



My Annihilation

Fuminori Nakamura

Sam Bett, Translator

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“Turn the page, and you may give up your entire life” begins *My Annihilation*, Fuminori Nakamura’s jigsaw puzzle of a novel exploring themes of connection and consequence through personal identity and responsibility.

In a remote mountain lodge, an unnamed narrator prepares to assume the identity of Ryodai Kozuka. In his room are false IDs and a journal that he assumes was left by Kozuka. There is also a locked suitcase that he suspects contains Kozuka’s body. In addition to relating Kozuka’s childhood background, the journal contains a psychological analysis of a murderer of four girls. The last page of the journal reads “YOU’D BETTER RUN.”

A doctor of psychosomatic medicine, the narrator also once treated a suicidal patient, Yukari, through hypnosis, attempting to replace bad memories with good ones, even though he knew the technique would have only temporary effects. He fell in love with Yukari; he replaced a memory of abuse with a memory of loving him. His quest for revenge on the men who hurt Yukari also involves hypnosis and planted memories, creating a whirl of mixed-up identities in a morbid farce.

Using a combination of techniques, including first-person narration, journal entries, letters, and articles, the novel poses the question, “What is a ‘self’? Under a particular set of circumstances, it becomes impossible to tell.”

The characters are interesting, yet flawed, even evil. Their motivations generate both empathy and horror. Yukari is tragic; her personality is nearly obliterated. Still, she elicits sympathy. Surprises abound, plotted with such care that they ultimately seem inevitable. The prose is deft; it varies according to the character who’s relating the story, or the medium being conveyed.

The psychological thriller *My Annihilation* poses multiple philosophical questions during its roller coaster of a story—not a whodunnit, but a who-is-it.

KAREN MULVAHILL (January / February 2022)

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