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On Not Knowing
A Tale for the Time Being and the Politics of Imagining Lives After March 11

On March 11, 2011, Japan was struck by a series of disasters: a 9.0 magnitude earthquake, the strongest in Japan's recorded history and listed as one of the five most powerful ever recorded; a tsunami that devastated the northeast coast of Honshū; and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Based on 2013 data,[1] scholars have estimated that around 18,600 people were killed during these events, including some 2,700 people whose bodies have not been found. Approximately 380,000 buildings were completely or partially destroyed, while an additional 710,000 were in other ways damaged. Due to radiation emitted by the nuclear meltdown—part of a nuclear crisis that is in no way finished[2]—around 100,000 people residing in Fukushima prefecture were forced to leave their homes; an additional 50,000 left voluntarily. In the aftermath of the devastation, there has been an extraordinary proliferation of accounts of March 11, leading one scholar to assert that "there is probably no other disaster which has received as much documentation" (Slater 25). In addition to accounts disseminated through social media, blogs, and other websites, there is a growing body of films, photography, literary writing, ethnographic studies, and critical reflection.[3] In one notable study, David Slater has argued for the importance of "urgent ethnography" after March 11. While Slater acknowledges the risks involved in conducting "rushed fieldwork" (32), he maintains that "most survivors want their stories told" (32), especially as "they often felt unheard" (44). Yet what is at stake in attempting to "hear" such stories?

In this paper I foreground the transpacific dimensions of attempting to hear and respond to such stories by focusing on one Asian Canadian text:

Ruth Ozeki's award-winning novel *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013).[4] Ozeki's novel vividly thematizes encounters across the Pacific through the story of a figure named Ruth, a writer living on an island off the west coast of Canada where she comes across "a scarred plastic freezer bag" (8) containing a diary and other texts and objects heaved onto the shore—materials that, in Kris Kosaka's circumspect reading, "may, or may not, be debris from the March 11, 2011, tsunami" (n. pag.). Through conversations between Ruth and her partner, Oliver, along with their neighbours and friends in British Columbia and elsewhere, Ozeki's novel sets in motion a story based on "forensic unpeeling" (9): an extended process of imagining lives in Japan primarily but not exclusively through excerpts from the diary, with a focus on the story of a figure named Nao, the diary's protagonist, whose life was dramatically transformed and plunged into precarity after her father lost his job as a computer programmer in California and moved with his family back to Japan. In unfolding this story about reading stories, one that moves across and beyond realist conventions, Ozeki's novel challenges readers to see how stories that are apprehended in Canada are not limited to Canadian stories alone. For critics, acknowledging this point is not a matter of being content to recognize, or celebrate, a plurality of possible narratives. Instead, as I will develop in my reading of Ozeki's novel, we need to underline, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's phrase, how the imagination—in this case, the act of imagining the lives in North America and across the Pacific—might "place a question mark upon the declarative" (4). Doing so will not bring back lives that have been lost. And it will not lead to straightforward accounts of imagined lives that we can finally presume to know. But it might, as Spivak observes, help us "change how we construct objects for knowing" (4).

A central plank of my argument is that critics responding to Asian Canadian texts, including *A Tale*, need to scrutinize the terms on which the lives of figures are imagined, both within and beyond the nation. But before I develop this argument, I wish to provide some disclaimers. In contributing to this special issue on "Asian Canadian Critique Beyond the Nation," my essay will not be suggesting that the act of reading Ozeki's novel (or any other text) could somehow, in and of itself, propel our critical work out of a presumably narrow national frame into a more globalized mode of critical engagement. Nor will my discussion of Ozeki's novel attempt to develop a form of reading that could comprehensively "cover," once and for all, this or any other text. Instead, my approach draws its inspiration from scholarship that underlines the complexities of Asian Canadian critique. Of

