



Submission

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In a near-future France, François, a middle-aged academic, is watching his life slowly dwindle to nothing. His sex drive is diminished, his parents are dead, and his lifelong obsession – the ideas and works of the nineteenth-century novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans – has led him nowhere. In a late-capitalist society where consumerism has become the new religion, François is spiritually barren, but seeking to fill the vacuum of his existence.

And he is not alone. As the 2022 Presidential election approaches, two candidates emerge as favourites: Marine Le Pen of the Front National, and Muhammed Ben Abbes of the nascent Muslim Fraternity. Forming a controversial alliance with the mainstream parties, Ben Abbes sweeps to power, and overnight the country is transformed. Islamic law comes into force: women are veiled, polygamy is encouraged and, for François, life is set on a new course.

Submission is both a devastating satire and a profound meditation on isolation, faith and love. It is a startling new work by one of the most provocative and prescient novelists of today.

Submission Details

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RK-isme says

Wow. Great satire ... of French ... of European ... of Western values ... or lack thereof. So well done that the irony often slips by unnoticed. Who the hell are we?

Soumission

So what do you call a novel about Muslims taking over control of France? A novel of generally cynical politics? A novel where women appear mostly in sexually explicit scenes and have little to say except in defining themselves in relation to men (some exceptions)? A novel where 15 year old girls become acceptable as second (or third) child wives? A novel in which the much touted French intellectual, defender of superior French culture appears to be willing to sell out in favour of the above? In this case, it is called "Soumission" – In the Islamic religion one submits to Allah. In Soumission, one submits to what one believes is necessary for a happy life – perhaps the same thing, but most likely cynical to a point. In any event, the Christian belief in Christ, belief in European values are found wanting, no longer relevant. So submission it is.

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GR readers seem to be greatly divided on this novel. Not only are there sharp divisions on ratings, but even those who agree on ratings often seem to have read different books.

Who should read this: Those who have a strong sense of irony, a willingness to be uncomfortable with themselves and a well-developed understanding of satire, for this is satire at its best, subtle but in your face at the same time. A certain knowledge of French culture and current French politics would also help but can be quickly acquired as needed on line. The English translation is scheduled to be out in October, 2015.

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Michel Houellebecq has written a book about a disaffected, lonely, somewhat cynical French university professor at Sorbonne III, François. François has, many years back, written his doctoral thesis on the writings and life of Joris-Karl Huysmans, a fact that is important to the novel. Alcohol seems to play an exaggerated role in his life. The reader is subjected to his innermost thoughts on his life, his work, French politics and his sexual activities, both alone and with others. The story unfolds in the first person as the world evolves before François eyes.

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So, it's 2022 and France and the world have continued to unfold on the current track. Nothing much has changed as France enters its scheduled elections. And the Earth moves ... and nothing happens. The gist of the story, which you can read in detail elsewhere (preferably in the book), is that France inadvertently elects a Muslim led government. (Plausible under Houellebecq's view of his compatriots.) The newly elected Muslim Brotherhood party, in coalition with the Socialists, moves slowly and intelligently under Prime Minister Mohammed Ben Abbas, a likeable and competent man, to transform France, Europe and the entire Mediterranean region into a moderate Islamic culture. He is somewhat of a Constantine transforming Rome.

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This change leaves François at somewhat of a loss – in particular, he has lost his teaching position, non-Muslims are not allowed to teach in publicly funded institutions, and he has lost his young Jewish girlfriend, who has moved with her family to Israel and "met someone else." He wanders in this new culture, at a loss – but he was somewhat at a loss before the changes. Houellebecq makes it clear throughout the book that French, European culture is already bankrupt. Can we see the Muslim takeover as a new opportunity for a better future? I do not believe that Houellebecq wants to say that. Nor is he in disdain of the Muslim takeover. His disdain is for his fellow French citizens who have lost all values.

All is not lost for François however. The new administration comes calling. They need him. They need an expert in Huysmans on the faculty. Indeed, the new administration wants to support traditional French culture for all of its respectability. They have no intention of interfering with the tradition of La Belle France. It is François who hesitates. First, in trying to situate himself in the new France, he has gone searching for his old passion, Huysmans. He has tried to follow Huysmans into the world he withdrew into a hundred years earlier when he too found himself adrift in a changing France ... and quickly flees back to France, questioning Huysmans commitment and sure of his own ability to suffer Christian commitment. He needs stimulation, not adulation. Mostly, he needs to satisfy his own sexual obsessions, normal male sexual obsessions. He has returned to Paris to try to fulfill his needs and to basically give up when the offer comes to return to the Sorbonne.

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But as with all good deals, there is a condition. Of course François must become a Muslim and he cannot imagine doing so. His recent experience with his Christian beliefs has left him drained of the possibility of believing in any religion. And this is where Houellebecq is at his best. He introduces us to Robert Rediger, a man recently promoted to be in charge of the Sorbonne but moving quickly up the ladder into the leadership of the new Muslim government. He is charming, intelligent, extremely well read and Muslim. He converted to Islam as a young man and comes across as sincere. At the same time, Rediger is enjoying all of the benefits of his situation – a grand old mansion, an overflowing library, the best of wines and a new 15 year old wife to supplement his first, middle-aged, wife who quietly moves around in the background serving his every need.

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Rediger explains his own conversion many years before, feeling unsatisfied with the values of the world in which he lived (Belgium). « Cette Europe qui était le sommet de la civilisation de la monde s'est bel et bien suicidée, en l'espace de quelques décennies ». European culture was collapsing and his favourite bar in Brussels in the Hotel Metropole, noted for its Art Nouveau style was closing. In contrast, he saw Islam as providing stability of tradition, unchanging in its values in its submission to Allah. As the Metropole closed, he became a Muslim, a sincere Muslim. He tells his story to François and then sets out to lay out why Islam has become the core of his life: the concept of submission – of woman to man (as in the novel “The Story of O”). François has been given a lot to think about. Rediger has also given him a small book he has written on Islam – it has sold millions. He reads the book and on their next encounter poses some questions.

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Questions on bigamy. His main concern, as a professor, is that he does not consider himself to be a dominant male. Rediger clarifies that, no, university professors are by nature dominant males. But then there is the real problem of ... how does a man chose the right woman? Here too Islam has developed the perfect solution: les marieuses – women whose role it is to approach young women's families on behalf of men. Simply put, the process of finding a spouse, or spouses, is without stress. Islam has taken care of that. Worry-free courting.

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Houellebecq has been accused of being anti-Islamic, but I think not. Yes it is Islam that takes over France, but it is not portrayed as evil or oppressive. It simply is. Definitely, Houellebecq portrays it as something much more benign than the Christian takeover of the Roman empire some 1 600 years ago. Pagans would have gladly suffered such a fate as French citizens face here – losing your job with a full pension?

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No, not the Muslims, nor women are Houellebecq's target. It is his fellow French intellectual, the complacent unthinking, European who has abandoned all semblance of cultural tradition; who cannot relate to his/her own roots; who cannot form real human relationships that he attacks. Islam isn't a bad thing. It is portrayed as being a more energetic, more committed other which replaces the sloth of Europe. A satirical warning that if values matter, the need to be upheld. If not, then accept what comes.

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One thing should be noted by those of us in the Americas. We a barely thought of here. I would guess that Houellebecq considers that we already have nothing to lose. We are already, long have been, little more than barbarians. This is a novel about values and I suspect Houellebecq is in complete distain of what we have

and have never had. His concern is for what France has lost and continues to lose.

Yves Gounin says

Il est de bon ton de critiquer le dernier Houellebecq.

Les fans des Particules élémentaires y voient une œuvre mineure, annonciatrice de l'inéluctable déclin du grand homme ; les contempteurs du prix Goncourt, un énième ressassement de sa veulerie beauf.

Je ne crierai pas avec les loups. Pour trois raisons.

1. Le style. Houellebecq écrit bien. Fichtrement bien. Avec l'air de ne pas y toucher. Et pourtant avec un perfectionnisme qui force d'autant plus l'admiration qu'il a l'humilité de ne pas se laisser voir. Loin de la prose prétentieuse d'Ono-dit-Biot ou de la simplicité rêche de Toussaint, Houellebecq nous offre un vrai plaisir de lecture. Son cynisme lui évite la morgue ou le didactisme. La profondeur de ses références - et je me fiche qu'elles aient été pompées sur Wikipédia dès lors qu'elles sont articulées avec intelligence - lui fait échapper à la superficialité.

2. Le sujet. Houellebecq a le don de disséquer notre société. D'appuyer là où ça fait mal. Il raconte comment la victoire au second tour de l'élection présidentielle d'un Musulman modéré face à Marine Le Pen entraîne l'islamisation bon enfant de la France. Pour autant, Houellebecq n'est ni Nostradamus ni Éric Zemmour. Son roman est une fiction et peu importe qu'elle se réalise ou pas (reproche-t-on à Orwell que 1984 ne ressemble pas à son "1984" ?)

3. Un titre. Comme on le sait déjà, le héros du roman est un Sorbonnard dépressif, spécialiste de J.-K. Huysmans, qui se convertit lentement aux valeurs du nouveau régime. Pourtant, quand on referme le livre, on est pris d'un doute : s'agit-il d'une prophétie amère et pessimiste ? ou au contraire d'un appel à l'insoumission comme le titre du livre, qu'il faudrait lire en creux, nous y exhorte ?

