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Vincent Debaene, *Far Afield: French Anthropology between Science and Literature*, trans. Justin Izzo. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2014. i-ix + 398 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$115.00 U.S. (cl); ISBN 978-0-2261-0690-8; \$35.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-2261-0706-6.

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French ethnography and literature were bound to meet but also compete with each other over the course of the twentieth century, or so Vincent Debaene argues in his important and beautifully translated book on the entwined history of these two intellectual traditions. The rise of the social sciences, or human sciences as they have come to be referred to in France, inevitably posed a challenge for the literary field, since both anthropologists and literary writers claimed the study of mankind as their purview. In what Debaene describes as the “ethnographic moment in French culture” (p. 1)—from 1925 when anthropology entered the university through the 1970s—anthropologists were haunted by the sense that there was “a residue in every culture that escaped science, and to which ‘literature’ alone” granted access (p. 292). As a result they regularly published two books about their field experiences: a scholarly account for specialists, and a second, more stylized account pitched to a different audience. The existence and epistemological status of this second literary book provides the guiding thread of this learned, elegantly written, and thought-provoking work. Three “second books” come in for special attention: Marcel Griaule’s *Les Flambeurs d’hommes* (1934), Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme* (1934) and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* (1955).

Debaene, who teaches in the French department at Columbia and is the critical editor for the Pléiade edition of the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, frames *Far Afield* as a contribution to the intellectual history of anthropology in twentieth-century France, about which we still know too little.[1] And indeed, ethnographers’ relationships to writers, rather than vice versa, structure the analysis and render the topic manageable. Debaene makes clear in his introduction what he is not doing: he is *not* seeking to resurrect forgotten narratives and thus rewrite the canon; he does *not* believe these second books by French ethnographers were simply attempts to popularize (in the best sense) scientific knowledge to a public eager for exoticism; he does *not* conceive of anthropology and literature as distinct and opposed worlds, discourses, or types of writing whose influence upon each other (or not) he will trace—to do so would be to presuppose the very categories that need investigating; and, last but not least, his object is *not* “the poetics of ethnographers or the question of writing in the social sciences” (p. 7). His approach, rather, is ethnographic, historical, and non-teleological: to begin with “what people do,” which in the case of his ethnographers is to write first and second books, and then consider why they write both kinds of books and what the relationship between the two might be (p. 3). He hopes to avoid holding up the present as a norm and instead to “think through the meaning” of a particular distribution of knowledge of humanity “with the help of concrete, historically situated documents” (p. 12). His goal is to show that unique practices of writing (if not “literature” itself) can play a key role “in the construction of a knowledge-based discourse such as anthropology” (p. 21).

In Debaene’s reading of anthropology’s distinctive trajectory in France, the foundational influence of Durkheim’s nephew and armchair theorist of the “primitive,” Marcel Mauss, looms large. Mauss, in the interwar years, along with the physical anthropologist and linguist Paul Rivet, defined what a new and

properly scientific anthropology would be: one characterized for the first time by extensive fieldwork, the writing up of results in dissertations, the awarding of degrees, and the creation of research lines. Yet in an era when, at least in France, anthropology was still closely linked to positivist museum practice, a tension marked this new social science. On the one hand, students were to collect material data from a given culture and then exhaustively describe this data in their PhD monographs; on the other hand, these same students were to access the moral climate, the mental world—in Mauss's words, "the atmosphere"—of the particular society they were observing. This second imperative was Durkheim's legacy to the fledgling discipline of anthropology, since for him the social always included the mental.

Yet if collecting artifacts was a relatively straightforward exercise, understanding the moral world of others was less so. Mauss, a famously opaque lecturer, provided no blueprint to his students for how to proceed on this second front, although he did implicitly encourage ethnographers to mistrust themselves "at each instant of investigation" (p. 110). Despite persistent claims to the contrary, many of Mauss and Rivet's acolytes solved this dilemma by turning to figurative writing. Interestingly, at the same time that these ethnographers were producing literary second books, many literary writers were longing for the very knowledge of humankind that anthropologists were claiming as their own. The Surrealists' flirtation with ethnography around the short-lived avant-garde publication *Documents* in the late 1920s is only the best-known case. Thus began a "dispute over territory" in which the two groups remain fascinated with, while simultaneously renouncing, what the other one was doing. The result was acrimonious debate and valuable exchange. To ignore this exchange, insists Debaene, is to miss critically important *common* modes of investigation and objects of inquiry that shaped French intellectual culture in the twentieth century.

