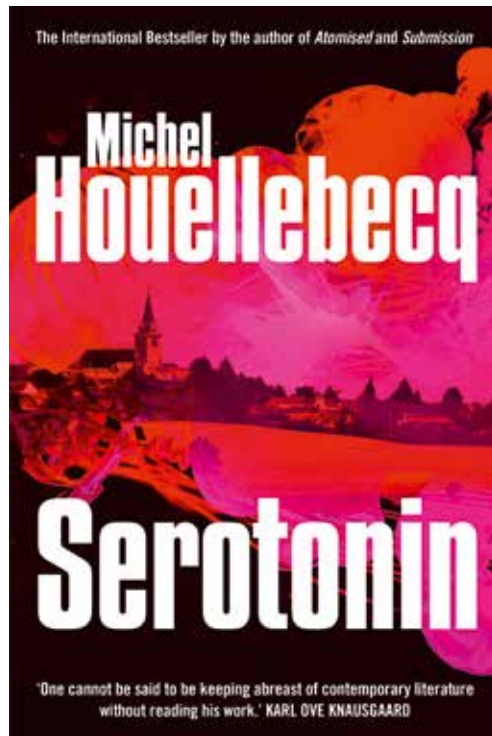


Readers' Guide



Serotonin

Michel Houellebecq

Translated by Shaun Whiteside

William Heinemann

Other novels by Michel Houellebecq

Whatever (1998)

Atomised (2000)

Lanzarote (2002)

Platform (2002)

The Possibility of an Island (2006)

The Map and the Territory (2012)

Submission (2015)

thebookerprizes.com

About the author

Michel Houellebecq was born on the French island territory of Reunion in February 1956. He is a poet, essayist and novelist. He is the author of several novels including *The Map and the Territory* (winner of the Prix Goncourt), *Atomised*, *Platform*, *Whatever* and *Submission*. He was awarded the Legion d'Honneur in 2019. He lives in France.

About the translator

Shaun Whiteside was born in Dungannon, Northern Ireland, in October 1959. His translations from French, German, Italian and Dutch include works by Georges Simenon, Amélie Nothomb, Patrick Rambaud, Ralf Rothmann, Walter Kempowski, Judith Schalansky, Luther Blissett/Wu Ming and Marcel Möring, as well as classic authors including Freud, Nietzsche, Robert Musil and Adolf Loos. His reviews have appeared in a range of journals including the *Guardian*, the *TLS*, the *Literary Review* and the *Irish Times*. He lives in London with his wife and son.

About the book

Dissatisfied and discontented, Florent-Claude Labrouste feels he is dying of sadness. His young girlfriend hates him and his career as an engineer at the Ministry of Agriculture is pretty much over. His only relief comes in the form of a pill – white, oval, small. Recently released for public consumption, Captorix is a new brand of anti-depressant which works by altering the brain's release of serotonin.

Armed with this new drug, Labrouste decides to abandon his life in Paris and return to the Normandy countryside where he used to work promoting regional cheeses, and where he had once been in love. But instead of happiness, he finds a rural community devastated by globalisation and European agricultural policies, and local farmers longing, like Labrouste himself, for an impossible return to what they remember as the golden age.

What the judges thought

'A novel about a repugnant man, and such is the level of artistry that our moral universe is turned on its head.'

Discussion points

What do you think about Florent-Claude's journey to revisit his past throughout the novel?

Does the novel raise questions of morality?

How are women portrayed in the novel?

What challenges do you think the translator may have faced when working on this novel?

Houellebecq's previous novels have seemed to predict political events. How does *Serotonin* reflect current events in France?

Themed reading

Journey to the End of the Night

by Louis-Ferdinand Céline

Vernon Subutex 1 by Virginie Despentes

Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue

by The Marquis de Sade

Against Nature by Joris-Karl Huysmans

The End of Eddy by Édouard Louis

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/20/serotonin-by-michel-houellebecq-review>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/books/review-serotonin-michel-houellebecq.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/6c775d98-d560-11e9-8d46-8def889b4137>

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/lonely-white-men-on-michel-houellebecqs-serotonin/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/michel-houellebecqs-new-book-indictment-eu/580165/>

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