

Language, Letters and Loss

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Language, Letters and Loss

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言語、文学、喪失

ケイト・ボウズ

この論文では水村美苗が『日本語が減びるとき：英語の世紀の中で』(*The Fall of Language in the Age of English*) (2015)で述べているような、日本における読書離れ、及び、日本語、日本文学が英語、或いは欧米の影響を受け、その純粋性が維持されないことへの懸念について考察する。

歴史的に見ると日本語の純粋性は三度の危機を経験している。一度目と二度目は日本だけに特有なことで、それまでに経験しなかった外部との接触から、一度目は明治時代、二度目は第二次世界大戦後である。言語に対する三度目の危機は日本のみならず、世界中に見られる現象で、それはインターネットによるコンピュータ技術がもたらす言語・読書への影響である。第三番目の危機への対処としては「深い読み方」の実践を提唱したい。

インターネット情報を求めて次から次へと表面的に画面の文字を読むのではなく、文学作品を「深く読む」意識を助長させるための実践として、相違と多様性を必要とする聖書的、相互依存的関係を含む作品を取り上げる。「深く読む」ことにより、自己を知り、また同時に他者との関係、社会との関わりが明確になること、さらに、過去、現在の歴史の流れのなかでの自己と他者の関係、世界の中での個人という相互依存的関係の理解を深めていく必要性を論じる。

キーワード：水村美苗，言語，精読

'A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.'

Chinese proverb

'In the world, approximately 6,000 languages are spoken . . . of which only about 600 are confidently expected to survive this century.'

MIT Indigenous Languages Initiative (Ryan)

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Key Words: Mizumura Minae, languages, deep reading

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This paper engages with Minae Mizumura's anxieties regarding the decline of literary reading in Japan as well as the contamination of Japanese (language and identity) by English/the West. It traces the three ruptures modern Japanese has sustained and considers the dangers of a dominating language (English) from an ecological perspective. Certain diminishment to minority languages are bound to follow the arrival of a dominant language and this is particularly true where there is weak familiarity with the native literary tradition.

While this essay is framed using the Biblical story of the Fall, based on a cue from the English translation of Mizumura's *Nihongo ga horobiru toki: eigo no seiki no naka de* (2008) (*The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (2015)), it is also a mis-reading. Strictly speaking, as Jay Rubin notes, the verb *horobiru* echoes a famous sentence spoken by a pessimistic social critic in the novel *Sanshirō* (1908) by Sōseki Natsume. 'When pressed by the novel's young protagonist, Sanshirō, to agree that Japan is surely going to go on developing, the man coolly declares, "Japan is going to perish", which is translated here as "Japan's headed for a fall."' (n.p.) The Biblical Fall is plainly not where Mizumura intended the imagination to go. Readings of the biblical story show that change necessarily entails both losses and gains, a more cautiously optimistic point of view, perhaps, than Sōseki's.

A Garden Story: The Fall

God creates, according to the scriptures, out of speech and breath. Speaking to the human, the first divine words are a proscription that limit absolute freedom.¹ God's compassion for Adam causes the creation of animal companions. God's second act of speech is an invitation to Adam to speak, to give expression to difference and to name the animals. Despite this, the encounter with other created beings brings no light of recognition: 'there was not found an help meet for him' (v.20) and so God makes another human being, one whom Adam does recognise at a profound level: 'This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. . .' (v.23). It is written that 'they both were naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed' (v.25). This is the original blessing, an intimacy not marked by separation, rather at one with the whole of creation; the primal innocence of humanity.

The serpent's tongue is forked with reason, a sp(l)itting organ. A creature of God's garden nevertheless it speaks not with God's language but another, that contradicts. Eve's first speech act is to echo what the man must have told her (off stage) about the forbidden fruit. 'God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' (v.3-5)

Eve, the naive, new to incarnate reality, unaccustomed to speech, could not grasp the consequences of her inability to hear God's words clearly. The Latin expression *ob*

audire means to hear or listen to. The English word 'obedience' is hardly disguised by the older Latin root. The relationship is plain. Dis-obedience is often thought to have been Eve's error: a matter of will rather than a lack of maturity, an inability to be 'response-able', a failure to understand. Conversation was not possible until obedience, strictly, the ability to hear clearly, to follow rules and to respond, was tested. Language evolved as the primitive pair worked to orient themselves after the trauma in the new world outside Paradise.

