Scattered All Over the Earth

Yoko Tawada
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Set in a futuristic, dystopian world reshaped by climate change, Yoko Tawada's *Scattered All Over the Earth* celebrates cross-cultural, crosslinguistic friendships.

An unnamed country, presumably Japan, has disappeared. Knut, a Danish linguistics student, sees Hiruko, a survivor from this lost country, on television and decides he must meet her. She speaks Panska, a Pan-Scandinavian language she invented that somehow everyone can understand. They travel to Trier to attend an umami festival in hopes that Hiruko can meet someone who speaks her childhood language. From there, the two wander through Europe, making friends who join them as they try to understand a new linguistic and political landscape.

The time period and geopolitical structures of Tawada's science fiction world remain vague, which places greater emphasis on the book's ideas about friendship, borders, and language. Panska symbolizes language as a connecting force, one that challenges political and cultural boundaries. Communication goes even deeper, however; the characters find ways to reach one another that defy language barriers. The novel celebrates crosslinguistic communication as generative, fostering imagination and friendship and offering hope in a chaotic world.

The novel's form underscores this hopefulness: it moves through a series of narrators so that each character has a chance to speak. Knut and Hiruko tell their stories first, followed by a trans woman from India, a German woman, an Indigenous man from Greenland, and another refugee from Japan. As these people meet, hear each other's stories, and travel to new places to solve each other's problems, a feeling of openness and possibility emerges. Threats abound—a changing climate, terrorism, and hostile political structures create danger and uncertainty—but these characters carry within themselves the seeds of a possible new world.

Yoko Tawada's *Scattered All Over the Earth* is a cheerful dystopian novel that celebrates inventiveness, possibilities, and human connections.

REBECCA HUSSEY (January / February 2022)

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