

Reader-Writer Relationship: A Rhetorical Narrative Analysis of A Tale for the Time Being

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Abstract: Ruth Ozeki's work *A Tale for the Time Being* has piqued world-wide interest in its thematic extensivity and unique style. Previous theme studies on one of the novel's most fundamental topics — reader-writer relationship, proves insightful in understanding the novel's artistic construction. In light of Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative, the paper intends to build on the interpretation of the novel's aesthetic value by employing three of the core concepts of Phelan's theory — four dimension readers, narrative progression and narrative judgements to better demonstrate the significance of readers' involvement not only in building, but also propelling and revealing the dynamics of the multilayered reader-writer relationship. By analyzing various engagements readers have with characters and the implied author, the paper shows that rather than through overarching explanations, the novel preserves the relationship's elusive nature through a multilayered reading experience.

Keywords: reader-writer relationship, James Phelan, rhetorical theory of narrative, *A Tale for the Time Being*

1. Introduction

The third novel written by Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being* has won the Japanese-American writer unprecedented reputation from readers and literary critics across the globe. Finalists for the Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, the novel did not stop at attracting readers' affection. For scholars, the novel's extensive thematical concerns on such topics as global interconnectedness, trauma, quantum mechanics, Zen Buddhism, and reader-writer relationship, provide a wide range of research topics to explore. Amongst them, large proportions of studies are conducted on the novel's read-writer relationship.

Reader-writer relationship has not only provided a theme, but also an emotional impetus and a structuring principle for the novel. Featuring the relationship between the writer and reader, the novel revolves around two parallel narratives which intersect only through the medium of words: one depicts a Japanese-American teenage girl who keeps a diary for an imaginary reader, the other a novelist who picks up the girl's diary, thus becoming the girl's reader by chance. Therefore, the interpretation of the relationship between the reader and writer helps to better understand the novel's artistic construction. Focusing on the reader-writer relationship between Nao and Ruth (to avoid confusion, the character Ruth will henceforth be called Ruth while the implied author Ruth will be called Ozeki), and the author-character relationship between Ozeki and Nao, Lee explored the world-making potential between minoritized individuals through an exchange of words during

the dynamics of reading and writing. Though contributing to the study of reader-writer relationship in its potential in world-shaping, Lee's analysis only addressed the interaction between characters or the interrelationship between the author and character, whereas actual readers' engagement in this process of worlding is not given due attention. Researching the compliance of the novel's narrative identity with the fractal nature of self in postmodern society, Krevel analyzed the merging of Ozeki's identity as the author with that of Ruth-the-reader and Nao-the-writer, the interchangeability of which reflected them as the internal differentiation of the same self. Also intrigued by the role reader-writer relationship plays in the construction of narrative identity, Zhao examined the function of the collaboration between the reader and writer in the construction of Ruth's identity, where Ruth's role as Nao's reader helped to rebuild her confidence as a writer. Without considering the actual readers' response either to the instability of the two identities, or the growing bond between them, the aforementioned two studies failed to fully capture the subtle dynamics within the reader-writer relationship. Davis probed into a new dimension of the reader-writer relationship by analyzing the actual reader's role in creating the interface between reality and fiction [1], where actual readers, just like Ruth as Nao's reader, are constantly tempted by the referentiality in the process of reading. However, the actual readers' participation in complicating and completing the reader-writer relationship both within and outside the novel is discussed only indirectly.

