



The Map and the Territory

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Having made his name with an exhibition of photographs of Michelin roadmaps – beautiful works that won praise from every corner of the art world – Jed Martin is now emerging from a ten-year hiatus. And he has had some good news. It has nothing to do with his broken boiler, the approach of another lamentably awkward annual Christmas dinner with his father or the memory of his doomed love affair with the beautiful Olga. It is that, for his new exhibition, he has secured the involvement of none other than the French novelist Michel Houellebecq. The great writer has agreed to write the text for the exhibition guide, for which he will be paid handsomely and also have his portrait painted by Jed.

The exhibition – ‘Professions’, a series of portraits of ordinary and extraordinary people at work – brings Jed new levels of global fame. Yet his boiler is still broken, his ailing father flirts with oblivion and, worse still, he is contacted by one Inspector Jasselin, who requests his assistance in solving an unspeakable, atrocious and gruesome crime.

Art, money, fathers, sons, death, love and the transformation of France into a tourist paradise come together to create a daringly playful and original twist on the contemporary novel from a modern master of the form.

The Map and the Territory Details

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Author : Michel Houellebecq

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At some point later in the book, someone observes that the map is more interesting than the territory. Contemplating (and rendering) the world is more interesting than being involved in it.

I loved the take on the art/literary world. I enjoyed the storyline with the father, the reflections on France and society, on death, on relationships. Houellebecq bringing himself in as a character was a master stroke and revealing. I adored the rant about Picasso. The way he did himself in was marvelous. To me it was a subdued joyride of a book, not in that it was uplifting, but because the author tugged the rip cord and let it rip.

Rich says

the bitter frenchman solidifies himself as one of my favourite authors. countless vicious soundbites that i had a lot of fun with on twitter --

"They really don't amount to much, anyway, human relationships."

"flowers are only sexual organs, brightly coloured vaginas decorating the surface of the world, open to the lubricity of insects"

"What can you reply, in general, to human questions?"

"it was conceivably true, he thought, that France was a marvelous country - at least from the tourist's point of view"

"the tables were taken by law students talking about rave parties or 'junior associates', in other words, those things which interest law students"

"It's his place in the productive process, and not his status as a reproducer, that above all defines Western man"

"Houellebecq, a man of rational if narrow mind"

"It doesn't amount to much, generally speaking, a human life"

"Sexuality is a fragile thing: it is difficult to enter, and easy to leave."

"He had got a full sense of that mixture of deceit and laziness which sums up the professional behaviour of a lawyer"

"Her professional life could thus be summarized as teaching contradictory absurdities to social-climbing cretins"

"So that was it, thought Jed; his father now served as food for the Brazilian carp of Zurichsee."

Nikos Tsentemeidis says

Ο Houellebecq είναι κυνικός, σαρκαστικός, έντονα κριτικός, αλλά ρεαλιστής. Ήσως απ' τους λόγους που δεν εξιδανικεύει τους ήρωές του. Επ'σης, γράφει τόσο ωραία που διαβάζεται πολύ εύκολα.

Marc Nash says

Michel Houellebecq is the subversive satirist supreme. The diffident misanthrope who takes humanity to task for our natures, our systems, our ridiculous aspirations and our delusions. But he does so with light touch. He doesn't have to beat us around the head with our own foolish failings.

Jed Martin is an artist of some repute. The one layer he misses on his palette is an ability with words, so he

seeks after commissioning one Michel Houellebecq to write the programme notes for his upcoming exhibition (and my how this novel blows Patrick Gayle's lame novel of that name out of the water). As part of the deal, Martin offers to paint a portrait of the author. Both men are non-social beings. The Houellebecq portrayed in the novel has few redeeming features and is always tagged with some aspect of his bibliography, brand Houellebecq.

So artist commissions writer, only the novel of course embodies an author writing about the fictional artist. In a few simple words, Houellebecq not only lances the pomposity of the art world, but conjures up marvellous canvases simply through his words: a painting entitled "Damian Hirst and Jeff Koons Dividing Up The Art Market" and something similar with Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. Satire delivered by steely rapier wit rather than floppy palette brush. Without our literary words constructing a title, such paintings would carry no weight. Arriving at Shannon Airport, Martin passes a gallery of photographed visiting Popes and US Presidents, yet is only struck by an oil painting of the first celebrity visitor JFK and gives the portrait due study. This from an artist who initially made his name through photographic art works.

Houellebecq is either satirising or protesting the death of the old, traditional France within this novel (it's hard to prise his intent, seeing as he himself resides in exile in Ireland, having spurned France, or surrendered to being spurned by his native country, though this novel won the Prix Goncourt). Martin's photos were of Michelin maps of the French rural heartlands. Not the scenery, not the landscapes, nor the people living there, just the topographic maps, an ironic juxtaposition. The map evidently is the territory after all. Added to that a meditation on Michelin's guides having necessarily to change and adapt, from appealing to the French (who can no longer afford to holiday in their own country) and the Anglo-Saxons (who tour further afield) and now have to resonate with the tastes of Chinese and Russian tourists. The restaurants experiment with exotic fusion menus, only to discover the Chinese hanker for locally sourced pork sausages and France must contemplate returning to its bucolic traditions and away from multi-cultural influences. Just as the artistic Academies would look askance at the dominance of conceptual art of the likes of Koons and Hirst, so French cookery is under assault; lunch now being a rushed workplace half-hour, without the savouring of wine and fine gustation. Other Academie Francaise cultural touchstones are under threat from foreigners and globalisation in this novel. Not least the imposition of a smoking ban in line with the EU stipulation.

