Andrea Battistini. *Lo specchio di Dedalo: Autobiografia e biografia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990. Pp. 226.

Alice before the looking glass saw her own image distorted and realized the difficulty of imposing a form on herself as a complete individual. Similarly, the autobiographer will always find the imposition of a written form on his life to be a confused distortion to some extent and his work becomes, like that of Dedalus, the construction of an immense labyrinth. Andrea Battistini's collection of essays, *Lo specchio di Dedalo*, is a significant addition to scholarship for both the genre of autobiography and the literature of the eighteenth century. Whereas much attention has been given to the study of autobiography as a literary genre by American and French critics, until the appearance of this volume a similar work was lacking in the context of Italian studies. This is a thorough and detailed study written for specialists and a valuable research tool with extensive notes and bibliography.

Unlike the French literary historian, Philippe Lejeune, who dates the birth of autobiography in the late eighteenth century with the appearance of Rousseau's *Confessions*, Battistini follows instead the example of Misch and Bakhtin who acknowledge classical antecedents to the genre in Greek and Roman literary production. This philological study is very important to an understanding of early Italian autobiography, especially in a work like the *Vita* of Giambattista Vico. The emergence of autobiography is a very gradual process and is closely related to the development of such genres as encomia, eulogies, biographies, epistolary collections, diaries, memoirs and first-person narratives. Those features which are unique to autobiography and which separate it from other genres are indicated by Battistini through a careful textual study of some of the most significant works of the Settecento corpus, including writings by D'Andrea, Vico, Muratori, Giannone, Goldoni, Alfieri, Casanova and Da Ponte. Autobiography, although a literary form, is also the individual expression of the author's vision of himself and his world and is closely linked to social and cultural values. Battistini acknowledges this fact by presenting those factors which lead to the beginning of extensive autobiographical production in Italy. Until the Settecento, the dominant Catholic culture did not allow for autobiographical writing since it was construed as a sin of pride. The exceptions could be only for didactic or apologetic motives. The thesis of *Lo specchio di Dedalo* is that the personal writings of Descartes and Ignatius Loyola helped to break down the inhibitions of contemporary men of letters, thus liberating them and allowing them to write freely about themselves.

Lo specchio di Dedalo consists of a collection of six previously published articles by Battistini which have been amplified and in some cases extensively revised especially for this volume. The first part is entitled "I percorsi della storia" and contains three critical articles on various Settecento autobiographies while the second section, "La dialettica delle forme," is more theoretical in nature. Although most of the chapters deal with specific issues in Italian literature of the eighteenth century, the fourth chapter ("Il fluido della vita e il cristallo della scrittura") is of broad range and highly suitable as a starting point for any study of autobiography. It is a full, clearly presented exposition of the current debate on the literary study of the genre. To Andrea Battistini highest praise is due for the content of this volume and also for its precise and erudite prose style.

JORDAN LANCASTER

University of Calgary