From the above reviews, it can be seen that previous researches, while building insights on the reader-writer relationship at the level of story, or even at the discourse level by considering the author's interaction with characters, rarely touch upon actual readers' engagement in the dynamic relationship. Thus, to better interpret and display the construction of the multidimensional reader-writer relationship in the novel, this paper intends to study it with a special attention to actual readers' involvement, where their participation not only initiate new relationships with fictive characters but also with the implied author. Deeming narrative as an action instead of a construction, Phelan's rhetorical conception of narrative orients its users towards the way authors and audiences draw upon narrative to achieve multilayered exchanges [2]. Particularly, among such concepts as narrative progression and narrative judgement for interpreting rhetorical transaction, Phelan developed Rabinowitz's four dimension readers to better understand the different layers of narrative communication. The four types of positions readers could take on: flesh and blood audience, narrative audience, ideal narratee and authorial audience, provides greater explanatory power to readers' changing relations with the text. Thus, the paper is composed of three parts based on the three main components of Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative. Making Phelan's rhetorical model of audience as the entry point to the novel, the paper first analyzes the actual readers' shifting role as the narrative audience, authorial audience, and ideal narratee in constructing three sets of reader-writer relationships: Nao and actual readers; Ruth-the-reader and Nao-the-writer; Ozeki and actual readers. The paper then investigates the narrative progressions that propel the development of the three sets of reader-writer relationship, including instabilities of Nao's existential crisis and Ruth's inner conflict, and tensions caused by readers' disparity with the implied author regarding the magical dream sequences in the novel. The third part allows a deeper understanding of the reader-writer relationship by demonstrating the similarities and differences between readers and Ruth's interpretive and ethical judgements on Nao's father, revealing different levels of readerly engagement in the reader-writer relationship and arousing readers' appreciation of Ozeki's artistic construction.

As indicated above, the paper hopes to emphasize readers' involvement as a key factor in constructing the reader-writer relationship in the novel, which not only better present its dynamics according to readers' unfolding reactions, but also reveal more dimensions of the relationship with actual readers as active participants. Adopting Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative, the paper

aspires to take an active part in the development of contemporary western narratology and offer a concrete narrative critical practice for the postclassical narrative studies regarding the interpretation and application of rhetorical narrative theory.

2. Analysis of Four Dimension Readers in *A Tale for the Time Being*

In *A Tale for the Time Being*, the construction of the three sets of reader-writer relationship among actual readers, Ruth, Nao and Ozeki relies on different levels of reader engagement, or to use Phelan's words [3], "different kinds of audience". Holding these competing perspectives in the consciousness simultaneously, readers experience a fluidity of roles in their interaction with the text. The fluctuation of their roles as the narrative audience, ideal narratee and authorial audience helps to reveal a multilayered reader-writer relationship Ozeki intends to construct.

2.1. Nao's Reader: Ideal Narratee

As claimed by Rabinowitz [4], "the act of joining the narrative audience is ... the first and most elementary step in literary interpretation". For a literary work to make sense, it's essential for readers to accept the premise of the fictional world. In reading *A Tale for the Time Being*, readers would find their entry into narrative audience fairly easy, due to Ozeki's attention to details regarding the depiction of Nao's narrative. Through Nao's drawing of emojis (probably influenced by her frequent use of online correspondence), her use of slang "Assumptions suck", "Well, duh, Granny!" [5], and the mixture of Japanese and English in her writing, readers get an authentic portrayal of a Japanese-American teenager girl, allowing for their smooth immersion into the fictional world.

However, Nao's narrative continues to draw readers in from their standard observer role familiar to them in reading homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration [3], a position in which readers remain somewhat distant to the fictional world. The second-person address in Nao's diary arouses readers' desire to reach out and respond to Nao's speculation about her imaginary reader: "I bet you're wondering what kind of stupid girl would write words like that" [5]. As Phelan claimed, second-person address exerts pressure on the actual reader [3]. The stress is not only caused by a natural urge to reply, but also by the ambiguity of "you", which could be both textual and extratextual. It refers not only to the narratee Ruth, but also to readers. But at this point, unaware of the presence of narratee Ruth, readers tend to project themselves into the subject position of Nao's ideal narratee.

To further blur the boundary between the narrative audience and the narratee, Ozeki refrains from any characterization of Nao's imaginary reader, whether it be the reader's gender, age or cultural background, rather, in her account, Nao is quite content to leave her reader a mystery:

Are you in a New York subway car hanging from a strap, or soaking in your hot tub in Sunnyvale?

Are you sunbathing on a sandy beach in Phuket, or having your toenails buffed in Brighton?

Are you a male or a female or somewhere in between [5]?

To Phelan [3], the less the narratee is characterized, the greater the coincidence between the narratee and narrative audience. With no designation on the narratee's personality, there are no discrepancies in beliefs and opinions to which readers might object, making it easier for readers to be pulled into the position as Nao's imaginary reader. In Phelan's revision to replace the term and concept of ideal narrative audience with that of ideal narratee, he defined it as the narratee the narrator wishes they were addressing [6]. Indeed, with Nao's enthusiastic address to her imaginary reader, readers long to become the ideal narratee this quirky teenage girl is writing to, thus forming a bond with her.