Martin further chronicles this slow decay as he switches from photography to oil painting. His painting series is about the dignity of white collar labour. Such labour itself fast being stripped of any useful productive value. The irony strikes him that the captains of industry he paints, are those most rich and best capable of paying the large sums for his paintings. Martin is an artist with a good eye, but no ostensible love of what he does. He is unfazed during unproductive periods. He remains untroubled by doctrinal issues in art, or moral issues. He is even fairly detached from the money his job has rolling in. He is critiquing capitalism, which is why the fictional and real Houellebecq empathise with his work, yet he is happiest walking around the familiar aisles in a chain supermarket.

In part 3 of the novel a terrible crime takes place and here Houellebecq offers up a pretty stylish police procedural genre part work. Some may feel the energy built up in the novel percolates away at this point, but I didn't see it as a problem. I rather enjoyed his take on a tired old genre, very French it was too since it puts one in mind of all those French detective movies that they no longer seem to make (another Academie loss in the face of globalisation of culture?). The author seems rather taken with the real-life police advisers who helped him, so much so they are awarded a very rare Houellebecq accolade of an acknowledgement, alongside his flippant doff of the cap to Wikipedia. He has confessed to lifting sections from Wikipedia and transplanting them into the novel, but then Burroughs did something similar with his cut-ups of the works of other authors. The subversion is still nestling within this third section, a brilliant little meditative riff on dogs and pets, turns into a heart-rendering cameo about the lack of posterity and childlessness.

Houellebecq has somewhat of a curious style. There are points at which he freezes the action to riff or spout off about something in modern life that clearly grinds his gears. But he does faithfully embed it in the voice

of his characters, so that he doesn't come across as ranting. In fact I'd venture that he actually wears his cynicism with rather good grace, as if he can't quite buy into his critique of modern society himself. Then the action is likely to veer straight back into either a profound welter of emotion through the interaction between characters, or its polar opposite, the drab, weary observations made by a totally isolated character out of kilter with everything and everyone in the world. Sometimes the switch between these three states and tones is a bit perplexing, but for me it does all hold together, underscored by a real wit and charm, however begrudging that charm is to both the characters and the reader. Could Houellebecq be cooking a snook at his readers? Quite possibly, but we accede graciously to his art.

If you want something to sum up Houellebecq, then it's the early phrase "scarcely insufficient", very much a glass half-empty view of the world, where others might have posited "easily sufficient". I give you Michel Houellebecq, possibly literature's greatest living misanthrope.

Manny says

WARNING: THIS REVIEW CONTAINS MAJOR SPOILERS FOR THE DAVID CRONENBERG MOVIE *MAPS TO THE STARS*

This is an acidly cynical black comedy, and it's pretty funny, but that really doesn't tell you much about what it's like. I can see that many of the other reviewers are stuck too. Some of them have tried to explain by telling you about the plot, but since there are several rather excellent twists it doesn't seem right to reveal any of them. Luckily, we saw *Maps to the Stars* last night at the Grütli's Cronenberg festival, so I have the ideal comparison point: Cronenberg's depiction of the festering confluence of ego, money, sex and vacuous desire for fame that constitutes Hollywood is remarkably similar to Houellebecq's depiction of the world of modern art.

As noted, *La carte et le territoire* is funny. It's as funny as a thirteen year old movie star boasting that he's now been off drugs for 90 days. It's as funny as his foul-mouthed girlfriends calling every woman over twenty a menopausal slut. It's as funny as Julianne Moore literally dancing for joy when her rival's toddler drowns in a swimming pool, so that she can finally get her dream role. And it's as funny as the ending, where Mia Wasikowska batters her to death with her Academy Award statuette and then symbolically marries her own brother before they both take fatal overdoses. Let's face it, this is the world we're living in; at least we might as well laugh at the absurdity of it all.

Yes, it's pretty funny. But make sure your sense of humor is in good working order before you start.

[Update, Mar 4 2018]

People interested in modern art and its relationship to festering confluences of ego, money, sex and vacuous desire for fame may also enjoy *The Square*.

March says

OK, if I have to be completely blunt, Michel Houellebecq must be the most overrated contemporary author since Amelie Nothomb. *The Map and the Territory* has received so much publicity in the last year or two,

and I've come across the title in news and write-ups so many times, not to mention enthusiastic comments I've overheard during social occasions, that it seemed like I am missing out on something big out there. Not only did the book seem to be in the cultural news every other day or something for the last few months, but it has also been awarded the "most prestigious literary prize in France" in 2010, and its author has been hailed as a unique and brilliant voice and an astute commentator on the world of contemporary art and culture.

Yet here I am finishing it up (the first whole book that I read entirely on my Kindle, by the way) today and being completely baffled as to what in the world I missed and how come I didn't feel not a hint of the ubiquitous excitement about this "fresh new voice."

Not that the book is completely horrible, but it is decidedly one of the most mediocre and dull things I've read, ever.

