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*Alois Hotschnig , Tess Lewis (Translator)*

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A spellbinding short story collection by one of Austria's most critically acclaimed authors. A man becomes obsessed with observing his neighbors. A large family gathers for Christmas only to wait for the one member who never turns up. An old woman lures a man into her house where he finds dolls resembling himself as a boy. Mesmerizing and haunting stories about loss of identity in the modern world.

Why Peirene chose to publish this book: 'I love Kafka and here we have a Kafkaesque sense of alienation - not to mention narrative experiments galore! Outwardly normal events slip into drama before they tip into horror. These oblique tales exert a fascinating hold over the reader.' Meike Ziervogel, Publisher

First published under the original German title: Die Kinder beruhigte das nicht by Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006

## Maybe This Time Details

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# From Reader Review Maybe This Time for online ebook

## Yasmin says

Conjunto de historias cortas, las cuales al leerlas me provocaban golpes de ideas: alienación, demencia, locura, desequilibrio, vida diaria, pintura en movimiento hecha con palabras, un momento, un sentimiento, contemplación, post-modernismo, hechos inconfesables, siniestro, inminente terror, externo, extraño, insomnio, asombroso, apabullante.

En fin. Acabo de terminar de leer este libro y aun no consigo conectar estas ideas de forma lógica. De lo que sí estoy completamente segura es que estas historias no son para cualquiera.

Título de las historias en inglés:

The same silence, the same noise  
Two ways of leaving  
Then a door opens and swings shut  
Maybe this time, maybe now  
The beginning of something  
Encounter  
The light in my room  
Morning, noon, and night  
You don't know them, they're strangers

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## Jim says

I wonder how many writers have disappointed their readers because their publishers or some well-meaning reviewer has compared them to Kafka. He really is a hard act to follow. You can compare anyone you like to Thomas Bernhard because most people won't know him. But Kafka? To be fair these stories do have "a Kafkaesque sense of alienation" but really it's just a whiff of Kafka. There's a whiff of Beckett here too in the story 'Maybe This Time, Maybe Now' which relocates *Waiting for Godot* to suburbia:

Walter's not coming. That would be fine with us if only our parents didn't live in expectation of him. They constantly hope that he might just show up, that when we get together at their place again, the whole family might just be there, all of us, as if we did in fact belong together, as if we were a whole, one more time, or for the first time rather, because it hasn't happened yet, not once.

We never learn why Walter, Uncle Walter, is the focal point of the narrator's parents' world. But one of them is always at home in case he turns up. Sometimes he's expected, for one of the regular family celebrations (which now always have to take place at the narrator's parents' home), or then again he might just drop in unexpectedly. Either way the house is always kept in readiness for him:

Walter can't bear the sun. Too much light isn't good for him, and draughts make him ill. So the windows and doors are all kept shut, since Walter mustn't become ill. In summer, we wait in

the sun or in the shade, and in cold weather we wait indoors. The house is not heated. The warmth isn't good for Walter, so in winter we sit chilled in the rooms, looking at each other but with Walter on our minds.

Sometimes Walter's wife turns up:

Walter will follow, she says then. She has come ahead of him because he was held up by someone at the last moment. We wait, and while waiting she becomes restless and worried, as do we and our parents. Something must have happened or he would be here, she says. She stays a while longer, then leaves. We stay behind, waiting for her call, for a sign. But there is none, ever, as if there really were no Walter, not for us.

Would it spoil the ending if I told you Walter never comes? Well he might have; they say we just missed him but did we really? And what's worse we're left without any answers as to why he stopped coming or if he ever intends to come again. And we know as we're reading this that we're not going to get any answers because none of the stories leading up to this have provided any answers so why should this one? And yet we keep reading. Just in case. And we read the next one and the next one just in case any of them explain themselves but none of them do and despite the quality of the writing—every story is constructed out of beautifully-designed sentences—I was a little glad this book was as short as it was because by the end I was screaming for something resembling closure although to be fair 'Morning, Noon and Night' does provide something resembling an explanation at the end and although 'Encounter' doesn't provide any answers at least it does come to an end.

