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Sullying the sacred: Proust transgressing Houellebecq

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Transgressions

Cette étude prend comme point de départ un passage dans Les Particules élémentaires où un extrait tiré de l'œuvre de Proust fait l'objet d'une étude approfondie en classe. Dans cet extrait il s'agit d'une description de la Duchesse de Guermantes, sommet de la perfection féminine. Le passage permet de contraster les attitudes différentes de professeur, élève et lecteur – chacune transgressive à sa manière. En même temps, une comparaison entre les différents niveaux de respect accordé à la duchesse, au milliardaire Bill Gates et au chanteur Snoop Dogg suggère que le système de valeurs fixe qui réglait la société de la belle époque est remplacé aujourd'hui par un autre système plus dynamique et moins respectueux.

Houellebecq has complained of the failure of writers and intellectuals to engage with issues that are of interest to a contemporary readership. He is particularly concerned with the failure to incorporate the insights of science, preferring instead commitment to a political struggle to change society:

> Il faudrait encore citer Ballard, Disch, Kornbluth, Spinrad, Vonnegut et tant d'autres qui parfois en un seul roman, voire en une nouvelle, ont plus apporté à la littérature que l'ensemble des auteurs du *nouveau roman*. Sur le plan scientifique et technique, le XXe siècle peut être placé au même niveau que le XIXe. Sur le plan de la littérature et de la pensée, par contre,

> l'effondrement est presque incroyable, surtout depuis 1945, et le bilan consternant: quand on se remémore l'ignorance scientifique crasse d'un Sartre ou d'une Beauvoir, pourtant supposés s'inscrire dans le champ de la philosophie, quand on considère le fait presque incroyable que Malraux a pu – ne fût-ce que très brièvement – être considéré comme un *grand écrivain*, on mesure le degré d'abrutissement auquel nous aura menés la notion d'*engagement politique*, et on s'étonne de ce que l'on puisse, encore aujourd'hui, prendre un intellectuel au sérieux; on s'étonne par exemple de ce qu'un Bourdieu ou un Baudrillard trouvent jusqu'au bout des journaux disposés à publier leur niaiseries. De fait, je crois à peine exagéré d'affirmer que, sur le plan intellectuel, il ne resterait rien de la seconde moitié du siècle s'il n'y avait pas eu la littérature de science-fiction[1].

For Houellebecq, only literature that is in touch with science will be meaningful not just because it is tackling an important feature of twentieth-century life but also because it is a kind of writing that the mass public will find interesting. Aurélien Bellanger, in his book on Michel Houellebecq, expands on this when he claims that the laws of science are ultimately what novelists must engage with: « Les lois du monde constituent le seul sujet pour un romancier. C'est la définition du roman… Le roman et la physique moderne sont à peu près contemporains[2] » . So all-encompassing are the laws of science, that they may be considered the only « lois du monde ». These are the rules that govern reality.

It is certainly an interesting proposition and one that merits consideration, particularly with repect to Houellebecq's works, in which science plays a major role. Mixing science and fiction has produced a long-established hybrid genre and, as we have seen, Houellebecq himself has argued for the need to take it seriously. Furthermore, the elements of science fiction incorporated within Houellebecq's own work belong firmly to the category known as hard sf [science fiction]. Kathryn Cramer provides a useful definition : « hard sf is science fiction that gets the science right[3] ». The science needs to be real. Throughout his work, Houellebecq does not transgress the laws of science but respects the rules. That is because if he wants to depict the way the world works, he has no choice but to be faithful to the principles that govern it. They are stable and unchanging.

In contrast, Houellebecq has on a number of occasions been accused of flouting or challenging social or civic laws – which are not so much « lois du monde » as « lois mondaines ». For Sandrine Rabosseau, Houellebecq, like Zola before him, is pursuing a deliberate strategy: « la réception de leurs fictions décrivant le monde du travail occidental a toujours provoqué dans la presse des polémiques virulentes[4] » . At times, within his works and outside, he makes remarks that are deemed to be out of place, which have transgressed the bounds of what is fit and proper. He has been attacked in print and dragged through the courts. Unlike the laws of physics, the rules which govern behaviour are conventional. They function not because that is the way the world works but because they are agreed. That is perhaps why any transgression or attempt to challenge social or civic rules frequently meets with a virulent response as interested parties seek to defend positions that they had thought settled by agreement. Indeed, the assaults that feature so prominently in the novels are but the metaphorical expression of the outrage that has greeted some of Houellebecq's pronouncements. The violent murder of Michel's father that opens *Plateforme* turns out to have been an attempt to curtail a relationship that in the murderer's eyes posed threat. In killing Michel's father, the murderer is seeking to protect a set of values that he thinks are worth adhering to.

