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Chapter Two

Wave or Particle?

Crossing Borders in Ruth Ozeki's novel A Tale for the Time Being (2013)

Peter Schmidt

This essay honors my friend and colleague Professor Amritjit Singh's life and work through a meditation on one of the most important novels in English published in the twenty-first century. Set in two archipelagos, Japan and in Desolation Sound on the west coast of North America, north of Seattle and Vancouver, *A Tale for the Time Being* begins when a Hello Kitty lunchbox containing texts in English, French, and Japanese drifts east across the Pacific Ocean sealed in plastic. The novel is woven from the different perspectives of two narrators, a troubled Japanese teenager named Nao Yasutani who assembles the Hello Kitty text-cluster; and a middle-aged woman writer named Ruth who finds the plastic container on a beach, becomes fascinated, and begins reading aloud from Nao's diary each night. This "Ruth" appears to be Ruth Ozeki's fictional double. The contrapuntal narrative that ensues unfolds with all the wit and paradoxes of a Zen Buddhist koan—a brilliant embodiment in narrative of key principles of both Buddhism and quantum physics, as well as themes of transnational cultural flows and Anthropocene worries that humans have a death wish and may make Earth uninhabitable for us and many other species. While a profoundly philosophical and timely book, *Time Being* is also full of humor and vividly voiced, engaging characters. Its primary mode of narration involves asking questions, not asserting answers, and—appropriate to both its Buddhist and quantum sources of inspiration—its mood is marked by wonder and a sense of mystery and playfulness, not shrill certainties.

Is a person's identity defined primarily via separation from others or through interconnections with them? If the act of reading (especially literature) encourages empathy, does that act of identification flow along axes of perceived sameness, or can it recognize and honor difference? How stable is the dichotomy separating empathy from bullying, an engine of *difference-generation* in which a person's, group's, or even a nation's identity is affirmed and unified by making an Other abject and then expelling it from the body politic? A similar question is asked by David Palumbo-Liu's 2012 study *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age*,¹ which investigates literature's role in an age when global capital and mass media increasingly manage the "difference" of others for consumption, implying that basically we are all "human" and share the same desires and rights (or should). Deeply dependent upon and embedded within capitalism, can literature nonetheless make us more skeptical and resistant toward mass media's seductive but illusory forms of empathy and equality—while perhaps creating better versions?

"Affect Studies" are influential in some realms of academia, for they focus on assessing how readers respond (emotionally and intellectually) to texts and other media, including asking how such encounters may build empathy and change readers' behavior. Through such an approach, authors like Tomkins, Brennan, Ricoeur, and Nussbaum make a case for the ethical function of the arts and humanities. But many of the claims made by affect studies treat literature in a way that is alien to its central mysteries and paradoxes. Literature should not be conceived as a just-in-time delivery system for empathy embedded within the consumption models promoted by global capital. Can empathy really be studied as if it were a commodity, with consumer connections increasing or decreasing? Instead of being interested mainly in "relatable" characters—a cliché popular with contemporary students that basically means "I identify with characters like me, ones I relate to and understand"—why can't we have a *change-centered* rather than "relatable" model for readerly connection, one that explores how a reader's self may be profoundly changed by a journey into different selves and worlds? As a character says in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, she learned "tenderness toward the unknown and anonymous, which is tenderness toward the self"—that is, toward "our" self's unknown histories and voices (49). Such a discovery would involve deep rather than shallow empathy, a two-way dynamic rather than a delivery system.

Furthermore, "affect" and "ethics" models of reading are impoverished if they don't spend enough attention on *how characters in narratives themselves may model how deep empathy works*, including how another's emotions may influence our own (Teresa Brennan's key claim). Narratives often also explore the hurtful consequences of treating others merely as instruments to be manipulated for one's own goals. Analyzing readers' responses

to literature is a notoriously complicated process; it's hardly a matter of measuring levels of consumer satisfaction. In contrast, attending to how shallow versus deep empathy function *within a text* is an achievable goal—a rich data-set is all there, waiting to be interpreted.

Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* takes an invigoratingly different approach to modeling reading, empathy, and ethical action in a globe dominated by capital flows and information exchange. What if we imagine a text as written for an ideal reader who will involve herself so intensely in the text's story-world (its diegesis) that she may be driven to cross barriers of space and time in dream to influence its events? Ozeki's novel presents us with just such a radical ethics of reading. It also asks these fascinating questions: In what ways do both Buddhist ethics and quantum physics model such an "entangled" sense of readerly and textual identity? What would it be like for a reader to experience a truly quantum/Taoist narrative? In *Time Being* Ozeki offers both Buddhism and quantum physics as counter-models to global capitalism's pitch that freedom is best realized via market exchanges where self-interest dominates and "access" to others is guaranteed. Here Ozeki is very much in tune with other theorists, including Teresa Brennan, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and the novelist Gish Jen, who have all argued in different ways for a theory of the *interdependent* self as a critique of possessive individualism—not to mention works such as Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* or Wai-chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* that identify complex global cultural flows shaping "local" identity and history.²

Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* participates in at least two other contemporary critical debates regarding how we should conceive, read, and teach global literature. First, truly "global" literature must be concerned with the fate of the planet. Over six years in the making and completely reconceived after the twin tsunami and Fukushima nuclear plant disasters of 2011, *A Tale for the Time Being* suggests that how we conceive of nature is part of the problem. The term "environment" is packed with suspect assumptions: it places us humans at the center of the world and treats "Nature" as the environs apart from us, full of resources we have a right to extract. Better to see ourselves less egocentrically as a node in a web, affecting and affected by the whole, without a Biblical sense of "dominion" and entitlement (as in *Genesis*). Thus the new term *Anthropocene* to describe the modern era, in which human activity created climate change.³ One of Ozeki's characters, Ruth's husband Oliver, meditates a good deal on fossil fuel addiction and its opposite, a reactionary zeal for preserving as some sort of micro-climate antidote supposedly natural areas with native flora and fauna. Will natural areas really counter global changes and species extinction, or the everyday suffering of animals caused by human activities, such as the gyres of junk (including dissolved plastic) rotating in the Pacific and other oceans? Oliver campaigns

to plant species like ginkgo trees, which thrived on their island in the warmer climate of a pre-human era, the Pleistocene, but his efforts are met with scorn by “nativists” suggesting he is introducing “alien” species.

Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* asks what role the humanities (including the arts, philosophy, and religion) may play in joining with the natural sciences and the social sciences to force nations and other entities, including corporations, to act in order to divert disaster. Those decrying global warming often focus primarily on the effects of fossil fuel extraction, but a powerful Anthropocene perspective arguably needs a broader historical perspective. Humans first began planetary resource extraction not during the industrial era but in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Plantation slavery in the Americas was extractive both of natural and human resources, its methods resulting in a whole new level of violence on a global scale. So too slavery’s dark double, in which productive local agricultural and manufacturing economies were dismantled by colonial powers to create dependency (as in South Asia and elsewhere). The world’s first truly multinational corporations (including the British East India Company) had a profound effect on both the global ecosystem and human populations.⁴

Ozeki’s novels bid to become touchstone works as we try to think historically and critically and be less human-centric. Ozeki’s experiments with interdependent characters and portals between story-worlds in *Time Being* fit Trexler’s credo that strong Anthropocene novels “challenge received literary functions, such as character, setting, milieu, class, time, and representation” (16). Understood more broadly, Ozeki’s fiction is also part of a cultural shift in our understanding of science, not just of how fiction works. As Trexler notes about the historian of science Bruno Latour, science “is characterized by the ongoing activity of creating new methods of knowledge production”; scientific facts, not to mention interpretations of those facts, are what emerge “from ongoing, developing human practices. . . . In Latour’s account, modernity is best understood as a style of ontology that artificially separates Nature and Society, objects and subjects” (21). Ozeki’s exploration of both Buddhist meditative practices and the scientific testing of assumptions in *Tale for the Time Being* offers her own dynamic enactment of Latour’s counter-claim in *We Have Never Been Modern* for “the ontological interdependence of subjects and objects, society and nature, [that] has proved productive in environmental criticism” (Trexler 21; my italics). Hers is truly Anthropocene fiction, casting a cold eye on both modernism’s human-centrism and the nostalgia for such arrogance that permeates much so-called postmodernism.