There are two ways to interpret the story recorded in the Bible of God's ejection of Adam and Eve from Paradise. One is that it is a loss worthy of lamentation; the other is that it is a gain worthy of celebration. Traditional and conservative readings emphasise the former whereas the latter, being more optimistic and even, perhaps, utopian, is favoured by progressives. The lamentation focuses on the weakness of Eve, primarily, and complicit Adam, who fall prey to the serpent's seductions, are tempted, and eat of the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the only act which has been explicitly prohibited. This, in effect, ruptures humanity's parent-child relationship with God: a loss.

The trauma of this rupture ignites in humanity, it could equally be argued, the spirit of [its own] creativity. Another way to interpret the aftermath of the first humans' exile from Paradise is to consider that the banishment created conditions for the flowering of human consciousness. With eyes opened after tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve became aware of one another for the first time and they became aware of difference. For each of them, this moment is an awakening to an entirely new world(view). While the feelings of shame and discomfit they experience are hardly celebration-worthy, the dawning awareness of difference that comes from the exploding of them apart from one another and apart from their Parent-Creator, engenders a distance which has enabled humanity to flourish. These claims can be illustrated and clarified by the analogy of the human infant coming to consciousness, to speech, to writing, ideas, representation, vision. At first, the Mother is all: sight, sound, nourishment, care. Over time the child gradually becomes increasingly independent of the parents as she matures in body and mind. This developmental model is also one way to read the scripture of the Fall: the human is tasked with a mission to become open to and face reality, recognise difference, reflect, understand and grow wise.

Language is, in a fundamental way, part of the ecology of the world. The spoken word, often conceptualised as 'the mother tongue', is symbolic of what we are born with, what is natural and familiar. As a communicative medium, it extends outward and always expects to be met with a response. The mother tongue shows one's initiation and belonging in a language community. The mother tongue is characterised as 'inaccurate, unclear, coarse, limited, banal, repetitive, earthbound, housebound' and, according to the writer Ursula Le Guin, the mother tongue

is a language constantly ignored or belittled by speakers of the "father tongue"

[and] regarded as “primitive”. But without it no one ever learns their real native tongue, the language of transformation, imagination, the conscious art . . . that makes style, pattern and beauty out of our biological existence. And without this elusive native tongue, we become incapable of telling the truth . . . (qtd. in Williams, 73-74).

By contrast, the father tongue, native to no-one, a form of language which we must be schooled into, is associated with reading and writing. It is, by contrast with the mother tongue, ‘technological’. Over the course of human evolution we can see a Fall-like parallel. Marshall McLuhan, the media theorist, explains how

The oral world of our distant ancestors may well have had emotional and intuitive depths that we can no longer appreciate. [. . .] preliterate people must have enjoyed a particularly intense “sensual involvement” with the world. When we learned to read [. . .] we suffered a “considerable detachment from the feelings or emotional involvement that a non-literate man or society would experience.” (qtd. in Carr 56-7)

The written word as coded communication produces a sense of separation, of slowing, of distance. This does not make it less authentic than the spoken. Rather, the written word enables a reflective, indirect relation with what is native. This indirectness in the act of writing gives us the time to think, to deliberate, and to readjust our relation with the world. The father tongue is ‘language that . . . stops you in your tracks’ (Saito 266). Being arrested (or ‘convicted’ in the Cavellian phrase) by written language evokes a response, quite natural to readers, characterised by receptivity, silence and patience, all modes of the reader’s relation to a text.

