

# Journal of European Studies

<http://jes.sagepub.com>

---

## **Paradoxes of the postmodern reactionary Michel Rio and Michel Houellebecq**

Ralph Schoolcraft and Richard J. Golsan  
*Journal of European Studies* 2007; 37; 349  
DOI: 10.1177/0047244107083224

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://jes.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/37/4/349>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Journal of European Studies* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jes.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jes.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations** <http://jes.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/37/4/349>



## Paradoxes of the postmodern reactionary Michel Rio and Michel Houellebecq

RALPH SCHOOLCRAFT III AND RICHARD J. GOLSAN  
*Texas A&M University, USA*

*This study examines two writers, Michel Rio and Michel Houellebecq, who have encountered opposite fortunes among the public and critics. However, they share numerous writing practices associated with postmodernism that include mixing literary forms, integrating epistemological discourses, doubling characters, avoidance of meta-narratives, and destabilizing interpretation through irony, fractured perspectives and the parodic recycling of popular genres such as detective fiction and eroticism. Moreover, both display putatively reactionary elements in their fiction: Houellebecq quite explicitly, Rio through his sexual and political imaginary (especially in the Francis Malone 'enquêtes'). We conclude that both writers are indeed rooted in reactionary habits of thought, but Rio's practices place him in the camp of modernism (hierarchy of epistemologies, elitist stereotyping, scientism), while Houellebecq falls among the postmodernists (neutralizing voices of authority, erasing high/low cultural distinction, refusal of progress, denial of the subject). The difference in their literary strategies no doubt accounts at least in part for their diverse receptions, with Rio remaining inside a familiar (albeit intellectually demanding) model while Houellebecq enacts a highly debatable but radical critique of the modern notions of humanism, the desiring subject, and the benefits of liberal democracy.*

**Keywords:** *authoritarian politics, desire, detective stories, discursive strategies, epistemology in literature, Extension du domaine de la lutte, Michel Houellebecq, Francis Malone, Nazi fictions, postmodernism, reactionary, Michel Rio, Schmittian exceptionalism*

At first glance, all facets of their respective careers would seem to place these two French writers in separate corners of the literary world. Despite 18 novels and the Prix Médicis, Rio remains largely uncelebrated. He is almost never included in the pantheon of France's contemporary masters and his sales are dwarfed by those of Amélie Nothomb and Daniel Pennac. Moreover, dubbed a hermit by *Lire*, he gladly plays the outcast in snubbing promotional processes that fashion authors as public figures.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Houellebecq is one of the rare underground voices to skyrocket to fame. Media magnate Arnaud Lagardère personally negotiated Houellebecq's transfer (in excess of one million euros) from Flammarion to Fayard and, despite a small corpus, the writer's work has already sparked a flurry of scholarly monographs. And whereas Rio supports organizations like Amnesty International and UNICEF, Houellebecq's pejorative remarks about women, homosexuals, Islam and May '68 have led to legal troubles and accusations of right-wing extremism (see Redonnet, 1999). Even their fictional universes are dissimilar: Rio has a predilection for the medieval mullings of Merlin and Morgan, while Houellebecq's characters frequent Bangkok massage parlours and RER commuter trains.

Surprisingly enough, however, there are also striking overlaps in their approach to writing. Solitary figures arriving in the Hexagon after childhood years spent on the islands of Madagascar (Rio) and Réunion (Houellebecq), neither has much use for his literary peers. Rio, for example, castigates today's writers as 'de plus en plus médiocres', '[sans] aucune compétence particulière' for their craft (Gascoigne, 2002: 19). In return, the two Michels defend ambitious visions of the novel. Because 'elle [la forme du roman] permet tout', asserts Rio, he strives for a sort of encyclopaedic novel that embraces a wealth of subjects and styles (Rio with Lanfranchi and Lebrun, 1999). In spite of his novels' brevity, he shifts with virtuosity from renewals of Arthurian romances and Chandleresque detective stories to *contes philosophiques*, meditations on the art of the novel and fictional travel narratives. His considerable erudition filters in through passages on boat building and navigation, linguistics and opera, American urban culture and the history of African exploration. Houellebecq, disdaining liberal defenders of the Enlightenment tradition, frames his approach differently but nonetheless strives for an analogous form: 'Un roman idéal devrait pouvoir comporter des passages versifiés, ou chantés', he writes. 'Il faudrait pouvoir tout mettre ... nous avons vocation à une connaissance totale'

(Houellebecq, 1998: 119, 40). His readers thus encounter a disconcerting mixture of neo-realist prose, advertising slogans, poetry, scientific theorems, technical jargon, pornographic passages, and of course his trademark deadpan vulgarity.

This is not in itself so novel. Modernist writers as disparate as, for instance, Blaise Cendrars – who imagined *Alia* as a literary mosaic (Cendrars, 1969 [1911]: 132) – and Walter Benjamin – who spent years on the massive *Arcades Project* – invested greatly in models of this nature early in the twentieth century. But Rio and Houellebecq, in addition to juggling genres, draw on an unusual range of epistemological fields, shunning most methodologies in vogue in order to seek inspiration from the hard sciences in particular. Rio grounds his entire creative project in a ‘trinity’ of disciplines: history – common enough for novelists – but also biology and theoretical physics (Rio with Lanfranchi and Lebrun, 1999). In discussing the destinies and dilemmas faced by his characters, he also delves into psychology and metaphysics. Similarly, Houellebecq’s novels contain frequent socio-historical pronouncements *à la* Balzac, but these compete with paradigms introduced from quantum physics, information theory and Comtian positivism.

Some of the recent disciplines cited above have required radical re-imaginings of our universe, and thus in intellectual terms we have moved into the realm of postmodernism. A further resemblance between the two authors, which lies in their handling of epistemological references, bridges the gap on aesthetic grounds too. In addition to tempering these voices through irony, Rio and Houellebecq deploy discursive strategies that complicate the status of factual claims. Rio’s texts are linguistically rich but largely jargon-free; dissimulated within narrative descriptions, many of his intellectual references elude even expert readers. The discourses of knowledge melt seamlessly into the fiction, as part of postmodernism’s levelling of high-culture hierarchies. Moreover, by inserting hard science into discredited forms like detective fiction, Rio enacts Barthes’ notion of making ‘knowledge appear ... where it is not expected’ (Ray, 1991: 140–1). By contrast, Houellebecq is a master at mimicking codes, leaving his scientific citations hanging ambiguously between authority and parody. The indetermination reverses Barthes’ principle, with knowledge potentially treated as just another fictional element.

Finally, though he has nothing of Houellebecq’s notoriety, Rio also tows on dubious turf in camping various forms of explicit sexuality. His novels privilege representations of voyeurism, onanism and violence against women, while entangling these highly charged

scenes with equally weighty historico-political stereotypes. The result poses serious questions about Rio's views on gender relations and political order.

