
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Digital Afterlife of the Self: A Derridean Reading of Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* in the Age of Algorithmic Memory

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| ABSTRACT

This study represents how personal memory, grief, and human connection are revealed in Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* through Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology. The primary purpose of this research is to scrutinize how the novel contrasts physical life-writing, such as handwritten diaries, with modern digital networks to understand how we preserve memories and process loss today. Using a qualitative content analysis methodology, this paper conducts a close textual reading of the novel in relation to a close textual reading of the novel close to Derrida's concepts of spectrality, the visor effect, and the work of mourning. The key findings reveal that while digital algorithms flatten human grief into permanent data that refuses to fade, physical vestiges require a patient, empathetic reader to bring the past back to life. Furthermore, combining Derrida's ideas about ghosts with Zen Buddhist concepts of temporal non-duality shows that technology alone cannot replace genuine human care in honouring the dead. Ultimately, the project concludes that reading serves as an active ethical commitment. Digital surveillance and algorithmic memory are forever shaping our world, but textual interaction creates an essential space for empathy, hospitality and meaningful mourning.

| KEYWORDS

Digital Media, Hauntology, Memory, Mourning, Spectrality.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: September 10, 2026 **PUBLISHED:** October 15, 2026 **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.61424/jlls.v4i3.1078>

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study:

Modern writers are increasingly fascinated by the way our lives are shaped by technology, ecological disasters, and historical trauma. Ruth Ozeki, a Japanese-American author, filmmaker, and Zen Buddhist priest, stands out as a truly unique voice in this conversation. She effortlessly blends Western storytelling techniques with Eastern philosophy. Her well-regarded 2013 novel, *A Tale for the Time Being*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize, offers a moving reflection on human connection, lost time, and the lasting power of the written word.

Set in the painful wake of Japan's 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, and shadowed by the vast environmental damage of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the story bridges both sides of the Pacific. On a quiet, isolated island in British Columbia, a writer named Ruth stumbles upon a barnacle-covered Hello Kitty lunchbox washed up on the beach. Inside lies a handwritten diary belonging to Naoko "Nao" Yasutani, a sixteen-year-old girl in Tokyo. Nao opens up about her painful struggles with severe school bullying, her father's downward spiral into depression after

the Silicon Valley crash, and the quiet, enduring wisdom of her 104-year-old great-grandmother, Old Jiko, a Zen nun.

As Ruth grows deeply absorbed in Nao's world, she finds herself turning to internet searches, online forums, and digital translation tools to uncover what became of the teenager. She desperately tries to learn if Nao survived the tsunami or took her own life. By intertwining the intimate, physical act of diary writing with the cold reality of the digital age, Ozeki reveals how storytelling can transcend time and technology, creating an unforgettable bond between a reader and a stranger on a page.

In Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being*, she depicts personal and historical trauma through themes like life-writing, cyberbullying, kamikaze diaries, Zen meditation, and transpacific drift. Present studies show how digital technology, environmental flotsam, and Zen philosophy shape modern identity and narrative structure in the novel. For instance, present studies show that ocean currents act as memory archives, that virtual connectivity can paradoxically deepen feelings of social alienation, or life-writing serves as an act of sense-making across global trauma.

However, the problem is present studies do not show how Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology from *Specters of Marx* (1994) provides an overarching theoretical framework to understand these dislocated temporalities. Present studies do not show how automated digital algorithms and search engines alter the traditional Derridean work of mourning compared to physical, analog flotsam. Furthermore, present studies do not show how Derrida's visor effect and ethical hospitality can be used to explain the ethical responsibility of the reader toward the writer across temporal divides.

In the twenty-first century, as digital networks continuously cache personal data, individual voices risk being flattened into searchable metrics rather than receiving empathetic engagement. This project addresses these critical gaps in present scholarship by offering a hauntological reading of *A Tale for the Time Being*, demonstrating how literary reading serves as a necessary space for genuine empathy, spectral justice, and meaningful mourning in the digital age.

The objective of this project is to examine Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* through Jacques Derrida's hauntology to demonstrate how Derrida's hauntology illuminates memory, temporal dislocation, and textual connection and to analyze how digital networks and physical traces influence the work of mourning and identity in the novel.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aims to address some level of clarification for the following questions.

1. How does Ruth Ozeki apply Jacques Derrida's concepts of hauntology to portray the relationship between reader, writer, and text in *A Tale for the Time Being*?
2. How do digital and analog traces in the novel reshape the work of mourning in the age of algorithmic memory?

