En Jeu. Histoire et mémoires vivantes

N° 6 | 2015
Du Témoignage. Autour de Jean Norton Cru

Annexe 1

Frédéric ROUSSEAU

Édition électronique :
URL : https://en-jeu.numerev.com/articles/revue-6/878-annexe-1
Date de publication : 05/12/2015

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Pour **citer cette publication** : ROUSSEAU, F. (2015) Annexe 1. *En Jeu. Histoire et mémoires vivantes*, (6). https://doi.org/10.34745/

James Shotwell, professeur d'histoire des relations internationales à l'Université de Columbia devient à la veille de l'entrée en guerre des États-Unis (1917) le directeur de la recherche à la Fondation Carnegie pour la Paix. Après avoir fait partie de la délégation états-unienne présente à la Conférence de la Paix de Paris, il devient pour la Fondation Carnegie le responsable éditorial d'une très importante série de monographies consacrées à l'impact de la Première Guerre mondiale sur la vie économique et sociale des nations touchées par la guerre. C'est dans cette prestigieuse collection que Shotwell avait projeté de publier ce qui allait devenir Témoins. Shotwell fut le principal soutien de Jean Norton Cru jusqu'au rejet de Témoins par le comité parisien de la Fondation.

Nous publions dans ce dossier deux lettres dans lesquelles Shotwell donne son appréciation du travail de Jean Norton Cru.

Mots-clés :

Lettre de James Shotwell à Jean Norton Cru le 21 septembre 1927.

« Dear Professor Cru:

I had read most of you manuscript before your letter came: I sat up last night, absorbed in it, I am free to say, as in no other volume in the War History. It is a very distinctive work and you have indeed put much of your life into it as I can see in every comment. I am passing it immediately and sending it on its way to Paris for the French Board to give their ratification. So you see I have anticipated your desires already.

Editorially, I have only one reservation in the midst of all my cordial, and I think I should say enthusiastic, approval of it for the War History. The reservation is one which arises from the very nature of your approach to the problem and it is this. Have you applied too generally a criterion of criticism based upon your own experience in the war? Does this inject a subjective element into the judgements passed upon the works of others who may not have had the same experience? Sometimes I think I detected an impatience which you will want to tone down when you see the comments in cold type, for after all, even the literary impressionist work of those not actually at the front may have had a justification of its own, so long as it is properly labelled and is not to be mistaken for authentic experience. In short, I

think there is a slight overproportion of negative criticism which will be relatively less valuable in future than the positive in view of the fact that the negative element is not likely to be looked up by a reader who is warned off it, whereas the positive and approving comment should send a reader to the text. I have not the time at present to go into this matter in detail and do not want to hold up your book. But I really think that there are passages that would be better toned down. Also, when an author or a book is of little value, the bibliographical and biographical data is sometimes quite too long. You remember I spoke about this when we were together. I realize that in some instances this is due to the extent of the search which you have had to make to verify your data. But the finished book will suffer from it.

I am therefore going to suggest this. I think you should have a care-free holiday while this manuscript is on its way to Paris. Then while it is being read over there in the early weeks of the New Year, I should like to ask of you that you go through the copy in your possession with a blue pencil in your hand for ready use thinking of the reader and not of the author's effort to establish his facts and cut quite liberally in the case of the unimportant or inadequate authors and documents. If you could do this by the fifteenth of January and then let me send your revised text of your own re-edited manuscript to Paris, instead of making your corrections on the proof, it would save much time and also save me considerable cost. I have not done this myself in the case of your volume for two very good reasons which, after all, reduce themselves to one! I have not the time at present and would have to delay the reading of your text for at least six weeks if I were to undertake this myself. As it is, by relying upon your own cooperation, the manuscript is already this very morning moving on its journey to Paris. I mean that it has got as far as the desk in the room from which things go to Paris!

I am turning over your note to my office for the purpose of sending you back what we have so that you can look over the detail of those few pages you refer to.

Finally, let me congratulate you most sincerely upon the completion of a work which is, I think, without parallel in the history of criticism. I like your introduction very much indeed. If, in the course of your revision, you want to add anything to that I shall be only too happy to see it inserted, for I think you have mobilized for the service of peace your long years of service in the war. It may be, after all, that in spite of cynicism in these post-war days, the World War may yet offer us the greatest single step towards the abolition of war itself. I shall add a paragraph to my general introduction characterizing the volume as a contribution to this great cause.

With my best wishes for the holiday so long deferred, if I may say so, so brilliantly achieved. »

Lettre de James Shotwell à Babcock, président du comité français de la Fondation Carnegie à Paris, qui accompagne l'envoi à Paris du manuscrit du livre de Jean Norton

Cru, 21 décembre 1927.

« Dear Babcock:

This mail will take along a volume in the War History which I should like to have your own judgement upon as well as that of the French Editorial Board, although formally I am referring it to them through you. Is is a volume by Professor Cru “Les Souvenirs des tranchées”. It is a kind of literary criticism which I think has no exact parallel in the history of literary criticism. I needn’t describe it as it tells its own our History. My only query is as to strictures passed upon books in the rejected lists or those which Professor Cru does not regard as giving authentic information as to the soldiers life at the front and his psychology. I have asked him to cut this part down somewhat and also to lessen the biographical data. He will do this and send along his slightly amended copy for the press sometime in January. But the changes he will make will so relatively slight that the text should be judged as it stands. For my own part I am ready to accept it as a first-class contribution to our understanding of what war really is. For, while the volume is not just what I planned or expected, I think it contains more of a corrective of existing ideas than any other that I have ever read. Take his analysis of Barbusse, for instance, is it not very illuminating? I venture to drag you into this editorial problem because of your interest in literary criticism as well as the fundamental purposes of our War History. I hope you don’t mind.

Sincerely yours. »