



Last Train to Helsingør Heidi Amsinck

Menacing and at times darkly humorous, *Last Train to Helsingør* is a collection of nineteen short stories set in Copenhagen and surrounds, a place of twilight and shadows where strange and sinister things often happen. Many of the stories were specially commissioned for BBC Radio 4 as afternoon readings.

From the commuter who bitterly regrets falling asleep on a late-night train in the title story, to the mushroom hunter prepared to kill to guard her secret in *The Chanterelles of Østvig*, the characters are victims and perpetrators and sometimes both. These are stories of horror, obsession and murder, with elements of the supernatural thrown in and, inevitably, a twist in the tale.

Discussion Points

1. Heidi Amsinck grew up in Denmark, and Danish is her mother tongue. Can you tell that *Last Train to Helsingør* is written by someone for whom English is a second language?
2. Consider the ghosts and supernatural occurrences in the collection. Are they being presented as real, or could they have a rational explanation?
3. Did you find the stories creepy or unsettling? Did the endings surprise you?
4. Does the fact that the author is Danish, and able to use specific locations and cultural references, add to the authenticity of the collection? What would the difference be if a British-born author had written it?
5. In many of the stories, characters that on the face of it are vulnerable or weak, such as little old ladies, turn out to be anything but. Consider the significance of this.
6. Heidi has said that she has a fascination for all things twisted, dark and macabre, and has been heavily influenced by writers such as Roald Dahl, Daphne du Maurier and Susan Hill. Can you tell from the stories?

7. Stephen King wrote that compared to novels, short stories can be “invigorating, sometimes even shocking, like a waltz with a stranger you will never see again, or a kiss in the dark”. Consider the experience of reading a short story rather than a long novel. If you had not read short stories before *Last Train to Helsingør*, will you do so now?
8. What is the role of humour in Heidi Amsinck’s stories?
9. Nordic Noir, represented in books, films and TV series such as *The Killing* and *The Bridge*, has been hugely popular in the UK in recent years. What is the appeal of dark Scandinavian fiction, and to what extent does *Last Train to Helsingør* capture this?
10. Heidi Amsinck said in an interview that “setting and atmosphere come first” when she writes. What is the effect of her descriptions of place on the overall feel of the stories?
11. Did *Last Train to Helsingør* resonate with your perception Copenhagen and the Danes, or contrast with it?
12. Did you find the stories satisfying?

About the author



Heidi Amsinck was born in Copenhagen and worked for many years as a London-based foreign correspondent for the Danish media. She is the author of two Danish guidebooks on London, and many of her stories have been broadcast on BBC Radio 4, but this is her first published collection. Heidi was previously shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature’s V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize. Currently head of communications for a large, British bank, she writes in English, though her first language was Danish.