Second, although Ozeki’s fiction uses many techniques associated with both modernist and postmodern/postcolonial fiction—such as intertextuality, collage, and multiple languages, points of view, and even story-worlds—her work is profoundly resistant to some of the assumptions we usually associate

with modernist form and its successors. For instance, although we hear pronouncements of the death of the author and/or of “master narratives” (Barthes, Lyotard), much late twentieth- and twenty-first century fiction yearns for what Paul Dawson has aptly called the return of “authorship and authority” embodied in an omniscient narrator. Ozeki swerves away from either of these extremes and thereby slyly critiques them. David Palumbo-Liu rightly suggested that Ozeki’s earlier novel, *My Year of Meats*, is a “calculated and persistent rebuttal of the postmodern” (188), even though it appears quintessentially postmodern at first glance. That is, *Meats* ironically imitates many different kinds of discourse, including film, advertising, and a wide range of text genres and diction, to critique what global capitalism promotes as a new “real” to be consumed. (In this case, tragicomically, hamburger beef in Japan as a way for stressed U.S. producers to gain a new market and for Japanese to access a lifestyle of “independence” associated with cowboys, cattle, and the American West.) Such writerly techniques are arguably not “postmodern” at all, however, but deeply connected to the long history of the novel itself, an omnivorous discursive form since its inception. As Mikhail Bakhtin long ago demonstrated, great fiction imitates and sets against each other most or all of the forms of discourse active in the era of its composition, without maintaining conventional hierarchies or “truths”; it is dialogic rather than monologic.

A Tale for the Time Being uses dialogic intertextuality and multilingualism even more boldly, directly targeting our contradictory nostalgia for omniscience in an age of global corporate power and media phantasmagoria. Here too Buddhism provides a source of inspiration. But we must understand Ozeki’s Buddhism (she is a practicing nun) *not* as an easily packaged panacea to the stresses of modernity, as Buddhism is so often promoted in the West. In his study of the autobiographical novel in Japan, Edward Fowler quotes Irakawa Budai, a contemporary Japanese writer: “*You see, there is no God in the Japanese tradition, no monotheistic ordering authority in narrative—and that makes all the difference*” (quoted in Ozeki, *Time Being* 149; italics hers). *A Tale for the Time Being* has no omniscient narrator, though one of the characters (Ruth) does annotate the English and Japanese in Nao’s diary to aid her and our comprehension. Character-Ruth and author-Ruth, however, cannot be collapsed or ordered into one identity; her “self” remains hybrid and ever-changing. Similarly, the book’s twin primary narrative lines (Nao’s and Ruth’s) are not entirely separate story-worlds. For Ozeki the act of reading must be collaborative and based on an ethics of border-crossing empathy and action. Such an exchange must be deeply *time-based* as well, recognizing our capacity for error, our mortality, and the importance of recognizing error and revising it. It is a readerly ethos of profound humility, resisting the sin of omniscience and the belief that one can fully “know” or experience another being or another world. (As Ruth says in the book’s

epilogue, echoing poet John Keats' concept of Negative Capability, she believes that "Not knowing is the most intimate way" [402].) *A Tale for the Time Being* explores just such an ethics for our reading/interpreting as "time beings." Even more audaciously, it suggests that an acute awareness of finite time and interdependency taught by literary texts may model a better way to interact with other beings and with our planet Earth.

In the space left, I discuss in more detail two ways in which Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* models border-crossing forms of collaborative reflection, interpretation, and action. The first is Ruth's and her husband Oliver's very different but equally valid ways of responding to Nao's diary when they read it aloud together. The second considers how deeply the novel's interest in both oral performance and intertextual form is allied with its conception of the interdependent self and the lived paradoxes of Buddhist being and quantum time on a fragile planet.

Oliver's way of interpreting doesn't focus on emotional bonds with characters so much as being skeptical and ironic about the very identification process involved in reading fiction ("She says she's writing it for you. So do you feel special?" [35]). When Nao worries her book might be thrown in the garbage rather than read, her word-choice sparks Oliver's own memory-archive about garbage and connects with his knowledge about Pacific Ocean currents, his deep disgust at the waste produced by industrial capitalism endangering not just sea-going animals but the planet itself (36). Oliver constantly connects references within the text to extra-textual information and systems, particularly those generated by the natural sciences.