particular importance in the context of my argument is the work of Roy Miki, who underlines how the term *Asian Canadian* "functions as a limit term that lacks a secure referential base but rather is constituted through the literary and critical acts that are performed under its name" (xiii-xiv). Miki's scrupulously antiessentialist approach echoes some of the strongest work produced in Asian American cultural criticism, including Jodi Kim's discussion of Asian American critique as an *analytic*, which is for Kim "decidedly not a reified identity category" but rather an attempt to apprehend the workings of American empire in Asia (10). What makes Miki's work especially helpful, however, is its call for us, as variously situated critics, "to draw on the resources of the imagination to invent writing forms" that could adequately address and work at the limits of terms such as "CanLit" or "Asian Canadian" (274). As I discussed in my article "Interwoven Temporalities: Reading Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*" on the politics of reading difficult histories, developing such kinds of writing—what Miki calls "creative critical practices" (274)—is nevertheless a struggle. In the case of reading Ozeki's novel, the struggle to develop "creative critical practices" has taken a particular form, one that sharply encapsulates Miki's observation about "the potential of the imagination either to open up or to foreclose a reflexive approach to the somatic and social production of cultural values" (262). As we shall see, the meanings produced in and around *A Tale* create space for readers to think through the politics of imagining lives beyond the nation, while also raising troubling possibilities that such acts of imagination might reinforce rather than unsettle existing relations of power.

I.

Some of the troubling yet also potentially generative possibilities about acts of imagination can be glimpsed in the marketing and initial reception of Ozeki's novel. The book trailer for the Viking edition of the text, for example, focuses on the figure of Ruth walking along the shore of Cortes Island, where she comes across Nao's diary and begins reading.[5] Particularly notable here are the trailer's overtitles and the ways they position some of the novel's key figures. Nao, for example, is depicted as "a troubled schoolgirl in Tokyo," who presumably requires some form of rescue. Ruth, by contrast, is presented as "a novelist on a remote Canadian island," thereby raising the question: remote in relation to where?[6] In the initial reception of Ozeki's novel, it is remarkable how frequently these tropes have appeared. Reviewers have at times positioned Nao, in starkly possessive terms, as Ruth's "dear, vulnerable

Nao" (Boyce) while at other times describing the setting of the novel's narrative present as "isolated" (Grassi), "sparsely populated" (Donaldson), and "remote" (Connelly; Johnstone; Moore; Smith).

Such discourses of presumed helplessness and assumed remoteness have not simply circulated through the marketing and the initial reception of *A Tale*; they also appear in the novel itself. The figure of Ruth, for example, at one point expresses an awareness of her desire to "help the girl" or "save her"—but in Ozeki's text, both phrases are followed by a question mark, and answered with the single word "Ridiculous" (29). Later in the novel, referring to the possibility of Nao and her father being "in trouble," Ruth admits that "she wanted to help" (311). Soon afterward, Ruth glumly notes that "[i]t's too late" to "help her," an observation that is again followed by a question: "So what's the point?" (314). Despite such apparently scrupulous self-questioning, Ruth retains a "protective" feeling about Nao (35), a feeling of worry and concern that propels her reading of the diary and the other texts that were washed up on the shore, even as she asks a fundamental question facing any reader engaged with a narrative text: "What was she doing wasting precious hours on someone else's story?" (31). Ozeki's novel thereby positions figures in Japan as presumed objects of rescue while implicitly presenting Canada as a presumed site of refuge—but it also offers possibilities for its variously situated readers to reflect upon how and why we might read Ozeki's text or other texts representing the connections between scattered lives before and after March 11.

Likewise, depictions of the setting of the novel's narrative present as "a remote island" (11)—and, later, as a place with "remote shores" where Ruth and Oliver, following Oliver's illness, are "wash[ed] . . . up" (57)—also appear in Ozeki's novel, which depicts Cortes Island as "sparsely populated" and as a place where "human culture barely existed and then only as the thinnest veneer" (61). This problematic framing forcibly brackets the lives of Coast Salish peoples, who are in the novel positioned as spatially removed through Ruth's glimpse of "lights from the Klahoose reservation" located "*on the far side of the cove*" (225; emphasis added) and as temporally in the past through Ruth's act of imagining "the Salish who *used to tend* [the clam gardens]" on the island (188; emphasis added).[7] The violence of this framing appears in contrast to Ruth's longing for the built environment of New York City, a comparison that is followed by Ruth's claim that "[i]t was only in an urban landscape, amid straight lines and architecture, that she could situate herself in human time and history" (61). At this point, however, the novel opens

