



Anti-Matter: Michel Houellebecq and Depressive Realism

By Ben Jeffery

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Michel Houellebecq, author of five novels including *Atomised* and *Platform*, has become possibly the world's most famous literary pessimist. His work declares that life is painful and disappointing, death is terrifying, and the human condition is a nasty sort of joke. He has been wildly successful – translated into over 25 different languages and hailed as the voice of a generation. Beginning with Houellebecq's novels, this book explores the concept of 'Depressive Realism' in literature and philosophy – the proposition that the facts of life are bleak and unkind. Ranging over work by David Foster Wallace, Susan Sontag, Fredric Jameson and Margaret Atwood, *Anti-Matter* surveys the case for pessimism, asks how a mass culture rooted in sentimentality and trivialisation manages to produce so much cynicism and apathy, and hunts for the space that remains for serious, life-affirming art.

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