EMBASSYTOWN
China Miéville
NEW "WEIRD FICTION"

MIEVILLE

EMBASSYTOWN
King Rat (1998)
* Perdido Street Station (2000)
The Scar (2002)
The Tain (2002)
Looking for Jake (2005)
Un Lun Dun (2007)
* The City & the City (2009)
Kraken (2010)

EMBASSYTOWN (2011)
“There was a human girl who in pain ate what was given her in an old room built for eating in which eating had not happened for a time” (26)

Shortened with use to:

“A girl ate what was given her” (26)

Avice Benner Cho becomes part of Language and is spoken by the Hosts
There are currents and storm fronts in the immer. There are in the immer stretches it takes tremendous skill and time to cross. Those were among the techniques I now knew, along with the somatic control, the mantric thoughtfulness and instrumentalised matter-of-factness that made me an immerser, allowed immersers to stay conscious and intentional when we immersed” (31)

“What we do, what we can do—immersers—is not just keep ourselves stable, sentient and healthy in the immer, stay able to walk and think, eat, defecate, obey and give orders, make decisions, judge immerstuff, the paradata that approximate distances and conditions, without being crippled with always-sick. Though that’s not nothing. … The engines take us out of the sometimes [manchmal], but it’s we who do the taking, too; it’s we who push the ship as well as it that pulls us” (33-34)
HOSTS AND BIORIGGING
THE HOSTS

Speak Language through two mouths, the cut and the turn
Thought is the same as speech
The signifier and signified are equivalent to the referent
They cannot lie
Semiotics:
The signifier conjures the signified in our minds
The referent in the world does not play a role in signification

Language:
For the Hosts, the referent is one and the same as the sign
There is no play in signification in the Hosts’ Language
The Hosts were patient, seemed intrigued by and, insofar as anyone could tell through their polite opacity, welcoming to their guests. They had no access to immer, nor exotic drives or even sub-lux engines; they never left their atmosphere, but they were otherwise advanced. They manipulated life with astonishing finesse, and they seemed unsurprised that there was sentience elsewhere.

The Hosts did not learn our Anglo-Ubiq. Did not seem to try. But within a few thousand hours, Terre linguists could understand much of what the Hosts said, and synthesised responses and questions in the one Ariekene language. The phonetic structure of the sentences they had their machines speak—the tonal shifts, the vowels and the rhythm of consonants—were precise, accurate to the very limits of testing.

The Hosts listened, and did not understand a single sound. (52)
Their language is organised noise, like all of ours are, but for them each word is a funnel. Where to us each word means something, to the Hosts, each is an opening. A door, through which the thought of that referent, the thought itself that reached for that word, can be seen.

“If I program ’ware with an Anglo-Ubiq word and play it, you understand it,” Scile said. “If I do the same with a word in Language, and play it to an Ariekes, I understand it, but to them it means nothing, because it’s only sound, and that’s not where the meaning lives. It needs a mind behind it.”

Hosts’ minds were inextricable from their doubled tongue. They couldn’t learn other languages, couldn’t conceive of their existence, or that the noises we made to each other were words at all. A Host could understand nothing not spoken in Language, by a speaker, with intent, with a mind behind the words. That was why those early ACL pioneers were confused. When their machines spoke, the Hosts heard only empty barks. (55)
Can speak the Hosts’ Language where most humans cannot.
They speak through two mouths from one shared consciousness.
LeRoy glanced at each other and began. “They said: ‘It’s a bird,’ ” Scile said. The Ariekei muttered. The noun was shorthand for a local winged form, as well as meaning our Embassytown birds. LeRoy spoke again and several Ariekei shouted, out of control. “LeRoy says it’s flying away,” Scile said into my helmet. I swear I saw Hosts crane their eye-corals up as if the lifeless plasm might have taken off. Le and Roy spoke together again. “They say . . .” Scile frowned as he followed. “They say it’s become a wheel,” he said, over the strange pandemonium of the audience.

One at a time every Ambassador lied. The Hosts grew boisterous in a fashion I’d never seen, then to my alarm seemed intoxicated, literally lie-drunk. Scile was tense. The room was whispering, echoing the furore of its inhabitants. (84)
EzRa is a new ambassador from the Out who is two separate people.
The Ariekei become addicted to the words of EzRa.
When EzRa speaks, the Hosts go into a sleep-like trance or stupor.
Their biorigging is also affected.
The entire planet becomes addicted to the Language of EzRa.
This includes the houses, buildings, roads, factories, vehicles, even prosthetics.
A revolutionary group of Hosts are trying to learn how to lie and is becoming adept at it.

Avice says, “If similes do their job well enough, they turn into something else. We tell the truth best by becoming lies” (296).

She says she doesn’t want to be a simile anymore, she wants to become a metaphor (296).
LANGUAGE: LYING AND LIBERATION

What happens when Avice becomes a metaphor?
UPCOMING

Next class