

## Cooke on Goutaland (2017)

Goutaland, Carine. *De régals en dégoûts: le naturalisme à table*. Classiques Garnier, 2017, pp. 415, ISBN 978-2-406-06152-6

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The representation of food in literature has become an increasingly prevalent critical topic in recent times, and the Naturalists have been among the most-studied authors in this regard. Following on the heels of scholars such as Geneviève Sicotte, Karin Becker, and Joëlle Bonnin-Ponnier, Goutaland's comprehensive tome spans both Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* and the works of those associated with his approach, including not only his coauthors of *Les Soirées de Médan*, but also figures such as Robert Caze and Oscar Métenier, whose critical bibliographies are still slimmer than that of Léon Hennique. The author draws on a wide range of texts produced by these writers, from Guy de Maupassant's short stories to the aforementioned Zolian cycle, taking in correspondence, journalism, and critical essays along the way. At the same time, the fiction is placed in dialogue with a sample of historical sources that illuminates nineteenth-century French attitudes to "la table," from the expected Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin to more public hygiene-inclined authors such as Louis-Charles Bizet, a director of Paris' abattoirs.

As the title suggests, *De régals en dégoûts* embraces the vicissitudes of the Naturalist table, a tripartite structure treating, in succession, pleasure and the art of living, failures and indigestions, and finally "la poétique du ventre." In the unfurling of this format, the subject matter moves gradually further afield from "la table" itself to include bodily functions linked more or less closely to the act of eating, before the final section on poetics uses metaphor to consider the process of writing Naturalist fiction as a symbolic devourment or eructation, depending on the author.

In the first section, mealtimes both bourgeois and working-class are analyzed in works such as *Pot-Bouille*, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and Paul Alexis's "Le Collage." Goutaland points to the social and spatiotemporal boundaries of bourgeois life as they are instantiated in food consumption, and argues that the Naturalists did not challenge the prevailing *doxa* as it bore on the subject, satirizing the hypocrisy of a middle class that failed to live up to its professed ideals, rather than the ideals themselves: on her analysis, the working classes' fictional meals are still evaluated in reference to the "modèle bourgeois."

Almost every meal that might spring to the reader's mind appears at some point in *De régals en dégoûts*, from Gervaise Macquart's birthday dinner to Maupassant's wedding feasts to the "déjeuner sur l'herbe" in Hennique's *L'Accident de M. Hébert*. Each of these, the author argues, exposes a "faillite" of some form, be it social, psychological, political, or a blend of the three: for instance, the mid-Lent dinner of *La Curée* lays bare the excesses of Second Empire high society. However, despite the stated goal of covering authors from Zola to Métenier, the preponderance of Goutaland's interest clearly lies with those whose work has already received the most sustained analysis; many subchapters treat a passage from Maupassant or Zola in detail, before then briefly adducing a related example from the likes of Caze or Camille Lemonnier.

The major exception to this rule of proportion is Henry Céard, whose *Une belle journée* is the focus of two different subchapters. The final chapter, given over to Céard and J.-K. Huysmans, also distinguishes itself from the preceding eight in that it draws differences between their visions of society and of literature, on the one hand, and that of their champion Zola on the other (until this point, the emphasis is firmly on similarities among the authors studied). In the lineage of Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau and others, Goutaland stresses the Flaubertian inheritance of the "livre sur rien" and suggests that the treatment of themes such as autophagia and "blague" by the so-called "petits Naturalistes" represents a pursuit of that ideal to its logical (or perhaps absurd) end. Her book thus becomes increasingly conceptual and, as noted, metaphorical in its treatment of food in Naturalist fiction as it progresses towards the conclusion. Some missteps impede this progression; notably, the section professing to elaborate a "poétique du vomissement" in Huysmans provides few examples of the stated theme, digressing instead to topics such as vampirism in Maupassant.

Anglophone readers will likely be disappointed by the near-total absence of English-language sources in *De régals en dégoûts*. The thoroughness of the bibliography in every other area, from the span of primary texts to the useful range of contemporary sources to the mix of sociological and historical studies that leaven the wealth of Francophone (and occasional Germanophone) literary scholarship cited, makes this absence all the starker. In particular, a work of literary criticism that studies late-nineteenth-century eating from a partially sociohistorical perspective while omitting any mention of Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's scholarship will raise some eyebrows.

Nevertheless, Goutaland's study has a great deal to recommend it. The breadth of coverage enables an important synthesis of

Naturalist writing on a subject whose apparent simplicity is gradually complicated over the course of almost 400 pages. Any scholar interested in either the representation of food in literature, or the complex connections and divergences among these authors, will find *De régals en dégoûts* productive reading.

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