

either “literary” or “aesthetic.” His pervasive use of these words suggests a focus that he neither defines nor proves, but perhaps others can build on the considerable foundation he has laid to pursue that topic. In the meantime, he has produced a resource that will not need rewriting for some time to come.

**The delay in publishing the following review is the fault of *Seventeenth-Century News*, and we would like to apologize to the author and reviewer:**

**DRD**

Sharon Cadman Seelig. *Generating Texts: The Progeny of Seventeenth-Century Prose*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996. x + 202 pp. Review by MEG LOTA BROWN, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA.

Sharon Cadman Seelig’s study of genre is distinguished by remarkably nuanced close readings of three pairs of literary works. Each pair is comprised of one text from the seventeenth century and one from a later period. Seelig allies the texts according to their authors’ shared perspectives. Her concern is with the extent to which “they adopted the same rhetorical strategies, the same mode, the same method; it is the similarity of conception—of the nature of the persona or voice, the nature of the quest, the nature of the inquiry—and of the structure that emerges to which I have tried to turn attention” (155-6). Seelig’s objective in comparing early and later works is less to find resemblances in their topics than to argue that “analogous approaches create analogous rhetorical and syntactic structures” (158). Idea, she maintains, produces form.

Building on the work of Claudio Guillen, Barbara Lewalski, David Radcliffe, Heather Dubrow, and Ann Imbrie, Seelig expands the notion of genre, skillfully demonstrating the flexibility of the category. She offers a valuable account of both genre and literary influence, as she explores how each is produced by a shared conceptual approach to the world and the self. At the same time, she points to defining differences in place, motive, voice, frame of refer-

ence, and tone, and she notes ways in which genres evolve over time.

Seelig gives illuminating readings of three “generating” and three “progeny” texts. The pairs of works are Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* and Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (both designated as “meditations”); Browne’s *Religio Medici* and Thoreau’s *Walden* (termed “normative autobiographies”); Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (“deconstructive texts”). Seelig’s analysis of the common vision and shared rhetorical strategies of the allied works is irresistible. She astutely demonstrates, for example, the formative concern of Donne and Eliot with both the power and the indeterminacy of language, with the anxious resolution of paradox, with the generative tension between abstract statement and concrete image, and with the relation of time to eternity. She shows affinities between their methods of incremental inquiry and dramatic presentation. And she illuminates the probing of experience that characterizes the meditative mode. In each pairing of texts, Seelig is concerned not so much with the influence of the earlier work on the later, but with the similarities of method that emerge from the world view of each author. She is at her best when she considers “what relationship exists in each work between conceptual genesis and mode of expression” (63).

Seelig categorizes *Religio Medici* and *Walden* as “normative autobiographies,” works in which the self is exemplary as well as idiosyncratic. Both proceed by ongoing modification, enacting the experience of discovery in the structure of sentences and paragraphs. They are both cyclical and progressive, and they both present the self as a model of discovery in which the reader is rhetorically, intellectually, and emotionally enlisted. Most importantly, Seelig argues, the works share a sense of “the metaphysical implications of everyday actions, and the linguistic and rhetorical means by which that conception is represented” (83). Both Browne and Thoreau find reason, analogy, and language to be essential but inadequate tools, and each author points the reader beyond those tools to what cannot be said or known.

Seelig's sixth chapter is a masterful examination of that generic pasticcio, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. She brilliantly limns Burton's "anti-method," his "attempt at order that manifests disorder," his "citation of authority [that] produces no unanimity," and his extraordinary efforts both to establish boundaries and to transgress them (110). From this anti-method, Seelig shows us Burton's method, navigating his carnivalesque prose with agility and infectious appreciation. Indeed, one of Seelig's great strengths is the obvious pleasure she derives from mining the language and the methods of her subject. She understands and celebrates the messiness of Burton's work, arguing that his divagations from the point are the point. The playful, transgressive, digressive text is about process, and it requires the reader to participate in the process of discovery. Considering the generic implications of the "studied indeterminacy" of Burton's work, Seelig focuses on his "fascination with process, with detail, with discovery, rather than with conclusion or resolution" (111).

In her final text of comparison, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Seelig finds the greatest challenges to classification: "it is perhaps wide of the mark to define the genre of a work whose very point seems to be to test notions of genre" (130). Tracing the deconstructive characteristics that Sterne and Burton have in common, Seelig gives a cogent reading of the disjunctiveness, the unstable verbal texture, the deliberate deviations from expectations, the generic play and ambiguity of both works. Especially convincing is her account of the ways in which the authors engage, challenge, and collaborate with their readers.

Although Seelig's account of specific texts is itself generative, her discussion of generic kinship is not always as enabling. Genres are sometimes so generously and generally defined that they grow to embrace more instances of literary discourse than they are differentiated from. For example, Seelig defines the "normative autobiography" of Browne and Thoreau by describing their "similarities of approach": "Each articulates a relationship between the mundane and the cosmic; each sees through the reality we know to a world beyond, and, most significant, each creates rhetorical forms

that force us to make the leap that he does, that enable us to see what he sees" (3). While these remarks are unimpeachable, they also aptly characterize the "meditative modes" treated earlier in the book. Similarly, Seelig distinguishes the "deconstructive impulse" of Burton and Sterne, claiming that "Both are characterized by excess; each puts forward a form only to undermine it, to tease our expectations, or to manipulate our responses" (5). Both writers cite authority to such excess that authority is undermined by chaotic diversity, and both "play games with the reader, treating him both as partner and as object" (6). True, but the same, of course, could be said of *Pseudo-Martyr* or *Biathanatos*, *Ulysses*, or *Ada*, to name only a few, generically distinct, works. To speak of genre is at some point to differentiate. Indeed, Seelig distinguishes among her paired texts by making generic distinctions: meditative mode, normative autobiography, etc. But as she examines each of her categories, the contours of genre are replaced by an integration of epistemological systems, formal structures, authorial impulses, strategies, and attitudes. Seelig criticizes Alastair Fowler for his proliferation of generic distinctions, categories, and sub-genres, pointing out that his system "provides too little framework . . . thus destroying the function of genre, which is not only to help understand individual works but also to see them in relation to other works of the same kind" (9). At times, however, Seelig's generous view of genre and of relations among works over-corrects Fowler's excess.

Nevertheless, *Generating Texts* is a valuable contribution to the study of literary form and literary influence. Its governing assertion that ways of seeing the world are determinative of structure is eloquently argued and—more importantly—is borne out by the works of literature under consideration. Always sensitive to the subtle nuances of language and method, Seelig "unpacks" her subject with extraordinary insight and affection.

Ramie Targoff. *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,