Sharon Cadman Seelig. *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600–1680*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 214 pp. index. bibl. $75. ISBN: 0–521–85695–7.

In this stimulating study, Seelig describes the disparate forms many women's autobiographies have taken and suggests, since most women have been unable to preserve their texts from censorship or destruction, that we read them from unfettered standpoints. She devotes a chapter to each woman: Margaret Hoby, Anne Clifford, Lucy Hutchinson, Ann Fanshawe, Anne Halkett, and Margaret Cavendish.

Seelig intends her arrangement to leave an accurate impression: women autobiographers became more willing to present their lives and thoughts as important, and to look within themselves and write imaginative narratives shaped by their own agendas. As she herself makes clear, though, the extant autobiographical texts of four of her six women — Hoby, Clifford, Hutchinson, and

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Halkett — are censored portions of a corpus of texts, much of which has been destroyed or not yet published. The first two and the last of the large folios in which Hoby wrote her diaries have been torn out. Clifford's extant papers suggest she wrote compulsively, from the time she was very young to near the time of her death: the striking diary of 1616 to 1619 — in which she struggles against violence, as well as humiliation and neglect, to hold onto her inheritance — is missing the year 1618 and is extant only in eighteenth-century copies. Hutchinson's powerful and moving elegies on her husband's death — imaginative, strongly self-centered texts, which doubt Providence's presence and justice — have not yet been published in book form. In the case of known published remnants of devotional texts, revealing women whose sexuality, outward behavior, and thoughts manifest piety and regard for the family's aggrandizement and respectability, we have an unrepresentative basis for inference.

Fanshawe and Cavendish's uncut women's memoirs are strongly compromised. Seelig refers to studies that demonstrate that Cavendish represented herself as having no sexual knowledge or ability to manipulate, and that she strictly followed her husband's decree to omit anything that could create trouble from living individual people or be construed as overtly political. Yet Seelig also reveals that Cavendish's autobiography is a continuously defensive and self-contradictory text. Like other recent scholars, Seelig does not acknowledge the limitations of Fanshawe's understanding, even though Fanshawe's text itself shows the gap between her grasp of what was happening and her husband's attitude toward her and his outlook. Seelig praises this memoir because Fanshawe presents behavior not stereotypically feminine: as a girl Fanshawe was a tomboy, and during the Civil War she is "anything but passive in the experiences that befall her" and a "bold initiator of action" (99, 100). Seelig urges the reader to validate the conventionally acceptable story this typical gentry woman "chooses to tell" (109). We should remember, though, that Fanshawe's memoir survived precisely because it is a record of "a life of success, and hardship, [a] strong history of [Fanshawe's] family and her place within it" (109).

Seelig's close readings of these texts and her attempt to accept their conscious content as sufficient explanation for their existence, and as evidence for a full portrait, produces useful insights when she sympathizes strongly with the way her subject presents herself: for example, Margaret Hoby's restrained presentation of her life as unelaborated facts of daily virtuous work and religious practices, Anne Clifford's unashamed self-gratifying presentation of her hard-won victory and powerful later life, and Cavendish's flamboyant fantasy *The Blazing World*. On the other hand, she feels disappointed by Lucy Hutchinson's overt self-effacement and dismayed by Anne Halkett's partial revelation of her "vulnerable position" in the public sexual arena (81). Her analysis of Hutchinson's male-centered *The Life of Colonel Hutchinson* is brief and relies heavily on N. H. Keeble and Susan Cook. Hutchinson's autobiographical fragment is analyzed to show its conventional religious, romantic, and exemplary imagery. Seelig does justice to the literary quality, introspection, and the "strength and coherence of narrative line," of Halkett's text,

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and has profited from Loftis's new edition of Joseph Bampfield's memoir (110–11). However, since, like many scholars, she frames the text as a proto-romance that anticipates later novels, she reads the Scottish parts of Halkett's memoir — her close relationships with women as their companion and life after marrying James Halkett — less carefully. In addition, I found errors: Halkett did not rescue Charles and Mary Seton, Earl and Countess of Dunfermline, but an important pair of Bampfield's allies, the Scots Presbyterian pro-royalist landowners, Lord Alexander and Lady Margaret Mackenzie Lindsay (Lord and Lady Balcarres), who were also anathematized by Charles II. Halkett's closing details, which Seelig says "clog" the narrative (129), are part of another third of the original manuscript. The present memoir and the undamaged one do not simply end with a happy marriage.

This is a book rich in details from, and suggestive strategies for reading, early modern women's texts. For women excluded from public social hierarchies, and especially those of print, manuscript writing held out recreative possibilities for enacting longed-for social selves, anticipating novel-writing to come, developing the kinds of poetic genres women would make their own — for example, friendship poems — and giving women a place to be and to reinvent themselves, and the hope of becoming part of recorded public history. Students of book history — posthumous publication — and manuscript culture will find this a book worth reading. The obstacles and new findings and perspectives before the researcher into early modern women's autobiographies are those of the researcher into unpublished manuscripts and manuscript circulation from the sixteenth century down to our own era's uses of cyberspace.

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