possibilities for a more nuanced reading than one predicated on an urban/nature binary. It does so in two ways: by later suggesting that excavations of the complexities of "human time and history" are in no way limited to urban settings, a point I will elaborate on in the next section; and, also, by arguably undercutting its depictions of the setting of the novel's narrative present with humour. One example of *A Tale*'s deadpan humour is the way its first reference to the island's presumed remoteness is immediately followed by a description of the local library's collection, which in Ozeki's account seems to consist mostly of "books on gardening, canning, food security, alternative energy, alternative healing, and alternative schooling" (11).

The "alternative" perspectives foregrounded here, when read as an assemblage of textual refusals to accept singular or received accounts, lead us to another way we might engage with the discourses circulating in the novel's marketing and initial reception: by emphasizing the evident diversity of perspectives that appear in Ozeki's text. Such diverse perspectives (as indicated metonymically by the books housed in the local library as well as the diary and letters within the novel) may, in part, be a function of the way the novel brings together an extraordinary plurality of topics and materials cutting across various times and spaces, including (as one reviewer put it) "Schrödinger's cat, quantum mechanics, Japanese funeral rituals, crow species, fetish cafes, the anatomy of barnacles, 163 footnotes and six appendices"—all of which appear in this novel and "jostle for attention" (Jensen n. pag.). If anything, this list understates the range of topics, intertextual references, and formal experiments (including typographical ones) appearing in Ozeki's text. But it is not enough to be content with recognizing such plurality. Instead, we must push further to investigate the ways in which this plurality has been represented and received. One way to do so is to turn to the portrayal, in Ozeki's novel, of what Lawrence-Minh Bùi Davis has perceptively called a "community of engagement" (n. pag.). In this community, various characters in the novel's narrative present—including, most prominently, Oliver, but also Muriel, Callie, Benoit, Dr. Leistiko, Kimi, and Tosh—have differential access to Nao's narrative and the other texts found on the beach, as each of these figures provides (variously) questions, insights, counter-positions, background information, and invaluable translations into English of texts written in French and Japanese. In his review of *A Tale*, Davis underlines how the novel "leaves us with the promise of dialogue, of broad community engagement via reading and writing" (n. pag.). But how—if at all—could this "promise" be fulfilled?

II.

Two brief and seemingly inconsequential scenes in *A Tale* may help us to further scrutinize the "community of engagement" Davis has identified. The first features a conversation between Ruth and Muriel, in which Ruth states simply that she found the freezer bag and its contents "below Jap Ranch":

> No one on the island called it by that name anymore, but Muriel was an old-timer and knew the reference. The old homestead, one of the most beautiful places on the island, had once belonged to a Japanese family, who were forced to sell when they were interned during the war. The property had changed hands several times since then, and now was owned by elderly Germans. Once Ruth heard the nickname, she stubbornly persisted in using it. As a person of Japanese ancestry, she said, she had the right, and it was important not to let New Age correctness erase the history of the island. (32)

By evoking the state-directed dispossession of racialized subjects on Cortes Island (in this case, an unnamed "Japanese family") who were forcibly relocated and forced to sell their home, this passage points our attention to figures who are no longer present in this community. But it also emphasizes Ruth's stubborn refusal to allow the lives of those subjected to such forced relocation to disappear. As Kyoko Matsunaga notes, "Ruth is acutely aware of the violent colonial history of the region" (88), a history that—as I discuss below—extends beyond the forced removal and dispossession of subjects racialized as "Japanese" in British Columbia in the 1940s. While Oliver protests that "[i]t's hardly fair" that Ruth can reclaim and reiterate the term "Jap Ranch" while he, as a German Canadian, cannot, Ruth retorts: "Exactly. . . . It wasn't fair" (32).

