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Lysis Houellebecq: "I was bruised by the porn film affair"



Separate apartment. Lysis, 33, at her home in the 13th arrondissement of Paris on May 9. On her fridge, between the memories, photos of her husband. © Vincent Capman / Paris Match

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Lysis, the wife of Michel Houellebecq, speaks for the first time. On May 24, the author of "Submission" will publish a pamphlet in which he responds to the controversies caused by his participation, and that of his wife, in a pornographic film. Both would have been trapped. In turn, Lysis steps up.

Paris Match. When did you meet [Michel Houellebecq](#) ?

Lysis Houellebecq. In 2016, I was nearing the end of my studies at the Sorbonne, where I was going to support my master's thesis on Michel's work. The title was "Houellebecq, dandy in spite of himself". The day before the defense, I wrote him a letter in which I included a photo of me, dressed in his style of dress, where I hold the cigarette in his way – it's my profile picture on Instagram now. He answered me immediately and offered to continue the discussion in person.

“ Michel and I really appreciate the Sarkozys ”

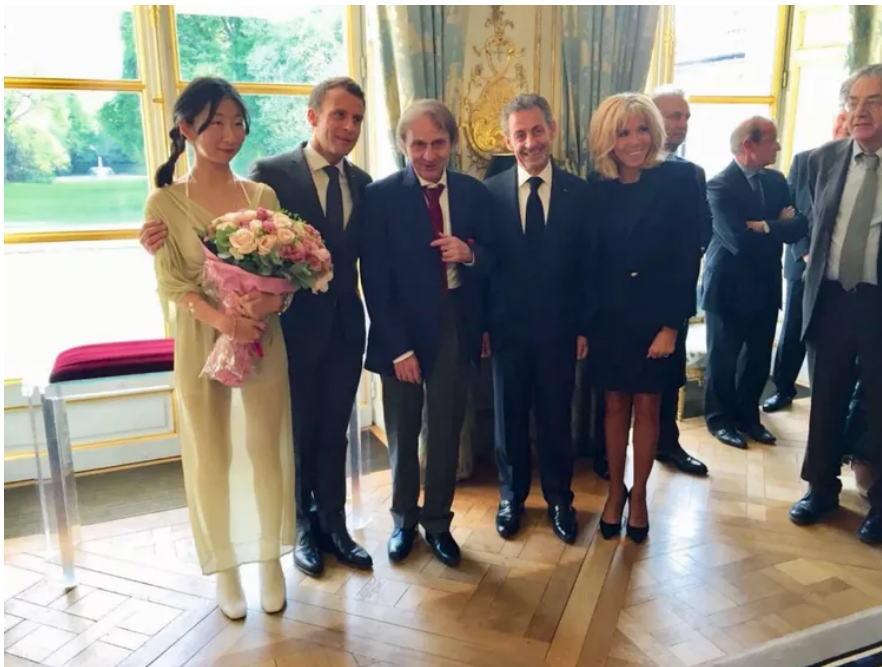
Lysis Houellebecq

How did he propose to you?

By email. [She laughs.] At the time, I had gone back to work in China for six months, while he was battling illness in Paris. Only, I didn't know anything about it. Michel is extremely modest about his state of health, he didn't want to disturb me. But he missed me. As soon as he woke up from his surgery, he wrote to me: "My love, the operation is successful. I ask you in marriage."

[Carla Bruni was the first to reveal your wedding photos on her social networks](#) . Do you have regular contact with the Sarkozy couple?

Michel and I are very fond of the Sarkozys. I have very good memories of a dinner at their house, [the Seigner-Polanski couple](#) was invited. I smoked my first cigar there in front of Marceline Loridan, laughing at my apprenticeship.



With Emmanuel Macron, who has just awarded him the Legion of Honor, Brigitte, his wife, Nicolas Sarkozy and (on the right) Alain Finkielkraut. In 2019. © DR

In Michel Houellebecq's penultimate novel, “Sérotonine”, is the character of Yuzu, an odious and zoophilic Japanese woman. It is said that you inspired her...

I believe that the evil and the wickedness of this character were rather inspired by the wars which the Japanese made with China. Note, it was perhaps I who inspired Michel with this sympathy for my native country.

Your husband was awarded the Legion of Honor by Emmanuel Macron in 2019. How was this day?

The ceremony took place at the Élysée. I wore a dress that Frédéric Beigbeder later described in “Charlie Hebdo” as “transparent”. I don't find it that transparent! But, according to Frédéric, “We could see, through this dress, the bra which was also transparent.” A few days before the ceremony, an adviser to the president showed us around the palace. He even showed us the first lady's office. At the end of the visit, I ran into his dog, a black Labrador named Nemo, lying on a couch. I told him that I had come to see his dad. I have never seen such an impassive dog. But I think he likes me anyway, because on the day of the ceremony, he allowed me to pet him.



At the reopening party of the illustrious Lapérouse restaurant, in Paris, in 2019. © DR

Last December, Annie Ernaux was delighted in “Le Parisien” to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature against Michel Houellebecq, castigating in passing his ideas which she considers “totally reactionary and anti-feminist”. What do you think ?