1.3 Research Objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To demonstrate how Derrida's hauntology illuminates memory, temporal dislocation, and textual connection in *A Tale for the Time Being*.
2. To analyze how digital networks and physical traces influence the work of mourning and identity in the novel.

2. Literature Review:

Specifically, I have reviewed certain critiques, essays, and journals that focus on Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. A number of critics and scholars have expressed their views on how Ozeki presents memory, digital culture,

narrative structure, posthumanism, and Zen Buddhism in her novel. This section focuses on the reviews of key scholarly works that examine Ozeki's text from diverse theoretical perspectives.

The author Rocío G. Davis, in her article "Fictional Transits and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*," explores the boundary slippages between autobiography and fiction. She states that "Ruth's engagement with the diary, particularly the way it leads her to think about her own life and craft, foregrounds the relationship between and among writers and their readers" (Davis, 2015, p.89). Davis demonstrates how Ozeki deploys an "implied author" as a narrative strategy, observing that "[b]y deploying an implied author, Ozeki is able to experiment with how flexible and accommodating a recursive self might be as she experiments with new ways of representing experience" (Davis, 2015, p. 98). She predominantly emphasizes narratological choices, metatextual performance, and the dialectic of authorial self-reflexivity. What she has not fully examined is how Jacques Derrida's hauntological concepts of the "visor effect" and spectral justice provide an ethical framework for understanding this reader-writer relationship across time. In my project, I intend to build upon Davis's narratological insights while incorporating Derrida's theory of hauntology to address this concern.

In her paper titled "Differentiation, Entanglement, and Worth in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*," Beverly Hogue examines how the novel positions waste and flotsam as the raw material for meaning-making. She notes that "[t]he novel is constructed as an assemblage of discarded narratives: a young girl's diary washed up on a beach, the hidden journal of a Japanese kamikaze pilot, a college professor's corrupted computer file, and more" (Hogue, 2020, p. 70). Analyzing the novel alongside quantum entanglement and Gay Hawkins's waste theory, Hogue asserts that "[i]n a world in which two such unlike things can be considered both 'not same' and 'not different,' differentiation becomes futile and entanglement eternal" (Hogue, 2020, p. 84). She primarily focuses on material ecocriticism and the revaluation of trashed narratives. What she has not discussed is how the physical drift of tsunami flotsam contrasts directly with the frictionless, automated permanence of digital data caching in the work of mourning. I have tried to address this concern and incorporate it into the work for my project.

Ruth Ozeki's novel is dissected in the article "Japanese Melancholy and the Ethics of Concealment in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" by Andrew Kim. The article approaches the text as an ethnography of twenty-first-century Japan and post-3/11 trauma. Kim argues that "Ozeki's novel functions as both an ethnography of twenty-first-century Japan and a melancholy speculation of Japan's meaning within a planetary *longue durée* of human cruelty, injustice, and diminishment in the face of geological time" (Kim, 2019, p. 74). Examining Haruki 1's secret French diary and Haruki 2's *Mu* software, Kim observes that "Haruki embodies a 'time being' underneath and outside the Heideggerian conception of a co-constitutive temporal being-together-with-others in the historical community" (Kim, 2019, p. 78). He focuses mainly on state power, precarity, and an ethics of concealment. What Kim does not address is how Derrida's specific notion of the "sensuous non-sensuous thing" links the physical Hello Kitty lunchbox to digital algorithms in resisting automated grief. I have made an effort to include this issue in my project.

In her article titled "Taking the I out of Being: Zen Buddhism and Postmodern (Dis)contents in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*," Mojca Krevel demonstrates how internalizing Zen Buddhist teachings allows the novel's characters to resolve postmodern existential conflicts. Krevel states that "[b]y internalizing Zen Buddhist teachings, the protagonists of Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) resolve their conflicts with the world and within themselves" (Krevel, 2019, p. 89). Connecting Dōgen's concept of *Uji* (being-time) with Hugh Everett's many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, Krevel emphasizes that literary texts serve as a "catalyst, generating and distributing agency across the material networks of literature" (Krevel, 2019, p. 105). She predominantly focuses on how non-dualist Zen metaphysics offers an empowering model for the postmodern fractal self. What Krevel overlooks is how Zen temporal non-duality directly intersects with Western post-structuralist hauntology, specifically Shakespeare's and Derrida's concept of time being "out of joint." For the purposes of my study, I believe synthesizing these two frameworks provides a valuable contribution.

