

Analysis Of Anorexia Reflected In French And Francophone Novels

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Abstract

Anorexia means weight loss, thinness that has led to changes in the functions of the body, is also called eating disorder that occurs most often at the time of puberty. It manifests itself in a categorical refusal to eat normally for a long time, to lose weight or not to gain weight. It is triggered most often between fourteen and seventeen years, with the maximum peak prevalence at sixteen years. However, it seems that the starting age is getting younger. The disorder can sometimes occur early, from eight years, or later, after eighteen years. Unlike certain misconception, anorexia affects not only wealthier person but also all social categories of people. This study aims to analyze the anorexia that reflects theoretically in French and Francophone novels. It highlights anorexia as represented in French and francophone countries. Regarding anorexia, there are some contemporary French and Francophone writers who have highlighted so much about anorexia or weight loss or diet etc. in their notable works namely Ananda Devi, Delphine de Vigan, Nelly Arcan, Victoire Maçon Dauxerre etc.

Key words: Anorexia, Eating disorders, physical and psychological disorder, French and Francophone Novels.

INTRODUCTION

Anorexia means weight loss, thinness that has led to changes in the functions of the body, is also called eating disorder. As regards the anorexia, Laura Di Lodovico et al demonstrated that anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder essentially for girls or women that appear most often in adolescence. It leads to strict and voluntary food deprivation for several months or even years. Anorexia is very often associated with psychological disorders. The researchers try to pinpoint the mechanisms involved in the appearance of this disorder, as well as its risk and evolution factors. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder that occurs most often at the time of puberty. It manifests itself in a categorical refusal to eat normally for a long time, to lose weight or not to gain weight which is triggered most often between fourteen and seventeen years, with the maximum peak prevalence at sixteen years. However, it seems that the starting age is getting younger. The disorder can sometimes occur early, from eight years, or later, after eighteen years. Unlike certain misconception, anorexia affects not only wealthier person but also all social categories of people. About twenty percent of young girls adopt restrictive and fasting behaviors at some point in their lives but only a minority of them becomes anorexic, then having all the diagnostic criteria associated with this disorder. In France, an epidemiological study conducted in 2008, among the adolescents at the age of eighteen which indicates that anorexia nervosa affected 0.5 percent of these young girls and 0.03 percent of boys between the age of twelve and seventeen years. Findings support similar data with equivalent figures. According to a review of epidemiological studies conducted between 2000 and 2018, the lifetime prevalence of anorexia is 1.4 percent in women and 0.2 percent in men. These figures have remained stable over the last decades. (1) Amianto, F et al; White, M; Legg, T ; Bhandari, S stated that anorexia is an eating disorder that first appears as an obsession with thinness. There are factors such as the unalterable desire to lose weight, refusal to eat or the implementation of control strategies. Daily, the person experiences food as a nightmare, an aggression, whereas fasting is a situation of control. The person follows a drastic diet, eats in very limited quantities and suffers from deficiencies in which sugar, fats and starches are often eliminated from the diet. The main cause of anorexia is a lack of self-confidence marked by body dissatisfaction: puberty and / or socio-cultural factors have an influence in its appearance, but it can also be due to emotional shock or depression. Anorexia becomes self-control. Whatever the form of anorexia, there is often a psychological background marked by a shortfall of self-confidence and self-esteem. The control of the body compensates for this lack and more generally of everything around the person. Progressive weight loss is often experienced as a victory. There are typically two types of anorexia: restrictive anorexia, where the person is very thin, eats very little and fights against hunger, and

