

# Subject, Repetition, Lack: Rétif de La Bretonne's *Monsieur Nicolas* and Fictional Autobiography

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This article focuses on *Monsieur Nicolas*, a semi-fictional autobiography of Rétif de La Bretonne (1734–1806), to shed new light on the meaning of the ambiguous zone between fact and fiction which the text never ceases to show to readers through its repetitive episodes. Based on a detailed analysis of several love stories, where the author always ends up losing his love who, according to his fantasy, would make him happy with her true affection, we will show that the final object of Rétif's desire always disappears although he loves so many women. This lack of object corresponds to the disappearance of Rétif's subject. Despite his wish to take the father's position in telling girls morally useful stories, an attitude which certainly comes from his own father's practice of reading aloud the Bible to his family, Rétif tends to abandon it and to hide behind his *écriture* in many episodes of anonymous letters. His autobiography *Monsieur Nicolas* contains a lot of fiction, but indicates in this way the place where the truth *as lack* is.