A second scene also takes us to the 1940s, this time involving a character named Callie, a marine biologist and environmental activist contacted by Ruth to inspect and to date (eventually unsuccessfully) the barnacles attached to the freezer bag found on the beach. In this scene, we learn that Callie earns a living by giving lectures about whales and other cetaceans on cruise ships travelling through the Inside Passage to Alaska. On one such cruise, a skeptical passenger laughed derisively at the chance to see humpback whales—but, to Callie's surprise, subsequently attended her lecture and later came up to watch another pod swimming close to the ship. Just before disembarking, he handed Callie a $500,000 cheque to help support a marine mammal protection agency. Eventually, Callie learns why:

> He had been a bomber pilot during World War II, he told [Callie], stationed at an airbase in the Aleutians. They used to fly out every day, looking for Japanese targets. Often, when they couldn't locate an enemy vessel, or the weather conditions turned bad, they would be forced to abort their mission and fly back

> to base, but landing with a full payload was dangerous, so they would discharge their bombs into the sea. From the cockpit of the plane, they could see the large shadows of whales, moving below the surface of the water. From so high up, the whales looked small. They used them for target practice. (117)

The use of whales as targets signals—here and elsewhere in Ozeki's text—the damage done by humans to nonhuman animals. Indeed, the focus on the lives of whales gains additional force through the foregrounding of the ecological violence of the European settlement of Whaletown, a name that (like "Jap Ranch") evokes figures no longer present, in this case the whales killed during the nineteenth-century trade in whale oil. But the scene also draws attention to how the man who handed Callie the cheque was stationed in the 1940s at a US airbase in the Aleutian Islands: another site of dispossession in which Indigenous Aleut people (but not white settlers) were forcibly removed, either to Japan or to the Alaska panhandle, to clear space for the militarization of these islands by Japan and the US.[8] In this way, Ozeki's text goes beyond simply offering a "promise of dialogue" in the novel's narrative present, instead pointing to the limits of which lives we, as variously positioned readers, can presume to know. By representing spaces marked by commercial and militarized violence and by the forced removal of Indigenous and other racialized subjects, it underlines overlapping forms of violence and exclusion that have enabled the novel's "community of engagement" to come into being.[9]

III.

One of the striking features of Ozeki's novel is the way it represents histories of dispossession by inventively juxtaposing what appear to be unrelated times and spaces, thereby challenging readers to reconsider some of the discourses of presumed remoteness identified earlier in this essay. In a memorable example, the novel describes Miyagi prefecture in Japan, where old Jiko's temple was located along the coast, as part of Tōhoku, "one of the last pieces of tribal land to be taken away from the indigenous Emishi, descendants of the Jōmon people, who had lived there from prehistoric times until they were defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army in the eighth century" (141).[10] The text then moves from this old invader-settler history to more recent developments in one site just south of Miyagi: Fukushima, described as "also part of the ancestral lands of the Emishi" but now prefectural home to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The novel glosses "Fukushima" as "Happy Island," a designation given harshly ironic inflections in the banners displayed across the main streets of nearby towns:

Nuclear power is energy for a brighter future!
The correct understanding of nuclear power leads to a better life! (141)

As Ozeki's novel makes clear, the "brighter future" referred to on this banner abruptly vanishes for those whose homes were located near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. We learn, for example, that Akira and Kimi, the proprietors of Arigato Sushi in Campbell River, were effectively barred from returning to their hometown following the nuclear meltdown. As Kimi tells Ruth and Oliver, "Okuma City wasn't very special. . . . But it was our hometown. Now nobody can live there. Our friends, family, everybody had to evacuate. Walk out of their homes. Leave everything behind. Not even time to wash the dishes" (233-34).