In Derek Lee's paper "Postquantum: *A Tale for the Time Being*, *Atomik Aztex*, and Hacking Modern Space-Time," Derek Lee defines Ozeki's text as a pioneering "postquantum novel." Lee asserts that "[t]he postquantum novel recognizes the influence of classical and quantum mechanics on cultural conceptions of time and space, but it

refuses to accept them as the only valid paradigms for representing reality" (Lee, 2020, p. 2). He demonstrates how Ozeki challenges Eurocentric scientific hegemony, arguing that "Ozeki combats this epistemic colonization by proffering quantum mechanics and Zen Buddhism as equal and entangled approaches for representing space-time" (Lee, 2020, p. 12). While Lee offers a compelling critique of Western scientific orthodoxy, he does not explore how digital search engines and online archives transform the internet itself into a hauntological apparatus for spectral inquiry. I have tried to incorporate this concern into my research.

The author Yana Ya-chu Chang in her article "Making (Non)Sense: On Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" investigates the epistemological complexities of reading the Asian "Other." Chang observes that "Ozeki's novel illustrates a story of attempting to read stories of the other through a character named Ruth... through representing Ruth's inability to make sense of Nao's narratives despite her various efforts to contextualize the diary" (Chang, 2018, p. 42–43). Critiquing book trailers, cover designs, and early reviews that reduce the novel to an exotic guide to Japanese culture, Chang emphasizes that "[t]he novel itself presents the extraordinary difficulty of making sense rather than simply providing a window to Japanese culture" (Chang, 2018, p. 61). She focuses predominantly on Asian American literary pedagogy and marketing reception. What she has not discussed is how the mirror scenes in the novel operate hauntologically to stage an ethical encounter with spectral traces. In my project, I attempt to address this issue.

In her article "Ozeki's Mirror Rooms: Posthumanism and *A Tale for the Time Being*," Keren Omry analyzes the novel through the lens of posthumanism, *zoography*, and "interbeings. Omry argues that "[i]t is only through the second-person direct address, the mechanism of the journal, of the dialogue, of the links established between people—through and across technology—that we can begin to see a healing process" (Omry, 2019, p. 134). She focuses on how posthuman technology reconfigures subjectivity and embodiment. What Omry does not emphasize is how algorithmic memory specifically disrupts classical processes of mourning and emotional closure. I have incorporated this perspective into my project.

Marlo Starr, in her essay "Beyond Machine Dreams: Zen, Cyber-, and Transnational Feminisms in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" examines how digital technology and Buddhist meditation offer experiences of disembodiment for the bullied teenager Nao. Starr notes that "[i]ntervening in discourses about the liberating potentials of cyber- and Buddhist feminisms, Ozeki's novel explores how experiences of disembodiment are empowering in some ways and inhibiting in others" (Starr, 2016, p. 99). Critiquing the erasure of physical reality in cyberfeminism, Starr concludes that "Ruth and Nao's transnational relationship represents a process of mutual co-creation, a model of feminism that emphasizes intermingling and interdependence over nondualism or a unitary form of identity" (Starr, 2016, p. 119). She emphasizes gender theory, cyber-bullying, and transnational feminist solidarity. What Starr overlooks is how the physical diary acts as Derrida's "sensuous non-sensuous" object to anchor ethical responsibility beyond disembodied virtual networks. I have addressed this concern in my project.

Finally, in the published interview "'A Universe of Many Worlds': An Interview with Ruth Ozeki," scholar Eleanor Ty engages directly with author Ruth Ozeki regarding the philosophical and structural underpinnings of the novel. In the interview, Ozeki explains that "[t]he book plays with Buddhist notions of self and no-self, as well as with the Japanese literary genre 'I novel.' Who is the self in this novel? What is real?" (Ty, 2013, p. 162). Ozeki further reflects on the relationship between reality and fiction, stating that "[e]very act of representation is also an act of misrepresentation, so there is no way to represent without fictionalizing" (Ty, 2013, p. 162). This interview provides crucial primary insight into Ozeki's authorial intent, her ordination as a Soto Zen priest, and her interest in quantum mechanics. While Ty's interview highlights the biographical and philosophical origins of the text, it leaves open the task of systematically applying post-structuralist spectrality theory to Ozeki's reflections. My research project undertakes this critical application.