2.2. Ruth's Reader: Narrative Audience

The actual readers' role as Nao's ideal narratee was soon interrupted by the presence of Ruth. Despite the absence of contact with Nao, Ruth stands out as Nao's reader in the fictional world. Standing between readers' newly initiated connection with Nao, Ruth forces readers to reconsider their position as Nao's ideal narratee, which reminds readers of their ordinary position as the observer within the story. However, reader's being temporarily jolted out of their role of ideal narratee doesn't mean the complete break of their relationship with Nao. Since the excerpts of Nao's diary stand independently from Ruth's narrative, and there is no real correspondence between Nao and Ruth, readers can employ the role of ideal narratee and observer simultaneously. Thus, while observing the reader-writer relationship between Ruth and Nao, readers are no longer in the position of the outsider, the position from which we watch characters think, move, talk, act [3], but rather as active participants who deem Ruth as a fellow reader of Nao's diary.

The overlap of the actual readers' two positions not only helps their reflection on their own bond with Nao, but also allows for a deeper understanding on the reader-writer relationship between Nao and Ruth. In the reading process, the actual readers' reading of Nao's diary is almost synchronized with Ruth's, who decides to pace herself, thus forcing readers along, to read as Nao had written her diary: "in real time, living her life, moment by moment" [5], so as to better replicate Nao's experience. This similar pace in reading Nao's diary provides readers a chance to compare Ruth's response to Nao's writing with their own. In this way, they can not only examine their own engagement with Nao but also obtain an understanding of Ruth's feeling towards Nao. With readers' fellow readership with Ruth, they are able to view the bond between Ruth and Nao from a perspective that entails deeper engagement, distinct from the apathy of a mere observer.

After reading that Nao plans to "graduate from time", to "drop out of time" and "exit her existence" [5], readers would be unnerved by the implication of suicide attempt behind these expressions, hence naturally longing to share and confirm this interpretation with another reader. At this point, Ruth's existence as a fellow reader would prove instrumental in the understanding of Nao. Indeed, readers are assured of their speculation of Nao's tendency towards suicide after sensing the same desire in Ruth to help the girl: "she was aware of an odd and lingering sense of urgency to ... what? To help the girl? To save her?" [5]. This common concern for Nao later leads to readers' curiosity towards the story's end, a desire also shared by Ruth to find out "what happens in the end" [5].

With similar sympathy and curiosity towards Nao, readers can easily identify with Ruth and discover common traits in their respective relationships with Nao. However, there are also differences in the reading process. Reading Nao's diary, Ruth suffers from a sense of prurience, "like an eavesdropper or a peeping tom" [5], while readers conscious of Nao's diary as a fiction, aren't troubled by the unease of prying. Accompanied with the sense of peeping, there is also a sense of protectiveness towards Nao readers might find hard to identify with. While reading the passage of Nao's imagination of a pervert to Oliver, Ruth "felt a sudden flush of discomfort" that was more "on behalf of the girl" [5], which readers with the tacit knowledge that Nao is Ozeki's invention, wouldn't feel as strong an emotion as Ruth. Thus, the simultaneity of readers' being the narrative audience and ideal narratee provides them with a new perspective in comprehending their relationship with Nao as well as the bond between Ruth and Nao.

2.3. Ozeki's Reader: Authorial Audience

In the novel, readers' experience is further complicated by their role as the authorial audience. When first encountering character Ruth as Nao's narratee, though readers' engagement with Nao is temporarily disrupted, they are presented with another bridge of communication with the implied

author. By naming the character Ruth, Ozeki reminds readers of her presence as the author behind, which helps to build a connection between her and readers. As suggested by Davis, there are textual clues that invite us to link her to Ozeki, conflating the figure of the person in the writing process and in daily life [7]. With further reading, readers would find that character Ruth not only bears the same name with the author, but also shares extremely similar life experiences with her, hence the usual covert awareness that character is an artificial construct becomes overt [8]. Therefore, despite the temporary interruption of readers' engagement as Nao's ideal narratee, they are engaged in another reader-writer relationship with Ozeki.

