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Laurent Turcot, ed., *L'Ordinaire parisien des Lumières: Edition critique de trois textes du for privé parisien du XVIIIe siècle*. Quebec: Presses universitaires de Laval, 2010. 262 pp. \$30 Can. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7637-9218-7.

Review by Noah Shusterman, Temple University.

For scholars, the rise of the internet has meant increased access not only to new material, but to old. Digitalization projects like Google Books and the BN's Gallica have made countless texts—both the rare and important, and the obscure and unimportant—accessible at the click of a mouse. Thus far, the principal progress has been made in the realm of printed materials. Archival material is another matter; there, even the guides are hard to find digitally, and the material itself generally requires a trip *somewhere*, whether it be Salt Lake City, Paris, or the departmental and municipal archives spread across the hexagon and beyond. For “landlocked” historians of France with only limited time in the archives, it is always nice to find ways of reading archival material without having to use precious on-site time.

Therein lays the principal attraction of *L'Ordinaire parisien des lumières*, a collection of three archival texts from the second half of the eighteenth century. With one text from the National Archives, one from the Bibliothèque Nationale's manuscript collection, and one from the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Laurent Turcot has provided access to three unique texts that would otherwise be accessible only on site, three unique primary texts that can only help deepen our understanding of eighteenth-century Paris.

Readers hoping to find in any of these texts a discovery on the order of Menetra's journal will be disappointed.[1] None of these are groundbreaking texts, nor does Turcot present them as such. Rather, he intends them to serve as ways of getting more insight into Parisian life in the late eighteenth century (primarily in the last decades of the Old Regime, although the third does reach into 1793). The result is an interesting, at times fun, often quirky collection of texts that touch on much of Parisian life.

The first of the three, *Récit des faits reprochés par M. de Montjean à sa femme*, is a rambling, repetitive, yet oddly captivating account of what one might euphemistically call a deteriorating marriage. The author and main character, M. Montjean, spends seventy-five folios describing his wife's behavior and its shortcomings. There is a certain entertainment value to the tale, in a watching-a-train-wreck sort of way. The husband recounts his wife's behavior during much of 1774 and 1775. During that time, he identifies several men with whom his wife becomes involved, detailing when and where she saw them, as well as her general disobedience. His wife was consistently unapologetic, continually criticizing her husband, preferring (he said) not to work, and spending her time walking on the boulevards and at the Palais Royal.

The text is of interest for anyone interested in conceptions of marriage in Old Regime France, as clearly, the husband and wife in question had quite different ideas of what was appropriate. He wants her to help by working, to be polite, to obey him, and not to run around Paris with other men. She, on the other hand, does not wish to work, and prefers the company of others and the life of the capital to staying home with her husband. In Montjean's telling, it is his idea that is more widely shared, as everyone (their daughter and the cook, as well as his wife's sister and father) side with him. Nor does the behavior he describes sound like anything that would pass for traditional wifely behavior. But then, it is he who wrote the account, and he does his best to make himself look good and his wife bad. Here, he was not always successful: his account of entering the house when it was dark, when “elle ce donna un coup a l'oeuil contre la porte batante,” causing a black eye, hardly rings true. While he notes that she claimed he beat her, no one seems to be giving Montjean a difficult time about that. Instead, both he and his father-in-law are working toward sending her to a convent, a

thesis that Turcot evokes in the introduction as the probable reason that Montjean wrote the piece.

In the next text, *Voyage qui n'est point sentimentale comme ceux de Mr Stern Anglois*, romance looks a lot more palatable. The main character, anonymous this time, is a man from Le Mans who visits Paris from June 25 until August 1, 1784. His journal is to "sa Lylie," a woman who is either his wife or his mistress, waiting for him back in Le Mans. Again, this is a bit repetitive, like the first text, even if it does not share the habit of repeating the exact same sentences over and over. Still, there are two themes which dominate the account. One is the theater: the author attends many plays during his stay. "Le spectacle est mon plus grand plaisir," he writes, and as a result he devotes a significant portion of the text to the plays he saw. Historians of the theater will find here a crucial resource, with descriptions of plays (both analysis and plot synopsis), as well as descriptions of the theaters and the audience. The author liked some more than others (*The Marriage of Figaro*, for instance, pleased him). He also clearly enjoyed being in the same audience as the king of Sweden, who was visiting Paris at the time. Other plays and specific actors impressed him less, and he was not shy in his criticisms.

