

Sigrun Slapgard

Sigrid Undset. A Biography

Sigrid undset. Dikterdronningen

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Don't you know that the bite of a lunatic is poisonous?

Did Sigrid Undset smile as she sat in the train and looked out the window, thinking about her Danish aunt as the windswept landscape flowed past? Goodbye Denmark! Hello lunacy! Perhaps she ought to have thanked her sweet Aunt Agnes for once giving her that bloody bite. "She flew at me, her face beet-red, her lovely, light-brown hair disheveled, and her eyes glittering grass-green like those of an angry cat. Then she bit me on the arm so that drops of blood trickled out, and she snarled in fury: 'Don't you know that the bite of a lunatic is poisonous?'" That was how Sigrid had been bitten. By her lunatic aunt.

Passion and morality were the touchstones of Sigrid Undset's life. Full of affection and possessed by a yearning for love, she married the painter Anders Svarstad, for only to leave him later. She moved with her children to Lillehammer, where she divided her time between family and writing. With her novels set in medieval times, especially the trilogy about Kristin Lavransdatter, she won the Nobel Prize – and worldwide fame. Gradually she found her way to Catholicism, which helped her control herself and rein in her ardour. Her personality – energetic and majestic – made a strong impression on everyone who met her. A woman of principle, her choices had far-reaching consequences, and her life took several dramatic turns. In 1940 Sigrid Undset had to flee war-ridden Europe to the USA. Here she engaged herself strongly in the fight against the Nazis.

Sigrun Slapgard, who has uncovered new information about all the phases of Undset's life, has produced a deeply moving account of the grand dame of literature.



Sigrun Slapgard. Foto av Christian Ege (2007)

Sigrun Slapgard is a foreign correspondent for NRK. She has previously published the Melsom Prize-winning and Brage Prize-nominated biography *The Pen of War* (2002), about war reporter Lise Lindbæk.

PREVIOUS TITLES

Krigens penn. Ein biografi om Lise Lindbæk, biography 2002.
Krig og løgn, non-fiction 2003.

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Praise for *Krigens penn* (2002):
"A gripping biography ... extremely well-written"

VG