When situated in the context of contemporary Japan, the evident sadness represented in this scene cannot simply be understood as an individual family's tragedy, even though the loss of one's home is indeed tragic. Nor can it be simply viewed as a time to offer assistance and charity, however urgently needed.[11] Instead, as critics such as Muto Ichiyo have underlined, understanding developments in Fukushima requires a broader view of "the nuclear regime" (171) and its genealogy. Muto acknowledges "the appallingly inept and irresponsible handling of the situation by the government leaders, bureaucrats, and owner of the reactors" (172). But he pushes beyond such contemporary failures of governance and management to track the imprint in Japan of what, in 1953, then-US President Dwight Eisenhower famously called "Atoms for Peace" (qtd. in Muto 179). The following year, Thomas Murray, representing the US Atomic Energy Commission, told members of the United Steelworkers Convention: "Now, while the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remains so vivid, construction of [a nuclear power plant] in a country like Japan would be a dramatic and Christian gesture which could lift all of us far above the recollection of the carnage of those cities" (qtd. in Muto 210 n2). Muto analyzes this attempted obfuscation of militarized violence to note that "by inverting the sense of victimizer into the sense of benefactor, the victimizer can forget, bury, and justify the carnage, thereby closing the channel through which the meaning of the act could have been called into question" (210 n2). In the aftermath of March 11, the complicity of the US government and the larger "nuclear industrial complex" (182-83) is in this respect unmistakable, despite prominent attempts to rehabilitate the image of US military activity in Japan through joint operations in 2011 dubbed "Operation Tomodachi," in which the US military was discursively positioned as a "friend."[12]

Intriguingly, Ozeki's text juxtaposes its representation of Fukushima as a "Happy Island" with a description of the island where Ruth and Oliver live in the novel's narrative present: a place that "was named for a famous Spanish conquistador [i.e., Cortez], who overthrew the Aztec empire" (141). Ruth notes that while Cortez "never made it up as far north as his eponymous isle, his men did, which is why the inlets and sounds of coastal British Columbia are scattered with the names of famous Spanish mass murderers" (141). But the killings were by no means restricted to the Spanish imperial project, as Ozeki's text then turns to the island's nickname, "the Island of the Dead" (142). While the possible meanings of this nickname are multiple and contested, one account refers back to "the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population" (142)—a brutal, decisive moment in what historical geographer Cole Harris calls "a profound settlement discontinuity" (30) in what is now British Columbia.[13] Referring to the earlier smallpox epidemic of 1782, Harris asks why it has not become "part of the lore of modern British Columbia" (26), despite the fact that it had been identified quite precisely as early as 1910. Harris confronts the obfuscation of this history by stating that "the idea of disease-induced depopulation runs counter to the long-held conviction that Europeans brought enlightenment and civilization to savage peoples" (29). According to Harris, such accounts of damaged and lost lives "were not what modern British Columbians or other recent North Americans, proud of their achievements and intent on their futures, wanted to hear" (29).

A Tale helps to make stories related to this history audible, if only briefly, to those willing and able to listen. The brevity of its enunciation extends into the novel's fleeting representations of contemporary Coast Salish peoples' lives, which, as noted above, appear at one point in the twinkle of lights coming from the Klahoose reserve "on the far side of the cove" noticed by Ruth, tellingly, on her way home from the garbage dump (225). The significance of this small scene can be augmented by turning to the work of Australian cultural critic Ghassan Hage, who uses the term *colonial rubbishing* to try to account for complex feelings he experienced when he saw Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. Hage responded to this experience by writing:

> How is this possible today? It is like a colonialism running amok with power. Walling people as they please, mistreating them as they please, building colonies high up on the hills and literally shitting on those living down the hill by letting their sewer come out outside the settlements for others to cope with. How heroic is it that the Palestinian people are still managing to squeeze a bit of life in the midst of this? (193-94)

Hage identifies the process of "rubbishing" people (demonstrated in this instance through the placement of sewers) as "a colonial technique" (197), one that cuts across various settler colonial sites. For Hage, "[e]xterminating people by 'rubbishing them' is always less dramatic than when it is done through massacres. It is more like dumping a truck that one has destroyed somewhere on one's property and letting it slowly rust, corrode and disintegrate" (197). Yet, in the face of various modes of "rubbishing" people, there remain subjects who continue to struggle—in Hage's account, "heroically" (198).

