FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Unknown Book
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Let's begin with a simple declaration: Attila Bartis is a great writer. That his prose, like a slow, centripetal whirlwind, involves one in a dark world monstered with dreadfully fascinating people fumbling at all the big questions and ending up being devoured by them, will be evident to anyone who takes up his new novel, *Tranquility*.

Bartis, a Romanian-born Hungarian, at times puts one in mind of Joyce, at others of Kafka, at others of Roth, yet ultimately eludes all comparison by the strength of his originality. He tells the story of Andor Weér, a brilliant writer forced by the twin demons of duty and guilt to live with and care for his de-ranged, recluse mother.

His mother is made culpable for her violinist daughter's defection from the communist regime and loses her position as an actress in the national theater. To make amends for her daughter's refusal to return to Hungary, she orders a coffin made, puts all her daughter's effects inside, has it interred in a cemetery, and mails death notices to sundry commissars and comrades so and so…all to no avail. So she shuts herself in her apartment with her young son and refuses to leave for any reason, effectively imprisoning both herself and Andor. His many attempts at escape over the ensuing years, both physical and emotional, are what propel the plot of the novel.

Since the foundation of Stoic physics, numerous natural philosophers have argued that the universe is a plenum, that there is no such thing as empty space, that all beings are held in a thick unseen aspic that makes the infinite flow of cause and effect possible. At times it would seem that all that the characters in *Tranquility* need do is to cross a spleenful of verbs, to have angry sex with one another, to share a bot-tle of slivovitz in grudging peace, or to love each other in order to drive each other mad, as though madness were like small pox, a disease spread through some mysterious medium of contagion.

And like a virulent illness, Attila Bartis's novel will be hard for any reader to recover from.