

A review of 'Swansea Miracle' Written By Ann Marie Thomas, By Mx Nat Kane.

Introduction

Ann Marie Thomas, a local poet and science fiction author, started her publication career later on in life, after her children left home¹. Thomas is not a qualified historian as far as I can determine, though her work has been stocked in museums, and has sold many copies. Thomas came to writing about local history and published her first book 'Alina, The White Lady Of Oystermouth' in Easter 2012², and has a few titles to her name, selling copies in local shops, speaking events, and museums³. The book I am reviewing today was published in 2022⁴, It is important note for this review that this was an entire decade after the first release, and more than a decade after the first researching tasks were completed for the first book to be released, which is a "*local history book told as a story*"⁵ as stated in the 'About The Author' section of 'Swansea Miracle'.

As the Author has gained notoriety with the local general public, and local museums and is deemed a credible local source I thought it would be interesting to read the books Thomas has produced with Alina Publishing. I was impressed by many of them, as slim as they are, local enthusiasts and younger minds do need access to information in digestible ways until ready to delve further into academic knowledge and information. Though this book is not, in my opinion, up to par with the other books Thomas has produced, I will go into this further into the review.

My findings

In a fast moving age of information technology, aswell as leading demanding daily lives, the general public need to be able to digest information in accessible ways, they may be new to the information, or in some cases, to be frank, somewhat disinterested in learning. For example, in school, and especially with neurodivergent students, reading a history book is less likely an enjoyable experience unless it is a special interest of the student, this applies to adults too. Thomas's writing is digestible, and not over complicated, the language use is formal but not unreadable. There are small paragraphs, and the way the information is presented is concise and to the point.

¹ Thomas, Ann Marie. 2022. *Swansea Miracle*, P.1 (UK: Alina Publishing).

² Thomas. 2022. *Swansea Miracle*, P.1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

For example;

“Joan was put under house arrest for twelve months, but Llywelyn later forgave her, so it seems there was genuine love between them. But it should be remembered she was also King John’s daughter and the half-sister of the present king, Henry 3rd.”

There are those historians who say it was a conspiracy to falsely accuse and murder William. Indeed, it did mean his daughters came into their inheritance. But it jeopardised the whole marriage arrangement, so if it was true, Llywelyn was playing a dangerous game. Most likely it was a genuine affair. Llewelyn was at great pains to convince Isabel’s relatives the marriage should go ahead.”⁶.

The size of Thomas’s books are another bonus for this exact reason.

An issue I find myself having is with is the non-existence of references, it is wise to keep things as simple as possible for intended audiences, I would still argue a compromise between academic reference styles and public sector writing styles should be made by those producing works that involve both sides of printing. I am aware each page could not have an end-note section, alas the book would be bigger, so more expensive to print, there is also the drawback of being more complicated for the reader if they do not have the wish to find out how to use them, or another example could be if they have learning difficulties, the author accommodated the public’s opinion, this is said in the inside cover pages of the Author’s first book, the second edition of ‘Alina – The White Lady Of Oystermouth’;

“Note on the second edition

The only changes made from the first edition were to standardise the family name as Braose, not Breos, and the removal of endnotes, which readers did not find helpful”.

This could still be remedied with a reference page at the end of each chapter, and a page at the back of the book with a simple introduction to end of chapter reference notes, this could be very useful to introducing and inspiring people to get into the seeking of knowledge on history in more expansive, and meaningful ways, with a bit more explanation people can understand what they are for, and those who are not interested can be informed that there is no need to if they do not wish to. The public are a diverse group of people who have different experience and inspiration levels for subjects presented to them, over complicated information, or information that is on the vague side, like the bibliography of this book, can adversely impact the readers wanting to learn more, either through unconscious fear, or lack of energy due to the demands of daily life in common working class lives. This also limits the readers level of understanding if the author has not done their due diligence in researching varied sources.

Leaving references at the end of the chapter could help to keep the book organised so the reader is not overwhelmed by the existence of reference endnotes, and still offer further explanation to the sources in the bibliography and where to look for what information they are concerned with seeking more information on.

⁶ Thomas, Ann Marie. 2022. *Swansea Miracle*, pp.17-18, (UK: Alina Publishing).

Another concern I have relates to my above argument regarding the lack of referencing, which is the bibliography. While there is one, it is extremely limited in its diversity. The bibliography has Two reliable academic sources, two unreliable references to Wikipedia and one which is the Britannica Encyclopedia. Whilst the authors of two of these sources, Robert Bartlett and Andrew Dunley, can be found in most University libraries and online shops, there are numerous qualified and leading experts that Thomas could of included in the bibliography to give the audience a chance to learn the differences of opinions, one of which is an online learning experience called 'City Witness' produced and presented by the Swansea Medieval Research Team self-described as;

"City Witness is a major, cross-institutional, multi-disciplinary research project, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The initial research phase ran from January 2013 until the end of June 2014, though activities continue beyond this period.

In these pages you can find information about the project, as well as guidance on how you can make use of the City Witness resources.⁷" .

The bibliography of this review has a list of sources that Thomas could of utilized, and as Thomas has released a few different books concerning medieval Swansea, and more than one edition of her first book, I argue that there was plenty of time to seek more information for this particular book, though I find the style of writing to be more digestible for those who need it, and the information to not be incorrect as such, I am still concerned with how information is perceived by the reader, I would argue it is also the responsibility of the Author if they are not offering tools to understand and learn further in the appropriate manner.

The bibliographies of Thomas's other books are robust, save one, 'Alina', they reflect the type of bibliography that is produced from an author that has not plagiarized anybody else⁸, and has done their homework on their knowledge⁹, it also showcases that the author has taken on different opinions and arguments so there is no echo chamber of information¹⁰, or misinformation being presented. Which I feel is important for institutions like Museums to also consider, as well as the Author, when offering these books to the general public.

⁷ Medieval Swansea Project Team. [n.d.]. 'City Witness', *Medievalswansea.ac.uk* <<https://medievalswansea.ac.uk/en/index.html>> [accessed 5 July 2023]

⁸ Bakshi, Poulami. 2020. 'What Is a Bibliography in Academic Research and Why Do We Need It?', *India Study Channel* (Poulami Bakshi) <<https://www.indiastudychannel.com/resources/178694-what-is-a-bibliography-in-academic-research-and-why-do-we-need-it>> [accessed 5 August 2023]

⁹ Reference*. 2022. 'Why Is a Bibliography Important?', *Reference.com* (Staff member) <<https://www.reference.com/world-view/bibliography-important-48a3f8b56a5aa0ef>> [accessed 9 August 2023]

¹⁰ BBC learning. [n.d.]. 'How to Create a Bibliography', *BBC* (BBC Bitesize) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zv8myrd/articles/z9c2qfr>> [accessed 7 August 2023]

Conclusion

From my own research of medieval Swansea, William Cragh, and the miracle that may of occurred, I have found numerous academic sources, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, Journal articles, books and so on. I find the bibliography of this book to minimise my impression of the Authors ability to find source material. The sources I found were all through google, and some from online academic institutions, many of these were free, and books can be taken from the libraries, though I do find it curious that an author would not pay for expert access to journal articles, books and so forth. Having looked at these pay walls myself, they are not unaffordable. Though I commend the effort that has been put into the other titles from the author, and the format in way the information is given being digestible, I argue that the lack of varied research expresses the opposite of what is needed for this particular book to be credible source material for any audience, including end of chapter notes, and having more extensive research could also create further demand for the book as it would also have appeal to academic minds as well as younger students, and the general public. The book has a lot of potential, though what is missed suggests to me not enough effort was made, which is off brand from what I have seen so far.

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