Attending to the father does not deny the mother: how could it? Can we ‘keep faith at once with the mother and the father, to unite them, and to have the word born in us?’ (qtd. in Saito 266). In societies with a long history of literacy, like Japan, the mother tongue is always already conditioned by the father tongue. Language and thought and communicative ability are enriched by reading, in other words. We need both mother and father to experience the world in its full-blown form. Neither a phonocentric (listening and speaking) nor a logocentric (reading and writing) approach on its own, will do. For the true word to be born, to come to a healthy and open bilingualism (within and between languages), we need both.

The Fall/s of the Japanese language

There have been three ruptures in the written form of modern Japanese language, a script that has its beginnings in the seventh century. By rupture I mean points in the evolution of the language in which tension has gathered around the language causing its users to reflect on its survival in the global context and whether or not (and how) it needed to change. The first of these ruptures, dubbed by Sōseki Natsume a ‘sudden twist [*kyokusetsu*]’ (Mizumura 151), occurred in the Meiji era with

the opening of the archipelago to non-Asian outsiders. The second occurred in the wake of World War II. And the third, underway currently, is happening with the proliferation of cyber-technologies, often English-dominant media, which present real challenges to the integrity of non-dominant languages. Each of these moments in history has been marked by changes in technology, in writing and reading culture.

The First Rupture: THE MEIJI PERIOD

During the Meiji period (1868-1912) Japan emerged as a modern nation-state no longer confined to the Sinosphere. Though the prestige of Chinese had long overshadowed the evolving Japanese language, three conditions enabled a fairly rapid establishment of the national language. First, a mature written language had already formed while the country was still part of the Sinosphere; second, a robust 'print capitalism'² had emerged during the preceding Edo period that made for an active book trade; and third, Japan was free from Western colonization, unlike scores of countries influenced by the European imperial projects of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the first threat to the Japanese language issued from the very people whose language it was: the Japanese. At the time of the Meiji Revolution, when Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world and began to emerge as a modernized nation, there were great anxieties as to whether the Japanese language could ever legitimately be of any real use for connections off the archipelago or, more generally, outside of the Sinosphere. Even a couple of years before the Meiji Restoration, Maejima Hisoka, a pro-Western intellectual submitted a proposal to abolish Chinese characters. Mori Arimori, the first education minister of the modern government, took up that baton, too, wondering aloud (in English) in an article for American readers how

our intelligent race, eager in the pursuit of knowledge, [can] depend upon a weak and uncertain medium of communication in its endeavor to grasp the principal truths from the precious treasury of Western science and art and religion? (qtd. in Mizumura 123)

This was the first time (of many to follow) in which there was pressure to drop Japanese in favour of English as the national language. This pressure was not yielded to despite the fact that by the time Commodore Perry's 'black ships' appeared in 1853 off Japanese shores, the English language was already the world's most dominant language (122). Would English be easier to learn, some of the bilingual elites in the first government wondered—at least to read—than the traditional classical Chinese with its myriad characters and combinations of characters? Would a more phonocentric (and Western) system of writing be better? After all, Chinese characters symbolized an 'external language' (with implication of colonialism) and, in addition, ideograms were, at the time, also deemed rather backward and thus unsuitable for a newly opened nation making its way forward to parity with other Western nations.³

Common sense at the time deemed it wise and practical for language to 'look'

what it sounds like, a phoneticism later identified as phonocentrism. This was the basis for a kind of equivalence conundrum: language as simply sound (phonocentrism) or language as written code (logocentrism). It is this opposition that forms the core of Mizumura's quarrel with the threats to written Japanese. In her view 'an understanding of language that gives primacy to spoken language as a spontaneous expression of the human mind, [reduces] written language to the status of mere representation of spoken sounds' (124). Ideographic languages could never aspire to simple phonocentrism without significant mutilation. Chinese characters, indeed, stand stubbornly against phonocentrism; they are concise, versatile and able to "succinctly express abstract concepts and, when combined, to create new worlds without end" (125).