The idea behind *The Map and the Territory* itself is perhaps not a bad one – attempting to present a picture, an analysis of current trends, of things here and now and in flux, is challenging, but at the same time, it is, I think, necessary and appreciated by those who nevertheless would like to make sense of the world around them, to hear the opinions of those who are an active part of the current (cultural) landscape and who can offer an insightful analysis, venturing to do it without the benefit of hindsight. When done well, such works can be really thought-provoking and can have a long staying power that enhances the reader's being in the world and adds to the reader's critical engagement with it. The problem of *The Map and the Territory* in being far from this kind of book lies largely, I think, with its execution.

To start with, the plot of the book is, how to say, nothing to write home about. The story traces the life of an upper-class photographer-turned-painter in France as he goes from being a dull loner -- with no particular interests other than his art, which he doesn't seem to be too excited about either -- to a superhighly paid dull loner snapping away pictures of decomposing industrial materials in his mansion (OK, nice point perhaps, not sure), until the time comes when he finally decides to present these mind-blowing images to a thankful and wowed world that's surely been left in a sort of bereavement during the period since the artist's going into reclusion. The events take place over a span of 20-30 years, from the 00s to the near future, the 2020s.

Three events seem to mark the otherwise completely unexciting life story of Jed Martin (the book's protagonist). In order not to give out spoilers, I am not going to go further into details on these three, except to say that I am still completely at a loss as to how two of those had any place in the book at all – the Olga bit and the episode with Michel Houellebecq, the character, didn't bring anything to the story, in my opinion, in addition to being poorly written, hardly believable, and unmoving. I have to admit that, as the story of Michel Houellebecq the character developed, about two-thirds into the book, I really got tricked into believing that this book would finally start being interesting. Ha – at long last some stir, something to make you want to read further. Alas, the excitement lasted only a chapter or two, as M. Houellebecq the writer steered us back onto the tedious track, to completely evaporate by the time of the most anticlimactic and trite denouement.

The protagonist himself I found completely unengaging and unlikeable. Not that characters need to be likeable in the cutesy, goody, righteous kind of way, of course not. But even normal or bad personages need to be full-blooded and complex enough for me to take them seriously. Jed Martin was simply stonecold. Things just kept *happening to him*, it seemed to me, almost as if he had no active part in what was going on, nor did he seem like he wanted to have an active part in anything. OK, Houellebecq the writer makes the point of Jed Martin being sort of excited about his art in the beginning of the book, but nothing like the fervor, pain, tribulations, and ups and downs that so often characterize artistic life ever emerges in the narrative, and so the whole idea of Jed Martin becoming an extraordinarily good artist is completely unconvincing. So, I had to share Jed Martin's own cluelessness when his work ends up receiving a fantastic and unanimous critical acclaim that makes the protagonist the rather unwitting star of his artistic generation.

Another problem – one that seems common in recent books that I've (attempted to) read, unfortunately, and

like. Houellebecq is for sure not Guy Debord, but he shares his sense of love (disgust?) at looking at culture and what that means to an artist/writer as well

There are major plot turns that makes this narrative into a policier. The twists in the plot makes this a really fun read. "The Map and the Territory" is the best novel of the year and its January 3, 2012.

Gerald says

I read The Map and the Territory because Jeffrey Eugenides admitted *he* was reading in in a NYT interview.

No surprise why masterful American novelists would want to read this. The author, Michel Houellebecq, is unabashedly and unashamedly literary and intellectual. No doubt there's a certain penis envy in admiring a Gallic author who can be so brazen as to simply drop trou and masturbate with his mind for us all to watch. Those of us on this side of the pond who fret about novels and commercialism and fads and attention spans and the general lack of receptiveness for ideas must surely Jones for the opportunity to wax philosophical and not only get away with it, but also actually sell books.

This is the story of a fine artist, Jed Martin, and the rationale behind various distinct phases of his work. It is also a policier, a procedural, about a ghastly murder. One connection is that the murder was performed in such a way as to create a work of art. This second story has very little to do with the main plot line of Jed's work life. Jed's difficult relationship with his aging master-architect father is a subplot upon which many heady sub-themes are hung, including the history and philosophy of architecture, the relationship between habitation and quality of life, and no less than the fate of civilization.

In perhaps the most stunning stroke of hubris in a work chockful of it, occurring some way into the narrative so it's a surprise when it comes, Houellebecq makes himself a principal character. By name. The relationship between life and art is open to question - that is, between the physical description of the French novelist, his eccentricities, and his volatile temperament. The Houellebecq in the narrative is not what you'd call a nice person and certainly not someone you'd probably consider taking on as a friend. The author seems proud he's alienating you, else why talk so unashamedly of his body odor and atrocious manners?

Martin's life is well-to-do Parisian, but mundane. He has an extended affair, off and on, with a Russian media executive named Olga. She is one hot babe, apparently, but even she can't hold his interest. She did abandon him for a time, and perhaps an infantile ego can never forgive the ultimate insult of abandonment.

I'm somewhat mystified. I may reread it someday to study what I missed on first reading, which is probably a lot.

This is the first Houellebecq novel I've read, so I am curious to investigate the others. I read in other reviews this isn't the one to start with. Ah, well. Houellebecq would no doubt approve.

I do know that, based on his descriptions, I would love to visit a showing of Martin's paintings. I expect they would be photorealistic and iconic - reminiscent, say, of Chinese Communist propaganda posters. One of the delights of the book is imagining what these fictional works would look like. If they have an analog in the real world, I'd love to know it.