Unlike the laws of physics, conventions turn out to be unfounded in reality. Transgressing those laws shows that they are not established on any solid basis. On the other hand, scientific principles cannot be violated. When conventions have been swept away, we are left not with a void but with, as A. Bellanger says above, « les lois du monde » – those laws which are the bedrock of experience. Houellebecq's universe is not fundamentally chaotic but rather it is rule governed – and those rules govern everything including us. Consequently, this challenges any comforting illusions that we might be masters of our fate, or that there might be a benign control of our destiny – and it is unbearably terrifying. As Michel David puts it, some people want to turn from Houellebecq's work because « elle expose cette donnée brute et tragique de l'expérience humaine dont au fond on peut comprendre que la plupart d'entre nous n'en veut rien savoir[5] ». It is not just that the novels are more graphic in their depictions. Rather they convey « l'impact du réel, au sens de l'« *impossible à supporter* » (Lacan[6]) ». Houellebecq's transgressions are not simply trespasses but are challenges to our view of the world – something which allows us to control and manipulate the environment in which we find ourselves. The real,

then, is not something that we can explain away or serenely contemplate but rather is something which affects us in a more tangible way – it transgresses our awareness in a confrontational way. Not surprisingly, a number of Houellebecq's characters seek to anaesthetise themselves from such a painful encounter by consuming alcohol or prescription medicines. The challenge of the real is a threat to our way of life.

The reference in *Plateforme* to the popular television show, *Xena, the Warrior Princess*, exemplifies this: « Ton règne, n'a que trop duré, Tagrathâ ! s'exclamait la blonde ; je suis Xena, la guerrière des Plaines de l'Ouest[7] ! » Here, transgression is an incursion of one fighter into the territory of another and this incursion is a territorial challenge that must be met. No person or institution can dominate permanently but rather must eventually be challenged. Similarly, in his novels, Houellebecq transgresses what is deemed appropriate for the form, bringing into the serious literary novel elements of style and substance that would normally be taboo – elements that would normally be found in their proper place elsewhere, just as Xena's proper place is the Plains of the West. For example, discussion of scientific theories and speculation on the mechanics of cloning invade the novels – something that finds its echo in the visit to the earth of the Élohim mentioned in both *Extension du domaine de la lutte* and *La Possibilité d'une île*. However, the arrival of these visitors from the far-flung reaches of space is, in the eyes of Raëlian cult followers, productive and creative. This is not an unreasonable response in itself, since preserving the *status quo* can lead to stagnation. What we hold sacred is protected but it is stagnant and unproductive.

Indeed, the clones in *La Possibilité d'une île* are identical, unchanging reproductions of their predecessors but they have not the power to innovate. The clones do not live their own lives but rather spend their time vicariously reliving the life of their originator. In their compounds they are cut off from physical contact with the world outside and from each other. Only by trespassing outside his compound, by transgressing on the territory held by what he calls the savages, can Daniel25 relaunch his life. In the broadest sense, Daniel25 proves the truth of the adage: *errare humanum est*. It is human to stray. The alternative is unchanging, eternal sterility.

Straying from what has been laid down frees from that sterility. The price, however, is the loss of purity – a lack of homogeneity and harmony. But ultimately, impurity is

fruitful. Simon St-Onge speaks of the « caractère hybride » at the heart of Houellebecq's style, « un lieu de cohabitation d'antagonismes[8] ». In *Plateforme*, Michel's imagined film scenario expressly conflates sentimental romance and hard-core pornography:

> Bob ne l'avait pas touchée, il s'était contentée de la regarder de ses beaux yeux bleu clair et de lui parler de son pays – la Caroline du Nord, ou quelque chose d'approchant. Ils se voyaient ensuite plusieurs fois en dehors du travail de Sirien, mais malheureusement, Bob devait partir pour achever sa dernière année d'études à l'université de Yale. Sirien attendait avec espoir tout en satisfaisant aux exigences de ses nombreux clients. Quoique pure dans son cœur, elle branlait et suçait avec ardeur des Français bedonnants et moustachus (second rôle pour Gérard Jugnot), des Allemands adipeux et chauves (second rôle pour un acteur allemand[9]).