No attempts were made at the time to adopt English for the national language but the ministry tried to come up with ways of reshaping Japanese into a language befitting a modern nation. The debates raged on about how to get rid of Chinese characters and in the meantime a 'practical kind of written Japanese was taking shape, one that continued the tradition of mixing kana and Chinese characters and that depended on those very characters as never before' (125). This 'practical' Japanese writing gave rise, in turn, to a hugely active translation industry. It might be said that the rise in translations was one of the major characteristics of the Meiji era. The government actively pursued the translation of as many Western books as possible, as soon as possible. Japan aimed to make each and every bit of Western knowledge and technology its own. There was an amazing quantity of translated materials on an amazing diversity of subject matter. These acts of translation, from different 'universal' languages (English, Dutch, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish, for example), provided a new lease on life for the Japanese language: one of the more life-giving aspects of the burgeoning phenomenon of globalisation. Mizumura observes that 'The ultimate driving force behind any act of translation is the human desire to seek knowledge—a desire independent of concern for one's nation's viability. This desire is what makes humans *Homo sapiens*' (126).

The Second Rupture: WORLD WAR TWO

By the end of World War II, with Japan's defeat and the subsequent occupation of the country by American forces, freedom from Western influence was on the wane. The influence, indeed, was gaining quite a hold. The independence Japan had enjoyed as it modernised was now compromised. Mizumura holds that the rupture created by the war caused 'Japanese intellectuals—everyone from students at elite universities to primary and secondary school teachers, university professors, writers and editors—[to turn] against all that represented the Japan of the past and their "tainted" cultural heritage'. There were great efforts made to find stable ground, however, for the Japanese culture and identity, something, anything that did not bear the burden of wartime guilt. Resistance to foreign influence and the fear of the colonising threat was

met with the adoption by (leftist) intellectuals of Marxism, an ideology which viewed the United States as a 'corrupt, capitalist nation'. In spite of this spirit of resistance among the elite, Mizumura acerbically notes, during and following the Occupation (1945-1952) Japanese commoners 'wholeheartedly and unabashedly embraced all things American' (183). As much as the educated elite were 'postwar spiritual guides', commoners had their own ideas, too. Had not, after all, the [military and government] elite been the perpetrators of the war? And had not the victims of Japan and other countries been the victims of this war? Was it not logical, in light of this, that a full recovery of dignity required Japan to sever itself from its imperial past, its dangerous patriotism and elitism?

Two quite rational principles were adopted to guide the recovery from the devastation wrought by war: pacifism and egalitarianism. The former was understandably endorsed by traumatised public intellectuals. The latter, clearly Marxist influenced, was egalitarianism, a principle Mizumura strongly critiques as introducing unnecessary limitations on real progress. On the one hand, positively, egalitarianism could make for a more united society; on the other, negatively, no drive for uniformity can be ultimately successful in the garden of humanity. The flavour of this egalitarianism was rough and lacking in nuance as it left little respect for difference, depth or complexity—a complexity well represented (however unfortunately) by the language of the educated. Anti-elite, this egalitarian principle aimed at removing the vertical hierarchy of society that had brought the country to rack and ruin. How to make people more equal? A re-examination of the difficulties of the written language was proposed. Wouldn't it be simpler, the egalitarians in the Ministry of Education reasoned, if 'the written language were made easier to reflect the spoken language more closely, then everyone . . . could write' (184) and then, in theory, everyone could be educated equally. As it turned out, the inclination toward phoneticism was strongly supported by the occupying forces who had been surrounded by incomprehensible signs. In fact, at the time, these foreign forces were calling for 'the complete romanization of the Japanese writing system' (184). The purported 'superiority of phonetic notation was in fact a mark of utopianism imported from the West,' Mizumura notes, that along with 'primitive communism, egalitarianism, and the Self freed from the shackles of the past . . . wrecked cultural havoc . . .' (189).

