

***The History Man and Submission: The Figure and Role of the
Intellectual in times of crisis and the role of the female characters
in the novels' critique of the progressive male academic.***

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Introduction

I saw the university not as an innocent pastoral space but also a battleground of major ideas and ideologies which were shaping our times. It was a space in which people did discuss ideas, theoretical and aesthetic, contemplated literary and cultural theory, and experiences and responded to the large intellectual and social changes that have shaped our late twentieth-century world.

—Bradbury, “Campus Fictions.”

In recent years, in light of the global economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath plaguing the Western world, unemployment rates increasing and digitization and modern technologies shaping the job market, the humanities are being attacked as an unsustainable and sometimes unnecessary field of study, offering skills and knowledge that are irrelevant to the modern world and its needs. As a result, fewer funds are given to humanities faculties, the bulk of governmental research funding is granted to other disciplinary areas, and many humanities departments are being cut, as they are regarded as economic drains on their institutions, leading to an educational crisis. The financial crisis, and the educational crisis that derives from it are, nevertheless, not the first, or the only, crises pestering the West. The refugee crisis, the growth of religious fundamentalism and the accompanying Islamophobia, the rise of the extreme-Right in politics, the increase of nationalism and xenophobia, unfortunately all constitute distinct characteristics of the overall sense of crisis that typifies our times. It appears that the Western world is in a permanent state of crisis that is expressed with different manifestations. Precisely in such times, times of not only political and financial but also cultural change, it constitutes an oxymoron in my view to declare the humanities, the academic disciplines that study aspects of human culture, irrelevant. The value of the humanities especially in times of political change and crisis, along with the role of the intellectual or academic in society, are therefore currently objects of public debate.

Looking back at the 1960s and 1970s, a time of great social unrest and political movements in the West, we see that the figure of the intellectual/academic and his/her role were heated objects of debate, just like today. Through the years, intellectuals have been active voices in political debates, frequently assuming a public role, summoning the people and their peers to act and get involved in contemporary events. Because of their position and knowledge, intellectuals are expected to provide criticism on pressing matters and lead the way to improvement. But what happens when it is the intellectuals who need to be criticized? What happens when they are part of the problem rather than the ones with a solution? Maybe literature holds the key to these questions. Campus novels – that is, the novels situated in and around a university campus – date back to the early 1950s and the genre has been used as a means of critique towards academics and the institution of academia itself. This genre constitutes a fruitful ground for the figure of the intellectual/academic to be staged and examined, since authors treat the figure of the academic as the object of their fiction, and often choose the genre in order to cast their critique of the academic institution. Thus, for my Master's thesis, I decided to choose two academic novels that both stage figures of the academic in times of (political and social) unrest and crisis, to investigate how the figure of the intellectual is depicted according to each novel's context of crisis: Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man*, published in 1975, and Michel Houellebecq's recent novel *Submission*, published in 2015.

The intellectual as a public figure.

In order to better discuss the ways these two novels represent academics, it is necessary to show how the figure of the academic/intellectual is cast by prominent voices in this ongoing debate. American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky has been one of the most prominent ones. In 1967, triggered by the politics of the U.S and the Vietnam War, Chomsky expressed his own idea of the 'Public Intellectual' in his well-known article "The Responsibility of Intellectuals", arguing that intellectuals ought to have a public

role within society. This article constitutes an attack on the mentality and culture of intellectuals in the United States, which, according to Chomsky was problematically subservient to power and authority. Chomsky believed that every single member of society “has responsibility for the actions that they are involved in and the consequences of those actions” in accordance with the perception of man as an autonomous subject. According to this conception of the subject there is no such thing as fate; people are responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions, forming thusly their good or bad fate. Chomsky extends this insight to intellectuals and their responsibility and role, arguing that greater knowledge and sources comes with greater responsibility. When talking about himself getting involved in the anti-war movement he states that “the academic life offers opportunities, in training and experience that can be put to use in circumstances like these”. For Chomsky, intellectuals have the power to exercise pressure on important public matters and to guide the people towards the most beneficial direction as far as the greater good is concerned. Chomsky criticizes intellectuals in the Western world for having given up their interest in converting ideas into social levers for the radical transformation of society since, as he says, we have achieved the pluralistic society of the Welfare State, and thus they see no further need for a radical transformation of society. Intellectuals should always remember that they are in a position to expose any possible lies from the part of the government, and to analyze actions according to their true cause and motives; they have the task to “seek the truth lying hidden behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation, ideology and class interest through which the events of current history are presented to us” (Chomsky, n.pag.).

Another leading intellectual was Edward W. Said who acted politically to counter the stereotyped representations of Arabs in the American media during the Arab-Israeli War. In the 1970s he openly criticized the West in his seminal study *Orientalism* for the prejudiced stereotypes of the Middle East and the Orient it had

historically constructed. In 2003, shortly before his death, he criticized the U.S for the Iraq invasion. Said, in his Reith lectures for the BBC in 1993, included in his book *Representations of the Intellectual*, provides his own definition of what constitutes an intellectual and what his/her responsibility and role should be in modern society. What constitutes an intellectual, for Said, is the vocation for the art of representing, and the will to commit to this vocation regardless of the means of communication. Thus, an intellectual is a “representative figure that matters – someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers” (Said, 12). For Said, the intellectual has an edgy role within society and is “someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, confronting orthodoxy and dogma rather than producing them” (11). He is rather critical towards those who surrender and become servants to power and authority and who support the preservation of the status quo. He argues that the main principle of the intellectual must be “never solidarity before criticism” (Said, 32). Said concludes that the intellectual is “someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating affirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do” (23). This mission often means standing outside of society and its institutions and actively disturbing the status quo.

Moving towards a more contemporary setting, several academics today ponder their role in society in the context of the asserted crisis in the humanities and the consequent educational crisis in the West. Wendy Brown in her book, *Undoing the Demos* (2015), explores the ways that neoliberalism, a form of reasoning that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms, is undoing basic elements of democracy. Brown argues that neoliberalism poses a threat to democracy in the modern Western world. According to Brown the omnipresent neoliberal mentality “disseminates market values and metrics to every sphere of life and construes the human itself exclusively as

homo economicus” (176). In other words, neoliberalism is not just an economic model, concerning markets and money, but instead has turned into a political and governing rationality to the point where it formulates humans themselves. Economic growth, competitiveness and capital accumulation seem to have become the sole purpose of the state. Accordingly, the focus of education has shifted to human capital development. “Public goods of any kind are increasingly difficult to speak of or to secure” (Brown, 176). When a neoliberal mentality is manifest in all aspects of human life, along with its accompanying competitiveness, the value of public goods and services is doubted by citizens who now identify as investors and consumers rather than sharing members of a democratic state. People no longer make life choices based on their ideology, preferences and interest. Instead they are restricted to self-invest in ways that constitute them more profitable. They no longer seek knowledge for “intelligent democratic citizenship” but merely for all sorts of capital enhancement purposes (177). Democracy itself, Brown argues, has been radically changed due to this distribution of neoliberal rationality to every domain and, as a result, “democracies are conceived as requiring technically skilled human capital, not educated participants in public life and common rule” (177). As Brown explains, this fixation to profit and this mentality of competitiveness and privatization, imperils democracy.

A few years before Brown, Martha C. Nussbaum in her book *Not for Profit*, published in 2010, expressed her own concerns regarding the fate of democracy in Western societies. In her book, Nussbaum draws attention to what she sees as a severe “silent” crisis that Western societies are going through; a global educational crisis. According to Nussbaum, the focus, when it comes to education, has drastically shifted and the humanities are less and less valued. This fact, in her opinion, poses a threat to democracy. We witness that the priority of educational institutions is to create specialists for technocratic professions, as opposed to creating citizens with independent, critical and innovative thought. She traces the source of this problem to social and economic

trends and the insatiable will for economic gain, courtesy of global capitalism. The above, is expressed in educational policies and practices. As Nussbaum explains, in search of profit, nations and their educational systems are carelessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. “If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements. The future of the world’s democracies hangs in the balance” (2). As Nussbaum explains, with the financial crisis of 2008, economic growth has become the world leaders’ top priority and, based on this “profit motive”, they consider science and technology as crucial means to a healthy economy. Nussbaum isn’t against scientific and technological education or advancement, but underlines the risk lurking in the neglect of an arts and humanities education for the sake of promoting more economically beneficial fields. According to Nussbaum, the humanities are crucial throughout the educational journey of a person, since they are associated with abilities vital to the health of democracies and the creation of a decent world culture; “the ability to think critically, the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a citizen of the world as well as the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person” (7). It is rendered clear throughout the book that an education that promotes profit is not to be condemned so long as there is room left for an education that promotes good citizenship. For Nussbaum, no system of education can be considered a good one if it works for the benefit of the wealthy elites and underestimates cultivated skills that the humanities have to offer.

The ethical value of an arts and humanities education is also stressed by Peter Brooks in his recently published edited volume entitled *The Humanities and Public Life* (2014). His motivation was the publication of the *Torture Memos*, documents released by the U.S Justice Department in 2002, which “presented arguments that justified the use of torture by the most twisted, ingenious, perverse, and unethical interpretation of

legal texts” (Brooks, 2). With that in mind, Brooks investigates the relationship between close reading and ethics, and whether the attentive sort of reading practiced in the interpretive humanities bears any weight in forming an ethical attitude and point of view. He acknowledges that teaching in the humanities nowadays, especially in American culture, appears to many as a disempowered profession with reduced status; “the whole enterprise, we are told, may be a waste of time, money and national commitment” (2). According to Brooks, the focus has shifted and in this context “the humanities are made to appear a kind of zombie wandering in a world that should be producing technocrats and entrepreneurs” (2). Yet, he argues, training in the ability to critically read the messages that society, politics and culture impose on us is probably more needed than ever in a world in which “the manipulation of minds and hearts is more and more what running the world is all about” (2). Brooks argues that the humanities can foster a commitment to ethical reading, an understanding of a subject from a moral point of view, since the practice of reading itself, pursued with care and attention to language, its contexts, implications, uncertainties, can be, for Brooks, itself an ethical act. This commitment to an “ethical reading” is a skill taught through the humanities but can be translated to other sciences that shape our world such as medicine and computer science. Thus, the contribution of the humanities to the growth of a translational, interdisciplinary public sphere can be crucial. This is why, according to Brooks, the close reading practiced in the humanities ought to be an exportable commodity to other fields, and it should take its place in public life (2).

All the aforementioned academics, along with many others, understood the imperative need for intellectuals to assume a public role and become politically active, especially in times of crisis and political and social change. From Chomsky’s call for political activism in the 1960s to Brook’s concern about neglecting the humanities, all these accounts, despite their differences, project a rather idealistic view of the intellectual/academic, as a figure with agency in society. The intellectual is envisioned

as a powerful public figure, capable of ameliorating the world. All the above accounts reflect views on academia and the role of intellectuals as expressed by practitioners of the humanities themselves. However, as stated, the purpose of this paper is to explore how literary works – that are often the objects of academics’ research – cast the figure of the academic/intellectual. In literature, the figure of the intellectual/academic does not always chime with the previously delineated idealistic presentation by theorists. The genre of campus novels, also known as academic novels, has often glorified academia, but in its more satirical trends has also time and again taken issue with an idealist view of academics and their role in society. As Ian Carter states in *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-War Years*, “the academic novel proffers through its satiric depiction of the institutional states of malaise inherent in its fictive representations of contemporary universities – a means for both implicitly and explicitly advocating positive value systems” (277).

As mentioned, in this thesis, I will be focusing on Bradbury’s novel *The History Man* and Houellebecq’s novel *Submission*. Both protagonists of the novels, Dr. Howard Kirk and François, are Western academics and university professors in the humanities; both find themselves in times of drastic political and cultural change and with academia in crisis. The way these academics are depicted in the novels, problematizes the idealistic image of the intellectual that I previously delineated through a number of prominent theorists. The novels respectively adopt a critical and disillusioned view on the matter and they both unmask the contradictions and hypocrisies involved in liberal emancipatory politics as they have taken shape in progressive academia in the 1970s and in its contemporary version. The novels also share a rather pessimistic outlook on the future of the humanities, despite the fact that they are situated in diametrically opposed social/political contexts and conditions. *The History Man* is situated in the midst of the emancipatory politics of the ‘60s and ‘70s, in the wake of feminism and sexual revolution whereas, *Submission*, takes place in a dystopian world in the near future

(2022). In this dystopia, a Muslim political party gains power in France with tremendous consequences, among which the rise of conservatism and patriarchy not only in society but also in academia. This difference in context affects the figure of the intellectual, since *The History Man* takes place in a time where the academic/intellectual is regarded as a strong, powerful figure, whereas in *Submission* the academic represents disillusionment and decay. As a result, Howard Kirk and François, constitute two very different figures of the academic. These elements make the two novels fertile ground for comparison. The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to explore the role of the intellectual in times of crisis in relation to the emancipatory politics in academia, as depicted in the novels. It will also explore the role of the female characters in the novels' complex critique of the progressive intellectual.

