

intelligent, and innovative analysis, Molière's comedy acts as a baroque self-reflexive mirror in which the spectator becomes aware of the nature of self-discovery and the fashioning of his or her identity.

Nicholas D. Paige. *Being Interior: Autobiography and the Contradictions of Modernity in Seventeenth-Century France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. ix + 299 pp. + 4 illus. \$55.00. Review by ZAHİ ZALLOUA, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY.

Nicholas D. Paige's *Being Interior* makes a compelling case for the irreducibility of modernity to skepticism and secularism. Turning to the religious literature of seventeenth-century authors, mostly of women writing in the first person, Paige examines the historical process by which the works of those authors, displaying an interiorized subjectivity, came to be read as "autobiographical," and its importance for a more nuanced understanding of the origins of modern subjectivity—one which does not equate the beginnings of modernity solely with the advent of the Cartesian *cogito*.

Central to Paige's project is the metaphor of interiority, which permeates the religious or mystical writings of lesser-known seventeenth-century authors. Attention to the personal space of interiority in its religious context has indeed been a lacuna in contemporary criticism of the early modern period. Yet it would be an error, as Paige warns, to see *Being Interior* as a naïve valorization of religious inner space. Quite the contrary, what Paige seeks to illustrate is that from its very inception the autobiographical subject is mired with contradictions and paradoxes, and it is precisely these contradictions and paradoxes which Paige claims to be constitutive of modern subjectivity.

In his introduction, Paige quotes approvingly Judith Butler's formulation of the modern process of subjection: "[T]aken to be the condition for and instrument of agency,' Judith Butler has recently argued, '[the subject] is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency'" (4). This essentially Foucauldian insight is confirmed in the early writings

of religious autobiography. Motivated by two contradictory impulses, the turn to interiority is seen at once as a *voluntary act* performed in the pursuit of self-cultivation (the fashioning of an inner self), and as a *forced response* to infringing forces from the external (social) world (the desire to turn inward did not originate from within). A case in point is Marie Baron. In a letter describing Baron's fascination with interiority, the Jesuit Jean-Joseph Surin reveals how Baron experiences her vast inner depth simultaneously as an idealized place where love abounds ("where loved kept her occupied"), and as a place of exile ("banished and confined"), where she takes refuge from the scrutinizing male gaze ("the eyes of men"). The space of interiority is, as a result, a "Janus in that it is both desired and imposed" (3).

But what provokes the injunction "be interior"? This question is, again, interlaced with the question of modernity. While modernity has been defined in terms of the absence of God (the expression of a skeptical, secular, or atheistic ideology), Paige contends that this picture is both incomplete and misleading, for it fails to attend to the complexity and specificity of the relationship to God found in some of the early autobiographical writings. Facing a social and semiotic crisis in the spiritual domain (the disturbing *prise de conscience* of a discredited natural theology; the questioning of bookish and scholastic accounts of God's existence), religious autobiographers turned inward for a (deceptive) sense of stability and for a more authentic knowledge of God. The modernity of early autobiographers lies, then, in their refusal of a hierarchical and institutionalized rapport with God, in favor of one grounded in both experience and experimentation.

Paige's book is divided into two well-balanced parts, "Reading In" and "Frictions," each comprised of two chapters. In the first chapter, Paige turns to the material forms of early autobiography, examining how autobiographical texts—namely Augustine's *Confessions* and Montaigne's *Essais*—were strategically packaged and sold. And while today's readers, who are more sensitive to the historicity of those quintessential texts, may object to the characterization of the *Confessions* and the *Essais* as "autobiography," Paige

convincingly shows that the making or history of this “anachronism” is nevertheless quite telling. Drawing from Foucault’s late works on the “technologies of the self,” Paige argues that Montaigne’s writing, for instance, displays two competing models of selfhood: the “care of the self” and the “hermeneutics of self.” On the one hand, Montaigne is a clear inheritor of the Greco-Roman culture of self-care, which sees “the self as a practice” (29), that is, the self as something to fashion rather than discover. On the other hand, through his use of metaphoric interiority, Montaigne seems to present the “self as the locus of pre-existing truths” (29), although, as Paige remarks, even the deepest inward turns are perpetually disrupted by the very mutability of the Montaignian self. But in a move to make the *Essais* the book of a “universal inspector of the inner man” (from Marie de Gournay’s 1635 “Preface” to the *Essais*, quoted in Paige 46), seventeenth-century editors readily privilege the author’s intimate “hermeneutics of self” over his Stoic or aristocratic “care of the self.”

In the second chapter, Paige investigates the formative process by which seventeenth-century writers became autobiographers. What started as a typically private exchange of letters between a nun and her director acquired around 1650 the status of publishable material. The unparalleled demand for autobiography is especially visible in the proliferation of religious biographies, which, it must be stressed, amounted to verbatim representations of autobiographical documents, or a compilation of autobiographical fragments. Yet what remains most striking about autobiography is its female origins. Paige turns again and again in his learned study to the “gendering of autobiography,” and interestingly suggests a collaboration between mystic writers (predominantly women) and their progressive biographers “who were trying to enlarge women’s influence in the Counter-Reformation Church” (115).

Moving from “Reading In” to “Frictions,” Paige explores the more problematic side of autobiography and modern subjectivity. In chapter 3, he addresses the problem of interpretation surrounding the works of three key autobiographers: Jean de

Labadie (1610-1674), Antoinette Bourignon (1610-1680), and Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717). The utopian wish to effectuate a pure correspondence between interiority and exteriority through the autobiographical text is shown to have been repeatedly frustrated from its outset. With print technology, which many mystics did their best to resist, the autobiographical text unavoidably escaped its author's interpretive control, becoming something dangerously "exterior"—subject to misreading and misappropriation, and, in some cases, leading to judicial persecution. Increasingly conscious of the "legal vulnerability of writing" (170), seventeenth-century mystics came to realize that the threat of alienation paradoxically accompanied any proposed "transparent" act of autobiography. In the last chapter, Paige returns to the Jesuit exorcist Jean-Joseph Surin (the spiritual director of Marie Baron), whose autobiography *Science expérimentale des choses de l'autre vie* (1663) recounts the bizarre story of his twenty-year struggle with aphasia and delirium, and, perhaps most importantly, his painful and acute sense of his own otherness. Writing privacy and difference—producing a book "about being different" (180)—raises particularly interesting questions regarding experience, form, and authority.

Eloquently incorporating literature, history and critical theory, Paige's *Being Interior* will have great appeal not only for seventeenth-century scholars, but also for avid readers of the early modern period and critics interested in the genealogy of the modern subject.

Andrew Calder. *The Fables of La Fontaine: Wisdom Brought Down to Earth*. Geneva: Droz, 2001. 224 pp. (cloth). Review by JOE JOHNSON, GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY.

There are more than a few ways to "read" and appreciate La Fontaine's *Fables*. A student might memorize these models of form and content for recitation and classroom study. Other readers might prefer to dissect their discourse, content, and intertextual or formal elements for insight concerning a Sun King's France or the