The third-person narration in Ruth's half of narrative indicates the presence of an extradiegetic narrator, preventing the narrative from being too autobiographical so as not to confuse Ruth the character with Ruth the author. As the synthetic component of character moves out of the background of the narrative [8], the presence of the implied author also becomes easier to be noticed. Thus, with the consciousness of the implied author's presence, some of the narrative communication in Ruth's narrative becomes increasingly ambiguous. When explicating Zen master Dōgen's notion of the granular nature of time, there isn't any indication of who is making the explanation. The free indirect speech could carry either Ruth or Ozeki's voice, as Gérard Genette claims, it could either be the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or the character speaks through the voice of the narrator [9]. Furthermore, the mixed voice addresses readers directly: "You can imagine the pure summer heat enfolding the mountain ..." [5], doubling the narrative communication. The ambiguous communication also appears when recounting images on the footages of tsunami: "from the vantage point of the camera, you could see how fast the wave was traveling ..." [5]. In this case, it could be Ozeki watching the tsunami video and talking to readers directly, hence forming a channel of communication between readers and Ozeki within Ruth's narrative. Therefore, while assuming the role as Nao's ideal narratee, observing Nao and Ruth's relationship, readers are also involved in the communication with Ozeki, establishing a multilayered reader-writer relationship through readers' multiple reading experiences.

3. Narrative Progression in *A Tale for the Time Being*

Conceiving narrative as a purposive communicative act [10], Phelan's rhetorical model of reading reconceives classical narratologists' concept of plot and employs a new term progression to better track the dynamic process of narrative. Due to progression's ability to shed light on the forward momentum of a narrative, Shang espoused it as a highlight of Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative [11]. In *Narrative as Rhetoric*, Phelan gave a comprehensive definition of progression as the way in which a narrative establishes its own logic of forward movement, and the way that movement carries with it invitations to different kinds of responses in the reader [3]. This paradigm shifts of rhetorical narratology from "the static" to "the dynamic" can either be caused by the elements of story (instabilities) or the elements of discourse (tensions) [11]. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, readers' focus on the dynamic and gradually unfolding reader-writer relationship mainly relies on the two global instabilities in Nao's and Ruth's narratives, and tensions created by Ruth's magic dream sequences.

3.1. The First Global Instability: Nao's Existential Crisis

As Shen claimed, "Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative is not concerned with ... the instabilities themselves, but the dynamic reactions of readers to these dynamic factors in the process of interpretation" [12]. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, instabilities not only function as the momentum for the development of the story, but also play a crucial role in encouraging readers' emotional and cognitive engagement in the multilayered reader-writer relationship.

The first global instability is introduced at the opening pages of Nao's diary in which she expressed her decision to "exit her existence" [5] in the near future, unsettling readers in their relationship with Nao. Threatened by her father's unexplained suicidal tendency and her great-grandmother's potential death, Nao was in a vulnerable position to question the meaning of her own existence. Without a truly reliable presence to depend on, Nao deemed the imaginary reader of her diary as the only motivation for her to keep on living: "like as long as I had a secret diary, I could survive" [5]. As Phelan claimed, "the ongoing communicative exchanges between ... narrator, and audience ... have significant effects on ongoing relationship with the narrator" [10], Nao's reliance on the imaginary reader imposes on readers a sense of responsibility. Like Ruth, willingly or reluctantly, readers are forced into a role critical to Nao's survival, thus becoming the key to the resolution of the global instability. In light of this, readers are constantly caught up with a desire to reach out and help Nao, which helps to establish an engaging reader-writer relationship.

The first global instability not only deepens readers' bond with Nao, but also increases readers' attention towards Nao and Ruth's relationship. With Ruth being the one who can actually contact Nao in their fictional world, readers are likely to expect Ruth to go beyond the pages to find and help Nao. However, against readers' expectation, the gradual resolution of Nao's existential crisis does not rely on the correspondence or meeting between the two, but a bond established solely on the process of Nao's writing and Ruth's reading. Faced with the obstacles posed by time lag and lack of information about Nao, Ruth is unable to reach Nao, just like readers who have difficulty accessing the fictional world of the novel. By presenting Ruth's ability to help Nao through her dream sequences, the novel demonstrates that the written word can be as much a means of meaningful connection as real life contact.

