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Murakami:
Love and Nothingness

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Abstract

Murakami: Love and Nothingness

Haruki Murakami's "Ice Man" extends love's destruction of the self to completion, beyond a moment of rupture to a moment of absence. Murakami's narrator marries the Ice Man, the radical Other, whose gaze pierces the heart of the narrating self and digests her body in its entirety. The Ice Man himself remains unknown, a polysemic physicality. Through the gaze, the Ice Man subjects the narrator to an erotic project, an eternalizing emphasis of the body, while the narrator simultaneously pours herself into the Ice Man, "seriously in love." Thus, through internal and external forces the text enacts a self-Other exchange. Losing self and agency, she fulfills her role as narrator; to speak and then to be heard—the Ice Man crosses over her into the position of subject. He emerges into a community of ice in the South Pole, while she is othered in the same instant. The necessary division of bodies renders the narrator as a trace of the finite dispersed over the infinite. In the South Pole she becomes "lonelier than anyone else in the world." Yet love persists. The Ice Man's words and the narrator's reaction conclude the story: "See how I love you," he says. He is telling the truth." Can one love without a conception of self? Does love cease to function in emptiness? "Ice Man" exposes an unavoidable collapse of self beyond rupture into the infinite, which reconfigures the function of love. French theorist Jean-Luc Nancy offers a reading of Lacanian love as a lack that must be filled, thereby bringing love into presence: love is that which fills emptiness with emptiness in order to share it. Nancy's reading allows love to persist through Murakami's zero-grade.

Love

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche writes, “My impatient love overflows in torrents down towards morning and evening... And let my stream of love plunge into impassable and pathless places! How should a stream not find its way to the sea at last!” (108). In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche calls love the act of “spending oneself” (786). Here and throughout other texts, Nietzsche develops a metaphysics of love as self-ruination or self-obliteration. For Nietzsche, love is a voluntary rupturing and an “overflowing” of the self. By “self,” we mean a person’s essential being or identity. Thus, in love an individual spends or annihilates her limited, finite self in an uncalculated projection, an “impatient” “[plunging] into impassable and pathless places,” towards and into a limitless Other. Damian Stocking encapsulates Nietzsche’s theory of love as self-ruination in a paper presented at Occidental College in 2008. Stocking writes, “Love, for Nietzsche, in other words, is the delirious, unreasoning will to a dissolution of self in the face of an incalculable, limitless other, the desire of the stream to throw itself into the boundlessness of the sea, the sea that is the heart of the beloved; love is the will to our own ecstatic ruin, into and for the one we love” (Stocking).

In “Ice Man,” Haruki Murakami pushes Nietzsche’s metaphysics of love as self-ruination to its limit. Through internal and external forces (i.e. by herself and from the outside), the narrator of “Ice Man” is reduced to a trace. Murakami critiques Nietzsche’s metaphysics of love by foreclosing the possibility of return; that is, the narrator obliterates herself into a figure that cannot engage in community, and thus cannot give anything back to the narrator. She is driven by a “delirious, unreasoning will to a dissolution of self” into the Ice Man, the incalculable, limitless Other. The text sustains a notion of love while the narrator infinitely obliterates herself; and yet, she can never obliterate herself completely. The trace of the narrator’s subjectivity

allows the narrative to recycle, and she diminishes in each iteration. As she reaches the limit of the trace (of the person, and of the text), the story reconfigures the love function as that which fills emptiness with emptiness in order to share it. Love, in other words, is a giving, a sharing, of nothing.

Murakami's "Ice Man" begins in a ski resort, where the narrator's friend points out an Ice Man reading by himself in a corner. He sits as far as possible from the fireplace. After seeing the mysterious Ice Man for the first time, an unexplainable compulsion to speak to him overtakes her. She says, "...I couldn't help myself. I *had* to talk to him. This was my last night in the hotel and if I let this chance pass I probably would never have another" (Murakami 209). The next day, the narrator stays behind at the resort to talk to the Ice Man. In the first moments of their interaction, the Ice Man seems to respond to her curiosity. She says, "The Ice Man gazed into my eyes and gave what looked like a faint smile. Or was it? Had he really smiled? Maybe I was just imagining it" (Murakami 210). One thing leads to another. They date every weekend in Tokyo, sitting on a park bench together. Because the Ice Man does not know anything about himself, they only talk about her.

Eventually, the two fall in love and decide to get married. The narrator says, "I fell deeply in love with him, and he came to love me, the present me, apart from any past or future. And I came to love the Ice Man for who he is now, apart from any past or future...the Ice Man was the first person I'd ever truly loved" (Murakami 212). The communion between the narrator and the Ice Man is perfect in the traditional sense; they share a "first" love and both are "truly loved" apart from past or future. The narrator's friends and family do not accept the Ice Man, and thus the two are ostracized from others; they live solitary lives. The sublimity of their love

remains strictly contained between them, not dispersed into a larger community. The narrator says, “We loved each other, and everyone left us alone” (Murakami 213).