Chapter I: The figure of the intellectual as constructed in *The History Man* and *Submission*.

In this chapter, I intend to focus on the protagonists of the novels, to examine how the figure of the male academic is presented in the specific context of crisis of each novel, and what their assumed role is. Furthermore, I will explore whether there are other types of intellectuals/academics presented in the novels, what their relationship seems to be with the protagonists and how they help us understand the main characters better. Based on my delineation, I will then attempt to discover what stance *The History Man* and *Submission* take regarding the figure and role of the intellectual, and in relation to their main characters. In other words, I will try to discover whether literature, in this case, satirizes and criticizes its main characters and the type of intellectual they represent, or whether it glorifies them and considers them a role-model in each situation of crisis. Based on my analysis, I will also try to find out how these two novels envision the future of academia.

An intellectual named Howard Kirk.

I thought, if that man only really knew himself. He thinks he's free. He talks about liberation, openness, all the time. And what is he? An institutional man. That stuffy job he does. That stuffy desk he sits at. That stuffy academic manner he has, that he thinks is so equal, so matey. He hasn't started on himself yet. He's in a mess of inconsistencies.

– Bradbury Malcolm, *The History Man*

Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* is a satiric novel that belongs to the campus fiction of the seventies and that takes place at the University of Watermouth, an invention of the author. According to his article, "Campus Fictions" in which he lays out

the rationale for writing *The History Man*, Bradbury felt the need to write a book about the clash between disinterested liberal values and the emancipatory politics of the 1960s, the conflict between the ideology behind the political approaches introduced in academic curricula and how they took shape in academic practice. As previously stated, campus fiction often aims to present the complex and contradictory portrait of Academia and the power relationships that rule it. The microcosm of a university campus constitutes an ideal starting point for an author to criticize the dominant culture and the political and societal situation of his/her times. Bradbury, in "Campus Fictions", attributes the dissemination of the genre to the fact that in the '60s and '70s, universities were playing a large part in the social changes taking place and the general formation of culture (52). Bradbury, in his *History Man* uses a fictitious university to point out and criticize the problems of the institution at that time, focusing on the academic environment and its conflicts. Through fiction, he has the opportunity to deal with human behavior, with its contradictions and hypocrisies, and explore the figure and the role of the academic in times of radical social change.

The novel starts in medias res, and we are informed that "it is the autumn again" and "the people are all coming back" and thus we are quickly aware that a new academic year is about to start. The narration is made by a third-person narrator who is not a character in the novel and thus conveys the story without being involved in it. From the very beginning, the narrator presents the Kirks as a well-known couple that always has a party at this time of the year. Dr. Howard Kirk is a lecturer of sociology in his thirties. He is married to Barbara and thus they are "the Kirks". Through a flashback we get to know more about the Kirks' background. Brought up in the North of England, our protagonist, Howard, walked up the social ladder in a class-conscious society through his education. Despite his working-class origins, he managed to work for a new educational institution, founded after the war, the University of Watermouth, in the south of Leeds. We are also informed that the Kirks' background was one of "vestigial

Christianity and inherited social deference” and they both came from “well-conducted and more or less puritanical homes” (Bradbury, 25). Nevertheless, Howard alienated himself from his prudish upbringing, and we see that with great energy and grit, he patterns his personal and academic life after the liberating sociology of the 1960s.

The ‘60s was the decade when student activism became really important in British universities and the era, in general, is associated with a complex of cultural and political trends around the globe such as the anti-war movement, triggered by the Vietnam War, the blooming of feminism, the sexual revolution and the use of recreational drugs. The social movements and sexual revolution of the 1960s up to the 1970s, which challenged established norms, can be well traced in Bradbury’s novel; the marriage of Howard Kirk is the epitome of sexual liberation. The Kirks have anything but a conventional wedlock. Howard and his wife, Barbara, are “experimental people, intimates with change and liberation and history, and they are always busy and always going” (Bradbury 1975, 5) After Barbara cheated on Howard, they both started having small affairs and solemnly embracing the revolutionary movement of the time. They condemn monogamy and start bedding colleagues, colleagues’ spouses and students. They come to realize that by getting married they had “committed themselves to an institution which, as Howard nowadays explains, is society’s technique for permanentizing the inherent contingency of relationships, in the interest of political stability”; an institution which no longer expresses them.

What we were doing...was trapping each other in fixed personality roles. We couldn’t permit personal adventure, personal growth. That would have been disaster. We couldn’t let any new possibilities develop, could we kid? And that’s how people murder each other in slow motion. We weren’t adult (Bradbury, 24).

The narration, as already mentioned, occurs in the third-person, and consistently in the present tense. The only exception is when the narrator tells us about the Kirks' history; then he switches to past tense. For the Kirks are "new people" and so is their marriage. Howard Kirk is the main focalizer, which means that the narrator usually appears to reproduce Howard's vision on the world. In the above passage, Howard himself takes the word speaking to a third party about his marriage. His and Barbara's attitudes towards marriage, as he describes them in this quote, are in the past tense, because now everything is different. The narrator keeps referring to Howard and Barbara as "the Kirks" which as a term implies a strong partnership, a unit. That is how everyone regards this 'well-known couple', and the narrator reports that. For example, when Myra Beamish wants to abandon her husband, Henry, because she "wants the chance to exist" and "assert her identity", she also reaches out to "the Kirks" (Bradbury, 80). In her conversation with Howard and Barbara she characteristically states: "But, God, I need help. And I knew just who to come to. I thought, the Kirks" (Bradbury, 80). This strikes us as surprising, and there is room to doubt whether the Kirks are such an ideal couple. Howard describes their marriage in positive terms but Barbara doesn't seem to embrace his views. What Howard considers "being adult" tires Barbara. She states clearly that she is sad and tired by "the Kirks swinging scene" and from the beginning of the novel we see her fighting with her husband, making Howard's statements sound hypocritical. Frequent comments from the narrator point to the same direction, when he uses conflicting terms to describe their situation ("together and separately", "a settled, but not an absurdly settled, couple").

Even though the narrator often seems to reproduce Howard's vision through free indirect speech, there is enough room left for ironical comments that reveal another reality. Both Howard and Barbara have affairs, and Howard finds this healthy, whereas Barbara finds it tiring. Howard takes pride in how they don't "trap each other in fixed

personality roles” but at the same time we find out that “as for Barbara, she became, of course, a housewife, or rather, as she puts it, a flatwife” (22). All these facts point towards the direction that Howard isn’t as revolutionary as he likes to think. He is pleading for emancipatory politics while at the same time he is being oppressive and authoritative towards his wife, who, as we understand, is forced to have a marriage that doesn’t seem to express her. It is thus suggested that “the Kirks” is an unjustified label given to Howard and Barbara, and a rather ironic one, since they are hardly a unit; one of them is self-consciously deconstructing traditional social patterns and the other one resents him for that.

Based on the way things are presented from the beginning of the narration it seems like Howard has made it his life’s ambition to represent the unconventional type and live a ground-breaking life, in other words incarnate the cultural revolution of his time. He criticizes the status quo, writing books attacking the corrupt mentality of the bourgeoisie, against capitalism and social conventions. In a sense, Howard appears to be reproducing Said’s view of the intellectual’s role, “confronting orthodoxy and dogma” and to be “a representative figure that matters” (11-12). He does not cease to apply this ‘new religion’ of his as well to the classroom, the department meetings and overall to the campus activities. The Kirks’ radicalism is also evident in their choice of residence. When they first moved to Watermouth they were shocked by how “bourgeois” the Beamishes had become; they had a property in the countryside in an area that, according to Henry, was nice so he thought he’d suggest it to Howard. But Howard didn’t want that, he wanted “nothing nice” claiming he doesn’t come from a nice place and so he doesn’t “accept its existence politically” (Bradbury, 43). In his attempt to find something ‘not nice’, Howard ends up in an empty old house, full of drunks and addicts. Barbara finds it a “good scene” and Howard likes the fact that “you couldn’t really call it a property” so they decide to “squat in it” (Bradbury, 45). They started fixing it

themselves, this “debris of a good address” until they turned it into a nice, two-story house, with a terrace and a nice view, suitable for parties. As the narrator comments:

What had started as a simple attempt to make space liveable in gradually turned into something stylish, attractive, but that was all right; it still remained for them an informal camp site, a pleasant but also a completely uncommitting and unshaped environment through which they could move on and do their thing (Bradbury, 47).

The irony, in this passage, is evident, as the narrator comments a bit earlier that the Kirks ended up with “an unproperty like property after all” (45). The hypocrisy from Howard’s part, when he was criticizing Henry for becoming bourgeois and liking property is unmasked, and Dr. Kirk’s true mentality is revealed: it is “all right” for him to have property, to contradict himself with his actions, so long as he can dress it up with radical motives. Howard doesn’t care about the essence but about maintaining the appearances, and if he can seem radical while also having a big property, that’s “all right” (47). His actions only seemingly align with the idealistic image of the politically engaged intellectual that Said had.

We see Howard in a conversation with Myra Beamish smugly describing his new book *The Death of Privacy*: “you see, sociological and psychological understanding is now giving us a total view of man and democratic society is giving us total access to everything. There is nothing that’s not confrontable ... we’re all nude and available” (Bradbury, 75). Myra panics and asks if there is “no me anymore” to which Howard knowledgably responds saying that “you’re there... but you happen to be a conjunction of known variables cultural, psychological, genetic” (75). We see him giving similar

'profound' and 'insightful' answers to his wife, too. When Barbara accuses him of lack of character, Howard starts explaining to her how he defines a person:

How do you define a person? Except in a socio-psychological context. A peculiar type of relationship to the temporal and historical process, culturally conditioned and afforded; that's what human nature is. A particular performance within the available role-sets. But with the capacity to innovate through manipulating options among the role sets (Bradbury, 35).

He maintains the same attitude when it comes to teaching. Dr. Kirk doesn't cease to criticize his fellow peers for their lack of capability to transform, break free from the chains of traditional and obsolete social conventions, and adapt to the changes of the era. We see Dr. Kirk entering the room and asking the students to remove all tables to the corridor and form a circle with their chairs instead in order to "improve interaction". He comments on the structure of the furniture, saying: "I'm afraid this is what Goffman would call a bad eye-to-eye ecological huddle" (Bradbury, 137). It is clear that Howard speaks with clichés, as if he has memorized by heart bits of his sociology books, in an attempt to sound knowledgeable and radical. These scenes, with Howard sounding more like a textbook than a human being, constitute a parody of sociological jargon, and a parody of radicals like Howard, who, by appearances, have the knowledge, but are not able to fully comprehend it, let alone apply it. He claims to be able to solve any problem with "a bit of Marx, a bit of Freud and a bit of social history", a catchphrase in the novel mentioned by Howard himself, other characters in the form of dialogue or by the narrator, in an attempt to satirize the knowledge Howard

claims to have on these subjects, and the fact that it is his default response to any problem posed to him.

This repetition is rather ironic, enforcing the sense that the protagonist uses these words as catchphrases without necessarily being knowledgeable about the theories these thinkers advanced. For someone who repeatedly claims that he can explain the world and human behaviour based on these subjects, he shows no proof of being able to apply them to events in the novel. For example, when Henry Beamish has a serious accident in one of Howard's parties, Howard simply attributes the incident to the fact that he is not radical enough and to his mundane personality. We see him discussing what happened with Flora and in direct dialogue he says:

I saw him falsify himself, says Howard. It wasn't a wise marriage. Myra was his social superior, she had all the bourgeois ambitions; and this was in the fifties, when everyone wanted to have it so good. Before he knew where he was he was into goods and chattels. He stopped thinking, he got caught up in this fancy, pseudo-bourgeois rural lifestyle, he lost his social conscience. He became repressed and a repressor. As Marx says, the more you have, the less you are (Bradbury, 128).

