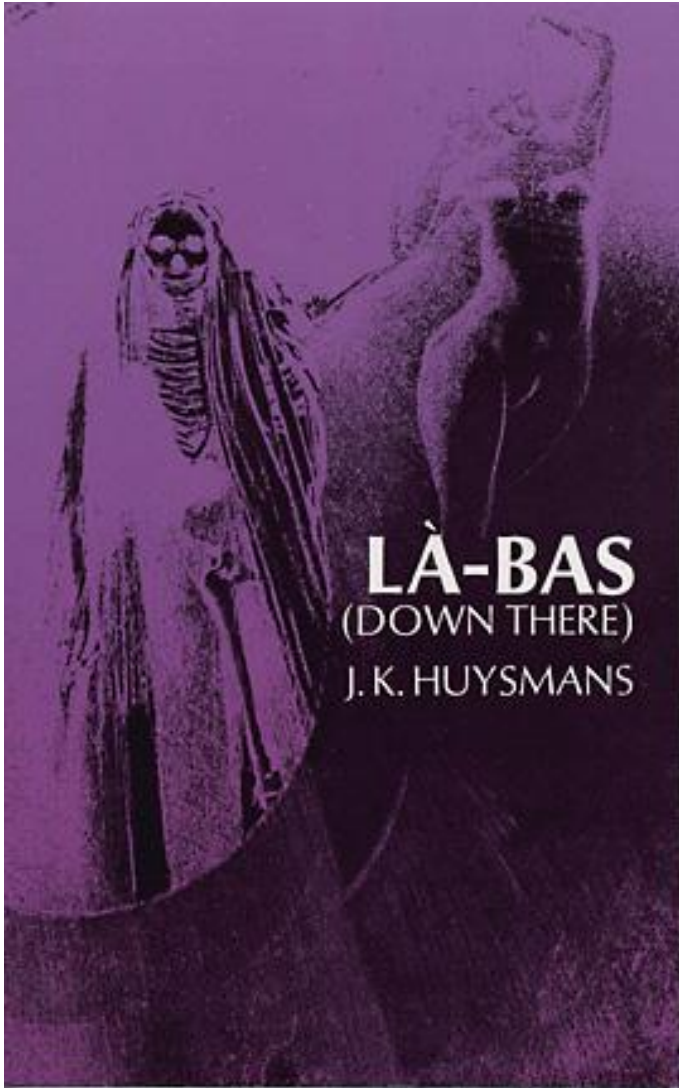


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**Joris-Karl Huysmans**

**Là-Bas (Down There)**



Title: Là-Bas (Down There)

Author: Joris-Karl Huysmans

Format: Paperback

Language: English

Pages: 287

Publisher: Dover Publications, 1297900800

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## Description

At the novel's center is Durtal, a writer obsessed with the life of one of the blackest figures in history, Gilles de Rais -- child murderer, sadist, necrophile, and practitioner of all the black arts. The book's authentic, extraordinarily detailed descriptions of the Black Mass have never been surpassed.

## Insightful reviews

Christopher: "Là-Bas" is a tale told through the affairs and investigations of a writer named Durtal and some rather thinly-developed characters with whom he associates. It's written in (and seems to be faithfully translated in) the typical French Gothic style; very flourished in its prose with dark and shadowy sets and its romantic scenes are written almost as parodies of themselves. I do enjoy the way that Victorian-era writers can describe filth and vices that can leave you feeling effectively disgusted without ever having to use a foul or vulgar word, a literary art that has been all but abandoned, even by Nobel winners these days.

Durtal and all of the prop characters within "Là-Bas" are actually a composite of the author, Huysmans, and they are used to set up monologues on his developing philosophy and his disgust with the emptiness of modern life. Durtal is retained in further novels as Huysman's own philosophy and conversion to Catholicism seems to develop. The popularity and scandal of the novel was originally for its vivid depiction of what is known as a "Black Mass" used in Satanic ritual. After all of the build-up towards the actual Black Mass, I was personally disappointed in its shortness, the description covering only a few pages.

Taking up almost half of the writing, and to me the most interesting aspect of the book, was Durtal's studious history of Gilles de Rais, the subject of a book he was writing and the source of his interest in attending a Black Mass. Gilles de Rais was an actual 15th Century companion of Saint Joan of Arc whose zealous but consuming search for mysticism degraded over time into a consuming obsession that led him far from his goal and into demonology and Satanism. By the time he was executed, he'd raped and slaughtered hundreds of children. A very disturbing and fairly accurate history yet told by Huysmans without base language.

I'm often compelled to compare a newly-discovered author to other authors I'm familiar with and I make no exception here as it seems the best way to describe what is otherwise an elusive book. In Huysmans, I find the revulsion of Oscar Wilde at the new decadence of the era in which he was living(\*), the satire and humorous cynicism of fellow Frenchman Louis Ferdinand Celine, and the tremendous vocabulary and what seems to be an encyclopedic knowledge of obscure and secret things exhibited only by today's Umberto Eco.