However, towards the end of the story the narrative conveys a paralyzing sense of loneliness. When they make love, the narrator sees a single piece of ice somewhere far away and unknown; she says, “What [the Ice Man] did was convey a memory of that ice” (Murakami 213). Every day the Ice Man goes to work, leaving the narrator by herself. Because no one accepts the Ice Man, and by consequence the narrator, she does not have friends or family to talk to. Her loneliness manifests in a distinct separation between her and an outside world: “We’re different people from *them*, they concluded, and the gulf separating them and us will never be filled” (Murakami 213). Her perpetual solitude eventually urges her to propose a trip with the Ice Man, a honeymoon they never took.

She suggests the South Pole, and not long after, they go to the South Pole. Yet, despite the presence of her husband, the icy landscape is “much lonelier than anything [the narrator] could have ever imagined” (Murakami 216). The Ice Man’s ability to learn the native language of the South Pole emphasizes the narrator’s loneliness. She, on the other hand, remains isolated and unable to communicate. Even from her husband, the narrator feels “left behind, betrayed and abandoned” (Murakami 217). There is no way for her to return to Tokyo because the runway at the airport is frozen over; she says, “Just like my heart” (Murakami 218). Moreover, at the end of the story she realizes that she is pregnant. She knows also that her child would “have the same icicle eyes as his father, the same frost-covered fingers” (Murakami 218). There, eventually, “in the coldest, loneliest place in the world” (Murakami 218) the narrator loses her very conception of self.

The love that begins the story underpins its ending. The narrator's tears melting on the Ice Man's tongue is the concluding image of the story. The Ice Man holds the narrator and says, "You know I love you" (Murakami 218), but because of an icy wind from the past, his words never seem to reach her. Perhaps this ending scene, in particular, is what makes "Ice Man" difficult to read as a love story. The tears of grief, the complete loss of self, and the emptiness of the icy landscape radically oppose love's common framework. Concerning the oppositional framework of the narrative then, the story is easily received as a failed love story. However, "Ice Man" does not reject or diverge from Nietzsche's metaphysics nor does it extend a different conception of love that gives way to masochism or suffering. Instead, the story investigates the very limits of love as self-ruination by pushing that theory to its margin.

To push love as self-ruination to its margin, Murakami forecloses the possibility of return by collapsing one of the entities involved in Nietzsche's metaphysics. Rather than self-obliteration into a positive entity, the narrator always spends herself towards and into a figure of absence. The Ice Man is an incalculable, limitless Other who cannot enter into intersubjective community. For the narrator, love marks the process of self-shattering, continual displacement of the self (marked by "fell" in "we fell deeply in love") in order to annihilate it into the Other. In each act of recuperation, the narrator loses a fragment of her subjectivity in relation to the Ice Man, and she gets nothing in return. As the story ends, the narrator is a trace of the finite. In other words, the story ends without positive entities, which is the limit of love as self-obliteration. This destabilizes Nietzsche's metaphysics and critiques the subjected-centered love function ("spending oneself").

Two aspects of narration become important in this reading of "Ice Man": narration as self-ruination, like love, a vehicle through which the narrator becomes a trace; and the present

tense in a past tense narrative. The narrator's present tense declaration of love transcends the past tense in which she otherwise narrates. She says, "I came to love the Ice Man for who he *is now*" (Murakami 212, my emphasis) rather than who he *was then*. Because the narrative is a retelling of the past that returns to the point of authoring (thus, it rejects a movement forward from the South Pole and only allows the narrator to continually retell her past), love is retained while she continually diminishes. Love persists and reconfigures its function from presence to absence.

The Ice Man as the Incalculable, Limitless Other

The narrator "[falls] deeply in love" with the unknowable, unreadable Ice Man, a figure without a past or community. His name and the thematic that envelop it remove him from commonality and constitute a polysemy exploited by the text. The narrator is denied any knowledge of the Ice Man beyond the body. Yet even knowledge of his body falls under obscurity. In this way the Ice Man is a radical Other, a polysemic physicality. His gaze obliterates the narrator's subjectivity; he is able to render her entire past, to know her completely through the gaze alone. The gaze pierces the narrator's heart and her head, and eroticizes her body to the point at which she is unable to speak. Thus, the text creates an imbalance that others the narrator and invigorates the obliteration of her self within a love as self-ruination metaphysics. In this violent shift and through the necessary division of bodies (i.e. a self/Other binary is always preserved), the narrator is dispersed into the infinite.