We know from the narrative that Myra Beamish had confessed to the Kirks that she wanted to abandon her husband and that she came to their party-the same one where Henry was taken to the hospital after punching a window- with another man. It is thus surprising for someone who claims to understand human psychology to attribute the incident to "loss of social conscience" (128) rather than jealousy or cry for attention. Henry's relationship with Howard is very significant in the novel, because they represent

two antithetical figures of that time. From the very beginning, when the Kirks first moved to Watermouth, we see the two old friends arguing about how Henry has become “bourgeois”. Henry back then had explained to Howard that he simply wants to live and let live, that he is “trying to give [his] life a little dignity without robbing anyone else of theirs. [He is] trying to define an intelligent, liveable, unharmed culture” something that Howard, in his turn, attributes to “evasive quietism” (Bradbury, 43). This is the first time we see anyone in the novel expressing disagreement with Howard. The second time is when Howard reveals to Henry that his wife, Myra, intended to leave him and Henry makes it clear that he doesn’t want to discuss the matter with him; their opinions regarding the institution of marriage are too different. Henry states that he simply doesn’t believe in his friend’s radical solutions. When Howard pushes, Henry responds indignantly:

“God ...the Kirk consultancy parlour. I’m out of all that now. I had enough of it in Leeds. I’ve stopped wanting to stand up and forge history with my penis. And I’m rather sick of the great secular dominion of liberation and equality we were on about then, which reduces, when you think about it, to putting system over people and producing large piles of corpses. I think Ireland’s really done the trick for me, turned me sour on all those words like “anti-fascism” and “anti-imperialism” we always used. I don’t want to blame anybody now, or take anything off anyone. The only thing that matters for me is attachment to other knowable people, and the gentleness of relationship” (Bradbury, 185).

Henry in this passage talks about his values. He condemns violence and is longing for a peaceful, respectful life. His statement strikes us as admirable in its

bluntness, especially since it is addressed to Howard, who has his way of making people see the world from his point of view. Considering the full image of Henry though, not much is left to be admired. Originally, the Beamishes were poor until Myra inherited some money and were now “settled, outside Watermouth, an architect-converted farmhouse where they were deep into a world of Tolstoyan pastoral” (Bradbury, 40-41). In other words, Henry had become complacent and, in this case, deserves Howard’s accusation of “evasive quietism”. According to Linda Lois Elphick’s dissertation *A World without Real Deliverances*, Henry, even though he is a sociologist, completely ignores the fact that his “pastoral comforts are based on economic privilege while at the same time he has retreated from any political involvement” (209). Henry rushes every day after class to his “pseudo-Victorian pub” and then, after a few pints, rushes off home to the countryside, to attend to what he calls “property”. His gravest mistake ever, as Howard tells Flora, is that he “falsified himself” (Bradbury, 128). To his passionate speech about wanting to live and let live, Howard responds by saying that that’s what everyone wants, that everyone wants “sweetness and light and plenty of Mozart” but life fails us. As Howard says, “we can’t have it, and you can hardly sit back and rest on your own record. If that’s life, Henry, you’re not very good at it are you?” (Bradbury, 185). Henry agrees. He admits he is “stuck” and that he doesn’t “want to become grist to the historical mill” (185). But, thanks to Howard, that’s exactly what he will become.

As Howard says, he likes to “make history happen” to “put some order into chaos” (Bradbury, 58). Bradbury also confirms this when he writes that Howard “plots in a plotless world, hoping to serve the radical plot of history” (qtd. in Elphick, 249). Shortly after their conversation, Henry falls victim to Howard’s obsession for making history happen. As the plot evolves, Howard systematically spreads a rumor that a Professor Mangel is to visit the university. Mangel is a liberal geneticist whose academic discipline marks him out as a fascist in Dr. Kirk’s eyes. Howard plants the rumor of Mangel’s visit, causing tension between students and professors who are clueless when

it comes to Mangel's work. Mangel "the geneticist", "the racist" (Bradbury, 63), doesn't make it to the speech; he dies shortly before, so he doesn't witness the riots in the university by those protesting against his visit. Henry Beamish, though, who was supposed to introduce him, gets injured by the startled crowd. This non-event is completely set-up by Howard and once again we see how much he needs tension, to make things happen. Thus, it becomes clear how Howard manipulates the societal changes of the 1960s to his personal and professional advantage. So, Henry becomes Howard's victim, just like Mangel would have become if he had made it to the campus.

George Carmody becomes Howard's next victim, in the Professor's attempt to establish his power on campus. For Howard, this student is a "kind of historical offense" (Bradbury, 140). Carmody doesn't sympathize with Howard's leftist agenda and because of that he is constantly failing on his sociology course. At a private meeting, Carmody talks to Dr. Kirk about his beliefs and how they regard sociology in a different way, and suggests that they agree to disagree, asking Howard to give him a chance to exist too. "You can (exist), says Howard, if you're capable of changing. Of learning some human sympathy. Some contact with others. Some concern, some sociology" (Bradbury, 148). In the end, we find out that George Carmody fails the course and misses the chance to obtain his diploma, whereas Dr. Kirk comes out of the whole scandal intact. The irony, once again, is clear. In his dialogue with Carmody, we see Howard asking him to conform to his radicalism as an expression of human sympathy. Only he fails to show human sympathy himself by not accepting a different opinion, and by depriving someone who doesn't comply with his beliefs from his education. As such contradictions gradually accumulate in the process of the narrative we realize that the narration has been full of irony from the very beginning when Dr. Kirk was introduced to us.

Howard is a sociologist, a radical sociologist, a small, bright, intense, active man, of whom you are likely to have heard of, for he is much heard of...His course on Revolutions is a famous keystone, just as are, in a different way, his interventions in community relations, his part in the life of the town. For Howard is a well known activist, a thorn in the flesh of the council, a terror to the selfish-bourgeoisie, a pressing agent in the Claimants' Union, a focus of responsibility and concern (Bradbury, 3).

By the end of the novel, and even though it is never explicitly said, we understand that his seminars and professed views, along with his every action, are just the means to his own personal and professional self-realization. Referring to the title of the book, Howard Kirk as the "History Man" spends a good amount of time desperately trying to make things and history happen, without seeming to bear in mind the potential consequences. Nowhere in the narrative, do we see Howard showing the "responsibility" or "concern" the narrator refers to in the above quote (and that is customarily attached to the figure of the academic-intellectual that we previously saw); not towards his friends, his students, his colleagues not even towards his wife, Barbara. Thus, we understand that the narrative has been ironic all along. The narrator never has to spell out the hypocrisies or contrasts concerning Howard. The seemingly objective presentation of the facts is actually double-layered, leading us to understand who the character really is, his personality and his true motives. The narrator makes sure that the original description of Howard Kirk is annulled and by the end it is made clear how irony was used during the entire narration in order to reveal the flaws of a character that is presented as a representative figure of the academic of that era. To quote Bradbury, "Howard Kirk, the radical as opportunist, the reader of history as the urgent now, is desperately trying to keep the embers of apocalypse aflame, one kind of history man" (Bradbury 1990, 53). The novel condemns the radical self-serving academic as a figure that emerged during

the 1960s revolution. At the same time, this doesn't mean that the novel suggests a return to a past vision of the intellectual/academic. Henry Beamish represents the liberal humanist, the dominant figure of the academic before the revolution of the 1960s. Even though his values and dislike for violence make him sympathetic to the reader, in the end as a character, he too fails us. Despite his good intentions he is too weak to stand up to Howard and resorts to privatism, which is not the answer. In the end, we are left with the impression that none of the figures of the intellectual depicted are convincing enough to win our trust and approval.

François: an academic of our times.

For a long time France, like all the other countries of Western Europe, had been drifting towards civil war. That much was obvious. But until a few days before, I was still convinced that the vast majority of French people would always be resigned and apathetic – no doubt because I was more or less resigned and apathetic myself. I'd been wrong.

– Michel Houellebecq, *Submission*.

The context in which Houellebecq wrote his novel is all very familiar. *Submission* was published in 2015, not long after the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting attack in January 7th in Paris. France has been a target for terrorist attacks by extremists on several occasions since then, leading to the inflation of xenophobia and islamophobia. France has also witnessed a rise of the far-right represented by the Front National, led by Marine Le Pen, who during her election campaign in 2017 declared her will for France to abandon the E.U and the Eurozone. The rise of the far-right is also a theme in Houellebecq's novel, which takes place in a dystopian world in the near future, in the France of 2022. Marine Le Pen of the Front National and Mohammed Ben Abbes of the fictional Muslim

Brotherhood party are running neck and neck in the opinion polls for the French elections. In this dystopian future setting, the rise of the far right is so significant that, fearing that Marine Le Pen will become the next French President, the socialist party forms a coalition with Ben Abbas, helping him to win the elections.

The protagonist of the novel is François, and he is also the narrator of the story. The narration occurs in the first person so all the information that we get is from François' point of view. This type of narration enables us to get to know the character profoundly since we can only see through his eyes and we are acquainted with his inner world. François begins his narration with a flashback, going back to the time when he submitted his dissertation. "Through all the years of my sad youth Huysmans remained a companion, a faithful friend" (Houellebecq, 5). From this first sentence we are informed that François is an expert on the 19th-century novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans. We quickly find out that Huysmans plays a significant role in the protagonist's life, as he turns back to his books very often in the narrative and seems to consult him when in doubt. In the novel's present, François is an academic at the Sorbonne Paris III, and tells us that he was never really interested in politics – "I was about as political as a bath towel" – but he suddenly finds himself living in a time of radical political change (Houellebecq, 39). François gives us the build-up for the political tension: "the rise of the far right had made things a little more interesting. It gave the debates a long-lost frisson of fascism" (Houellebecq, 40). From 2017, France was "a country that was more and more openly right wing: the spectacle was shameful but mathematically inevitable" (40). François states that "a strange, oppressive mood settled over France, a kind of suffocating despair" and that compared to its predecessor, "The Muslim Brotherhood learned its lesson and was careful to take a moderate line" (40).

The day of the first round of the elections arrives and the Front National is ahead. From that day, the 15th of May, the narrative changes: dates start to appear and it starts resembling a diary. The diary-form ends at the 31st of May and the final elections

and we get the impression that what happened in the meantime was of great importance for the protagonist. As François talks about his past relationships, he appears very cynical, condemning the idea of a long-term relationship while at the same time he struggles with loneliness. He ponders whether a happy marriage is realistic and applicable to modern times. He ends up undermining the whole institution, attributing any happiness to good cooking skills. He does, however, think of his Jewish lover, Myriam, who surprisingly calls him. She wants to meet him and, indeed, on the 21st of May, Myriam visits him and announces that due to the rise of anti-Semitism she is going to leave France with her family and go to Israel. François keeps his emotions concerning the matter to himself but we can see that he is saddened by Myriam's departure: "I really hope I come back soon' she said, as if she'd read my mind" (Houellebecq, 91). Not long after that though, he resorts to the internet for some soft porn and escort services.

On Wednesday the 25th of May, our protagonist finds the University closed until further notice. In these heated and politically unstable times, François decides to take off for a while to the south of France. He leaves on the day of the final round of elections, the 29th of May. On route, he admits that he has no concrete plan or destination but instead a feeling that he should head south-west, "that if a civil war should break out in France, it would take a while to reach the south-west" (Houellebecq, 103). The last date mentioned in the "diary" is May 31st, when the Socialists form a coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood, a "broad republican front", thus forming the new French government. Upon his return in the summer, he finds out that he has been forced to early retirement, with a rather generous pension. He is given the option to still work for the now Islamic University of Paris- Sorbonne, as long as he converts to Islam. After all, insignificant colleagues of his, Robert Rediger and Steve, were now Muslims enjoying the titles of the new president of the university and lecturer of Rimbaud respectively. The projection of religion as a determining factor for someone's academic appointment

obviously clashes with the ideal of a secular university and with freedom of academic thought, which was the starting point of the novel. Nevertheless, the protagonist makes no comments on that. Instead, he makes a caustic comment about the new management and government overestimating the public power of academics.

No doubt they had overestimated the ability of academics to make a nuisance of themselves. It had been years since an academic title gained you access to major media, under rubrics such as ‘tribune’ or ‘points of view’; nowadays these had become a private club. Even if all the university teachers in France had risen up in protest, almost nobody would have noticed, but apparently they hadn’t found that out in Saudi Arabia. They still believed, deep down, in the power of the intellectual elite. It was almost touching (Houellebecq, 148).

