

Hild

by Nicola Griffith



About the Book

A brilliant, lush, sweeping historical novel about the rise of the most powerful woman of the Middle Ages: Hild

Hild is born into a world in transition. In seventh-century Britain, small kingdoms are merging, usually violently. A new religion is coming ashore; the old gods' priests are worrying. Edwin of Northumbria plots to become overking of the Angles, ruthlessly using every tool at his disposal: blood, bribery, belief.

Hild is the king's youngest niece. She has the powerful curiosity of a bright child, a will of adamant, and a way of seeing the world --- of studying nature, of matching cause with effect, of observing human nature and predicting what will happen next --- that can seem uncanny, even supernatural, to those around her. She establishes herself as the king's seer. And she is indispensable --- until she should ever lead the king astray. The stakes are life and death: for Hild, her family, her loved ones, and the increasing numbers who seek the protection of the strange girl who can read the world and see the future.

Hild is a young woman at the heart of the violence, subtlety, and mysticism of the early medieval age --- all of it brilliantly and accurately evoked by Nicola Griffith's luminous prose. Recalling such feats of historical fiction as Hilary Mantel's *WOLF HAIL* and Sigrid Undset's *KRISTIN LAVRANDATTER*, *HILD* brings a beautiful, brutal world --- and one of its most fascinating, pivotal figures, the girl who would become St. Hilda of Whitby --- to vivid, absorbing life.

Discussion Guide

1. As you watched the young Hild serve as cupbearer, what intelligent decisions, what connections, did you see her make? It takes physical strength to lift the cup, but what other strengths make this possible?

2. What does Hild's mother, Breguswith, teach her about survival? Do you think Breguswith is on Hild's side? How is Hild's sense of security affected by the memories of her sister, Hereswith?
3. What qualities does Hild possess that make her a good seer? Do those skills help her in other ways?
4. Hild has a lifelong relationship with Cian, from their early childhood to the book's closing scenes. How do they manage their power imbalance and their kinship? Ultimately, what do they need from each other?
5. Do you admire Edwin as a leader? Would you want him to be your king?
6. In Hild's world, what roles do the conquerors and the defeated *wealh* (strangers) play? Do you think the Angles are really that different from the native British?
7. How is Hild affected by her sexual awakening? Does it make her stronger or more vulnerable?
8. What did you discover about the early kingdoms of Britain by reading the novel? Which aspects of medieval life were startling to you? Which aspects were timeless, echoed in modern culture and twenty-first-century politics? How would you have fared in this society?
9. How does mysticism shape Hild's perception of life and death, before and after her conversion?
10. As their lives unfold, the people of Hild's community seek to know their *wyrd*, or fate. What do they believe about their ability to shape their destiny? What do they expect from religion?
11. Discuss the significance of the scene in which Gwladus's collar is removed. What does freedom mean under those circumstances? How does that moment change the way Gwladus sees herself and her role in Hild's life?
12. Discuss Hild's relationship to the land and to the unpredictable natural elements. How does her love for Menewood compare to her love of humanity?
13. Do you believe in Hild's fighting prowess and her ability to lead?
14. What gives Hild the ability to counsel Angeth with clarity, although Hild hasn't experienced motherhood? How does Angeth's role in Cian's life compare to Hild's?
15. How are Hild's rites of passage as a woman distinct from those of the other women in her life? What advantages does her gender provide?
16. If you have done a bit of online research on Saint Hilda of Whitby, the historical figure who inspired this novel, what parallels do you see between the fictional Hild and Saint Hilda? In Saint Hilda, do you find a woman who was empowered or disempowered by the church?

17. What is unique about the female characters Griffith creates, in *HILD* and in any of her previous novels that you have read? What traits do her most memorable characters possess, transcending the diverse settings Griffith has designed for them?

18. What books does this novel remind you of?

19. What wine do you think pairs best with this story?

Author Bio

Nicola Griffith is a dual UK/US citizen living in Seattle. She is the author of award-winning novels including *HILD* and *AMMONITE*, and her shorter work has appeared in *Nature*, *New Scientist*, *New York Times*, etc. She is the founder and co-host of #CripLit, holds a PhD from Anglia Ruskin University, and enjoys a ferocious bout of wheelchair boxing. She is married to novelist and screenwriter Kelley Eskridge.

Critical Praise

"Vivid, vital, and visceral, *Hild*'s history reads like a thriller."

— Val McDermid

"The novel resonates to many of the same chords as *BEOWULF*, the legends of King Arthur, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Game of Thrones* --- to the extent that *HILD* begins to feel like the classic on which those books are based."

— Neal Stephenson

"Nicola Griffith is an awe-inspiring visionary, and I am telling everyone to snatch this book up. *HILD* is not just one of the best historical novels I have ever read --- I think it's one of the best novels, period. It sings with pitch-perfect emotional resonance, and I damn well believe in this woman and everyone she engages. I finished the book full of gratitude that it exists, and longing for more."

— Dorothy Allison

"What a fabulous book! *HILD* has all the joys of historical fiction --- transportation into a strange, finely detailed world --- along with complex characters and a beautiful evocation of the natural world. But the tensions of the gathering plot make *HILD* feel like a quick read --- too quick! I fell into this world completely and was sorry to come out."

— Karen Joy Fowler

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