



Gunnar's Daughter

Sigrid Undset , Sherrill Harbison (Editor) , Arthur G. Chater (Translator)

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Set in Norway and Iceland at the beginning of the eleventh century, this is the story of the beautiful, spoiled Vigdis Gunnarsdatter, who is casually raped by the man she had wanted to love. A woman of courage and intelligence, Vigdis is toughened by adversity. Alone she raises the child conceived in violence, repeatedly defending her autonomy in a world governed by men. Alone she rebuilds her life and restores her family's honor, until an unrelenting social code propels her to take the action that again destroys her happiness. More than a historical romance, Gunnar's Daughter depicts characters driven by passion and vengefulness, themes as familiar in Undset's own time - and in ours - as they were in the Saga Age.

Gunnar's Daughter Details

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Author : Sigrid Undset , Sherrill Harbison (Editor) , Arthur G. Chater (Translator)

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From Reader Review Gunnar's Daughter for online ebook

Kira says

The only beloved Sigrid Undset that does not leave one depressed for weeks. Lovely!

Brynne says

I'm going to try not to gush, but it's going to be tough. I am in awe of Sigrid Undset. Total and complete awe. The style of the novel was intriguing. Undset models the book after the old sagas, which gives it a fundamentally different tone than that of *Kristen Lavransdatter*. At first, I was not entirely convinced; it seemed a little awkward and artificial, but thankfully after a couple of chapters she seemed to settle into the form. Or, perhaps, she simply abandoned her initial strict adherence to it and let her own voice come out more. I love how she can write such an intimate account of a character with such simplicity.

The story, in typical Undset form, is heart-breaking. I won't go into the details of the plot, but Vigdis Gunnarsdatter is a pretty remarkable woman. She faces a fairly horrible life head-on with a level of independence, determination, and viciousness that could never have been expected of her. I liked how she didn't fold under the weight of it all. In fact, I liked just about everything about this book. Read it!

Rowizyx says

[Vigdis è la bella figlia di un capotribù, Gunnar di cui Viga-Liot, un vi

Audrey says

This book was written by Nobel Prize-winning writer Sigrid Undset when she was in her late 20s. It's written in the style of Icelandic sagas and takes place in 11th century Norway and Iceland. I've never read Icelandic sagas before but Gunnar's Daughter was AMAZING. Many characters, including Vigdis Gunnarsdatter, the heroine, had been badly wronged, Undset depicts them in a detached, unsentimental manner, showing how people would respond to their awful circumstances within their historical/social context. Though fiction, though the setting takes place almost a thousand years ago, there is a reality and relevance to the story and the characters. Undset also shows how the ways social life is changing as the Norwegians and Icelanders are slowly transitioning from paganism to Christianity. And as you would expect, it's a bloody world with Viking raids, blood revenge, rape, and infanticide. For example:

"One time, as we lay under the Southern Isles, some vikings from Norway laid their ship alongside, and then Arngrim fell. Gunnar, your father, was their chief. When he led me out of the cabin I went to where Arngrim lay dead on the deck; I knelt down and washed my hair in the blood that flowed from him, remembering how Arngrim used to tie my hair about his neck at night. Never had I a more grateful washing."

AWESOME.

Ashley says

Gunnar's Daughter feels like it was written hundreds of years ago. Undset based her style and story on the sagas of Iceland that she read as a girl--even the language and tone echo those early pre-Christian histories. Set in eleventh-century Iceland and Norway, it's the story of Vigdis Gunnarsdatter who is raped by the man she wanted to marry. It's full of vikings and violence, and you might think the setting is too far removed to hold any interest for you--but it's amazing how relevant and powerful the story is. It's a fast paced read because it's sparse and short, but I can't stop thinking about it. I loved it!