3.2. The Second Global Instability: Ruth's Writer's Block

In Ruth's narration, her instability with herself was set up the moment she began reading Nao's diary. Like Nao, Ruth has been suffering from an existential crisis with her writing project at a standstill. Identifying herself as a writer, she was losing her sense of self due to the difficulty in writing. Caught in her memoir project, Ruth struggled to find the power of narrative again, which can only be obtained through an engaging reading experience. It is not hard for readers to recognize Nao's diary as the key to lift Ruth from her predicament. With readers' own enjoyment reading Nao's diary, they are likely to anticipate Ruth's final submission to Nao's narrative as a way to recover her narrative power.

Since the resolution of the second global instability depends on Ruth's immersion into Nao's diary, her commitment as Nao's reader becomes a major focus for readers. As Tang stated, the substitution of progression for plot is primarily intended to highlight reader responses as a source of interest in the narrative. In narrative progression [13], the focus is not only on the significance of Ruth's submission to Nao's diary, but also readers' subsequent attention to the development of Ruth's bond with Nao, which they monitor with their own level of involvement as the reference.

Indeed, there is a lot of resistance in the process of Ruth's relinquishing her authorial agency. The dynamics of Ruth's investment in Nao's diary during the voyage — the development of the global instabilities and/or tensions follow a mixed pattern of commitment and self-doubt. Unlike readers who eagerly join Nao's ideal narratee, it is hard for Ruth to change her habit of judging people's narratives from a writer's perspective. When reading the smooth flow of Nao's narration, Ruth "couldn't help but notice and admire the uninhibited flow of the girl's language" [5]. While feeling the deficiency in Nao's words to capture the texture of time passing: "No writer, even the most proficient, could re-enact in words the flow of a life lived, and Nao was hardly that skillful" [5], Ruth herself began to depict the situation Nao was in using her own words and imagination.

However, towards the end of the novel, readers would find Ruth's commitment to Nao has

surpassed theirs. When some pages of Nao's diary disappeared, Ruth even began to question whether her own existence is conjured by Nao: "Maybe she was ... a homeless and ghostly composite of words that the girl had assembled" [5]. Paying close attention to the complication and resolution of Ruth's writer's block, readers are able to better observe the dynamic development of Ruth's bond with Nao, which sometimes differs from sometimes matches with theirs.

3.3. Tensions in Magic Dream Sequences

Reading the beginning of the novel, readers are likely to detect the design of setting Nao the writer and Ruth the reader as the key to resolve each other's existential crisis. This, coupled with the novel's realistic style, are likely to lead to readers' speculation of the novel's configuration — "audience's hypothesis ... about the direction and purpose of the whole narrative" as the hymn of the touching relationship between Ruth the reader and Nao the writer [10]. However, two magic dream sequences in the novel break readers' assumption of the implied author's intention to build a realistic world and force them to reconceive their original interpretation of the reader-writer relationship between Ruth and Nao.

The first dream sequence comes at the very night Ruth decided to become Nao's reader. In her dream, Ruth saw Jiko's response to Nao's e-mail, which shows signs of premonition. Though the dream could be explained away as a coincidence, as Oliver suggested in the novel, readers are clearly aware of the mysterious actor in the story. Indeed, even Ruth herself was surprised by such a dream: "I think I'm going crazy" [5]. Faced with this dream sequence, readers are abruptly asked to accept the fantastic fact that Ruth can predict Nao's story by dreaming, while the other parts of the novel are depicted in a realistic way. As Phelan noted, tension is some disparity of knowledge, value, judgment, opinion, or belief between narrators and readers or authors and readers [3]. Indeed, with readers' expectation of the novel's depicting a realistic story, the sudden emergence of disparity between readers and the the implied author's knowledge on Ruth's mysterious power makes it hard for readers to enter the authorial audience. It is therefore natural for readers to be skeptical about the premonition's actually being the magical product of Ruth's growing connection with Nao. As a result, readers are likely to view the dream as a symbolic representation of Ruth's participation in creating Nao's story.

In the second magic dream sequence, facing the blank pages of Nao's diary, Ruth was even able to enter and change Nao's story. Again, it is hard for the authorial audience to accept such a mystical element within a novel that is otherwise told in a matter-of-fact tone. Ruth's intrusion into Nao's story is analogous to writer's intervention in the creative process. Thus, to better conform to the conventions of realism employed in most part of the novel, readers are more likely to interpret the change as an indication of Ruth's regaining of her writer's narrative power, who's finally able to change the ending of Nao's story.

