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Vincent Debaene, Jean-Louis Jeannelle, Marielle Macé et Michel Murat, dir., *L'Histoire littéraire des écrivains*. Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2013. 367 pp. Preface, bibliography, bibliographies, *index nominum*, and table of contents. 22.00€. ISBN 978-2-84050-874-8.

Review by Oana Panaïté, Indiana University-Bloomington.

The book's foreword by Antoine Compagnon, "L'autre histoire littéraire," heralds the main objective of a long-standing collective project that has generated several colloquia and published volumes on topics germane and sometimes overlapping that of the current volume. These previously published works form an extensive section of the bibliography, listed under the heading "Publication of the ACI 'L'histoire littéraire des écrivains'" (pp. 347-351). The French research group's emphasis has been "le renouvellement moderne des genres littéraires, conduisant à un élargissement du corpus" (p. 7), leading its members to devote their attention to less canonical texts, forming a literary counter-landscape able to reveal an internal history of the idea of literature itself. Perhaps the volume's main contribution to literary criticism lies in the introduction of the term "indigenous" to define this internal history.

Conceptualized by Vincent Debaene, it posits the writer as the true inhabitant of the literary world, the "indigenous" subject of literary history whose discursive rise from a subaltern to an autonomous position highlights the duality of the discipline: on the one hand, an academic literary history, on the other, a "native" one. Leading among the many references shared by all the contributors to *L'Histoire littéraire des écrivains* is A. Thibaudet's 1922 distinction between two forms of literary criticism, one that is cold, detached, primarily interested in classifications and hierarchies, on the one hand, and another one, warm, proximate, caring for literature as one would for an ever-evolving and growing being, on the other hand. Even as one may be surprised at the use of this debated distinction, famously introduced into the social sciences vocabulary by Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1959 seminal work, *The Savage Mind*, to indicate the different ways in which "primitive" societies deal with the effects of historical factors, the "cold" by trying to annul them and the "hot" by internalizing them, one must admit that it proves productive in this context.[1]

This approach combines an ethnological interest for what Jean-Louis Jeannelle calls the "memorable" side of literature (p. 79), Didier Alexandre a "collective" history (p. 235), and Bruno Curatolo a "living" and "enduring" history (p. 203), on the one side, with a desire to sort through the plethora of facts contained in memoirs, essays, journals and magazines, in order to extract new forms of knowledge about the actors' situations and attitudes (Marielle Macé), the literary work's, among which chief is the novel, endless ability of shaping both its audience (Christophe Pradeau) and its own history by re-imagining it through fiction (Michel Murat), on the other side.

Overall, the volume's contributions zoom in on the last decades of the late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century as they mark the apex of modernity and the beginning of its decline while witnessing the emergence of critical and aesthetic paradigms that fashion themselves as the new foundations of literature. Furthermore, the time period favors the study of an "indigenous" literary history by bringing to the foreground literary forms disdained by the rationalist and intellectualist academic stance. The volume seeks to offer, as Macé writes, "a *literary* history of literature" (p. 33,

Macé's emphasis), qualified by contributors as hot, pure, or emotional, categories which they oppose to those of cold, impure or intellectual used to describe more traditional approaches.

In her study, "Situations, attitudes," Macé envisions the actors of the literary field not through the prism of their "position," developed by literary sociologists such as Jérôme Meizoz, but of their "situation," a "notion moins rhétorique ou positionnelle (ce qui implique la théorie du champ) que stylistique et herméneutique" (p. 28). Four distinct types of writers emerge: watchmen (J. Rivière), those who perceive literature as an inexhaustible resource filled with potentialities (J. Gracq, A. Malraux), those who see it as an inner library (J.-P. Sartre) and remembering ("mémorieux") writers (F. Mauriac, R. Queneau). The critic teases out several sub-types accounting for the rich variety of distinct and sometimes clashing attitudes. Macé examines the writers' complicated relation to the present, from Gide's adherence to the Nietzschean concept of untimeliness as a conduit for creative singularity and a way of drawing the line of separation between time and value to Montherlant's self-proclaimed stance as a "mécontemporain" (p. 61).

Yet Gide's predilection for the anachronism, his ideal of the literary creation ruled by the idea of a "future perfect," and his dual symbolism that brings together the cultivation of the land and the mind to make possible a "continuous generation" (p. 46) stem from an understanding of classicism in stark contrast with Charles Maurras's version of classicism as a finished process fated to be followed by an inevitable decline. The final part of the chapter underscores the "force of intimisation" (p. 51) integral to a sensible and sensitive relation to the tradition whereby past works are appropriated by osmosis and incorporated into a living literary experience. Burdensome as the presence of the past may prove to be (as Blanchot, Bataille or Malraux illustrate), the collective stupor caused by the massive cultural legacy embodied in constructs such as the canon, encyclopedias, museums, and libraries concerns the reactions, positions and uses that define literary community or, as Macé puts it, the enigma of the "ensemble-littérature" (p. 76).