Zaphirenia says

Στη Γάλλ?α του πολ? κοντινο? μ?λλοντος, την εξουστ?α καταλαμβ?νει μ?σω της δημοκρατικ?ς οδο? των εθνικ?ν εκλογ?ν το μουσουλμανικ? κ?μμα, το οπο?ο στο δε?τερο γ?ρο ?χει να αντιμετωπ?σει την ακροδεξι?. Κεντροδεξιο? και σοσιαλιστ?ς βρ?σκονται μεταξύ? δ?ο ακρα?ων κομμ?των τα οπο?α β?λλουν ευθ?ως, απ? διαφορετικ? αφετηρ?α αλλ? με την ?δια ?νταση, κατ? των θεμελιωδ?ν αρχ?ν και κατακτ?σεων του δυτικο? πολιτισμο? και επιλ?γουν να συνεργαστο?ν με ?,τι θεωρο?ν ως το μικρ?τερο μεταξύ? δ?ο (εκ πρ?της ?ψεως το ?διο) κακ?ν.

Αρχικ? ?μουν λ?γο διστακτικ? με το βιβλ?ο και, για να ε?μαι ειλικριν?ς, οι πρ?τες 60 περ?που σελ?δες δεν μου πολ?ρεσαν. Αντιπαθητικο? ? και αδι?φοροι χαρακτ?ρες, υφ?ρπων μισογυνισμ?ς και μια ελαφρ?ς βαρετ? για τα γο?στα μου ενασχ?ληση με τη ζω? και το ?ργο του Ουισμ?ν, που δεν τον ε?χα ξανακο?σει αλλ? δεν μου δημιουργ?θηκε και κ?ποιο ιδια?τερο ενδιαφ?ρον να τον γνωρ?σω προχωρ?ντας την αφ?γηση. Επ?σης δεν εμβαθ?νει αρκετ? στον κεντρικ? του ?ρωα. Στα μισ? περ?που ?ρχισε να αποκτ? περισσ?τερο ενδιαφ?ρον, με την παρουστ?ση των μ?σων που μετ?ρχεται το ν?ο καθεστ?ς ?στε να οδηγ?σει στην αν?δυση μιας ν?ας αυτοκρατορ?ας της υποταγ?ς, μιας μουσουλμανικ?ς ν?ας τ?ξης και στην οριστικ? εκρ?ζωση της δυτικ?ς κουλτο?ρας

και της θεωρητικῆς θεμελίωσης αὐτῆς της ιστορικῆς και κοινωνικῆς ἐξέλιξης. Δι᾽τι μᾶ ἐπιβολῆ του νῦν προτῆπου ζῶς με τη βᾶ δεν ἀρκεῖ, θα πρέπει οἱ νῦν δομῆς να ἐμπεδωθοῦν μᾶς μίας πειστικῆς (᾽στὼ ἐκ προτῆς ᾽ψευδῶς) ἐπιχειρηματολογίας, μίας ἐπιτυχημῆς προπαγᾶνδᾶς ἡ ὁποῖα θα ἀποτελεῖσει τη βᾶση της νῦν μουςουλμανικῆς παιδεᾶς. Καὶ γι᾽ αὐτῆ το προτῆ προγᾶμα που ἀπασχολεῖ τη νῦν κυβᾶρνηση εἶναι να ἀποκτῆσει τον ᾽λεγκο των σχολεῶν και της πανεπιστημιακῆς κοινῆτητας.

Πᾶς ᾽μῶς θα πειστοῦν οἱ πανεπιστημιακοῖ να ἀπαρνηθοῦν τις ἀξῆς του ὀρθολογισμοῖ και της ατομικῆς ἐλευθερίας και να συμμετᾶσχουν στη διαμᾶρφωση των νῦν συνειδᾶσεων; Πᾶς θα ἀσπαστοῦν οἰκειοθελῆς τον μουςουλμανισμῆ και θα διδᾶξουν τις ἀρχῆς της παραδοσιακῆς οἰκογᾶνειας (᾽πως ἀναπτᾶσσονται στο πᾶσι της θρησκεᾶς) με τους ἀυστηρᾶ καθορισμᾶνους ρᾶλους της ὡς "βᾶσικοῖ κοινωνικοῖ κυτᾶρου", πᾶς θα ἐνστερνιστοῦν την καθυπᾶταξη της γυναᾶκας (για ᾽λλη μᾶ φορᾶ) και την ἐγκαθᾶδρυση της πολυγαμᾶς ὡς ᾽κφᾶραση της φυσικῆς ἐπιλογῆς ἡ ὁποῖα θα ἀπευθᾶνεται σε ὀρισμᾶνη μερᾶδα του ἀντρικοῖ πᾶθυσμοῖ που θα ἀπολαμβᾶνει τα προνᾶμιᾶ της; Για τον Ουεᾶμπᾶκ, ἡ ἀπᾶντηση εἶναι ἀπᾶ ᾽σο και ἀποκαρδιωτικᾶ: πολᾶ ἐᾶκολα. Θα τους παρασχεθοῦν ᾽λα ἐκεᾶνα τα πλεονεκᾶματα που ἐπιφυλλᾶσσονται για τα κυρᾶρχα ἀρσενικᾶ: μᾶ, δᾶο ᾶ και περισσᾶτερες σᾶζυγοι, ἐπιλεγμᾶνες ἀνᾶλογα με την κοινωνικᾶ θᾶση και την ἐξελιξιμᾶτητα του ἀρσενικοῖ. Ἡ ὑπᾶσχεση για μᾶ βολεμᾶνη, νοικοκυρεμᾶνη ζῶη οἰκογενειακῆς εὐημερίας με μᾶ-δύο σκᾶβες που θα φροντᾶζουν κᾶθε τους ἀνᾶγκη εἶναι ἐπαρκᾶστατη ἐγγᾶηση για τη συνενοχᾶ τους. Ἐν τᾶλει, ἡ ἀναζοπᾶρωση της πατριαρχᾶς που ἀποτελεῖ τη θεμᾶλιο λᾶθο του καθεστᾶτος δεν τους βᾶλπει ἐνᾶ τους παρᾶχει ἀσφᾶλεια και τη βεβαᾶτητα ᾽τι ὀποτεδᾶποτε θελᾶσουν μποροῦν να ἀπαλλαγᾶν ἀπᾶ τη μοναξιᾶ ᾶωρᾶς να χρεᾶστεᾶ καν να δραστηριοποιηθοῦν ατομικᾶ. Οἱ φιλελεᾶθερες ἀξῆς τᾶθενται ὑπᾶ διαπραγᾶτευση και "παζαρεῶνται", ἐμπεδᾶμᾶνοι θεσμοῖ σταδιακᾶ διαβρᾶνονται, οἱ πολᾶτες ἀλλοτριᾶνονται και ὑποκᾶπτουν στη δᾶροδοκᾶ της κρατικῆς μηχανᾶς που τους ὑπᾶσχεται ᾽να "σπιτικᾶ". Ὁ στᾶχος ἐπιτυγχᾶνεται και οἱ σᾶχᾶεις μετᾶξᾶ των δᾶο φᾶλων ἀπλοποιοῦνται ᾽ταν μᾶνο το ᾽να μᾶρος ᾽χει δικᾶᾶωμα ἐπιλογῆς και γνᾶμης: ὁ κᾶνδυνος της ἀπᾶρριψᾶς ἐξᾶλεᾶφεται και το προνᾶμιο της ἀνδρικῆς ὑπεροχῆς ἐξᾶσφᾶλᾶζεται.

Γενικᾶ δε μου φᾶνηκε κακᾶ βᾶβᾶλο ἡ "᾽ποταγᾶ". Δεν εἶναι ἀκριβᾶς ᾽να δυστοπικᾶ μυριστᾶρημα, εἶναι πᾶο πολᾶ ᾽να ἐᾶδος προφητεᾶς μᾶς ἐπερχᾶμενης κοινωνικῆς μεταστροφῆς. Μπορεᾶ μᾶ τᾶτοια κοινωνᾶ να ἀποτελεῖσει πιθανᾶ ἐξᾶλιξη μᾶς Εὐρᾶπης του μᾶλλοντος; Δεν εἶμαι σε θᾶση να το γνωρᾶζῶ, ἀλλᾶ ὁ Ουεᾶμπᾶκ παρᾶουσιᾶζει ὀρισμᾶνες ἐκδοχῆς της ἀρκετᾶ πειστικᾶ. Ἀπᾶ την ᾽λλη μεριᾶ, δεν με ᾶπεισε τελεᾶως, δι᾽τι ἀφᾶνει ἀπᾶ ᾽ξῶ κᾶποια κρᾶσιμα κοινωνικᾶ και πολιτικᾶ ζητᾶματα: ποιος εἶναι ὁ ρᾶλος της Εὐρωπᾶκῆς ᾽νωσης σε ᾽λα αὐτᾶ; Σε ᾽λο το βᾶβᾶλο παρᾶουσιᾶζεται ὡς ἀπᾶς παρατηρητᾶς της πτᾶσης της γᾶλλικῆς κοινωνᾶς και της ἀλλαγῆς του εὐρωπᾶκοῖ πολιτικοῖ σκηνικοῖ - ἀλλᾶ θα ᾽ταν ᾽τσι σε μᾶ τᾶτοια περᾶπτωση; Ποια θα εἶναι ἡ θᾶση των ὀμοφυᾶφιλων στην μουςουλμανικᾶ κοινωνᾶ του Ουεᾶμπᾶκ; Μποροᾶμε μεν να το φᾶνταστοᾶμε, ἀλλᾶ δεν κατᾶλαμβᾶνει ὀτε μᾶ σειρᾶ στον κᾶσμο που περιγᾶρφει το βᾶβᾶλο. Γενικᾶς πιστεᾶᾶ ᾽τι λεᾶπουν σημαντικᾶ σημεᾶ που δεν ἀναλᾶονται ᾽σο θα ᾽πρεπε ᾶ δεν ἀναλᾶονται και καθᾶλου. Ἐπᾶσης, κουρᾶστηκα λᾶγο με τις φιλολογικᾶ ἀναφορᾶς που ὑποτᾶθεται ᾽τι ἀντανᾶκλοᾶν τις πολιτικᾶς και κοινωνικᾶς ἐξελᾶξεις και τις ψυχολογικᾶς μεταπᾶσεις του κεντρικοῖ ᾽ρωᾶ - τα βαριᾶμαι γενικᾶς αὐτᾶ. Τᾶλος, ἐπειδᾶ το θᾶμα με το ὀποᾶο κατᾶπᾶνεται δεν εἶναι ἰδιᾶτερα πρωτᾶτυπο, θα περᾶμενα μᾶ κᾶποια μεγᾶλᾶτερη ἰδιᾶτερᾶτητα στο χεᾶρισμᾶ του, ᾽στε να κᾶνει

πραγματικ? διαφορ?.