The narrative depicts the Ice Man as an outsider among "noisy...hordes of young people" in the lobby of a ski resort. The Ice Man sits "as far as possible from the fireplace, quietly absorbed in a book" (Murakami 209). The narrative's juxtapositions render the Ice Man as Other. The narrative intensifies this distance in various ways. The narrator eventually says, "The Ice

Man was as isolated and alone as an iceberg floating in the darkness” (Murakami 212). Her words further those initial juxtapositions. The text portrays the Ice Man as “isolated,” “floating” without grounding in the “darkness.”

The Ice Man’s distance from the fireplace strongly indicates Otherness. He is “as far as possible” from the hearth, the space where community originates and where it is most intense. As a name, “Ice Man” designates an individual who must remain at the limit of community. Distance dictates his being: ice, that which must never encounter warmth. He cannot cross the liminal space into a community of multiple bodies generating an exchange of self. As such, he is delineated in the narrative’s opening moment (and in his name) as an entity completely othered, antithetical to the notions of community. He remains always in relation as an Other who rejects proximal subjection. In this way, the Ice Man perpetually remains obscure, unknown.

The first speech act within the story, a whisper of ostentation, interpolates the Ice Man as Other. In the crowded ski lobby, the narrator’s friend leans over to her and whispers, “*That’s an Ice Man*” (Murakami 209). The utterance is simultaneously furtive as a whisper and marks distance through ostentation. Its furtiveness suggests that the words are not meant to be overheard. The whisper, generally, is a private conveyance of meaning. In initially identifying the Ice Man through a whisper, the narrator reveals her awareness of the relation of dissimilarity between the Ice Man and themselves. She would not otherwise conceal this identification. Moreover, the whisper introduces the Ice Man, but as an unspoken name, perhaps a name that is not meant to be spoken. Her whisper further marks distance by its referential quality. The referential “that” establishes and preserves distance, while the more proximal “here” discards it. Thus, the narrator’s friend’s use of “*That’s*” indicates and preserves a distance through its function as ostentation.

The narrator substitutes the Ice Man for placeholders that suggest distance and difference when she comments on her friend's expression: "[She had] a serious look on her face. As serious as if the topic wasn't an Ice Man but a ghost, or someone with a contagious disease" (Murakami 209). A figure without community, "a ghost" is physically absent, a trace that occupies the world of the living and of the dead; "someone with a contagious disease" explicitly marks a danger in crossing an implied distance. The possibility of substituting a ghost for the Ice Man exposes the Ice Man's unreadability, his existence in both positions of the binary: his absent presence.

The Ice Man is precisely a polysemic unreadability. Semantically, the Ice Man is an irresolvable mix of the concepts of "ice" and "man." The literal and figurative tendencies of interpretation necessarily pull in opposite directions and the text exploits this division. The narrator describes his youth "offset by the white strands, like patches of leftover snow, mixed in among his stiff, wiry head of hair" (Murakami 209). Her description forces an awareness of the "mixed in"; the figurative is perfectly interspersed with the literal. The narrator continues her descriptions: "He was tall, his cheeks were sharply chiseled, like frozen crags, his fingers covered with frost that looked like it would never, ever melt. Other than this, he looked perfectly normal" (Murakami 209). The narrator's description extensively uses the literal—cheeks "like frozen crags," "fingers covered in frost"—then concludes with an assertion of the figurative—"he looked perfectly normal." The text establishes infinite possibilities by refusing to foreclose a specific formulation of the Ice Man. Rather than disambiguating his polysemic nature, the text exploits it. In this exploitation, the literal and the figurative constitute an endless expanse, a multiplicity of physicality. Furthermore, the text "never, ever" establishes the Ice Man as a specific resolution of the two tendencies. In this way, his being is always a radical becoming;

rather than a product, he is a process of interaction between different concepts. The Ice Man is the incalculable, limitless Other because he is always becoming Other.

The Impossibility of Return

The Ice Man's ambiguity creates an important imbalance within the text, a catalyst for the narrator's own self-ruination. He acts as the incalculable, limitless Other into which the narrator ruins herself. In her self-ruination, she receives nothing in return. Despite marrying the Ice Man and making love to him, the narrator is unable to bring him into proximal subjection, and thus unable to know him. She describes the first moment of interaction:

I was dying to find out more about what an Ice Man was all about. Was he really made out of ice? What did he eat? Where did he live in the summer? Did he have a family? Those sorts of questions. Unfortunately, the Ice Man didn't talk about himself at all, and I didn't dare ask the questions that whirled around in my head. I figured he didn't feel like talking about those things. Instead he talked about me, who I am. (Murakami 211)

The narrator's desire to know the Ice Man—one that inflicts a metaphorical violence on herself in that she is "dying"—is ultimately suspended by her own inability to speak. Yet this desire is present, collecting inside the narrator as a string of questions she does not "dare ask." The Ice Man does not offer information about himself, which forecloses the narrator's desire for a sense of return. In the developing relationship between the two, the Ice Man is the absence of knowledge while the narrator is known. Discourse about her alone circulates between them.

