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Joseph Harris, ed., *Marmontel and Demoustier, "Le Misanthrope corrigé": Two Eighteenth-Century Sequels to Molière's "Le Misanthrope,"* Cambridge, UK: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2019. viii + 138 pp. Notes and bibliography. \$17.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-78188-753-0; \$0.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-781887-54-7.

Review by Suzanne Jones, New College, University of Oxford.

Joseph Harris's contribution to the MHRA Critical Texts series not only reflects the remit of offering a scholarly edition of lesser-known literary texts, but also supplements critical interest in the reception and afterlives of Molière's work. As the introduction attests, the ending of *Le Misanthrope* (1666), in which the protagonist quits the stage in exasperation at the machinations of urban court society, invites audiences to imagine what will happen next. By charting the interrelations of Molière's play, François Marmontel's *conte moral* titled *Le Misanthrope corrigé* (1765), and its dramatic adaptation by Charles-Albert Demoustier, *Alceste à la campagne, ou le Misanthrope corrigé* (ca. 1790), Harris juxtaposes two eighteenth-century conceptions of Alceste's life after Paris, thereby providing an exploration of Enlightenment reconfigurations of Molière's presentation of misanthropy.

The volume begins with an overview of the different trajectories of Alceste's literary lives in both the early modern and modern era, focusing primarily on their manifestations in sequels but also alluding to adaptations of Molière's plays in English. As the introduction points out, the Anglophone link evokes a literary prehistory to Alceste in the form of Timon of Athens as dramatized by Shakespeare and Middleton. While there may be a reflection of Timon's retreat into the wilderness in Alceste's desire to flee to an "*endroit écarté*," Harris emphasizes that by the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers, sympathetic to such characters' commitment to frankness, sought to rehabilitate misanthropes into society. The dialogic nature of eighteenth-century intellectual debate meant that the figure of Alceste reappeared in several critical and literary texts. Jean Jacques Rousseau's antitheatrical treatise *La Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) argues that Molière had unfairly placed most attention on the misanthrope in order to make him the butt of comic laughter. Harris deftly summarizes Rousseau's main arguments and points to the range of responses it provoked, among the most vehement of which was Marmontel's confrontational *Apologie du théâtre* (1761), in which Rousseau's idealized misanthropic figure, "a harsh, high-minded censor of humanity" (p. 6), is dismissed as dramatically uninteresting. Beyond the defense of Molière's theatrically driven choices, Marmontel argues for Alceste's underlying regard for humanity, since his despair at its vices can only be motivated by concern for potential virtuous victims. Harris's exploration of the critical

dialogue between these two theoretical texts is a helpful inroad into the alternative representations of Alceste and his rehabilitation in the annotated primary texts that follow.

Harris's introductory sections on Marmontel's *Le Misanthrope corrigé* set the *conte moral* in its particular generic context, reminding readers of the form's distance from moralistic writing and helpfully drawing attention to the parallels and contrasts between Marmontel's narrative choices and the dramatic context of Alceste's first appearance on the Parisian stage. Thus, Marmontel's idiosyncratic recording of character dialogue without explicit indication of the speaker reads in a "quasi-dramatic way" (p. 9); but elsewhere the narrator by turns suggests identification with Alceste through free indirect discourse, as well as detached observation, in the epithet "Le Misanthrope." It is worth pointing out that such oscillations reflect the various audience responses to Molière's play that inspired the very dialogue in which the *conte* participates. Harris guides readers through the dismantling of Alceste's misanthropy and his resultant rehabilitation into society through his encounter with the paternalistic and virtuous local lord the vicomte de Laval and his daughter Ursule. In contrast to the courtly environment of Molière's play, Marmontel's Alceste interacts with characters who actively challenge his preconceptions by presenting and building on the arguments Marmontel had put forward in the *Apologie*, thereby alluding to the texts that frame the characters' interactions.