Our examination of these two authors therefore seeks to address several questions. Despite the features catalogued here, are there difficulties in labelling Rio and Houellebecq as 'postmodern'? In the other direction, are the charges – only mentioned briefly here but discussed in greater detail below – of objectionable politics misguided critical readings or justified? With respect to the first issue, we find ourselves faced with an uncomfortable clash. While European modernism is known for its share of reactionary figures (Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, F. T. Marinetti, Paul Morand, and numerous Germans), postmodern practices are generally thought to preclude allegiance to the far right (only the neo-Marxist anthology (Foster, 1983) breaks substantially with this view, and for predictably dogmatic reasons). Is there thus a contradiction inherent in the notion of a 'postmodern reactionary'? Finally, how can we account for the relative indifference greeting Rio's texts and the quasi-hysterical response elicited by Houellebecq's? Should we attribute it to questions of literary content, social views or the effectiveness of textual practices?

Let us turn first to Michel Rio. For admirers such as David Gascoigne, all of Rio's work is characterized by its philosophical and intellectual 'density' (Gascoigne, 2002: 19). Rio's novels challenge the reader not only through their esoteric knowledge but through their willingness to explore the most daunting existential questions from the perspectives of human and even pure sciences. The result, according to Gascoigne, are 'intellectually charged, emotionally intense' novels which, in keeping with their scientific pretensions, 'function as controlled experiments designed to explore the chemistry of unstable compounds' (Gascoigne, 2002: 19, 24).

If Rio's novels are essentially successors to the great tradition of the novel of ideas, or contemporary incarnations of Zola's ideal of the *roman expérimental*, then perhaps one way to account for the lack of serious critical and academic attention accorded his work is to suggest that he is simply out of step with today's postmodern writing in France. According to this view, Rio's vision and practice of literature as what we might call a 'cognitive music' (Rio with Gillain and Loufti, 1994: 790) would be out of sync with the vision and practice of his critics and colleagues.

But in our opinion the issues affecting Rio's reception go beyond questions of the writer's poetics and novelistic practices, or, for that matter, questions of contemporary taste. First, it is important to stress

that, despite pretensions to scientific objectivity and cognitive rigour, Rio's novels are at least equally characterized by what might be described as their obsessive sexuality: specifically, their fetishization of extreme virility and male-centred erotics. Characters and episodes from early novels like *Les Jungles pensives* (1985) and *Faux pas* (1991), or more recent works including the Inspector Francis Malone *enquêtes*, display these obsessions often to the point of overwhelming the narrative, reducing Rio's characters to stereotypes and cardboard characters, and his novels of ideas to erudite pornography. While it is true that occasionally the scenes involving onanism, voyeurism or displays of masculine virility are appropriate to the plot and add to the dramatic power of the work – such as when the narrator of *Mélancolie nord* (1982) masturbates joyfully on the deck of his storm-damaged boat after he has succeeded in repairing it and thereby saving his life – more often these scenes serve to replace more substantial explorations of characters' sexuality, or to reconcile artificially what Gascoigne labels the 'discordant co-existence of flesh and spirit' (Gascoigne, 2002: 24), or, finally, to undermine the author's own celebrations of heterosexual love itself. As an example, in *Les Jungles pensives*, the young narrator's first romantic and sexual encounter with Lady Jane Savile occurs after he has watched her masturbate and reach a climax while she watches him watch her. Here, voyeurism and onanism serve as necessary and essential pretexts to traditional lovemaking, tending to underscore the derivative and even artificial nature of the latter. Moreover, while the scene in question is powerfully described, the net effect is not to *reveal* the characters to each other – or to the reader, for that matter – but to reinforce their opacity. At least where character development is concerned, Rio's 'cognitive music' is silenced by the novelist's penchant for evoking his characters' sexuality essentially as spectacles of auto-eroticism.

In another episode in the novel, a lengthy intellectual exchange between the narrator and Lady Savile concludes with her demand that they make love immediately. The outcome of the scene reduces the intellectual exchange to a form of mental masturbation (or, at best, seduction), and to suggest that there is no 'discordance' between 'flesh and spirit' or between the mind and material reality itself. It is precisely the latter discordance that the novel purports to explore.

Rio's fascination in his novels with voyeurism and onanism borders occasionally on more sinister preoccupations, and with rape in particular. In the first Malone novel, *La Mort* (1998), the connection between masturbation, voyeurism and violation is evoked in a performance by Malone's love interest, the Scandinavian erotic

dancer Karen, whose act involves her being stripped and then aroused to orgasm on stage by the visible hands of partners who remain invisible. As she tells Malone, the auto-erotic intent and power of the act has literally been violated when these hands, against her wishes, seek to penetrate her on stage.

If Rio's preoccupation with onanism and voyeurism in his fiction tends to subvert or short-circuit more complex explorations of his characters and their sexuality, or, in some instances, to invoke sexual violence, the novelist's cult of virility in his fiction results in the creation of characters whose hypertrophied sexuality is more reminiscent of comic-book superheroes than subtle novelistic portrayals. Inspector Francis Malone is a perfect example. Although Rio is at pains to stress Malone's intellectual breadth, the cultural diversity of his background and his psychological subtlety, the description of Malone given at the outset of *La Mort* focuses ultimately, and almost exclusively, on his hypermasculinity:

[Malone] était bâti tout en puissance, mais paraissait presque mince, sa constitution excluant la double boursofflure du gras involontaire et du muscle fabriqué. Son corps, qui approchait les cent kilos, avait la densité du granit de ses terres celtiques d'origine, la Bretagne et l'Irlande, et quelque chose de cette dureté primitive apparaissait dans son visage ovale, régulier, dont les traits allongés semblaient faits d'intelligence cultivée et de déraison naturelle, de générosité instinctive et de défiance apprise, de volonté calme et d'ironie désabusée, dureté cependant corrigée par la mélancolie du regard bleu pâle reflétant la lumière tempérée des eaux et des ciels du Nord ... Ses mains étaient immenses, puissantes, harmonieuses à cause de droits très longs, curieux mélange de colosse et de pianiste. (Rio, 1998: 8)

If Rio's most cherished masculine characters are prone to being French Rambos with culture and brains, his female characters are equipped to be the perfect partners for such macho specimens. All are perfectly beautiful, and any contact with them of an intellectual or emotional nature is a prelude to the moment of their submission to Rio's heroes. As if to underscore the ultimate indifferentiation of these women, Rio reminds the reader in *Sans songer à mal* (2004) – the most recent Malone crime story, in which the novelist himself is a character – that the most celebrated of his heroines are all named Laura. They are ultimately interchangeable.