Diane Anderson says

I am on sabbatical and that means I can spare some time to read for pleasure! I am not sure of reading books by Nobel Laureate Sigrid Undset is only pleasure. Her books feels like an education in feminist theory, history, geography, aesthetics, psychology, and literature. She is an amazing author! Start with the trilogy Kristin Lavransdatter if you have any interest at all. How she can write as such a knowledgeable Norwegian historian AND have her novels feels so contemporary regarding the "human conditions" is masterful, or mistrissful;>)

Michael says

Sigrid Undset is probably one of my favorite authors. This book is very different in some ways from *Kristin Lavransdatter*, her most well-known work, as it was highly inspired, not only in content but also in form, by the Icelandic sagas, specifically *Njal's Saga* and *Laxdaela Saga*. *Gunnar's Daughter* is more of a tragedy as well, dealing with the romance of Vigdis (the title character) and Ljot, his betrayal of her, their lives apart from each other, and finally their fateful meeting decades later. Undset again captures beatifully and compellingly the time, place and society of medieval Norway — this time dealing with the period just after the end of the Viking Age, when its harsh customs were only beginning to give way to the milder ways of Christianity. Indeed, the main plot of *Gunnar's Daughter* revolves around the Viking idea of retribution. But this is not just a story of revenge. Vigdis and Ljot are well-written characters, both sympathetic to the reader, and one hopes the best for them despite the terrible things they do at certain parts of the story. Perhaps the saddest part of the story is the hardships endured by Leikny Lytingsdatter, an Icelandic woman who had no guilt in the larger saga of Vigdis and Ljot, but who suffers because of it anyway. Despite the tragedy and oppressiveness of the time period, Undset makes the reader feel as if he was there, and makes him wish he was. Her clarity and economy (following the sparse saga style) is beautiful and her story heart-breaking.

Beth says

My new heroes: 14th-century Norwegian women. Our protagonist not only sliced her rapist/would-be suitor with a knife, she also called him a "ghastly bugbear," and her foster mother washed her hair in the blood of her own newly-killed captor/rapist/would-be suitor. Much of the language from this translation needs to be brought back into everyday use. "Dastard" is a noun that deserves recognition on its own instead of being subsumed within an adverb spoken only ironically in contemporary times, and "on the morrow" is just one of

my favorite phrases.

Henry Avila says

As the age of the fierce, savage, marauders, the Vikings slowly comes to an end, they become more traders than raiders, with the spread of Christianity's love they neighbor philosophy , around A.D. 1000, a small settlement, (this isn't just another Nordic saga) in what will become the great city of Oslo, Norway there lived a beautiful daughter of Gunnar's, the most powerful landowner in the area. She has many suitors naturally , but being a teenager Vigdis Gunnarsdatter, has time to choose her mate. Her father promised that, unusual for the era. But Gunnar loves his brave , intelligent daughter and only child, besides, he has nobody else in the world he cares for. Into this still pagan, uncivilized land arrives Ljot an Icelander and his uncle Veterlide, on a trading voyage from distant Iceland which had a much warmer climate back then. Immense forests covered 25% of the country, now less than 1%, these hardy, courageous people colonized that island to get away from "Civilization" in Norway. With the establishment of an unwanted monarchy there, telling them how to live and obey his laws. Icelanders founded a commonwealth (republic), with a primitive parliament, the Althing in 930, the oldest on the planet. Engaging in blood feuds, freedom for them...nobody their master, might makes right, the survival of the fittest, take what you need no authorities to pay tribute to ...paradise they believe. Ljot, at twenty has already killed many men, including the slayer of his father, he becomes enamored of Vigdis but she feels uncomfortable with his passion, though liking him, the girl is not ready for this kind of involvement, not a woman yet...A tragic event happens that will mar the lives of this unfortunate couple , all their lives, so Ljot goes back to his native land but always remembering the woman he left behind, it will be many years before they'll meet again and much blood flows in each country , before that occurs. When a disaster happens, Vigdis seeks the help from King Olav of Norway, the first Christian monarch, the king is still a man and tries to seduce her and Vigdis recently baptized into the new faith...Fascinating look at a long ago era of the human race, time marches on and these events become forgotten by most people , but books shall keep us from never entirely. That is what classic novels are about, to enjoy but also for knowledge, people get new gadgets but human feelings are the same, in any year. Sigrid Undset is a fine writer and she, a Nobel Prize winner , should be read more today...End of sermon.