3. Methodology

As this study is based on literary works, this project follows content analysis method. This is a non-experimental research. My primary sources for research data are *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki and *Specters of Marx* by Jacques Derrida. As secondary sources, I have gathered information from other relevant books, review papers, articles, literary publications, criticisms, journals, and different websites related to my research topic. These materials help me to examine how the themes of hauntology, memory, and mourning are addressed in the aforementioned books. And my writing style follows the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research is hauntology and spectrality theory, as formulated by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his seminal text *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt* (1994). Hauntology is the critical study of the specter, an entity that is neither fully present nor absent, neither living nor dead, but which haunts the present with unresolved traces of past trauma and unrealized future possibilities. It is compelling to examine Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) through a hauntological lens, as the narrative explores how personal and historical memories traverse temporal and geographical boundaries. Before discussing Ruth Ozeki's novel in detail, an exploration to the theoretical parameters of hauntology and spectrality will help readers understand *A Tale for the Time Being* when read from a Derridean perspective.

Jacques Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, replaces traditional ontology with hauntology to account for beings that resist fixed temporal presence. Derrida speaks of the ethical necessity of ghosts thus:

It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii)

Derrida is remarkably precise in his formulation. He readily asserts that living justly requires an ongoing "commerce without commerce of ghosts" (xviii), establishing an indispensable "politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (xviii). He believes that ethics cannot exist in a vacuum of the immediate present; rather, justice demands an unconditional responsibility toward the dead, the missing, and those yet to come.

Furthermore, Derrida introduces the concept of the "visor effect", drawing upon the helmeted ghost of King Hamlet, to describe an asymmetrical relationship between the specter and the observer. He writes, "We will call this the visor effect: we do not see who looks at us... To feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross, that is the visor effect on the basis of which we inherit from the law." (Derrida, 1994, p. 6-7). He explains that the visor effect generates a profound feeling of being observed by an invisible authority or absent trace. Intimately bound to this visor effect is Shakespeare's dictum, "The time is out of joint" (Derrida, 1994, p. 20).

Derrida demonstrates that time in a hauntological state is "disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged... deranged, both out of order and mad" (20). In modern society, this temporal dislocation is accelerated by tele-technology and digital media, as he says, "...the medium of the media themselves... this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology... It requires, then, what we call... hauntology." (63) In addition, Derrida explores the materiality of spectral artifacts through the concept of the "sensuous non-sensuous thing" (Derrida, 1994, p. 189), adapted from Karl Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. Derrida notes that an ordinary physical object, when imbued with human memory or economic exchange, is transformed into "a supernatural thing, a sensuous non-sensuous thing, sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible" (189). Through this paradoxical materiality, a physical artifact comes alive as a "bodiless body" (189) that connects individuals across space and time. This material spectrality directly shapes the work of mourning, which Derrida defines as an effort "...to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead... One has to know who is buried where—and it is necessary... that, in what remains of him, he remain there" (Derrida, 1994, p. 9).

Where classical mourning seeks to fix remains in a specific place to achieve closure, modern digital and algorithmic networks disrupt this process by keeping past traces endlessly accessible in an eternal, searchable present. Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* vividly dramatizes Derrida's theoretical framework. The novel opens with sixteen-year-old Naoko "Nao" Yasutani addressing her reader directly from Tokyo. She says, "Hi! My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is? Well, if you give me a moment, I will tell you. A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be" (Ozeki, 2013, p.1).

Nao's diary—written inside a repurposed copy of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and sealed inside a Hello Kitty lunchbox that washes ashore on a remote Canadian island following the 2011 Tōhoku tsunami—operates precisely as Derrida's "sensuous non-sensuous" spectral artifact. When the novelist Ruth discovers the barnacle-covered lunchbox on the beach, she experiences Derrida's "visor effect": Nao's voice addresses Ruth from a decade prior, looking at and interpellating her across the Pacific Ocean, while Ruth remains unable to verify whether Nao is alive or dead. Ruth's subsequent quest, Googling Nao's name, translating Japanese message boards, and investigating her family's history, embodies Derrida's "ontologization of remains," turning digital technology into a tool for spectral inquiry. By weaving together Nao's diary and Ruth's digital search, Ozeki illustrates how literary writing and algorithmic memory converge to create a hauntological space where time is "out of joint," enabling a profound ethical encounter across time.