Panagiotis says

Για ?ναν συγγραφέα ?πως ο Ουέλμπ?κ, τα συναισθη?ματα ε?ναι ακρα?α μεταξ? των αναγνωστ?ν: ε?τε τον λατρε?εις ε?τε τον απεχθ?νεσαι. Την απ?χθεια δεν την καταλαβα?νω, μα τα πρ?ματα ?τσι ε?ναι και δεν μπορο?ν να ε?ναι αλλι?ς. Μιλ?ντας για ?να βιβλ?ο το Ουέλμπ?κ, λοιπ?ν, θεωρ? πως πρ?πει να ε?ναι ξεκ?θαρη η αρχικ? θ?ση του αναγν?στη. Κι εγ? δηλ?νω οπαδ?ς του. Το βιβλ?ο αυτ? το ?πιασα μετ? το μ?λλον μ?τριο «Ο Χ?ρτη και η Επικρ?τεια». Οι προσδοκ?ες μου ?ταν αν?μεικτες και σαφ?ς επηρεασμ?νες απ? το ευρ?τερο κλ?μα αποδοχ?ς του βιβλ?ου: αντιδρ?σεις απ? ?λες τις πλευρ?ς για την θεματολογ?α του οι οπο?ες κλιμακ?θηκαν με το αιματοκ?λισμα της εφημερ?δας Charlie Hebdo.

Τελικ?;

Τελικ?, ας τα π?ρουμε απ? την αρχ?. ?νας καθηγητ?ς, στο Παρ?σι του 2022, δ?χως να περιμ?νει πολλ? απ? την ζω? του, σκ?ρπιο σεξ, αποτυχημ?νες σχ?σεις – μια γενικ? μ?τρια ζω?, ?πως ?λων μας- μας μεταφ?ρει τις εξελ?ξεις στην Γαλλικ? ζω?, αλλ? και ακολο?θως στον Ευρωπα?κ? χ?ρτη, καθ?ς το Μουσουλμανικ? κ?μμα πα?ρνει τα ην?α. Καλ?; Νομ?ζω ε?ναι ακριβ?ς αυτ? που κ?νει ο Ουέλμπ?κ σε ?λα του τα βιβλ?α: μια εναλλακτικ? πραγματικ?τητα, μια ματι? σε ?να ?σως που μπορε? να μην ε?ναι και τ?σο απ?θανο.

Το πιο καλ? ε?ναι πως ο καυστικ?ς πεσιμισμ?ς του, αυτ?ς που αγαπ?ω, ε?ναι δυνατ?ς εδ?. Ε?ναι παρ?ν. ?δη στο δε?τερο κεφ?λαιο, ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς, αναρωτ?ται για τον σκοπ? της ζω?ς και καταλ?γει πως το να ζεις δ?χως να το ψ?χνεις και τελικ? να πεθα?νεις, δ?χως π?λι να το ψ?χνεις, αρκε? στους ανθρ?πους για να κ?νουν τον κ?κλο της ζω?ς τους. Ο ?διος νι?θει πως πρ?πει να δικαι?σει την παρουσ?α του επ? της γης μα του π?φτουν λ?γα τα ορ?σημα της καρι?ρας του.

Στο βιβλ?ο γ?νονται αναφορ?ς σε δι?φορες θεωρ?ες απ? κλ?δους της φιλοσοφ?ας που επιστρατε?ονται για να δικαιολογ?σουν την πιθαν? επ?νοδο του μουσουλμανισμο?. Και φυσικ? αυτ? το μ?λλον εφιαλτικ? ?ραμα του Ουέλμπ?κ για την τελικ? παντοκρατορ?α αυτ?ς της θρησκευ?ας ως του μ?νου συστ?ματος που θα μπορ?σει να αντικαταστ?σει τον σ?γχρονο καπιταλισμ?. Τον προσεγγ?ζει με τ?τοιο τρ?πο που ο αναγν?στης δεν θα βαρεθε?, αντιθ?τως θα θ?λει να μπει για λ?γο στο μυαλ? του Ουέλμπ?κ. Τ?σεις που διαμορφ?νονται στο μ?λλον ? αποκτο?ν μια διακριτ? σ?σταση, καθ?ς και κιν?ματα και αντιδρ?σεις π?νω σε αυτ?ς τις αλλαγ?ς συν?θως δραματικ?ς, ε?ναι χαρακτηριστικ? της θεματολογ?ας του κι εδ? ε?ναι πιο ισχυρ? απ? ποτ?.

Μ?λλον, ?μως, η γενικ? υπ?θεση δεν λ?ει πολλ?. Στο βιβλ?ο ελ?χιστα πρ?γματα συμβα?νουν π?ραν αυτ?ν μ?σα στο κεφ?λι του ?ρωα που γαμ?ει και προβληματ?ζεται π?νω στην ζω? – την δικ? του και των υπ?λοιπων συνανθρ?πων του, με τους οπο?ους μ?λλον δεν θ?λει και πολλ?-πολλ?. Ε?ναι περισσ?τερο ?να μ?σο για να ξεδιπλ?σει ο Ουέλμπ?κ την ιοβ?λα αφ?γησ? του. Σημε?α ?πως εκε? ?που αντιμ?τωπος με την μαται?τητα της ζω?ς και το τ?λημα του υλισμο? γυροφ?ρνει τη αυτοκτον?α καταλ?γοντας σε ?να κρεσ?ντο απαξ?ωσης των συνανθρ?πων του ε?ναι που τον

χαρακτηρ?ζουν μηδενιστ? και μισ?νθρωπο. Και φάλλοκρ?τη καθ?ς αναγκαστικ? καταλ?γει πως και η γυνά?κα ε?ναι συν?νθρωπος, αλλ? σαφ?ς πιο δελεαστικ? και απαρα?τητη, γιατ? ε?ναι κ?τι πιο εξωτικ?. Εγ? τον λ?ω ρεαλιστ?, ευφυσ?ς κυνικ? και χιουμορ?στα.

Διαβ?ζοντας το βιβλ?ο απ?ρησα με την υποδοχ? και τον σ?λο που δημιο?ρησε, φτ?νοντας στα γεγον?τα του Σαρλι. Βγά?νοντας ως εξ?φυλλο ο συγγραφέας στο περιοδικ?, οι φανατικο? Μουσουλμ?νοι εξαγρι?θηκαν – ?ταν νωπ?ς οι αναμν?σεις των δηλ?σεων του περ? του Ισλαμισμο? ως την πιο ηλ?θια θρησκε?α. ?φτασαν ψηλ? ιστ?μενοι της κυβ?ρνησης –νομ?ζω ο ?διος ο πρωθυπουργ?- να αποκηρ?ξουν τις ιδ?ες του Ουελμπ?κ ως μη συμβατ?ς με το ?ραμα μιας Γαλλ?ας πολ?-πολυτισμικ?ς. Ναι, πειρ?ζει τον μουσουλμανισμ? στο βιβλ?ο, μα ?χι παραπ?νω απ? ?σο οτιδ?ποτε ?λλο απ? τα ?θη και τις αξ?ες των δυτικ?ν, μ?χρι τη δι?θεση μας να συνεχ?σουμε να ζο?με. Τουναντ?ον, λιγ?τερο θα ?λεγα. Δεν τον πυροβολε?. Τον αφ?νει να σταθε? ως μια εναλλακτικ? προοπτικ? και μ?λιστα την ανακατασκευ?ζει με πειθ? και επιμ?λεια.

Κ?θε φορ? που ακο?ω σχ?λια απ? κ?σμο που εξοργ?ζεται με τον Ουελμπ?κ ενισχ?εται η ?ποψ? μου πως ο κ?σμος χωρ?ζεται σε αυτο?ς που ?χουν χιο?μορ και σε εκε?νους που δεν ?χουν. Κι εγ? αν?κω στους πρ?τους, δ?χως να θ?λω να περιαιτολογ?σω. Νομ?ζω ?λοι οφε?λουμε σε ε?ν βαθμ? να βλ?πουμε την ζω? μ?σα απ? το πρ?σμα της αμφισβ?τησης και του σαρκασμο?. Πρωτ?στως, ?μως ως αναγν?στες δεν πρ?πει να ξεχν?με πως ο συγγραφέας δεν ασπ?ζεται απαρα?τητα ?σα λ?νε οι ?ρω?ς του, αλλ? δοκιμ?ζει ιδ?ες. Πρ?γματα που του φα?νονται δελεαστικ? και με δυσκολ?α τα εκστομ?ζει στην αληθιν? ζω?, τα β?ζει να τα πο?νε τα δημιουργ?ματ? του. Το αν συμφων?σει ? μετανι?σει αργ?τερα, αυτ? ε?ναι κ?τι που δεν με απασχολε?.

