

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, large, grey, moss-covered rocks are scattered across the frame. Some rocks have patches of white lichen. Green ferns and other vegetation grow between the rocks. In the middle ground, a dark, rocky sea stack rises from the sea. The sea is a deep blue-green color. In the background, a low, green hill or cliff line stretches across the horizon under a cloudy sky. The text "Reach Poetry 227" is overlaid on the image in a white, stylized font.

Reach Poetry 227

In the image: Portraits of Mediaeval Women – Alwyn Marriage
2017, 32pp, £6.80 inc P&P UK From:www.indigodreams.co.uk or chq
'IDP' this address

Down the centuries we hear her songs of glory
soaring higher in ripieno praise,
above the black-clad choir stalls
and dusty academic libraries
of those who failed to grasp that wisdom
could be grounded in a woman's wit
HILDEGARD ; DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
- Hildegard of Bingen 1098-1179

Now, ask yourselves, which courageous English Queen went to war in the Crusades ? - Well then, do you happen to know how London's Charing Cross received its name ? - And are you, our devoted readers, aware of the actual reason for Lady Godiva's decision to make that amazing memorable ride through Coventry , all those centuries ago ? However, if you will please excuse the inevitable pun – all is to be revealed.

Alwyn Marriage, herself a former university lecturer, is now Director of two NGOs, and has, through the auspices of Indigo Dreams, found her way clear to the publication of this, her 10th collection - And I can assure one and all that 'In the image: Portraits of Mediaeval Women' is a veritable gem, attractively presented and altogether well worth the modest purchase price! Within Alwyn's collection, the lives and passions, strengths and weaknesses of eight notable women of historical importance are sensitively highlighted, and a short potted, history, or relevant background information, concerning each of these personages, is further contained in the 7-page additional appendix.

By far the longest poem here, extending to 37 fine verses of varying size, tells of CHIARA's (Clare of Assisi) tremendous love and devotion to St. Francis. This lovely poem, part reminiscence, part narrative, and somewhat soul-searching soliloquy, is exquisitely related in 1st person mode :

He stroked my naked head
so tenderly, sending shivers
down my spine,
prickles of uneasy pleasure

in a place I can't define.
Poor Clare, he murmured,
And again, Poor Clare,
before he turned and went away.

CHIARA

-Clare of Assisi 1194-1253

- And in this poem, Clare asks herself, "*Do others suffer love as I have done/ and do ?*"

There then follows a sonnet to 'GODIFU', whose Anglo-Saxon name, of course, was later to be Latinised to 'Godiva'. This fine poem, though not adhering to orthodox guidelines of usual sonnet metric requirements, nevertheless -maintains all the hallmarks of a well-written poem, scans agreeably, and its content remains faithful to the legendary story-line. The poem, dedicated to 'HILDEGARD OF BINGEN', tells us that :

Like many other women since,
she posed a challenge to the Church,
displaying a deep learning never found
in books the clergy knew, - - -

In Alwyn's 14-line poem, 'EDWARD MOURNS FOR ELEANOR' , King Edward 1st is represented, in verse, speaking about his late, dear wife and queen, the lovely Eleanor of Castile (1241-1290). The poem, itself, is actually based upon a letter sent by Edward 1st to the Abbot of Cluny, in 1291. There: is also a poem here, written in Terza Rima mode, dwelling upon the poet Dante's unrequited love for the greatly desired Beatrice :

He dreamed her face became ever more bright
As Beatrice guided him to God's holy light.

'TRANSFIGURED'- Beatrice in the Divine Comedy: 1266-1298

The short inclusion dedicated to the lesser-known Mother Julian of Norwich, honours the good lady as being, not only a notable mystic, but also because of her authorship of the very first book in English, known to have been written by a woman. Another Norfolk-born mystic, Margery Kempe of Kings Lynn (1373-1438) is duly remembered. In verse, which refers to the unfortunate disruption caused to her family, resultant from her constant absences, in her continual search for spiritual perfection :

While you travel in search of mystical marriage,
an earthly husband waits at home for you,
fights the law on your behalf, pays all your debts,
freeing you to wander where you will.

ITCHING TO GO

-Mary Kempe of Kings Lynn (1373-1438)

- And quite honestly, I rather think that the husband was the actual saint under those unfortunate circumstances !

The eighth, and concluding poem is for those two sadly beleaguered lovers, 'ABELARD and HELOISE'. Their ill-fated romance, secret marriage and subsequent enforced retribution, does, of course make for a very sad narrative (as recounted by Heloise) , but this excellent poem does resonate with such dramatic impact.

- A compact poetry pamphlet that I found totally absorbing, with its informative appendix adding that extra vital touch of class.

Superb front-cover design, too ! - Highly Commended !

Bernard M. Jackson

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