It is safe to argue that Rio's obsessive and excessive treatment of onanism and voyeurism, as well as the writer's cult of virility, risk undermining his cognitive and objective ambitions and, in the end, the quality and seriousness of the novels. At least equally detrimental

to both, however, are the writer's troubling and ambivalent treatments of power, and the authority of the law in particular. In his 1994 interview, Rio discusses the unique circumstances of his upbringing, first growing up as a kind of Truffautian wild child on the beaches of Madagascar and later finding himself in Paris in a *collège* run by Oratorians. The school's strict discipline and long working hours made it, in Rio's view, nothing less than 'un univers absolument concentrationnaire', and the combination of, first, the experience of a limitless personal freedom in Madagascar, followed by one of virtual incarceration in Paris, gave Rio, according to his own account, 'une espèce d'allergie absolue à n'importe quelle idée d'association'. Thus, the standoffishness we noted in the introduction appears to have deep roots and consequences, for he claims to have rejected subsequently any and all collective values, whether religious, ideological or political. In his choice of professions, his extreme individualism eliminated any career paths that would require, as he puts it, functioning within a hierarchy (Rio with Gillain and Loufti, 1994: 788).

The absolute freedom and independence the writer embraces in his own existence is clearly reflected as well in the lives and actions of all of his protagonists, whether modern adventurers or Arthurian knights and sorcerers. These attributes are most salient, however, in his inspector/hero. Although Malone professes 'une conviction de fer à l'endroit des idéaux de la loi républicaine, de l'État démocratique, des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, de la Révolution', his superiors are well aware of the fact that he operates 'à la limite de la légalité' and indeed outside the law, ostensibly in order to uphold and guarantee the rule of law and democracy itself (Rio, 1998: 10). This marginal legality is standard fare and part of the appeal of hard-boiled detective novel heroes. But cast in political terms, and especially in the French Republican and democratic context Malone supposedly embraces, it assumes a more disturbing cast. In effect, Malone assigns himself the role of protector and indeed purveyor of the law, while also ascribing to himself the right to act outside the law in order to protect it. In Rio's fictions, then, Malone functions as a kind of Schmittian sovereign who defines the 'exception'.<sup>2</sup> He is the lawgiver or ruler who acts extra-legally, so to speak, ostensibly to make the rule of law possible. Within a democratic and republican context, of course, the danger is that the defence of the government and law in this fashion also paves the way to authoritarianism, dictatorship, and the subversion of all democratic principles and legalities. The problem was vividly demonstrated at the moment of the collapse of Weimar, among other historical circumstances. In any event, Rio's heroization of his police

inspector/sovereign raises the disturbing possibility that Rio's own literary elitism is either tinged with a less than egalitarian political outlook, or that the novelist's vaunted erudition is marred by a skewed or blinkered understanding of recent history that prevents him from recognizing the full political implications of his fictional hero's *modus operandi*.

If there is one Francis Malone novel that casts all of these issues into sharp relief – that is, the impact of Rio's sexual obsessions on his fiction, his flirtation with a Schmittian anti-democratic exceptionalism, and a frankly disturbing take on recent history – it is the provocative but appropriately entitled *Leçon d'abîme* (2003). Unlike the other Malone *enquêtes*, which take place in contemporary urban landscapes and deal essentially with dehistoricized corporate and governmental corruption, *Leçon d'abîme* opens with Malone arriving at the fortified personal residence of David Klein, a wealthy Holocaust survivor living on the shores of Lake Zurich. Ostensibly, Malone has sought out Klein in order to seek the latter's help in finding a notorious SS officer, Hans Uzler. Uzler, who had been the lover of Klein's beautiful sister Judith, had supposedly murdered her and then killed himself in his quarters at Auschwitz in order not to be captured by the Allies. Both bodies were then burned beyond recognition when the building itself was set on fire.

But, as Malone informs Klein, it now appears that Uzler did not die, but instead killed an inmate, substituted the body for his own, and escaped. Recent DNA tests on the charred remains confirm, in fact, that the remains are not Uzler's. In his pursuit of Uzler, Malone is seeking to determine if he escaped alone, or if Uzler used a similar subterfuge to help Judith escape with him. If the two did leave together, Malone surmises it would be easier to track Uzler because Judith's extraordinary beauty would not have gone unnoticed. Malone therefore seeks a sample of Klein's DNA to determine if the female remains are in fact Judith's.

While on the surface Malone's request is reasonable and his rationale sound, Klein is quick to see the trap that the French policeman is laying for him. One possible substitute victim Uzler could have used to facilitate his escape was Klein himself, whom Uzler kept in barracks near his own. From these barracks, in fact, Klein had witnessed through a combination of visual and auditory voyeurism the sexual humiliation and debasement as well as the torture of his sister. If Klein were to agree to provide the DNA sample, Malone could potentially turn the tables on him, by using the DNA to prove he is Uzler and not Klein, expose the theft of the Jew's identity, and arrest the former Nazi.

Klein therefore refuses Malone's request, and the novel follows the inspector's stratagems to finally expose the Nazi Uzler. Malone does this with the help of Klein/Uzler's beautiful German assistant, Hildegard Rein, who betrays Uzler after being seduced by Malone and falling in love with him. When Malone finally confronts Uzler with his true identity, the latter blows out his brains rather than be captured.

On the face of it, *Leçon d'abîme* is common detective novel fare – macho hero exposes the killer and gets the gorgeous woman along the way – and Manichean insofar as good once again triumphs over an evil Nazi con artist. But in reality Rio's novel is more ambiguous and unsettling than the simple plot structure and stereotypical characterization suggest. The novel plays with certain racial and racist stereotypes and character interactions that belie Malone's claim that there is an absolute moral distinction between the persecutors and their victims, that is Nazis and Jews. First, Judith herself is presented as the gorgeous but dangerous Jewish seductress who corrupts good Aryans like Uzler. Moreover, so overwhelming is her sexual power that she has already seduced and conducted an incestuous affair with her brother, which makes Klein, if not as politically culpable as Uzler, at least as morally corrupt. The fact that both Klein and Uzler have been Judith's lovers, and that Klein's body substitutes for Uzler at the moment of the latter's escape, treats Nazi persecutor and Jewish victim as interchangeable.

The conflation of persecutor and victim does not stop here. Klein's assistant and later Malone's lover turns out to be the spitting image of Judith. Not only are both blonde Aryan goddesses, but upon encountering Hildegard for the first time, Malone likens her to an Arno Breker statue of the ideal German and Aryan type. As Hildegard herself is fully aware, she has been hired precisely *because* she is a kind of twin or clone of Judith; that is, Hildegard is supposed to help keep Judith's memory alive and even physically present in her person.