anorexia-bulimia (or anorexia purgative), where the person alternates between restrictions and bulimic crises marked by compensatory strategies. There is also a difference between mental anorexia and anorexia nervosa, but this difference is small: it is considered that mental anorexia is focused on the fear of getting fat and being in poor health because of a distorted self-image, while anorexia nervosa is based on the well-being felt at weight loss and the satisfaction of seeing your body lose weight. On the other hand, medical anorexia is an inability or refusal to eat because of certain pathologies or diseases. (2) This study aims to analyze the anorexia that reflects in French and Francophone literature and how anorexia portrays in French and Francophone countries. As for as anorexia, In one hand, there are some contemporary French writers namely Delphine de Vigan, depicted it in her novel "Jours sans faim" which means "Days Without Hunger" published in 2001 (3) and the other novel "Jamais assez maigre, Journal d'un top model" which means "Never skinny enough, Diary of a top model" written by Victoire Maçon Dauxerre, published in 2016 (4); on the other hand, there are some contemporary francophone writers who are specially focused on anorexia or weight loss or diet etc. in their masterpieces namely that Ananda Devi, the contemporary Francophone writer from Mauritius, pointed out in her novel "Le Voile de Draupadi" i.e, "The Veil of Draupadi" published in 1993 (5); Nelly Arcan, a Canadian novelist, mentioned in her novel "Folle" which means "Crazy", published in 2004 (6) ; Hélène Koscielniak, a great Franco-Ontarian writer, articulated "Mégane et Mathis" published in 2022 (7) etc. This study highlights on anorexia as it represented in French and Francophone literature and what are the impacts that anorexia has created in these French and Francophone societies?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

David M. Garner et al demonstrate that anorexia is found in girls who train to do modeling in fashion world. According to their studies, it presents only pressure for her daughters to keep a slim figure that leads to the development of anorexia. (8) Jacques Maillet is expressed that anorexia and bulimia are increasingly common pathologies, which are the constraints of reducing food and eating too much. (9) Marie-Ève Matte described anorexia and bulimia as Melhy, is a teenage girl, wants to stay like a child, does not want to grow up, refuse food or sometimes eat everything, and then vomit. (10) Simon Boulерice highlighted the theme of self-confidence, anorexia and family relationships etc. in his novel. (11) Vincent Dodin and Marie-Lyse Testart first one is the psychiatrist and the other one is the psychologist-psychoanalyst have explained that the understanding of anorexia besides the social problem, the belief of finesse etc. are the first cause of disorder. According to them, young girls were captivated by family emotions and influenced by their way that they feed through emphasizing their family problems. (12) Jean-Louis Nandrino et al has emphasized that anorexia nervosa always brings many reasoning and interpretations that highlight the disorder of etiological models. They explained the emergency of this pathology. (13) Vanessa Germain was described the suffering of Clara and Elizabeth; Clara is anorexic, and Elizabeth suffered from bulimia. Evidently, these two talks and exchange their feeling about eating disorders. (14) Anne Bargiacchi et al have discussed an interdisciplinary study for eating disorders; highlight several symptoms such as genetic, psychological and biological elements etc. (15) Daniel Rigaud was highlighted the mechanisms and basic information about these eating disorder that are accompanied by therapies to treat these disorders. (16) Philippe Jeammet has deeply articulated pathologies that are gradually extensive. He underlined the individual, family and cultural elements to the origin of these behaviors. (17) Catherine Sénécal was providing some advices about how to develop a relationship between the health, the food and the body for children. He gave some thought-provoking tips which lead young teenagers into a world of thinness and physical appearance. (18) Jean Wilkins was found young anorexic people during most of his practice at Sainte-Justine who was nicknamed "little girls at Wilkins". (19) Aimé, Annie et al have highlighted the mental health problems which are associated with eating disorders and actively examined obesity, anorexia etc. (20) Caroline Fronteau has underlined that the girls left the family to enroll in university at the age of seventeen and facing her anorexia disorder and her new surroundings. She expressed her life in danger because of weight loss and recovers the suffering condition. (21) C. Cheval et al have indicated that anorexia is a most common eating disorder of infant. They approached infant anorexia as a feeding disorder and interpreted according to the physical and psychic state, the cultural and interaction context. The networks associate with somatic, relational, psychological,

cultural and educational factors. (22) Alice Côté Dupuis has spoken in her article « faire fondre les préjugés, plutôt que les calories - Mégane et Mathis-Hélène Koscielniak » which means, melt prejudices, rather than calories - Mégane and Mathis-Hélène Koscielniak with reference to the Franco-Ontarian writer who realize the first invasion of the young novelist's society which was encouraged by the society around her, the writer was put forward the reality of women suffering from anorexia. (23)