According to François, the reason why he is offered such a generous pension is because the new government falsely believes that academics maintain a position of power within society and can exercise pressure. With this cynical comment, François shows signs of resignation which strikes us as consistent with his pessimism and cynicism towards his own personal relationships. He believes that academics are becoming increasingly irrelevant and have lost their power to make a change in the public sphere. He holds an attitude of disillusionment towards the role and status of the secular academic. This reflects a dominant attitude of our times which I addressed at the beginning of this paper too: the value of the Humanities is being doubted which is why, as Brooks notes, it is more reputable nowadays to be an engineer than an academic.

François, indeed, decides to retire. Retirement is a new chapter in his life and he starts thinking about his life, his relationships and, once again, marriage. The fact that

the matter of marriage comes up repeatedly in the novel suggests that the protagonist feels rather lonely. He admits that “once you reach a stage of physical decline, the only relationship that really, clearly makes sense is marriage” and expresses concerns about aging and the absence of a companion: “I had ten years, probably less, before the decline grew visible and I could no longer be described as *still young*. As for my marital prospects, clearly, I was off to a bad start” (Houellebecq, 152). But the first time we witness that he is bothered about his retirement is when it strikes him that he is no longer able to meet female students to sleep with: “Although it took a few weeks to sink in, the end of my academic career had deprived me of all contact with female students” (Houellebecq, 153). Soon enough though his cynicism kicks in; it would all be in vain. So, once again, he gives up on the thought. Nevertheless, he seems impressed by, and even envious of, the life of his former colleagues who are now able to not only enjoy the pleasure of working but also the company of their multiple young wives, since polygamy has been introduced .

The protagonist continues to observe the changes that occur in the social sphere and reports them – especially the ones concerning the opposite sex: women dress more “decently”, which makes life less of a torment of desire. They are veiled, deprived from education, polygamy becomes the norm and the new government initiates the southward expansion of the European Union. Even more so, the Muslim Brotherhood has reduced crime dramatically, even when it comes to the most dangerous and uncontrollable districts. While suffering from solitude and from an existential crisis, François decides to take another trip, this time to Ligugé Abbey, to the oldest Christian monastery in the West, where Joris-Karl Huysmans resided himself and “had taken his monastic vows” (Houellebecq, 172). Huysmans’ work is used as a guideline when it comes to François’ view of the world. He quotes pieces of Huysmans’ work throughout the novel, regarding all sorts of issues, from marriage and the ideal woman to religion. It is thus not a surprise that our protagonist, while in an unsettled state, decides to take this trip. Through his

personal experience with monastic life, François realizes that his spiritual journey hardly had the same impact on him as it did on Huysmans and decides to leave without ceasing to mention in disillusionment that “that old queer Nietzsche had it right: Christianity was, at the end of the day, a feminine religion” (Houellebecq, 181). He comes home to find an offer by Bastien Lacoue the head of Editions de Pléiade who wants him to edit Huysmans’ work for the Pléiade catalogue. François decides it’s an offer he cannot resist, at least not without “renouncing all intellectual and social ambition – all ambition, full stop” (Houellebecq, 191).

At their meeting, Lacoue invites him to the reception for the reopening of Sorbonne; the president of the University, Robert Rediger, will be pleased to see François there. At the reception, another offer awaits. Rediger makes clear his interest in having François back teaching at the Sorbonne. They meet at his house where François is greeted by one of his wives, a fifteen-year old girl. François focuses on her “low-waisted jeans” and her “Hello Kitty T-shirt”, a brand that teenage girls are known to like. There is some noticeable irony in this description since it is used for a ‘wife’, a label attributed to adult women in our culture. Similarly, when Rediger says that his fifteen-year old wife will be ashamed François saw her and that it’s her fault because she doesn’t know the house well, our protagonist simply says: “Yes, she looks very young” (Houellebecq, 203), shifting the focus away from anything other than her age. A bit later Rediger makes François the offer to return to the Sorbonne, and states that converting to Islam is, naturally, an inevitable prerequisite.

During his conversation with Rediger, we get significant insight into François’ psychological state. We see him thinking about his current life, how his only goal in life now, is to “do a little reading and get into bed at four in the afternoon with a packet of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey” and yet at the same time understanding that this is problematic (Houellebecq, 208). François is unhappy and perhaps Rediger notices that.

Towards the end of their conversation, during his hard effort to convince the protagonist to convert, he reveals to our protagonist how he can reach happiness:

It's submission, Rediger murmured. The shocking and simple idea, which had never been so forcefully expressed, that the summit of human happiness resides in the most absolute submission (Houellebecq, 217).

This quote by Rediger almost ends his conversation with François, after which François starts to consider the offer. I think it is the mention of human happiness that motivates our protagonist to consider becoming a Muslim. He can see that his quest of happiness is not promising and he wants to change that. A smoker, an alcoholic, depressed and lonely, what would he have to lose? The only problem is, for François, submission won't constitute a change. In his own way, he is already submissive.

He has become extremely cynical and has given up on any professional or personal ambition. He has given up on humanity and marriage even though he longs for a relationship and is feeling lonely. He has turned into a passive, submissive person with no motivation to try and ameliorate his life. He finds an appeal in Islam because it will guarantee him a wife or two "a wife to perform each of the roles, like Robert Rediger has". He decides to reject the offer he had to edit Huysmans work for the Pléiade, effectively turning his back on his "companion" and "faithful friend" and giving up on his intellectual life: "I made my way home slowly on foot, like a little old man, more aware with every step that this time my intellectual life really was over; and that so was my long, very long relationship with Joris-Karl Huysmans" (Houellebecq, 236). He considers accepting Rediger's offer to return to the Sorbonne as a teacher and a Muslim. In this scenario, he gives up on his professional ambitions but maybe his solitude will be cured. This change will give him a new start and he "would have nothing to mourn"

(Houellebecq, 250). During his conversation with Rediger, he thinks: “I was going to die if I kept that up – I was going to die fast, unhappy and alone. And did I really want to die fast, unhappy and alone? In the end, only kind of” (Houellebecq, 208). This is not the first time François makes such comments about death. From the beginning we see him making statements like “while I was waiting to die” or “would I at least have the courage to kill myself?” all indicating a bad psychological state, if not severe depression.

François takes productive skepticism too far, to the point of extreme cynicism, which naturally lead to an attitude of complete resignation and lack of will to live. On a personal level, these traits of the protagonist’s personality constitute true obstacles for him to reach happiness. On a more general level, these traits represent the state of academia in the West and the projected cause of its ‘malaise’. I think the fact that the protagonist, François, doesn’t have a last name in the novel is hardly coincidental, nor is the fact that the name bears an association with the country, France. Houellebecq created a character which incarnates the modern Western academic, who has become too cynical and submissive and no longer fights for his beliefs, nor for a better future. With the first-person narration, we can successfully enter the mind-set of François, realize that he is a truly unhappy man, and in the end it is left to the reader to criticize this defeatism of his, which is hardly the solution to the crisis plaguing our era.

Submission, thus, constitutes a meditation on the sterility of modern life, the hallmark of which is an unyielding pessimism about the future of humanism. It’s a strong criticism of the ideological landscape in contemporary French and European political culture and academia. As Anders Berg Sorensen argues, François describes the decay, disillusionment and calculated behavior that has transformed not only political life and society in general over the last couple of decades but also working life, intimate affairs and existential matters, specifically (141).

According to Ian Tuttle, Houellebecq supports that global capitalism has exported material wealth and spiritual poverty. The emptying out of the West's spiritual and cultural resources in pursuit of sheer economic might has made everyone richer and their lives more luxurious – but also increasingly inhumane (22). A pessimistic outlook on the fate of Western liberal humanism is what the two - overall different - depictions of the figure of the intellectual have in common in *Submission* and *The History Man*. Both novels seem to be asking the same question: what happened to humanism. The radical sociologist, Howard Kirk, who is constantly on the move, politically engaged, making radical history and things happen, is very different from the cynical, pessimistic, resigned François. At the same time, they are both depicted as self-serving, self-absorbed and indifferent towards the people around them. This attitude of theirs is, by default, contradictory with the nature of the humanities as disciplines focusing on aspects of human culture and on understanding the human.

Chapter II: Female characters and gender theory in *The History Man* and *Submission*.

The History Man, published in 1975, is a novel written during a very crucial point in the history of feminism. In the U.K during the 1960s and 1970s, there were key reforms in legislation relating to women's rights, childbirth, marriage and sexuality: the Abortion Act of 1967 legalizing termination of pregnancy, the Sexual Offences Act 1967, decriminalizing homosexuality, the Divorce Reform Act in 1969 making divorce available through mutual consent and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 banning employment and education discrimination against women (Childs, 7). On the other hand, *Submission*, is set in a dystopian time where women's rights and liberties are jeopardized. In this chapter, I will analyze the key female figures in *The History Man* and their relationship with the radical Howard Kirk, and examine François' relationships with female characters presented in *Submission*. My aim will be to explore how intimate relationships and gender discourse affect the novels' critique of the figure of the male progressive intellectuals.

Bradbury's women; Barbara Kirk, Flora Beniform, Annie Callendar.

“She is a woman women read,” says Howard, “she’s on the right side.” “Why do women read her?” asks Celia. “They’re angry at men,” says Howard. “At you?” asks Celia. “Oh, not me,” says Howard, “I’m with them at their fight.”

(*The History Man*, 108)

In an interview with John Haffenden, Bradbury says that Barbara Kirk is in a sense the “hidden central character of the whole novel”. The fact that her story is not fully represented and that she is deliberately not fore-grounded, Bradbury adds, does not mean that the book is not substantially her story. Barbara Kirk is at once Howard's “implicit antagonist” and his most tragic victim (41). One thing we know from the

novel's early beginning about the crucial figure of Barbara Kirk is that she is "a bit depressed". That, according to Howard, is "just the price of a dull summer. She needs a bit of action" (Bradbury, 59). For Howard, the answer is to throw another one of the Kirks famous parties. Nevertheless, one of the first things we hear Barbara say is that she has got tired of all "the shows" they've been putting up. Howard keeps insisting that a party will make her feel better but he is simply projecting; he is the one who needs a bit of action because he is so desperate to make history happen. Thus, Howard shows no interest in his wife's complaints, nor does he provide any understanding, solace, or help around the house, for he is Dr. Kirk with much more important things to do and matters to attend to; that is to say, ensure to "make things happen" (Bradbury, 58).

In the very first pages of the novel, the Kirks are introduced to us; first Howard, then Barbara. Howard, the radical sociologist, the successful author, the man who frequently appears on television, the leader of the radical faculty and his students, a terror to the selfish bourgeoisie, a pressing agent in Claimant's Union, a focus of responsibility and concern. Even though the story is recounted by an unidentified external narrator, as I noted in the previous chapter, the focalizer in the biggest part of the novel, i.e., the primary consciousness of the story, is Howard. Therefore, through the narrator, we get to see how the protagonist views himself and his wife, Barbara. Barbara "is at this minute just a person, as she puts it, trapped in the role of wife and mother, in the limited role of woman in our society; but of course she, too, is a radical person, and quite as active as Howard in her way" (Bradbury, 3). The irony in this statement becomes clear from the sentences to follow, where her radicalism and activism are attributed to the fact that she is "a cordon blue cook" and a "familiar figure, in the streets, as she blocks them with others to show that traffic is not inevitable, and in the supermarkets, as she leads her daily deputation to the manager with comparative, up-to-the-minute lists showing how Fine Fare, on lard, is one pence up on Sainsbury's, or vice versa" (3). Based on this description it is fair to say that there is a certain amount of

irony when the narrator says: “of course she, too, is a radical person, and quite as active as Howard” (3) given that her achievements are disproportionate. It is evident that being a “pressing agent in Claimant’s Union” is not “quite the same” as informing super markets’ managers about the difference in prices. Knowing that the focalization often occurs through the eyes of Howard, it is easy to deduce his opinion on the matter: compared to his wife, he has more important things to attend to. We witness a similar way of thinking a bit later in the novel when the Kirks decide to have a party and the narrator explains the role each one of them has when it comes to organizing these “unstructured” parties:

Howard is a theoretician of sociability; he debates about what he calls “relevant forms of interaction”, and the parameters of the encounter. Barbara performs the antithetical role, and thinks of persons and faces, not because men are abstract and women emotional – that is the sort of role-designation both of them would deny – but because someone has to keep abreast of who likes whom, and who can’t be in the same room as whom, and who is bedding whom, and who ought sooner or later to bed whom, if you want to have really good parties (Bradbury, 7).