But the conflation and fusion of identities – and the erasure of the distinction between persecutor and victim – goes further still. Part of Hildegard's job description requires that she – like Judith before her – be raped and brutalized nightly, this time by the brutish manservant Karl, while Uzler, now in the role of David Klein, watches and listens. And in one final twist, Uzler, in his final confrontation with Malone before taking his own life, makes it clear that he no longer considers himself to be simply Uzler: he has, he claims, absorbed David's identity into his own to the point of no longer really knowing who, or what, he is. The fusion of Nazi and Jew is now complete.

And what of Rio's hero, Francis Malone? The supposed lawgiver, the sovereign who determines the exception, demonstrates that he himself cannot stay outside this infernal circuit. Rather than merely seducing and dominating Hildegard in order to enact his plan, he finds (after she performs fellatio on him) that he too is unable to resist her. Malone is, in fact, subjugated by her at least as much as she is by him: '[Malone] la prit avec une sorte de fureur ambiguë, fureur érotique tournée vers elle et fureur mentale tournée contre lui-même, contre son incapacité à résister à une impérieuse manipulation par la suite à un désir dévorant' (Rio, 2003: 39). Later, in an attempt to locate incriminating documents, Malone agrees to hide in the basement and watch and listen helplessly as Hildegard is raped by Karl. In joining David and Uzler in the role of voyeur and indeed impotent spectator of the abject, Malone the lawgiver becomes morally indistinguishable from the Nazi persecutor and the Jewish victim. In so doing, he participates in the destruction of the fundamental moral distinction that he claims to uphold. Moreover, as Uzler ironically points out to Malone during their final confrontation, the same is true of Malone in his position as defender of the law. The former SS officer, as an ex-Nazi, congratulates Malone precisely for his extra-legal tactics and his willingness to use brutality and even murder to achieve his ends. Also, as an ex-Nazi, Uzler expresses his appreciation of Malone precisely as the embodiment of the ideal northern barbarian so admired by Nazi ideologues. Given his role in the novel, Malone emerges less as the sovereign defender of republican democracy with its laws and values than as an ambivalent participant in a perverse play of doubles that ultimately erases all moral, legal and even political distinctions.

In the troubling story told in *Leçon d'abîme*, then, it appears, in effect, that the novelist has lost control of his narrative and allowed the sexual obsessions that haunt his work generally, and afflict his police inspector hero in particular, to overwhelm, distort or simply cancel out any 'lesson' the novel purports to offer. Malone's credibility as moral agent and lawgiver is compromised by his own descent into forms of sexual excess and depravity. The result is, among other things, an evocation of the Holocaust, of perpetrators and victims, that smacks of the kind of revisionism and unhealthy fascination with Nazism that characterized the troubling *mode rétro* of the 1970s. In *Leçon d'abîme*, at least, Michel Rio's cognitive music ultimately discloses no new truths, but instead reveals the writer's own troubling fascination with and ultimate submission to the dangerous seductions of eroticism coupled with authoritarian politics.

In shifting our attention now to Houellebecq, we find that, broadly speaking, the situation is reversed. Rio wove philosophical and scientific discourses into a camped popular genre (detective fiction), but was blind to the reactionary vision sketched by his sexual imaginary and its proliferation of stereotyped doubles. In the case of Houellebecq, a right-wing agenda is flaunted in novels borrowing outmoded genres and disparaging poststructuralist thinkers like Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan (Houellebecq, 2003 [1998]: 314). Yet defenders like Dominique Noguez (2003) and Fernando Arrabal (2005) argue that his texts should not be taken at face value. The question thus is to discern whether the postmodern facets of these novels are mere surface effects, or if they do in fact invite a mitigating re-reading of his ideological content and poetics.

Given that Houellebecq's narrative practices scramble the message(s), Liesbeth Korthals Altes argues that *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998), for instance, cannot be deemed 'un roman à thèse postmoderne' because the genre requires an unambiguous thesis (Altes, 2004: 43). Altes notes, though, that the genre's archetype – realism – was generally torn between its complex descriptive renderings and the univocal argumentation of its thesis (Altes, 2004: 31). With Houellebecq, the same tension is at play but the problematic has shifted terrain: the content is clear (not disrupted by avant-garde techniques, for example) but his discursive strategies refract epistemological points of view throughout the novel (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 515). He has, however, indicated two global principles, each founding its own truth: scientific fact and method – because they affirm that certain objects 'ne relèvent pas de l'opinion' – and a Manichean morality – declared unique and universal.<sup>3</sup> Dion and Haghebaert thus conclude, 'le monologisme du roman à thèse est contrecarré par le dialogisme des diverses formes qui [y] cohabitent ... On obtient ainsi le paradoxe d'un roman à thèse ambigu, protéiforme, hybride' (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 520). For an era increasingly accustomed to postmodernism, this would seem to be a logical evolution for the novel of ideas.

In this respect, we can at least posit the grim *premise* driving his novels. A familiar refrain now among thinkers on the right and even occasionally the left, the claim holds that the humanist model of individualism acting in fusion with today's liberal capitalism forces us to pursue unrealizable desires. What were supposed to be widespread liberations in politics (after the Revolution), economics (the advent of industrialization and consumerism), intellectual life (the Enlightenment and its legacies), and sexuality (the emancipation of women and May '68) have only rewarded a few and reduced the

rest to misery. Houellebecq pushes this position to its extreme, arguing that this discrepancy has in turn produced forms of competition and self-interest that have dissolved social bonds to the point of no return. His conclusion: 'Nous sommes foutus' (Houellebecq, 1999 [1991–8]: 78). The only way out, he believes, is the dissolution of the ego and, by extension, the current social model, 'pour en finir avec le désir' (Metzidakis, 2003: 135). The task is complicated, however, not only by the all-pervasive nature of these phenomena but by the fact that the society of the spectacle that accompanies them recuperates most dissenting voices. New approaches must be devised if we are to break out of the current intellectual boundaries.

Rather than unpack these socio-historical arguments (they have been very ably elucidated elsewhere, most notably by Abecassis, 2000), we will focus on the latter issue. Concretely speaking, how do Houellebecq's discursive techniques function? Let us examine the first two chapters of *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (1994).

The epigraph is borrowed from the Bible (Romans 13: 12) and points indeed to moral considerations: 'La nuit est avancée, le jour approche. Dépouillons-nous donc des œuvres des ténèbres, et revêtons les armes de la lumière' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 5). The summons to embrace revealed truth appears ironic in light of what follows as we slip from *éthologie* to *éthylisme*. At an evening party (thus, 'les ténèbres') the narrator sees a co-worker humiliate herself with an ill-received striptease, overhears the feminist posturing of two more women colleagues (who justify with fake magnanimity a fourth female's choice of skimpy miniskirts), and then passes out in an alcohol-induced stupor. In the morning, the 'light of day' reveals only that he has vomited on the carpet.