METHODOLOGY

This study uses comparative research methods of analysis of representation of anorexia that reflects theoretically in French and Francophone novels. There are some contemporary French and Francophone women writers who highlight about anorexia or weight loss or diet etc. in their notable works namely Ananda Devi, Delphine de Vigan, Nelly Arcan, Victoire Maçon Dauxerre etc.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Anorexia Reflected in French novels

This study highlights particularly about anorexia in French novels. Firstly « Jours sans faim » which means "Days without hunger" by Delphine de Vigan, then, "Jamais assez maigre, Journal d'un top model" which means "Never Skinny enough, Diary of a top model" by Victoire Maçon Dauxerre. To begin with the first novel « Jours sans faim », written by Delphine de Vigan, is the first novel, published in 2001. It is an autofiction, written under the pseudonym Lou Delvig. The narrator introduces us "Laure", a young anorexic woman who reaches the extreme level of anorexia. At the last hope, she was admitted in hospital to recover. She was reaching extreme limitations of fasting and suffering. The narrator highlighted anorexia as a mental suffering that reveals a relationship problem with the mother, a reverse role. She mentioned that first, how she came to suffer this disorder and eliminate the foods:

« Elle a éliminé d'abord la viande rouge, et puis toutes les viandes, les volailles et cochonnailles, et puis toutes les protéines animales, les œufs et le fromage [...] Elle devenait plus forte que la faim, plus forte que le besoin. Plus elle maigrissait, plus elle recherchait cette sensation pour mieux la dominer ».

"She, firstly, eliminated red meat, and then all meat, poultry and pork products, and then all animal protein, eggs, and cheese [...] she became stronger than hunger, stronger than the need. The more she became thinner, the more she was looking for this feeling the better dominates her."

Then, how she was uncontrolled in her body, she faced so much difficulty for all signs of nutritional deficiency:

« Trente-cinq degrés de température, huit de tension, aménorrhée, dérèglement du système pileux, escarres, ralentissement du pouls et de la pression sanguine » (Delphine de Vigan : 17)

«Thirty-five degrees of temperature, eight degrees of blood pressure, amenorrhea, deregulation of hair growth, bedsores, lowered pulse and blood pressure»

Finally, she was soon admitted to the twelfth floor of the famous hospital, happened by chance last moment a skeleton of thirty-six kilos/1.75m, the patient did not reach to coma state. In one last hope, she is recovered.

In second novel is "Jamais assez maigre, Journal d'un top model" (Never skinny enough, Diary of a top model) written by Victoire Maçon Dauxerre published in 2016. The story begins with notice at the age of seventeen; Victoire Maçon Dauxerre has everything to become a model which integrates into the top twenty most demanded models, she must fit in a size of 32! Who implies for the girl of 1.78 ms in height and weighs 47 kg! It says that it is only how she will succeed. She is forced to eat only three apples a day and uses laxatives when she eats more. She becomes essential in the world of fashion, parades for the greatest and makes around the world. When she falls into anorexia, she does not realize her condition. "Most models get vomited. There is a real code of silence around it, but it is the workplace reality. It's being impossible very tall of weighing as little and be so thin," she said. Victoire then took refuge in bulimia and made several suicide attempts. The young woman managed to get out by and so surrounded by her family and a doctor. She returned on fashion world. She now weighs sixty-four kilos and wants to

become a comedy actress. But for now, with the release of her book, she wants to make her voice heard and use her experience to help other young girls. "Never thin enough" is a kind of diary of her descent into hell, denial of the disease, lies to make believe in her surrounding that everything is fine. But also, the difficulty to return this universe that makes to dream so many people. It takes her for a privileged, she who travels and sleeps in the most beautiful hotels in the world. She suffers silently and sometimes wishes to put an end of life.