When Bob's limits himself to admiring Sirien, his gaze consumes her as an unsullied ideal. In this way, Bob avoids confronting or being confronted by the reality of the woman. That would be insupportable. But in so doing, Bob seeks to make her other than she is. Sirien's purity is an illusion and Houellebecq's impure prose reveals that. Pornography mixes with romance. Contamination is in fact integral to this extract in which it is the young American, Bob, who is out of his proper environment. He is an impure, non-Thai element in a place where he cannot stay. Yet that grain of impurity – or significantly its loss – is what drives the story. Without the foreigner who has to return home there would be no poignant romance. The dynamic of romantic fiction depends on not just the disturbance caused by the intrusion but also on the threatened loss of the interloper – in the words of the popular song, the « stranger in paradise ». This dynamic reveals romance's hybrid nature.

However, it is not just romance that loses its integrity – the pornographic fantasies that surround prostitution are also contaminated. The « avec ardeur » rings hollow. The excitement is purely mechanical. There is a destabilising of categories that succeeds in holding both genres up to ridicule. This is epitomised in the reference to Gérard Jugnot. It places him in a category where he would not normally be found. In so doing, it poses the question: why not? Were all his roles undertaken out of conviction or for pecuniary advantage? Why should not an actor appear in a porn film? The roles that we associate

with certain actors are merely habits. We are accustomed to seeing them that way. The reality is that actors can take any role. Indeed, British audiences may well recall Olivier's appearance in *The Betsy*. What the above extract also shows is that transgression is also infidelity to any fixed and static viewpoint we may seek to impose on reality. Sirien's actions are a betrayal of Bob's romantic expectations just as Bob's idealistic views are an unfaithful representation of the reality of Sirien's situation.

In broader terms, parody is a betrayal of genre. The conflation of romance and pornography is a betrayal of both. The humour deflates the sentimentality of the romance and also prevents the descriptions of Sirien's activities being arousing. Houellebecq's novel is not *un livre qui se lit d'une main* – unless the reader transgresses. When Michel, in *Plateforme*, masturbates while turning the pages of a John Grisham novel, it is probably not what the author intended and it says more about Michel than about the intrinsic value of the work or about how the book is valued by the rest of the reading public. Grisham's story, though it deals with the rich and powerful, is not part of the established literary canon. Yet though it may not enjoy that level of esteem, it is accorded a certain measure of respect as testified by its popularity. Michel's disrespectful attitude reveals the subjective and collective nature of literary worth. In refusing to follow the norm he challenges it, thereby drawing attention to its dominion.

However, all literary value is ultimately a matter of what readers collectively choose to value – and how. There is a *bienséance* that underpins the hierarchical distinctions between canonical and non-canonical works not unlike the hierarchical structures in the society depicted by Houellebecq's fellow Goncourt laureate, Marcel Proust. Grisham is not deemed to be in the same category as Proust just as the Verdurins are not considered to have the exalted social status of the Guermantes. How people are judged is a function of where they are placed by the viewpoint of whoever is contemplating them – not unlike the judgement that Bob arrives at considering Sirien. Unlike the latter case, where Bob's viewpoint is peculiar to him and at odds with the readers (hence the humour) the relative merits attributed to the Guermantes and the Verdurins is a collective attribution, an attribution to which the society depicted by Proust subscribes. When a person moves from their allotted place, that is a transgression – hence the importance of snobbery (and inverted snobbery) in the sequence of novels as a marker of social solecisms.

However, Proust's social structures are ungrounded in anything other than opinion and consequently they are vulnerable, open to being transgressed. There is nothing scientific about the hierarchy he describes. The rules governing social niceties are not the same as the laws of physics. Far from trying to conceal this, Proust's depiction of society acknowledges this and reveals an awareness of the instability in social structures. The liaison between Charlus and Jupien is but one example of rank dissolving in the face of desire (inverted desire, at that). The moneyed bourgeoisie seeks to enter the aristocratic milieu. Swann, like the narrator, navigates between the two poles and at the end of the sequence of novels Madame Verdurin is the Princesse de Guermantes – Xena has invaded Tagrathâ's territory and taken over.

Hierarchies are temporary but mobile structures. This is not to deny their importance. There always will be hierarchies as can be seen in *Les Particules élémentaires* when Bruno comments on the relevant places of Snoop Doggy Dogg, Bill Gates and the Duchesse de Guermantes in the French cultural value system. The range of references would be familiar to many if not all: « La Duchesse de Guermantes avait beaucoup moins de *thune* que Snoop Doggy Dog [sic]; Snoop Doggy Dog avait moins de *thune* que Bill Gates, mais il faisait davantage mouiller les filles[10] ».