... _ _ _ ... says

Π?σο ποζερ?ς και τρολ αυτ?ς ο Ουελμπ?κ

?βαλε τον εαυτ? του σε β ρ?λο (στο βιβλ?ο) και ?χι σε μονοπρ?σωπη αφ?γηση, αλλ? κανονικ? διηγεται σε τρ?το πρ?σωπο και τσουπ να τος και ο ?διος ο Ουελμπ?κ σε β ρ?λο τον οπο?ο σκοτ?νουν με β?αιο τρ?πο.

Δεν ξ?ρω τι ?θελε να πει ο ποιητ?ς, κ?τι ?σως για το τι ε?ναι τ?χνη, τι ε?ναι ο ?νθρωπος, γιατ? αυτ? το βιβλ?ο π?ρε το βραβε?ο Goncourt, εμ?να τα φασολ?κια μου αρ?σουν με φ?τα και φρ?σκο ψωμ?, εσ?ς ;

Lee says

Just finished the last thirty wonderfully flowing and surprising pages that end with the total domination of vegetation and then went back to the first lines namedropping Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst and said aloud "Ha, what a great book." I love how clearly he writes, with such unexpected analysis/insight, exaggerated generalizations asserted as truth (although toned down in this one -- not as much potentially politically incorrect stuff in general, and certainly not as much sex as the last two). I purposefully read nothing about this one and only knew it had been called an art world thriller -- which is half right. It's not a thriller and it's not so much about the art world as it is about how the nature of human industry relates to nature itself? A must for fans and a good introduction, too. No one else does genre-mashup semi-misanthropic nihilistic philosophy quite like him, although this did at times seem like a much better rendition of what BEE did in Lunar Park, genre-y literary fiction that includes the author as a character? But this novel doesn't devolve into spare plot mechanics -- the detective crimey bits are just as robust and typically swervy and "written" as the stuff that seems more literary. A nod, I think, to 2666 at one point but transposed to Thailand and the murders dropped from 300 to 30. Overall, an enjoyable weekend plus a few other sittings reading this. A softer, gentler (even accounting for the vicious murder and assorted body parts here and there), more mature Houellebecq, with his sharp, authentically Franch eye now a little more on the end of life (and the end of authentic/traditional French culture), although in this he spends 30 pages early on delivering the main character's backstory, something I don't remember in his other books, wherein characters are presented without much authorial worry re: their histories, like in genre books. Amazingly, there's even a strong-willed successful female character in this one who's not treated as a sex object! This book will probably be treated as news about contemporary (French and international commerce) culture that'll stay news in the future, or maybe like the old photos Jed films it'll fade with exposure to time and the elements, like Balzac before him? Houellebecq suggests that all he wants to do is account for what he sees, aspiring to the patient vision of plants. What he sees he presents as an inexact map of the thickety terrain of life, where all things change, except for ever-changing nature and the criminal motivations of sex and greed. Something like that. Anyway, a real good book. Might go back and read The Elementary Particles.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"I've known several guys in my life who wanted to become artists, and were supported by their parents; not one of them managed to break through. It's curious, you might think that the need to express yourself, to leave a trace in the world, is a powerful force, yet in general that's not enough. What works best, what pushes people most violently to surpass themselves, is still the pure and simple need for money."

Jeff Koons has made himself an objet d'art.

Whenever Jed Martin calls his agent and says I'm ready to do an art show he is also saying I'm done with this particular artistic endeavor. He, for instance, took provocative photos of man made objects. Once he showed the world his creations:

J'ai fini.

He painted a series depicting bakers, waiters, and other blue collar workers as well as a few portraits of the rich and powerful. Steve Jobs and Bill Gates discussing the future was of more interest to his rich patrons than say a postal worker. He knew he was finished, well thought he was, with this series when he gutted a painting he was doing on Jeff Koons, stomped, sliced and turned it into a mangled pile of pulp. He knows, despite this last failure or because of it, that it is time to share the series with the world. His publicist convinced Jed that he needed to contact the writer Michel Houellebecq and see if he could be persuaded to write a piece for the show catalog.

It is good timing because the writer has suffered some financial setbacks so he is motivated by "*the pure and simple need for money.*" The French press has had a field day accusing him of all kinds of dastardly deeds and the bad press has certainly limited his opportunities to fix his pecuniary problems.

The always controversial Houellebecq.

There are readers who have an issue with a writer inserting himself so blatantly into the story. Of course writers put themselves in books, sometimes thinly disguised behind another name, and will deny if asked that a character bears any resemblance to themselves. This is a novel and now with the emergence of Houellebecq in the text it has become some kind of hybrid. What is to be believed? Is this a fictional version of Houellebecq? The way I look at history even the history of ourselves, within the confines of our own mind, is that our memories are a fusion of fiction and nonfiction. To label something one or the other is never completely correct. History is full of accounts that are sometimes a 60-40 split between truth and fantasy, but there are readers who want to feel the reassurance of a **NONFICTION** label.

As if fiction doesn't reveal as much truth as nonfiction.

So let's just say that Houellebecq, becoming a character in his own novel, does not bother me.