"Je trouve anormal et criminel de montrer cette image de maigreur et d'inciter les jeunes femmes à maigrir. On dit aujourd'hui que l'idéal de beauté, c'est d'être maigre. Et ça incite à l'anorexie, ça crée des troubles alimentaires et c'est extrêmement grave".

"I find it abnormal and criminal to show this image of thinness and encourage young women to lose weight. It is said today that the ideal of beauty is to be thin. And it encourages anorexia, it creates eating disorders and it's extremely serious."

A proof of moving and very lucid from young woman who did not dream of being a fashion modeling, but when she was spotted who was preparing to join in Political Sciences. She was invited as a Guest of Grand Soir, she returns to these difficult years. On April 3, 2015, the National Assembly voted to ban the use of skinny and malnourished models to fight against anorexia, as part of the review of the Health Bill. The amendment of the reporter Olivier Veran was adopted with the favorable opinion of the Minister of Health, Marisol Touraine. When Olivier Veran has put forwarded this amendment, Victoire Maçon Dauxerre's mother contacted him to tell her daughter's story. Victoire then sent him a letter, which he read to the Senate. Soon after, the young woman was approached by a publishing house to tell her story. If this law had existed when Victoire started modeling, she would not have had the right to march.

Analysis of Anorexia Reflected in Francophone novels

This study also highlights about anorexia as represented in Francophone novels. First, «Le Voile de Draupadi» which means, "The Veil of Draupadi" written by Ananda Devi; second, «Folle», which means "Crazy" written by Arcan, Nelly and finally, Hélène Koscielniak's novel «Mégane et Mathis». At first, the novel of Ananda Devi "Le Voile de Draupadi", her second novel indicates the refusal of food, published in 1993. As far as I am concerned, the narrator highlights the female body, and eating disorders in her effective work, Susan Bordo has shown that, far from being paradoxical, the epidemic coexistence of anorexia and obesity in term of consumer culture reveals full of difficulty in finding the balance in the formation of identity between the self-producers and consumers elements:

L'anorexie peut être considérée comme un développement extrême de la capacité de renoncement à soi-même et de répression du désir ; l'obésité comme une capacité extrême de capituler au désir. Les deux sont enracinés dans la même construction de la culture de consommation du désir comme écrasant et dépassant le soi. (24)

Anorexia can be considered as an extreme development of the ability of self-denial and suppressing desire; obesity as an extreme ability to capitulate the desire. Both are rooted in the same creation of the consumer culture of desire as overwhelming and surpassing the self.

This novel presents a reflection on different values such as psychics, families, religious, cultural, political, historical which bring on its protagonists' bodies gather, and the ways in which these values can surpass the singular or conventional interpretations of fasting.

Damlé, Amaleena mentioned that the narrator strongly evokes the intermingling life of the young mother (Anjali) and her little child (Wynn), the gentle closeness of their body whereas Anjali faces her strong feeling about her son's health in this novel. As a religious fasting turn into a more extreme act of hunger, Anjali depicts a form of refusal with the limited protest tools at her disposal. The paradoxes that are exposed in Anjali's food refusal are very clearly compatible with the medical, sociological and cultural studies of anorexia. Indeed, Wynn's doctor finally suggests to Devi that Anjali suffers from anorexia. As the form of hunger strike, fasting of Anjali, the death of the body symbolizes not only refusal of food, but also refusal to feed. It is no longer an act of offering or supplication, Anjali's resistance to eating gives power in the very sense when it offers a respite:

« Ce n'est pas un supplice. C'est un repos que de ne plus avoir de corps » (Ananda Devi : 154).

“It is not a torture. It is a rest that not to have a body anymore”

When Anjali’s fasting turns into a more extreme act of hunger, there is a clear resonance with the definition of anorexia, like other eating disorders, makes its presence felt in Mauritius. However, despite the compelling context of such interpretation, Devi’s novel seems to escape such a careful categorization. It is striking that Anjali’s own reflection on her body at the end of the novel provides a pluralized set of meanings for her reality of body:

« Je pense à mon corps décharné, anorexie nerveuse, grève de la faim, suicide à retardement »

«I think of my emaciated body, anorexia nervosa, hunger strike, delayed suicide»

By bringing together with the religious and spiritual practices of fasting, the cultural and political purpose of hunger strike and the managed formation of anorexia, then, Devi emphasizes numerous significations changes which are superimposed in Anjali’s refusal to eat rather than providing a singular or overly pathological definition of her action. (25)

Analysis of second novel is « Folle » which means “Crazy”, written by Arcan, Nelly, her second work, after the death of the former lover, the protagonist was 15 years old.