When they return to Tokyo and begin to date, the narrator attempts to cross the knowledge impasse. She asks, "Why don't you ever talk about yourself?" (Murakami 212). However, the Ice Man's answer perfects the imbalance between the two and creates the

impossibility of return: “I have no past. I know the past of everything else, and preserve it. But I have no past myself” (Murakami 212). Even through discourse, the Ice Man remains completely unknown. His Otherness is radical to the point that he is othered from himself; he doesn’t know “where [he] was born,” or “what [his] parents look like, or whether [he] even had any,” or finally “if [he] even [has] an age” (Murakami 212). The Ice Man is precisely an absence. Rather than an excess of knowledge, the text (and thus the narrator) characterizes him as an infinite lack of knowledge about himself. He is unable to give, share, or exchange anything related to selfhood. This imbalance, the fully realized known/unknown binary, inevitably destabilizes the narrative and enables the self-Other exchange that occurs later.

Even in moments of intimacy, the Ice Man escapes the narrator; she cannot collapse the distance that obscures the Ice Man and thus prevent her own complete ruination. The distance established by the “*That’s*” used to identify the Ice Man as other in the beginning of the narrative sustains throughout, despite their intimacy. The narrator briefly describes making love to the Ice Man:

When we made love, I always pictured a solitary, silent clump of ice off somewhere...What he did was convey a memory of that ice...The first few times we made love, I was confused, but soon I grew to love it. I grew to love it when he took me in his arms. As always he never said a word about himself, not even why he became an Ice Man, and I never asked him. The two of us simply held each other in the darkness, sharing that enormous ice” (Murakami 213)

Intimacy, which inevitably attempts to transcend the physical, brings selves into more complete knowledge of each other. The narrator attempts to dismantle the distance of “there” for the “here” of intimacy beyond the physical in seeking knowledge or a return. Yet this is impossible

for the narrator; she cannot move beyond “his arms” to a transcendent self. Instead the Ice Man “conveys a memory” of “a solitary, silent clump of ice.” Instead of sharing the self, they share an abstraction; they share the impossibility of “here.” The narrator accepts this impossibility, appropriates it as part of love: “I grew to love it.” This impossibility again renders the Ice Man as the limitless: he endlessly defies physical configuration, lacks a conception of his own past from which to produce a notion of self, and continually escapes the possibility of the “here.” To the narrator, he is an absence; he forecloses the possibility of return.

Part of the Ice Man’s status as radical Other lies in his configuration as the finite perceived in the infinite (the figure of the ghost evinces this concept). Unlike the narrator, who begins as a finite being and becomes subsequently dispersed over the infinite (thus, a trace of the finite), the Ice Man begins at this point. The narrator describes the Ice Man, still in the initial moment of the story: “There was something about him that pierced right through you. Especially his eyes, and that silent, transparent look that gleamed like an icicle on a winter’s morning—the sole glint of life in an otherwise provisional body” (Murakami 209). The image of the Ice Man’s eyes gestures at the idea of collectivity, of finitude in the singularity of “an icicle.” Yet this idea struggles against the Ice Man’s endless polysemy, the infinite permutations of his physical being. The interplay of these forces manifests as the gaze itself, “the sole glint of life in an otherwise provisional body” that “pierce[s] right through” the narrator. However, the “silent, transparent look” in his eyes do not exchange or give back. His agency is purely transparent, his commonality or communion with the narrator is nothing, or rather, through nothing. Her description makes it clear that the encounter with the Ice Man is solely a rupture and “overflowing” of her self at the edge of the limitless.

The Gaze That Removes Subjectivity

The narrative continuously emphasizes the Ice Man's gaze, the gaze that catalyzes the narrator's self-shattering. The first time the narrator speaks to the Ice Man, she says, "[He] slowly raised his head, looking like he was carefully listening to the wind blowing far away. He gazed intently at me..." (Murakami 210). The narrator is acutely aware of the gaze that seems to come from nowhere, from the Ice Man's absence. First described in terms of "wind blowing far away," the gaze suddenly shifts and manifests as a focal point. The emphasis the narrative places on the gaze suggests its importance. The self/Other binary is preserved through the visual, a sense that is unavoidably distal.