In the watershed year of 1946, three language reforms were instituted and disseminated via compulsory education and the mass media: the number of Chinese characters was reduced to 1,850; the form of many Chinese characters was simplified; and the traditional kana orthography was altered to reflect pronunciation more accurately. While recognising the common sense of these reforms, Mizumura reserves a blast of criticism for the haste and carelessness which characterised the changes to the Chinese characters.⁴ She writes:

. . . those characters were simplified in a haphazard way, taking out a line here

and a dot there, as if it didn't matter that omitting a single stroke can sever a character from its semantic roots. Perhaps most damaging was the switchover to phonetic kana, which obscured the roots of a wide array of words. In English it would be almost as bad as enforcing a new spelling of philosophy as "filosofee" (185).

The Japanese language, asserted the English literature scholar and renowned Shakespearean translator, Fukuda Tsuneari in 1960, could never adopt a strictly phonetic writing system if only because of the enormous prevalence of homophones among ideogram compounds. Fukuda decried the desperate measure of new kana orthography noting how 'it confused the Japanese language and dulled people's awareness of word roots' in the process flattening out the hard-earned riches of orthodox notation (187). The reforms not only impoverished the Japanese language but also created a cultural gulf between the generations and their reading abilities. The effort required to read anything written before the changes was too great a struggle, equivalent perhaps to modern American youth's difficulty with reading Chaucer's English, or appreciating the King James Version of the Bible. Still, at least the committee on romanization was disbanded, and despite the purported damage done to Chinese characters, in 1966, for the first time in Japan's modern history, it was decreed that the written language would be a mixture of Chinese characters and Japanese kana.

The Third Rupture: THE INTERNET AGE

Twice, Mizumura asserts, the Japanese 'lost sight of themselves as a nation': first in the upheavals of the Meiji Era and, second, in the wake of World War II (200). The third rupture in language is technological, a global phenomenon not uniquely occurring in the Japanese language. If the 'fall' of the Meiji era could be seen as the loss of intimacy of a strictly isolated people; its gain was access to wider fields of knowledge and the birth of a modern nation state in relation with other countries of the globe. The trauma of the multiple losses in World War II is unquantifiable historically, but linguistically, as Mizumura has shown, there were significant changes to the written form of Japanese, a fall which many recognised as losses, even while there were (arguable) gains in the form of more accessible and democratic technologies in the areas of writing and reading. The losses and gains of the Internet Age are surely more difficult to judge without the benefit of hindsight. For the utopians, the Age has the potential for bringing a new kind of enlightenment or 'super-consciousness'; for the slower among us, there is a feeling that the world seems to be losing what the playwright Richard Foreman calls 'the thick and multi-textured density of deeply evolved personality (n.p)'. Today, he observes,

I see within us all . . . the replacement of complex inner density with a new kind of self-evolving under the pressure of information overload and the technology of the "instantly available". A new self that needs to contain less and less of an inner

repertory of dense cultural inheritance—as we all become "pancake people"—spread wide and thin as we connect with that vast network of information accessed by the mere touch of a button. (n.p)

So much for the global colonisation of the mind by the software and hardware of technology, a kind of Babel, destined we know not where.

The 'mesmerizing polyphony' of Japanese in its written form has undergone many changes in the last two centuries under the influences of modern technology, beginning with the typewriter all the way up to the present, diminutive and ubiquitous mobile technologies. Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows* points out that

Because language is, for human beings, the primary vessel of conscious thought, particularly higher forms of thought, the technologies that restructure language tend to exert the strongest influence over our intellectual lives. As the classical scholar Walter J. Ong put it, "technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word." The history of language is also a history of the mind. (51)