« Selon une étude, la mort de faim prenait trop de temps pour mourir mais y arrivait plus certainement. La mort de faim montrait tant de trouble dans la famille qui devait se réorienter pour résister. Aussitôt qu’elle est sortie de l’hôpital, elle est soufferte de l’anorexique. ».

“According to a study, death of hunger took too much time to die, but it was very likely too. The death of hunger showed so many troubles in the family which had to reorient to resist. As soon as she is discharged from the hospital, she suffers from anorexia.”

She showed that the competition between women in her writing. She appears as "madly jealous, madly hated her body." Few years later, in other novel namely « L’enfant dans le miroir » which means “The Child in the Mirror” published in 2007. She finds once again in her life at the age of fifteen years old:

« C’est quinze ans qui est présenté un grand problème qui s’appelle un trouble de poids. Aujourd’hui, je l’apporte encore».

«It is fifteen years girl who was facing a big problem named as a weight problem. Today I still bring it».

Hunger and emptiness are also evoked in her story. (26)

The third novel is “Mégane et Mathis,” written by Hélène Koscielniak, the narrator describes that Mégane is a young anorexic teenager. From the foreigners’ attitudes, Mathis grows up with her twin sisters from birth. Both are always close and conscious from time to time, from one to the other. The narrator integrated a boy to encourage especially young men to read in her story, at the same time to become aware of the anorexia which affects the disorder gradually to the boys. Her first conception showed that how suffering of an anorexic person can sometimes separate families by looking at her sister. It allows asking so many questions to other people to understand about this disease and explain it. She taught her entire life to the grandchildren, students at the age of fourteen or fifteen. She lively described the thoughts, vocabularies which are used, the activities are likely to do practice etc. the narrator has integrated in all the essential elements in her story to make the reader interest. She made a service of giving advice for parents of anorexic children. The author is not a specialist of closely to anorexia, but highlights anorexia by doing so many researches for better understanding and it said:

« Tu vas arrêter ça, tu vas manger! ».

«You will stop it, you will eat! »

But it is a mental illness, and I try as much as possible to show it in my book. The narrator highlights more authentic characters to understand the role of psychology behind this disease. The other characters represent their constant hunger, unfortunate incidents, etc. At the end of the story, Mégane herself will say:

« Parce que j’ai eu de l’aide, parce que mes parents ont eu de l’aide, parce qu’on a rencontré des conseillers, conseillères, j’ai fini par m’en sortir. »

“Because I had help, because my parents had help, because we had doctor consultant, I came out of it eventually.”

It is possible to get away with it, paraphrases the author to summarize. The author believes that if Mégane accepted by losing weight, she would live more affectionately, the novel *Mégane et Mathis* highlights the importance of accepting oneself as one is and, especially involving prejudice, rather than calories.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the girls and women in the French and Francophone novels are very thin, skinny, who were represented the perfect model to achieve the greatness of women, anorexics and others. By reference to anorexia, the pressure on the girls is to maintain a slim figure which leads to the development of anorexia in term of genetically, biologically, family, psychologically, individually as well as the cultural elements of these behaviors. This study has highlighted anorexia as the mental health problems most often associated with eating disorders. Anorexic disorder in her surroundings and life threatening were caused by her suffering to lose weight and to recover from a suffering state. The social impact of this image was promoted in the fashion world, when it addresses that how anorexia leads a teenager to do difficult things. However, perseverance, but also a psychological disorder, a mental disorder, a pathology that affects the whole family and that realize the first invasion to the society of the young novelist who is encouraged by the society around her, the writer was emphasized the living reality of the women suffering with anorexia.

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