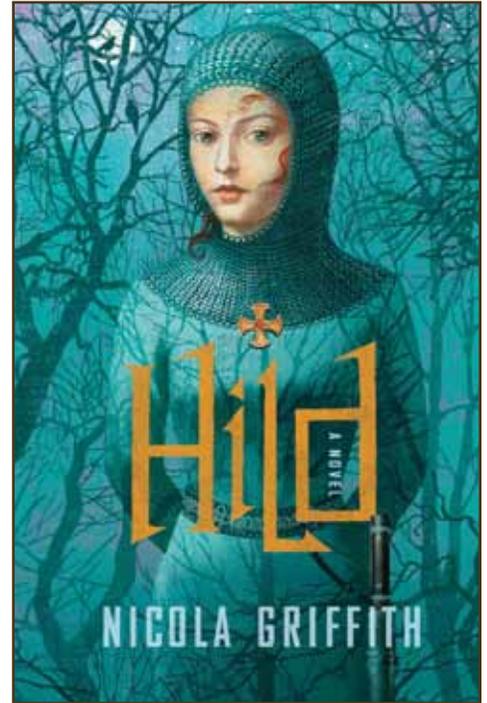


Reading Group Gold

Hild

A novel

by Nicola Griffith



ISBN: 978-0-374-28087-1 / 560 pages

Bringing to life a dynamic woman at the center of early medieval British history, *Hild* is a captivating novel of a beautiful, brutal world, where kingdoms are shaped by the sword and love often depends on the whims of politics. As King Edwin's youngest niece, Hild has special responsibilities, but her powers of observation are what truly set her apart. As a child, she demonstrates an uncanny way of observing human nature and predicting future outcomes, quickly establishing herself as the king's seer. When a new religion comes ashore, she sees a Roman bishop tout rituals that defy the old gods of the Angles. Amid the turmoil of these transitions, Hild grows into womanhood under the protection of the king's warriors but possessing the physical strength to take care of herself. With her fame growing throughout Northumbria, she takes a pivotal role in the lives of the conquered, while keeping the secrets of the men and women who are closest to her heart.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of Nicola Griffith's *Hild*. We hope that the following questions will enhance your reading group's experience of this luminous novel.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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?

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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?

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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?

PRAISE FOR *HILD*

“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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicola Griffith was born in Yorkshire, England, and is now a dual U.S./U.K. citizen. Her previous books include the novels *Ammonite*, *Slow River*, *The Blue Place*, *Stay*, and *Always*, as well as the multimedia memoir *And Now We Are Going to Have a Party: Liner Notes to a Writer’s Early Life*. Griffith’s many awards include the Nebula Award for Best Novel, the James Tiptree, Jr. Award, the World Fantasy Award, and six Lambda Literary Awards. She lives in Seattle, where she co-owns Sterling Editing with her wife, the writer Kelley Eskridge. Visit www.nicolagriffith.com for more information.

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