

Legendre, Claire. *Le Nénuphar et l'araignée*. Montréal: Les Allusifs, 2015. Pp. 9-100. ISBN 978-2-923682-45-7. €11 (Paperback).

Le Nénuphar et l'araignée is Claire Legendre's tenth publication and originally an invitation by Editor Jean-Marie Jot to contribute to Les Allusifs's collection—since terminated—“les peurs” (6). In a series of thirty-five brief chapters, Legendre, indeed, charts and attempts to make sense of her hypochondria, anxiety, superstition, fear of dying and living, and other phobias such as of insects and spiders in particular.

From the onset, assigning a genre to this book becomes an arduous task. Labeled on the back cover as something “entre essai et chronique,” it could also be read as a diary of Legendre's very fears: how they came into being; how they impact her personality, life, and even writing; how she tries (or fails) to manage them. As in a diary, some chapters cover the course of specific events. For instance, fourteen (“Nodule”) to twenty-eight (“Drama Queen”) deal with Legendre discovering that her thymus—an organ essential to growth but that self-resorbs at adolescence—did not follow its natural pattern. It now needs to be removed as it may become cancerous, a surgery from which the author successfully recovers. However, beyond a set of entries or self-analyses, the author also weaves, as a spider does, a specific thread that becomes the driving force behind all chapters. Even if in appearance unrelated, all sections in *le Nénuphar et l'araignée* illustrate the premise developed in the inaugural chapter “l'ironie tragique.” For Legendre, hypochondria, superstition, phobias, or anxiety, function like a Greek tragedy: the root of evil is glaringly there yet remains unbeknownst to the protagonist until the dramatic ending (10-11). Hence, a person afflicted by anxieties develops obsessions and rituals so as to never become “le dindon de la farce” (10). As a consequence, their lives center on “l'anticipation des soucis futurs” as they need to constantly check for the potential presence of sicknesses, obstacles, parasites or even rivals (11).

In each of the chapters, Legendre analyzes how this fear of falling prey to the “ironie tragique” impacts, if not pollutes, every aspect of her life whether it is health, love, or how people perceive her. Nonetheless, she also underlines the futility of such an effort as the unpredictable can never be anticipated: for instance, until her “thymectomie,” she had no idea this organ even existed, thus she did succumb to the “ironie tragique” (79).

The inability to assign a definite genre to *le Nénuphar et l'araignée* also stems from its participating in Legendre’s reflection on the writing of the self, including her own, since the 2000s. Her tenth publication is her first book-length, nonfictional contribution to this metacritical endeavor. A few chapters are actually dedicated to her role as a writer, such as “Le roman,” “Le complexe du romancier,” or “Viol 2.” For Legendre, translating one’s experiences in literature does not at all alleviate anxiety as writing provides a form of control that can never be achieved in “real” life: “être Dieu dans les livres vous formate l’esprit si efficacement qu’il est ensuite intenable de ne pas l’être dans la vie: comment se résoudre à accepter de ne pas savoir à l’avance le sens et le devenir des choses” (22). Yet, Legendre also ponders the impact of the writing of the self on readers. As *le Nénuphar et l'araignée* is based on autobiographical events, one cannot help but think about, or even re-read, Legendre’s previous novels through these elements. For instance, the chapters “La prophétie” and “Tout ce que tu mérites” strikingly echo her rebellious teenage characters in *le Crépuscule de Barbe-Bleue* (2001); namely their romantic, excessive fantasies or cigarette addiction. In “L’abandon” and “Le médicament,” Legendre describes her painful break-up, in Prague, with writer Jérôme Bonnetto. In her latest novel, *Vérité et amour* (2014), her protagonist, Francesca, also witnesses the bitter end of her marriage in Prague. But can these connections truly be made or do they really matter since, according to Legendre, fiction is always more structured or interesting than real life? (72). In the final chapter entitled “Inventaire,” Legendre addresses her readers directly and confesses her fear of a negative critical reception: she

knows that books, once in their hands, may betray or be interpreted against an author's intentions or perhaps too much in the light of her personal life. This constitutes another, inescapable source of anxiety.

Le Nénuphar et l'araignée blurs generic boundaries as it is both a personal and metacritical book. Legendre's greatest achievement though lies in her rendering a highly personal experience universal through these multilayered self-analyses: she makes readers realize that by constantly looking for a potential "spider" in hiding, we "cultivons en nous-mêmes les monstres qui nous dévorent" and thus forget to enjoy life as it is (96).

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Book review published as:

Michèle A. Schaal. "Le Nénuphar et l'araignée by Claire Legendre (review)." *Women in French Studies* 23.1 (2015): 160-62. *Project MUSE*. Web. 17 Dec. 2015. <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>>.