When Jed meets Houellebecq he realizes he is not finished with the series. The final painting has to be this writer. Houellebecq is extremely hard on himself. His portrayal of himself is rather scathing. Note to self: if I prostitute myself as a character in a novel please remember to emphasize my better qualities. Bret Easton Ellis writes himself into the novel *Lunar Park* which I really enjoyed, though there are reviewers who fervently disagree with me. Martin Amis also inserts himself in the hilarious book *Money*. Three winners for this reader.

Michel Houellebecq not at the top of his game as a fictional real person.

Jed's relationships with women are similar to his relationship with his art, only he isn't always finished with them before they are finished with him. He has a prostitute girlfriend named Genevieve.

*"As much as men are often jealous, and sometimes horribly jealous, of their girlfriends' former lovers, and as much as they ask themselves anxiously for years, and sometimes until death, if it hadn't been **better** with*

*the other one, if the other hadn't given them **more pleasure**, they easily accept, without the slightest effort, everything their women might have done in the past as a prostitute. As soon as it is concluded by a financial transaction, any sexual activity is excused, rendered inoffensive, and in some way sanctified by the ancient curse of work."*

She leaves him for a client to have babies and settle down. Now he can be jealous?

Houellebecq, the one outside the book I'm not sure about the one inside the book, usually brings up the themes of the politics of sex and the way lust motivates all aspects of our lives, but in this book he just settles for some philosophical musings on prostitutes. This is the third book I've read by him and this is the book he spends the least amount of time talking about sex... libido slowing down Mr. Houellebecq?

So what makes a good artist Jed Martin?

...to be an artist, in his view, was above all to be someone, submissive. Someone who submitted himself to mysterious, unpredictable messages, that you would be led, for want of a better word and in the absence of any religious belief, to describe as intuitions, messages which nonetheless commanded you in an imperious and categorical manner, without leaving the slightest possibility of escape--except by losing any notion of integrity and self-respect. These messages could involve destroying a work, or even an entire body of work, to set off in a radically new direction or even occasionally no direction at all....

Jed begins a new series of photographing beautiful old Michelin maps and he meets a woman named Olga, a Russian beauty, who develops a real liking for the little Frenchman. She is desired by many and has her pick of the men of Paris, but she chooses Jed. He brings the maps alive making the art fresh with his own view of them. Her career with Michelin soon takes her back to Russia, but Jed stays in Paris afraid to get too far from the source of all inspiration...Paris. It was interesting to me that a man who is so willing to abandon success to move on to something new is unwilling to take the chance of finding new inspiration in such a vibrant country as Russia. The love of Paris and of France that Houellebecq feels, despite his travails with the French press, is readily apparent throughout this novel.

Towards the later third of the novel Houellebecq introduces a new character, a police inspector named Jasselin. There is this momentary bobble in the universe where this reader wondered if the writer was overstepping himself, but there is a gruesome Jackson Pollockesque murder that needs to be investigated. Jasselin has interesting thoughts about children (he is not a fan), silicon breasts (he is a fan), and Bichon Dogs (a breed perfectly designed to please man).

This novel drew me in even during those fleeting moments when I had doubts that there would be a definable plot or any resolutions. Houellebecq doesn't shy away from those taboo subjects that we rarely discuss. Jed's mom committed suicide and his father refuses to talk about it. The question that haunts the survivors is always why, but at the same time Jed's not sure he wants to know why. When his father comes down with a terminal illness and is considering going to Norway for an assisted suicide, Jed has to deal with the consequences of such a decision. Suicide is a virus that once it infects a family it seems to have recurrences and ramifications for many, many generations. I always think of the five suicides in the Hemingway family that have haunted that line for four generations.

Houellebecq by Thomas Saliot

Houellebecq, as always, forced me to think about issues, some that have touched my life and some that may turn up like a bad penny in the future. His descriptions of the art world and the life of a famous writer gave

me true insights into what it means to be creative, to be successful, and the struggles that everyone has to be happy. Although I have enjoyed his more sexually explicit novels it was nice to see him write a novel where his philosophies of life are not overshadowed by the controversy of what some would consider an obsession with deviant behavior.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
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Takisx says

Ο Καλός μου ο Μισός. Ο δόστροπος. Ο ευφύναστος, που σου μιλάει για την τέχνη σαν να είναι ένα τσοτά.

Που σε κάνει να νιώθεις συννοχος του. Μην κοιτάς εγώ τώρα που το παζω καλλιτέχνης, είναι σαν σου λέει,

στο βθος ασθνομαι ενα μπζο. Εχει και τα δκια του ο Δσκαλος. Ισως γιατ βαθι μσα του ξρει πως

ο Καλλτεχνης, αυτος που ριζε παλι η κοινωνα, και τον ριζε κι αυτ με την σειρ της χει παρλθει οριστικ. Τρα τα φργκα και το σουξ? κνουνε παιχνδι. Τρα ισως καννας Μριος Χκκας, και

καννας Μοζιλ να μην χωρει στο τοπο. Ισως να ναι καλυτερα τσι. Οι νθρωποι που δεν εχαν οτε

τουαλλτα, και βγαναν στα χωρφια να κατουρσουν, ακμη και σμερα θα ταν παρες. Τελικ για λα πρπει να εχε δκιο ο Χειμωνς: η Τχνη δεν είναι οτε για τους λγους, οτε για τους πολλος.