Watching is fundamental to these stories. Of course as readers we become watchers too watching the watchers watching the watched who sometimes watch back. It's all very creepy and probably the most extreme example is the opening story 'The Same Silence, The Same Noise' where a man becomes obsessed with his neighbours who do virtually nothing day in and day out but sit on deckchairs:

For hours they didn't move, not even to wave away the mosquitoes or scratch themselves. Every day, every night, always the same. Their stillness made me feel uneasy, and my unease grew until it festered into an affliction I could no longer bear.

As with Uncle Walter we're kept in ignorance about this couple but this doesn't stop the narrator's imagination going wild. As does ours. Maybe not so much in this story because the narrator is our proxy but in later stories we are him, watching, wondering what Hotschnig's up to. Why are his characters doing so little? Why does he insist on describing things in such minute detail but skimps on the basic facts?

There's a definite *Twilight Zone* feel to a few of the stories especially the last one where a man finds himself becoming alternate versions of himself or in 'Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut' where a man visits an old woman in order to access past memories via a doll version of him she's made and gradually feels himself swapping places with the doll:

She stroked Karl's head and looked me in the eye and placed the child's finger in her mouth, kissing it tenderly for a long time and sucking on it. She slavered over the little hand, and pulled it back out of her mouth where the fingers had begun to dissolve.

In his review in *The Guardian* Nicholas Lezard writes that it's "very refreshing to be confronted by stories which so firmly refuse to yield to conventional interpretation, or even comprehension." In layman's terms then: Don't expect to get these. So why read them? In this respect I found myself thinking of Beckett's play *Not I*. Objective meaning does seem to have been of secondary consideration in the writing style. As Beckett

indicated to Jessica Tandy he hoped that the piece would "work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" and if there's a single word I would use to describe the nine stories in Hotschnig's collection it would be 'unnerving'. Lezard chooses another word: *Unheimliche*, the Freudian concept of an instance where something can be both familiar yet alien at the same time, resulting in a feeling of it being uncomfortably strange. That fits too. Some might also say that that's what Kafkaesque means. It's as good a fit as any.

I did enjoy these stories and although the publisher suggests that they can be read in a single sitting I'd be tempted to ration them. While I was writing this review I happened to be listening to an album of flute music. The first track was lovely but by the end I'd had quite enough and if the only flutes I hear in the foreseeable future happen to be buried deep within a symphony orchestra I can live with that.

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### **Irem Tatar says**

Birinin y?llar boyunca gördü?ü rüyalar? okuyormu?sunuz hissi veren güzel öyküler var kitapta. Özellikle son öykü "Tan?m?yorsun Onlar?, Yabancı? Onlar", mekansal s?n?rlar? olmayan, ak?p duran bir rüya gibi.

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### **Kirsty says**

Originally released in 2006, and rendered into English into 2011, Alois Hotschnig's *Maybe This Time* is one of Peirene Press' earliest publications. *World Literature Today* declares that 'Hotschnig's prose dramatizes the voice of conscience and the psychological mechanisms we use to face reality or, just as often, to avoid it'. Hotschnig is one of Austria's most critically acclaimed authors, and he has won major Austrian, and international, literary prizes over his career. The collection has been translated from the Austrian German by Tess Lewis.

Hotschnig's short story collection has been described by many readers as 'unsettling', and this, I feel, is quite a fitting appraisal. There is a creeping sense of unease which comes over one as soon as the stories are begun. The initial tale, 'The Same Silence, the Same Noise', is about a pair of neighbours who sit side by side in the narrator's eyeline for days on end: '... they didn't move, not even to wave away the mosquitoes or scratch themselves'. This has rather a distressing effect upon our unnamed observer: 'Every day, every night, always the same. Their stillness made me feel uneasy, and my unease grew until it festered into an affliction I could no longer bear'. His reaction is perhaps the most interesting one which Hotschnig could have come up with in this instance: 'I drew closer to them because they rejected me. Rejection, after all, is still a kind of contact'. As one might expect as the midway point is reached in this tale, the narrator soon becomes obsessed: 'I decided to observe them even more closely to calm my unease, as if I no longer had a life of my own but lived only through them'.