The narrator makes sure to inform us that the Kirks would never admit to acting on gender stereotypes, only to then tell us that they do exactly that. As a woman, Barbara needs to know all the necessary gossip, and Howard, as a man and a Doctor, has to do some social research. Only his ‘research’, as we come to realize, is more about sleeping with his guests than anything else. While Howard calls an acquaintance, Roger, in order to invite him to the party, Barbara cannot hide her discontent with a party where you might “meet anything and do anyone” (8). As the dialogue between Roger and

Howard on the phone – along with Barbara’s interventions – is presented to us, we are able to form a clear picture about the dominant attitude in the house of the Kirks:

“Barbara’s fine, I’m fine,” says Howard, “we’re just ready to get started again.” “Oh, yes, I’m fine,” says Barbara, “fine fine fine.” “No,” says Howard, “it’s just Barbara having schizophrenia on the background. See you on the second. And bring anyone you can predict will be unpredictable.” “That’s what we need,” says Howard, putting down the telephone (Bradbury, 8).

How Barbara feels about this party seems to make no difference to Howard; he attributes her irritation and anger to “schizophrenia” giving us the impression that he is not listening to her. It is from that moment that we realize that Howard is ruthless and self-serving and that comments such as “the Kirks are a modern couple” who value equality and want to make sure that “no one gets exploited” may reproduce Howard’s worldview, but are simultaneously meant ironically by the narrator and are perceived as such by the reader.

As the Kirks are doing their shopping for the party, Barbara runs into an acquaintance whose lover recently committed suicide. On their way home Barbara’s face is “dark”; she is obviously upset about the news and she decides to share it with her husband. She repeats the conversation she had with the late man’s girlfriend: “She says he found things absurd. He even found being happy absurd. It was life that was silly” (Bradbury, 16). Howard hastily belittles the “existential choice” for suicide as an “absurdist thing” but Barbara in an expression of nostalgia, as she goes through her own existential crisis, asks him:

“Do you remember when our sort of people didn’t think life was silly? ...when things were all wide and free, and we were all doing something and the revolution was next week? And we were under thirty, and we could trust us? Don’t you think people have got tired? Found a curse in what they were doing?” (Bradbury, 17)

Howard censures her, saying that she is trying to turn the death of a boy to a “metaphor for the times”. Barbara unmasks his hypocrisy saying that he has always turned everything into a metaphor for the times claiming that “the times are where we are; there’s no other place”. Howard does not seem touched by his wife’s melt-down. Instead, he belittles the issue saying that she is just feeling depressed and suggests that she takes a Valium. Even though Howard tends to politicize everything, filtering it through the lens of his radical politics, here he does the opposite: instead of taking his wife’s reaction seriously, as an occasion for debating their views on “the times”, he personalizes it in order to dismiss it as trivial. From a radical sociology professor one would expect a bit more insight and, from a human being, a bit more sentiment and concern. Barbara’s ironic response is fully justified:

“Take a Valium. Have a party. Go on a demo... Bed a friend. That’s your problem solving system. Always a bright, radical solution. Revolt as therapy. But haven’t we tried all that? And don’t you find a certain gloom in the record?” (Bradbury, 18)

Her desolation is understandable. This life-style doesn't suit her anymore. Howard, however, as if he hasn't been part of the same conversation, says "I don't understand your sourness, Barbara. You just need some action" (Bradbury, 18).

It is as if the reader is witnessing two people trying to have a conversation while speaking two different languages. In the aforementioned scenes, Howard's incapability to understand what Barbara is saying is incomprehensible, and the reader may be led to think that his callousness stems from an unwillingness (rather than incapability) to identify with another's perspective, certainly when that perspective runs the risk of putting his worldview into question. As for Barbara, clearly the situation does not satisfy her anymore; she needs more than the ephemeral fun that a party promises.

According to Elphick's study, *A World without Real Deliverances*, Barbara's plight is that she lives a life of "radical chic" with an abundance of possessions but essentially entirely empty. She has Howard Kirk instead of faith, Valium instead of values, insignificant projects instead of constructive work, sex instead of love. Her world lacks everything but the ephemeral, that is to say, it is "a world without real deliverances" (Elphick, 188). This element of the ephemeral is communicated to the reader through the use of present tense throughout the novel. In an interview with Michael Barber, Bradbury explains how the novel, being written almost entirely in the present tense, underlines the Kirks' notion of themselves as people solely of the present.

I wanted to write about instantaneous people, people who were living in a world where the past was cut off, where only things from the day, from the diary as it were, from the room they were in, from the immediate environment in which they were living mattered to them (qtd. in Elphick, 192).

If “the Kirks are indeed new people”, Barbara is miserable with this ‘new way’ of living in the moment. She craves for something more substantial. Howard admits that she is depressed, but does not try to understand why. As mentioned, he calls her schizophrenic. Her reaction is such a mystery to him that he can only explain it as the result of psychiatric condition. Howard’s attitude chimes with what Simon de Beauvoir describes in her book, *The Second Sex*, while talking about the myth of the “feminine mystery”. Beauvoir states that out of all the myths none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine “mystery”. The reason for that, she explains, is that this myth has numerous advantages. Most importantly, it “permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable; the man who ‘does not understand’ a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a ‘mystery’ outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once” (1269). The aforementioned ‘mystery’ in this case, as Beauvoir explains, refers to communication: “it implies a stammering presence that fails to make itself manifest and clear. To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there, but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances” (1270). Barbara is not silent, but her language appears not to be understood by her husband. The fact that Howard attributes her unhappiness to a psychiatric condition is an indication of his own “laziness”, “ignorance” and “deficiency of mind” to listen to and understand her.

In order to understand the character of Barbara de profundis, we need to understand her past as well as her present. As stated, “the Kirks are new people” and that does not only refer to their modern opinions and attitudes but also to the fact that they used to be different. In contrast with the rest of the novel, the Kirks’ past is described in the past tense, indicating firmly that this part of their lives is over. The narrator informs us that the Kirks; background is:

One of vestigial Christianity and inherited social deference, the ideology, says Howard, of a society of sharply striated class distinctions and of great class-consciousness. They came, both of them, from well conducted and more or less puritanical homes, located socially in that perplexing borderland between working-class anarchism and middle class conformity (Bradbury, 25).

The Kirks became “new people” after Barbara cheated on Howard with Hamid, a psychology student. In the chapters that describe the Kirks’ past, the narrator reveals to us that Barbara’s unhappiness is nothing new. Back then, in the eyes of Howard at least, she was also feeling unhappy, trapped in a flat.

Barbara, her education over, had promptly closed out her opportunities and reverted to being standard woman, a pre-Reichian woman geared to nothing else but the running of a house. The result was a characteristic syndrome of relative frigidity, suppressed hysteria, bodily shame, and consequential physical and social self-loathing (Bradbury, 26).

After Barbara’s affair, according to Howard, they realized that they were trapping each other in fixed roles, that they “weren’t adult”. So, they became the new Kirks, they went along with the sexual revolution of the time and stopped being monogamous. The difference is that, unlike Howard, Barbara still felt trapped. The “revolution as a solution” that she mentioned in the car the day they went shopping did not work for her. She was still trapped in the role of a mother and a “flat-wife” and her

discontent can be easily justified. As Simone de Beauvoir explains in the *Second Sex*, every person has certain innate characteristics, attributed to nature, but also the potential to transcend them and experience something beyond their physicality. If, nevertheless, someone deprives or prevents a person from having an aim in life, or robs this person of their personal victories, then this “transcendence” is cancelled, and that person is condemned to live in its “immanence”. According to Beauvoir, this is what happens to women in “the patriarchy” (1267). We witness exactly what Beauvoir warns us of in the case of Barbara Kirk. Barbara, before and after her marriage became unconventional, lacks any aim. She lives in the ephemeral, being a house-wife, throwing parties and bedding strangers and longs for something more substantial. Every small victory is taken away from her by Howard; her affair is not attributed to her attractiveness but (from Howard’s perspective) to an attempt from Hamid’s part to “establish intimacy between the male parties” (Bradbury, 28). Every time she gives birth, Howard writes a book as a reaction, in order to steal the spotlight from her. Barbara wants more than just being a mother, she is a human being not just a mammal, and wants to be treated as such: “I’m a person Howard. I’ve been a person here all this time, stuck in this room, and he saw it, and you never have” (Bradbury, 29). It is true, argues Beauvoir, that both man and woman are beings rooted in nature, but “[because] the woman’s animality is more manifest, she is more enslaved to the species [according to the patriarchy]”. Regardless, they both belong to the human realm and to assimilate woman to Nature “is simply to act from prejudice” (Beauvoir, 1267). That is exactly what Howard does. He fails to see Barbara as “a person”. If the patriarchy crushes woman’s “transcendence”, Howard crushes Barbara’s spirit, basically pushing her out that window in her attempted suicide.

Howard’s mentality towards his marriage becomes clearer to the reader through a dialogue he has with another crucial female character of the novel, his mistress, Flora Beniform. She is a social psychologist, a colleague of Howard’s, and an

academic specialist in complicated marriages. Flora, in certain ways, is Howard's female 'double' in the novel: according to the narrator, Flora is "formidable, and she likes going to bed with men who have troubled marriages" (Bradbury, 57) simply because talking with them can benefit her research. It's not surprising at all that Howard fits the description. Howard is well aware of the source of her interest in him which is why we see him telling her details about his relationship with his wife along with stories about the Beamishes. Flora is ruthless when it comes to her research, to the point where the promise of a good story is enough to ensure Howard a night in bed with her. During the first of their intimate meetings that is described to us, they talk about Barbara. Howard believes that Barbara wants to destroy him and that she thinks he is fake just because he has "a passion to make things happen. To get some order into the chaos" (Bradbury, 58). Flora asks Howard why they both persist with the marriage, why he does not leave her:

"I'm not quite sure," says Howard, "I think we both have still expectations. We feel there's something yet to achieve. Somewhere else to go." ... "You haven't quite finished defeating each other," asks Flora, "is that it?" "The battle means something," says Howard, "it keeps us alive." "Well, you thrive," says Flora. "Does Barbara?" "She's a bit depressed," says Howard (Bradbury, 59).

This dialogue helps us understand Howard's attitude; he has a lust for power which is also expressed in his marriage. He needs the battle to keep him alive but this kills Barbara in the end. He gives the impression of a puppet master, manipulating and controlling people in order to satisfy his lust for power. Flora Beniform does not fall into the category of people Howard can easily manipulate. After their aforementioned conversation she basically kicks him out of her house, her "clean and simple place" and

her “comfortable room”. We get some insight into how uncertain Howard feels about their type of relationship; he is “never quite sure of Flora, never quite sure whether he is having an affair with her, or a treatment” (Bradbury, 59) a statement ‘quite’ revealing for it is this uncertainty that fascinates him and keeps him interested in her and at the same time confirms her sentiments on the matter; Flora most likely treats this affair as research with benefits. Flora’s character, with her Freudianism and ability to understand other characters’ psychology helps underline Howard’s overall ignorance of (or unwillingness to understand) human behavior. We see Flora and Howard debating whether Henry Beamish had attempted suicide at the Kirks’ party or not. While Howard was busy bedding his student, Felicity Phee, Flora found Henry severely cut after punching a window. While Howard insists that it was another one of Henry’s accidents since he is so prone to them, Flora, as a true Freudian, believes that “Henry acted”, injuring himself deliberately, in a cry for attention. Flora confronts Howard and tells him that it is his ego that won’t allow him to believe that something interesting happened without him being around and also remarks that he has a lot more of “bourgeois moments” than he thinks. According to Flora, the explanation regarding Henry’s injury is simple; it constitutes an act of “anger and despair”. Flora had noticed Myra’s hostility towards her husband; obviously tired and discontent with her marriage she shows no concern for Henry. Instead she just “shouted at him for spoiling her lovely evening” (Bradbury, 124). Flora is certain:

“It was a minimal suicide attempt. A gesture to say, look at me, think of me But, anyway, a radical gesture against the self but not an absolute one. When a man who publishes, like Henry, chooses his left arm, you can be sure he has hopes of going on writing with his right.” Howard laughs and says: “Flora, you’re marvellous” (Bradbury, 126).