Through the gaze, Ice Man already knows everything about her. The narrator says, "It's hard to believe, but he knew everything there was to know about me...He knew it all" (Murakami 211). The narrator's entire past, the most intimate moments that constitute who she is, are instantly revealed to the Ice Man through his gaze (as Ice preserves the physical). The narrator is thus fully, completely rendered as a finite self by the Ice Man. The Ice Man's gaze, always a silence and an absence, shapes the narrator's subjectivity; he sees her complete past, even events invisible to her: "Even things I'd long forgotten, he knew everything about" (Murakami 211). However, paradoxically, the Ice Man delivers her finitude. In this way, the absence of the Ice Man, his unoffered presence in the form of the gaze, shapes the narrator's subjectivity. She stands in relation to him as the limited, the finite.

Yet, the distance that reveals her entire history and shapes her subjectivity is the exterior vehicle through which the radical Other obliterates her. She describes the feeling of being under the gaze: "...I blushed. I felt like I had been stripped naked in front of people" (Murakami 211). In this way the Ice Man's gaze forces the narrator to become aware of her own vanishing self,

but as a body. It is the body that engenders her subjectivity for the Ice Man. The narrator becomes aware of her “pierced” self enacting a slow dispersal into “naked” otherness.

The narrator describes the moment she loses conception of self beyond the physical after she suggests a honeymoon to the South Pole: “The Ice Man looked deep into my eyes, unblinking. His look was like a sharply pointed icicle piercing deep into my brain. He was silent for a while, thinking, then with a twinkle in his voice he said, All right” (Murakami 215). The gaze penetrates the narrator and obliterates her self, her agency, her narrating power. She cannot speak after this rupture of the self; she can only nod. She says, “I couldn’t respond. His icicle stare had frozen my brain and I couldn’t think” (Murakami 215). After the moment of penetration, the “sole glint of life” in the Ice Man’s gaze manifests as a “twinkling in his voice.” Thus, the diminishing of the narrator is the beginning of his unavoidable movement over her into a subject position where the power resides in speech and in language. The narrator becomes the erotic, the Other, through an external manifestation of obliterated subjectivity.

“Known, Savored, Received”

The gaze that induces nakedness marks the point of the erotic project, the overthrowing of the self and an eternal emphasizing of the body. French critic Roland Barthes gestures at the erotic project in his work *The Empire of Signs*. He writes, “...the body exists, acts, shows itself, without hysteria, without narcissism, but according to a pure—though subtly discontinuous—erotic project” (Barthes 10). The erotic irreducibly concerns itself with the pure physicality of the body. The erotic is the speech of the physical that depends on the absence of the self through which to comprehend that speech. For the narrator, the erotic project is the loss of subjectivity.

The erotic project culminates in the icy wasteland of the South Pole, the landscape of the physical. The Ice Man's gaze entirely sees the narrator's body; this complete seeing forces an awareness of herself as a vanishing self, a physical being, an Other. Through the nakedness exposed by the gaze, the narrator is physicalized. She discards her power as a speaking self in the moment she calls the landscape of the physical into being. The narrating self disintegrates into the physical, which operates as a trace of her self. This transition emerges in the narrative after she suggests a honeymoon to the South Pole to the Ice Man: "...ever since I mentioned the name 'South Pole' he changed. His eyes grew more piercing and icicle-like than ever, his breath whiter, his fingers covered with an increasing amount of frost" (Murakami 215). The narrator is acutely aware of increases in the physical, more so than in any other part of the narrative. Moreover, the increases come as the narrator references the name "South Pole" as a linguistic object. Even the spoken words between her and the Ice Man call attention to themselves as instances of the physical.

The narrator transitions from the community of the speaking to the community of the physical through the erotic project. The Ice Man, the infinite physical, crosses over her into the position of the subject thus displacing the narrator when they arrive in the South Pole. The narrator says,

As we walked down the ramp and first set foot at the South Pole, I could feel my husband's whole body tremble. It all happened in the blink of an eye, in half an instant...Something inside him sent a quiet yet intense jolt through him...He stood there, looked up at the sky, then at his hands, and then let out a deep breath. He looked over at me and smiled. (Murakami 216)

In the landscape of the physical, the body dominates the narration. The narrator perceives the Ice Man's "whole body tremble." The infinite physical emerges into a community of ice, the element preserving the physical. Ice is the sole signifier in the South Pole, and the primary signifier in the name "Ice Man" (ice is itself the word that violently pulls the semantic of Ice Man in two divergent directions, the literal and the figurative). In this way, the South Pole constitutes complete community for the Ice Man. The landscape is the totalizing of his being. He acknowledges himself as a being when he "[looks] up at the sky, then at his hands." He exhales a "deep breath" and for the first time in the narrative he smiles. The narrator says shortly thereafter, "*The husband here at the South Pole is not the husband I used to know*" (Murakami 217). The Ice Man is configured as a subject in the South Pole. His agency moves beyond that of the "sole glint of life" in the gaze.

