



Laudatio Laureanne Willems

Dear Laureanne,

Among the 34 theses that were submitted for consideration for the Student Award for Best Master's Thesis this year, your thesis immediately drew the jury's attention. After all, a comparative study of three autobiographical literary works by authors writing about their own anorexia is not something one encounters every day. Three aspects of the content stood out in particular.

First of all, the work is extremely pleasant to read: your writing style is smooth, well-considered and holds the reader's attention; it has a clear structure, precisely chosen wording and fluent use of language. Your handling of not only your literary sources, but the theoretical and conceptual secondary literature as well, is quite deftly done. This gives the resulting whole a pleasantly balanced feel. Your thesis has proven to be extremely easy to follow and comprehend even for academics outside the Humanities sphere, without making any concessions to the depth of the work.

Secondly, the research itself is remarkable and original. The central question – i.e. 'how the lived experience of anorexia nervosa is illustrated in different autobiographical illness narratives by recovered/recovering anorexics' – has been approached and answered in a particularly expert fashion. By analysing and comparing the memoirs of Marya Hornbacher (*Wasted*, 1998), Kelsey Osgood (*How to Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia*, 2013) and Emma Woolf (*An Apple a Day*, 2012), and framing them in the context of existing literature on anorexia, the breadth of literary representations of the disease is revealed. In addition, the research clearly illustrates the role these personal histories can play in medicalised discourse on anorexia, in turn facilitating efforts to understand and define the disease. By combining various medical-social explanatory models of anorexia and existing disability theory with autobiographical accounts and illness narratives, your work has convincingly demonstrated that these literary testimonials provide an essential addition to a broader understanding of anorexia. What's more, the study – as the title suggests – compels the reader to deeper and interdisciplinary reflection on what is normal and healthy.

Thirdly, your personal engagement with the topic is exceptional: the personal notes reveal a human vulnerability that touches the reader, yet at the same time, the appropriate academic remove is never endangered. You have struck an admirable balance in this regard.

In the course of your studies, you took part in the Descartes Honours programme, served as a teaching assistant and actively contributed to an academic journal. You are currently a junior lecturer in Academic Writing at the UvA. Your supervisor, Dr Susanne Knittel, wholeheartedly recommends that you continue your academic career by pursuing a PhD. In light of the exceptional quality of your thesis, the jury of the thesis prize can only offer a sincere endorsement of her wish.