I would either be a World, or nothing,” was, as Elspeth describes, a
paradoxical writer who “could not but have written in autobiographi-
cal form” (135). The reason for this paradox is that while Margaret
Cavendish was profoundly dedicated to her husband William, but
as a writer and self-taught philosopher and scientist, she persistently
needed to assert her autonomy. So at times, Margaret emphasizes
her connection to William as wife, almost entirely eliding herself, as
“nothing,” whereas elsewhere she appears entirely separate, “a World”
unto herself. Graham thus suggests that Cavendish “wants simultane-
ously to be her sole author and yet to be written,” seeming to assert
a controlling self and to deny it at the same time (142). Even, and
perhaps especially in her scientific texts, Graham finds that the writer
inserted herself, making autobiography central to all her learning.

In the end, it should be obvious that early modern women’s life
writing is not a clearly defined genre practiced by a handful of well-
known writers. Rather, Genre and Women’s Life Writing encompasses
a vast category of self-presentations—famous and obscure, formal
and informal, poetic and prosaic, aristocratic and middle-class, and
published in print and preserved in manuscript. Seventeenth-century
scholars seeking to expand the scope of their research will find the
volume useful in suggesting new published texts, new manuscripts,
and new authors for study, as well as new methods of understanding
early modern genres. While some scholars may find the messiness
of this vast category, the generic experimentation it entails, and the
sheer number of unfamiliar authors exasperating, it is a vital form of
exasperation. And whatever the exasperation, Genre and Women’s Life
Writing in Early Modern England is much better reading than most
blogs.

Nicholas Kiessling, ed. The Life of Anthony Wood In His Own Words.
illustrations. $50. Review by edward paleit, university of exeter.

The later seventeenth century witnessed a marked rise in occur-
rences of life-writing, in which people tried to give shape and order to
their personal experiences. Often the results remained in manuscript
until retrieved by more recent scholarship, especially in the case of women. Anthony Wood, or as he later called himself, à Wood, the historian of Oxford University and biographer of its alumni, was more fortunate. Wood wrote two manuscript autobiographies in diary format, both beginning with his birth in Oxford in 1632. The first, entitled *The Diarie of the Life of Anthony à Wood*, goes only so far as 1659-60; the second, suggestively entitled *Secretum Antonii* and revising the original into the third person, was still unfinished at his death in 1695. It proceeds as far as July 1672; Wood’s rough copy of the remainder of his life, occasionally referred to in the *Secretum*, is lost. Thomas Hearne first published the *Secretum* in 1730 and it has been printed since, but Nicholas Kiessling’s attractively presented edition of the original manuscript (Bodleian MS Tanner 102) is the first with a textual apparatus detailing Wood’s changes to his earlier version.

Like any autobiography Wood’s is a partial, polished and retrospective account of its author’s experiences, written towards the very end of his life and after the works which made his reputation, the *Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (1674) and *Athenae Oxonienses* and *Fasti* (1691-2), were published. Surviving documents, such as Wood’s almanac diaries—frequently referred to in Kiessling’s notes—offer a less varnished, more immediate and indeed more ample record of what Wood actually did and thought. As a guide to what he might have wanted others to believe, or came to believe himself about his life, the *Secretum* remains illuminating. It vividly records Wood’s sustained Stuart prejudices. John Locke, who attended a “Chymistrie” club with Wood in Oxford 1663, is described as “a man of a turbulent Spirit, clamorous and never contented” (93), and his uneven attitude to women, exemplified in a shocking dismissal of his mother’s death and burial in two spartan sentences (103-04). There is historical interest in Wood’s documentation of aspects of Oxford society during the 1650s and Restoration, including music-making societies (and who attended them), the first Oxford coffee-houses, and Merton College politics, on which he supplies a partial, rather sour perspective. The *Secretum* also documents the progress of his antiquarian researches, in Oxford and further abroad. In 1666, he encountered the great survivor William Prynne, Keeper of the Records at the Tower of London, who addressed him with “old fashion Complements, such as were used in
the raigne of King James I’ and dressed “in his black-Taffaty cloak, edg’d with black lace at the bottom” (105-06). In later parts Wood touches on the pre-publication travails of the Historia, including the interventionist supervision of the vice-Chancellor John Fell, and incipient controversy over Wood’s version of recent University history.

Little is disclosed about Wood’s actual scholarly methods, although there is nervousness about inaccuracies in his published works later seized on by enemies. John Aubrey, for example is introduced as a “pretender to Antiquities.” he would, Wood comments, “stuff his many letters ... with fooliries, and misinformations, which somtimes would guid him [Wood] into the paths of error” (108). Aubrey, however, can hardly be blamed for Wood’s own failures of method, and readers of Brief Lives alongside Athenae Oxonienses will know he repeats from him not only possible inaccuracies but slanders and insinuations. Wood’s personal motivation for antiquarian study is, intriguingly, suggested to rest not only on his reading in 1656 of Dugdale’s Antiquities of Warwickshire, which made his life thereafter a “perfect Elysium,” but also his hostility to the “sacrilegists” of interregnum Oxford, who painted over, for example, ancient murals in Merton College chapel and desecrated other ancient objects (49, 70). He comes across as sharp-tongued, highly knowledgeable, gratified by the company of social superiors, and above all a scholar whose expansive gifts were matched and marred by narrow horizons: born opposite Merton, he lived and died near its walls and was always mentally in its sway.

Kiessling’s edition provides readers with a clear text of the autobiography supported by accessible textual notes and informative historical annotation, showing scholarly knowledge and discrimination that bests its subject’s in accuracy and even-handedness. A section after the Secretum tells the story of Wood’s life after 1672, supported by lengthy selections from his papers, including the almanac diaries and will. While informative—especially about the controversial reception of his major works—this section implies that Kiessling is offering an account of Wood’s actual life, rather than the rhetorically shaped one of the Secretum. It could better have been replaced by a critical introduction exploring the text’s strategies of self-presentation in relation not only to independently ascertainable events of his life but also the emergent genre of life- or diary-writing. At present the former has to be
pieced together by the reader using Kiessling’s notes and his very brief (three page) introduction. Meanwhile the adjustments from The Diarie to the Secretum, though clearly treated in the textual apparatus and an article Kiessling has previously published in the Bodleian Library Record, could helpfully have received some summary interpretation.

A critical introduction might also allow for one of Kiessling’s claims to be more convincingly settled. He contends that The Diarie, and the Secretum, were composed as self-vindications after the publication of Athenae Oxonienses had provoked attacks from several quarters and indeed a libel lawsuit (which Wood lost) from the son of Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon. They were a “third defence of his life,” Kiessling claims, having the same purpose as the published note “To the Reader” inserted into copies of Athenae, and A Vindication of the Historiographer of the University of Oxford, (almost certainly by Wood) published in 1693. These are of course not defenses of his life—although they do touch on it—as much as his scholarship and integrity. Meanwhile the text edited here, though it defends Wood against accusers in places and clearly originated after Athenae’s publication, also contains much that is extraneous to any such narrow vindication, including for his example his Oxford boyhood and early school years. In its current form, it has no explicit or implied addressee and we remain at a loss what its eventual destination would have been. Its revised title suggests an archived treasure, a secretum, to be uncovered by future antiquarians not present opponents.

The Life of Anthony Wood In His Own Words is an excellent accompaniment to Wood’s better-known published works of, as Kiessling puts it, “controversial bio-bibliography” and antiquarian scholarship. Superbly edited by an accomplished Wood scholar, it makes readers amply aware of what Wood wanted them to think about him, and maybe also what he did not.