Debaene's book is organized thematically and chronologically in three broad sections. Part one, "Ethnography in the Eyes of Literature" briefly tracks the institutional foundation of the first Institute of Ethnology at the University of Paris and its association with Paris's ethnographic museum at the Trocadéro (expanded and renamed the Musée de l'Homme in 1938), then takes up the specifically French nature of the relationship between ethnography and literature until roughly 1955. Debaene sees the rising prestige of ethnography in the 1920s as a response to the nineteenth century's oppressive social division of labor. In the aftermath of World War I, fieldwork also offered a new form of escape and opportunity to revive the heroic scientist of yesterday. Field experience, framed for the first time by texts and methodologies learned at the university, would produce knowledge in ways that amateur travel or study in the library could never do. Such at any rate was the dream. On the literary side, authors too were lamenting a lost world of art in which writing connected with the totality of life; in their case, the professionalization of literature had made it a job like any other. Academic anthropology in France thus offered both groups a chance at, in Leiris's words, "redemption," that is to say recovery of subjectivity in an excessively fragmented world (p. 50).

Ethnographic scholars and avant-garde writers shared a second trait: a disdain for rhetoric, i.e., figural or picturesque language, or narrative, which might distort the documents that these fieldworkers were collecting. Yet, as suggested above, when ethnographers found themselves required to describe the totality of a particular society and "restore the atmosphere" of a given ritual, the scene was set for "the return of the rhetorical repressed" (pp. 76-77). Academic anthropology, imagined as simultaneously social and moral, required a means to reconcile the demands of the heart and the mind that somehow avoided the rhetoric trap. The ethnographer's second book represented the primary means to this end, although no two second books adopted exactly the same path in search of such reconciliation. Nevertheless one strategy appeared almost universally: citing indigenous literature. Second book authors, aware of the limits of their own style to communicate a moral realm, hoped that recourse to a native voice might partially do the trick. Debaene's point here, of course, is not to assess whether such attempts were "successful" on their own terms (by definition they could not be); rather, he is fascinated by ethnographers' return to a form of rhetoric precisely because it reveals "the inability of anthropology in the 1930s to deal with its object in its entirety" (p. 106).

Having accounted in part one for the appearance of the second book, Debaene in part two turns to a close look at three of the most distinctive examples of the genre published between 1934 and 1955. The title of this second part, "L'Adieu au voyage"—a phrase that originally appeared on the last page of *Tristes Tropiques*—is the original title of Debaene's book in French. In an era when the development of tourism had degraded the voyage and in a literary field crisscrossed by competing claims for who traveled most authentically, France's newly professionalized ethnographers obviously did not abandon voyaging. But as they tried to come to terms with what they had experienced in the field, at least a few bade farewell to something else once associated with travel: an "idealized conception of difference" (p. ix). In the process they reoriented the anthropological project in ways that a strictly internalist account of the discipline has missed.

The most famous example is Lévi-Strauss, who in *Tristes Tropiques* experimentally tacked back and forth between various layers of his own past as part of his attempt to understand his earlier ethnographic encounter with the Nambikwara Indians of Brazil. This form of writing made possible "the anthropological work to come," i.e., the second structural anthropology of *The Savage Mind* and the *Mythologiques*, in which Lévi-Strauss moved between classificatory systems or variants of a myth. *Tristes Tropiques*, in short, offered "the opportunity for an initial experience of the logic of sensation" that would then become central to Lévi-Strauss's science (p. 212). In Marcel Griaule's *Flambeurs d'hommes* and Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme* we can see a similar "drift[ing] away from the expectations and assumptions that originally presided over ethnographic investigation" (p. xi) and a literary form of writing up fieldwork that reveals that the original expectations (principally the notion that "one could either get outside of oneself" or come into contact with "a pure and preserved alterity") were flawed (p. 322). In each case the "second book is not an invitation to 'get back on track,'" but an invitation "to reorient the entire space of the anthropological relationship" (p. xii).

Part three, "Literature in the Eyes of Ethnography," reverses the terms of part one while extending the analysis through the 1970s. Here Debaene doubles back to consider how literary writers first responded to the birth of the social sciences and the "threat" they posed. If ethnographers secretly longed to write "literature," writers themselves covertly desired to contribute to the science of man. Reactions by two *littérateurs*, Gustave Lanson in 1895 and Agathon in 1911, to the arrival of the Durkheimians and the New Sorbonne set the stage. Lanson, a believer in scientific progress, accepted that a new relationship between science and literature now existed: to artists the evocation and description of morals and affect, to science the study of nature. Agathon, a political conservative, in contrast decried the "human" sciences as "dehumanizing" but failed to realize that once science is institutionally entrenched its prerogatives can only be challenged on the terrain of science itself. Turning next to the interwar years, Debaene notes that André Breton "missed anthropology on two separate occasions, and represents the clearest example of the artist who has been dispossessed by the scientist" (p. 262).

