

**ALOIS HOTSCHNIG, *MAYBE THIS TIME*.**

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Translated from Austrian German by Tess Lewis.**

*By Georgia Panteli*

Alois Hotschnig's collection of short stories *Maybe This Time* is like a visit to the House of Mirrors in a dark forgotten amusement park; you only see your reflection: distorted, but still yours. Like with a David Lynch film, you know that a part of you understands what it is all about, even though you cannot properly articulate it.

Tzvetan Todorov describes the fantastic as lying within the moment of hesitation of the reader and the character, 'who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from "reality" as it exists in the common opinion'.<sup>1</sup> Hotschnig's *Maybe This Time* could be described as hesitating about hesitation. Should the reader even be hesitating? Is it fantastic, an allegory, a metaphor or just poetically uncomfortable realism? Karl, in "Then a Door Opens and Swings Shut", mysteriously finds fragments of his past memories through an old lady's uncanny dolls without being able to recall and understand these memories properly; in a similar way the reader merges into Hotschnig's stories unprepared, wandering around in a territory of uneasy symbolism and wondering whether he should be having the questions that emerge.

Stories like "You Don't Know Them, They're Strangers" have references to the anxiety familiar from the work of Franz Kafka, however, Hotschnig has his own particular style. A style which is more universal than just Austrian, his characters uncomfortably recognisable: suffocating family relationships, failed old relationships, unresolved traumas, and the never-ending quest for understanding and defining oneself.

Haruki Murakami's short stories also end without explanations, unresolved, but with Hotschnig the reader is left with a very uncomfortable feeling that he might have read them and interpreted them in a way that reveals something about his own self. This can be disturbing. Are these stories a deep, psychoanalytic free-dive, a fantastic realistic painting, a twisted metaphor, a strange mirror, just as most of the characters are mirrors for each other?

In an interview with the BBC Hotschnig mentions that he wants "to take the reader by the hand and seduce him into a forest and leave him there in the darkness."<sup>2</sup> He has definitely managed to do this and the forest is haunted. You will be thinking of these stories long after you have read them; of course always depending on how many of your personal demons you encountered on your way back from the forest...

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<sup>1</sup> Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1975: Cornell University Press, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> The Strand, 16/09/11, BBC World Service.