There are nine short stories included within *Maybe This Time*, all of which have rather intriguing titles. These include the likes of 'Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut', and 'You Don't Know Them, They're Strangers'. Some rather thoughtful ideas have been woven in; they have a definite profundity at times: 'We looked at the same views, heard the same noises. We shared a common world and were separated by it'. Each of the tales is sharp; every one relatively brief, but all of which have a wealth of emotions and scenes packed into them. Hotschnig is shrewd, and in control at all times; he makes the reader fear impending

danger with the most subtle of hints.

No particular time periods have been specified within the collection, and only small clues have been left as to when each story takes place. They are, one and all, essentially suspended in time. I did find a couple of the stories a little abrupt in terms of their endings, but this collection is certainly a memorable one. There is a great fluency in Lewis' translation, which helps to render *Maybe This Time* one of the creepiest reads on Peirene's list thus far.

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## Seher Andaç says

Kitaba ismini veren öykü, omzuma öyle dostça dokundu ki ben de art?k Walter amcay? beklemeye ba?lad?m:) Gelip gelmemesi önemli de?il! Önemli olan benim evde olmam! Kitap bitip gün ilerledikçe ,öykü Naz?m'?n bir dizesini dü?ürdü akl?ma;

"Kesilmi? bir kol gibi

omuz ba??m?zdaki bo?lu?un...

Ho?geldin!

...

?yi bir odaklanma isteyen hikayeler, k?sa olmas? yan?lt?c? bu yüzden. Gözetlemeyi seven ayr?ca...

....

Bugün dinledi'im bir ?ark? bana bu öyküyü hat?rlatt?: jimmy, moriarty'den!

Eve dönmesi beklenenin, ça?r?lanan?n adlar? çok:)

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## Baran ????? says

Son zamanlarda okudu?um en tuhaf öykü kitaplar?ndan biri. Anlat?lan öykülerde olaydan ziyade durum merkezde oldu?undan kimi zaman okunan ?eyin fazla soyut olmas? okumay? güçle?tirebiliyor, elbette bundan kas?t dikkat da??lmas?...

Öykülerin hemen hemen ço?unda, anlatan ile anlat?lan, bakan ile bak?lan, takip eden ile edilen, hatta kimi zaman Calvino'nun *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*?n ilk bölümündeki gibi okuyan ile okunan?n birbirinin yerine geçti?i harika durumlar yaratm?? yazar. Empati e?er hikaye olsayd?, her?ey böyle olurdu diyesi geliyor, zaten bir-iki istisna hariç hiçbir karakterin isminin olmamas? da bu evrensellik noktas?ndaki empatiyi, "onun yerinde sen de olabilirdin-miydin"i hakl? ç?karan bir durum olarak yer al?yor kitapta...

Sahneler, sesler, yan?lg?lar, aynalar, acabalar, ben-miyimler, yoksalar, türlü türlü enstanteneler, sonsuz dönü?ümler, ?ekilden ?ekile girmeler, olmalar, olmamalar, kokular, kötülük hissinin d??ar?da olmas?, sonra birden içeriden geliyor olu?u ?üphesi, nedir ne de?ildirler, böyle her?ey muallak, her?ey olabilir ama her?ey bir rüya da olabilir, yada psikotik bir aldanma...

En sevdi'im öyküler: "Ayn? Sessizlik, Ayn? Ba??r??ma", "Yürümenin ?ki Çe?idi", "Odamda I??k Yan?yor" ve "Tan?m?yorsun Onlar?, Yabancı? Onlar"..