Είναι για τον καθνα ξεχωριστ. Δεν ζει για να δει το πανηγρι με τα φργκα, αλλ ζει ο Ουελπκ και

παρνει την εκδκτηση για λογαριασμ του γρφοντας αυτ το εξαιρετικ μυθιστρημα παρωδντας και την Τχνη αλλ και τον ιδιο του τον ευατ.

Τι να πες, ιδιοψυα.

Tony says

It was public knowledge that Houellebecq was a loner with strong misanthropic tendencies: it was rare for him even to say a word to his dog.

Martin Amis did it before, in *Money*, when he introduced himself, 'Martin Amis', as a character in the book. Houellebecq replays the conceit here, with a similar pretension and expanded role for himself. In the spirit of literary self-flagellation, in addition to the epitaph offered above, Houellebecq does horrible things to himself. I would be plot-spoiling to say more.

Yet the main character is not Houellebecq, but Jed Martin. Like Houellebecq's other protagonists, Jed has an ease with women despite himself and is utterly incapable of sustaining a relationship. The author Houellebecq does sex no better than the character Houellebecq:

"I . . ." he croaked. Olga turned around and noticed it was serious: she immediately recognized that blinded, panicked look of a man who can no longer withstand his desire. She made a few steps toward him, enveloped him with her voluptuous body, and kissed him on the lips.

230 pages in, the book becomes a murder mystery. Except it doesn't really.

I suppose you could dissect this. Jed first photographed still life, then machine parts. He has an epiphany and begins to photograph Michelin maps. This is how he made his first millions. It's how he meets the delightful Olga. And it's how we have the supposed theme of this book, printed in capital letters in case we missed the significance: THE MAP IS MORE INTERESTING THAN THE TERRITORY.

Not exactly ¿*Le gusta este jardín, que es suyo? ¿Evite que sus hijos lo destruyan!*, now is it?

Later he paints people in different professions. He paints *Michael Houellebecq: Writer*, of course. Houellebecq, the character, doesn't seem to care. I thought, then, that Houellebecq, the author, was giving me, the reader, direction.

This book has the same malaise, the same ennui as Houellebecq's earlier books. He just left out the sex this time. Instead, there was a gruesome murder. Which I was okay with. Especially because we learn photographs of the crime scene look like monochromatic Jackson Pollock paintings. But there was also a scene where Jed beats up a woman working in a Swiss Euthanasia clinic. Which really bothered me.

Eliasdgian says

Αγ?ρασα το συγκεκριμ?νο βιβλ?ο με συγκρατημ?νο ενθουσιασμ?. Ε?τε γιατί δεν ε?χα διαβ?σει τ?ποτε ?λλο απ? τον Michel Houellebecq, ε?τε γιατί ε?χα ?δη υπ?ψη μου μερικο?ς απ? τους χαρακτηρισμο?ς που (δικα?ως ? αδ?κως, δεν θα το κρ?νω εγ?) του ?χουν κατ? καιρο?ς αποδοθε? με αφορμ? κ?ποιες απ?ψεις του: μισογ?νης, ρατσιστ?ς, αντισημ?της κ.α.. Απ? την ?λλη, β?βαια, ?ξερα πως πρ?κειται για ?ναν αναντ?ρρητα σπουδα?ο συγγραφ?α και πως ειδικ? στον Χ?ρτη και στην Επικρ?τεια συμβα?νει το εξ?ς (λογοτεχνικ?) ιδιοφυ?ς: ο ?διος ο συγγραφ?ας γ?νεται μ?ρος της ιστορ?ας που διηγ?ται (σε τρ?το πρ?σωπο), διαδραματ?ζοντας σημαντικ? ρ?λο στην εξ?λιξ? της, καθ?ς, μεταξ? ?λλων, στα μισ? του βιβλ?ου θα βρεθε? φριχτ? δολοφονημ?νος (κυριολεκτικ? κατακρεουργημ?νος!) στο καθιστικ? του σπιτιο? του και η μισ? Εθνικ? Αστυνομ?α της Γαλλ?ας θα προσπαθε? να διαλευκ?νει το ειδεχθ?ς αυτ? ?γκλημα, θ?μα του οπο?ου δεν ?ταν ?ποιος κι ?ποιος, αλλ? μια προσωπικ?τητα των γαλλικ?ν γραμμ?των, ο γνωστ?ς συγγραφ?ας των Στοιχειωδ?ν Σωματιδ?ων!

Π?ραν αυτ?ς καθαυτ?ς της ενδιαφ?ρουσας ιστορ?ας που διηγ?ται ο Ουελμπ?κ, [ο Ζεντ Μαρτ?ν, νεαρ?ς απ?φοιτος της σχολ?ς καλ?ν τεχν?ν και γ?νος ε?πορης αλλ? μ?λλον ατυχο?ς οικογ?νειας, θριαμβε?ει σχετικ? σ?ντομα στο παγκ?σμιο καλλιτεχνικ? στερ?ωμα, ως φωτογρ?φος βιομηχανικ?ν προ?ντων και χαρτ?ν της Μισελ?ν αρχικ? (η πρ?τη του ?κθεση φωτογραφ?ας τιτλοφορε?ται «Ο χ?ρτης ε?ναι πιο ενδιαφ?ρων απ? την επικρ?τεια») και ως ζωγρ?φος αργ?τερα μιας σειρ?ς πιν?κων εκπροσ?πων διαφ?ρων απλ?ν επαγγελμ?των και εταιρικ?ν συνθ?σεων, μεταξ? ?λλων και της προσωπογραφ?ας του γνωστο? συγγραφ?α Μισ?λ Ουελμπ?κ, που δ?χτηκε να προλογ?σει τον κατ?λογο της ?κθεσης του ζωγρ?φου], ο Χ?ρτης και η Επικρ?τεια ε?ναι μια διανυ?ς, κριτικ? ματι? στον σ?γχρονο κ?σμο, μια καλειδοσκοπικ? αν?γνωση εννοι?ν, πραγμ?των και τ?σεων, ?πως το

