

by Mario Petuzzi
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Fiction

Hibernation

Winterschlaf

review

An unsettling debut that blends folklore, psychological suspense and literary fiction, ‘Hibernation’ unfolds in a remote Alpine valley where the boundaries between myth and reality are never entirely clear.

Each spring, young twins – a brother and sister – descend into the cellar to wake their mother from her winter-long sleep. Frail at first, she slowly regains her strength and begins recording the prophetic dreams she experienced during hibernation.
The children’s grandfather, convinced these visions can be turned into profit, invites strangers to seek her advice; their mother, however, regards her gift as a burden rather than a business. As summer progresses, mysterious visitors arrive: a German traveller searching for answers, a woman measuring radiation in the surrounding forest, and a man conducting strange experiments into human hibernation. At the same time, the fragile balance within the family begins to fracture. The mother’s visions falter, old resentments surface and an uneasy sense of foreboding settles over the valley.

The novel is set over the course of a
single spring, summer and autumn and is narrated throughout in the first-person plural. The twins, who turn ten during the novel, speak only as ‘we’, never as individuals. Their incomplete understanding of the adults around them creates a persistent sense of ambiguity, leaving readers to piece together a reality that remains tantalisingly out of reach. Is the mother genuinely gifted, or is she the victim of

exploitation? Is the grandfather a ruthless opportunist, or simply trying to keep the family afloat? Petuzzi refuses easy answers, allowing ambiguity to become the novel's driving force. Beneath the fairytale surface lies a subtle exploration of power, family, belief and the stories people tell themselves in order to survive.

Petuzzi's prose combines lyrical descriptions of forests, snow and mountain landscapes with the unsettling intrusion of contemporary life: mobile phones, laptops and fluorescent outdoor clothing sit alongside candles, prophecies and cellar rituals. The result is a world that feels both timeless and unmistakably modern. The novel's dreamlike atmosphere is heightened by the absence of quotation marks, fluid dialogue and recurring images that blur the boundaries between waking life and dreams, while the twins' shared narrative voice lends the story an eerie, hypnotic rhythm.

A remarkable debut of quiet originality, 'Hibernation' will appeal to readers of Daisy Johnson's *Everything Under* and Mariana Enriquez's *Our Share of Night* for their uncanny blend of folklore, domestic unease and psychological suspense.
Atmospheric, enigmatic and deeply immersive, Petuzzi's novel introduces an exciting new voice in contemporary Austrian literature.

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press quotes

> *Through the power of language, Petuzzi turns readers into friends, enemies, partners and adversaries of his characters. We cannot forgive him for this, but we are delighted.*

Michael Köhlmeier (author)

about the author



Mario Petuzzi, born in 1989 in Hall in Tirol, lives with his wife and daughter near Innsbruck. He studied Economics and Management, as well as Comparative

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Literature in Innsbruck and São Paulo. He participated in the Klagenfurt literary course and the Literary Colloquium Berlin's novel workshop. *Hibernation* is his debut.

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