In his descriptions—of the theater, of the streets and gardens of Paris, and of events like seeing the King (not impressed), seeing a hot air balloon (impressed), and even visiting Dr. Mesmer (a charlatan and a "fat German")—there are passages that are reminiscent of a sincere version of *Persian Letters*. There's a more curious theme to the journal, though, that stands out. The author often writes of love and of women. Part confession, part meditation, he continually describes his love for and devotion to Lylie. He does not hide, however, the attraction he feels toward the women of Paris. He says in the beginning that he will "ouvrirai mon âme" and he keeps his word, describing the encounters he has with women of Paris. He seems to be quite out of his element in Paris, particularly when it comes to dealing with women there. His encounters with Parisian women—prostitutes, respectable women, and women somewhere in between—were enough to get him worked up, leading him to question his devotion to Lylie, but always, in the end, to reaffirm it.

The third text, *Comptabilité d'une bourgeoise*, gives the collection something of a duck-duck-goose feel. Unlike the first two, the third breaks from narrative form and instead lists the expenses of a well-off woman from the Parisian region. As with the second text, it is a bit of a mystery, including neither the author's name nor their place of residence. There is enough information to situate it in the region of the capital, but as Turcot notes, it could be from the *faubourgs* or from Paris itself. There are a number of themes that could render the text relevant for researchers. Both the decision of a woman to mark down her expenses, and the content of the expenses themselves, provide much material for thought. It is here that Turcot's introductory essay is the most useful. Few readers who enjoyed reading the first two narratives will be likely to read through the eighty-five page list of expenses, but Turcot gives useful tables with totals, and some discussion of the categories of expenses.

The chronological and geographic overlap between the three texts unites them well enough to warrant their inclusion in one volume. The economic situation of the three authors seems close enough as well. None are immune from concerns about money, but all have enough to go beyond the bare necessities and engage in the rich cultural life of eighteenth-century Paris. Turcot's introductory essay is thorough, though longer than it needs to be. He does a strong job of linking the texts to contemporary trends in historical writing. His attempt to further unify the three texts by a discussion of the *for privé* is not necessary, for the overlap is clear enough to start, and there are a number of equally pressing concerns that cut across all three texts, starting with the need to put pen to paper. The footnotes he includes in the texts, though, are quite useful. Again, though, the work he did in making these texts accessible outshines the scholarly apparatus he included.

Having these texts available is a plus for any scholar working on the cultural history of Old Regime France. Historians studying marriage, romance, theater, and household expenses will certainly have much to work with, and should be sure to consult this. It is hard not to wonder, however, about the overall role of a book like this, putting archival work into print as the digital age hits stride. The work here is invaluable. As anyone who has tried to transcribe even a few pages of archival work knows, given the labor involved in transcribing this much, to be able to bring it to the public is a true public service. But it is hard to imagine these three sources getting the attention they merit, despite their interest to many scholars. Scholars of the theater, for instance, several years from now, will have a hard time knowing to look here. It is easy to foresee future researchers in

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the archives straining their eyes trying to transcribe these texts, unaware that they are now available in print. At some point in the hopefully-not-to-distant future, archival digitalization will start to hit its stride as well, and one of the challenges will be to find a way to take advantage of already existing works like this one.

## NOTES

[1] Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); originally published as *Journal de ma vie*, ed. Daniel Roche (Paris: Editions Montalba, 1982). The book is the memoirs of an eighteenth-century artisan, a text which, as Daniel Roche notes, "has no history" and "no way of tracing its itinerary" before winding up in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, but whose rich content has significantly improved historians' understanding daily life in Old Regime France.

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