Mizumura identifies three points that have adversely affected language as evidenced in changed reading habits in this late capitalist, (cyber-)technocratic era. First, there is the development of science and the reification of 'objectivity.' 'The growing importance of science is manifest,' she points out, 'in universities around the world that are relentlessly downsizing the humanities, especially literature' (156).⁵ Second, in tandem with the advancement of the sciences, is the proliferation of technology. This has caused a rapid diversification of cultural goods including, for example, radio, film, television, videos, CDs, DVDs, video games, music downloads, streamed videos and more. All of these media compete for our attention and, being an endlessly distractible species (once to our evolutionary advantage), we find ourselves smitten. Films and television dramas have replaced the once venerable position in society of the novel. Mizumura observes that in addition to 'stimulating our audiovisual senses these cultural goods explore the meaning of human life and thus, like novels, address the question of how one should live. Dethroned, the novel has become merely one of many affordable mass-produced commodities' (158). The third development that has upset reading practices is the viral nature of mass consumer society. One particularly corrosive influence of this has been the obscuring of the notion of value. A recent *New York Times* editorial makes the point that 'Everybody loses when books become yet another commodity, produced by a few big names. It's one thing if everyone wants to wear the same shoes or drink the same soda. But the world of literature is the last place in which globalization should mean homogeneity' (Moser n.p). As Mizumura points out, there is a widening gap between what is of intrinsic value compared to what is of market value. She is clear in her judgment that 'what sells the most does not necessarily reflect genuine discernment' (159).

It is not only *what* we read that matters, but *how*, according to developmental

psychologist Maryanne Wolf. Media brings us the stuff of thought; it also shapes the process of thought. They are not simply passive channels of information. They really 'in-form'; they shape our minds. It is often reported that people are reading more than ever nowadays: text is on the Internet is ubiquitous as is text-messaging on mobile technology. Indeed, people may be reading more than ever before, but it is, as Nicholas Carr points out in his lauded essay "Is Google Making Us Stupid", 'a different kind of reading, and behind it lies a different kind of thinking—perhaps even a new sense of the self' (n.p). If 'we are how we read' what are the important characteristics of reading in the Internet era? Wolf mentions efficiency and immediacy, a pragmatic and instrumental approach that many young people are coming to know, an approach that Frank Kermode has classified as 'carnal reading' (see Murphy-Paul). Wolf fears this 'information decoding' method of reading

may be weakening our capacity for the kind of deep reading that emerged when an earlier technology, the printing press, made long and complex works of prose commonplace. When we read online, she says, we tend to become "mere decoders of information." Our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged. (n.p)

In contrast to this late-modern form of the 'carnal' consuming of text (for can it honestly be called 'reading'?) Annie Murphy-Paul describes deep reading as a spiritual practice, as a 'slow, immersive, rich in sensory detail and emotional and moral complexity—[. . .] a distinctive experience, different in kind from the mere decoding of words.' She goes on to detail how

[T]hat immersion is supported by the way the brain handles language rich in detail, allusion and metaphor: by creating a mental representation that draws on the same brain regions that would be active if the scene were unfolding in real life. The emotional situations and moral dilemmas that are the stuff of literature are also vigorous exercise for the brain, propelling us inside the heads of fictional characters and even, studies suggest, increasing our real-life capacity for empathy.

Deep reading skills, as opposed to the superficial reading we do on the web, are becoming an endangered practice: one we ought to take steps to preserve, as we would an ecosystem, if we are to flourish as *Homo sapiens*, humans that are wise and self-reflective, the species that knows that we know. The loss of deep reading skills threatens, Murphy-Paul warns, to imperil the intellectual and emotional development of generations of the so-called digital natives, as well as a critical part of human culture: 'the novels, poems and other kinds of literature that can be appreciated only by readers whose brains, quite literally, have been trained to apprehend them.'

Deep reading, as such, is not Mizumura's express goal. It, rather, explores the

way identity and reading are entwined. It seems to me to be about remembering people to their deeper and more authentic selves. She is concerned about gaining a proper perspective on the place of foreign languages in Japan, and toning down the 'national hysterical obsession with English' (196). She is concerned, secondly, with developing fully competent bilinguals, aware of both the local and the global and 'capable of defending or criticizing their own country as informed citizens' which, she insists, quite rightly, 'requires . . . thorough grounding in Japan and the Japanese language' (197). Thirdly, Mizumura proposes reforming the reading curriculum, at all levels of education, to enable the young to engage in deep reading and gain a broader sense of (their own) history, the world and themselves. It is said that when the great library of Alexandria was lost to fire, the resource that was lost was books themselves. Today, with billions of books in print and stored online, *the endangered breed is not books but readers*. Murphy-Paul echoes Mizumura's very anxieties when she states, 'Unless we train the younger generation to engage in deep reading, we will find ourselves with our culture's riches locked away in a vault: books everywhere and no one truly able to read them' (n.p.)