Houellebecq's dislike for such gatherings was already outlined in 'La Fête' (Houellebecq, 1999 [1991–8]: 69–73), and things are no different here. Social rites of seduction have degenerated into sad imitations, with guests half-heartedly trying to prove their liberated sexuality (in disrobing, the first woman mimes the most kitsch of erotic acts while the other two trade bad-faith commonplaces to reassure themselves of their empowerment). Far from being aroused, the narrator has nothing but contempt for the dancer – dubbed 'une connasse' – and the duo – condemned as 'les deux boudins du service' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 5). These verbal rejections are doubled by the visceral one: orgasmic discharge gives way to a second mode of 'nocturnal emission'. A final element resolves any lingering doubt about the logic behind this implied psychosomatic transfer. While slumbering, the narrator has a dream: the two would-be feminists traipse down

a hallway doing a show-tune before yielding to the miniskirted colleague. On her shoulder is a parrot with the face of their boss. As the dream concludes, the woman pets the bird: '[Elle] lui caressait les plumes du ventre, d'une main négligente mais experte. En me réveillant, je me suis rendu compte que j'avais vomi sur la moquette' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 7). The sequential juxtaposition of the onanistic gesture with his illness reiterates the implied causality behind this peculiar oral ejaculation, a sort of phantasmatic aphanisis where disgust has displaced desire.<sup>4</sup>

In a mere three pages, we have encountered four distinct discourses, none of which fare well. The biblical exhortation is deflated by the Bukowskian anecdotes, the politically correct dialogue is presented as hypocrisy, a realist voice of omniscience is compromised by the drunken narrator's loss of consciousness, and the dream – in our opinion, at least – is discounted as parody with its overtly caricatured imagery (especially given the novel's hostility toward psychoanalysis).

From this ensemble of contradictions emerges, nonetheless, a thematic coherence. Regardless of the narrator's scorn for them, feminism and psychoanalysis are both discourses which seek to enable subjects to distinguish between unhealthy and gratifying desires. Similarly, it is worth consulting in the Bible the two verses (not cited by Houellebecq) which follow the epigraph:

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. (Romans 13: 13–14)

In a novel that calls for an end to desire and sexual rivalries, these lines perform precisely the work of an epigraph: they introduce the subject and suggest (albeit, cynically) the author's view.

The second chapter moves in a roundabout way onto the terrain of politics, philosophy and science. The morning after the party, the narrator is searching for his car in a Paris suburb. The streets enumerated – Marcel-Sembat, Marcel-Dassault, Émile-Landrin and Ferdinand-Buisson (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 8–9) – do in fact exist, and allow us to localize a realist setting.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, each names a figure of the Third Republic who contributed to causes that remain cornerstones of an idealized modern France. Léon Blum's mentor Sembat (1862–1922) promoted secularization and pacifism. Before earning a Nobel Peace Prize in 1927, radical socialist Buisson (1841–1932) helped secularize France's education system and rallied early to the

Dreyfusards. Landrin (1841–1914) defended workers' movements as a municipal councillor. Only Dassault strains the pattern (by age, profession and politics), but we surmise that he is cited as a model of successful 'assimilation'.<sup>6</sup> These four references tend to confirm the Marxist overtones of the novel's title and thus of moderate socialist sympathies *chez* Houellebecq. However, when the narrator, unable to locate his car, decides to claim that it has been stolen, it is just as likely that Houellebecq is insisting on a contrast between the republican vision (community-oriented socialism, secularization, pacifism, assimilation) that these figures incarnated and the embattled 'Hexagon' of today.<sup>7</sup> These paragraphs thus suggest a potentially more ideological slant, a hint at how the author sees French life under globalization.

Continuing with the chapter, the narrator finally returns home and presents excerpts from a work-in-progress called *Dialogues d'une vache et d'une pouliche*. Houellebecq has again veered from one genre (realism) to another, 'une fiction animalière', later qualified as a 'méditation éthique' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 9). A possible source for this pastiche is Aesop's Fable 84, 'The Ox and the Heifer'. After the biblical homily, then, a second pedagogical paradigm from Western civilization's earliest stages.

For the greater part of her existence, this Breton cow grazes happily and uneventfully. Her only vexation occurs when she is overcome by the urge to mate. Artificial insemination intervenes and calving occurs – 'tout bénéfice pour l'éleveur' – leaving unaddressed only 'certaines complications émotionnelles' for the cow (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 10). The narrative concludes with a comparison of the cow's lingering dissatisfaction to the filly's happy lot in life, granted 'la jouissance éternelle de nombreux étalons' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 11). The first chapter's preoccupations are thus simply translated into another context: the breeders (agricultural technology backed by modern capitalism) stifle the cow's desire which leads to distress (thereby disturbing the natural order).

Houellebecq disrupts his tale of animal husbandry by introducing yet another voice to discuss the repercussions of disappointed yearnings. The cow which previously only knew single-minded peacefulness is now agitated, anxious. 'Une étonnante révolution se produit dans son être' as she experiences internal division. A parody of a philosopher ensues: having observed the cow grazing, he falsely concludes that she enjoys 'une profonde unité existentielle, une identité à plus d'un titre enviable entre son être-au-monde et son être-en-soi' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 10–11). This is consistent with the Sartrean view – not named but the terminology is his – that animals

are without an 'être-pour-soi' and are therefore unified, contrary to humans who are irretrievably alienated (James, 2007: 9). Houellebecq, in fact, agrees on the latter two points: the Kantian *noumenon* is an illusion because human experience can never have access to an 'être-en-soi' (be it its own or another's; Houellebecq with Haan, 2004: 27). Houellebecq differs from Sartre with respect to the cow, however; had the philosopher consulted '[le] naturaliste', comments the narrator, he would have acquired proof that 'double est la nature de la vache bretonne' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 10).

What is Houellebecq up to? A couple of remarks are in order. First, Sartre represents here post-Enlightenment humanities thinkers – from philosophy, of course, but also history, political science and certain branches of psychology – who primarily perceive human life (in general) and human desire (in particular) in terms of choice and freedom. By not consulting the naturalist, the existentialist ignored 'l'inexorable fonctionnement de la programmation génétique'. Moreover, Houellebecq's fable implies that these mechanisms are the same as those of humankind: our Breton cow, for instance, emits groans in her altered state that recall 'parfois de manière stupéfiante certaines plaintes qui échappent aux fils de l'homme' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 10). In addition to thumbing his nose at human sexuality, he is arguing that nature (genetics) defines human desire much more than will or personality.