J.-L. Jeannelle, in "Le mémorable des lettres," shows that, in the triad fraught with discord and mutual distrust formed by the professor, the writer, and the chronicler, the last one proves to be the keeper, not of the truth, but of the many truths of literature. Standing in opposition to the sacerdotal view embraced by the acclaimed writer, the literary journal reveals its author's ability to live his passion for literature. The many anecdotes, comments and stories that pepper the memorial works of Maurice Martin du Gard or Léon Daudet constitute a collective and national memory, indicative of a "phenomenon of incorporation" (p. 89). They enclose a type of "mémorable" that combines historical retrospection with autobiographical introspection, both turned towards posterity and predicated on a principle of sincerity.

Narrative strategies mobilized by the literary memoirist bring out the difference between individual and collective memory while striving to negotiate one's reception by re-ordering the past and providing a self-representation meant to correct the idea or the image the audience has of the writer. Jeannelle points out that the concept of the "mémorable" is germane to Malraux's *englobant* (p. 114) which calls upon several disciplines such as cultural history, sociology of literature, and genre theory. These distinct theoretical perspectives can bring to light the "*literary matrix*" (p. 117, Jeannelle's emphasis) contained within the narratives of literary lives, and offer a figurative key for reading them. Contemporary works (such as Duras's *L'Amant*) mark the end of the "accounting function" ("fonction de consignation") (p. 120) of such narratives and therefore the exhaustion of memorial writing as a type of vicarious living of Literature with a capital "L."

William Marx's contribution, "Transmission et mémoire," engages with the aesthetic contradiction generated by modernity, and especially its Symbolist avatar in which poetic language isolates itself from the vulgar tongue as the keeper of a secret knowledge with its creator, the artist, retreating from society into an ivory tower. However, as Marx points out: "ce qui rend possible un discours spécifique sur l'essence de la littérature rend aussi plus incertaine, *ipso facto*, l'existence même de la littérature" (p. 127).

The end of history generates two conflicting reactions: either going back in time (“arrières-gardes”) or skipping ahead (“avant-gardes”). Proponents of both attitudes engage in the same fight, albeit by different means, against the normal course of literary history, and, in order to support their choice, they invent different traditions intended to recreate or lay new foundations for literature itself. The “instability of literary memory” (p. 133) in the twentieth century is a direct consequence of this tension.

In “La littérature depuis le roman,” Christophe Pradeau discusses the transition from poetry (which had itself unseated nineteenth-century dominant aesthetic form, the theater) to the novel as the paradigmatic literary genre at the turn of the last century before addressing, through Thibaudet’s distinction between “liseurs” and “lecteurs,” the capital role fiction plays in establishing a set of memorial and cultural practices. From Balzac’s duality of the forgetful and the memory-filled reading through Proust’s paradigmatic reader as the receptacle of an era to E. Auerbach’s theorization of the literary audience, the novel reflects the constant interrogation around literary values and relations while also drawing its audience into its magic space—Pradeau uses the term “enchantment” (p. 149)—where the world’s contradictions are resolved and the *pax literaria* is instituted.

Michel Murat’s essay, “L’histoire littéraire et la fiction,” maintains the focus on fiction while taking issue with most critics’ positivist dismissal of literature’s self-representation in the novel. He contends that fictional information or hypotheses can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of literature and, to support his point, offers a classification of terms whose study would allow us to better grasp preconceived notions about literature. This includes *figures* (like metaphorical terms commonly used in literary criticism “sources”), *etiological or foundational narratives* (the anthropomorphic vocabulary about the birth of a notion or a movement) and *counterfactual hypotheses* (the “what ifs” of literary history such as Sainte-Beuve’s question “What if André Chénier had survived the Terror?”). Murat proposes two other classifications, the first one related to the different forms displayed by what he calls the “novel of literature” (such as the writer’s vs. the reader’s novel; p. 181), and the second one regarding the phases of the modern novel’s involvement with literature as a fictional topic, from the Romantic reconfiguration of literary history around the novel (Balzac) to contemporary metafiction that dismantles literary history in order appropriates its pieces into a larger and largely ironic fictional panoply (Chevillard).

Bruno Curatolo’s piece, “La part des revues,” envisions literary journals and magazines as the living and lasting memory of literature, a laboratory of creation and an arena for intellectual confrontation of ideas and personalities. Revisiting the birth of the modern review in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affords us a unique and dramatic insight into literary life, the author argues. A literary review’s paradoxical nature lies in its contradictory pull towards being a “review” in the English sense of the word, turned towards the past, and a parade of current works. Literary journalism writes a quasi-immediate history of literature as it unfolds before the eyes of the contemporaries by evaluating, judging and praising or criticizing books immediately upon their publication. Furthermore, publications and their editorial choices often bear the mark of a powerful, paradigm-making personality such as Maurice Nadeau, Jean Paulhan or Nathalie Sarraute. In stark contrast with academic history, taste is the dominant category although historicity is not completely discarded, as reviews are not only sites of creation but also of conceptualization and historicization (as were the *NRJ*, *Cahiers du Sud* or Surrealist reviews such as *Le Grand Jeu*, *Minotaure*, and *Acéphale*).

