

oversights and sweeping statements that arguably require nuance. For example, when discussing the staging of the martyr tragedies in Chapter two, Ibbett posits that “the crux of the martyrological narrative is the relation between victim and audience, between the exemplary figure and those who follow in his, or increasingly her, wake.” “In the plays of these years,” Ibbett continues, “such a relation was necessarily troubled as the seemingly defining moment of the martyr play was pushed off stage. In the new martyrological theater, the spectator is left stranded, waiting to see something whose importance is continually stressed but which can never come about in our presence” (38). Not physically showing the martyr’s death, however, has precedent and is thus not so new: in fact, several earlier hagiographical tragedies, such as Laudun d’Aigaliers’ *Dioclétien* (1596), Pierre Troterel’s *Sainte Agnès* (1615) and Etienne Poytevin’s *Sainte Catherine* (1619), the latter both about female martyrs, do not stage the saints’ demise. Nonetheless, such pitfalls are rare and, overall, Ibbett’s project is a fructuous contribution to scholarship. The unlikely and unexpected connections throughout the book lead to perspicacious insights that will certainly nourish the future of French seventeenth-century studies.

Fernand Hallyn, *Descartes: Dissimulation et Ironie*. Geneva : Droz, 2006. 214 pp. 18€. Review by REBECCA WILKIN, PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY.

A materialist masquerading as a metaphysician? A dogmatist in disguise? Descartes’ confident prose continues to spur readers to search out contradictions and confusion: telltale ripples on a too-smooth surface. In *Descartes: Dissimulation et Ironie*, Fernand Hallyn provides vocabulary for understanding the discrepancies that readers past and present have alleged between Descartes’ thought and his expression of it. Ferrying deftly between the specifics of rhetorical strategy and the larger controversies into which words played, Hallyn sheds light on the constraints surrounding scientific discourse as well as on the passionate reactions inspired by Descartes’ philosophy and person. Dissimulation—that tool of the free-thinking atheist—was a frequent feature of Descartes’ expression; mistrust thus was (and remains) a rational response to his writing. Yet Hallyn’s purpose is

neither to inculcate Descartes as a libertine, nor to defend him from such accusations. Rather, he argues that distinguishing mask from face is preliminary to properly understanding Descartes' thought. Hallyn uses Descartes' unpublished writings—the *Treatise on the World* that he held “in reserve,” his more candid correspondence, the interview with Francis Burman—to reconstruct his process and priorities in his published works.

Hallyn defines the historical and rhetorical backdrop in the introduction and in Chapter one. In the wake of Galileo's trial, dissimulation—which Castiglione had recommended to courtiers as a facet of the art of prudence—became equally advisable for the natural philosopher. Francis Bacon considered dissimulation the middling degree of prudent veiling, between mere discretion and outright simulation. To dissimulate was to prevent just anybody from extravagant interpretation; to protect oneself against accusations of heterodoxy; to create an elite community of those who were “in” on the secret—who were sensitive, in Hallyn's terms, to the provocative “perlocutionary” effects of an apparently orthodox “illocution” (23). Descartes' early statement, *larvatus prodeō* (“I advance masked”), evinced precocious prudence: to unmask false sciences, one had to first mask oneself (33-37). Yet the mask must be undetectable, for dissimulation was the hallmark of libertine discourse.

Mostly, Descartes dissimulated in order to avoid Galileo's fate while supplanting Aristotelian physics with his mechanism, as Hallyn shows in chapters two and three. Whereas Galileo promoted heliocentrism through confrontational dialogue, Descartes adopted the “sermo,” a private conversation in the context of tranquil idleness, in which he imagined the world's creation (94). Descartes nonetheless judged his *Treatise on the World* too risky to publish; he published (anonymously) in its place the *Discourse on Method* and accompanying essays. Out of prudence, the philosopher suppressed the metaphysics from the *Discourse* and added the four rules of moral conduct at the eleventh hour (59). Sometimes, he signaled suppressions ostensibly to exercise his reader's sagacity, but really to dissimulate shortcomings in his arguments (97-105).

In chapter four, Hallyn elucidates equivocation in Descartes' efforts to placate the theologians of the Sorbonne in his *Metaphysi-*

*cal meditations*. The *Meditations* posed as foundational principles in harmony with Catholic dogma, as if paving the way for his physics, when in fact they served to justify Descartes' mechanistic natural philosophy *a posteriori* (126). The "meditations" promised in the title were moreover misleading: senses are central to spiritual meditation, while Descartes envisages the achievement of epistemological salvation through detachment from the senses and rational meditation—freedom from error, rather than from sin (111-114). Did Descartes really write the *Meditations* in hopes of bringing infidels to the faith? His proof of God's existence, Hallyn notes, only sustains a vague deism (134, 139). Is grace the key to faith or were the Pelagians right to acquire faith through reason? Hallyn underscores inconsistencies in the philosopher's responses (133-142). Descartes made a point of inviting theologians to correct his work, but Pierre Gassendi, reviving Aristotle's opposition of the *alazon* (braggard) and the *ieron* (dissimulator), argued that the philosopher's show of deference clashed with Descartes' manifest confidence elsewhere, and that from this dissonance emerged the sure sound of dissimulation. Hallyn cites in support of Gassendi's perceptiveness a letter in which Descartes aspires to "accommodate" Catholic dogma to his philosophy (132).