Το βιβλ?ο διαβ?ζεται ευχ?ριστα. Σχεδ?ν εθιστικ?, γιατ? ?χει τον χειμαρρ?δη λ?γο του Ουελμπ?κ. Δεν γ?νονται πολλ? πρ?ματα, π?ρα απ? τα ορ?ματα των ανατροπ?ν σε μια μακροκλ?μακα. Μα μ?νο για τις σκ?ψεις αυτ?ς και την ωρα?α γραφ?, αξ?ζει ?να ζ?ρι με τα ?λα του. Το ζαρι του ευαν?γνωστου που ?σως να ξεχαστε?, που αδυνατ? να του προσδ?σω μεγαλ?τερη αξ?α (πχ διαχρονικ?), αλλ? που δεν πα?ει να αποτελε? ?να ενδεδειγμ?νο αν?γνωσμα.

Jonfaith says

Above our heads the linden branches stirred in the breeze. Just then, in the distance, I heard a soft, muffled noise like an explosion.

This wasn't the dystopia I had expected. Scandalous -- such was the domestic response to this alleged fragmentation grenade. Set a few years in the future, the Muslim Brotherhood in France forms a coalition and becomes ruling party -- but what exactly follows? Changes, for sure, but ones that often elude the eye. That is, however, from a man's perspective. Women appear eased into the margins, out of sight and somewhat blurred. The internet and supermarkets still maintain us, meet our needs and desires with a formal clumsiness: just like Amazon. Weather patterns feature in the novel. Maybe our trends in civilization and ontology are just as capricious. This novel is more about the life-cycle of ideas rather than *Sharia* or the more extreme notions: stonings, genital mutilation etc. There are always times when I read Houellebecq that I think-- wait, am I like that? H succeeds in prodding us to consider our self-deceptions and I'm truly thankful for that. This may disappoint some, but I found it to be remarkable. 4.8 stars

Hanneke says

Why do I always have to think of an iceberg when reading Houellebecq? It is that icy tone of voice in his writing while you sense that there is a vast amount of nasty coldness that stays hidden underneath. His dislike of women and, really, his disgust for mankind is always evident. I do admire though how he evokes in this novel a world that could be entirely possible. One could fit perfectly in this new world order if you do not care about your principles in any strong way. Francois, the protagonist, unemployed academic and painfully lonely, is willing to do anything to feel less wretched. The solution offered by the Islamic Sorbonne is an option solely open to the male part of society. Typically, there is no mercy for us, females. Reading Houellebecq is always interesting. Whether it is pleasant is another thing.

Maciek says

Not only none of this sound scary, none of this sounded especially new.

Francois, the protagonist and narrator of *Submission*, is a man thoroughly burned out; although he teaches at the Sorbonne and is a specialist in the work of Joris-Karl Huysmans, he thinks little of his job and by his own admission has not done any important academic research in decades. At 44, He has no contact with his divorced parents, and no real, close friends; he eats TV dinners and browses porn sites. Francois seems unable to form any meaningful relationship with anyone, especially women - although he is deeply lonely, he seems capable only of short flings with his much younger students. Francois feels that he is balancing on the verge of personal dissolution: he casually contemplates whether he should just commit suicide, as he simply cannot find meaning in anything. It is interesting to compare Francois to Mersault from Camus's *The Stranger*, which coincidentally I have read just before this book. Mersault is apathetic, and feels no emotion - but this is how he always was, and he knows no other way to live. In contrast, Francois feels a desperate yearning to feel something, but is unable to; Mersault feels bored and bothered by the world with its emphasis on emotion and feelings, while Francois feels betrayed by a world which does not give him anything or anyone that would make him feel. Both are very alone, but react to their loneliness very differently.

Besides Huysmans, Francois does not display any lasting passion or interest for anything, including his own country - in his own words he doesn't know much about it, and is in no way an engaged citizen. But even Francois cannot not notice the turmoil that is sweeping across France - after a series of political scandals, public trust in government is at an all time low. The two main candidates competing for votes in the presidential elections are polar opposites: Marine Le Pen from the National Front, and Mohammed Ben Abbes - creator of France's first openly Islamic party, the Muslim Brotherhood. As the two rivals go head to head in the polls, the charismatic Ben Abbes secures support of the Socialists, and eventually wins the election by a very slim margin.

France, a country famous across the globe for its secular society, legacy of enlightenment and republican values, is now ruled by an openly Islamic party. Is this the end of history? Far from it. It's just the beginning. Abbes introduces a series of reforms, which drastically change the face of France: he combats the atomisation of society by emphasizing the importance and strength of traditional, patriarchal family - now encouraged to be polygamous comprised of marriages based on reason, and often arranged on economic grounds. Women are not forbidden to study at universities or enter the workforce, but they are encouraged to

learn housekeeping and stay at home in exchange for generous state support. Abbas advocates a third way between capitalism and communism, a sort of state capitalism based on distributism. aiming to strengthen small businesses; institutions of higher education - including the Sorbonne - are privatized with money flowing in from rich Gulf states, with only Muslims allowed as teachers. Catholics and even Jews are also allowed to have their own schools which offer religious teaching - because the enemy is neither religion or spirituality, but the precise lack of it: secularism and atheism, which Abbas and his followers blame for the destruction of European culture and European values, and for creating chaos and misery.

The new regime is not only not opposed; citizens embrace it, as it gives them order and meaning which they have so deeply lacked. Unemployment plummets, and so does crime; fellow Islamic parties are on the rise in Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Britain. The European Union is expanding southwards and southeast - with Turkey to join imminently, followed by Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, reaching across the sea further towards the Middle East. Through diplomacy alone and without shedding a drop of blood, Abbas is creating a new empire - uniting vastly different nations peacefully in a common political project, establishing within a generation what has taken the ancient Romans centuries of conquest. This is not an empire built on suppression; societies are *thriving*, experiencing what is seen as a new Golden Age.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama saw Western liberal democracy as the ultimate form of human government, with no possible alternative that could displace it. For Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War was also the end of history itself - the end of mankind's ideological evolution, with Western democracy being the pinnacle of human achievement, bound to eventually spread across the entire planet. For Fukuyama, the only threat to Western liberal democracy was radical Islam - but he saw radical Islamist ideology as unable to effectively control and govern a nation state, mostly because it is usually based on oppression of its own citizens and not attracting potential supporters. But the Islam in *Submission* is neither radical, nor oppressive; people are submitting to a soft theocracy out of their own volition, and vote Islamic politicians into office. They accept their reforms because they work, and bring them the results they want and desire. Here liberal democracy can be seen as not the greatest human achievement, but as the greatest tragedy - bringing about the freedom to pursue happiness which never comes. Enlightenment is nothing but a collection of ideas which ultimately left us feeling empty and hollow. Human beings create civilizations because they need order, structure and meaning; Islam realizes the eternal dream of a good government.

In the vision of the future as realized in *Submission* a dystopia? Dystopias are based on submission based on force and terror, resulting in unhappiness or at best illusion of happiness, with protagonists usually rebelling against the new order at some point. I would argue that in *Submission* Houellebecq has created not a dystopia, but a genuine utopia - in which people live peacefully and are content, and whose rules they accept of their own free will. Their conversion is an act of hope - and a step towards a new and better society.

Submission is a very controversial, interesting and genuinely thought provoking book; in a stroke of deep and cruel irony it was published in France on the very day when armed Muslim fanatics killed 11 people at the headquarters of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* for publishing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The last issue before the attack had a cartoon of Houellebecq on the cover, Houellebecq - who has been taken to court for his criticism of Islam, which he called "the most stupid" of all monotheistic religions - is satirized as a seer, who predicts that in 2015 he'll lose his teeth, and in 2022 he'll observe Ramadan. *Inshallah?*

Paul Martin says

Would a society based on "Moderate Islam" be such a bad thing?

This seems to be the kind of book that divides critics into the two equally useless camps:

- 1) *This is islamophobic and racist garbage!*
- 2) *Bravo! A dark satire!*

My view is that it's neither.

All Houellebecq is saying is that a completely secular society is like a vacuum. Given the opportunity, it will let itself be filled. If you don't want to risk it being filled with something you don't like, then you shouldn't have emptied it completely in the first place.

With this in mind, Houellebecq goes on to show how the polarization in French politics could pave the way for a Muslim party to get into power, and what it could mean for the French population.

Returning to the question in the title - would that be a bad thing? Well, it turns out, not necessarily. From a perspective of power, comfort and freedom, at least not for ~~men~~ half the population. Or at least the heterosexual and educated part of it.

I don't see this novel as an attack on Islam. I am no expert on religion, but most of what he says about it seems to be accurate. If anything, he is merely pointing out that Islam as a religion is much more capable of social change due to its hereditary element and ability to bind large amounts of people to its cause - whether it's for "good" or "bad". The sense of cultural loss and inability to feel any sort of connection to your own roots which dominates the French secular society in *Soumission* (and perhaps also real life) appears as a no less bleak situation than what Islam offers, namely a life with meaning and a clear direction. The downside? ~~The return of the patriarchy~~ Just some minor details concerning women's rights

Houellebecq is criticizing everyone and no one, really. He isn't pointing fingers of laying blame. He is merely pointing out that a secular society is fragile, very fragile, and that it to a certain extent has to be combined with a set of cultural values if it is to remain in place. Otherwise, it will slowly erode under the pressure of other ways of life, which in this case just happens to be Islam. For better or worse? Better for some and worse for others, like every other society in the history of mankind. Houellebecq doesn't presume to have the answer - he is simply saying that it will be different, and that it might very well happen.