In *A Tale*, Ruth's glimpse of lights coming from the Klahoose reserve can hardly stand as an adequate marker of Indigenous agency in Canada understood as a settler colonial state, signalling once again the limits of which lives various readers of this text can presume to know. Readers of Ozeki's novel searching for expressions of "heroic" struggle in Canada need to turn elsewhere.

IV.

Perhaps the most overt representations of heroism in *A Tale* can be found in the stories of the two characters named Haruki, both related to Nao, who in distinct ways attempt to speak out against and confront forms of imperial violence. The character referred to in the novel as Haruki #1—Nao's father's uncle—stands as the most unambiguous example, as he rejects the violence of Japanese imperialism in Asia and the Pacific by aborting his mission as a kamikaze pilot in World War II. With his love of philosophy and literature, and his ability to write in what one reviewer dryly calls "a code language called French" (Jensen n. pag.), Haruki #1 and his principled acts of resistance have not always been viewed positively in the novel's initial critical reception.[14] The figure of Haruki #2—Nao's father—appears as a more complex character, as his evident love of computer programming conflicts with his concerns about the ways the US military will use his applications to further its imperial violence in the Middle East. Because of his refusal to stop asking questions about the military applications of his work, Haruki #2 loses his job in Silicon Valley, leading to his family's sudden departure from the US and their descent into precarity in Japan—a central element in the plot of Ozeki's novel. The quiet form of heroism in his life, mixed with moments of despair, along with his eventual determination to use his skills as a programmer in novel ways, make him one of Ozeki's most sympathetic characters, even as he is frequently overshadowed (at least in the eyes of Nao) by his legendary uncle and his

extraordinary grandmother Jiko. All of these figures, viewed from the perspective of Nao, can point us to what Anne Allison in her discussion of "precarious Japan" calls "a glimmer . . . of something new: different alliances and attachments, new forms of togetherness, DIY ways of (social) living and revaluing life" (18).[15]

But what makes *A Tale* an important text for critics is not only its representation of various heroic struggles against forms of Japanese and US imperialism as these struggles become legible through direct action or smaller quotidian acts. Instead, Ozeki's novel creates space for us to rethink how these anti-imperialist struggles are entangled with representations of Canada, a place that in Haruki #2's estimation is (in a memorable phrase appearing in Nao's diary) "like America only with health care and no guns" (42). In this highly circumscribed depiction, Canada is positioned as a "safe" place (44) appearing in contrast to—and later, in Montreal, as a potential refuge from (382)—Nao's harrowing experiences in Japan. But again Ozeki's novel offers us a chance to develop a more complex reading. Regarding Nao's accounts of bullying in the school system in Japan, Oliver responds with outrage before stating glumly that "it makes total sense," as "[w]e live in a bully culture. Politicians, corporations, the banks, the military. All bullies and crooks. They steal, they torture people, they make these insane rules and set the tone" (121). After further naming Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, Oliver observes: "America's bad, but Canada's no better. People just going with the program, too scared to speak up. Look at the Tar Sands. Just like Tepco" (121).

Oliver's positioning of Canada as "no better" than the US—and, through his reference to the Tar Sands being "just like" the Tokyo Electric Power Company, the notorious (mis)manager of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, also evidently no better than Japan—provides an opportunity to renew forms of critical engagement with Canada in the imperial present.[16] While Ozeki's novel can contend that after the events of 9/11 "Canada had never felt safer" (272) for Ruth and Oliver, a more forceful response must push beyond such perceived feelings of safety to address how, in Julie McGonegal's account, "Canada has contributed to national and transnational racist discourses of the other, not only by participating in regimes of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but also by enacting legislation aimed at enhancing 'national security'" (74). As Enakshi Dua, Narda Razack, and Jody Nyasha Warner have pointed out, this legislation—including the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Public Safety Act—has not only affected people of colour and would-

be asylum seekers to Canada; it has also been used to police Indigenous peoples, including those protesting land claims in British Columbia (6-7). For scholars committed to developing forms of Asian Canadian critique, a scrupulous engagement with Ozeki's novel must prise apart depictions of Canada as a presumed place of refuge, to ask instead how these laws and others have been mobilized to bolster imperial formations *and* a settler colonial regime.

v.

