FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary

No One
Gwenaëlle Aubry
Trista Selous, translator
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"When my father died, he had already been gone a long time," says the narrator of Gwenaëlle Aubry's latest novel. Translated from the French by Trista Selous, this slim volume explores the life and personality of the narrator's mentally ill father as illuminated by things he left behind: journals, possessions, memories, a safety deposit box, and other traces of his passage through life.

Aubry organizes what is essentially ineffable—the inner identity of a troubled man—as a sort of dictionary: The first chapter is "A" and is titled with the father's name (Antonin Artaud); the final chapter is "Z" and takes its name from Woody Allen's film *Zelig*. How deft to begin a novel about identity and its mutable nature with an individual's name—a neat packet of information—and end the novel with a fictional character known for his liquid, unstable selfhood. (Allen's Zelig took on the characteristics of whomever he met.) Imposing order on the memories of her father is the narrator's way of examining his messy life.

If the narrator has imposed order on her memories, she has not made her musings lack feeling. Aubry's writing is restrained yet emotional; when she finds her father's safety deposit box, she lists its contents dispassionately, then says, "The keyless safe had contained a man's memory, vocation, and dreams of glory, the material manifestations of a soul."

She describes going through his things with similar wisdom and feeling: "We seek out words for what was always the secret, silent part in us, a body of words for a man who has no grave, a castle of presence to protect his absence."

No One is a philosophical novel that meanders from memory to memory, from musing to musing. Aubry's sense of the human condition is both startling in its originality and sharp in its beauty: the reader might find himself reading a book that is in fact reading him back, in that what he learns about a fictional "Zelig" may apply to everyone searching for their authentic self.

"Perhaps he found, in the white desert of death," concludes the author, "that which he always sought, the right, at last, to be no one."

No One is the winner of the 2008 Prix Femina. Aubry's previous novels include *Le diable detacher, L'Isole, L'Isolement,* and *Notre vie s'use en transfigurations.*

Leia Menlove