Roberto says

Sottomessi...alla religione?

Il libro, ambientato nella Francia dei nostri tempi, descrive l'ipotesi della vittoria alle elezioni di un partito chiamato "*Fratelli musulmani*" e la conseguente islamizzazione della Francia stessa in seguito al progressivo decadimento morale e degrado dei valori di riferimento occidentali.

"Mi rendevo tuttavia conto, e ormai da anni, che lo scarto crescente, divenuto abissale, tra la popolazione e chi parlava in suo nome, politici e giornalisti, era destinato a portare a qualcosa di caotico, violento e imprevedibile."

Sottomissione è un libro provocatorio. Il personaggio principale, un professore universitario quarantenne soprattutto ossessionato dalle studentesse e alle prostitute, è l'emblema di tale degrado.

È un libro esagerato, Sottomissione. Un libro che descrive situazioni estreme, che ovviamente ci provocano

sconcerto, irritazione e disgusto. Tutto nel romanzo è messo in discussione: il matrimonio, la famiglia, le tradizioni, i ruoli dell'uomo e soprattutto della donna nella società e nella famiglia. Ed è accuratamente descritto un futuro avvilente in cui l'uomo per sopravvivere si deve sottomettere alla religione in generale e alla tradizione islamica in particolare.

“È la sottomissione. L'idea sconvolgente e semplice che il culmine della felicità umana consista nella sottomissione più assoluta”

Il libro, che si legge facilmente a parte lo sviluppo centrale che ho ritenuto abbastanza noioso, è veramente indisponente e proprio per questo stimola il ragionamento e pone parecchie domande. Un autore che riesce a essere così prepotentemente provocatorio ed irritante non può essere né banale né stupido.

Fionnuala says

I set out to read this book expecting to be provoked because in my experience Houellebecq is always hell-bent on provoking somebody, and very often that 'somebody' is of the opposite sex. I wasn't disappointed this time; his narrator managed to provoke me right at the beginning, and regularly from then on, so I decided that the only way to review this book was with a full set of teeth on show!

But relax, my teeth are not 'bared', just revealed in a wide smile because the only way to take the twenty-first century part of this book is with a giant dose of humour. And there are some deliberately funny lines (at least I hoped they were deliberate). In fact, I enjoyed the book much more than I thought I would and it also lead me to read a book by a nineteenth century author, J-K Huysmans, a book I've owned for a while but hadn't yet got around to reading. I actually paused the Houellebecq book half-way through in order to read *À rebours* from beginning to end, and I began to better appreciate the parallels between the protagonists' lives and experiences, although it isn't at all essential for readers to read the Huysmans book since Houellebecq threads plenty of material about Huysmans' life and times into his twenty-first century story. To a certain extent, I felt Houellebecq's narrator's engagement with Huysmans and other writers of the late-nineteenth century might have suited me better in a book with less of a political theme but I can see why he combined the Huysmans part with his contemporary tale as there are some apt comparisons between the two. In any case, taking a break from the modern-day story to visit the nineteenth century suited me very well and I was grateful to Houellebecq for the nudge to finally open *À rebours* (edit: according to the notes at the back of *À rebours* in which Huysmans speaks of a character called Jean Folantin from one of his earlier books, *A Vau-l'Eau*, I see that Folantin, more than the protagonist in *À rebours*, is the character who more closely resembles Houellebecq's narrator. They are both slightly hypochondriac single men, despondent at work, obliged to eat poor food alone, and who decide eventually to 'go with the flow' (*à vau-l'eau*) when a new way of life presents itself).

When his narrator is not contemplating the nineteenth century, Houellebecq allows him to zone in on various aspects of modern French life: the political system, the university system, and especially the politics within the university system. I enjoyed all that satire very much. However, I generally prefer satire to be delivered with a little more nuance than I found here. Houellebecq dropped so many over-obvious hints about the eventual outcome of his 2022 scenario that even though he held off from describing that outcome until the very last pages (underlining the huge importance he gave to the story elements), we knew almost from the beginning exactly how it would end. So not only a laboured plot but the labouring done at the expense of the satire, I felt.

There were also some very long turns by characters who appeared in the narrative just to make certain ideological points: the secret service agent, Alain Tanneur, for example, who is introduced twice just to make

the case for one side of the book's principal argument; and the president of the Sorbonne university, Robert Rediger, who is twice brought on just to debate the other side of the argument - though I enjoyed the choice of name in Rediger's case: the verb 'rediger' means 'to write' or 'to write out formally' and it is Rediger who gets to write out the guidelines for living (comfortably) in a French Muslim state; the satire in this part is quite well done but not taken as far as it might have been.

That was my main problem with this book, the scenario is really too mild in the end. I think Houellebecq had several great ideas here and might have written something more powerful. But to do that, he'd have had to ditch his narrator at the abandoned motorway stop in the first half of this story. There! I 'bared' my teeth in spite of my good intentions...

Manny says

This week, on *Dystopia!* Michel Houellebecq discusses the future with Robert Heinlein

- Good evening, M. Houellebecq.
- *Bonsoir*, M. Heinlein. *Alors*, please, tell me your vision of the future.
- Sure. So Western civilization, it's already--
- --in a process of, ah, *désintégration*?
- You got it, buddy. As my old friend Cyril Kornbluth used to say, they breed faster than we do.
- Muslims, monsieur?
- People with low IQs. Same difference.
- *Excusez-moi, monsieur*, my novel is respectful towards the Muslim world.
- But you do say they breed faster than us?
- I do--
- You ain't foolin' anyone, Michel. I rest my case.
- We must, ah, agree to disagree. *Alors, la désintégration de la civilisation occidentale*. There will be increasing relaxation of the *mœurs sexuels*. Women will comport themselves like prostitutes, openly flaunting their faces, their legs, their breasts-
- I think it's important to describe this process explicitly.
- *Absolument, très important*. The reader must be shown how these *femmes décadentes* behave.
- At length.
- This time, I see we agree, M. Heinlein! And then, there will be violence.

- Limited nuclear war.
- Disruption of the *élection présidentielle française*.
- Details, details, Michel. We can sort that out later. But the important thing is, the West is finished.
- *Oui, fini.*
- They will take over. It's inevitable.
- *C'est inévitable.*
- But there will be a few strong, survivor types. Rugged, well-prepared libertarians.
- *Oui*, professors of nineteenth century literature.
- They will still be there. They will take younger women.
- *Jeunes étudiantes.*
- Their daughters-in-law.
- Again, M. Heinlein, *des détails*. We agree that there is only one thing to do?
- Only one thing, Michel.
- Convert to Islam.
- Start a bridge club.
- What?
- What?

Michael Finocchiaro says

I have never been a big Houellebecq fan finding his obsession with his own intellect and genitalia annoying, so when a friend assured me that this book, *Submission* from 2015, was his masterpiece and was not just a paen to his intellect, I gave it a shot. Well, aside from the novel premise of an islamic conversion of France in the 2017 election and a few comical observations here and there, the book is still primarily about his own intellect and his genitalia. I was bored from about page 5 and that *ennui* never really left me up to the end. Yes, there are some interesting observations and he does know an awful lot about Huysmans, but his characters are flat and two-dimensional, his female characters are either ugly (read unfuckable) or sexy (and it follows fondly fucked by the protagonist) or inaccessible (because they belong to another more powerful male). Despite the novelty of the central theme of Islam vs modernity, Houellebecq's own view of women is utilitarian and reductive.

In sum, my low opinion of Houellebecq remains low and I will be far less inclined to give him another shot to change that opinion in the future.

notgettingenough says

I'm just not sure

I wonder why it is that sticking my dick up girls' arses doesn't interest me like it used to

why a book that has something interesting to say about academia

The girls love it. Especially when I take my dick out of their arse and get them to lick it. They really like that.

and also about politics

Maybe if I fucked two girls' arses and then got them to lick my dick. Maybe I'd enjoy that like I used to. Hmmmm.

should interleave his ideas and quite amusing prose

Or maybe. Oh, I don't know. Young student? Arse? Licking excrement covered dick? While another one licks my balls maybe? Yeah. Let's try that.

with tedious, ludicrous shit about girls liking his pathetic (to the reader) dick up their anusses. Maybe it gets guys to read the book.

I kind of wish that it wasn't a book where the ending was just what you thought it was going to be, but maybe that was the point. That his scenario is inevitable. I don't know.

Any girls reading this like having dicks shoved up their arses and then get to lick them after? That being the author's definition of love? Form an orderly queue. I'll let him know.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

As a former Muslim, I see that Houellebecq is right on the money. I escaped Egypt my country in search of a land of freedom, and yet here oppression is chasing after me in the West. We love for Europe to be Europe. After all, that is why we left our mother countries in search of a more civilized world where human dignity is respected. By the way, please take a moment to read my story of conversion into Christianity and drop me a line and I will be your friend:

<http://www.answering-islam.org/author...>

Jibran says

It seems as though Houellebecq wrote the novel to stir up not debate but controversy. I'm afraid to say that charging a small segment of French population with so much power and influence is way too out of proportion. French Muslims have no power (as a bloc), have no media representation (they own nothing), have no think tanks or lobbies to influence decision-making in France or elsewhere in Europe.

Sure, they are the largest religious minority, but the numbers are small in the total population. The total percentage has not crossed into double digits anywhere in Europe, though if you were to listen to the right wing media, you'd probably think that about 30% to 40% of French, British, German, Dutch, Austrian etc populations now consist of Muslims and, lo and behold, it will hardly be another decade before the dark forces of the Crescent become a majority and, theoretically, come to power.