χρ?μα, ως ζωοποι?ς και φθοροποι?ς συν?μα δ?ναμη (" Ε?ναι περ?εργο, θα π?στευε κανε?ς ?τι η αν?γκη να εκφραστο?με, να αφ?σουμε ?να ?χνος στον κ?σμο ε?ναι ισχυρ? δ?ναμη. Κι ?μως, συν?θως δεν αρκε?. Αυτ? που λειτουργε? καλ?τερα, αυτ? που ωθε? με τη μεγαλ?τερη β?α τους ανθρ?πους να ξεπερ?σουν τον εαυτ? τους συνεχ?ζει να ε?ναι η απλ? και συνηθισμ?νη αν?γκη για το χρ?μα. "), η πολ?παθη ιστορ?α των ανθρ?πινων σχ?σεων, η αποβιομηχανοπο?ηση της Ευρ?πης και ο αναχωρητισμ?ς του σ?γχρονου δυτικο? ανθρ?που, η τ?χνη και η συν?φει? της με τη ζω?, ο θ?νατος σε κ?θε μορφ? του, ως αυτοκτον?α, ευθανασ?α ?/και δολοφον?α.

Λ?γος ?λλοτε καυστικ?ς κι ?λλοτε φιλοσοφημ?νος, σ' ?να σπουδα?ο (κατ? τη γν?μη μου) μυθιστ?ρημα, που μιλ?ντας για την τ?χνη και τη ζω?, τον χ?ρτη και την επικρ?τεια δηλαδ?, προσφ?ρεται για πολυεπ?πεδες αναγν?σεις.

"Η ζω? μας κ?ποια στιγμ? μ?ς δ?νει μια ευκαιρ?α, σκ?φτηκε, ?μως αν ε?μαστε δειλο? ? αναποφ?σιστοι για να την αδρ?ξουμε, η ζω? πα?ρνει π?σω τα χαρτι? της, ?ρχεται μια στιγμ? που πρ?πει να κ?νουμε κ?τι και να προσεγγ?σουμε μια δυνητικ? ευτυχ?α, αυτ? η στιγμ? διαρκε? μερικ?ς μ?ρες, καμι? φορ? βδομ?δες ? ακ?μα και λ?γους μ?νες ?μως εμφαν?ζεται μ?α και μ?νο φορ? κι αν αργ?τερα θελ?σουμε να επιστρ?ψουμε σ' αυτ? ε?ναι απλο?στατα αδ?νατο, δεν υπ?ρχει πλ?ον χ?ρος για τον ενθουσιασμ?, την εμπιστοσ?νη και την π?στη, απομ?νει μια γλυκι? παρα?τηση, ?νας αμοιβα?ος και θλιμμ?νος ο?κτος, η ?χρηστη και σωστ? α?σθηση ?τι κ?τι θα μπορο?σε να ε?χε γ?νει, ?τι απλ?ς φαν?καμε ?ξιιοι του δ?ρου που μας ε?χε δοθε?."

Fionnuala says

Finally a map of Houellebecq territory.

When I read 'Plateforme' some years ago, I dismissed Houellebecq as being overrated, and a complete misogynist, but I've changed my mind after reading La Carte et le Territoire. There are some very original plot details, interesting takes on photography and contemporary art, a bit of a meander on architecture, and plenty of information on cartography for those of us who loves maps. But the most amazing thing is that in spite of a main character who is very uncharismatic and some other positively eccentric ones, I felt drawn in and compelled to see it through to the end - a bit like the hypnotic feeling I had reading Thomas Bernhard's 'Correction', also featuring an uncharismatic main character and equally bizarre secondary ones..

Núria says

Debía llevar más de un lustro quejándome que Michel Houellebecq se repetía más que el ajo, que siempre hacía la misma novela y que parecía que escribiera con el piloto automático, casi como si estuviera parodiando la imagen pública de si mismo, repitiendo hasta la extenuación una fórmula que parecía funcionarle sin aportar nada nuevo. Así que os podréis imaginar cuál fue mi excitación cuando empezaron a salir críticas de 'El mapa y el territorio' que lo ponían por las nubes, diciendo que Houellebecq había madurado, que había dado un nuevo giro a su carrera y que ésta era su obra más personal. No discuto las dos

primeras afirmaciones. Sí, Houellebecq toma un nuevo camino y se podría decir que ha madurado, pero también voy a decir que esto también quiere decir que se ha vuelto un soso aburrido. Ahora bien, 'El mapa y el territorio' me ha parecido su obra más impersonal. Es más, diré que es cuando Houellebecq se ha vuelto menos Houellebecq que más le han premiado y más le han alabado, porque sé que es una frase/idea que a él le gustaría. En el fondo, le tengo un cariño extraño a Houellebecq. Cierto, muchas veces lo odio, pero no deja de ser un odio lleno de ternura.