5. Discussion

Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* opens with a direct address that immediately establishes a spectral, non-linear relationship between the writer and an unknown reader. Sixteen-year-old Nao Yasutani introduces herself from a French maid café in Akihabara, Tokyo, saying, "Hi! My name is Nao, and I am a time being. Do you know what a time being is? Well, if you give me a moment, I will tell you. A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 3). Nao's diary, which is written in purple ink inside a repurposed copy of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and sealed within a Hello Kitty lunchbox washed ashore on Cortes Island, functions precisely as Jacques Derrida's "sensuous non-sensuous thing" (Derrida, 1994, p. 140). Derrida adapts this concept from Karl Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism to explain how an ordinary physical object, when transformed by human memory or exchange, becomes a "supernatural thing... sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible" (Derrida, 1994, p. 189). Nao's diary is physically sensuous. It is coated in barnacles, smelling of sea salt and cedar. Yet it carries a non-sensuous, ghostly voice that operates beyond its material boundaries.

When the novelist Ruth discovers the lunchbox on the remote Canadian beach following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, she experiences what Derrida terms the "visor effect". Drawing from Hamlet, Derrida defines the visor effect as an asymmetrical gaze: "We will call this the visor effect: we do not see who looks at us... To feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross, that is the visor effect on the basis of which we inherit from the law" (Derrida, 1994, p. 6-7). In the novel, Nao's handwritten prose looks out at Ruth across space and time. Nao repeatedly addresses her reader as 'you', creating an intimate yet uncrossable boundary. Ruth feels intensely observed and interpellated by Nao's words, yet she cannot see Nao or verify her physical existence in the present. As literary critic Rocío G. Davis observes, "Ruth's engagement with the diary, particularly the way it leads her to think about her own life and craft, foregrounds the relationship between and among writers and their readers" (Davis, 2015, p. 88). The diary becomes a visor through which Nao speaks from the past, placing an ethical demand upon Ruth to listen and respond. Davis further notes that "the implied author... both produces and is produced by the text" (Davis, 2015, p. 98), illustrating how Ruth as a reader is called into being by Nao's writing, while Nao's story depends on Ruth's willingness to read and edit it.

Furthermore, the physical materiality of the diary as a palimpsest reinforces its spectral nature. Nao chooses to write her private thoughts over the printed text of Proust's French masterpiece. As Ruth reads Nao's purple ink layered over Proust's font, Western high modernism and Japanese youth vernacular haunt one another. Nao emphasizes this intimate, living connection across time when she addresses her reader directly: "I will write down everything I

know about Jiko's life in Marcel's book, and when I'm done, I'll just leave it somewhere, and you will find it! How cool is that? It feels like I'm reaching forward through time to touch you, and now that you've found it, you're reaching back to touch me!" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 31). The act of reading becomes an act of resurrection, wherein the reader offers temporary physical embodiment to the ghost in the text. As Marlo Starr highlights, "Ruth and Nao form a connection that is not based on essentialized notions of the body... but on a shared need for understanding and community, conveyed through the material object of the diary" (Starr, 2016, p. 120). This material connection enables a transnational bond that preserves individual differences while fostering deep mutual empathy.

Central to Derrida's hauntology is Shakespeare's declaration in *Hamlet*, "The time is out of joint" (Derrida, 1994, p. 20). Derrida argues that spectrality disrupts linear chronology, rendering time "disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged... deranged, both out of order and mad" (20). In *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ozeki structuralizes this non-linear temporality through two converging conduits: oceanic drift and digital media. The Pacific Ocean acts as a vast, non-linear archive where the 2011 tsunami flotsam carries physical debris across the gyre. As Beverly Hogue observes, Ozeki constructs her novel by "positioning garbage as the raw material for meaning-making" (Hogue, 2020, p. 70), showing how "neglected narratives and the detritus of trashed lives come back from the dead to provide the wave on which personal identity, community, and culture surf" (85). The physical movement of the Hello Kitty lunchbox across the ocean mirrors the temporal disjunction between Nao's past in Tokyo and Ruth's present on Cortes Island. As Ruth reads, she realizes that the time elapsed between Nao writing a sentence and her reading it creates a profound temporal gap.