This whole debate, this loud and endless lament, says more about the state of Western society than it addresses problems among minority faith communities or immigration. Can the West hold on to its post-WWII romance of liberalism / equality / secularism / multiculturalism? (LESM) This is the question Houellebecq is attempting to answer but he's chosen to unload the failures of Europe (in this case France) on the shoulders of a powerless community whose most effective means of showing power is to blow up buildings or truck down people walking down the street, leaving the rest of their people to give out embarrassed defenses.

Just imagine the despair.

Global Jihadist violence and recent high profile incidents of terrorism in Europe are causing palpitations that an extremist takeover, somehow or the other, is imminent. But no, what's happening in Iraq and Syria (in part the responsibility of the same Western regimes who make the most noise about Islamist terrorism) is not going to happen in France or anywhere in the West. So please sleep well. As for Houellebecq, a democratic coming to power of conservative Muslims who then go on to turn France into a theo-democracy is not only far-fetched but simply ludicrous.

So is this satire? A literary experiment to see what sort of France would there be if a conservative Muslim party came to power and changed the rules? If so, I'm not very amused. To think-up a scenario where a small minority of European Muslims would come into power through the backdoor and force everyone - the liberals, the atheists, the *other* - into "submission" is as questionable as, say, a writer engaging in a fantasy of the Jewish conspiracy to take over the entire world.

October '16

?ntellecta says

In the book "Submission" Houellebecq describes in a calm, almost casual style, the fictional stories of a Paris university professor of literature, who describes his everyday life and thereby taps the social upheaval, after a Muslim party has won the elections. Houellebecq tells about social developments in France, how it leads to the election success of the Muslim party and what the consequences are. The whole book is written in excellent language with a lot of bad irony and subtle humor. For this literature the reader has to have some advanced geographical, cultural and literary knowledge of France to understand all his allusions. The novel is not suitable to seduce the reader for a few contemplative hours from the everyday life, because he literally hits the reality in the readers mind. Moreover you learn a lot about Joris-Karl Huysmans and about French literature, and generally about topics of the French intellectuals. He calls for reflection and involvement, in society, religion and politics and to become aware of the meaning of human existence. It is brilliant and humorous written and therefore it is absolutely recommended.

Hadrian says

This is a case of a novel of ideas with the best (or worst) possible timing. The very day it was published in French was the day of the Charlie Hebdo shootings; a few short weeks after the English translation came out, Paris was attacked again.

Our protagonist, whose name I've already forgotten, is a professor of 19th century literature and an gormless slob who eats microwave food and hires prostitutes to lick his balls. He, like many Houellebecq protagonists, moves through life with a depressed indifference. That is, until the 2022 elections and the fictitious Muslim Brotherhood Party edges out the *Front National*.

He is the 'main character', but his life is shaped by Muhammad Ben Abbas, who is the Nietzschean 'Übermensch' to our protagonists' 'Last Man'. He is charismatic, sharply intelligent, and the sort of man who makes other men surrender to him willingly. In this curious way, he is the strong leadership which the far right craves, with the exception that he leads a Muslim revitalization of Europe instead of a Christian one. Unemployment and crime plummet, political squabbles perish, Europe rises to challenge and equal the United States, and the nation is a unified, organic whole. With the exception of the new underclass, women. But our protagonist doesn't really care about them.

Houellebecq's dystopia is apparently not the one where the fictitious Muslim Brotherhood takes over; it's the one with an anemic market liberalism which makes any takeover possible, or preferable. You *almost* get the sense that Houellebecq would approve of any new regime (even if you consider the Margaret Atwood-esque fate of all the women). His deep pessimism parallels his professional subject, Huysmans - a move from decadent overindulgence to the comfort of belief. Whether that belief is sincerely held is another matter.

Houellebecq's study does not cover sharia law or fundamentalism or any of the caricatures of Muslims which haunt the media or political debate. It is a study of *collaboration horizontale* with a new regime. This is the sort of person who would willingly abandon their old France, leaving behind 'nothing to mourn' for the prospect of material gain. This is apparently the sort of person who would favor any extremism, any man who would covet arranged marriages and obedient slave-wives because any social movement for women is threatening. They are not so poor that they'd be on the edge of survival, but just well off enough to have time to be frustrated and miserable.

An interesting idea, but I wonder if people will discuss it for all the wrong reasons.

Kyriakos Sorokkou says

Μια μακροβρια σμπτωση καλπει αυτ το βιβλο.

Εκδθηκε στις 7 Ιανουαρου 2015 και την διαμρα το σατιρικη περιοδικη Charlie Hebdo κδωσε το τεχος με την καρικατορα του Ουελμπκ ως μγου να λει τι το 2022 θα γιορτζει το Ραμαζνι.

Την διαεπσηςμρα τα γραφεα της Charlie Hebdo δκτηκαν επθεση με αποτλεσμα να πεθουν 12 νθρωποι.

Τον Οκτβρη του 2015 βγκε και η ελληνικη κδοση, και λγες εβδομδες μετ γιναν οι πολνεκρες επιθσεις στο Παρισι (Σταντ ντε Φρανς, Μπατακλν κλπ)

Ο Ουέλμπ?κ ?γραψε ?να βιβλ?ο που περι?χει εξτρεμιστικ?ς πρ?ξεις στο Παρ?σι, το οπο?ο μ?λις εκδ?δετα εξτρεμιστικ?ς πρ?ξεις λαμβ?νουν χ?ρα στο Παρ?σι. Ζω? και τ?χνη γ?νονται ?να. Σατανικ?ς συμπτ?σεις ? μ?πως ο Ουέλμπ?κ ε?ναι τ?σο προφητικ? ?ξυπνος που ξ?ρει π?τε κ?τι θα πουλ?σει / προκαλ?σει;

Το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι σχετικ? απλ?. Σε μια Γαλλ?α του κοντινο? μ?λλοντος (2022) διεξ?γονται εκλογ?ς με την ακροδεξι? της Λεπ?ν στο προβ?δισμα. Ακριβ?ς π?σω ε?ναι η μουσουλμανικ? αδελφ?τητα η οπο?α με τη βο?θεια του 3ου κ?μματος βγα?νει στην εξουσ?α.

Τ?ρα ?λη η Γαλλ?α ε?ναι υπ? μουσουλμανικ? καθεστ?ς.

Ε?ναι καλ? αυτ?;

Ε?ναι, δι?τι η κυβ?ρνηση σε 6 μ?νες με?ωσε την ανεργ?α σε ?να μεγ?λο ποσοστ?.

Π?ς;

Βγ?ζοντας ?λες τις γυνα?κες απ? τις δουλε?ες τους για να μπουν π?σω απ? τον π?γκο της κουζ?νας αλλ? με επ?δομα νοικοκυρ?ς και δ?νοντας τις θ?σεις τους σε (?ντρες) ?νεργους.

Τ?ρα αυτ? ε?ναι καλ?;

Αν ρωτ?σετε τη μ?να μου και δι?φορες θε?ες μου θα προτιμ?σαν να ε?ναι δο?λες στο σπ?τι, παρ? δο?λες και στη δουλει? και στο σπ?τι.

Αλλ? και π?λι το να χ?νεις τη δουλει? σου χωρ?ς τη θ?λησ? σου ε?ναι καλ?;

Τ?λος π?ντων, αυτ? και ?λλα πολλ? ερωτ?ματα αναδ?θηκαν απ? μ?σα μου καθ?ς δι?βαζα το βιβλ?ο.

Ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι ?νας καθηγητ?ς στη Σορβ?νη με ειδικ?τητα στον Ουισμ?νς. Ασυμπ?θιστος χαραχτ?ρας. Μισογ?νης, μισ?νθρωπος, και ?λα τα εις μισ?-

Για να παραμε?νει καθηγητ?ς στο πανεπιστ?μιο πρ?πει να ασπαστε? το Ισλ?μ.

?λο το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι μια εναλλαγ? μεταξ? Ουισμ?νς, πολιτικ?, π?δουλους, θρησκε?α - Ουισμ?νς, πολιτικ?, π?δουλους, θρησκε?α. Και ?λα σε μεγ?λη λεπτομ?ρεια. ?να βιβλ?ο ?που παρελα?νουν πολιτικο? της Γαλλ?ας (Ολ?ντ, Σαρκοζ?, Λεπ?ν) κυρ?ως στο πρ?το μισ? στη δι?ρκεια της προεκλογικ?ς περι?δου.

Το απ?λαυσα ως βιβλ?ο αλλ? δεν με ?πεισε. Μπορε? το μουσουλμανικ? κ?μμα να ?ταν σαφ?ς καλ?τερο απ? το να κ?ρδιζε το Front National της φασ?στω?ς Λεπ?ν αλλ? το ?τι μ?σα σε 6 μ?νες ?λη η Γαλλ?α μπ?κε σε ν?μο σαρ?α (γυνα?κες καλυμ?νες, καθηγητ?ς μουσουλμ?νοι, γ?μοι με προξενι? κλπ) αδιαμαρτ?ρητα ?μοιαζε κ?πως ψε?τικο και βεβιασμ?νο το οπο?ο, καταλαβα?νω, ?ταν ?νας τρ?πος για να κυλ?σει η ιστορ?α.