Flora's explanation is plausible even though it gets contradicted by Henry, who, like Howard, claims it was an accident. Flora, though distant and emotionally unavailable herself, has a deeper understanding of human psychology than Howard, possibly given her specialty. But, what's really interesting here is that Howard seems to listen to Flora, he overall accepts and values her opinion and moreover, he reacts in a different way to her comments about him actually being bourgeois, and hence, a bit hypocritical. In comparison to when Barbara calls him fake, Howard doesn't seem to think that Flora wants to destroy him. Furthermore, when Flora expresses her interest in starting to see Henry, because with his troubled marriage, he seems to need her expertise, Howard seems genuinely jealous, whereas when talking about Barbara's affairs, he admits to not even being curious enough to find out any sort of details. This could be attributed to the fact that the power relations between Howard and his mistress are reversed: unlike Barbara who is showing her emotions, her human side, Flora is callous and distant. This puts Howard in a less powerful position when it comes to her. In Howard's eyes, Flora is a radical and emotionally unavailable woman and that's the source of his appreciation for her.

This power struggle and the fact that he cannot control Flora keep our protagonist interested in this relationship. Based on that, we can easily understand his persistence when it comes to the last female character of this novel that I will be discussing, Miss Callendar. Annie Callendar is a female figure significantly different from the others of the novel. A twenty-four-years-old lecturer in English, Miss Callendar is a liberal character not unlike Henry. She retreats into "Victoriana"; a sense of self that is late Victorian. As Bradbury states in *Novelists*, "Annie is presented as somebody who is systematically attempting to preserve a way of life which she knows must be smashed. She holds a glass egg at the party, for example, and she cocoons herself in her room: it's a systematic process of fragile self-protection of which Howard Kirk's sexual possession

of her is a logical outcome” (qtd. in Elphick, 223). She is intelligent but not assertive enough. The morning after the start-of-term party, Howard runs into her and offers a lift to the university, during which the following dialogue takes place:

“With every word you utter, you state your world view.” “I know,” says Miss Callendar, “I’m trying to find a way around that.” “There isn’t one,” says Howard, “you have to know what you are.” “I’m a nineteenth-century liberal,” says Miss Callendar. “You can’t be,” says Howard, “this is the twentieth century, near the end of it. There are no resources.” “I know,” says Miss Callendar, “that’s why I am one” (Bradbury, 114).

She refuses to give Howard her address, and she turns down his dinner invitation. When he expresses the desire to go to bed with her, she responds saying that she doesn’t belong in his company. She is smart enough to know what motivates his interest in her, that he regards her as a “small, unmodernized, country property, ripe for development to fit contemporary tastes” (Bradbury, 117). Her words are strong but her body-language indicates something different. Through the eyes of Howard, the narrator notices that she is sitting in the van stiffly, clutching her umbrella; she is nervous and uncomfortable. Even her umbrella, according to the narration, is an anachronism, “elegantly capped with a glass knob, into which a flower is set, like some Victorian antique” (113). But to Howard, Annie Callendar, distant and remote, is “a serious challenge”. Unlike Flora, who is a challenge due to her lack of empathy and unwillingness to truly open up to her partners - as Howard’s double -, Annie’s unavailability lies in the fact that she is Howard’s exact opposite. She is a liberal humanist and a romantic “Victorian” figure who regards intimate relationships from a more genuine, and committing perspective. Her unavailability, and the fact that Howard

feels that she is distant, is registered in the narrator's consistent references to her as Miss Callendar, rather than Annie, even though the first name is used for all the other female characters. When the incident with their student, George Carmody, occurs, Howard finds out Miss Callendar's address and pays her a visit. She needs to choose whose side she is on, whose story she will believe. Trying to seduce her and convince her to side with him, he attacks her life style and personality. Unlike Flora's "comfortable" and "simple" room, Miss Callendar's "convenient" room is according to Howard "faded" and indicative of her personality.

"He's destroyed himself and, you will too," says Howard. "You'll dry up, you'll wither, you'll hate and grudge, in ten years you'll be nothing, a neurotic old lady." "It's a very nice room," says Miss Callendar. Howard says: "Freud once gave a very economical definition of neurosis. He said it was an abnormal attachment to the past." Miss Callendar's face is very white; her dark eyes stare out of it. "I don't want this," she says, "I can't bear this" (Bradbury, 228-229).

The problem for Howard is that Annie Callendar is a liberal, just like Henry, for whom we know how Howard feels: he is "bourgeois", "an institutional man". Of course, Henry is a man, not an attractive woman to seduce and radicalize like Annie. In the end, Miss Callendar succumbs to Howard's pressure, as he effectively mobilizes her insecurities: she cannot live a 19th century life in 1972 and the thought of becoming a "neurotic little lady" seems to frighten her to her core. Howard's argument, that if she doesn't conform to his ideology she will become a bitter spinster - as if she should have no other aim in life than to mate with a man - is certainly sexist. As the reader is likely to recognize this sexism, the fact that Miss Callendar ultimately succumbs to his

perspective and allows him to seduce her is disappointing. Miss Callendar is an educated woman, teaching at a university and could, of course, reach self-fulfillment in ways unrelated to men, to her sexuality or to reproductive functions. In truth, Miss Callendar comes across as a sympathetic liberal figure with strong values, as does Henry and, just like him she tries to maintain a distance from Howard Kirk and his radical historicism. Before the incident with Howard in her house, Annie is the only character that hasn't failed the reader. Considering when the novel was written, if Flora embodies a caricature (or a negative portrait) of the feminist of the '60s, Annie embodies an alternative kind of feminism that the reader is keen to relate to, up until the moment of Howard's 'victory'. Compared to the other female characters, Callendar is by far the most sympathetic one. This is why the fact that in the end she succumbs to Howard, seems to the reader as a betrayal, too difficult to forgive.

The analysis of the main female characters is definitely revealing when it comes to completing the image of the protagonist, Howard Kirk. At the same time, his relationships with them serves the novel's purpose as a satire on the sexual politics of redbrick universities, and the decline of humanism in the modern academic world. The doctrinaire that is presented as the radicalism of the early nineteen-seventies is cast as ruthless and inhumane. The way Howard exploits the female characters, each one in a different way, contradicts the image of the progressive intellectual he wants to promote. He is supposed to be promoting the emancipatory politics of the time, but regards the female characters as inferior, and he treats them in a sexist way. He does not hesitate to sacrifice any of them in the altar of historicism. When it comes to the female characters, none of them, just like the male ones, gains our approval. Annie Callendar, the liberal humanist is proven to be feckless even though she has the best intentions, while the radical Flora Beniform is self-serving and exploitative. Barbara is the biggest victim of the radical Kirk. She was unhappy as a conservative, middle-class, religious woman before the sexual revolution, and remained equally (if not more) unhappy once she

embraced her new, radicalized self. She is the character whose emotions are more expressed to the reader, revealing a sensitive, humane side of her, bare of any labels. When she cracks, Howard's inhumanness strikes us the most, to the point where he seems responsible for her attempted suicide. Barbara, Flora and Annie, represent three different types of women, but none of them is a female figure the reader would want to identify with.

Submissive women in veils.

"I got married" he added, rather brusquely. Then he elaborated: "To one of my students". "They arranged that for you too?" "Not exactly. Let's just say they don't discourage the possibilities of contact with female students. I'm getting another wife next month". With that he headed off towards the rue de Mirbel, leaving me open-mouthed at the top of the stairs.

(*Submission*, 151)

Given the fact that in *Submission* we have an internal, character-bound narrator (unlike in *The History Man*), whose vision is limited, any information we get about the female characters of the novel, and any talk about gender relationships, issues from the protagonist and what he communicates through the narration. François regards the institution of marriage as a model of "complete idiocy" (Houellebecq, 13). His affairs did not commonly last more than a year, and he would meet his girlfriends mostly through his position at the university. All these relationships ended in the same way, with the girls meeting someone else and leaving him. He describes his meeting with two of his ex "mistresses", as he prefers to call them, Aurélie and Sandra. His remarks regarding both of them are rather pessimistic, and come across as sexist and misogynist, given his casting of these women as sexual objects who are past (or almost past) their prime. For Aurélie he says that "Her body had been damaged beyond repair. Her

buttocks and breasts were no more than sacks of emaciated flesh, shrunken, flabby, and pendulous. She could no longer—she could never again—be considered an object of desire” (Houellebecq, 14). As for Sandra, who was “plumper and jollier than Aurélie”, and who hadn’t let herself go to the same degree:

She was sad, very sad, and I knew her sorrow would overwhelm her in the end; like Aurélie, she was nothing but a bird in an oil slick; but she had retained, if I can put it this way, a superior ability to flap her wings. In one or two years she would give up any last matrimonial ambitions, her imperfectly extinguished sensuality would lead her to seek out the company of young men, she would become what we used to call a *cougar*, and no doubt she’d go on this way for several years, ten at the most, before the sagging of her flesh became prohibitive, and condemned her to a lasting solitude (Houellebecq, 14-15).

His attitude, cynicism and tendency to sexually objectify women, as he informs us, led him to breaking-up with his girlfriends, including his latest one, Myriam. Knowing that he did not want to maintain a relationship, he broke up out of courtesy, as he did not want to lead them on. Nevertheless, “over the course of the academic year I’d change my mind, owing to factors that were external and incidental – generally, a short skirt” (Houellebecq, 16). When, on the other hand, he finds himself single, he spends his evenings on YouPorn, which over the years had grown into a sort of “porn encyclopedia”, or to escort services.

François seems to be completely driven by his libido, his criteria for choosing a partner seem nothing but superficial and writes bluntly that he “just didn’t feel up to maintaining a relationship” (Houellebecq, 16). He fails to look at women as equal subjects, and claims to be benefiting from a basic ‘natural’ inequality between the sexes, i.e., the fact that men’s erotic potential diminishes very slowly with age compared to

women for whom “the collapse comes with shocking brutality from year to year, or even from month to month” (Houellebecq, 15) rendering them undesirable and condemning them, according to the protagonist, to solitude. His sexist, diminishing thoughts about his colleague, Marie-Françoise, when she mentions her husband during one of their conversations, are telling in that respect: “I gazed at her in wonder. It was the first time, in all the ten years I’d known her, that I realized she had once been a woman – that she is still a woman, in a sense – and that once upon a time a man had felt desire for this squat, stumpy, almost frog-like little thing” (Houellebecq, 64). It is obvious by his slip of the tongue “she had once been...that she still is” and the choice of the words “in a sense” that François still fails to see her as a woman. But seeing someone as a woman, in his vision, amounts to objectification. The use of the opening line of a fairy-tale “once upon a time” indicates that he deems it implausible that anyone would have felt sexual desire for her. The adjectives used to describe her are, to say the least, offensive. Simone de Beauvoir’s notion of the ‘lost sex’ in *The Second Sex*, seems to be applicable to Houellebecq’s novel that takes place in 2022. Statements such as the one François makes, doubting the femininity of a woman, indicate that to him having a woman’s body doesn’t suffice for being a ‘true woman’. According to Beauvoir, men are willing to accept women as an equal fellow being but they still require her to be the “inessential”; in other words, to be a true woman she must make herself object, she must be the Other (Beauvoir, 1272). That is to say that besides the social role that a woman assumes for herself, she must remain at all times desirable, a sort of carnal prey, leading to the infinite bondage of women who, even if accepted as equals and given the same amount of freedoms, have to maintain elements separating them as the Other. As Beauvoir states, the feminine body, at all times, and even at a woman’s workplace, is asked to be:

flesh, but with discretion; it is to be slender and not loaded with fat;
muscular, supple, strong, it is bound to suggest transcendence; it must not

be pale like a too shaded hothouse plant, but preferably tanned like a workman's torso from being bared to the open sun. Woman's dress in becoming practical need not make her appeal sexless: on the contrary, short skirts made the most of legs and thighs as never before. There is no reason why working should take away woman's sex appeal (Beauvoir, 1272).

The impression we get from François' thoughts and comments is that he might as well have been the male subject Beauvoir had in mind while writing this passage, seventy years ago.

As Anders-Berg Sorensen remarks in his article on the novel, François describes himself as apolitical and disillusioned. He has given up on any hope for a better future, "is merely doing what he has to do without any energy or enthusiasm, and the only passion he has left – which is also waning – is his sexual desire. He has become an animal" (Sorensen, 141). François is motivated by lust rather than love, and seems to treat sexual pleasure as the only thing he has left in his overall dull life.

When François meets up with his last girlfriend, Myriam, their conversation sheds some new light on his views on women and intimate relationships. Myriam is surprised to hear that François has "never been convinced that it was a good idea for women to vote, study the same thing as men, go into the same professions, et cetera" (Houellebecq, 31). When Myriam asks him if he is suggesting a return to patriarchy would be a good idea he tells her that patriarchy was a more sustainable social system:

You know I'm not *for* anything, but at least patriarchy existed. I mean, as a social system it was able to perpetuate itself. There were families

with children, and most of them would have children. In other words, it worked, whereas now there aren't enough children, so we're finished (Houellebecq, 31).