French culture as presented in the novel is far from being pure. Indeed the language used is far from purist, which Houellebecq signals by using a transgressive slang word which he places in italics. The references show the complexity of the contemporary French cultural field. It is not an exclusion zone, maintaining its integrity and impervious to what lies outside it. Rather it is a site which constitutes itself by being transgressed. Indeed the point is that contemporary culture in France is far from being purely French. As in the film scenario above, there is intended humour in comparing the elegance of Proust's duchess with the rap singer and in arbitrarily grounding the comparison between Snoop Doggy Dogg (now known as Snoop Dogg and originally called Cordozar Calvin Broadus Jr) and Bill Gates in sexual attractiveness. Culture is not fixed and stable but is a shifting configuration of inter-related positions of value. The three personages are like particles whose position can be mapped but whose relative position will depend on the observer.

The Duchesse de Guermantes appears less important than the other two on both counts. It may be objected that she is a fictional character, living only in Proust's novel but the majority of people know Snoop Doggy Dog or Bill Gates not directly but through the medium of writing. So, they inhabit our thoughts on just the same terms as she does. The Bill Gates that we think we know is an amalgam of writings about him. Gates's worth is based on acquisition of financial capital and that of Snoop Dogg on his ability to attract women, sexual capital. The Duchesse de Guermantes is quite unlike the other two in that her worth and pre-eminence lie, not in acquisition or accretion of value, but in a paring away of all that is ignoble, of what is likely to degrade and bring low, as is shown in the following extract, taken from *Les Particules élémentaires* :

> *La pureté d'un sang où depuis plusieurs générations ne se rencontrait que ce qu'il y a de plus grand dans l'histoire de la France avait ôté à sa manière d'être tout ce que les gens du peuple appellent « des manières », et lui avait donné la plus parfaite simplicité*[11]*.*

The whole quotation is a form of transgression in that it is in fact taken from Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* that has found its way into a novel by Houellebecq. The italics are Houellebecq's as though to draw our attention to the alien nature of the quotation which is, in a sense, the transgressor, out of its rightful place and clashing with its Houellebecquian context. The juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements is a variation on the technique that brought together pornographic screenplay and romantic clichés – or which juxtaposed the Duchesse de Guermantes with Snoop Doggy Dogg and Bill Gates both of whom are polished images crafted for the media.

Ben Jeffery has commented that Houellebecq depicts a world « where concern for the body (health, beauty sensation) has been raised to a cultural zenith, only without any corresponding apparatus to give meaning to decline and death[12] ». Society tries to ignore the fact that the body is impermanent. The reality of the body is not perfect health but rather its mutability. The adjective « parfait », from « faire », is a hint that the Duchesse's perfection is a work of art, a given rather than an essential quality. It contrasts with the hybrid, impure nature at the heart of Houellebecq's style, as seen above. What we have in Proust's description is the Duchesse caught at that zenith – one which appears to admit of no decline. This is a perfection that has nowhere left to go: it is

sterile, the end of the line. The Duchesse de Guermantes's unsullied simplicity turns out to be the end result of careful breeding. It is an illusion.

Yet like all mirages, it is very attractive but not for what it offers but for what we see in it. Bruno considers the Duchesse a marvel of female perfection but the reaction of one of his students, Ben, could not be more different, at least as viewed by Bruno: « Je regardais Ben : il se grattait la tête, il se grattait les couilles, il mastiquait son chewing-gum. Qu'est-ce qu'il pouvait bien y comprendre ce grand singe[13] ? »

In Ben's actions (chewing gum and scratching his genitals) there are perhaps suggestive pre-echoes here of Sirien's activities in the *Plateforme* quotation above: « suçait » and « branlait ». There is a conscious or unconscious sexual dimension to Ben's response.

There is also a disagreeable element of racism in the characterisation of Ben by Bruno, not only here but elsewhere. The denigration of Ben is systematic and persistent. Bruno is reiterating racial stereotypes that devalue the person. He situates Ben lower down the evolutionary chain – and the story of our evolution is an important theme in the novel: humanity has come from the animals with which it retains kinship. Earlier Ben had been described as a « babouin[14] ». This may be vulgar abuse but it also carries the implication that this student of African origin does not quite qualify as human. In Bruno's eyes, he is not a perfect human but retains something of our animal origins. He is not the end of the evolutionary process but still in part animal – a hybrid.