Besides the reconfiguration of character dialogue to mirror the challenging debates of Enlightenment intellectual discussion, the eighteenth-century sequels to *Le Misanthrope* also reflect the period's interest in emotion. As Harris points out, Molière's *Le Misanthrope* cursorily explored the influence of the bodily humors on the eponymous character's emotions, but by the eighteenth century misanthropy and melancholy supposedly caused by an excess of black bile were more closely associated because they both triggered withdrawal from society. In Marmontel's tale, Alceste's bout of melancholy at the belief that he will not be able to marry Ursule is treated as a serious medical condition by Laval, who argues that sociability is the only cure. Alceste's initial love for the coquettish Célimène in Molière's comedy, replayed more successfully in his relationship with Laval's daughter in *Le Misanthrope corrigé*, is one of the most obvious challenges to Alceste's professed status as misanthrope. Harris picks out Marmontel's treatment of Alceste's new love interest in order to explore the limitations of Laval's progressiveness in regard to the role of men and women in courtship and marriage; whereas the benevolent father figure supposedly allows his daughter to choose her own husband, the daughter is conditioned to imagine this husband as a replacement father figure. Alceste is thus restored to the social order in his role as a paternalistic husband in the family structure. The question of how far this reconciliation is representative of compromise and how far it suggests a troubling paternalistic control reminiscent of microcosmic social structures in Molière, remains an underlying question.

The introductory sections on Charles-Albert Demoustier's play *Alceste à la campagne ou le Misanthrope corrigé* (ca. 1790) situate the work within the context of contemporaneous drama on the theme of misanthropy in France and Germany, the most direct descendent to Molière's *Le Misanthrope* being Fabre d'Églantine's *Le Philinte de Molière, ou la suite du Misanthrope* (1790). Harris argues that Demoustier's play is most likely a response that weaves in elements from Marmontel's *conte*. An exploration of Demoustier's restoration of Alceste to a dramatic and specifically comic role leads to a helpful discussion of the theory of sequels and their tendency to evoke knowing laughter at parodic recognition of source texts; but Harris argues that Demoustier's text bucks this trend by downplaying the links to the dramatic ancestor in favor of

accommodating eighteenth-century strains of dramatic influence such as pathos. Harris's discussion of Demoustier's dramatic adaptations of Marmontel's tale is particularly adroit in emphasizing the evolutions that the sequels underwent, though the shift from a reliance on implicit stage directions in Molière's play to the intensification of emotive stage directions in Demoustier's could reflect evolving practices in the representation of drama in print form, as well as an expansion of the character's emotional range. Harris exemplifies Demoustier's emphasis on Alceste's emotional response to the ills of humanity by highlighting his amplification of the martial imagery he uses to jolt his old soldier friend Blonzac out of contemplating suicide; whether or not Demoustier's play was written before 1789, his Alceste's self-presentation as a "wholehearted scourge of all modern values" (p. 29) invites further reflection on the revolutionary context. Perhaps the distance of the associative leap is so short that it does not warrant flagging up, but a footnote reference to a work like Mechele Leon's *Molière, The French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife* would help readers situate the play in its historical environment.[1]

Throughout Harris's introduction, the complex ambiguities and contradictions in Alceste's character in all its forms are presented cogently and the pertinent examples taken from the edited texts are easily cross-referenced. Indeed, the clarity of the critical apparatus in this work is one of its greatest strengths. The notes to the edited texts are judiciously selected to draw linguistic and thematic parallels between Marmontel's *conte moral*, Demoustier's play, and Molière's play. The inclusion of notes highlighting the correction of printing errors in the base texts or punctuation changes are testament to the editor's conscientiousness. Particularly striking and insightful are the notes on Demoustier's text that point to borrowings or influences from specifically seventeenth-century French theatre, not only echoes of Molière, but also of heroic drama and Racinian tragedy. Although there is mention of Demoustier's apparent affinity for seventeenth-century culture and literature in the introduction, the numerous notes referring to Alceste's quasi-tragic lines invite some further reflection on whether Demoustier was intentionally including comic-parodic elements typical of the sequel form. The ludic nature of the play could perhaps be explored further as these allusions suggest that Demoustier's Alceste is perhaps self-consciously and metatheatrically playing the part of misanthrope, a role that is unsustainable in the "real world" on which society inevitably impinges.

This volume is an important addition to the corpus of Molière reception in the Enlightenment.[2] The arc of *Le Misanthrope's* reception can be traced back to the play's first appearance with critical responses such as Donneau de Visé's *Lettre écrite sur la comédie du Misanthrope*; but this new comparative and elucidating edition of two eighteenth-century sequels will encourage scholars and students to encompass a wider range of texts in their reflections on Molière's audiences and adaptors.

## NOTES

[1] Mechele Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution, and the Theatrical Afterlife* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009).

[2] See, for example, Monique Wagner, *Molière in the Age of Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1973).

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