

Language is a Poem

by [Justin Wong](#) (July 2024)



The quest for something outside itself,
How one thing points naturally to another,
The world may die save for a system of implications:
Darkness suggestive of light,
Masculine suggestive of feminine,
The word suggestive of world.

The invisible and ephemeral
Point to things real and felt,
Like the heavens to the earth beneath,
In an endless interplay,
Between the intangible and touched
Between witnessed and unwitnessed,
Or word and the earth.

Speech is both mirror and divinity,
Reflecting a creation it aids to invent,
This street called home that I describe
Would never have been unless once inscribed,
This is the typology of the tongue,
The allegory of the word
Turns into the fulfilled prophecies of cities,
O make me a martyr to these seen miracles.

Without this (word) the world becomes
Chill, dim and oceanic
An abyss in a universe of form,
A chaos under the heavens of constancy,
Nothingness in a world of signs.

Now within this temporal existence
Where death looms constant
In the periphery of the conscious,
Is the duality between thing and concept,
Swinging back and forth
Between left side and right,
Perception and reality,
Description and invention—
The second creation in speech.

Where does the earth end and verb begin?
We still give credence to the ancestral impression,
The risen sun—an unreal idea
Overrides the knowledge
Of the eternally turning earth,
And the spoken world that's four-cornered
Dispels the round earth's curvature.

You can disenchant the cosmos
Everywhere aside for the soul,
Make man into a prisoner
In every way apart from his perception.

Words hold meaning beyond literality,
A cup is a cup;
Is two hands held as one;
Is a vessel for sacrificial blood;
Or symbol of memorial.
A tree is a tree;
Is a place where the deceptive
Cant of serpents is spoken;
Is a place in which death is crushed,
Is a symbol of life.

The closer you analyse a word,
The further you move away from it.
The word as flesh is like the word that became it,
Born from a genealogy
Extending back into the haze of centuries:
Logos, the child of miscegenation
Birthed of the expulsion of borders;
The noun, a wandering nomad
Part of the contamination of cities.

O word, thing that will survive us,
Some plots bare the barren curse,
And certain flowers murdered
By the assassins of infertility,
Within this world of birth and death,
An anathema to the lineage of the tongue,
Not made to perish by a mercurial nature,
Though left to die, if die at all,
Upon the pretermitted vine.

The word is a border crosser—
An Ephraimite who can speak the word
Shibboleth to wade past the Jordan waters,
Nouns are carried across the threshold of worlds,
A familiarity viewed within the fresh,

Like recognisable eyes upon faces unseen.

O Babel, tower of Hubris,
Illimitable symbol of our rebellion,
Within your dust was our division,
Within your fall, disparate vernaculars.

The familiar word hearkens back to this beginning,
When all communed in a common tongue,
Before the world comprised shards of nations,
And our unity sought a failed insurrection against divine
order.

After Babel, our disunion through the word,
All my meaningful speech condemned to senselessness
After Babel, the lamentation of eros unexplored,
After Babel, the lost beauty of the poem
Heard as the bard intended.
After Babel, inexpressible subtlety
Lost as it passes from tongues,
After Babel, the birth of nations
And their bloodshed.

The sentence and its constituent words
Are a translation, not between nations,
But from the mind to the mouth
Thought turned into the sign of speech
As time into the representation of number
It is dispersed into the world
Into a kaleidoscope of signs
Into a discord of dialects.

Our words are but a persona of the thing,
Utterance degraded in transduction
From a lofty, unheard Theophany
Used for a communion divine,
To the fallen world, and...

Silence: the dormant thought eluding language,
The sound of a lonesome hermitage
Severed from the chattering world,
The prerequisite ambience of the prayerful,
Or possible crossroads for those without hope.

But if silence is the language of the dead,
Then my tongue will be filled with repentance and praise.

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Justin Wong is originally from Wembley, though is presently based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and literature since a young age. Previously, he lived in China working as an English teacher. His novel, *Millie's Dream*, is available [here](#).

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