4.5 stars and not 5 only because of the scantily disguised autobiographical character and the straw men that feed him his lines.

(\*) Incidentally, an early work of Huysmans, "À Rebours (Against the Grain)," is the "poisonous

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French novel" that leads to the downfall of Dorian Gray as mentioned in Oscar Wilde's novel.

Stephen Durrant: In recent weeks I have been concentrating on literature of the last decade or two of the nineteenth century. This interest has inevitably pushed me towards the decadents—Gabriele d'Annunzio, Oscar Wilde, and now J.-K. Huysmans. The latter's *The Damned* (*Là-Bas*) is sometimes put alongside his *Against Nature* (*À rebours*) as two masterpieces of French decadent literature. I have difficulty, though, in understanding how Huysmans fits together with a writer like d'Annunzio, whose *Pleasure* was one of my most recent readings. These authors both share a fascination with the obscure, to be sure, and both display a kind of authorial self-indulgence, but beyond that I see no clear resemblance. Obviously it's time to turn to secondary studies of decadent literature, which I have not yet done. *The Damned* concerns a scholarly non-believer by the name of Durtal who is writing a book about the inexpressibly horrible 15th century murderer Gilles de Rais. The central problem for Durtal is to understand how Gilles goes from what appears to be relative decency (he was a companion in arms of Jean d'Arc) to become a sexually perverted murderer of hundreds of small children. The answer, he seems to find, is in Gilles' fascination with the obscurities of alchemy and his related involvement in Satanism, for only Satan can provide the ultimate elixir. As Durtal researches and writes all this, he develops his own interest in religious esoterica of all sorts and eventually becomes involved with the strange Madame Chantelouve, who arranges for him to attend a black mass (and does other things too—let the reader beware). As it happens, the place where this mass “takes place” in the novel is just a few blocks from my Paris apartment—Yikes!! *The Damned* is about as dark and disturbing as a novel can be, even if you live very far away from my neighborhood. But, strangely, I read this book as a pro-Catholic work, which seems to say that in the end the only real safeguard against either boring, shallow materialism, on the one hand, or Satanism, on the other, is time-honored Catholicism. Huysmans even seems to proclaim the superiority of the Middle Ages over late nineteenth century. Hmm. Not sure I can buy that.

Nate D: Being an investigation into mystical and heretical Catholicism at the end of the 19th century, with comparisons to the reign of terror of medieval murderer-mystic Gilles de Rais. What's most interesting is perhaps the degree to which Satanism here is presented as reliant on and subordinate to orthodox Catholicism. The greatest heresiarchs, are, of course, fallen clergy, much of the weird ritual described here is utterly reliant on consecration of the host, and one of the most horrifying aspects of de Rais' career is the degree of devotion he maintains throughout his unbelievable child-killing. In the end, in the face of excommunication, a Church tribunal actually accepted his repentance and re-admitted him to the fold, inconceivable crimes apparently expiated. And Huysmans' protagonist seems to in some sense admire de Rais' wild swing from monster to martyr, as preferable to the blander religion and modernity of his own time. ICK. Informative and excellently composed as this is, I think I much prefer the treatment Jim Shepard gives the subject in his story "Classical Scenes of Farewell" (slated for inclusion in his next collection, next year), which is a rather more scathing demonstration of the overwhelming atmosphere of pious terror and ignorance reigning at the time. But this version certainly seems closer to its source material, and is certainly not without its livid charms. Oh, and there's a love story, sort of.

Evan: ultimate THOUGHTS: I'm unlikely with a purpose to do that ebook justice. It truly is a type

