



In Search of Sir Thomas Browne: The Life and Afterlife of the Seventeenth Century's Most Inquiring Mind

Hugh Aldersey-Williams

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The extraordinary life and ideas of one of the greatest and most neglected minds in history.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682) was an English writer, physician, and philosopher whose work has inspired everyone from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Jorge Luis Borges, Virginia Woolf to Stephen Jay Gould. In an intellectual adventure like Sarah Bakewell's book about Montaigne, *How to Live*, Hugh Aldersey-Williams sets off not just to tell the story of Browne's life but to champion his skeptical nature and inquiring mind.

Mixing botany, etymology, medicine, and literary history, Aldersey-Williams journeys in his hero's footsteps to introduce us to witches, zealots, natural wonders, and fabulous creatures of Browne's time and ours. We meet Browne the master prose stylist, responsible for introducing hundreds of words into English, including *electricity*, *hallucination*, and *suicide*. Aldersey-Williams reveals how Browne's preoccupations—how to disabuse the credulous of their foolish beliefs, what to make of order in nature, how to unite science and religion—are relevant today.

In Search of Sir Thomas Browne is more than just a biography—it is a cabinet of wonders and an argument that Browne, standing at the very gates of modern science, remains an inquiring mind for our own time. As Stephen Greenblatt has written, Browne is "unnervingly one of our most adventurous contemporaries."

60 illustrations

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