Consequently, Bruno's attitude is not just that Ben is too intellectually undeveloped to be in a place of education, learning to appreciate great art. As far as Bruno is concerned, he has transgressed by leaving the place where primates rightfully belong, the tree. The rendering of Dogg as "Dog" – though the slip may be accidental – seems to confirm this in that Bill Gates is meant to be seen as more intelligent alongside the singer whose appeal is more instinctual, appealing to the animal part of our nature. More significantly perhaps, the pattern helps us see the underlying racism of the Proustian reference to the « pureté d'un sang où depuis plusieurs générations ne se rencontrait que ce qu'il y a de plus grand dans l'histoire de la France ». What is not pure is stigmatised and anathemised. Bruno's brother, Michel, seeks through biological engineering, to take humanity in the direction of a higher development, to create neo-humans, the equivalent of the Duchesse de Guermantes.

However, Bruno’s racism is not really transgressive. It is simply stupid – or unpleasant or disgraceful or contemptible... or any adjective of disapprobation readers may chose. The transgressive is, like Xena’s words to Tagrathâ, a serious challenge. Bruno’s words are not a serious challenge. As M. David points out, the transgressive confronts us with a truth or a reality that we might like to ignore but cannot. Bruno’s denigration of Ben is nasty but it is not true. Just as Michel’s masturbation to Grisham tells us more about him than about the book he is reading, so Bruno’s racist attitudes tell us more about the character and about his response to the reality of the world. The mentality that would promote racial purity is not in keeping with the dynamic configurations that constitute French contemporary society – as exemplified by the multiplicity of confluent genetic traits that constitute not only Bruno himself but also his half-brother. Bruno is anything but a pure genetic specimen.

Bruno’s racism is an amalgam of sexual rivalry and the human impulse to pass on our genes. Ben and his teacher are, in the eyes of the latter at least, in competition for the affections of the female students in the class, and one in particular. Ben appears to be winning – he has something of Snoop Dogg’s sex appeal and Bruno’s suppositions about the size of the young man’s penis are an unequivocal expression of envy. Similarly he describes Ben as uncomprehending in order to emphasise that he, Bruno, is superior in one important respect.

Yet nothing is settled in Houellebecq. Bruno may be reading Ben’s physical gestures as indications of incomprehension and, conventionally, scratching the head is a sign of lack of understanding. But Ben is scratching a different part of his anatomy. It is not an indication of incomprehension. His hand draws attention to his penis and could also be interpreted as preening. Ben, whom Bruno is characterising as an ape, is grooming himself in the presence of an attractive female. If Bruno sees in the Duchesse de Guermantes the expression of what is uplifting and noble in French womanhood, Ben sees her as someone he would like to have sex with. In its new and transgressive context, Proust’s depiction of the Duchesse provokes arousal in the male – just as pornography does or, in *Plateforme*, Grisham’s novel *The Firm*. The iconic figure of the Duchesse, symbol of all that is great in French womanhood, an aristocratic figure in the etymological sense of the word (that is, she is an exemplar of what is best and noblest in the female) serves to inspire in Ben not feelings of nobility or an awareness of the gap

between them but rather to arouse a transgressive, sexual desire that challenges normal expectations.

Interpreting the scene in this way not only acknowledges the power of transgressive desire to destabilise expected responses, but also encourages us to re-view the Duchesse de Guermantes in the tripartite comparison quoted above. The Duchesse no longer appears untouchable and acquires something of the sex-appeal of Snoop Doggy Dog, able to arouse carnal desires in the opposite sex. Her « simplicité » is taken less as a sign that she is out of reach than as a quality that makes her desirable. In this context, she is less disadvantaged in comparison to Snoop Doggy Dog and Bill Gates. She is presented as a creature who belongs in the here-and-now and whose power can be felt by both Bruno and Ben. Her appeal is not outmoded even though it is based on an ideal racial purity that is somewhat suspect today. She is forbidden fruit, not just in the sense that she is out of reach but also because she represents something that is not right. Transgressing on Houellebecq's novelistic territory, she becomes an invitation to transgress.