As Phelan and Rabinowitz regarded the implied author's interest in guiding the audience's response as having a significant influence on the construction of the plot dynamics [14], Ozeki has also considered readers' potential responses as a way to develop the story. The insertion of unusual fantastic elements into the novel encourages multiple interpretations of reader-writer relationship. With readers changing their original interpretation of the fixed read-writer relationship between Ruth and Nao, readers are now open to the second interpretation, where Ruth's role would be reversed, being the writer of Nao's story.

In the rhetorical triangle among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response [15], Ozeki's design of multiple interpretations as a way to signify the complex reader-writer relationship is realized through readers' response to the ambiguity from their different roles in the reading process. This experience is what enriches readers' understanding of the multilayered reader-writer relationship presented in the novel.

4. Narrative Judgements in *A Tale for the Time Being*

As we could learn from Shang [11], just as there is progression of narrative, there is progression of narrative judgements. Readers' ongoing judgements on characters, actions, narrators and the implied author are crucial to their experience of the story's development. Thus, it is as necessary to analyze the novel's narrative judgements as its narrative progression. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, the differences and similarities of readers and Ruth's judgements on Nao's father Haruki provide a path for readers' understanding of the multilayered reader-writer relationship among Ruth, Nao and themselves. Moreover, as the point of intersection for narrative form, narrative ethics, and narrative aesthetics [10], narrative judgements further lead readers' response from the novel's ethics to its aesthetic construction by Ozeki. In this section, Phelan's three types of narrative judgements: ethical judgements, interpretive judgements and aesthetic judgements will be analyzed in turn to present their functions in building a multileveled reading experience.

4.1. Ethical Judgements on Oliver

As the reading progresses, readers encounter a series of tough experiences Nao has undergone: her father's dismissal, the sharp decline of her family's economic situation, the bullying against her at school, and the worst of all, her father's suicide attempts. Like Ruth, as Nao's addressee, readers' sympathy for Nao and their subsequent protectiveness towards her grow with the accumulation of each of her misfortunes. Thus, with readers' deepening concern for Nao, reading Nao's diary is no longer a matter of simply becoming conscious of characters' actions. Rather, readers couldn't help judging the moral value of characters and actions [10], especially those responsible for Nao's miserable situation, but readers' judgements are not limited to the characters in Nao's novel. Simultaneously employing Nao's ideal narratee and narrative audience, readers can not only assess the characters in Nao's diary along with Ruth, but also judge Ruth's responses to these characters. As Phelan elaborated [10], "because characters' actions include their judgments, readers often judge characters' judgments", a phenomenon called by Shang as "double judgements" [11]. That is to say, readers and Ruth can be deemed to stand at the same level when reading Nao's diary and judging the characters within it, but since Ruth is also a character in the fictional world, her evaluation on other characters is also a part of reader's judging material.

Influenced by readers' concern for Nao, their ethical judgements on others' reactions towards Nao's suffering become a crucial indication of their bond with Nao. With the reader-writer relationship strengthening through their involvement in Nao's story, readers are not only expected to share Ruth's sympathy towards Nao, but also deepen their sympathy as the reading continues. As Phelan stated, ethical judgements follow the path of "inside-out". Rather than based on people's pre-existing ethical standards, ethical principles are built and reconstructed through the reading experience. In the novel, readers' ethical judgements are influenced by Ozeki's different ways of depicting Ruth's indignation to her husband Oliver's lack of sympathy towards Nao's suffering. In the following two cases, readers experience a deepening negative ethical judgement on Oliver due to Ozeki's subtle adjustment of narrator's function from "evaluating" to "reporting".

Early in the story, when first encountering Oliver's indifference towards Nao after his hearing of Nao's rough time at home and school: "Interesting, about the crows," Oliver said, tentatively" [5], a complete revelation of Ruth's inner thoughts is given by Ozeki: "After everything she'd just read - about Nao's life, the girl's father, her situation at school - that his mind would alight upon the crows! There were so many other more pressing things she would have preferred to discuss" [5]. Readers, like Ruth, are likely to feel indignant over Oliver's not being distressed over Nao's experience as they are. Rather than showing her full trust in readers' recognition of Ruth's feelings, here Ozeki made the narrator play the role of an evaluator, who reveals directly Ruth's inner world.