The reception of *Tristes Tropiques* in 1955 perfectly serves Debaene's larger project, thanks to the different reactions of Georges Bataille and Roland Barthes. Bataille saw *Tristes Tropiques* as a perfectly realized form of anthropology because it moved beyond objectivity and specialization to a higher literary realm that included science while surpassing it: "What is fascinating in this book is the embrace of an immediate openness to any kind of thought that presents itself" (quoted on p. 266). Barthes, in contrast, refused to review the book. Some fifteen years younger than Bataille, Barthes in the 1950s was already reconstituting literature in France on a new basis, whose primary function was liberatory in a way *Tristes Tropiques* never aspired to be. Yet for Barthes the work also failed as anthropology. His silence vis à vis *Tristes Tropiques* thus marked yet another turning point in the ongoing exchange between science and literature. Henceforth anthropology would no longer be in the same discursive sphere as literature; rather it would be considered "a knowledge-based discourse that could potentially help us to think about literature" (p. 271).

In the final chapter of the book, Debaene considers briefly how the relations between science and literature fragmented and diversified between 1955 and 1970 against the backdrop of several changes affecting both domains. These included the abandonment of the museum model of anthropology; the recognition that anthropologists only ever constructed theoretical objects rather than described real ones; and the politicization of all writing in the maelstrom of decolonization. In the face of these shifts, the original concern among anthropologists with evoking an atmosphere disappeared, although the “dispute over territory” between literature and the human sciences remained. Jean Malaurie’s much written-about series *Terre Humaine*, which in its first twelve years (1955-1967) published two firsthand indigenous accounts (*Sun Chief* and *Un village anatolien*) and eight literary narratives by scholarly travelers, is exemplary on this score, since it claimed to “create a reflexive anthropology near[er] to men [than that of a desiccated and overly specialized scientific ethnography] and within the public’s reach” (p. 293). Debaene reserves some of his most pointed criticism for those in France who have taken these claims at face value—and who insist that the series anticipated the postmodern turn among American anthropologists such as James Clifford in the 1980s. Clifford, influenced by Barthes’s refusal to oppose the discourse of informants to the metalanguage of science, brilliantly analyzed the “silences, hidden power relations, and surreptitious determinations” that always weigh on the ethnographic encounter and writing (p. 293). There has in fact been no comparable critical move among anthropologists in France—no demand for dialogic or polyphonic ethnographies, for example—and Clifford and George Marcus’s important *Writing Culture* has yet to be translated.[2] *Terre Humaine*’s aggressive stance against science is best understood as a reaction against the theoretical turn within the literary field itself since World War II.

In the twentieth century, French anthropologists constantly announced the end of travel; each enunciation nevertheless constituted a new point of departure, at least for those who chose to write second books, a tradition that continues to this day. This then, Debaene concludes, is the meaning of the second book: writing one “continues and completes a movement of desubjectivation that the journey could only begin” (p. 311). Put another way, travel transforms not only one’s image of the other—an other by definition objectified by the ethnographer’s gaze; it also reconfigures the relationship between the subject and the object, “a twofold process of objectivation and subjectivation” (p. ix). Viewed from this angle, science rather than displacing literature walked (and still walks) side by side with it. In the best-case scenario, the ethnographer’s passage through writing represented a chance for post-voyage scientists to reconstruct themselves and their objects as no longer radically different: redemption indeed.

This summary does not begin to do justice to Debaene’s wide-ranging and highly original account, which is a must read for literary scholars, anthropologists and intellectual and cultural historians. For readers not familiar with the works analyzed, Debaene serves as an invaluable and accessible introduction; those conversant in French anthropology will see that world through new eyes. He insightfully compares Bronislaw Malinowski’s influential *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and posthumously published journal, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967), as a counterpoint to the very “French” story he tells. Debaene has read all the work published upon the return of a given anthropological expedition. He is the first to explore the distribution rather than construction of ethnographic knowledge in France, and the ways in which these texts have been conceived and characterized among different metropolitan publics in a given historical moment. One may quibble that Debaene has defined the field of French anthropology too narrowly (a criticism that he has already taken on board in the preface to this English edition) and that he has not given ethnographers’ “first” books their full due. Certain “scientific monographs” written by Mauss’s students in the interwar years were more experimental, more literary in character than Debaene in fact allows.[3] While French anthropologists’ publication of a literary second book signifies one kind of exchange, other exchanges beyond the science-literature nexus—for example with scholars abroad—have also shaped the discipline at key moments. Debaene would not deny these connections, any more than he would the role played by unequal colonial power relations in constituting academic anthropology in the first place. Good

historian that he is, Debaene asks, rather, that we situate all of anthropology's past practices within the epistemological configuration in which they were produced, rather than those of the present.

NOTES

[1] This negligence of the first half of the twentieth century is beginning to change. See Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Christine Laurière, *Paul Rivet: le savant et le politique* (Paris: Editions Scientifiques du MNHN, 2008); Wiktor Stoczkowski, *Anthropologies rédemptrices. Le monde selon Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Hermann, 2008); Harry Liebersohn, *The Return of the Gift: European History of a Global Idea* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012), and my own *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[2] James Clifford and George Marcus, *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[3] For example, Charles Le Coeur, *Le rite et l'outil: Essai sur le rationalisme social et la pluralité des civilisations* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1939).

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