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Whatever (Serpent's Tail Classics)

By Michel Houellebecq



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"This boy needs serious therapy. He may be beyond help."—*The Washington Post*

Just thirty, with a well-paid job, depression and no love life, the narrator and anti-hero par excellence of this grim, funny, and clever novel smokes four packs of cigarettes a day and writes weird animal stories in his spare time.

A painfully realistic portrayal of the vanishing freedom of a world governed by science and by the empty rituals of daily life.

Michel Houellebecq is a multi-award-winning French author. He currently lives in Spain.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The unnamed narrator of Houellebecq's novel is Marcuse's one-dimensional man. A single, 30-year-old computer engineer in Paris with no sex life, he suffers from a chronic passivity that, in Houellebecq's view, is characteristic of Generation X. He buys, but doesn't take joy in any of the things he possesses. He has acquaintances, but no friends. In his off hours he writes dialogues featuring an assortment of barnyard animals. When his company sends him and a colleague, Bernard, out to Rouen and La Roche-sur-Yon to consult on software, nothing much gets done. In Rouen he suffers from heart problems. Since Bernard visits him in the hospital, a bond develops between them. Bernard, cursed with a repulsive appearance and a horny disposition, makes obnoxious advances to every woman he sees and is predictably rejected. Sexual deprivation is the atmosphere in which these men exist. That both men see women only in terms of their sexual features makes their impotence even more pathetic. After breaking up with his last girlfriend two years ago, the narrator has withdrawn from the romantic arena. And yet he has developed an intricate and mean-spirited, if ill-defined, theory of sexual hierarchy. The loose narrative condenses to an action sequence when the narrator tries to get Bernard to murder a woman with a steak knife, but the incident is gratuitous. In the end, Houellebecq displays none of the novelist's eye for detail and, further, defaults on the development of a vital main character, who might have connected this series of threadbare incidents into an interesting social comment. (Jan.) FYI: A bestseller in France, this novel won the 1995 Prix Flore for best first novel. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

Houellebecq's deeply philosophical novel is about an alienated young man searching for happiness in the computer age. Bored with the world and too weary to try to adapt to the foibles of friends and coworkers, he retreats into himself, descending into depression while attempting to analyze the passions of the people around him. Houellebecq uses his nameless narrator as a vehicle for extended exploration into the meanings and manifestations of love and desire in human interactions. Ironically, as the narrator attempts to define love in increasingly abstract terms, he becomes less and less capable of experiencing that which he is so desperate to understand. Intelligent and well written, the short novel is a thought-provoking inspection of a generation's confusion about all things sexual. Houellebecq captures precisely the cynical disillusionment of disaffected youth. *Bonnie Johnston*

Review

Funny, terrifying and nauseating Independent The balance between philosophy and narrative detail is perfectly judged; the book slips down easily like a bad oyster. As is the nature of such things, it is grimly comic -- Nicholas Lezard Guardian Le grand fromage du jour The Face It could well turn out to be a cult here too ... astonishing Time Out Snappy, bite-sized, and often very funny. Is it European exhaustion? Is it the soul of man under late capitalism? Millennial gloom? Post-Christian despair? Is it the death of love? Whatever. But Houellebecq describes it perfectly Literary Review This boy needs serious therapy. He may be beyond help Washington Post The mischief-making enfant terrible of new-wave French fiction Independent Houellebecq captures precisely the cynical disillusionment of disaffected youth Booklist

Users Review

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