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**Philip Whalen**, *Gaston Roupnel, âme paysanne et sciences humaines*. Collection "Sociétés." Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 2001. 202 pp. 20.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-905965-54-1.

Review by Philippe Poirrier, Université de Bourgogne.

Review [*en français*] by Philippe Poirrier.

Gaston Roupnel is a quite forgotten historian nowadays. Most certainly his *Histoire de la campagne française*, published in 1932 and reissued in 1974 in the famous "Terre Humaine" series, benefited from the neo-ruralism of the 1970s. His thesis, *La ville et la campagne au 17ème siècle: étude sur les populations du pays dijonnais*, published in 1922, remains a foundational study in social history in the age of Louis XIV. On the contrary *Histoire et destin* (1943), a virulent attack on academic history and a defence of a truly organicist philosophy of history, would not be as successful even though its argument for a "structural history" received favourable comment by Fernand Braudel. As a local writer fervently defending Burgundy, he has suffered an eclipse since the 1970s due to the media and the editorial success of Henri Vincenot.

The present volume is a welcome revision of Philip Whalen's Ph. D. dissertation ("Life and Works of Gaston Roupnel") accepted by the University of California at Santa Cruz in 2000. Its translation into French makes the author's conclusions more accessible and different sides of Gaston Roupnel's personality more comprehensible.[1] This is an intellectual biography that strives "to trace [his] contribution to the different fields he studied" (p. 11). Beyond a precise analysis of Gaston Roupnel's works, Whalen had access to the rich private records conserved by the historian's heirs. Through his correspondence we realize Gaston Roupnel's position among the intellectuals of his time.[2]

Both an intellectual and a wine farmer in Gevrey Chambertin, Roupnel was also a professor at Dijon University and a well-known local writer. As a journalist for *La Dépêche de Toulouse* and a promoter of local activities, Roupnel advocated a dialogue between academic culture and folklore. However, having become a member of the university rather late in his life, he always bore a grudge against the Malthusian circle dominated by the Ecole Normale Supérieure. In *Histoire et Destin* Roupnel wrote, "This Ecole, more Normale than Supérieure, you enter once but you leave all your life" (p. 13). By choice, he kept his distance from this community of historians that was becoming more and more professionalized.

Philip Whalen's work has sparked strong reactions from some French historians. In a long and forcefully argued response to Whalen, Pierre Cornu pointed out how the hagiographical position of the author and his methodological options are at disciplinary odds with the community of social historians.[3] The way Gaston Roupnel's behaviour was dealt with under the Nazi Occupation of France shows these methodological problems. Roupnel's attitude had already been studied in a chapter devoted to the French historians by Daniel Linderberg in *Les années souterraines* (1990).[4] This issue

has always been sensitive since the fierce debate in 1995 about Lucien Febvre's attitude toward Roupnel.[5] The point is not to re-open a trial tinted by the "Vichy syndrome."

But Whalen has denied the evidence and defends his hero as a republican close to the Radical Party. Just before the war it is obvious that Gaston Roupnel became close to the agrarian circles led by Remy Goussault and Jacques Le Roy Ladurie, and in 1936, under Daniel Halévy's initiative, republican eulogists Henri Pourrat and Lucien Gaudron made a detour via Gevrey Chambertin. Patriot and anti-German, Roupnel criticized Maréchal Pétain's policies and adopted a wait-and-see attitude when France was occupied. We must underline that his works have some analogies with the themes of the National Revolution. In this respect, Philip Whalen minimizes, without ignoring, the impact Roupnel's works had in government circles. Returning to the countryside was necessary and was the main theme in Roupnel's *Histoire de la campagne française*, reissued by Grasset in 1943, and in *Histoire et Destin*, which received good reviews by the Vichy press.

The use of the letters sent to Roupnel by his colleagues needs to be examined carefully. These letters alone are not enough to measure the impact of Roupnel's works on the community of historians. Academic practices do not always shine with sincerity. For example, after Roupnel's death, in the *Annales* in 1947, Lucien Febvre published the letter by Roupnel sent to Fernand Braudel to thank him for his review of *Histoire et Destin*. Febvre explained that he had wanted to write the report himself, but finally he had left it to Braudel who had read the book while in captivity. Now, in June 1944, Febvre's letter to Braudel was less flattering: "Yes, you have really taken with Roupnel, a false great countryman, you have created him with your wealth, and as usual, you read your words while reading his. He is a whiner who claims to reach metaphysics. He is at his best when he speaks about Burgundy, that's for sure. Received his signed book and decided not to comment it." [6]

When Whalen's book was published in December 2001, the Université de Bourgogne organized an international conference titled "The Era of Human Sciences, Gaston Roupnel and the 1920s." The articles published at this conference should provide a timely completion to Whalen's intellectual biography. Philip Whalen's work has at least opened the debate and, with some others, drawn attention to a necessary re-reading of the history of social science from 1918 to 1939.[7] As a result it should be easier to come to grips with Roupnel's contributions to rural history in a more subtle way through an increasing professionalism.

## NOTES

[1] Philip Whalen, "Life and Works of Gaston Roupnel" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Santa Cruz, 2000).

[2] Thanks to an agreement with the Roupnel family, these private documents have been collected and preserved by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme of Dijon. Currently access to them is limited while they are being archived. See <http://mshdijon.u-bourgogne.fr/>

[3] Pierre Cornu "Sur l'âme des sciences humaines. Réponse à Gaston Roupnel by Philip Whalen" *Ruralia*, 2001-09, <http://www.ruralia.org>.

[4] Daniel Lindenberg, *Les années souterraines, 1937-1947* (Paris: La Découverte, 1990): 112-122.

[5] Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande* (Paris: Seuil, 1995). See the response published, significantly, in a major national newspaper by Bertrand Müller and Peter Schölter, "Faut-il brûler Lucien Febvre?" *Le Monde*, February 8, 1995.

[6] Cited by Pierre Daix, *Braudel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995): 183.

[7] See Olivier Dumoulin, *Marc Bloch* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2000); and *Le rôle social de l'historien, De la chaire au prétoire* (Albin Michel, 2003); see also Bertrand Müller, *Lucien Febvre, lecteur et critique* (Albin Michel, 2003).

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See also Philip Whalen's response to this review.

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