French feminism would be destroyed if it were represented by **Annie Ernaux**! I quote her: “They knew their place in the reality of the sexual market, that it was transgressed by one of their fellows gave them hope and audacity. [...] Come to think of it, the mature woman was more dangerous than the young one, the proof, he had left a 20-year-old one for me.” I let you judge for yourselves... The hatred of the father is not feminism either. In short, this woman thinks that her personal story is a splendid anthropological example. But imagining that passing the Capes de Lettres turns you into a big bourgeois, sorry, but isn't that a bit naive? If you are interested in social class issues, read Balzac.

“ Bruno Lemaire is a very dear friend of Michel ”

Lysis Houellebecq

Your husband has been implicated by Islamic authorities following comments he made in the magazine “Front Populaire” last November. How did you experience it?

I received a huge wave of insults and hatred on Instagram, coming from many French people who declared themselves “of the Muslim faith”. Someone wrote to me: "Fortunately you won't have children." It is terribly retrograde to think that a wife necessarily has the same ideas, the same point of view as her husband. I had a life before meeting Michel. However, I was more bruised by the affair of the porn

Bruno Le Maire is one of the protagonists of your husband's latest novel. Do you know it ?

He is a very dear friend of Michel's, we had dinner together several times and I was able to discuss books and music with him. I consider him a man of refined spirit, and even a romantic.

Are you interested in politics?

I'm excited to be able to vote in the next elections, and... even to be able to present myself! [She laughs.]



The accomplice adventure, at the Casela zoological park in Mauritius, in January 2020. © DR

Do you play a role in the work of Michel Houellebecq?

Writing a novel is very laborious and requires a lot of effort, so in practice I can distinguish very clearly when he is active. On the other hand, I do not seek to know more about his work in progress, because I do not want to spoil the surprise and the happiness of discovering his novels once finished. Likewise, I don't read the scripts of the films in which he plays. That said, Michel's work has always been and will continue to be a source of inspiration for my own creation. I am in contact with his Chinese editor, who was interested in a possible translation of his poems after my proposal for a personal work. I also take care of its digital presence, the website, social networks.



With Gérard Depardieu on the set of "Thalasso", where Michel Houellebecq plays himself. In 2018. © DR

Do you feel a form of control in your relationship?

I fell in love with Michel precisely because I was impressed by the passion he showed for me. If there is any hold, I have it on him, right? [She laughs.] I'm lucky to have an apartment entirely at my disposal, independently of my husband. Michel allows me to flourish and I am grateful to him.

How do you see your future?

In the countryside, in the countries where Michel spent his childhood, growing vegetables and raising animals.

“ Michel is going to release a pamphlet that tells you about the last six months of his life, including this episode. »

Lysis Houellebecq

You mentioned the affair of the pornographic film shot in the Netherlands in which you appear with your husband, who reacted via the courts and in the media. You yourself have, until now, expressed very little. For what ?

Because it's a fabricated story by a bunch of people trying to get a boost by using my husband's image. Their version of the story is completely false, by the way. The narrative doesn't stick. I'm just giving you a few elements so that you can judge for yourself the kind of “art criticism”, as it claims to be, with which we have had to deal. The first element is

that I had to make children with his sperm, because according to him, it was my deep desire. What charity! Another revealing detail is that during our stay in Amsterdam, he bribed a hotel employee to get a copy of the keycard for the room I was staying with Michel, so he could break in without our permission. Michel will soon release a pamphlet that tells you about the last six months of his life, including this episode. It will be in bookstores on May 24.

“ *I assume my female exhibitionism.* »

Lysis Houellebecq

In your blog Lysis reads, some pages may be perceived as exhibitionism. Have you not reaped what you have sown?

I assume my female exhibitionism, I maintain my blog legitimately without disturbing others and I demand that this non-disturb be reciprocal.

Is Lysis your real first name?

Lysis is my poetess pseudonym, it is the abbreviation of Lysistrata, a play written by Aristophanes. This is a comedy where Athenian women go on a sexual strike to end the war in ancient Greece. My Chinese first name was Qianyun, but as it is unpronounceable for the French, I had it replaced by Hermine during my naturalization.



She and her other half. Selfie after a reading of texts by Baudelaire at the University of Münster (Germany), June 24, 2022. © DR

China does not accept dual nationality, so by becoming French, you are stripped of Chinese nationality. Was this choice difficult for you?

My future is in France, I have been living here for almost ten years. Over the years, I have understood that France is the country of my heart – I came for freedom and against censorship, it is the country in the world where it still seems possible to obtain it. It's like a second marriage, I love French culture like I love my husband. Moreover, I have never felt out of place here, you will be surprised to know how much the customs of the two countries are close, in the end. As Josephine Baker sang, I have two loves...



A "Mimi" jacket as a comforter, and a library filled with French books. In his living room, May 9. © DR

At 23, you left everything for a distant country where you didn't know anyone. Where did this courage come from?

The trigger was an Ang Lee film "Lust, Caution", adapted from a short novel by Eileen Chang. The movie came out when I was 17, and since I love Ang Lee and Eileen Chang, I was looking forward to it. But the session at the cinema was a huge disappointment: the film was cut into pieces because of the erotic scenes, all censored! Later, in college, I was told that the only country where the film was not censored was France. So my choice was made, and I learned French on my own.



Michel Houellebecq



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