Hallyn notes that by the time Descartes published the *Meditations*, his bid to silence skeptics and chasten atheists with a watertight proof of God's existence had been brewing for about a decade (148). Hallyn nevertheless joins other recent commentators in suggesting that Descartes prioritized science over metaphysics and in characterizing the *Meditations* as a momentous detour from a narrower path of interest to which Descartes was never able to fully return, given the wake he unsuspectingly plowed with that work. Indeed, Hallyn argues in chapter five, the penultimate chapter and the keystone of the book, that the *Meditations* embroiled Descartes in a "situational irony" of which he was not the master, and in denial of which he redefined the preoccupations of western philosophy. Hallyn explores the consequences of irony—a form of simulation to the extent that it involves saying other than what one thinks—in the proof of God's existence and veracity. The *malin genie*, a demonic ironist, supposedly finds his illusions dispelled by Descartes when he proves God's existence and veracity. Yet these hyperbolic constructions leave loose

threads (157). The argument that God, as a perfect being, would never trick us, contradicts Descartes' claim elsewhere that for God, nothing is impossible (155). Likewise, Descartes' doctrine of eternal truths undermines moral certitude; the "good" is just one among others that God might have willed for us (163). (Correction: Descartes writes of free will to Elizabeth of Bohemia, not "Elisabeth de Bavière" [161]. Bavaria was the land of Maximilian I, who assisted the arch-Catholic Hapsburg Ferdinand II in deposing Elizabeth's father from the throne of Bohemia and pushing him out of the Palatinate). While in reassuring passages, Descartes reduces God to an anthropomorphic being incarnating the philosopher's ideal, in other passages this same God exercises the potential for irony, which Descartes ascribes to the *malin génie*. If Hallyn identifies a smokescreen in the *Meditations*, it is not, as Gassendi suspected, in the enabling rhetoric of a materialist, but rather in the denial of the relativism that inheres in Descartes' arguments.

Hallyn underscores the polemical context of Descartes' *oeuvre* in the final chapter, concluding that seasoned dissimulators are not above exposing the less subtle dissimulation of others when it suits them. Under attack by Henricus Regius, a former follower in once-friendly Holland, Descartes aggressively accused the disillusioned disciple of dissimulating materialist tendencies. Descartes was a slippery dissimulator—hard to catch in the act of dissimulating—because unlike Regius, he was careful to avoid the affirmation of a double truth, wherein what is true in natural philosophy contradicts what is true in faith (184, 16-18).

In *Descartes: Dissimulation et Ironie*, René casts the shadow of a tragic hero. He harbored a fatal flaw—certitude bordering on dogmatism—that condemned his writing to a hermeneutics of suspicion ever after. Yet it was not in circumventing obstacles (ignorance, bad faith, bigotry) that Descartes' unparalleled rhetorical skill—including, most prominently, dissimulation and simulation—had its greatest impact. Rather, Hallyn shows, it was because of Descartes' failure to control the irony he introduced in the name of certitude that his thought became so crucial for subsequent philosophers. Scholars and students of rhetoric and literature, as well as historians of science and of philosophy, can savor the drama of this irony thanks to the deep knowledge of rhetorical tradition that Hallyn brings to bear on all

facets of Descartes' work in this rich and densely argued book, which would have been greatly enhanced by an index.

Alain Rey. *Antoine Furetière: Un précurseur des Lumières*. Paris: Fayard, 2006. Pp. 203. 19€. Review by DAVID EICK, GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY.

Alain Rey is not a university professor but rather France's foremost lexicographer and is a household name as the longtime host of a popular, daily segment on the public radio station France Inter. As editor-in-chief of the Robert dictionaries since the 1960s, his practical experience renders him uniquely qualified to assess the work of the most important lexicographer of the Classical Age in *Antoine Furetière: Un précurseur des Lumières* (Fayard, 2006). Rey effectively launched modern Furetière studies in 1978 with his commanding introduction to a reprint of Furetière's 1690 *Dictionnaire universel*. In the interim, Furetière's dictionary and literary work has received some scholarly attention, and the field of "metalexicography," the study of dictionaries, has burgeoned. So this reviewer was eager to see what was new in Rey's return to a subject whose study he pioneered.

In the event, precious little is new. Except for a few minuscule revisions—two new pages on minor seventeenth-century French dictionaries by Jesuit Fathers Pomey and Danet, new section breaks and sub-chapter headings, and a bibliographical reference to a letter previously thought nonextant—the text is a reprint of Rey's 1978 introduction, a fact nowhere indicated in the volume. This said, the availability of Rey's seminal study in monograph form is a boon for scholars. It remains an excellent starting place for those interested in the author of the most complete picture that we have of the French language in the era of Racine, La Fontaine and Boileau, fellow members of the Académie française whom Furetière counted as friends until controversy erupted upon his announcement of the imminent publication of his *Dictionnaire universel* in 1684.

The book covers four areas: Furetière's biography as a man of letters and Academician, a play-by-play of his bitter polemic with the