Ozeki takes a different approach the second time she discloses Ruth's dissatisfaction with Oliver's reaction towards Nao's story. As the indication of readers' increasing bond with Nao, the negative ethical judgement on Oliver's apathy is further strengthened by Ozeki's changing of narrator's role. When Ruth's husband again failed to identify Nao's desperation, Ozeki restricts the narrator to the single function of reporting:

"That Babette seems pretty cool," Oliver said.

"She seems like a nice friend for Nao to have ..." he said.

"It's good that she finally has somebody to talk to ..." he said.

"I'd like to go to Akiba..." he said.

"It's sad about the bugs."

She [Ruth] closed the diary, took off her glasses, and placed both on the bedside table [5].

From the conversation, readers can sense a deliberate omission of Ruth's feelings towards the series of comments from Oliver. But this time, even without the disclosure of Ruth's inner world, readers are able to infer from the conversation Ruth's indignation based on their own discontent over Oliver.

Through Ozeki's different means of disclosure, readers not only recognize Ruth's and their own deepening connection with Nao, but also the implied author's trust in readers, thus establishing a closer relationship with Ozeki. In light of this, the three layers of reader-writer are invigorated at the same time.

4.2. Interpretive Judgements on Haruki

Interpretive judgments, centering on the nature of actions or other elements of the narrative are also what Phelan called first-order activities along with ethical judgements [10]. Due to readers' sympathy for Nao, they tend to make judgements not only on characters' moral values, but also the motives behind their actions. Shang's elaboration on interpretive judgements as what reader's developing experience of narrative progression is mainly dependent on shows the potential of interpretive judgements in presenting the dynamics of reader-writer relationship in the novel [11]. Readers' ongoing judgements on the nature and drive of characters' actions in Nao's diary serve as a dynamic indication of reader's feelings towards Nao.

As the major factor to cause Nao's existential crisis, Nao's father Haruki is likely to attract readers' negative interpretation on his actions. Reading another suicide attempt of Haruki after he found out about the burusera hentai website auctioning Nao's panties, Ruth interpreted the suicide attempt as an irresponsible behavior of a coward. Holding the negative interpretation of cowardice as the drive of Haruki's suicide, Ruth strongly argued against Oliver's opinion that Haruki actually tried to help before his suicide attempt: "He learns about the hentai site and so he takes pills and rises to kill himself? How exactly is that helpful?" [5]. Readers, with the same negative assessment on Haruki, are likely to identify with Ruth and support her argument.

However, it is soon revealed that Ruth and readers are making the wrong interpretive judgements on Nao's father. Blinded by the strong sympathy for Nao, Ruth and readers fail to recognize the name Haruki employed on the auction website, and therefore assumed that he was not involved in the auction. Thus, when the truth is revealed by Oliver: "'C.imperator? The guy who lost the auction? That was him. That was Nao's father'" [5], readers are likely to undergo a shock as Ruth did. Rather than a desire to escape from the fact of his daughter's having been sexually harassed, Haruki's suicide attempt was the result of his despair after his earnest attempt to help having failed. The shared misinterpretation on the motive of Haruki's suicide attempt reminds readers of both their and Ruth's growing bond with Nao, a bond strong enough to mislead their interpretive judgements.

Still, differences can be detected in readers and Ruth's respective relationships with Nao. Knowing that Haruki did try to help by bidding against perverts in the auction, readers' negative

judgements of him are likely to moderate. Despite the fact, Ruth still refused to change her negative interpretive judgements on Haruki and even made a more malicious suggestion of his being a pervert himself: “‘I get it,’ she said, ... ‘It’s disgusting. He was bidding on his daughter’s panties. What kind of sicko bids on his daughter’s underpants?’” [5], which readers might find too radical an interpretation to endorse. By juxtaposing readers and Ruth’s assessments, Ozeki manages to provide readers with a deeper level of understanding over theirs and Ruth’s bond with Nao, thus a better participation in the two sets of reader-writer relationship.