Didier Alexandre’s contribution, “Une histoire collective?,” remains concerned with group literary production but expands the scope of inquiry to other creative forms of collective literary production and especially book publications. At stake here is the question of singularity and solitude as sacrosanct values of modern writing theorized by Sartre, Blanchot or Duras. Jean Paulhan’s 1941 essay, “Les Fleurs de Tarbes,” which differentiates between two approaches to literature—a terrorist approach, emphasizing individual originality, represented by Rimbaud, Mallarmé, or Apollinaire, and a “fleurs de Tarbes” attitude (p. 237), favoring tradition and collective continuity—is perhaps the best expression of

the underlying tension of modernity. The communal dimension manifests itself in a number of intertextual practices like the creation of life narratives and literary families that reimagine time as legacy and filiation (Paul Claudel's *Accompagnements*). According to Alexandre, collective literary history functions in three distinct ways: first, as a group-defined aesthetics--a family of writers; second, as a search for new ways of sharing emotions and ideas (sometimes in an authoritarian, ideological manner); third, as the articulation between writers' emotions and ideas, on the one hand, and readers' expectations, on the other.

In his essay, "La 'littérature indigène d'expression française': une histoire pré-postcoloniale," Vicent Debaene shifts the focus onto another literary community, that of French colonial authors. The context of publication, content selection and critical introductions signed by two heralds of the Négritude movement, Senghor and Damas, of two anthologies from the late 1940s serve to illustrate the moment of emergence and strategies for gaining historical and aesthetic legitimacy by Francophone writers in the wake of the Second World War. After rehearsing Pascale Casanova's and other scholars' arguments about the precarious position of peripheral writers and the indigenous double-bind, Debaene situates the two poetry collections, *Les Plus Beaux Écrits de l'Union française et du Maghreb* and *Latitudes française: poètes d'expression française 1900-1945*, into what Richard Watts calls the uncomfortable in-between separating the colonial from the postcolonial. While recognizing the politically, culturally, and symbolically transitional nature of these volumes, their inaugural aspect in mediating the visibility and readability of a new body of works cannot be overlooked.

Two arguments in Debaene's essay are particularly persuasive. First, the examination of the strategies used by Senghor and Damas to shape the reader's expectations by referencing literary awards bestowed upon colonial writers (such as René Maran's Goncourt in 1921) and previous praises received by the work or its writer (from major metropolitan figures such as Anatole France and Paul Claudel). Both authors seek to insert poetic works hailing from the colonies into a larger literary history and, in both cases, Surrealism serves as a historical and aesthetic point of connection allowing them to reconstruct French poetic tradition and expand it beyond its Metropolitan boundaries. However, whereas Senghor suggests a "civilizational" (p. 290), Herderian model for collecting the writings of Black Africa, Damas seeks to establish "an intercolonial means of expression" (p. 294) lacking heretofore by retracing the dialectics of colonial writers' progressive dis-alienation (epitomized by the tragic figure of the Caribbean writer, Étienne Lérou). Second, Debaene convincingly explains that theoretical rationales generate a new narrative whose devices and classifications will shape the discourse of Francophone scholarship for decades afterwards. To conclude, the critic draws attention to the fact that, unlike similar literary projects, these anthologies do not seek to provide a definition of poetry nor do they offer an interpretive framework, which allows him to argue that viewing these anthologies as a desire for colonial recognition would be misleading. What they seek is to render the texts and their authors readable, by making them available and understandable to the French audience, with Senghor and Damas serving as mediators. One could however respond that the gesture of unveiling, contextualizing and mediating colonial authors' works for a French audience is a threefold search for recognition.

In keeping with the principle of expanding literary tradition beyond its national borders and widening the scope of the historical investigation, Michel Espagne argues in the last essay of the book, entitled "L'histoire littéraire et les frontières," in favor of a dis-enclaved literary history that should be read within the wider spectrum of world-literature, where French literature meets and interacts with "foreign Pantheons" (p. 306). Moving from literary history construed as ancillary to a national space towards a more accurate understanding of international influences and cross-border literary practices that have shaped literature entails a closer scrutiny of the seminal role of translations and diasporic configurations. Questioning the principles of national identity and continental homogeneity by highlighting the transnational dimension of literary history as performed and reimagined by writers' adds another layer to this innovative book.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

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## NOTE

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 233-234.

Oana Panaïté  
Indiana University-Bloomington  
opanaite@indiana.edu

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