



Sigriddaughter, Beate

THE UNICORN AND...

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A unicorn wanders through the landscape of American pop culture, exposing our collective strengths and failures in crystalline vignettes of prose poetry.

Born with insatiable curiosity and critical intelligence, the unnamed unicorn protagonist approaches human culture with a combination of wonder and consternation. In a particularly amusing conceit, no people comment on the unicorn's existence in "the real world," but the unicorn, performing such human activities as earning a doctorate degree and maintaining a long-distance relationship, constantly confronts puzzling situations. The platitudes of bourgeois daily life—pro-life rhetoric, pretentious writing groups, the expectations of Valentine's Day—confound the mythical creature, who interrogates them with an analytical innocence that reveals their absurdity. Though the book is essentially a plotless picaresque in slices of life shorter than a page each, the writing does not feel choppy or underdone. Rather, Sigriddaughter (*The New Parcival*, 2007) moves smoothly among philosophical topics, starting with "The Unicorn's Mission," continuing through segments on sex, God and the meaning of life, and concluding with "Postcards to a Young Unicorn." The unicorn matures as it wrestles with increasingly complex subjects, and not only is its development sympathetic, but its deadpan delivery invites the reader to share in its marvel and puzzlement. A naïve observer of the world risks sounding affected and precious, but the unicorn avoids this fate. For every solemn thought the creature entertains, it also frolics with its acerbic friend, the fox, fights with its sometime lover, the hunter, or engages in wordplay. Though it is inexperienced, the unicorn is not perfect, and Sigriddaughter makes this character endearing by describing its follies and successes with dry humor.

As sparely crafted as a fairy tale—a charming, sometimes lyrical, philosophical fable.

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