Bir de ?? Bankas?'ndaki sa?lam Nietzsche çevirilerinden tan?d???m Mustafa Tüzel'in keyifli Türkçesine de dikkat çekmek isterim..

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## Cheryl says

If the story reminds one of Kafka, it is “Kafkaesque”. If one is an ardent fan of Doctor Who, than one is a “Whovian”. If one of the short stories in this collection, “*Maybe this Time, Maybe Now*”, reminds one of Waiting for Godot, is it Godotian? In pathology, when faced with an entity that resembles a particular entity but which we don’t think actually is that entity, we add the suffix “-oid”. Hence, a cell which superficially resembles an epithelial cell but which we realize could actually be a macrophage or a stromal cell, will be described as “epithelioid”. So perhaps I could consider this story ‘Godotoid’. It doesn’t matter. Walter is Godot. And his whole family keeps waiting for him to show up. Waiting for Walter.

“*Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut*” is just sideways strange and you start to wonder if it is a bit creepy maybe? A man, Karl, is heading to a friend’s house, when he is waved over to the neighboring house. The old lady beckons him in. So he goes in. She proudly shows him her vast collection of dolls, her children as she calls them. Including one she has named Karl, who looks just like our narrator. Okay, yes, this is approaching the far side of odd now. The surreal state is the inevitable next stage, and if you are expecting that then you won’t be disappointed.

There were one or two I just did not get at all despite re-reading. A couple of the stories sounded like the human side of neurological or psychiatric disease, and so through that lens did not seem as weird. Rather like what it might be like as told from the perspective of a patient of Oliver Sacks.

These are very short stories in a very short book, another excellent one from the Peirene Press.

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## Cansu says

2.5/5 ??? Öykü okuyamazl???m?n faturas?n? kitaba kesmi? olabilirim..

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## Burkem Cevher says

Okumas? çok uzun sürdü bu kitab?. Araya ba?ka kitaplar, yaz?lar ve çeviri girdi. Hikayelerin baz?lar?n? çok sevdim, baz?lar? beni çok rahats?z etti. Ama her hikaye üzerinde çok dü?ündüm. Zekice kurgulanm?? ve çok güzel yaz?lm??. Yine de saplant?, tekinsizlik duygusu gibi konular san?r?m çok ilgimi çekmiyor. Yaln?z kitapta aileden kimsenin görmedi?i ama sürekli beklenen bir amca hikayesi vard? ki muhte?emdi. S?rf onun için kitap okunur bence.

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## Konserve Ruhlar says

Çok fazla anlat?m bozuklu?u vard? kitapta. Birbirine benzeyen ve bazen hiçbir ?ey anlatmayan cümleler hikayeleri görünmez yapt? benim için. Baz? hikayelerin konusu umut vericiydi. Ama sanki ???k veren bir metnin içindeyim de bir türlü önümdeki sis perdesi gitmiyormu? gibi hissettim. Pencere orada, perde de aç?k ama içerde kimse yoktu. Bu kitapla ilgili tam olarak hissetti?im bu ne yaz?k ki.

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## Marina Sofia says

I read this collection of stories in one go, which was perhaps not such a great idea, as they are the kind to ration, read sparingly and linger over. The first-person male narrator often feels a bit sameish in each of these very short stories (especially when read in quick succession), but each story is subtly different and odd. Unsettling, dream-like (or should that be nightmare-like?), often compared to Kafka (but perhaps more Kafka of the diaries, when he talks about his dreams) or Eugene Ionesco.

It reminds me most of Peter Bichsel's very short story 'Ein Tisch ist ein Tisch', in which the main protagonist decides to rename all the objects in his world - except that Bichsel played around with language, while Hotschnig plays around with concepts, creating an illusion of ideas and perspectives in our mind. Nothing is quite as it seems, we are not quite sure which side up we're looking at things. What is reality, what is interpretation?

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## Seda A. says

Kesinlikle okuduğum en iyi öykü kitaplarından biri. İnsan? a??rtan bir tarz? var. Baz? hikayeleri Black Mirror'un k?sa bir senaryosu gibi.