Παρ?λο που απ? Γαλλικ? Λογοτεχν?α κ?νω μεσ?νυχτα. (ε?μαι βλ?πετε της αντ?περα ?χθης *God Save the Queen*) δεν με κο?ρασαν οι αμ?τηρητες παραπομπ?ς στη Γαλλικ? Λογοτεχν?α του 19ου αι?να (Ουισμ?νς, Πεγκ? (Για αρκετ?ς σελ?δες δι?βαζα Π?γκυ) Ντομιν?κ Ορ?, Φλωμπ?ρ κλπ)

Απ' ?τι φα?νεται ?μως θα συνεχ?σω με Ουέλμπ?κ στο μ?λλον, ?σως με το δοκ?μιο για τον μα?στρο του τρ?μου αλλ? απ?στευτα ρατσιστ? Λαβκραφτ του οπο?ου οι απ?ψεις σ?γουρα θα βρ?σκουν

σ?μφωνα τη Λεπ?ν.

7/10

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Sex, Religion and Politics

If you only read one book about sex, religion and politics this year, make sure it's this one!

It packs enormous punch into (far) less than 300 pages, raising the question yet again why novels need to be 562 or 1,376 pages long (and if they do on the basis of some subjective criterion, why they aren't written with such consistent verve, intelligence, wit and humour as "*Submission*").

For all the philosophy, this novel is paced like a mass market thriller or the screenplay for a prophetic, if not quite dystopian, film. Think an R-rated "*Fahrenheit 451*" or "*Super-Cannes*" meets "*1984*" or "*Brave New World*".

Actually, the plot alone would make a fantastic film. In the meantime, we must be content with an outstanding satirical novel of ideas.

<http://www.lesechos.fr/08/11/2010/Les...>

From Diderot to Celine

If you still want your novels to be encyclopaedic, "*Submission*" is firmly in the Diderotian camp.

This time, it's no mere helmet cam trip through Asian sex tourist destinations. Instead, it actively mourns the decline of the secular values of the Enlightenment, the French Republic and the "*Encyclopédie*".

The first person narrators of Houellebecq's fiction are as misanthropic as anything conjured up by Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

However, the misanthropy is arguably a natural response to developments in modern consumer society, which has secreted us inside a spiritual vacuum. It seems that, literally, there is no other way for us to *be*.

From Engagement to Isolation

The narrator, François, is an unmarried mid-forties humanities professor. To describe him, you have to use words like: isolated, reclusive, withdrawn, unemotional, bored, abject, purposeless, unmotivated, hopeless, melancholy, uninvolved, resigned, disillusioned, deluded, disengaged, the very opposite of "*engagé*":

"I realised that part of my life, probably the best part, was behind me".

He is close to suicide, but he can't be bothered taking the final step. He figures that he has no more reason to kill himself than anybody else alive. On a date, he's just as likely to put on a Nick Drake album. He has no future to speak of. He just is. Until one day, when he won't be.

Yet, François is the fictional vehicle, if not exactly an anti-hero, through which European civilisation realises its destiny.

Tobi Vail from Bikini Kill

A Cock and Bull Story

There's a massive vacuum at the centre of François' being, but nothing is capable of filling it. Nothing can please or pleasure him, not even promiscuous sex with his teenaged students (his spiritual quest ferrets out paramours who smell like teen spirit). His narcissism has led inevitably to depression:

"In the end, my cock was all I had."

And it's of little practical use to him, *"since my erections were rarer and less dependable and required bodies that were firm, supple and flawless."*

The flesh might be flaccid, but the humour is Sterne.

Filling the Vacuum

"Submission" might wear the garb of satire. However, it still explores the causes of the vacuum as well as the forces that are intent on filling it, ostensibly for the purpose of satisfying our communal, personal and spiritual needs.

A lot of the blame lies at the foot of sex (?), religion and politics. To this extent, the novel was bound to be controversial. However, Houellebecq proclaims:

"I will not avoid a subject because I know it is controversial."

He just jumps right in, head first.

Strange Bedfellows

In order to explore the dimensions of the controversy, the novel projects forward to the French election in 2022.

It's a brilliant literary strategy that blends realism and fantasy.

The population is so divided that no one political party or ideology can command a majority in its own right.

Equally, the need to differentiate between like agendas blocks the scope for compromise and coalition (at least, in advance of the election). The Far Right National Front by itself can almost double (34%) the vote of the Socialist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood (or Fraternity)(22% each).

Despite the popular apprehension about Islam, the Left decides to form a government with the Muslim leader Muhammed Ben Abbes in the role of President and a lily-livered Socialist in the role of Prime Minister.

France – European Parliament Election 2014: Final Results

<http://metapolls.net/wp-content/uploa...>

The Human Face of Islam

This is no radical jihadist Islam. Ben Abbes is a charming, sophisticated, cosmopolitan, multicultural, moderate Muslim. He walks confidently on the international stage.

He recognises that the values of the Republic have allowed him to achieve the highest position in the country. Yet he remains a consummate politician and manipulator of public and private opinion:

"The reality is that Ben Abbes is an extremely crafty politician, the craftiest, most cunning politician France has known since François Mitterand. And unlike Mitterand he has a truly historic vision."

The Pragmatic March from Abandon to Abandonment

Nevertheless, some aspects of the Islamic agenda are non-negotiable. What is fascinating is Houellebecq's insight into the pragmatic process by which many secular values are readily abandoned by the public, the bureaucracy, academia and the Left, in order to deny power to the Far Right.

What is jettisoned includes the separation of religion and the state, academic freedom, a public education system beyond the age of 15, and anything resembling women's rights:

"What the Muslim Brotherhood really wants is for most women to study Home Economics, once they finish junior school, then get married as soon as possible - with a small minority studying art or literature first. That's their vision of an ideal society. Also, every teacher would have to be Muslim. No exceptions."

The Temptation of François

François witnesses these changes from a privileged position in academia.

Initially, he is dismissed like all other academics. Later he is offered a position at three times the level of remuneration, provided he will convert to Islam. Aware that he has frequently had sexual liaisons with his female students, the authorities offer to find him at least two wives, it being implicit that they could be as young as 13. It's almost enough to restore both cock and confidence (assuming they're not one and the same).

The dynamic of the potential conversion provides the novel's main plot device. François is actually a renowned expert on Joris-Karl Huysmans, a Decadent writer who wrote *"A Rebours"* and later converted from atheism to Catholicism at a similar stage of his life. Thus, the conversion is something for which François has been theoretically and mentally prepar(-ed/ing) for the whole of his adult life.

God Resurrected in and by Academia

Many French make the transition to the new Islamic society with little need for adjustment in their personal lives. However, the role of an academic allows Houellebecq to devise an intellectual analysis of Islam within a pre-existing philosophical tradition.

Houellebecq has previously been prosecuted (unsuccessfully) for making comments that might incite hatred against Islam (*"all religions are stupid, but Islam is the stupidest of all"*). Initially, the response to the release of the book by those who hadn't read it was that it was Islamophobic and anti-French. However, the opposite

is in fact the case. In a subsequent interview, he revealed that he has now read the Koran and it *"turns out to be much better than I thought...the most obvious conclusion is that the jihadists are bad Muslims."* Thus, he purports to have no prejudice against Islam per se.

The Occlusion of the National Affront

The Muslim characters are highly articulate advocates for their faith who place it in the context of European civilisation, even if some of its tenets aren't compatible with the secular Republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity (which arguably have failed France, well, at least its spiritual needs).

The fascinating thing about the book is that these arguments are given an intelligent and potentially appealing spin. You can imagine how society might one day get to the point where Muslims, despite comprising less than 20% of the population, become a social and political force that has a significant role in the mainstream (certainly one that can and must be embraced by the tired remnants of the Left in preference to the Far Right National Front).

Putting Man in His Place

The Islamic view (according to François) is that secular values have resulted in a rampant individualism at the expense of genuine community, fraternity and brotherhood. Here's how they view secularism and its mission against God:

"It wasn't enough for them to coldly deny the existence of God – they had to refuse it, like Bakunin: 'Even if God existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him.' They were atheists like Kirilov in 'The Possessed'.

"They rejected God because they wanted to put man in his place [ed: in the place, and instead, of God]. They were humanists, with lofty ideas about human liberty, human dignity."

Now that there was nothing but man, he was in a vacuum of his own creation.

The goal of religion is to restore man to his proper place, beneath God.

No Room for Sisters in the Brotherhood

Ironically, the word brotherhood reflects the real significance of the changes that are implemented by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The people who lose the most are women. They are by definition excluded from the brotherhood. Their role is confined to (polygamous) marriage, childbirth and parenthood. The most obvious change on the street is the sight of all women wearing conservative clothing and hijabs.

The Submission of Women

From the point of view of an outsider to both religion and Islam, the major problem with the Islamic vision is its treatment of women.

The explanation of the Islamic attitude towards women in the novel (assuming it is correctly portrayed) was enlightening, at least for me.

I had forgotten that the word "*Islam*" actually means "*submission*" and hence provides both the central metaphor and the name of the novel (as well as Theo van Gogh's short film).

It's argued that man must submit to God/Allah/the Creator and his laws, but equally that woman must submit to man.

Paradoxically, the role of women in the family is so paramount that they must be sheltered from the burden of work outside the family unit. It becomes the role of the male to financially provide for the family. It's almost as if Islam is doing women a favour by relieving them of a burden necessitated by life in a modern western economy. (You could even question whether a western economy, and therefore the way we currently work, is surplus to our real needs.)

Democratic Submission

The question today is: how could this vision be imposed on a Western society?

If 50% of the population are women, how could Islam be imposed peacefully on independent women as soon as 2022?

The answer depends on the existing apparatus of democracy, hence the pivotal significance of the 2022 election.

If 10% of the population were Muslim women, then it's possible that a coalition involving an Islamic party could garner as much as 55% of the vote, assuming the rest of the vote was split equally (45% for the Right, 45% for a coalition including the Muslim Brotherhood).