Yet Ozeki has added a delicious and highly "literary" complication into the scene in which we first see Oliver interpreting Nao's text. How should we understand the italicized sentences from Nao's diary that are presented by the narrator without quotation marks, such as "*What if you think I'm a jerk and toss me into the garbage?*" (35)? Ruth has just finished reading aloud the first few entries from the found notebook, so these italicized sentences of Nao's must reside in both Ruth's and Oliver's memory. Oliver replays these words in his mind (thus the italics) and then responds to them. He takes Nao's thought in his own direction, but *it emanates from a shared space created by the book being performed aloud*. This is one of the book's dramatic early examples of collaborative reading. Another twist: throughout this scene Oliver has been tinkering with the kamikaze pilot's watch that Nao also placed in the Hello Kitty box. Suddenly, the old watch begins ticking again: "I guess I wound it," he says, somewhat surprised (37). We could add that what's really been wound up and set in motion is the novel's plot, which will eventually bring Nao and Ruth together via the miracle of reading and creating a shared space across time's barriers.

In contrast to her husband, Ruth is secretly proud but also embarrassed by the fact that as a reader she's so strongly empathetic: "Her discomfort was more on behalf of the girl," the narrator tells us. "She was feeling protective. . . . 'It's crazy, but I'm kind of worried about her. I guess I'll have to keep on reading to find out'" (35). Ruth's intuitive connection to character in story is soon graphically demonstrated: "That night she dreamed about a nun" inspired by Nao's comments about great-grandmother Jiko and her mountain Buddhist temple (38). Ruth imagines a scene that isn't represented in Nao's narrative, but influences it: the moment when Jiko responded to Nao's texting her (19) with a question about which direction "the elevator" carrying all the time beings of the world is going, up or down? As if she's a spectator standing in Jiko's room, Ruth envisions Jiko kneeling in front of her glowing computer screen to text her typically Zen-like reply, "sometimes up, sometimes down." Nao obviously texts back a frustrated question, because Ruth then sees (she can somehow read the screen) Jiko type a four-line text that Nao never mentions receiving. *We must understand this text to be Ruth's imaginative reconstruction of how Jiko might have answered Nao.* Yet it arguably provides one key to the entire novel we're reading. It's a Zen riddle:

When up looks up, up is down.
 When down looks down, down is up.
 Not-one. Not-two. Not same. Not different.
 Now [Nao] do you see? (39-40)

How you position yourself in the world influences how you see. "Up" enacts its character and looks above itself; "down" does the opposite. Up's gaze, though, positions it below what it yearns for or is curious about, whereas the opposite happens to Down. Looking for one thing, you discover its opposite (if you're open to it). By paradox and gentle mockery, the riddle teaches us to praise flexibility and resilience or openness in thinking and responding. Ruth suddenly comes "not-two" (or perhaps I should write "not too") different from Jiko: she *is* her and in her nun's room smelling the moss and incense and seeing the moon rise (at least in her vision). And yet Ruth clearly is standing apart from Jiko in the dream as well, seeing her from a slight distance. It's from that perspective that Ruth envisions Jiko in her kimono becoming like a large crow—prophesying meanings that we can't know yet until we read further and learn more about the Pacific Northwest Sliammon peoples' Grandmother Crow, as well as the famous Jungle Crow of Japan, storied creatures that are not-one yet not-different. Those mischievous crows have important roles to play in *Time Being* and allow a powerful new magic to enter Ozeki's narrative.

In sum, in this first dream-scene Ruth has had her first experience with becoming not so much a spectator listening to a story but a collaborative writer-reader able to enter a story-world and shape its time-being (its meanings and the outcome). Ruth and her text are two/not two. "Empathy" seems a rather impoverished concept to use to describe what has occurred in Ruth's dream. It is certainly not connection to Nao or Jiko through sameness. Nor is it an easy celebration of non-threatening "difference." It's rather a visceral experience of perspective change and paradox like that induced by the Zen riddle or koan that Ruth-as-Jiko invents about Up and Down. Later in the novel, Ruth will have two more dream-journeys into the Yasutanis' world, each more harrowing than the last. Ruth becomes particularly concerned about Nao when Nao graphically describes the bullying she's receiving in school.