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## Andrew says

I found this a very unsettling collection of short stories. I mean that in a good way. Being unsettled is often the prelude to thinking about things in a new way, and to me that's one of the most important functions of literature.

The stories are very varied in style and content, but many of them deal with the question of identity in one way or another. In the first story, The Same Silence, The Same Noise, a man becomes addicted to spying on his neighbours. Yet he does not really seem interested in the neighbours themselves, but in seeing himself through their eyes. He is obsessed with why they don't acknowledge him, and although it is he who is spying on them, he is the one who feels invaded by them, who tries to escape. His identity merges into theirs, and he realises that "in truth, it was myself I was now looking at."

The final story, You Don't Know Them, They're Strangers, also deals with the merging of identities. A man comes home one night to a flat that has someone else's name on the door but that seems familiar still, and his neighbours and friends call him by that name, even though it's not his name and he doesn't know the people who call him a friend. He goes to work in a part of town he's never been to, again is recognised by his colleagues even though he doesn't know them, and does a normal day's work before returning home to find a different name on the door. The same neighbours who had known him the night before now introduce themselves as if for the first time.

See what I mean by unsettling? There's a dreamlike quality to a lot of the stories, a weird kind of internal consistency that often doesn't conform to real-world logic but nevertheless feels natural within the slightly warped reality of each story. And through many of the stories runs this same thread of loss of identity. In



another one, *The Beginning of Something*, a man washes his face and raises his arms to wipe it with a towel, but then realises "The arms weren't my arms." In perhaps the most unsettling one of all, *Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut*, a man is invited into an old woman's house, and although he doesn't know her, she treats him as a long-overdue guest. She has an enormous collection of dolls, which she calls "her children", and eventually she brings out one that looks exactly like the narrator and shares his name, Karl. She asks him, "Isn't that why you're here?" As he visits more regularly, he comes to identify more and more with the doll Karl, until:

"Whether I liked it or not, I too had become one of the old woman's dolls, or perhaps I had always been one. She sat me on her lap, and I let it happen, because in exchange she gave me something I wanted and each time craved more deeply – myself."

Apart from Karl, very few of the characters in the book are named. Many stories have a first-person narrator, and otherwise characters are referred to simply as "the woman", "the man", "the couple", etc. It all has a profoundly alienating effect, especially when coupled with the weird meldings of identity. I'd thoroughly recommend this book to anyone who's looking for something a little weird and disturbing and different. I'm planning to read more by the same writer, but can't find much in English translation so maybe will have to dust off my schoolboy German :-)

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## **Fact100 says**

En attendant Walter!

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## **Paul says**

Nine excellent and rather unsettling short stories. Difficult to pin down; there are strong shades of Kafka here. The narrators are all men and very few people in the stories are named. The stories are about identity and its loss. They appear mundane and everyday, but there are very many layers of meaning.

In "Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut" a man is visiting an old schoolfriend when a woman motions him into her house. Inside the house there are hundreds of dolls in different shades of repair and neatness. The woman brings down a doll that looks exactly like him and has his name and says she has been waiting for him ... Not a horror story, but very creepy.

In "The Beginning of Something" a man looks out of the window and realises he is in an unfamiliar country, looking in the mirror he does not recognize the person he sees there. He then wakes up relieved, but discovers the dream has come true. This one was scary, more for what was not said.

The last story, "You Don't Know Them, They're Strangers", is the most unsettling. A man returns home after an evening with the neighbours and notes the name on his door is different; his flat is familiar, but different. He goes to his office, it is in an area he has never visited before with people he does not know. They know him and he knows the job, returning home the name on the door has changed again, but the flat is still his; the pace of change quickens.

This collection is well worth reading. I must admit I had not heard of Alois Hotschnig before picking up this book. He has won literary awards in his native Austria and international honours like the Italo-Svevo award. I will look for more!

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