It is not the narrative of the Fall that springs to mind when thinking about Biblical stories of language, although as I hope I have shown, the birth of consciousness and its begetting of change, difference and increasing complexity, are essential to the evolution of humanity and the earth community. Rather, surely, it is the other story in the book of Genesis concerning the confounded and soon-scattered builders of the tower of Babel (Gen 11: 4-9), a story whose dream to re-bind humanity has distinctive echoes in today's ubiquitous technological environment. God punishes the people who have adopted one language because 'nothing will be restrained from them, which they've imagined to do' (v.6). This is not the kind of one-ness that works in creation, quite evidently, according to the faiths that share this sacred story.

Even so, there is a kind of one-ness that humanity is called to. The falls, or potential for perishing that I referenced at the start of this paper were metaphorical in character. In the twenty-first century, the peril is quite real and the task to become wise to our ecological reality is urgent. Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit scientist and philosopher, remarked as early as 1936 that 'The age of nations is past. The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the earth.' We will do this via the connectivity of our hearts in our different tongues: each a way of seeing the world that has given rise to a particular language. The eighteenth century philosopher and linguist, Wilhelm von Humboldt saw in the diversity of human languages enormous potential for the development of human ideas, each language having its 'inner form' and being an *energeia* for the interpretation of the world.⁶ Each language has its own genius, in other words. This mother tongue no longer depends, in our global age, on the nation of our residence. 'One's identity derives not from one's nation or blood,' Mizumura writes, 'but from the language one uses' (198). But as languages are corrupted and lost, and as

the practice of deep, or spiritual, reading is lost, the world loses texture and complexity as it loses memory and knowledge-making skills, and flattens.⁷ We cannot solve our planetary problems alone (nation by nation); we certainly cannot solve them in only one language. For this work we need diversity; we need a mature cosmopolitanism. We need, as Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, lays out

a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, [. . .] in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment. [141]

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Endnotes

¹ v. 16 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayst freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.

² Mizumura's assertions are based on her reading of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. She writes: 'The invention of Gutenberg's printing press in mid fifteenth century Europe made it possible to print mechanically what had previously been copied by hand; the enormous impact the invention had on the history of the written word is now well established. Yet according to Anderson, this invention alone would not have led to a profound transformation in society unless printed books could be distributed as market commodities. . . . The printing press proved transformational precisely because, in Europe, capitalism had by then been developed to a point where books could circulate as market commodities' (75) Also, ' . . . by the time of the Meiji Restoration, Japanese writing was circulating on a scale scarcely seen in any pre-modern society' (117).

³ The influence of Social Darwinism, which saw Western civilization as the pinnacle of human evolution was applied to writing systems as well, suggesting that human writing evolved from ideograms to phonograms. (124)

⁴ She writes ' . . . the Japanese Ministry of Education acted with inappropriate haste and unforgivable cavaliness implementing change before anyone realized what was happening. Out of a pool of tens of thousands of Chinese characters, the ministry limited the number for everyday use . . . -- without consulting experts, let alone seeking public opinion' (185).

⁵ In a similar way that the changes to policies happened after WWII, see footnote 5 above, a drastic change was announced in June, 2015 by the Minister of Education, Shimomura Hakubun, which proposed the abolition of all national universities' humanities and social science faculties. In a recent online news piece in *The Japan Times*, Koichi Nakano, a political scientist at Sophia University, slammed the proposed reforms: "They would be an utter disaster. Liberal arts education is what Japan needs more of, not less. . . . "

⁶ Quoted in *Ecolinguistics Reader*, eds. Fill and Mullhauser, 2.

⁷ See Haruo Shirane, "What Global English Means for World Literature."