It's hard to escape the conclusion that Ruth and her husband's ways of responding to texts are also "two" yet one, or at least necessary and complementary. They frequently each notice details and make important connections that their spouse wouldn't have. Ozeki suggests more than once, however, that Ruth's empathic reader response is so strong because she's a slow reader, performing Nao's handwritten words aloud and trying to match the pace at which she imagines Nao wrote. Unlike when Ruth scans text on her computer, her connection to Nao's journal feels tactile, like a living, breathing presence. We might pun and say Ruth's relation to Nao is thus digital in the non-pixelated sense: Ruth often fingers a dog-eared corner of Nao's notebook wondering whether the author also "worried" it while she composed (34). "I am reaching through time to touch you," Nao wrote, and Ruth's mysticism encourages her to imagine the text is "warm in her hands," a living being with a pleasing smell and an aura (37–38). In both Ruth's reading and dreaming, self and "other" are confluent, collaborative.

A Tale for the Time Being thus models a deeply co-dependent connection between writer and reader/listener, not to mention a profoundly intertextual understanding of what constitutes a "text." *Time Being* does not fetishize cursive as more valid than writing done with a keyboard. The texts we read are composed of email, texting, keyword clouds, and many other digital modes, as well as a cornucopia of rhetorical devices lovingly borrowed from the long history of print. The novel's understanding of identity and agency as interpersonal is matched by its love of its own heterogeneous form. A friend of Ruth's quips at one point that "Agency is a tricky business" (375). So is the "presence" of a text itself. Indeed, at one point in the novel Nao's handwriting actually *disappears* from the diary notebook, leaving blank pages instead of an ending and causing Ruth to panic. Ruth can't see Nao's next words until through another dream late in the novel she travels back in time to Japan to intervene in Nao's story-world, giving both Nao and her father a document (the secret French diary of Nao's great uncle, Haruki Yasutani,

who died as a kamikaze fighter pilot during World War II). This document was in Nao's Hello Kitty packet but Nao hadn't been curious about it when she cast it adrift at sea—she wasn't yet ready for it. Now Nao is. When father and daughter together arrange for the French to be translated and then read the secret story of their ancestor's heroism—his decision to dive his plane into the waves rather than striking an Allied ship and killing others—both finally swerve away from their obsession with suicide. We know this because this story is told when the missing final pages of Nao's diary re-appear (and are made available to us on 359–69 and 385–90) after Ruth is at last spiritually ready to read the text she needs.

Such startling notions of interpersonal authorial agency and intertextual rather than monologic writing have deep roots in literary history, as Ozeki's many epigraphs, quotations, and allusions remind us. For instance, this one, cited by Oliver: "The ancient Greeks believed that when you read aloud, it is actually the dead, borrowing your tongue, in order to speak again" (346). Or this, from Proust: "A book is like a large cemetery upon whose tombs one can no longer read the effaced names" (357). Ozeki's novel is not a "unified" text but rather oscillates between two separate story-worlds—Nao's diary, which was written before the 2011 tsunami—and Ruth's story, told in third-person but focalized primarily through Ruth's point of view, set in the post-tsunami world after Ruth finds the diary and other texts washed up on a beach near her home on Desolation Sound. Reading Nao's memoir at a point where she is blocked by her own memoir-writing, Ruth is profoundly changed by it and then at a crisis point in her reading violates all rules of "realistic" narratives by traveling back in space and time to change the outcome of the story she reads. Separate on the printed or digital page, these story-worlds spiral around each other rather like the twin primary strands that make up DNA.

A further twist: both Nao's and Ruth's stories are experienced by us extra-diegetic readers as layered and profoundly heterogeneous, woven of many textual strands. Nao's diary, for instance, has been carefully footnoted by Ruth after she and Oliver finished it, the better to aid both their comprehension and ours. Just as Nao imagined an ideal, destined reader for her text, so does "Ruth" the character, who in her explanatory notes merges as closely as she ever does with Ruth Ozeki the novelist. The multiform identity of Ozeki's text is perfectly modeled for us by the paired Japanese characters that, as footnotes tell us, provide handy keywords for the story: *ronin* (a samurai warrior without a master, constructed from the characters for "person" and "wave" [42]) and *fumi*, the Japanese word for non-dualistic identity made from the signs for "not" and "two" (194). Texts too are ronin-like, both singular heroes and yet bearing the traces of prior writings that have passed through them like a wave. They are both themselves and not-themselves.