Mi historia con Houellebecq empieza cuando estaba a punto de acabar la carrera y estaba leyendo su primera novela 'Ampliación del campo de batalla'. Puede que la leyera en el momento adecuado, pero me llegó como nunca me había llegado ningún otro autor vivo (David Foster Wallace llegaría más tarde); el tedio, el asco y la alienación que sentía el protagonista ante la existencia, era el mismo que sentía yo. Y estas cosas marcan. Especialmente cuando eres joven. Así que quedé ligada a él para siempre. 'Las partículas elementales' no me pareció tan grande, pero me gustó, aunque me temo que si la re-leyera ahora me decepcionaría. Luego leí todas las que siguieron: 'Plataforma', 'La posibilidad de una isla' y 'Lanzarote'. Y es lo que os decía al principio: me parecieron todas iguales y olvidables (quizás la única que salvaría sería 'Lanzarote', pero sólo porque era la más corta). Y ahora 'El mapa y el territorio' aún me ha gustado menos, pero sé que cuando saque una nueva novela voy a leerla. Las relaciones entre lectores y escritores siempre son complejas y la mía con Houellebecq lo es particularmente. Nunca se ha extinguido esa sensación de que me entiende y que si me conociera podría ver a través de mis múltiples máscaras con una sola ojeada. Y egocéntrica como soy, tengo la pretensión que yo también lo entiendo y que cazo sus trucos de escritor, sus trampas y su cartón. Os lo he advertido, es extraño: lo amo y lo odio, quizás porque me parezco más a él (o a su personaje) de lo que me gustaría.

En 'El mapa y el territorio', el personaje que más me ha gustado y con el que más he empatizado ha sido la caldera. En serio. Lo más emocionante ha sido descubrir si la caldera, que lanza extraños gruñidos, va a estropearse o no; su lucha por la supervivencia me ha emocionado. Por otra parte, los personajes de carne y hueso me han importado un comino. Y eso que salía el propio Houellebecq como personaje, pero ni así. A ver, la novela es una especie de biografía de un artista, pero en ningún momento me llegó a interesarme ni su vida ni su obra. Es un alienado, como todos los personajes de Houellebecq, pero es que su alienación no tenía nada de particular ni de remarcable; parecía escrito con desgana, nunca llegué a sentir lo que sentía él (yo misma me pregunto si será por qué ya no siento esta misma alienación o por qué la siento ya demasiado).

Pensé que la cosa se animaría cuando saliera Michel Houellebecq como personaje, pero ni así. Su personaje es demasiado personaje, demasiado tópico; se trata de una oportunidad desaprovechada, esperaba más ironía, más mala leche. Luego se produce un crimen y pensé que así se animaría el cotarro, pero ni así. El crimen sólo sirve para que salgan más personajes igual de planos que todos los demás. Sí, Houellebecq aprovecha para insinuar alguna que otra teoría sobre el arte y analizar/criticar el sistema capitalista, pero todo de una forma muy previsible y nada interesante. Esperaba más sarcasmo y más mala leche. ¿He dicho ya que todo demasiado plano? En ocasiones habrá alguna idea brillante y algún párrafo memorable, pero es todo muy escaso.

Volvamos a la caldera. No lo decía en broma cuando decía que la parte que más me ha gustado es la de la caldera, cuando la caldera amenaza de estropearse definitivamente y cuando el protagonista busca alguien que pueda venir a arreglarla pero no encuentra a nadie. ¿Por qué? Pues porque es algo con lo que puedo identificarme. Así de simple. El resto de la novela cae tan lejos de mi experiencia y mis intereses que no me importa un pimiento. Pero tampoco es esto: un escritor puede relatar algo totalmente alejado a mí pero hacérmelo cercano. Simplemente Houellebecq para mí no lo consigue en esta novela. Claro que me interesa el arte, claro que mi padre también murió, pero la forma en que está tratado en este libro, no me interesa nada, me parece todo demasiado superficial, tópico, previsible, manido. Es como si Houellebecq escribiera con desgana. Y aún así, voy a leerme la próxima novela que publique.

Debería ya estar acostumbrada a que todas las mujeres que salen en los libros de Houellebecq se note

tantísimo que han sido escritas por un hombre. Son planas a más no poder y generalmente encarnan el mito de la santa-puta, es decir, una mujer que es muy buena y muy generosa y muy guapa y en la cama muy puta. Cada cual es libre de tener las fantasías que quiera pero otra cosa es estamparla una y otra vez en todas tus novelas para que los lectores una y otra vez tengan que tragársela. Es por eso que cuando escribo algo de ficción más o menos en serio intento centrarme sólo en personajes femeninos. También debería ya estar acostumbrada que en cualquier momento una novela de Houellebecq sienta el deseo de convertirse en ensayo, pero es que no me ha interesado nada las aventuras de utópicos relacionados con los pre-rafaelitas y es que, además, estas reflexiones están inseridas con calzador. Pero lo más descarado es cuando se me pone a explicarme cosas como la historia de no sé que raza de perros. Parece que me haya hecho un “corta y pega” de la wikipedia. Y aún así, voy a leerme la próxima novela que publique.
