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## Joris-Karl Huysmans, Tome 1: Figures et Fictions du Naturalisme (book review)

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SOLAL, JÉRÔME, éd. *Joris-Karl Huysmans, Tome 1: figures et fictions du Naturalisme*. Caen: Minard, 2011. ISBN 978-2-256-91164-4. Pp. iii + 245. 23 €.

A gifted prose poet and writer of short fiction, an important art critic whom Fénéon called “l’inventeur de l’impressionnisme,” the first president of the Académie Goncourt, Huysmans (1848–1907) was all these things, but perhaps above all a unique novelist ever torn between science and spirituality (i). Associated with Naturalism, Decadence, Symbolism, and the Catholic literary revival, his remarkable career thus witnessed virtually all of the major literary and artistic mutations of the last three decades of the nineteenth century and beyond. This collection of thirteen essays, the first volume in a series devoted to the author and edited by Solal, seeks to examine the current state of Huysmansian studies while at the same time sparking new fields of inquiry. Using a wide variety of stylistic, sociological, historical, thematic, psycho-analytic, and comparative approaches, the book pays special attention to Huysmans’s ambivalent relationship to Naturalism—a movement that he never really abandoned, if only in his life-long commitment to research and documentation. Hence, the collection seeks not only to analyze Huysmans’s durable membership in Zola’s Naturalist school—one that shaped his worldview and methods—but also to demonstrate how that same affiliation granted him the freedom to break away and find his personal voice. Divided into two major sections titled “Figures” and “Fictions” respectively, part one examines Huysmans’s artistic affinity with the various “figures” of Naturalism—its “maître” Zola, its “initiateurs” like the Goncourt brothers, and its primary and secondary “acteurs” like Maupassant, Mirbeau, Alexis, Céard, Hennique, Caze, and Descaves (5). René-Pierre Colin shows how problematic these relationships were for a Huysmans who dreamed of an “intimisme” that would supplant Naturalism (5). In studying his *Correspondance* with Edmond de Goncourt, Pierre-Jean Dufieff underlines the ambivalence and complexity of the two writers’ relationship, concluding that they nevertheless shared a certain type of sensibility he calls “naturalisme artiste” (25). Among other interesting facts in Marc Smeets’s essay on Huysmans’s reception

in the Netherlands, we learn that the author was greatly admired by the Dutch neo-Romantic writer Arij Prins. Noëlle Benhamou compares the satirical representation of peasants in Huysmans's *En rade* (1887) and Maupassant's little-known *Mont-Oriol*, published the same year, while Samuel Lair compares Satanism, possession, hysteria, and the symbol of the bell in Huysmans and Mirbeau. Part two examines how the various Huysmansian 'fictions' are traversed by their own desires and obsessions like food, prostitution, hysteria, and bachelorhood. Laurence Decroocq treats Huysmans's unique take on gastronomy while Éléonore Reverzy and Jeannine Pacque analyze representations of women. Céline Grenaud's essay on hysteria in *Là-bas* (1891) sees Charcot and Lombroso as influential sources, but emphasizes how Huysmans took his depictions beyond facile scientific explanations. Sylvie Thorel explores fresh terrain in her essay on the Huysmansian *flâneur* while Jean Borie compares the notions of travel and luxury in Huysmans and Larbaud. The volume also contains two invaluable contributions that treat little-known or unedited works. Solal's essay on Huysmans's compassionate portrayal of a female protagonist in the unfinished novel *La faim* provides refreshing new insights into an author known for his bachelor heroes, while Philippe Barascud's contribution on the ephemeral journal *Les cloches de Paris* (1877) unveils the behind-the-scenes world of the nascent naturalist movement plunged into a kind of media circus. The collection is a highly diverse and stimulating addition to the body of scholarship devoted to an author who may have abandoned the ideology of Naturalism but never quite abandoned its methods.