Time Being is supplemented by six useful appendices of Ruth's making. Two of the most important source-texts for the novel's particle/wave // two/not-two identity—Buddhism and quantum physics—are explicated both in the primary text itself and through some of Ruth's "supplementary" writings. In quantum physics, certain subatomic particles must be understood to be "entangled," influencing each other, even though they may seem separate in space and time. The twin diegetic story-worlds of *Time Being* are similarly entangled. One of Ozeki's footnotes indeed even suggests that certain linguistic morphemes too have a "quantum" or koan-like presence. Annotating a poem of Jiko's about the search for lost time, for example, Ruth notes that the poem's concluding characters, *ka na*, are in linguistic terms an "interrogative *particle* that imparts a sense of wonder" to a knowledgeable reader of Japanese poetry (23n28; my italics). The appendices and notes thus don't merely comment on the main text, providing explanatory scaffolding. They offer an electron microscopic view (as it were) of the text's hybrid linguistic textures and guide our responses. The identities of memes and beings here don't just cross borders; selves and voices are profoundly interdependent and travel not in a single universe but within a multiverse.

Multiple space-time story-worlds and the deployment of different points of view are common in contemporary narrative, including fiction and film, especially those made by creators who have metafictional and metaphysical ambitions. To take just one example, David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004) includes multiple universes set in the past, present, and future. But these are connected via irony, not empathy or knowledge—a birthmark characters unknowingly share, or pieces of text—even a diary in some cases—that have mysteriously journeyed from one diegetic world to another. A credo for Mitchell's novel may be "sunt lacrimae rerum" ("there are tears for things," from Virgil's *Aeneid* I.462), but, as A. S. Byatt pointed out in a review, Mitchell's aim was "to make a distance between us and the tense dramas and horrors he describes, to make us see everything" in ways that the novel's characters cannot.⁵ Omniscience and irony—and the model of an *atlas*—are Mitchell's master-tropes as he imperiously maps the space-time coordinates of his story-worlds. *A Tale for the Time Being*, in contrast, is inspired by terror, wonder, and the two/not-two paradoxes of *its* playful master trope, which is metaphor itself. Indeed, when Ruth uses Nao's clues and searches the Internet to try to find precisely where in Japan is Jiko's mountain temple, she can't quite find it—and is reminded of a favorite book of hers, René Daumal's 1972 novel *Mount Analogue*, whose definition of a *peradam* seems relevant: "an extraordinary and unknown crystalline object that can be seen only by those who seek it."⁶ Ozeki's novel is more cloud than atlas and has nothing to do with imperial or post-imperial dreams of omniscience.

Time in *Time Being* is as profoundly Buddhist and quantum as its sense of space. From one point of view, time's borders are absolute: we are all temporal beings and will die. Yet time also proves fluid; its borders may be crossed mentally if not physically. We might call this a sense of time Proustian, given that both physically and thematically Marcel Proust's *In Search for Lost Time* (including its final volume, *Time Regained*) is central to Ozeki's story. Nao's journal was physically inserted *inside* a hacked-out copy of Proust's masterpiece⁷ when she placed it in the Hello Kitty package along with other items, including her great-uncle's letters and secret diary. *Time Being*, we might postulate, is intertextually embedded within Proust, inspired by his exploration of time. Yet Ozeki's novel also embeds Proust within itself, not the other way around. Its Buddhism and its knowledge of quantum possibilities profoundly change how we understand the ways lost time can be regained—particularly when Ruth journeys back in time to Japan to affect the outcome of the Yasutanis' lives.

The most important time being in Ozeki's fable is Nao's mentor, the 104-year-old Buddhist nun, Jiko Yasutani, who is unquestionably one of the most extraordinary and moving heroines to appear in recent fiction. Jiko is a time-master, one who understands and experiences time as both a wave and a particle. Her meditative powers are so strong that she can slow time down into almost infinitely small units or pixels. Yet she also embodies Wai-chee Dimock's notion of the importance of "deep time" in literature, a "present" made porous and entered by all the past that has come before, all the future that impends. Consider this exemplary passage of Nao's describing her great-grandmother: "In the shadows of the bathhouse, watching her pale, crooked body rise from the steam in the dark wooden tub, I thought she looked ghostly—part ghost, part child, part young girl, part sexy woman, and part *yamaba* [mountain witch or hag], all at once. All ages and stages, combined into a single female time being" (166). It's Jiko who teaches Nao humility, plus how to develop what this anime-influenced teenager calls her "SUPA-POWA"—her destiny to accomplish a special task. And Jiko also helps Nao let emotions like anger pass through her like a wave, not reside in her and control her.