An unexpected outcome of the events of March 11, 2011, is the way that Japan physically shifted toward North America, moving an estimated eight feet closer (Samuels ix)—a point noted, in a similar manner, by Oliver in Ozeki's novel (202). Under such conditions of increasing proximity, what would it mean to follow Oliver's injunction to "[i]magine the Pacific" (13)? Clearly, critics who attempt to do so must acknowledge the vastness of this project and the many things we cannot know. Ozeki's novel appears at times to celebrate such uncertainty. The figure of Ruth, addressing the figure of Nao in the novel's Epilogue, picks up on the notion of "not-knowing" (a Zen Buddhist notion attributed to Jiko) to state: "I'd much rather *know*, but then again, not-knowing keeps all the possibilities open" (402). And, in one of its appendices, the novel again draws on elements of Zen Buddhism to refer to "the unbounded nature of not knowing" (409). But in addition to this apparent celebration, Ozeki's text also underlines that "[n]ot knowing is hard" (400), returning us to statistics about the devastation that occurred on and after March 11: "In the earthquake and the tsunami, 15,854 people died, but thousands more simply vanished, buried alive or sucked back out to sea by the outflow of the wave. Their bodies were never found. Nobody would ever know what happened to them" (400). At this difficult moment of *not knowing*, Ruth's reading of Nao's diary emerges as part of an extended attempt to imagine the lives of countless others who may, or may not, have survived.

When read in this way, *A Tale* directs our attention to what Ozeki has elsewhere referred to as *agnotology*, which she glosses as "the study of ignorance, how it is produced and maintained, what is lost and forgotten, and most importantly, why" (Foreword xvi). Asian Canadian critique attempting to work beyond the nation—understood as a mode of critique that tries to account for, in Miki's formulation, "subjects whose mobility is always inflected by networks of determinants and indeterminacies, both close to the skin and globally distant" (274)—has an obligation to address

such concerns. Doing so could enable us to ask (following Ozeki): "What drops—or is dropped—from the historical record? What has gone missing, and whose agenda do those gaps and holes serve?" (Foreword xvi). In Ozeki's novel, the figure of Ruth, mesmerized by images from Japan on her computer screen after the events of March 11, attempts to confront such "gaps" and "holes":

> The tidal wave, observed, collapses into tiny particles, each one containing a story:
> • a mobile phone, ringing deep inside a mountain of sludge and debris;
> • a ring of soldiers, bowing to a body they've flagged;
> • a medical worker clad in full radiation hazmat, wanding a bare-faced baby who is squirming in his mother's arms;
> • a line of toddlers, waiting quietly for their turn to be tested. (114)

In calling attention to this constellation of images as "a minuscule few representing the inconceivable many" (114), Ozeki's novel pushes us to consider how, and toward what ends, such lives might be imagined.

In his analysis of what he calls "the Fukushima problematic" after March 11, Sabu Kohso observes that "[c]apitalism and the state are seeking to sustain their modus operandi—or the way of the world—by discovering new ways of accumulation and control. Meanwhile, people are facing a point of divergence: either follow the way of the world or pry open the fissures" (53). In this essay, I have suggested that Ozeki's novel and the meanings that have so far accumulated around it offer possibilities for both. It is my hope that the reading I have put forward, following routes that are necessarily partial and always incomplete, can encourage critics attempting to develop forms of Asian Canadian critique to work toward the latter, "pry[ing] open the fissures" in Canada and Japan and beyond, while also acknowledging (as Kohso notes) that "[w]here the fissures lead us is unknown" (53). With this form of *not knowing*, critics responding to Asian Canadian texts representing lives within and beyond the nation can return to Spivak's work on the imagination and the need to "change how we construct objects for knowing" (4): not as objects of rescue, and not in locations depicted as remote, but as lives in scattered sites that have become interconnected in previously unimagined ways.