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of reads the place you need to mark the e-book up with underlines as a result of all of the nice rates and the entire passages which are so suitable to today. The booklet is a brilliant read, very different. It covers rather a lot philosophical, old and transgressive territory. It has with regards to everything. Ultimately, the booklet bashes the trendy international of technology and expertise and atheism (of 1891) in prefer of the paranormal simplicity of the center Ages. that will not sound promising, however the manner the conversations and tale boost make for a thought-provoking template. Huysmans turns out to wish to steer the reader to Catholicism, however the ambiguities and skepticism within the brain of the most character, Durtal, appear to final the entire option to the end; an finishing i discovered a tad anticlimactic. Most of the ebook is a sequence of teases. One being the splendidly erotic dance among Durtal and Madam Chantelouve, the married lady whose hyperlink to Satanism fascinates and repulses Durtal on the related time. Their dating starts together with her nameless letters to him (she's partial to his books). And he turns into keen about studying who she is, because the letters turn into extra passionate. whilst he unearths her out, conferences are prepared and after parries and withdrawals they ultimately bed. Durtal's internal debate concerning the nature of the connection is fascinating, specifically his lack of ability to reconcile his "mother/whore" advanced approximately her. She's a chilly society lady in public, yet an orgasm hound in bed. the opposite tease of the publication is Durtal's try to malicious program his method into the Satanic cult global of recent day Paris. He must do that in an effort to end his publication at the lifetime of a bad satanic assassin of the center a while (the descriptions of his crimes -- the ripping of a fetus from a womb and raping it, for instance -- are transgressive to the max). There are striking descriptions of pedophilic crime, using poisons, and satanic rites. an excessive amount of stuff to even remember. The conferences among Carhaix, the straightforward bellringer with an easy faith, Durtal, the skeptic, and des Hermies, the guy who straddles the fence yet who turns out to lean to mysticism lead to fascinating discussions, no matter if a few of them appear choked with half-baked metaphysics. I may well cross on, yet there is simply too a lot here. This was, easily put, an awesome book.----- (earlier comment): So desirous to learn this I opened bankruptcy One and was once aid rapt. i used to be waiting for erotica (which possibly occurs later) yet as a substitute stumbled on it to be a wide-ranging, provocative, formidable and enlightening attention of art, literature, spiritual faith, money, corruption and the mysteries of life. It starts off as a debate among an remoted author and a innovative pondering physician concerning the validity of naturalist literature as practiced by means of Zola (which the author admires and the innovative disdains) as opposed to a much less tangible and poetic manner of documenting lifestyles in writing. the author starts to doubt lots of his precepts and ruminates at the truths in Matthias Grünewald's portray of the Crucifixion, which appear to endure out the arguments of his debate rival. the outline of the portray and the way it captures pain, truth and secret is achingly beautiful. So many rules during this first bankruptcy mirrored such a lot of of my very own suggestions approximately those concerns that I virtually idea Huysmans will be a religious antecedent of mine; a doppelganger of sorts. bankruptcy One is more or less a masterpiece; if the remainder of the booklet is that this good, i'll be very pleased. Provisional five-star rating.

Robert: Written in Huysmans' frequently languid and pompous prose, los angeles Bas (The Damned) is a pessimistic novel approximately Satanism and obsession, advised in the course of the reviews of a annoyed author named Durtal. A thinly-veiled analogue of Huysmans himself, Durtal desperately desires to write a wholly new form of novel, one that will evoke an identical form of awe as non secular art, yet with no resorting to any of the conventions of the

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genre. He ultimately settles on a biography of the mass child-murderer and Satanist, Gilles De Rais. The structure of the unconventional alternates among Durtal's researches into his appalling subject, depicted within the such a lot image and repugnant manner, and his encounters with a pious yet obsessive bell-ringer named Carhaix and the Satanist Mme Chantelouve. whereas Durtal continues to be strictly at the part of the secularists he turns into fascinated about his topic matter, consorting with a popular astrologer and finally - on the book's climax - attending a Black Mass performed through a Satanic Priest named Docre, back depicted within the so much grotesque phrases merely for the titillation of the reader. Densely descriptive in style, Huysmans is going to nice lengths with a view to end up his erudition to the reader that is forgivable while the result's so immensely enjoyable. Huysmans can take pages to inform you approximately Durtal's cat awakening yet his method with language is so artistic that he transforms even the main mundane into the main epic. Ultimately Durtal learns that obsession is a perilous thing, even though he notes that Satanism will probably live on Catholicism and that during destiny mankind should be doomed by way of mediocrity to stay less than the thrall of cheating politicians, duplicitous Popes and the mundanity of 1 another. purely the artist, the dandy and the reactionary who nonetheless insists on training the faith and occultism of the middle-ages earn Huysmans' seal of approval.

Daniel: "What a wierd period, the center Ages! Of that there should be no doubt,' he continued, lights a cigarette. 'Some humans view it as a type of utopia and for others it's with out a unmarried redeeming quality; there's not anything in between; both the nadir of lack of awareness and darkness, based on the twaddle placed approximately via the atheists and collage students; or a dolorous and beautiful era, as artists and spiritual students have maintained.'" (102) As others have acknowledged in previous reviews, this is often admittedly, a tough read. i would not suggest it to somebody for easy 'casual reading'. And but the prose is beautiful, in particular the culinary descriptions. The conversations on the Carhaix's also are excellent." . . . this century doesn't provide a fig for the arrival of Christ; it adulterates the supernatural and vomits over the other-worldly. how are you going to have desire sooner or later below such circumstances? how are you going to potentially think that they're going to be fresh and decent, those offspring of our fetid bourgeoisie and the vile instances during which we live? stated in stipulations comparable to these, what is going to turn into of them, what is going to lifestyles make of them?' 'They will flip out,' answered Durtal, 'just almost like their parents. they are going to stuff their guts with nutrition and evacuate their souls via their bowels.'" (264-265)

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