včetně happyendového klišé). Inspirativnější impulsy nabízí pohled na světovou literární scénu, kde je toto téma zpracováváno bez jakýchkoli tabu, s mnohdy šokující otevřeností, jež však v sobě nese i preventivní výchovný potenciál.

Klíčová slova: mentální anorexie, literatura pro děti a mládež, česká a světová literatura, výchovné působení