Writing (a) Home in Times of Crisis: A Review of *Scattered All Over the Earth* (2018) by Yoko Tawada

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Despite the universality of the idea of 'home,' there is an undeniable multiplicity to the many definitions, relationships, and experiences of 'homeness' expressed in art, literature, and daily life. Yoko Tawada's work celebrates this multiplicity by rejecting rigid definitions of home that imply permanence and physicality, showing instead the many ways in which people think about, relate with, long for, and inhabit their homes.

In her surprisingly heartwarming dystopian novel, *Scattered All Over the Earth* (2018), Tawada explores the concept of 'homeness' by imagining a future in which new communities can be formed, even after upheaval. Japan has been destroyed because of the climate crisis, and the island country's only survivors are emigrants who lived abroad when it disappeared. Among this small, displaced community is a woman named Hiruko, who embarks upon a quest to seek out other survivors with whom she can speak her native language. During her journey, she befriends a diverse cast of characters, each of whom becomes invested in her search for the cultural remnants of her home country.

When Hiruko speaks, she does so from the perspective of someone displaced, stateless, and officially unidentifiable because she lacks a valid passport and can no longer return home. However, through the unwavering hopefulness and creative spirit with which Tawada imbues Hiruko, the reader does not only see the bureaucratic obstacles, challenges, and injustices faced by displaced people but also the positive potentials inherent to the state of in-betweenness that permeates them.

Tawada illustrates the ambivalence of the migrant relationship to 'homeness' through the "picture dramas" Hiruko draws for the students at a school for immigrant children in Denmark (Tawada 27). These visual stories synthesize Japanese folktales with contemporary European settings and personal stories of migration and home. One such tale is that of Kaguya Hime, a moon princess found in a bamboo stalk and raised on

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earth. While adapting this tale, Hiruko wonders: "The stalk of bamboo where the old couple find[s] the shining girl should be her home, so why is she always talking about 'going home to the moon?'" (Tawada 31). As a result, Hiruko advances that "Kaguya Hime was the child of immigrants. She was born in a bamboo tree on Earth while her parents were living here, but unable to feel at home in her earthly environment, she's always dreaming about 'returning' to the moon, where her parents are from" (Tawada 31). Hiruko imagines that Kaguya Hime would feel deeper homesickness if she returned to the moon, finding that her sense of belonging is now split between two places. This feeling of in-betweenness, expressed through this moment of intertextuality, motivates Hiruko to seek out others from her lost homeland. Paradoxically, then, it is through this sense of in-betweenness and her experience of traveling, seeking, and meeting people with diverse backgrounds that Hiruko eventually finds community and belonging.

One way in which Hiruko constructs a metaphysical home is by creating and inhabiting a "homemade language" called *Panska* (Tawada 33). Panska is a hybrid language combining Japanese sounds, rhythm, and syntax with Scandinavian words. Through this act of language creation, Tawada offers a nuanced perspective on how language roots people, its potential to both connect and alienate, and "[…] the dilemmas of finding linguistic shelter in a world of rising seas and ceaseless migration" (Lucas 13). In her work and interviews, Tawada often speaks of language as a 'skin' that one inhabits, explaining that, while we may be born with the skin of our mother tongue – a skin we cannot step out of – when we consume foreign words, these words "slowly transform themselves and become meat and then, ultimately, they can become […] flesh" (Brandt 5). Through this metaphor, Tawada explains how language covers or shelters someone, and yet, it is changeable, growing and shifting with one's journey until it becomes something new.

The parallels between Tawada's background and Hiruko's story are undeniable. However, the author also explores in depth the experiences of home felt by the other five principal characters, each embodying a different aspect of Tawada's personal journey. To begin with, Knut, a linguistics student from Denmark, struggles with feeling confined to his home due to his mother's possessiveness. When he speaks, he rejects imposed relationships and conventional definitions of home and kinship, thus finding a new community of friends who offer him the emotional security intrinsic to the feeling of 'homeness.' Moreover, Knut's fascination with Hiruko's 'homemade' language hints at his interest in the act of homemaking itself.

Similarly, through the characterization of Akash, a trans woman from India studying in Germany who expresses the feeling of 'homeness' by wearing saris and openly sharing her experience of transitioning while exploring the ruins of Roman bathhouses in Trier, Tawada explores what it means to feel comfortable and at home in one's physical body.

When Nora, another important character in the novel, speaks, she is searching for someone to overcome feelings of detachment and estrangement in her physical home by sharing the space with another. When Nanook speaks, on the other hand, he inhabits the language and body of Tenzo, the alternate Japanese persona he creates to escape the ostracization and feelings of inferiority he experienced as a young Greenlandic Inuit person. Finally, when Hiruko's countrymate Susanoo tries to speak, he finds that his voice has been lost, mirroring the loss of identity and communication that can occur due to the trauma of enduring an environmental, economic, or social crisis.

In her novel, Yoko Tawada explores the complex struggle between the human desire to feel at home and the realities of the contemporary world, such as migration, climate change, and globalization. The novel reads as an unconventional letter home, one in which the author writes back to Japan, sharing the unique experiences of being a transnational migrant author while creating a metaphysical home through language. Thanks to her imaginative and whimsical snapshot of a dystopian world, Tawada succeeds in creatively engaging with discourses on home and kinship and their evolving definitions.

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Tawada explores the complex struggle between the human desire to feel at home, and the realities of the contemporary world

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