Samantha says

This was simultaneously the most heartbreaking and yet strangely beautiful book I have ever read.

The writing, probably, accounts for most of its beauty. Undset is absolutely phenomenal. Her words are powerful, striking, commanding. They speak to you with a rawness and a clarity of emotion.

As for the book's being heartbreaking... man. I am utterly speechless. I was in tears in several parts. The plot was so well-crafted that I caught myself crying aloud when a new twist revealed itself.

For one thing, there are so many upsetting themes. Rape. Betrayal. Anger. Hatred. But also love. Her characters were so well-written that they practically emanated them.

I would like to read this book again and explore things that came to mind in the middle of (and even after) reading this book. How did Ljot's change of character take place, if it was a change in character? Was his or Vigdis' suffering greater? Did they suffer similarly? If not, how were their sufferings different? Did Vigdis actually love Ljot the whole time? What kind of love did Ljot actually bear for Leikny? And did Ljot actually love Vigdis at all?

I believe this book to be so dense with meaning that one could write a college thesis on it. I also believe this book could make for a fantastic movie alike to *Gladiator* and *Braveheart* for its epicness, although it would most likely outdo both of them in story.

All in all, a powerful and curiously thought-provoking read. One of the world's finest literature, and definitely a new favorite for me.

Nick says

I'm not sure I could've picked a book more contrary in style and tone to the seven-volume *Dark Tower* series by Stephen King. Where King is elaborate and at times overpowering in his imaginative vision, Undset is so spare in her narration that her characters are almost always surprising me with their words and actions. I once heard Cormac McCarthy's writing described as 'biblical' for its laconic tone, but in comparison to Undset, McCarthy comes across like a high school girl journaling about her sorrows (with all due apologies to high school girls... seriously, though. Get over it). And it works for *Gunnar's Daughter*, it really does. It's an earlier work than *Kristin*, and that's clear without much of a question. Yet the genius of that later masterpiece is already shining here.

As ridiculous as any comparison between Undset and King is (I'd hate to imply that I'm considering as of the same caliber), it really gets at what I love about Undset's writing. Which is not to say I did not enjoy my time spent in King's world--not at all. But as I walked beside Roland of Gilead and his band of gunslingers, my heart was elsewhere. I was measuring them against a middle-aged Norwegian woman living in separation from the father of her eight sons, waiting to find in their story of multiverses and fusion of technology and magic the same contentment-in-mysteriousness that captivated me in Undset's fjords and saeters. Much like the accursed Ljot of the story I've just read, the happiness and rest I found with them only provoked the recognition that they were only a substitute, an adulteration, of what I'd known before.

Nick says

This was Sigrid Undset's first venture into the dark world of medieval Scandinavia; later, longer works would win her the Nobel Prize. "*Gunnar's Daughter*" is spare and harsh; it looks back not just on the sagas, with their manly world of insults and vengeance, but even farther back to the murder ballads. This is a world in which fate is set by a moment's decision, words uttered in anger control destiny. Gunnar's daughter herself converts to Christianity -- the great Christianizing king Olaf Tryggvason has a cameo - but like many a medieval conversion it is a switch of loyalties to a more powerful deity rather than anything to do with the gospels. Undset's view of this material is if anything darker than the world of the sagas; here not even bloodline is sacred, not even love saves. Her prose (at least in translation) and plotting are straightforward, with none of the romanticism that so often comes with this territory and which makes her innovations all the more startling. And the stage may be the largely male one of the sagas, but Undset is more interested in the women: the sad Leikny, who marries a man who cannot love her; Aesa, the step-mother, who has a compelling story of her own; and Vigdis, the passionate, unforgiving, fierce daughter herself.