This physical dislocation is further accelerated by digital networks. When Ruth seeks to confirm whether Nao survived the tsunami or committed suicide, she turns to search engines, Japanese online message boards, Google Translate, and Wikipedia. Derrida explicitly connects spectrality to modern tele-technology: "... the medium of the media themselves... this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology... It requires, then, what we call... hauntology" (Derrida, 1994, p. 63). In the age of cyberspace, digital data flattened on computer screens collapses historical distance. Search algorithms force past posts, cached web pages, and archived forums into a perpetual, searchable present. As Yana Ya-chu Chang points out, "Ozeki's narrative bridges transpacific geographic divides by turning life-writing into an act of sense-making amidst global trauma" (Chang, 2018, p. 42). Ruth's online investigations turn the internet into an apparatus for digital ghost hunting. When Ruth Googles Nao's name or researches her father's Silicon Valley past, she encounters digital traces that exist in an "eternal now," rendering time radically "out of joint". Keren Omry reinforces this point, noting that the novel "challenges the feasibility of the historical tale" (Omry, 2019, p. 118) as "the posthuman subject... is initially destabilized in *Time Being* but ultimately affirmed through the porous boundary that links the technological, the digital, the ephemeral, to the human, the body, or the biological" (123).

Ozeki contrasts the friction-filled drift of analog flotsam with the instantaneous speed of digital caching. While the internet promises instant global information, it often flattens the depth of human experience into fragmented data bytes. Marine flotsam requires patient, embodied care; Ruth must carefully wash off barnacles and dry fading pages, whereas digital search queries deliver cold, disembodied results. Ozeki uses this contrast to show that while tele-technology spectralizes communication, physical traces demand a deeper, slower ethical engagement.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida defines the work of mourning as an effort to localize and fix remains: "It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead... One has to know who is buried where—and it is necessary... that, in what remains of him, he remain there. Let him stay there and move no more!" (Derrida, 1994, p. 8). Mourning requires "ontologizing remains"—determining where the dead are buried so that the living can achieve emotional closure and allow the dead to rest. However, digital networks and algorithmic memory disrupt this traditional mourning process. Because algorithms cache, index, and continuously recommend past profiles and user data, digital traces refuse to remain in their place. The dead persist as digital specters that continuously interrupt the present.

Ozeki dramatizes this conflict between algorithmic persistence and human grief through the character of Haruki Yasutani, Nao's father. Formerly a brilliant computer programmer in Silicon Valley, Haruki becomes a hikikomori (a socially withdrawn recluse) in Tokyo after losing his job during the dot-com crash and attempting suicide. Traumatized by the pervasive, inescapable nature of digital surveillance and capitalist data tracking, Haruki devotes his technical intellect to building a computer program called "Mu" (named after the Zen concept of emptiness/nothingness). Haruki's Mu software is designed to systematically erase digital footprints, scrubbing data trails, web histories, and online identities from server archives. As Andrew Kim observes, this represents "a potentially transcendent ethics of concealment, and of dying as concealment" (Kim, 2019, p. 74). Haruki's software represents a technological attempt to reclaim the 'right to be forgotten' and restore impermanence to a digital culture that commodifies permanent memory.

Haruki's struggle is directly tied to historical trauma. His family is haunted by his uncle, Haruki 1, a young philosophy student who was drafted as a kamikaze pilot during World War II. Before his death, Haruki 1 kept a secret French diary in which he expressed his profound pacifism and critique of imperial Japanese militarism, hiding it from military censors. On the back of his sky soldier watch, the kanji for sky (hei) and soldier (sora) carry a double meaning: "The first was the kanji for sky. The second was the kanji for soldier. Sky soldier... But the character for sky can also mean "empty". Empty soldier" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 166). In his diary, Haruki 1 quotes both Heidegger and Dōgen: "Language is the house of being, he once wrote, and Dōgen (a wordy man himself!) would no doubt have agreed. But MH's labyrinthine Teutonic chambers I find exhausting in my present fevered state of mind, and what draws me instead are the quiet, empty rooms of Dōgen" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 333). For decades, the official state narrative depicted Haruki 1 merely as a patriotic martyr. When Nao and her father discover Haruki 1's secret diary, they uncover his true voice, performing what Derrida calls an act of spectral justice—rescuing a ghost from state propaganda. As Kim emphasizes, "the spectre of Nao's body, woven with the spectre of her family's bodies and those of others in Japan at-large, engenders transhistorical time loops that foreground the ongoing presences of past death and state culpability" (Kim, 2019, p. 77). This discovery inspires Haruki to abandon suicide and choose life, telling Nao, "We must live, Naoko! We have no choice. We must soldier on!" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 339).