Based on this passage, then, ontologically, it is biology over metaphysics; methodologically, the hard sciences over the human sciences; and, literarily, naturalism over existentialism. Yet, if we look more closely, Houellebecq borrows the vocabulary of the former and *asserts* their superiority over the latter, but the methods and proofs themselves are absent. There is no demonstration that instinct and desire are the same entity, or that human and animal models are parallel. Like Diderot, Balzac and Zola before him, Houellebecq *wants* to import scientific concepts to prove his claims but in the end employs them typically as *analogies* that help decipher social or psychological phenomena.<sup>8</sup> In a direct replication of Zola's naturalist premise, Houellebecq's choice of terms acknowledges as much:

Mes romans ont en commun avec la méthode scientifique leur côté expérimental. Mes personnages sont un peu des expériences que je fais avec mon cerveau, il y en a qui marchent, qui se développent bien, et d'autres qui ne marchent pas. (Houellebecq with Sénécal, 2001: 32)

Thus, regardless of the veracity of the theories themselves, their literary, imaginative usage strips them of scientificity and casts them

into the realm of figurative language. In *Rester vivant*, for example, literary genres are said to undergo transformations in a manner 'tout à fait comparable à l'évolution animale' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 15). With the application of the Darwinian concept to an inappropriate object, the discourse metamorphoses from epistemological to aesthetic: 'Dans leur translation d'un domaine à l'autre, les notions scientifiques gagnent en charge métaphorique, en pouvoir évocateur et en résonance poétique ce qu'elles perdent en précision et en pertinence du strict point de vue de la science' (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 519).

In these two chapters opening Houellebecq's debut novel, we witness numerous forms of discourse, all purporting to speak with authority on desire. But just as the narrator is included in the generalized societal portrait of miserable failure, Houellebecq's constant mixing and parodying of codes ensures that no methodology or narrative mode rises above the others as a meta-discourse of truth: 'Il est impossible de réduire cet effet d'hétérogénéité en ayant recours à une seule explication' (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 521). In this sense, as Metzidakis notes in extrapolating one of Houellebecq's phrases, the internal organization of the chapters is far from haphazard, for 'the most difficult task he sets for himself is "intégrer les différents modes de discours"' (Metzidakis, 2003: 137). In the initial chapter, for example, the four discourses fall neatly into opposing pairs: biblical morality is countered by the new religion (in Houellebecq's eyes) of political correctness, while realism's quest to explain his generation's behaviour as environmentally determined butts up against the attempt by psychoanalysis to ground it in the unconscious. Eschewing linear argumentation, Houellebecq relies on this structure of 'paratactic relations' (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 520) for its mutually annulling effects in chapter two: by juxtaposing the cow fable with Sartrean metaphysics, he shows his *pêché mignon* for the future *filet mignon* to be just as ridiculous as the German-inflected ontological terms are cumbersome and pretentious.

This is not, however, the ludic play of language championed by Barthes and Derrida, or the fashioning of new tools from the remnants of old ones as in Lévi-Strauss's *bricolage*. Given Houellebecq's antipathy for the fetishization of 'textuality' in the last few decades, it is probably not by chance that at the centre of the novel is the death of Raphaël *Tisserand* – i.e. 'textile weaver'.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the author's 'techniques de brouillage' (Houellebecq, 1999 [1991–8]: 36) are closer to the *nouveau roman* – though once again with the strategy inverted. Whereas Alain Robbe-Grillet and Robert Pinget created single, monochromatic

narrative voices which could thus recuperate and deflate all meta-commentary within the confines of their fiction, Houellebecq achieves the same end by multiplying distinct voices that all counter and cancel each other out.

The effect is thus double, for it disallows any authoritative meta-discourse at the same time as it refuses the singularity of any one discourse (the step not taken by the New Novel). In these respects, Houellebecq is indeed a radically pessimistic postmodernist, but not for all that a nihilist. The use of a biblical citation to open the novel is perhaps more serious than it first appeared, for discourse in his handling would seem always to be about belief. In turning away from religion, modern thinkers aimed to replace it with reason and fact, but, in the end, could offer only new theories and orthodoxies. The postmodernist levelling of discourses, with its critiques of language as instrument and of the dependability of logic, means that we cannot trust any of them in an absolute manner. From this perspective, Houellebecq's proclivity for parodying discourses he seems to endorse makes more sense: 'Somme toute, l'utilisation de la science ... procède simultanément de la croyance et du doute' (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 518). No discourse has a monopoly on truth and no utterance will be entirely true; *but* many will contain potential parcels of truth, 'une connaissance relative, certaine, de précision compatibles avec l'étude des phénomènes, réelle et organisatrice' (Sartori, 2004: 147). This explains the peculiarity of his style; Houellebecq's comment on Lovecraft applies just as well to him: 'Au lieu de se placer comme observateur, comme narrateur, il utilise des témoignages convergents' (Houellebecq with Haan, 2004: 11–12).

Does this mean we cannot attribute the novel's reactionary views to Houellebecq? The 'n'adhérez à rien' from his poetic manifesto would seem to indicate so (Houellebecq, 1999 [1991–8]: 26). But if his postmodern approach skilfully destabilizes discourses of knowledge, his practice is quite different when it comes to political opinions. Regardless of the discourse employed or the character speaking, his texts express an unvarying and unambiguous stance on women, Islam, blacks, homosexuals, ecologists, Americans, etc. Furthermore, we have just established (above) that ironic formulations do not mean that he disavows the content, and indeed he defends the same positions in his interviews (most famously and scandalously, of course, in Houellebecq with Sénécal, 2001). Ultimately, we cannot say whether these are Houellebecq's profoundly held personal views or if he is just being cynically provocative, but we can state that these are what his writings assert.

It is in this respect that Houellebecq presents the paradoxical case of a postmodern reactionary. Like Baudelaire and Céline before him, his right-wing views co-exist unabashedly in a startling manner with a creative intelligence that pulls the rug out from under existent dogma, conservative and progressive, only to reveal an intellectual myopia of his own.

What do these studies enable us to conclude about Rio and Houellebecq? Our analyses confirm the presence of many of the post-modern traits: self-conscious irony, parodic recycling of genres, a broad spectrum of epistemological discourses, rejection of meta-narratives, and predilection for doubling and duplicity. Let us focus on this last element to perform a direct comparison of the two authors.

