



The God-Madness

Jacopone Da Todi

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JACOPONE DA TODI (Jacopo Benedetti) was born, as his familiar name implies, in the Umbrian hilltop town of Todi in the year 1230. After the death of his wife in an horrendous accident, he discovered that, beneath her clothing, she wore a penitential hairshirt, and this spurred him to become a public penitent and, after a decade of extremely eccentric behaviour, to enter the recently formed Order of Friars Minor of St. Francis of Assisi. In 1298 he was excommunicated and imprisoned for signing a manifesto against Pope Boniface VIII and, following his release, retired to a hermitage. Considered a pioneer in Italian theatre, Jacopone is probably nowadays best known as the author of religious poems, typified by their "flamboyant and, sometimes, heartbreaking drama". "Like George Herbert in English, Jacopone was filled with the conviction that God extravagantly loves sinful humans. Jacopone is, however, more word-prodigal than Herbert, and his extrovert, singing voice is unmistakably that of early Franciscan Umbria... Few people nowadays would subscribe completely to Jacopone's theological outlook. He did not have the insights of modern theology or scripture studies. 'The Lauds' celebrate madness for the sake of Christ and sometimes Jacopone appears to barely cling to the right side of sanity, not to talk of orthodoxy. But how can anyone express religious experience without destroying it?" - Pádraig J. Daly, from the Introduction about the translator Pádraig J. Daly is an Augustinian priest now working in Dublin. His most recent poetry collections from the Dedalus Press are *The Other Sea* (2003) and *Clinging to the Myth* (2007), while *The Last Dreamers: New and Selected Poems*, appeared in 1999. He has also translated from the Italian of Edoardo Sanguineti and the Irish of Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin and Uilliam English.

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