But this remains an ambiguous and fraught invitation: « l'histoire de la France » is, no less than contemporary French society, a place of bloody struggle, as is all too clear from *Plateforme* and also from *Les Particules élémentaires*. The Duchesse is a symbol and site of that struggle. Her appeal arouses powerful impulses, as also does the youthful body: « Le désir sexuel se porte essentiellement sur les corps jeunes[15] » . It is not just that young people are more appealing, in itself a harmless enough statement, but rather that all too often in Houellebecq the freshness of their bodies (their « simplicité ») attracts dangerous predators. Attractiveness becomes the source of vulnerability. Usually it is the male who feels desire and the woman is the object of desire, a *bien de consommation* like the latest model of widescreen television. Women suffer the depredations of the male, though the youthful male can also be stalked by the more mature female as shown by the affair between Jane and David di Meola[16]. Generally, though, it is the male who pursues the female.

Sex is linked to the power to dominate, an idea reflected in the world of S&M practices explored in *Plateforme* and *Lanzarote*. In *Plateforme*, it reaches their most disturbing expression in the paedophiliac attachment of the rich, successful businessman, Jean-

Yves, for his children's babysitter. In *Lanzarote*, the transgressive excitements of the sex-clubs give way to the temptations of paedophilia. The need to dominate, to possess what is not yours is part of the transgressive urge.

Not surprisingly, envy and jealousy are powerful forces in Houellebecq, animating such disparate characters as Tisserand in *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (whose feelings are all the more acute for not actually possessing the beloved object) and Daniel1in *La Possibilité d'une île* (who ends up stalking a woman who has escaped his clutches). Indeed, jealousy in Houellebecq's fiction is animated by a grasping possessiveness that if frustrated can erupt in violence. So when, in *Plateforme*, Aïcha's brother sees the affair between his sister and Michel's father as a threat, as a loss of family honour, he brutally kills the old man. He kills to protect a purity that has already slipped away. If *Lanzarote* shows the brutality that lies behind the despoliation of the pure, *Plateforme* points to the violence that attends futile attempts to protect it. The high society of the Belle Époque that, according to the Proust quotation, valued careful breeding and selection of mates in order to ensure the integrity of the bloodline, its purity from outside contamination, has already been swept away – indeed Proust chronicles the eclipse of that society. Ironically, aristocracy had sought to harness the passing of time to its advantage in order to refine their class and select out undesirable traits. But this did not work. A new type of French person now lives and reigns. The France of Bruno and Ben is quite unlike that of Proust. The French are no longer depicted as being of pure stock (if they ever were) but, rather like the two brothers, an intermingling of genetic material that transgresses boundaries. Frenchness is dynamic, transgressive. To pretend otherwise is to fail to acknowledge the impact of the real. It is to indulge in the wishful thinking of Bob. Houellebecq's achievement as a novelist is to convey unflinchingly in his fictions the dynamics that in scientific fact govern the world we live in.

1 Michel Houellebecq, « Sortir du XXe siècle », *Nouvelle Revue Française*, no 561, avril 2002, p. 117-121, p.120.

2 Aurélien Bellanger, *Houellebecq écrivain romantique*, Paris, Éditions Léo Scheer, 2010, p. 78.

3 Kathryn Cramer, « Hard Science Fiction », dans Edward James et Farah Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,

2003, p. 186-196, p. 188.

4 Sandrine Rabosseau, « Houellebecq ou le renouveau du roman expérimental », dans Murielle Lucie Clément et Sabine van Wesemael, *Michel Houellebecq... op. cit.*, p. 43-51, p. 45.

5 Michel David, *La mélancolie de Michel Houellebecq*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2011, p. 15.

6 Michel David, *ibid.*, p. 213.

7 Michel Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, Paris, Collection J'ai lu, Flammarion, 2001, p. 11.

8 Simon St-Onge, « De l'esthétique houellebecquienne », dans Murielle Lucie Clément et Sabine van Wesemael, *Michel Houellebecq... op. cit.*, p. 67-80, p. 70.

9 Michel Houellebecq, *ibid.*, p. 109.

10 Michel Houellebecq, *Les Particules élémentaires*, Paris, Flammarion, Collection J'ai Lu, 2003, p. 192-3.

11 Michel Houellebecq, *ibid.*, p. 192.

12 Ben Jeffery, *Anti-Matter: Michel Houellebecq and Depressive Realism*, Winchester and Washington, Zero Books, 2011, p. 35

13 Michel Houellebecq, *Les Particules élémentaires*, *op.cit*, p. 192.

14 Michel Houellebecq, *ibid.*, p. 192.

15 Michel Houellebecq, *ibid.*, p. 106.

16 Michel Houellebecq, *ibid.*, p. 71.