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# A Tale for the Time Being and the Trope of Translation: Ruth Ozeki's Hacking of The Woman Warrior

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## Abstract

In 2013, Ruth Ozeki published *A Tale for the Time Being*. On the face of it the novel about a Japanese Canadian writer suffering from writer's block living on a small island off the coast of Vancouver might seem to have little to do with Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976). However, I will show that there are multiple interconnections. For example, both novels feature central female characters who are in the process of learning to translate their mother tongue—both literally and metaphorically. In both texts, translation is a crucial trope for finding power across cultural and national borders. And both novels contain ambiguous heroines who may be stand-ins for the authors. Yet there are also many ways in which Ozeki updates Kingston's work for a transnational, interethnic world. Her female characters move across time and space in an ever widening gyre with a freedom that Kingston's character never possessed. I will focus in particular on how Ozeki's text represents a new mode of translation—one that takes account of the many languages ethnic women characters must speak, and the multiple social and cultural borders they must cross. Ozeki's mode of translation ultimately blurs the concept of source text and target text to move towards a non-hierarchical and syncretic vision of the multilingualism of the contemporary world and the contemporary ethnic female subject. Ozeki hacks into Kingston's novel and the trope of translation, creating a new text that is bricolaged and syncretic. Ultimately Ozeki envisions an innovative type of Asian American feminine subjectivity: a border-crossing, hybridized character that is empowered by translation and boundaries, and by the multilingualism and interethnicity of the contemporary world.

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