Caitlin says

I lasted about a week after finishing *Kristin Lavransdatter* before giving in and returning to Sigrid Undset's

Norway. As with the much longer K.L. (an acronym seems necessary...), I was gripped from the first sentence: not because Undset writes in a sensational style--quite the opposite--but because yet again her medieval world feels as real as this one. Gunnar's Daughter has a plot that isn't far from melodrama in its broad strokes, but at no point (except perhaps towards the very end) does the story feel contrived: Undset sustains the masterful illusion of being a mere chronicler. It is, of course, an illusion, and subtly interwoven with the matter-of-fact "and-then-so-and-so-killed-so-and-so" is a world of profound feeling and even mysticism which rises to the surface at unexpected moments. One of my favourites of these moments is a story which a priest (who plays absolutely no role in the story, as far as I could tell) recounts: it's a bizarre and in some ways grotesque tale of a woman who encounters hosts of mourning and deformed infants who are, as it turns out, all the babies who have been left to die by exposure. The woman takes as many as she can carry, trying to bring them to the golden castle she is headed towards; and she discovers, in the end, that the child she has closest to her chest is the baby she herself left to die, many years earlier.

The thematic relevance of this tale will be clear to anyone who's reading Gunnar's Daughter, but for now I'll only say that this seems to me to be what Sigrid Undset does best: she waits until the crucial and unexpected moment to reveal that the character we had thought unimportant is the character closest to our heart--because there is no unimportant person in Undset's world. Even though characters get killed off at a truly alarming rate (this is, after all, the Viking Age), Undset creates a poignant and unshakeable sense that every life counts, no matter how brief or apparently unremarkable.

To sum up: Gunnar's Daughter is vivid; so gripping that it took all of my self-control, and then some, not to read it all in one sitting; moving--I cried at least twice, and given the brevity of the novel that's saying something; and in many ways profound. For fans of K.L., it's also interesting to see some of the proto-characters and themes emerging in this earlier novel. Now, on to The Master of Hestviken!

Teresa Proença says

Olav I reinou na Noruega entre 995 e 1000 e teve um papel importante na cristianização dos vikings. É nesta época que decorre a acção de **Vigdis, a Indomável**; uma parte na Noruega e outra na Islândia. Num tempo em que a vingança era rainha e as ofensas se lavavam com sangue. A vida humana tinha pouco valor; os recém-nascidos eram abandonados (expostos), sempre que o seu nascimento causasse incómodos; ou por serem ilegítimos, ou deficientes, ou desnecessários. Um mundo agreste e violento onde até o amor era sofrido.

Ljot e Vigdis amavam-se mas um erro - associado à incapacidade de perdoar - destruiu-lhes qualquer hipótese de felicidade e transformou as suas vidas num calvário de dor e amargura; como na canção de Martini: *Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment, Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie...*

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"Ninguém e nada nos pode prejudicar, excepto o que tememos e amamos."

— *Sigrid Undset*

Sigrid Undset nasceu em Kalundborg, **Dinamarca**, no dia 20 de Maio de 1882 e morreu em Lillehammer, Noruega, no dia 10 de Junho de 1949.

Sigrid, devido à doença do pai, foi para a Noruega com dois anos de idade. Com a morte do pai a família ficou com problemas económicos o que impossibilitou a Sigrid seguir estudos universitários. Começou a trabalhar como secretária, datilógrafa e a escrever. Inicialmente, teve dificuldades em publicar os seus

romances, os quais são inspirados no seu profundo conhecimento histórico, adquirido nas leituras e, devido ao seu carácter introvertido, na observação das pessoas e da natureza. Teve três filhos e cuidou de mais três do casamento anterior do marido; das seis crianças, duas eram deficientes. Em 1940, após a invasão da Noruega pelos nazis, refugiou-se nos Estados Unidos, onde escreveu e discursou incansavelmente contra o regime nazi, até que o filho mais velho foi morto pelos alemães. Regressou à Noruega, no fim da guerra, e abandonou a escrita.

