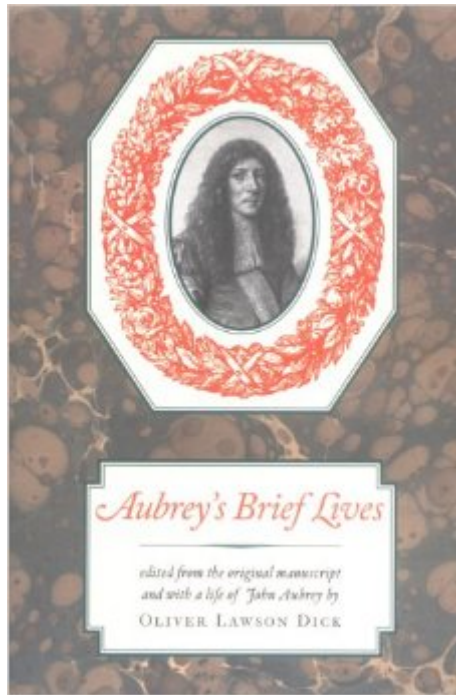


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Aubrey's Brief Lives (Nonpareil Book)



Synopsis

"I love John Aubrey's writing more than is seemly - it's a marvelous, gossipy, informal, brilliant stew of information, rumour, history, and anecdote." - Neil Gaiman

The whole ferment of the Elizabethan age and the vigor of the century that followed come alive in these "brief portraits" that have been looted by scholars for centuries. Here are Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Thomas More, Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, and countless others, who in these pages become not abstract names from a history book, but flesh and blood characters. Brief Lives was written by John Aubrey (1626-1697), the greatest gossip columnist of the seventeenth century. A hanger-on among the rich and famous, he left posterity a sprawling collection of notes, anecdotes, and morsels of gossip that the editor has cleverly sutured together into a series of unforgettable portraits. These men-flawed, vain, ambitious, vulnerable-are more alive and kicking in these pages, miraculously edited by Oliver Dick, than in any formal history. As Edmund Wilson writes in his introduction, "I have never read anything else that makes me feel in quite the same way what it must have been like to live then."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Brief Lives" has always been a delight, but it was Oliver Lawson Dick's scholarly editing that revealed Aubrey's genius. And Lawson Dick's Introduction, "The Life and Times of John Aubrey", is a miracle of synthesis and compression: certainly one of the finest biographical essays ever written. This Nonpareil Books edition is sumptuous - a joy to read in these days of cheap, quickly produced paperbacks.

This is a great book consisting of a hundred or so brief biographies of eminent persons principally of the Seventeenth Century. Each biography is no more than a page long. Most entries are humorous accounts of the personal details of the lives of these men, such as "Drunkenness he much exclaimed against, but wenching he allowed"; or "His tongue was a Charme, and drew in so many to be bound for him, and to be ingaged in his Designes, that he ruined a number." The English Civil Wars are covered in great detail. One learns in reading this book that many great men lost their lives at the young age of 22 or 23, such as Sir Charles Cavendish, in which Mr. Aubrey has this to say, "What wonders might have been expected from a Commander so Vigilant, so Loyall, so Constant, had he not dropt downe in his blooming age? This brave Hero might be opprest (as he was at last by numbers) but he could not be conquered." One also learns that it was the business of the crown to support and patronize literary men of promising talent, and Mr. Aubrey covers the lives of most of these men. However, sadly, one also learns that many books and treatises are mentioned that have since been lost to history, such as the voluminous work of Sir James Bovey. Thirty-two treatises are mentioned in his biography, and not one has survived to this day. The titles are all so very interesting, such as "The Art of Conversation," "The Art of Building a Man: or Education," "The Art of Governing the Tongue," "The Causes of the Diseases of the Mind," etc. etc. I really do wish that these books were available today. One can only surmise at their contents from the biography of its author contained in this book. Finally, a word of caution: This fascinating book will cause you to spend hours on Wikipedia reading up on the lives of the men mentioned in this book.

This collection of short narrative portraits of famous and semi-famous people by a recognized scientist and author is among the most interesting reading you'll enjoy. His information is detailed and personal and Aubrey's writing style is a fine pattern for modern readers as well. I recommend this book without question.

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