It would be this simple to arrive at a mandate for legislating a change of the rights and obligations of women. Having become law, the state would bring the full weight of the law down on women who failed to comply, quite apart from any social sanctions that might be applied.

Islam and Far Right Nativism

The attitude towards women reveals an anomaly at the heart of the political relationship between Far Right "*Nativism*" and Islam.

Nativists object to the presence of foreigners in their midst. However:

"...their irrational hostility to Islam [blinds] them to the obvious: on every question that really mattered, the nativists and the Muslims were in perfect agreement. When it came to rejecting atheism and humanism, or [promoting] the necessary submission of women, or the return of patriarchy, they were fighting exactly the same fight. And today this fight, to establish a new organic phase of civilisation, could no longer be waged in the name of Christianity."

Christianity has been fatally compromised by its lengthy cohabitation with the secular state of liberal individualism, which once it "*attacked that ultimate social structure, the family, and thus the birth rate,...signed its own death warrant; Muslim dominance was a foregone conclusion.*"

Against the Enlightenment, Against the Grain, À Rebours

Apart from Huysmans, much of the philosophical conjecture sounds like de Tocqueville, Gibbon and Spengler. We're witnessing the decline of the West, the decline and fall of the Judaeo-Christian Empire, as a result of a virus caught from secular humanism.

Or perhaps, given that European civilisation has already become secular humanist, it's more accurate to say that Europe's mortal wound has been self-inflicted. Houellebecq quotes Toynbee approvingly: *"Civilisations die not by murder, but by suicide."*

In Muslim eyes, the value of Enlightenment reason has been exaggerated. It's irrelevant to most of us:

"The totality of animals, the crushing majority of men, live without ever finding the least need for justification. They live because they live, and that's all, and that's how they reason - and then I suppose they die because they die, and this, in their eyes, ends the analysis."

An Alternative Projection

While the narrative ceases within months of the election result and before we know for certain that François has converted, what is implicit in the above analysis of secular humanism is the possibility that Islam might use its coalition with the French Left to arrive at a broader, more pervasive and more socially conservative alliance with the Far Right National Front.

Once this was achieved, secular humanism and liberalism could be extinguished altogether:

"Secondary and higher education [could be] completely privatised. All of these reforms were meant to 'restore the centrality, the dignity, of the family as the building block of society'..."

"For these Muslims, the real enemy - the thing they fear and hate - isn't Catholicism. It's secularism. It's laicism. It's atheist materialism. They think of Catholics as fellow believers. Catholicism is a religion of the Book. Catholics are one step away from converting to Islam - that's the true, original Muslim vision of Christianity."

Religious Affiliation

The portrait of Ben Abbes is far more positive than this. However, this speculation is consistent with the views of some of his supporters and the analysis of François. It makes sense that religions, no matter how diverse, might come together to defeat atheism and its political manifestations, especially as only they might be able to fill the spiritual vacuum that seems to be the heart of the matter.

Houellebecq has said something to this effect in a recent interview:

"My book describes the destruction of the philosophy handed down by the Enlightenment, which no longer makes sense to anyone, or to very few people. Catholicism, by contrast, is doing rather well. I would maintain that an alliance between Catholics and Muslims is possible."

While many see Houellebecq's fiction as misogynistic, it's conceivable that the only factor standing between today and this possible future is the resolve of women.

Presumably, they will get little or no support from men like François. His example is evidence that the submission of the male can be acquired for the price of the right to polygamy.

PICS:

Pro-Islamic women protest outside the Great Mosque in Paris.

<http://www.levif.be/actualite/interna...>

Activist protests outside the Great Mosque in Paris.

FEMEN disrupt Muslim conference in France:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wM-wx...>

REFERENCES:

"I think, then, that the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world; our contemporaries will find no prototype of it in their memories. I seek in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea I have formed of it; the old words despotism and tyranny are inappropriate: the thing itself is new, and since I cannot name, I must attempt to define it.

I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but he does not see them; he touches them, but he does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country." (Alexis de Tocqueville)

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DET...>

"If Islam is not political, it is nothing." (Ayatollah Khomeini)

NETGALLEY DISCLOSURE:

(view spoiler)

SOUNDTRACK:

(view spoiler)

Sidharth Vardhan says

The people believing in a religion, any religion, have different degrees of faith. There are for example fundamentalists who not only take their own religion seriously, following their holy books with strict literalism and who often also want to force their beliefs on others using different methods.

Then there are traditionalists who stick to their religious traditions but respects people of other religions. They are the ones always seeking shelter in freedom of beliefs and to carry on their traditions – which they deserve as well; as long as it is a question of personal religion but their idea of religious freedom often paradoxically includes a patriarchal control over their women (who are expected to act in a set, more or less submissive ways) and children (who are forced to go through religious education as per their parents' wishes).

The third category may be called reductionists to whom religion is reduced to mere matters of God and prayers. Religious books are read selectively and as poems. In other places like life-style, education of children, medicine etc –religion doesn't play a role.

The last category is of mere identifiers –who aren't exactly religious but it forms a part of their identity, an identity that connects them with people with whom they have long associated with. The religion, scriptures etc are mere symbols for them but symbols they have come to respect.

Now this categorization is just a little less stupid when compared to general statements made about a whole community – there can be no absolute classification but there are some benefits of using it as a temporary construct to help thinking laterally. For example, the outside critics of a religion and its most fundamentalist and sometimes also traditionalist believers are alike in at least one sense – they both read scriptures literally. Also, they both put very high premium as to impact that word of scriptures should have upon life of people. The two groups argue with each-other and other categories try hard not to get painted black-or-white. As to which interpretation is correct, I will say that even human laws are thought to be bad if they allow for so many interpretations.

If while talking about a religion, you make a general statement regarding its followers than you are probably talking about a behavior common to first of first two categories (Or a behaviour that wasn't there at all) And if behavior you commented upon was controversial, it might offend the innocent people from latter categories.

The come-back of religion

MH makes some kind of distinction too – the head of the party that comes to power is a traditionalist Muslim but not fundamentalist. He despises terrorists. They win power through peaceful means. The party actually supports Zionist movement, and they are friendly to Church too. There are no hate-crimes or forced conversions in their regimes as you might expect to see in a more paranoid novel. You can see they are more tolerant of other people's religions.

However, the problem is they are still traditionalists – and traditions return. Special educational institutions providing Islamic education with only Muslim teachers where education moves around Quran. Co-ed is removed from scene, education for women is to be limited. Women suddenly started wearing veils and polygamy is back.

Another tradition that returns is that of patriarchal family. Women are not supposed to work. And then there is polygamy and teenage girls being married. As is the case with any Patriarchal society, by the end, women have become currency.

You could see why many men like François, the protagonist, would love it with all advantages it offers to men. That explains acceptance of change for at least some of the men. But why did women let go of their liberty so easily? The conditions in *Handmaid's Tale* were far tougher and yet there was resistance – here despite all the democratic rights, there are no protests. What François says about increasing distance between government and people might have explained why protests might have failed, but no protests? From homosexuals either? I wouldn't have minded author saying that protests failed or that there were few protests but author claims that government actually remained popular, from when did people started accepting changes so easily? The author seems to put very little faith with French love for their values.

Why return?

Let us just say religion creates an order or an illusion of order (depending upon your faith) – saving people from burden of liberty by choosing for them. Without God, there is only chaos and François believes that people are incapable of choosing for themselves when faced with chaos, they would rather submit to laws given to them by someone else. Atheists are sadder, have fewer children, feel spiritual vacuum, blah blah

blah. Religion serves you everything on plate - François, single as long as atheist, was offered two wives as he became Muslim. There is the whole evolutionary advantage that religion has. Actually, I don't think religion might have given any survival advantage and even if it did, it doesn't do any longer. Its been a while we have stopped living in jungles. Some people might be scared of chaos after once they lifted away the veil of God and want to return to religion but I don't think it will be the general trend. I believe most people are willing to pay price of uncertainty for their freedom - we aren't like the horse from campus parable, and while we are on subject, evolutionary defense of polygamy is another thing which might have given Darwin restless legs in his grave.

Islamophobia?

MH's central argument is more of a contest between rationalism vs modern culture, patriarchy vs liberalism, religion vs atheism, but definitely not Islam vs West. New government was actually trying to enhance power of European Union and was friendly to church and Jews but had atheism as its biggest enemy.

However the problem is that he failed to see that traditionalism exists in all religions – he could have made his argument by letting church gain power rather than Islam. It would have been more convincing as Christianity is majority religion in country rather than make a hard to digest case in convincing us that peaceful takeover of France by Islam is possible. He spends a lot of time doing so taking shelter in petrodollars that an Islamic state might attract – for about a quarter of book, another two quarters go to poking fun at academics and François discussing his sexual life (another professor who sleeps with his students, I might as well start a shelf). All ideas are contained in about one-fourth of the book. If it wasn't for one or two of its ideas that made me think, it would have been a one-star book.

Unlike MH, I don't think that French Muslims comprise of large percentages of traditionalists, most of them probably belong to later two categories and so their religion plays a far lesser role in their lives. Still it is dislike-able that whenever non-Christians win some political power in one of Christian or secular countries of West, it is assumed that their religion will play an important role in their decision making. How many non-Christian presidents of secular countries of West have ever seen (compare: India has had people of four major religions act as their president or prime-minister as heads of government or country)? You can bet there won't ever be atheist presidents in USA. Charlie Hebdo felt called upon to ridicule Islam because Muslims won some political power in France – although they used the same democratic process. I guess it is high time the world realised that it is not immigrants that their democracy need fear but native Trumps.