The totalizing of the body is the othering of the narrator. She loses words, agency, and conception of self in the landscape of the physical. Because of the necessary division of bodies, the Ice Man crosses over the narrator as subject while she is othered in the same instant. In this crossing, she is bereft of language. She says, "Occasionally I'd stop passersby and ask where the penguins were, but they'd merely shake their head. They couldn't understand my words, so I'd end up sketching a penguin on a piece of paper to show them, but all I got was the same response—a silent shake of the head" (Murakami 217). The narrator is without language beyond the physical. In fact, under the erotic project and the eternalizing emphasis of the body, the physical is the speech of the Other. Roland Barthes' writes, "[In the erotic project], it is the other's entire body which has been known, savored, received, and which has displayed (to no real purpose) its own narrative, its own text" (Barthes 10). The gaze originally placed upon the narrator erases herself. She has been "known, savored, received" to the point of nakedness. This

point marks her as Other in the landscape of the physical, especially because the Ice Man crosses over her in this landscape. The narrator's speech transforms into the silence of the body "[displaying] its own narrative" as the few citizens of the South Pole "[can't] understand [her] words." In the breakdown of language in the erotic project, the body speaks, "a silent shake of the head."

The narrator loses all conception of self and selfhood under the erasure (or self-obliteration) of the erotic project, which figures in as a critical component in "Ice Man"; she remains as a trace of herself dispersed into an endless horizon of the physical. She says, "Finally, though, in the midst of this silent, icy world, all strength drained out of me, ebbing away bit by bit" (Murakami 217). There is silence in the physical that drains the speaking self out of the narrator. The strength of language to shape and interpret experience and to define the self "[ebbs] away bit by bit" until the silence of the landscape renders her as a trace of that self. She moves from narrating subject to physical Other through the force of the gaze, through her nakedness. This force is the external manifestation of self-obliteration. The projection of herself into the incalculable, limitless Other and the subjectivity-shaping gaze reduces the narrator to a trace of herself. These results, in part, constitute the critical prerequisites of reorganizing the metaphysics of love as self-obliteration. The reorganization occurs as the narrator's subjectivity approaches the limit of the trace.

Suspension in the physical is an important aspect of the story that halts the narrative. The totalizing of the body excludes the narrator's departure from the South Pole; that is, in the landscape of the physical, the power of narrating and speaking ceases: "The outrageous weight of the eternal past had grabbed us and wasn't about to let go. We'd never be able to shake free";

and later, "...the white wind blows his frozen words further and further into the past" (Murakami 218). In this way, the collapse and obliteration of the self is eternally emphasized.

"The Voluntary Obliteration of the Self"¹

Through narrating itself, the narrator enacts the self-obliteration in Nietzsche's metaphysics of love. French theorist Michel Foucault's "author-function" recognizes this process by marking the "division and distance" (Foucault 1631) between author and text, which implies an interactivity of these terms with one another in order to sustain the space between them and to operate as mutually constitutive: the author creates text while the text equally obliterates the author. This exchange characterizes narration as the vanishing point of the narrator, and yet the vanishing is always a becoming of nothing, a necessary function impossible to complete. Thus, in authoring her own narrative, the narrator instantiates an entity that endlessly and inevitably erases her. Because "Ice Man" is told in the first person past tense, the narrator assumes authorship of her past; she authors from a point to which the narrative returns. Through this return, the story gradually subsumes and reduces her. Narrating itself disperses her into the infinite, and in doing so, obliterates her.

The narrator begins with, "My husband's an Ice Man" (Murakami 209). Her first word, "my," momentarily situates her outside of the bounds of the narration she creates. The word carries with it an awareness of authorship in its most acute sense. First, the word is the creation of the narrative space into which the narrator will eventually fall. The narrative cannot conceal this moment of its inception. In fact, the first word is an unavoidable glimpse of the exteriority which instantiates it. Second, the word is a proclamation of identity and ownership. "My" implicitly establishes a self and a power of ownership. The force of the opening statement

¹ This section of the paper is a re-articulation of a previous analysis submitted for Literary Theory.

implies the ownership not just of an Ice Man husband, but also of a narrative itself. Through this beginning, the narrator tacitly says, “*my* narrative,” and in this initial moment, the narrative is secondary to the presence of the narrator.