Sigrid Undset foi laureada com o Prémio Nobel da Literatura em 1928 "*principalmente pelas suas fortes descrições da vida nórdica durante a Idade Média.*"

Dhanaraj Rajan says

Sigrid Undset is a genius. For, this is a short work with shorter chapters and yet contains many themes and all of them are adequately treated.

1. This is a historical fiction: The novel is set in the beginning of the 11th century in Norway when the Viking age was facing the transition into the Christian Middle Ages. It was the time Christianity entered into the Viking cultural milieu. And the initial frictions that appear between two cultures are expressed in many places in an interesting manner and that too in few words. For instance, the Viking who believed in physical power can not understand the faith of Christians and he remarks thus: "It was a strange religion whose God allowed himself to be slain by his enemies." Also the Viking practices are expertly narrated all through the book.

2. This is a love story: This is one of the fantastic love stories that I had ever read. The love blossoms between the main characters, Vigdis and Ljot. Ljot, afraid of losing Vigdis, seduces her. This is a shock to Vigdis who in fact was in love with him and his early advances make her angry. Later, Ljot runs to Iceland to escape the wrath of Vigdis' father. They both do not meet each other nearly for another twenty years and still they suffer from the loss of love (...for you do not know how miserable is the life of one who longs for his beloved"). After twenty years when they meet, the single encounter is charged with high emotion. One feels for both in those passages and Sigrid Undset is to be commended for it. There are also other minor love stories which are also very interesting (Eg: Ljot's married/love life with Leikny).

3. This is a story of a strong woman: After reading this book you will fall in love with Vigdis. She is a strong character. She decides for herself in the Viking society where men had much power. She decides her suitor. When her dad gets killed, as a rightful heir she takes upon herself to avenge his death by slaying the killer. And she does it. Later she flees with the new born baby to escape the wrath of the enemies. She brings up alone her child and avoids many wooing attempts for she fears that after a rightful marriage her bastard son will be left with nothing. She shrewdly builds up the fortune for her son and brings him up a responsible and manly son. She is a strong willed woman and remains a strong willed one till the end even when it destroys her happiness.

4. This is also a story of relationships, specially friendships (Vetertide and Ljot; Vigdis and Illuge), Father - daughter relationship (Gunnar and Vigdis), mother - son (Vigdis and Ulvar) relationship and father - son (Ljot and Ulvar) relationship. Each episode is touching in its own way. The emotions are well captured wonderfully in the dialogues.

A mention is to be made on the language. The language looked similar to the literary genre, Ballad. And it is one of the types of Oral literature. 'Saga' in Norwegian means saying. And this novel uses same technique. I love oral literature and so it was like listening to a story told by someone who is wise and elder to you. The book gave me that feeling.

The dialogues are superb. Each encounter between the characters and the words exchanged between them are very appropriate. And this is another specialty of the oral literature. Many things should be expressed in few words and so they can not be like the regular fiction books of today. Sigrid Undset knew it and had used the minimum of words with vast messages. I will read the book just for the dialogues alone another one time.

Last Remark: There is a wonderful introduction to the author, the book and the historical setting of the novel by Sherrill Harbison. Can introduction be very interesting? Read this and you will love it. It introduces well the author and the historical setting with enough pages and so they neither tire you before entering into the novel nor irritate you with known details. The introduction is just adequate and gives you the right stimulus and achieves the aim: To prepare rightly the reader to get into the book.

Czarny Pies says

This is the first novel by Nobel Laureate Sigrid Undset. In it you can see Undset's skill at recreating the people and mentalities of the Norwegian middle ages. The characters are engaging to the modern reader yet at all times remain congruent with the historical era in which the novel is set. Undset's art in Gunnar's daughter is still far from the level attained in her celebrated Kristin Lavransdatter cycle but the work still has its charms.