As we saw earlier, Rio's treatment of opposites – Jew and Nazi, victim and persecutor – as *doubles* ultimately portrays a perturbing relativism (in addition to a highly impolitic sexual imaginary that erases individual distinctions between women). There is, however, a long literary tradition behind one part of this: the ideal hero does not function without the ideal villain.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the device is not gratuitous: Rio has explained a purpose to this figurative technique, used both in the Arthurian cycle (with Merlin's sorceress sister Morgan) and in the Malone series (with Uzler). He rejects as dishonest the intellectual practice of creating 'straw' arguments that exist only to serve as an easy foil for the author's position. Thus, in the pursuit of his intellectual themes, Rio strives to put contradictory voices on an equal footing: 'C'est une dialectique permanente. Les livres sont en permanence des lieux de discours antagonistes valables. Une thèse ne se défend que si sa contradiction est absolument étayée' (Rio with Lanfranchi and Lebrun, 1999). Along the same lines, Houellebecq offers character pairings in his first two novels. Having felt that he failed to exploit to its fullest extent the duo of Tisserand and the narrator in *Extension*, he very deliberately developed Bruno and Michel as representatives of two epistemological lines in *Particules*: the former as a materialist living by a humanities (literature and sociology in particular) understanding of the world, the latter as a positivist trained in the hard sciences (Houellebecq with Argand, 1998: 28–9). The process maintains the same principles but shifts from synchronic to diachronic when *Particules* and *La Possibilité d'une île* clone their protagonists.

Upon closer examination, however, we see that the practices are not analogous. In Rio's Manichean *mise-en-abîme*, the hero does ultimately win out: the Nazi is defeated, good triumphs over evil, and the protagonist (identified with the author) reveals the soundness of his

methods. Houellebecq's Manichean model does just the opposite: that is, like Houellebecq's mutually annulling discourses, these characters do not constitute examples but, as Bruno Viard notes, 'counter-examples' (Viard, 2004: 130). Though Houellebecq may side intellectually (or sentimentally?) with science – Michel Djerzinski's research leads to successful eugenic cloning – both Bruno and Michel are doomed to dead-ends. There is, for Houellebecq, no human solution to the current socio-economic model.

Thus, the difference between the two authors is not simply a case of a lesser offence within misguided Manichean schemes (Rio is inattentive to the effects of stereotyping in popular genres but clearly designates the Nazis as evil, whereas Houellebecq thrives on provocation, as in his bratty preference for Pétain over de Gaulle as stated in Houellebecq with Sénécal (2001)). Rio is an elitist outsider who would, one gets the impression, participate willingly in the system *if it recognized his exceptionality* (e.g. he has no problem appearing on television if he is the only guest). Houellebecq, on the contrary, damns the entire system with a fairly convincing air of sincerity.

This probably accounts in no small part for their varied fortunes. Within a society of the spectacle that has taken the bite out of dissent as entertainment, it is extremely difficult to shake any of the foundations of its theatre. As Ruth Cruickshank astutely suggests, Dominick LaCapra's reading of the Houellebecq scandal: to provoke censure today, one must commit an 'ideological crime' (Cruickshank, 2003: 102–5). It does not suffice to contradict orthodoxies; Renaud Camus' flirtations with anti-Semitism offend, but remain completely within the parameters of well-worn stereotypes. Rio, covered by Uzler's ultimate defeat, disrupts even less.

This distinction also leads us to rethink where to situate these two authors. While Rio's writing contains facets of postmodernism, there is a strong case to be made for classifying it within *modernism's* right wing. His elitist views and Manichean approach lead him to construct the Other in terms of largely unreflected stereotypes. Houellebecq accepts postmodernism's view that the Other is by definition unknowable – but, as a reactionary, determines this Other 'therefore' to be a threat. Rio displays competing epistemological approaches, but, in grounding his project in the *tiércé* of history–biology–physics, he remains consistent with modernism by not challenging the hierarchy of intellectual values. This is not to fault his intelligence or training: as demonstrated by Margery Arent Safir's volume of critical essays, Rio's erudition and theoretical expertise is

legitimate and no doubt far superior to Houellebecq's (Safir, 1999 [1995]). This, ironically, is part of what separates them: Rio still invests in perfecting knowledge in these disciplines and thus pursues progress, while Houellebecq opts for prophetic eschatological tales that preclude any role for him within that progress. This is reflected in the fact that Rio's 'doubling' seeks to respect the competing discourses, whereas Houellebecq patterns his after Warhol and his postmodern practice of – the echo with the novel's science fiction preoccupations is intentional – 'clonage artistique' (Houellebecq, 1999 [1991–8]: 91). Finally, Rio focuses so intently on discourses of knowledge that he overlooks (or denies the existence of) the imaginary or phantasmatic aspects that are active in the composition of a work of fiction. Houellebecq, on the other hand, shows that he is well aware of such interpretive methods when he parodies the dream in chapter one. He responds with the cow fable's genetics lesson (i.e. desire springs from nature, not society or consciousness): that is, a reactionary gesture of trying to 're-naturalize' cultural phenomena (such as desire) that poststructuralism has been greatly vested in de-naturalizing.

Rio, in this light, is a practitioner of a French modernist novel whose intellectual content is too uncompromising to seduce a large readership and whose literary strategies are not subversive enough to put the critics on his side. Houellebecq, meanwhile, succeeds in pulling off the perfect hold-up: to contest the culture of the masses, one must first get their attention, and thus he produces increasingly cynical, consumable objects (e.g. *Plateforme*), generating sales at the same time as he denounces the forms used to do it (Dion and Haghebaert, 2001: 522). This means of 'extension of the terrain of the struggle' would no doubt startle Marx, but proves more effective than Rio's entangled forays into 'les jungles pensives'.

## Notes

1. Rio refuses to appear on television, establishing as his condition that he be the only guest (Argand, 2001: 13).
2. This is a key facet in the writings of Carl Schmitt, a German and later Nazi legal and political philosopher who endorsed authoritarian 'exceptionalism' as necessary to maintain democratic models.
3. This passage is worth consulting in its entirety: 'L'autre absolu auquel je crois, c'est la morale. Une morale unique et universelle qui ne dépend d'aucun facteur historique, économique, sociologique ou culturel. Le Bien et le Mal existent.' He further describes himself as completely Manichean (Houellebecq with Argand, 1998: 34).