However, the identity and ownership of the narrative voice is represented in the narrative by what it is not. Thus, after the momentary glimpse of an exteriority which gives rise to the narrative, the narrator gives herself over to an illusion of the text. Words are not at all the objects they call into being, and yet, the wish of writing is to obscure that distinction. This is the nature of the signifier, what for Jacques Derrida is the present absence. For the authoring subject within writing, the individual is replaced by what she is not. The author becomes a permeable field, an illusion created between the interactions of signifier and signified.

Narration is a foreclosure of the exterior itself (and text is purely the interplay of signs without an exterior). A constant movement towards the interior is effectively the loss of visibility and, paradoxically, the reduction of the self. Once the narrator calls the complete *telos* of the story into being, of traveling to the South Pole, her visibility within her own narration drastically decreases through confrontation with a recurring dream that enacts the subsuming role of narrative upon the narrator and forecloses exteriority. Both falling into a recurring dream and falling into a deep hole within that recurring dream dissimulate the narrator into interiority:

...the same awful dream night after night. I’m walking somewhere when I fall into a deep hole. Nobody finds me and I freeze solid. I’m frozen inside the ice, gazing up at the sky. I’m conscious but can’t even move a finger...There is no future for me, just the past steadily accumulating...I slip further and further away. (Murakami 216)

The recurring dream signals a shift in authorial presence. The act of “walking somewhere,” implies a self through which those actions pass but which the text removes in the same thought

“when [she] falls into a deep hole.” The narrator loses her visibility as a particular narrating subject, removed from the world of sight to the bottom of a deep hole. Moreover, falling into interiority completely suspends the self through which she orchestrates her own desires and narrating power. She “can’t even move a finger.”

She is subsumed and reduced to an interior. That is, her exteriority is foreclosed in two unavoidable ways by a movement away from her self to her own narration and away from her own narration into the recurring dream. The narration and the dream within the narration both “[create] an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (Foucault 1623). The authoring subject diminishes through the act of investing an exterior into an interior. In this way, text establishes itself as the point where the author is not, where exteriority is nothing but interiority. And yet because the act of authoring is an instantiation of the signified, an “exterior deployment,” the author can only “endlessly” vanish.

Moreover, the dream removes her from the present moment, a position necessary for the narrator. Thus, the dream prefigures the constant removal and reduction of the narrator. It enacts a violent dispersal of the narrator into the past and out of the position of narrator in a way that suggests she will never narrate again. She “slip[s] further and further away,” unable to return to the presence necessary for narration. Under erasure, she is “just the past steadily accumulating,” and thus “an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.” The narrator falls repeatedly through this opening, the dream itself.

The Ice Man attempts to comfort her when she awakes in tears, saying, “It was only a dream...Dreams come from the past, not from the future. Dreams shouldn’t control you—you should control *them*” (Murakami 216). She responds to the Ice Man, “You’re right,” but leaves this unspoken but visible within the narrative space: “but I’m not at all certain” (Murakami 216).

Thus, what she speaks is revoked. The act of narrating inevitably and endlessly seeks to erase the narrator through a distinct power of the narrative itself. The narrator is therefore powerless to resist the gradual diminishing of her own self from within her text. Murakami transposes this violent and unending process into visibility; it manifests as the lack of satiating sleep, as powerlessness within his narrator to resist the gradual dispersal of the self into the infinite.

Like Nietzsche's formulation of a metaphysics of love, Foucault describes the act of producing a text as "the voluntary obliteration of the self" (Foucault 1624). In this way, authoring and loving are perhaps identical. Authoring is effectively a process of voluntarily discarding the self for the text. Interpretation of the text renders the author or narrator as an obscurity dispersed beyond the text itself. Foucault states that texts "cancel out the signs of [an author's] particular individuality" (Foucault 1624). The author is indiscernible behind a text that gains defining characteristics. Moreover, the very concept of writing "merely [transposes] the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity" (Foucault 1625). In this way, the author becomes infinite and transcendent, and yet anonymous in that transcendence. The dispersal and canceling of the authoring subject by the very concept of writing occurs to a point, to a limit, however, leaving only the reciprocal concept of "to have authored." This dispersal constitutes an obliteration of the individual author, an erasure of the finite.

And thus, through love and also through narrating, the narrator of "Ice Man" overthrows herself as finite. After the final narrative arch is completed (and the narrator seemingly quiet), the narrating self is finally "obliterated" amidst the totality of her narrative. She says:

Finally, though, in the midst of this silent, icy world, all strength drained out of me, ebbing away bit by bit. Even, in the end, the strength to feel upset by my situation. My

emotional compass has vanished. I lost all sense of direction, of time, *of the sense of who I was*. (Murakami 217, my emphasis)

The silence of the South Pole indicates an end of narration. “Finally” equally establishes this end. There is no more insertion of exteriority into a narrative at this point; the narrator has exhausted that exterior of the self into the text that endlessly vanishes her. Through its exertion, authorial power ebbs away bit by bit until the author is subsumed by the “icy world” she originally calls into being.