CONCLUSION

The language we use and the stories we tell play a crucial role in determining the thoughts we can have, our understanding of past, present, and future. After reading *A Tale for a Time Being*, my students (none of whom knew much Japanese, though many spoke two or more languages) adopted key terms, such as *ijime* (bullying) that helped them understand both the novel's

action and its connection to their own experience. Similar linguistic border-crossings occurred when they responded to other recent novels on my post-World War II fiction syllabi that employ multiple kinds of English as well as other languages, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (the title word), Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (äppärät), or Junot Díaz's *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (fukú).

The ethics of reading explored by Ozeki's novel could also be said to teach an ethics of translation. That is to say, a recognition that monolingual reality is dangerously imprisoning, but also that there are no easy crossings among languages. We must attend to what can only be imperfectly translated, plus how the meanings of words and the identities they give us shift depending on context, place, and time. *Tadaima* is a Japanese word you may say in thanks when you come home, but Nao teaches her destined reader that it and other associated words, such as *dannasama*, are also employed by Tokyo sex-workers to "welcome" their "masters" to Fifi's Lonely Apron (163), the site where much of Nao's diary is surreptitiously written. Feeling homeless and confused, Nao eventually learns from Jiko that her spiritual home and life-source can be in Buddhism, something she can hold in her heart and head no matter where she is. *Tadaima* also proves to reside in her writing, in the texts-within-texts she sends across the sea.

NOTES

1. Intriguingly, a Professor "P-L" who teaches Comparative Literature at Stanford University is twice cited in *Time Being* (91, 305). Palumbo-Liu's *Deliverance of Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) dates from a year before *Time Being*, which was published in 2013.

2. Ozeki's earlier novel, *My Year of Meats* (New York: Penguin, 1998), could be said to dramatize in fictional form key concepts of Arjun Appadurai's influential *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)—particularly its concepts of the varied "flows" of global "ethnoscapes" that since transnational colonialism produced a sense of the local that was inseparable from the transnational flows of capital, images, and other cultural formations. Ozeki's novel's case study involves the American beef industry using images of the "freedom" of the American West (especially cowboys) to market beef to middle-class consumers in Japan. For a good reading of both the form and the cultural context of *My Year of Meats*, see the final chapter in Palumbo-Liu's *The Deliverance of Others*.

3. The term *Anthropocene* was first proposed in 2000. For a definition and brief history, see Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 1–5.

4. If the rise of slavery is often marginalized in environmental social sciences focusing on the industrial era, it has not been ignored in fiction, especially science fiction, as Trexler well surveys. Since at least the 1950s, science fiction has been profoundly interested in terraforming, the purposeful transformation of a planet's climate to make it more hospitable for humans (Arthur C. Clark's *The Sands of Mars*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*), and its dystopian opposite, narratives of climate catastrophe (Ursula LeGuin's *The Lathe of Heaven* [1971], which Trexler calls "the first novel directly concerned with an anthropogenic greenhouse effect" [*Anthropocene Fictions*, 8]). But dystopian fiction has also explored instances where corporate slavery and colonization have been reborn in futuristic forms (Samuel R. Delany's and Philip K. Dick's

work provide just two examples). See Trexler's "Contextualizing the Climate Change Novel," in *Anthropocene Fictions*, 1–27.

5. A. S. Byatt, "Overlapping Lives," review of *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, *The Guardian*, March 6, 2004, accessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/mar/06/fiction.asbyatt>.

6. René Daumal. *Mount Analogue*. 1952. Translated by Carol Cosman (New York: Overlook Press, 2004), Appendix D, 411–12.

7. Nao finds a hollowed-out copy of Proust's masterpiece in a second-hand shop in Tokyo and realizes it can be the perfect place to hide her journal-in-progress from her classmates and parents. This later leads to her interest in Proust and learning French, and to her decision to include Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* in her Hello Kitty time-travel packet.

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