Lindsey says

I read it in high school. The writing style seemed strikingly different from the trashy beach-reads I was into at the time.

I re-read it recently (2008) and again was struck by the effect of the sparse writing, which effectively conveyed both the cruelty of the weather and the characters.

Maggie says

Growing up, my mom tried to do the Asian mom thing and ban TV during the weekdays. So of course, I binge watched trashy daytime TV during holidays while she was at work. The TV was basically on from the time she left to an hour before she got home -- you know, so the TV would be cool to the touch if she was inclined to check. From 12-3pm, I watched *All My Children* (RIP), *One Life to Live*, and *General Hospital*. *General Hospital* was the only one I ended up watching regularly.

I loved the wealthy and ruthless Quartermaines:

the hot but evil Cassadines:

and the lovable, All American Spencers.

Remember, this was the era before Wikipedia so the only backstory I knew was that Luke and Laura

Spencer's wedding was the most watched daytime event in history and Elizabeth Taylor even made a special appearance. Imagine my shock when I found out that the Luke and Laura story began when Luke RAPED Laura. You know, because he loved her and wanted her SO much. Apparently in Port Charles, first comes love, then comes rape, then comes the baby in a baby carriage.

So what do my tragic TV memories have to do with Gunnar's Daughter? Let me explain.

Vigdis Gunnarsdatter is beautiful and headstrong. Her doting father welcomes two men into their house. The younger man, Ljot, is tall, dark, and handsome. He quickly falls for lively, intelligent Vigdis and asks for her hand in marriage. Vigdis is also smitten but, feeling unready, she asks him to wait for her answer. Soon after, Vigdis's childhood friend Kaare, another dashing Viking specimen, comes by and shows up Ljot. His pride injured, Ljot reacts brashly and suddenly assumes the worst about Vigdis and Kaare and her noncommittal answer to his proposal. Still, he wants to marry her and asks her again for her hand. She responds,

"You cannot have loved me so much either; no sooner did you hear evil spoken of me than you believed it and spread it abroad."

So then, because he loves Vigdis as much as Luke loved Laura, he rapes her. After he's done, he assumes Vigdis will want to run off with him and become some Scandinavian Ljot and Laura. Vigdis throws a rock in his face. Finally, a proper reaction.

However, in addition to the physical and emotional pain of the rape, Ljot leaves Vigdis with one more thing - she's pregnant with his child. This is really where the story begins, and it is a great story. I picked this book up after scouring my local bookstore for authors whose name start with "U" for the A-Z Author Challenge, and I nearly gave up after the first page (I mean, really, FOUR footnotes on the FIRST page!?!). Fortunately, I stuck with it and was pleasantly surprised by this very readable story. Sigrid Undset manages to write an epic that deals with vengeance, consequence, family, and love in a scant 200 pages. And this book, published in 1909 and set in the 11th century, deals with the issue of rape in a way that leaves modern writers in the dust. Undset follows the lives of both the victim and the perpetrator after the rape, but Vigdis refuses to live victimized. She is up there with Evanjalín in terms of female characters who kick ass. Ljot is also not your stock villain, and he regrets what he did, but Undset and Vigdis refuse to romanticize or condone him. He also lives with the consequences of his actions and has the most beautifully twisted line towards the end of the book.

Books like this are why I do random reading challenges. They're not what I would normally pick up, but they end up being worthwhile and rewarding. I highly recommend this short saga. It's no wonder that Sigrid Undset ended up winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1928. *Gunnar's Daughter* is a stunning debut novel.

Kelly says

The updated saga form further proves to us how little the fundamentals of human nature change over the centuries. I respect brutal truths.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

?Vigdis la farouche? = Fortaellingen om Viga-Ljot og Vigdis = Gunnar's Daughter, Sigrid Undset

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