



Hafni Says

Original title: Hafni fortæller
Publisher: Gutkind, 2023
Genre: Novel
Pages: 153 pages
English sample

Foreign rights

Czech: Paseka
Dutch: Querido
German: Penguin Verlag
Hungary: Polar
Norwegian: Forlaget Oktober
Polish: Filtry
Swedish: Norstedts

Awards

Nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize 2024



Helle Helle

Photo by Mikkel Carl

Hafni Says

Hafni says ... she's getting divorced. She's phoning the novel's narrator from a rest stop, but it's Hafni who does all the talking.

She's celebrating the divorce with a "smørrebrød tour" as she calls it – from Roskilde by way of Ringsted, Korsør, Nyborg, Svendborg, Faaborg and the Bøjden-Fynshav ferry to Gråsten, where she samples the South Jutland region's renowned afternoon tea. It's a tour that was meant to take a week – but it ends up taking nearly a month.

Now, Hafni's phoning to talk about what went wrong along the way. She says:

I don't want to be me.

I want to remake myself.

I don't know how to remake myself.

Hafni Says is a radically experimental and completely unbridled book. It's a novel about crisis and downfall, about the will to live, alienation, freedom, guilt and shame, and the heavy gaze of expectation. Simply put, it's a novel about existence...Helle Helle has long proven that her authorship can't be dismissed in a subordinate clause. Several of her novels already stand as masterpieces in Danish literature. Hafni Says is no exception."

Nordic Council Literature Prize Jury Statement

Hafni's story makes you both laugh and cry. Full of situational comedy and consummate humour keen to the quirks of language. Full of sorrow and anxiety, simultaneously conveyed and assuaged by Helle's marvellous writing (...) I envy anyone who is about to read this novel.

Politiken, 6/6 hearts

Helle Helle surpasses herself with Hafni's shame and screw-ups (...) Like few writers, Helle Helle manages to reproduce herself in such a way that each new novel buds from the one(s) before it, not as a clone or a one-to-one copy, but as one of those small wonders that life (biological and literary) every once in a while bestows upon us. A kind of literary-evolutionary self-propagation, a self-refining process of cell division, the art of writing at its very best.

Berlingske, 6/6 stars

Helle Helle's Hafni is perfectly perplexed (...) Every sentence is replete and tightly drawn; restrained and controlled (...) [Hafni's] cleverly turned befuddlement could sound trying, and Hafni herself says: I don't want to be me. I want to remake myself. But thank goodness, the novel, the smørrebrød tour, quivers with her liberating embarrassment, which is not despondent but deft, precise, drily humorous.

Weekendavisen

(...) let me highlight the splinteringly tight mini-chapters, (again) the strongest (the most well-turned, the funniest, the cleverest) short prose written by anyone on these shores ...

Lars Bukdahl

Helle Helle surpasses herself with this funny, dark and masterly novel.

Litteratursiden

With this wonderful novel, Helle raises her standard from gold to platinum.

Vårt Land

Helle Helle

Helle Helle (b. 1965) is a graduate of the Danish Academy of Creative Writing and the author of a number of novels as well as two collections of short fiction. She is one of Scandinavia's most original writers, with a career spanning three decades, from her debut *Example of Life* (1993) to her most recent novel, *Hafni Says*, published to rave reviews in 2023. Her books have been translated into 22 languages.