This comes as a surprise to Myriam perhaps more than it should, considering François' sexist and misogynist views. Besides the fact that this quote is indicative of how the protagonist feels about women's place in society, it is also indicative of how he feels towards society in general: Western society is, for François, in decay, failing to even perpetuate itself. Nevertheless, after the evening they spent together, François starts thinking about marriage and long-lasting relationships although he has been constantly claiming from the beginning that he has condemned them. Joris-Karl Huysmans, the protagonist's idol who, as previously stated, plays an important role in François' life, comes to his mind. He remembers one of his masterpieces, *En ménage*, where the life of a happily married couple is described. François admits to finding it beautiful, but, "was it realistic"? François tells us that Huysmans wanted "a good little cook who could also turn herself into a whore, and he wanted this on a fixed schedule" and suddenly our protagonist finds himself wondering whether Myriam could be that for him (Houellebecq, 79). After Myriam flees to Israel, François' solitude is really tormenting him: "A couple is a world, autonomous and enclosed, that moves through the larger world essentially untouched; On my own, I was chipped and cracked all over" (Houellebecq, 109). A bit later on he admits that "once you reach a certain stage of physical decline, the only relationship that really, clearly makes sense is marriage", only to hasten to censor himself a few moments later: "if after several weeks I actually met up with one of my numerous female analogues, what would come of it? Erectile dysfunction on one side, vaginal dryness on the other. I'd just as soon avoid it" (Houellebecq, 153).

It is telling here that François considers sex and partnership incompatible. He is thinking about marriage as a solution to his solitude but he rejects it because he sees it as leading to diminished sexual pleasure. Companionship would comfort his loneliness, but he is unable to achieve that, thus he remains solely focused on his sexual pleasure, proving Sonerson's argument that he has become an animal, incapable of establishing intimate relationships, thinking that the only benefit that can come from them is intercourse. He resorts to escort sites, which to the reader seems like an attempt to cure a disease with the wrong type of drug. He recounts his sexual encounters in a typically pornographic manner, that emulates the porn videos he was watching earlier: "she had a tight little arse . . . I could spend hours fucking it without the slightest fatigue or joy", "she asked me to come on her breasts; I did" only to reveal to us in the end that he didn't feel the satisfaction he was hoping for:

All of which to say, these two escorts were *fine*. Still, that wasn't enough to make me want to see them or have sex with them again, or to make me go on living. Should I just die? The decision struck me as premature (Houellebecq, 155).

In general, Houellebecq's novels are known to have graphic sex scenes. What we notice here, however, is François fixation with a long-lasting relationship that transcends flighty desire. According to Sophie Gilbert in her article, "Unliberated Sex", Houellebecq's protagonists share the same attitude when it comes to intimate relationships: "unmoored by the '60s and an ethos of relentless gratification, his characters engage in empty sexual encounters played out in extravagant detail. Lasting human connection eludes them, and their impulse to romanticize a purer, more orderly past gives Houellebecq's fiction a reactionary and misogynistic flavor" (Gilbert, 52).

This nostalgia for a “more orderly past” manifests itself in François’ aforementioned conversation with Myriam about patriarchy. In this conversation, François asserts that patriarchy has a merit in that it actually worked as a social system. In patriarchic societies, including Muslim ones as he sees them now under the new regime, there are families with large numbers of children who grow up to reproduce the same structures. “In short, it works” as opposed to the actions of feminists who supposedly do not care to bear the children that might make their cause sustainable. We see the protagonist looking outside his window, describing a depressing image of thousands of apartments, “a few thousand *households* – which by now tended to mean two people or, more and more often, just one. Most of the cells were dark” (Houellebecq, 170). The image conveys François’ depression after yet another failed encounter with a prostitute and while he suffers from a fungal infection. The use of the adverb “now” underlines a difference from a “then”, a romanticized version of the past, of the glorious days of patriarchy, where households had more than one or two people. The metaphor of the apartments as cells is indicative of how trapped the protagonist feels in this sterile and decadent Western society which condemns him, in his eyes, to his solitude. Our novel toys with the question whether more restrictive, illiberal societies possibly point the way to more fulfilling sexual and romantic relationships. After all, our protagonist has already started to notice the differences in everyday life under the new regime; women are veiled, polygamy becomes the norm, unemployment rates decrease due to women leaving the work force and a large new subsidy is given for families in a time where François’ lack of will to live reaches its apogee:

The mere will to live was clearly no match for the pains and aggravations that punctuate the life of the average Western man. I was incapable of living with myself, and who else did I have to live for? Humanity didn’t interest me – it disgusted me actually... I should have

found a woman to marry. That was the classic time-honoured solution. A woman is human, obviously, but she represents a different kind of humanity. She gives life a certain perfume of exoticism (Houellebecq, 171).

Huysmans, according to François, would have agreed. This is the second time Huysmans and the protagonist share an opinion regarding women: the first was when François decided that he, like his literary idol, wants “a good little cook”. As François retraces the sexism and patriarchal structures that run through the Western literary canon, and also inform his own views, the novel suggests that the compromised position of women in the Islamic culture may not be so radically different from the objectified position of women in the liberal West. Even worse, for the protagonist, Western liberalism has now been degraded to a spineless, cynical attitude to life that shuns any meaningful contact with others, is marked by the Western subject’s inability to show faith or committed belief in something, and produces many empty, lonely “cells”. Thus, and having followed the protagonist through his existential agony, it doesn’t quite surprise us when he envies his former colleagues, who are now Muslims and married to many women. While returning from his trip to Ligugé Abbey, where, unlike Huysmans, he failed to find God, we see him observing an Arab businessman, sitting close to him in the train, and the young girls accompanying him. Even though François tells us that he doesn’t miss his professional life – giving up all of his professional and intellectual responsibilities was actually a relief – he does comment on the fact that marriage must be some sort of consolation for this hard-working businessman: “At least he’d have the consolation of two graceful, charming wives to distract him from the anxieties facing the exhausted businessman – and maybe he had two more wives waiting for him in Paris” (Houellebecq, 189). Not long after that, our protagonist considers returning to the

Sorbonne and converting to Islam after being promised a salary that is triple his pension, and beautiful young wives. According to Gilbert:

“beyond the political specifics, Houellebecq’s narrator – whose melancholic pomposity has an oddly charming way of verging on self-mockery – supplies only a hazy vision of a Muslim France; women, seemingly unprompted, willingly leave the workforce when offered generous family subsidies and start covering their bodies almost overnight” (Gilbert, 53).

Indeed, that’s the impression François seems to have of these Muslim women. He is strongly fixated on the utterly devoted wives in veils who wear hello-kitty shirts, make delicious canapés, offer exquisite wine and subserviently obey their husband/master. This description is almost a parody of Muslim women in a Muslim regime. The fact that the protagonist embraces this view uncritically, and is convinced that these women will liberate him from his own ungratifying impulses, turns him into a caricature of the Western man, who fantasizes about obedient Oriental women. This is, thus, what tempts the protagonist; the polygamous family that he could have under this new regime and in this new Islamic society. François, so far, living in a decadent Western society as he does, has no reason to be optimistic about his chances of finding a partner; he is not wealthy, his parents’ relationship was a failure with love being “never more remote”, he is cynical and superficial when it comes to women. His opinion that all these factors are affecting his chances of having a good marriage is justifiable. As Angela Carter remarks in her work *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*:

we do not go to bed in simple pairs; even if we choose not to refer to them, we still drag there with us the cultural impedimenta of our social class, our parent's lives, our bank balances, our sexual and emotional expectations, our whole biographies – all the bits and pieces of our unique existences. These considerations have limited our choice of partners before we have even got them into the bedroom (9).

All this puts our protagonist in a disadvantageous position to find what he is looking for. Nevertheless, as a Muslim under an Islamic regime where women don't work, working again for the university and thus having more money, his chances increase immediately.

He sees first-hand the dynamics in such a family structure when he visits Rediger and he seems amazed; fabulous house, expensive wine, strong coffee, delicious food, all sort of treats that his first wife comes in to offer. Before thanking him for a “fascinating afternoon” he thinks to himself:

But still, even if his arguments were well rehearsed, that didn't take away from their strength. And look how he lived: a forty-year-old wife to do the cooking, a fifteen-year-old wife for whatever else... No doubt he had one or two wives in between, but I couldn't think how to ask (Houellebecq, 218).

They spend hours debating religion and God, Rediger tries to stress how a Muslim man can find happiness and François engages in the conversation pretending to care about religion. His attraction to this way of life is so clear that it is fair to say that François barely cares about Rediger's arguments regarding Islam. Rediger confides to François

that he sees a rapport between the absolute submission of a woman to a man and the submission of man to God, as Islam envisions it. This analogy is, of course, problematic. It indicates that man and woman, instead of being considered equal human beings, have the fundamentally unequal relationship that a human can have with a deity; man is to woman what God is to man. At the same time, if we regard “submission” as a bitter surrender of woman to man, an erotic thrill could be suggested in both the exercise of power and the abnegation of it. According to Gilbert, as François ponders the new regime in France, with its emphasis on conservative family structures and the elevation of dominant males, he feels he has perhaps glimpsed salvation. Offered several women to marry – he won’t even have to choose them – he could find solace in the traditionalist framework of the new religious order. He would escape from a hollow life punctuated by heartless sexual encounters (Gilbert, 53). Indeed, he will have nothing to worry about; even the wives will be chosen for him and they will also be content, simply by virtue of having no other choice, as expected by submissive women.

As Carter states, an erotic relationship is a direct confrontation of two beings whose actions in the bed are wholly determined by their acts when they are out of it. If one sexual partner is economically dependent on the other, “then the question of sexual coercion, of contractual obligation, raises its ugly head in the very abode of love and inevitably colours the nature of sexual expression of affection. The marriage bed is a particularly delusive refuge from the world because all wives of necessity fuck by contract” (9). This social contract would work to François’ benefit without a doubt. Women who don’t work, with no financial independence, couldn’t possibly break-up with him like his ex-mistresses; he wouldn’t find himself alone again. He would finally have “a little cook”, probably more than one, who would depend on him completely and eventually love him: “Each of these girls, no matter how pretty, would be happy and proud if I chose her, and would feel honoured to share my bed. They would be worthy of love; and I, for my part, would come to love them” (Houellebecq, 250). The novel ends

on a cliff-hanger; the use of conditional sentences draws a possible future scenario that is neither confirmed nor denied. We are thus left wondering whether François will indeed convert to Islam. Nevertheless, despite the uncertainty, the narration offers such clear pictures of his views and his mentality that the outcome hardly matters.

Based on François' love life, Anders-Berg Sorensen draws the conclusion that "this obsession with polygamy adds to the reading that the novel is a thick caricature of the Occidental fantasy of the Oriental harem; a fantasy that has become closer to reality because of the possibility of polygamy" (137). This could be true. In the Western culture, the East, its women, the Oriental harems, indeed exercise an exotic allure. Our protagonist uses the same term during one of his internal monologues when he states that a woman is obviously human too, but she has an element of "exoticism". He also says that Huysmans "would have posed the problem in almost exactly the same terms. Not much has changed since then" (Houellebecq, 171). The troubling fact is that all the male academics in the novel (from Joris-Karl Huysmans in the 19th century up to Houellebecq's dystopia in the 21st century) share certain similarities when it comes to gender relations. Whether they subscribe to an Islamic or Western secular regime, they all want this "good little cook which turns into a good little whore" and they want it "on a fixed schedule". This suggests that the compromised position of women in the Islamic culture may not be so radically different from the objectified position of women in the liberal West and the Western (male) literary canon. The average middle-aged Western man is not really different from denigrating attitudes to women in the Islam, even if this denigration is expressed in different ways. The objectification of women from François' part remained constant, and his sexist and offensive thoughts on women were there even before the Muslim Brotherhood took power in the story. The way the novel casts gender relations underlines the novel's criticism towards the ideological landscape in contemporary French and European political culture, the sterility of modern life in the capitalist West and a growing pessimism about the future of Western liberalism. This is

all registered in the relationships of the main character, adding to the general critical attitude of the novel towards the average Western academic, who is, like the protagonist, disillusioned both politically and personally. The fact that when it comes to gender relations there is no essential difference between the capitalist West and the illiberal Muslim societies, suggests that the novel does not seem to prefer one value-system over the other; both are criticized, and at the same time, no alternative is given. The novel gives us two options that share a comparable objectification of women and are equally unconvincing, just like in *The History Man* we are given two different types of people (radicals-liberal humanists) that are both flawed and fail us. In both novels, although in very different contexts, no convincing alternative is being promoted and thus, we are left with the feeling that there is no room for optimism.