4.3. Aesthetic Judgements in *A Tale for the Time Being*

Concerning artistic quality of the narrative and of its parts [10], aesthetic judgements play a distinctive role in readers’ experience of fiction. Different from interpretive and ethical judgements, aesthetic judgements are both first-order and second-order activities. Readers’ judgements on the quality of narrative both go alongside with interpretive and ethical judgements and follow from these primary-level judgements. In *A Tale for the Time Being*, readers not only appreciate Ozeki’s narrative techniques in their developing experience of the novel, but also acquire an overall assessment of their effects based on their interpretive and ethical judgements.

According to Phelan [10], first-order aesthetic judgements are ongoing assessments of the technical skills manifest in the narrative. In order to create an engaging experience of a multilayered reader-writer relationship, Ozeki employed various narrative techniques. In depicting Ruth’s indignation towards Oliver’s indifference to Nao’s suffering, Ozeki changed narrator’s functions. By shifting narrator’s role from evaluator to reporter, Ozeki spurred readers to speculate Ruth’s inner world hidden in the report by feeling vicariously Ruth’s indignation, thus strengthening their understanding of Ruth’s deep bond with Nao. Ozeki also employed delayed decoding — presenting the fact while withholding or delaying knowledge of the cause to guide readers to discover their wrong interpretive judgements on Haruki for themselves [16]. Presenting the result of Haruki’s suicide attempt while withholding the actual cause, Ozeki left room for readers to conjecture, thus a chance for them to reflect on their changing feelings for Nao.

Besides readers’ appreciation of Ozeki’s mastery of narrative skills, they also make second-order aesthetic judgements over overall quality of the experience based on their first-order interpretive and ethical judgements [10]. Under the implied author’s guidance, readers first experience deepening negative ethical judgements on Oliver, which indicates their and Ruth’s growing sympathy for Nao. Later on, the revision of readers’ interpretive judgements on Haruki further exhibits their deep bond with Nao that warps their judgements of truth behind Haruki’s action. In this way, readers not only become conscious of their own and Ruth’s ongoing relationship with Nao, but also the meeting of minds with the implied author, thus being able to fully experience the multilayered reader-writer relationship with characters and the implied author.

5. Conclusion

Since the novel’s publication, the touching reader-writer relationship between Ruth and Nao has provided an unforgettable reading experience for readers and an interesting case of study for scholars. To make up for the previous lack of attention to readers’ constructive role in the novel, the paper emphasized readers’ participation in establishing a multilayered reader-writer relationship. With a similar focus on readers’ active involvement, Phelan’s rhetorical theory of narrative offers a helpful perspective to interpret the complex relationship between reader and writer Ozeki intends to depict. By employing three of the major aspects of Phelan’s rhetorical theory of narrative: four dimension readers, narrative progression and narrative judgements, the paper investigated the role

of readers' participation in constructing the constantly shifting reader-writer relationship among readers, Nao, Ruth and Ozeki.

Firstly, the paper explored three sets of relationships established among readers, characters and the author through an analysis of the multiple roles readers assume in their reading process. Employing ideal narratee, readers build a close relationship with the diary's writer Nao, while observing the reader-writer relationship between Ruth and Nao as narrative audience and maintaining a reader-writer relationship with Ozeki as authorial audience. Secondly, the paper revealed the function of dynamics on the level of story and discourse in attracting readers' attention to the ongoing development of the three sets of reader-writer relationship. The two global instabilities caused by Nao and Ruth directed readers' attention to both their and Ruth's developing relationship with Nao, while the tension caused by Ozeki's employment of magic dream sequences bridged readers' bond with the implied author. Lastly, the paper analyzed the function of the comparison between readers and Ruth's judgements in encouraging readers to monitor and reflect on their own level of engagement as the reader so as to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics between reader and writer, and the implied author's skills in disclosure.

Through the exploration of readers' participation, the paper revealed the possibility of investigating two more layers of reader-writer relationship between readers and Nao and readers and Ozeki than the previous focus on the bond between Ruth and Nao alone. Besides, it provided new perspectives in understanding Ruth and Nao's relationship by analyzing readers' experience when observing it as Nao's ideal narratee and the authorial audience. In this regard, the paper not only demonstrated Ozeki's careful consideration for readers' participation in completing and complicating the reader-writer relationship in the writing process, but also illuminated Ozeki's concept of the connection between reader and writer in real life: the magic of narrative is created by the interplay between reader and writer and a relationship built through words are as deep and intimate as any other.

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