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NOTES

1 These numbers are drawn from Gill, Steger, and Slater (6; 13). Their account is based on 2013 data compiled by the National Police Agency of Japan; the numbers of people evacuated are based on data provided by the Fukushima prefectural government.

2 See, for example, Ahn, who focuses on the topic of environmental contamination from the release of radioactive materials from the Fukushima Daiichi site while also acknowledging that "[t]he full impact of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on Japanese society goes far beyond matters directly related to what happened within the nuclear power plant itself" (87).

3 For a brief discussion of films produced after March 11, see Schilling; on photography, see Tran. For a selection of writing (including fiction, non-fiction, and manga) translated into English, see Luke and Karashima; for a discussion of "post-3/11 literature" focusing on two writers from Fukushima, see Kimoto. For a generative discussion of teaching literature in Japan after the events of March 11, see Sato. For ethnography, see Allison's stunning account of what she calls "precarious Japan," especially 180-206. For recent examples of critical reflection, see the essays collected in "Dossier: Crisis of the Everyday/Everyday Crisis: Across Time in Japan" in *boundary 2* 42.3 (2015).

4 *A Tale for the Time Being* has received numerous awards including the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Fiction, the Association for Asian American Studies Book Award for Creative Writing in Prose, and the Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic; it was also shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize.

5 At the time of writing, this trailer was available at https://vimeo.com/60688567.

6 On the topic of "remoteness" and how it might be rethought in relation to capitalism, environmental activism, and injury, see Fitz-Henry.

7 The novel's use of the term *reservation*, more commonly used in the US, linguistically signals through Ozeki's narration that the character Ruth is new to Canada, where the term *reserve* is more commonly used.

8 See Kohlhoff for an account of the forced relocation of Aleut people (euphemistically named an "evacuation") up to the moment of US government redress in 1988—a settlement that provided an astonishingly paltry $12,000 USD to eligible individuals "as damages for human suffering" (186).

9 Here I wish to acknowledge a growing body of critical work engaging with the points of intersection and tension between Indigeneity and diaspora. See, for example, Kim and McCall; McCall; Lee; and Coleman. For critical work attempting to reframe understandings of settler colonialism beyond a white settler/Indigenous binary, see Wong; and Day.

10 See McCormack for an account of the waves of migration to what is now known as Japan and how "[t]he archipelago was profoundly transformed as a result" (4).

11 See, for example, Comfort and Okada's assertion that "[n]uclear engineers [in the US], many familiar with the design of the Fukushima Daiichi reactors that failed in this event, were eager to offer assistance, if needed" (259). Nuclear engineers in the US were "familiar" with the reactors because they were designed by General Electric (GE). Comfort and Okada's emphasis on feelings of "great concern, empathy, and dread" and the forms of charity provided by "[o]rdinary American citizens" (259) sidesteps the complicity of the US government and US corporations such as GE in promoting the use of nuclear power in Japan and elsewhere.

12 For a detailed analysis of "Operation Tomodachi" and its implications at the policy level in Japan, see Samuels, especially 20-23 and 80-109.

13 For Harris' account of the history of smallpox in what is now British Columbia, see 3-30, especially his observation that "[w]hen smallpox broke out in Victoria in 1862 and nervous [British] officials sent Natives [sic] home, a mechanism was at hand as never before for the diffusion of smallpox throughout the length and breadth of the Northwest Coast" (27).

14 See, for example, Marchand.

15 In the aftermath of March 11, such new social arrangements can be seen in the work of the Wa Wa Project, which has, through its newsletters, exhibitions, and other activities, focused on efforts to rebuild and regenerate communities in Tōhoku; see www.wawa.or.jp.

16 An important body of scholarship has begun to address this topic. See, for example, the essays collected in Klassen and Albo discussing the role of Canada as "empire's ally" in the war in Afghanistan; Klassen's account of Canada's foreign policy as "a class-based effort at *joining empire*" (6); and McCready's examination of the militarization of Canadian culture.

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