A unique dimension of *A Tale for the Time Being* is its synthesis of Western post-structuralist hauntology with Soto Zen Buddhist philosophy. The novel draws heavily upon 13th-century Zen Master Dōgen's treatise Uji ("Being-Time"), taught to Nao by her 104-year-old Buddhist nun great-grandmother, Old Jiko. Dōgen posits that existence and time are non-dual—that every living being is a time-being fully integrated into the present moment, as expressed in his epigraph: "For the time being, standing on the tallest mountaintop, For the time being, moving on the deepest ocean floor... For the time being, the entire earth and the boundless sky" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 1). As Mojca Kregel explains, "*A Tale for the Time Being* seems to lend itself as a literary case study of how internalizing a Zen Buddhist approach to self and reality may contribute to the contentment and empowerment of individuals" (Kregel, 2019, p. 90), noting that "being completely aware of each moment means being completely aware of all other moments" (94). Derek Lee reinforces this connection, observing that "the postquantum novel recognizes the influence of classical and quantum mechanics on cultural conceptions of time and space, but it refuses to accept them as the only valid paradigms for representing reality" (Lee, 2020, p. 1), showing how "Dōgen's contention that "mountains are time" and "oceans are time" anticipates Martin Heidegger's own claim" (11).

At first glance, Zen Uji (which emphasizes radical presence) might seem opposed to Derridean hauntology (which emphasizes temporal dislocation and absence). However, Ozeki brings these two frameworks into a harmonious dialogue. Derrida argues that justice requires "learning to live with ghosts"—an unconditional hospitality toward the specter: "It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics... seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there..." (Derrida, 1994, p. xvii). Old Jiko teaches Nao about "the not-two nature of existence" and how "surfer, wave, same thing" (Ozeki, 2013, p. 194), explaining that "a moment is a very small particle of time... one snap of your fingers equals sixty-five moments" (382). Old Jiko's monastery in Iwate serves as a sanctuary where past and present coexist, showing that honoring the dead is about cultivating an open, compassionate hospitality toward all time-beings across past, present, and future.

This ethical hospitality is fully realized in Ruth's reading experience. As Ruth reads the final pages of Nao's diary, the text mysteriously fades, leaving blank pages. In a magical realist sequence informed by quantum physics and Zen dream-logic, Ruth dreams of meeting Old Jiko and Nao, aiding Nao's father and helping restore the missing words to the diary. Rather than treating this sequence as mere fantasy, we can read it through Derrida's concept of undecidability. Ruth's active, empathetic reading acts as a quantum measurement that collapses wave functions, offering Nao hope and survival. Ultimately, Ozeki demonstrates that in an age dominated by automated algorithms and digital caching, technology alone cannot perform the work of mourning. Algorithms store data, but they cannot care. True memory requires an ethical, hospitable reader who is willing to listen to the ghost in the text, embrace temporal dislocation, and acknowledge an "infinite responsibility" (Derrida, 1994, p. xvi) to those who came before and those who are yet to come.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* uses physical objects washed ashore and digital archives to explore how people remember, grieve, and connect with one another today. By drawing on Jacques Derrida's ideas about memory alongside Zen Master Dōgen's concept of time, the paper explains how personal and historical trauma can break apart our normal sense of time across borders and technology. While online networks reduce human sadness into cold, searchable data that disrupts the natural process of mourning, physical objects like Nao's handwritten diary require slow, patient, hands-on engagement from the reader. Nao's written words invite us to build a direct, compassionate connection with voices from the past. In a similar way, Haruki's footprint-erasing software and the discovery of Haruki 1's secret wartime diary show that we need to bring hidden history to light and accept that life is temporary. Ultimately, computers and algorithms can store data, but they cannot care about people or do the emotional work of grieving. Literary reading serves as a vital ethical commitment—offering a hospitable space for empathy, human connection, and meaningful mourning in an age dominated by algorithmic memory.

This project employs a qualitative content analysis and focuses specifically on *A Tale for the Time Being* and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*; its primary limitation is its concentration on a single primary literary text and a specific post-structuralist and Zen theoretical blend. Future scholarship could build upon these findings by applying hauntological analysis to broader transpacific, post-disaster, or eco-critical literature dealing with ocean flotsam and global trauma. Additionally, researchers could investigate how newer digital memory environments—such as algorithmic memorial spaces and automated legacy systems—shape grief in contemporary fiction, or combine close textual analysis with empirical reader-response studies to measure how readers process trauma across print versus digital formats.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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