Chapter III: Synthesis and Conclusions.

In this final chapter, I will provide a synthesis and analysis of the conclusions provided in the previous chapters concerning the two novels. I will attempt to take the interpretation a step further, in order to discover where the novels stand in regards to the types of academics presented. I intend to find out whether a slight preference towards one of the types of intellectuals is suggested and whether an alternative is proposed. I will then place the novels side by side, to explore how they speak to one another, how they seem to envision the future of academia, and investigate what their contribution is to the public debate on the role and figure of the intellectual.

Malcolm Bradbury's *History Man*, as Terry Eagleton poignantly observes, depicts perfectly "the battle between the contradictory English perception of the intellectual, as at once sinister and shambolic, dangerously dissident and innocuously eccentric" a battle that for Eagleton "becomes metonymic of the ideological dilemma of Britain as a whole, torn between a cherished but threadbare amateur humanism and an efficient but alienating professionalism" (95). Because of this novel, Bradbury was accused of conservatism. His protagonist, Howard Kirk, is presented as a representative of the emancipatory politics of the 1960s. Ruthless and self-serving, he pulls strings and causes events to happen. He incarnates exploitation, whereas the liberal humanists of the novel (Henry Beamish, Annie Callendar, George Carmody) speak up for more humane values than Kirk has to offer, to the extent that liberal humanism and humaneness become almost synonyms. This way, the revolution of the 1960s seems only to be cast in a negative light and criticized, despite the fact that it had a beneficial outcome to society and was so pivotal for the advancement of civil rights and liberties. As a result, liberal humanism seems to be a somewhat more preferable option, despite the fact that in academia it reproduces an elitist ideology.

What is the novel's overall stance towards the types of intellectuals it accommodates and the ideologies they represent? The theory of dialectics by Hegel could help us deal with this question. Hegel is mentioned in the preface of *The History Man*, in a dialogue between two unknown speakers. "Who's Hegel?" asks the first speaker. "Someone who sentenced mankind to history" is the answer. "Did he know a lot?" the first one asks again. "Did he know everything?" is the response he gets. The question "Who is Hegel" is asked again in the novel, but is never satisfactorily answered. When two students knock on Howard's door, debating whether to attend a sociology course, he asks them "who's Hegel". "Ah... you see, you do need to study sociology." "Did he know a lot?" asks the student. "He did," says Howard, "but his roof leaks" (Bradbury, 67). Hegel's dialectical method (or "speculative mode of cognition") includes three abstract terms that were named by Johann Fichte "thesis", "antithesis" and "synthesis", that is to say, the beginning preposition, the negation of that preposition, and a synthesis whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled to form a new preposition accordingly. According to James Acheson, "Hegel believed that each historical epoch, characterized by an ethos, or thesis, would eventually give way to its ideological opposite, or antithesis, and that the best features of the two would finally be united in a synthesis. This process would repeat itself, he held, until the ultimate synthesis" (Acheson, 41-42).

If we bring this to bear on Bradbury's novel, according to Acheson we could come with the following scheme: the thesis consists of the pre-1968 bourgeois liberal humanists and the antithesis of post-1968 Marxist radicals (48-49). Liberal humanism, the "thesis", is represented by Henry Beamish when it comes to the male characters of the novel. He is too weak to make a change and stand up for himself, perpetuating any 'malaise' expressed in society from capitalism to sexism by being evasive and passive. The reaction to this preposition, the "antithesis", is the radical, revolutionary Howard Kirk. He is active, radical, he wants to deconstruct social conventions but at the same

time he is self-serving, ruthless and inhumane. Neither of these figures represents a solution. However, there also seems to be no alternative projected in the novel. There is no affirmative proposal for another ideology or for a third type of academic that could point toward a “synthesis”, a synthesis that might have been able to solve the problem of the decline of humanism in the modern academic world.

Similarly, we find the same distinction in the female characters. Miss Callendar, representative of “another era”, and Barbara Kirk before the revolution of the 1960s, represent the “thesis”, the beginning proposition. Their attitude fails them, Barbara is “trapped and unhappy” and Miss Callendar “can’t bear” the way Howard perceives her life as unfulfilled. The negation of this proposition, the “antithesis”, is represented by Flora Beniform, the radical who treats people as means to professional ends, exploiting her affairs for her research. The “synthesis” whereby the two conflicting ideas should be reconciled to form a new proposition accordingly, is nowhere to be found in the novel. How the novel is dismissive towards the radical politics of the 1960s and its authoritative sides is clear. The way it is dismissive towards liberal humanism differs; the suggestion that seems to be attached to these characters of the novel is that they are too weak to stand up to figures like Howard Kirk, and that in the end they are ineffective. The distance Annie unsuccessfully tries to maintain from Howard and Henry’s choice to turn to privatism and “evasive quietism”, suggests that even though they have good intentions and sympathetic values, they lack confidence and motivation to stand up against Kirk and his comrades.

I don’t believe that the mentioning of Hegel in the novel is a coincidence. By seeing his name pop-up in the story, the reader is led to try and apply his theory to the novel, only to find out that it is not fully applicable due to the lack synthesis. If, for Hegel, synthesis is the answer, the novel is deprived of one. For me, this adds to the pessimistic tone of the novel. As Acheson states “the novel presents a stark view of academic life in the seventies and promises little hope for the future” making historical

synthesis too uncertain and remote (51). In his interview with Haffenden, Bradbury says that “there is no one in the book with whom you could keep any identification, no one whom you could say was nice, philosophically correct, or did all right” (36). The novel does not promote one ideology instead of the other, so Eagleton’s accusation of conservatism seems unjustified. The reader is thus left with the impression that no characters could be role models; the novel offers no answers, no “synthesis”, and no source of hope.

Houellebecq was also criticized for his novel. *Submission* was accused of being Islamophobic. As mentioned, on the date of the novel’s publication, *Charlie Hebdo* was attacked by the Kouachi brothers resulting in the death of twelve people. The cover of *Charlie Hebdo* that week depicted Houellebecq in the form of a chain-smoking grotesque sorcerer predicting that in 2022 (the year when *Submission* is set) he would observe Ramadan. The book became associated with the massacre to the point where the French Prime Minister at the time made an announcement that France was not Michel Houellebecq, was not a country of intolerance and hatred (Knausgaard, *The New York Times*). However, with a more observing eye we realize that, from the very beginning, the novel is far more critical of Western society than it is of Islam. It has a pessimistic view of Western politics and secular progress.

Early in the narration, the protagonist reveals that “for a long time France, like all the other countries of the Western Europe, had been drifting towards civil war. That much was obvious” (Houellebecq, 94). This statement is accompanied by the confession that François is apolitical; he has no interest at all in the contemporary political scene. A bit later in the novel, he reaches the crude conclusion that, in this life, his “dick is all he has”. As Regina Gagnier argues, the gap between ordinary people and their governors in neoliberal society, in which politicians are perceived as part of a wealthy elite serving their own interests, has become a catastrophe and the protagonist in Houellebecq’s novel sees no choice within capitalism’s ugly culture except hedonistic participation or ascetic

withdrawal (Gagnier, 424). The French population in the novel, in the upcoming election, needs to make a choice between the far-right Front National and the Muslim Brotherhood. In other words, the choice to be made is between a nationalist, capitalist, neoliberal political party, and a conservative, patriarchal and illiberal (by Western standards) one.

Both of the scenarios depicted in the novel are rather pessimistic and unappealing to most readers, each one for different reasons. When the Muslim Brotherhood takes power and the alterations in the social sphere are presented, the protagonist appears to be neutral if not attracted by the caricatured image of Islam presented. It's the Western neoliberal society that the novel is critiquing and once we realize that, we feel that the aforementioned Islamophobic accusations are unjustified. As Gagnier states:

“Houellebecq's secular critics understand his work as critical and self-critical of sex within neoliberal consumer society, in which sexual competition and economic competition appear equal and often identical. They note that the struggle of the radical activists in the sixties for sexual liberation was co-opted by neoliberal competition and individualism, resulting in ever increasing individuation expressed through insatiable desire for banal objects of consumption” (423).

This is something Bradbury, when he wrote *The History Man*, was able to foresee and, perhaps, constitutes his source of pessimism at a time when the radical academic was regarded as a powerful figure with great potential. In his interview with John Haffenden, he stated:

I was pretty sympathetic to the early stages of the radical movement... but my rising sympathy with sixties radicalism became more and more qualified. One great irony of the human behavior is the way people authenticate themselves through fashion... The long hair served the season and the American radicals of the 1960s very quickly turned up as executives of law firms and insurance companies. Utopia and Standard Oil are closer than you think (36).

François, then, represents what has become of the liberated, politicized academia of the 1960s. The activist aspirations and politicized views that asserted the key role of academia in society, have given way to defeatism and the inability to really believe in something. As mentioned, François is an expert in Huysmans and this plays a significant role in the novel. The first thing we see when we open *Submission*, in the preface, is a part of *En Route* where Huysmans characteristically notes that he is “haunted by Catholicism”. Huysmans is an interesting choice as he converted to Catholicism after a mid-life crisis. When François is going through his own crisis, he attempts to find God – like his idol – but concludes that Catholicism is no longer an option; science and modern rationalism have compromised it. Islam, for him, is probably the better solution. They both turn to religion in their search for salvation, although for different reasons; Huysman’s motive is spiritual whereas the protagonist seems more drawn to Islam’s ‘added benefits’ than anything else. Another trait François shares with Huysmans is that they both represent decay. Huysmans’ most famous novel, *À rebours*, became the epitome of fin-de-siècle decadence. As Tom Wilhelmus states, François is similarly decadent, a member of the French academic class that is cynical, disillusioned,

overspecialized, and without meaningful social or political commitments, a man whose apartment, habits of eating, and sex life have become indifferent and mechanical (693).

In the end, however, the protagonist gives up on Huysmans. He is unable to ultimately find in literature an alternative ‘religion’ to the kind of religious paradigm that takes over the country. With his actions and attitude, he underlines the inability of the liberal Western subject to ‘believe’ in something. This inability becomes a weakness and pushes the protagonist towards ‘submission’ to the new regime. Converting to Islam, however, will not provide any solution since the protagonist remains essentially the same; only the religious label is different. Thus, the novel promotes neither Islam nor the declining Western liberalism, offering no hope to the reader. This disillusionment and element of decay has contaminated the figure of the modern Western intellectual, who is now viewed as powerless and helpless. Even academics themselves are unable to believe in values promoted in their own field, in the field of the Humanities.

During an interview, Houellebecq has expressed his conviction of the “absolute irreversibility of all processes of decay once they have begun... in friendship, family, social group or whole society” (qtd. in Gagnier, 426). His protagonist, François, repeats this view, saying that “Europe had reached a point of such putrid decomposition it could no longer save itself any more than fifth century Rome had done” (Houellebecq, 230-231). So, he surrenders and converts to Islam. The thought of assuming for himself a public role (like Chomsky and Said had envisioned for the intellectual), of becoming politically active and of trying to save – or ameliorate – society, eludes him. François, with his defeatism, represents a powerless and passive modern Western academic.

Written several decades apart and situated in opposed social and political contexts, *The History Man* and *Submission*, unmask the contradictions and hypocrisy of the progressive academic. Even though the image of the intellectual as a powerful figure, as it was in 1975 when Bradbury published his novel, is deflated and annulled in

Houellebecq's novel, both novels share an equally pessimistic outlook on the future of academia. Furthermore, both novels present two alternatives that equally fail the reader. Neither the liberal humanists nor the radicals in Bradbury's novel serve as role models, and nothing is really better when it comes to a fundamentalist Islamic state and a declining Western liberalism in Houellebecq's world. This shocks the reader but, in my opinion, does not demoralize him. On the contrary, it is food for thought, engaging the reader with the issues presented.

The History Man and *Submission*, having as their object the figure of the academic, offer a strong critique on his/her role and potential. Their view of the figure of the intellectual is harsh and severe, in contrast with the idealized or at least more optimistic version often offered by theorists. If the theorists mentioned in the introduction provide different manifestos of intellectuals and what their role should be, literature provides us with examples to be avoided. In other words, the literary works examined here, by giving us the underside of the progressive, contemporary intellectual, and by debunking him, work in a complementary way with the theory, showing us the opposite side of the same coin. Thus, literature earns its rightful place in the public debate concerning the role and figure of the intellectual.

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