4. It is a scenario central to Houellebecq's sexual imaginary, present in novel after novel. Keith Reader (2006) offers a Lacanian account of this dysfunction.
5. These references identify a grid of several blocks in Boulogne-Billancourt, south-west Paris. There is no rue Marcel-Sembat in this neighbourhood but the metro station between Marcel-Dassault and Émile-Landrin bears that name.
6. Marcel Bloch (1892–1986), a Jewish engineer and founder of the great aeronautics company, was deported to Buchenwald in 1944 and was only saved *in extremis* by two communists. After the war, he changed his name to Dassault, converted to Catholicism, and made annual donations to *L'Humanité* to honour the men who saved his life. Perhaps of equal relevance are streets *not* cited from this sector: the revolutionaries Georges Sorel and Édouard Vaillant; Victor Hugo; Generals Leclerc and Galliéri; and the crusher of the Commune, Thiers.
7. The narrator notes the plausibility of his fabrication: 'Beaucoup de voitures sont volées de nos jours, surtout en proche banlieue; l'anecdote serait aisément comprise et admise, aussi bien par la compagnie d'assurances que par mes collègues de bureau' (Houellebecq, 2007 [1994]: 9).
8. Though we cannot develop the issue here, this is especially true for the models borrowed from physics and information theory. In this respect, the practice is reminiscent of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), in which extended metaphors serve to integrate the scientific themes into the novelistic discourse (see Schaub, 1981).
9. In *Extension*, Houellebecq uses the real names of his former colleagues in most instances; 'Tisserand' is one of the few he invented (see Demonpion, 2005: 182–8).
10. In a sense, Conan Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Final Problem' (1893), in which Sherlock Holmes goes tumbling over the Reichenbach Falls locked in battle with his evil counterpart Professor Moriarty, is a modernization of the god versus devil pairing, but, also, as Michael Chabon (2004) demonstrates in his recent novel, eerily prescient of the Jewish tragedy.

## References

- Abecassis, J. I. (2000) 'The Eclipse of Desire: L'Affaire Houellebecq', *Modern Language Notes*, 115(4): 801–26.
- Altes, L. K. (2004) 'Persuasion et ambiguïté dans un roman à thèse postmoderne (*Les Particules élémentaires*)', in S. van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq*, pp. 29–46. Amsterdam: Rodopi/CRIN.
- Argand, C. (2001) 'Un ermite fasciné par la légende arthurienne', *Lire*, 292: 13.
- Arrabal, F. (2005) *Houellebecq*, trans. L. Arrabal. Paris: Le Cherche Midi.
- Benjamin, W. (1999 [1927–40]) *The Arcades Project*, ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cendrars, B. (1969 [1911]) *Inédits secrets, 1910–1935*. Paris: Le Club Français du Livre.

- Chabon, M. (2004) *The Final Solution: A Story of Detection*. New York: Fourth Estate.
- Cros, C. (2005) *Ci-gît Paris, ou L'impossibilité d'un monde*. Paris: Michalon.
- Cruikshank, R. (2003) 'L'Affaire Houellebecq: Ideological Crime and *fin de millénaire* Literary Scandal', *French Cultural Studies*, 14(1): 101–16.
- Demonpion, D. (2005) *Houellebecq non-autorisé. Enquête sur un phénomène*. Paris: Maren Sell.
- Dion, R. and Haghebaert, É. (2001) 'Le Cas de Michel Houellebecq et la dynamique des genres littéraires', *French Studies*, 55(4): 509–24.
- Foster, H. (ed.) (1983) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Post-Modern Culture*. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press.
- Gascoigne, D. J. (2002) 'Elucidating Uncertainties: Michel Rio and the Science of Fiction', *Nottingham French Studies*, 41(1): 19–27.
- Houellebecq, M. (1998) *Interventions*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Houellebecq, M. (1999 [1991–8]) *Rester vivant et autres textes*. Paris: Flammarion/Librio.
- Houellebecq, M. (2001) *Plateforme*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Houellebecq, M. (2003 [1998]) *Les Particules élémentaires*. Paris: Flammarion/J'ai Lu.
- Houellebecq, M. (2005) *La Possibilité d'une île*. Paris: Fayard.
- Houellebecq, M. (2007 [1994]) *Extension du domaine de la lutte*. Paris: Maurice Nadeau/J'ai Lu.
- Houellebecq, M. with C. Argand (1998) 'Entretien avec Michel Houellebecq', *Lire*, 268: 13.
- Houellebecq, M. with M. de Haan (2004) 'Entretien avec Michel Houellebecq', in S. van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq*, pp. 9–28. Amsterdam: Rodopi/CRIN.
- Houellebecq, M. with D. Sénécal (2001) 'Michel Houellebecq', *Lire*, 298: 28–36.
- James, S. P. (2007) 'Phenomenology and the Problem of Animal Minds', available at: [www.environmentalphilosophy.org/ISEEIAEPpapers/2007/James.pdf](http://www.environmentalphilosophy.org/ISEEIAEPpapers/2007/James.pdf):1–12.
- Metzidakis, S. (2003) 'Postmodern Neutralizing of Nineteenth-Century Imagery', *Nottingham French Studies*, 42(2): 128–41.
- Noguez, D. (2003) *Houellebecq, en fait*. Paris: Fayard.
- Ray, R. B. (1991) 'Postmodernism', in M. Coyle et al. (eds), *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, pp. 131–47. Detroit, MI: Gale Research.
- Reader, K. (2006) 'Abject Phalluses, Abject Penises: Serge Doubrovsky and Michel Houellebecq', in *The Abject Object: Avatars of the Phallus in Contemporary French Theory, Literature and Film*, pp. 87–134. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Redonnet, M. (1999) 'La Barbarie postmoderne', *Art Press*, 244: 59–64.
- Rio, M. (1982) *Mélancolie nord*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rio, M. (1985) *Les Jungles pensives*. Paris: Balland.
- Rio, M. (1991) *Faux pas*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rio, M. (1998) *La Mort (une enquête de Francis Malone)*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rio, M. (2003) *Leçon d'abîme (une enquête de Francis Malone)*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rio, M. (2004) *Sans songer à mal*. Paris: Fayard.

- Rio, M. with A. Gillain and M. Loufti (1994) 'Entretien avec Michel Rio', *French Review*, 67(5): 786–92.
- Rio, M. with F. Lanfranchi and J.-C. Lebrun (1999) 'Michel Rio ou écrire *Le Principe de l'incertitude*', *L'Humanité*, 16 September.
- Safir, M.A. (ed.) (1999 [1995]) *Melancholies of Knowledge: Literature in the Age of Science*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sartori, É. (2004) 'Michel Houellebecq, romancier positiviste', in S. van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq*, pp. 143–52. Amsterdam: Rodopi/CRIN.
- Schaub, T. H. (1981) *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Viard, B. (2004) 'Houellebecq du côté de Rousseau', in S. van Wesemael (ed.), *Michel Houellebecq*, pp. 127–42. Amsterdam: Rodopi/CRIN.

**Ralph Schoolcraft III** is Associate Professor of French at Texas A&M University. *Address for correspondence:* Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Cultures, Texas A&M University, TAMU 4215, College Station, TX 77843-4215, USA [*email:* rschoolcraft@tamu.edu]

**Richard J. Golsan** is Professor of French at Texas A&M University. *Address for correspondence:* Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Cultures, Texas A&M University, TAMU 4215, College Station, TX 77843-4215, USA [*email:* rjgolsan@tamu.edu]