

Gravity Journal.

Gail Sidonie Sobat.

Winnipeg, MB: Great Plains, 2008.

162 pp., pbk., \$14.95.

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Grades 7 and up / Ages 12 and up.

Review by Marsha Skrypuch in *CM Magazine*

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excerpt:

under the fashion doll's spell
she taught us
how to walk and talk accessorize
fill our closets with dreams and trifles
have possessions be possessed
if not in full possession of our
selves

we created movies in our minds
daring escapes kidnappings
sometimes we were even heroines
but that's not what she had in mind

showed us the proper attire
for weddings performances
glamour heterosexuality
dates with ken
whoever he is

we so worshipped the Malibu tan
seamless skin
legs sans cellulite
that we swallowed the whole lie
and little else
now with the dolls
headless or head-shaven
broken or lost or closeted
what do we do with our plastic
selves?

There are risks when writing a young adult novel about anorexia. They're purchased by yearning-to-be-thin teens as how to manuals on purging. Look at some pro-anorexia blogs and websites and you'll see what I mean. Because of this, it is not enough to simply write a compelling read. Lives can be lost due do a flippant turn of phrase, so an anorexia novelist must also provide support and illumination.

So it was with trepidation that I picked up *Gravity Journal* by Gail Sobat: written in journal style, the anorexic has a dysfunctional family, and the anorexic also engages in self-mutilation. This has all been done before. I prepared myself for yet another YA novel that tried to be trendy but missed the mark. Instead, I was sucked in to the world of Anise, a gifted young woman from a troubled family, on the eve of her admission into the hospital for an eating disorder. Sobat has crafted nuanced and textured characters, from Anise herself, to her troubled brother and cold mother. Anise's fellow patients are not caricatures. They're real. Anise is more concerned about her addict brother's welfare than her own. She will go out on a limb to help anyone but herself, and, in showing that, Sobat has got to the underbelly of eating disorders. Much of the media makes it seem that eating disorders are caused by fashion magazines and a teen's desire to be thin, but while culture can exacerbate the problem, anorexia is more about the inability to love oneself than it is about appearance.

Peppered throughout the third person narrative are journal entries from Anise. These entries are often poems, like the one quoted above. At other times, they're plays on words, definitions, ruminations. The journal entries add depth and reflection to the narrative. Some of the poems are so incisive that I found myself flipping back and reading them again and again.

Sobat has created a tight and simple masterpiece. It is obvious that she has done her research about eating disorders yet she doesn't preach or pander. She lets the story unfold to its own simple conclusion in a surprisingly satisfying way. The story itself provides the reader with tools to deal with their own problems. Additionally, there are resources listed in the back. This isn't a self-help book; it's a damned good novel. But it will not harm a person with anorexic tendencies. It may well help them.

Highly Recommended.

Marsha Skrypuch's tenth book, *Daughter of War*, was just published. Her first novel, *The Hunger*, was time-travel novel about an anorexic teen.