In narrating, she loses “the sense of who [she] was.” This loss outstrips the loss of author as an impossible exteriority within an interiority. Within the pure interiority of her own narrative, she loses, precisely, the *sense* of herself. The permeable field between signifier and signified, sense itself, is isolated and dismantled. What remains, after a moment where the agency of the author has been completely subsumed, is pure text. And yet in its very concept, the text transposes the trace of its exteriority to the transcendental and to the infinite. Thus, this moment in “Ice Man” marks the point where the author is dispersed as the limit of the existence of text, the trace of agency which sets them in motion. Text suspends the obliteration of the author as inevitable and endless. The forestalling of movement past the South Pole halts the narrative, which produces the text as an endless repetition of itself—an endless repetition of the declaration: “I fell deeply in love with him, and he came to love me, the present me, apart from any past or future. And I came to love the Ice Man for who he is now, apart from any past or future...the Ice Man was the first person I’d ever truly loved” (Murakami 212).

Nothingness

Through the “delirious, unreasoning will to a dissolution of self,” through the erotic project of the Ice Man’s gaze that pierces the narrating self and displaces her through nakedness into the infinite physical horizon, and finally through the act of narrating itself, the narrator is reduced to a trace. Nietzsche’s metaphysics of love as self-obliteration constitutes this diminishing. And yet, how can love persist through this emptiness? The narrator herself says, “My heart is just about gone now” (Murakami 218). “Heart” evinces the notion of love and its function of double movement: giving and receiving. One gives of herself, and in that giving, necessarily receives something back. Yet, Murakami’s narrator falls deeply in love with the Ice Man, the radical Other defined by absence and the infinite. Here, it is impossible to receive anything back; thus, the narrator gives, is taken from, perhaps, and ultimately becomes the limit of the trace, an absence.

We argue that love persists through the absenting of the self. “Ice Man” never departs from the love story it begins. At the conclusion of the story, the narrator recognizes the Ice Man’s love. He says, “You know I love you,” to which she replies in the text, “And I know it’s true. The Ice Man does love me” (Murakami 218). The narrator continually declares her love and recognizes the Ice Man’s own declarations of love.

Thus, through the endless cycling of the narrative, “Ice Man” simultaneously critiques Nietzsche’s metaphysics of love as self-ruination and insinuates its reconfiguration. That is, in order to make sense of the love that repeatedly surfaces, the text entirely shifts the function of love from presence to absence. How else can one love when she is nothing?

French theorist Jean-Luc Nancy offers a reading of Jacques Lacan’s definition of love that articulates the reconfiguration of the love function in “Ice Man.” For Lacan, “love consists

in giving what one does not have” (Nancy). Lacan’s definition seems to indicate that once the self is “what one does not have” anymore, then, exactly a nothingness of the self is the very basis of love. Indeed, Nancy asserts this, saying “So *to love* means to give what is behind or beyond any subject, any self. It is precisely a giving of nothing, a giving of the fact that I cannot possess myself...love is to share the impossibility of being a self” (Nancy). Nancy’s reflection on Lacan’s definition allows love to retain a presence in the continual absencing of the narrator. If conceptualized in this way, the narrator gives “the fact that [she] cannot possess [her]-self,” which is evident through the myriad ways in which the narrator is othered. The narrator of “Ice Man” is unable to possess herself, in fact, she obliterates it; she is obliterated from the very forces she sets in motion. She instantiates the union between her and the Ice Man, calls the physical horizon into being, and voluntarily obliterates herself through the act of narration. In these ways, it is impossible for her to remain a self; she gives what is “beyond” her, the very nothingness she becomes.

Nancy offers further clarification of Lacan’s definition. He says, “Everywhere in Lacan’s system you have this haunting nothingness, which here gives perhaps a certain pessimistic or ironic sound to his definition of love” (Nancy). Nothingness—the lack—indeed characterizes Lacan’s system just as it characterizes Murakami’s “Ice Man.” The lack is “haunting” if it is left as an absence; however, if it is filled, as all lacks should be if possible, the system produces a moment of fullness. The absence in “Ice Man” should not be interpreted as lack because *it can be filled*. Nancy proposes a reading of Lacan’s system that articulates the shift of the function of love from presence to absence. He says, “Love means precisely to fill the emptiness with emptiness, and thus to share it” (Nancy). In this sense, love is a fullness of emptiness. Nancy’s reading allows love, the self, and the absences in “Ice Man” to emerge as elements of community,

to engage in the sharing which characterizes union. Love persists in "Ice Man" because the function of love is reconfigured as that which allows the sharing of nothing.

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