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L'envahissement by Metka Zupančič (review)

Cheryl Toman

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Nonetheless, her stories are an easy read that contributes to lifting taboos about bodies and sexualities, and furthers those conversations in an environment where patriarchy and traditions rule. For those avid of sensuous plots and steamy encounters, a well edited and proofread version of *Les Marées* would be a good addition to their reading list.

Sandra Mefoude-Obiono

Dartmouth College

Zupančič, Metka. *L'envahissement*. L'Harmattan, 2020. Pp. 150. ISBN: 978-2-432-2115-1. 16€ (paper).

An incredibly prolific and highly esteemed literary critic in our field, Metka Zupančič has finally published a work of literature of her own. Although published in 2020, Zupančič had actually started *L'envahissement* years ago; it includes references to the dramatic events in the Balkans in the 1990s but this *récit* also remains very timely and pertinent for today's readers. In fact, considering the time that has passed since the events in the former Yugoslavia, Zupančič's work is a most welcome commentary as it brings out fresh perspectives about this particular war and readers can easily draw parallels with other conflicts plaguing today's world.

But this is not a literary work about war even though this is what provides a backdrop for the *récit*. It is also not an autobiography, even if some of the elements of the work clearly are part of Zupančič's past and present (the narrator's Slovenian heritage, her status as a university professor in North America, her profound ties with France on a professional but also a personal level, her advanced training in yoga and its philosophies etc.). The book traces the intellectual and sentimental journey of "vagabonds jetés sur de nouveaux continents" (10) for various reasons, along with the frustrating, if not heartbreaking effects of the past on relationships, specifically romantic ones. It illustrates the impossibility of continuing as before after certain life events. "*L'envahissement, c'est une visite, et qui n'a pas duré*" (13).

Every reader can relate to Zupančič's characters, both female and male, who can never quite perfectly fit into a new society even if appearances give another impression. For this reason, romantic relationships are troubled too. We feel the pain the narrator describes of not being able to break through the numerous layers of walls that her lover has built around him with an aim to protect himself—in doing so, he denies himself happiness in the process: "*s'il admettait avoir des besoins emotifs, s'il se permettait de ressentir un besoin de tendresse*" (17).

L'envahissement is profoundly feminist; the narrator ultimately never betrays that part of herself despite the deep longing for companionship. We feel the narrator's struggle and hurt when even her highly intellectual partner still exhibits misogynist tendencies. She constantly resists the notion presented by her lover that "*il n'y a pas de difference entre la vision féminine et la vision masculine*" (19). She sees how horribly damaging it would be for her to betray these values and beliefs that have given meaning to her existence and allowed her to be a survivor in hostile and strange worlds. The *récit* certainly illustrates that "*TOUS les problèmes de ce monde étaient causés par les relations déréglées entre femmes et hommes*" (123).

Outside of the moving chapters surrounding the narrator's troubled romantic relationship, there are also haunting chapters centered on the theme of exile in its various forms. The narrator mentions, in fact, "[s]a propre culpabilité d'avoir choisi le départ, avant que tout ne s'ébranle là-bas" (95). One especially well-written chapter linked to this theme is entitled "Le pays" (51) where Zupančič takes readers back to the Communist era of Central and Eastern Europe while also including references to the horrors of the Nazi period, times where one could potentially become exiled in one's very own country, a period when questions were asked about who was a true friend and who was a false one (54). Despite the similarities in events, the book proves that war is lived differently by everyone.

At the end of the work, Zupančič brilliantly intertwines all her themes, exposing in the chapters "De la fraude" (103) and "De la fraude suprême" (109) the unfortunate need to navigate this world by pretending—"conscient, peut-être inconscient, parfois voulu [...] tout milieu a son 'ambiance,' ses codes, sa manière d'être, de vivre, de vouloir gérer l'espace, le temps, son propre temps, celui des autres, ceux qui sont admis, bien, mal, un peu, dans ce réseau, dans ces jeux" (103). The narrator finally comes to ask herself "[...] mais le sentiment de fraude disparaîtra-t-il jamais ?" (112).

While the narrator is frustrated and inquiring, the reader never feels her completely lost. It is no surprise then that the work ends with the narrator making a promise to herself to stop "la violence qu'elle s'était faite pendant toute sa vie à *elle-même*, dans ses relations avec les hommes" (127).

Zupančič's work is an outstanding contribution to Francophone literature. As a Slovenian, her feminist text with her observations of how violent events in the Balkans have affected relationships is reminiscent of those by Croatian authors Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić, who, of course, never wrote in French. Thus, Zupančič's text fills a void. The novel is so beautifully and artistically written that one cannot imagine that French is not Zupančič's native language. As a Slovenian writer with a wonderfully hybrid culture because of her numerous multicultural experiences on a deep intellectual level, Zupančič becomes here, with the publication of *L'envahissement*, a prominent and influential feminist literary voice among Francophones, especially those of Central and Eastern Europe.

Cheryl Toman

University of Alabama