

voice

We are seated together in workshop. As requested, the student begins the discussion by reading a page of her workshop piece. I love this piece and I look forward to hearing the writer herself read the magic into my ears.

But as she reads I quickly realize that something is not right. Is she reading the right page? Is this the same story I loved?

Yes, I decide that it is, the *words* are the same, but the student is not reading it even sort of the way I had heard it in my mind.

An overwhelming urge comes over me to grab the paper from her and say, “No, no, no. I’m sorry. That is not right. That is not how it sounds at all. Please try again.”

I have never actually done this to a student. The day may come, as I dwindle deeper into my second childhood.

I would read the workshop piece aloud myself, but sadly I exhibit the same malady. I *understand* this student who is butchering her lovely piece. And she and I are in good company. T.S. Eliot read his poems as if (quote), they were lines from the telephone book. Wallace Stevens, it is reported read his work as if he loathed it. Marianne Moore read her poems in a tuneless drone. When *Keturah and Lord Death* was put out in audio books, read by a professional reader, it was torture for me to listen to it.

This recurring phenomenon is the greatest evidence to me for the reality of that elusive thing called voice. The voice that lives on the page can be so subtle and beguiling that it is difficult if not impossible to capture and project in the spoken voice.

importance of voice

We all know that voice is critically important. We have all read about how agents are looking for an original voice. I heard an agent say, “I read the first few pages to see if I find a fresh voice. If I do, I read on.” A unique voice will cause agents and editors to ignore a multitude of

manuscript sins. One of the most pervasive bits of advice that beginning writers hear is to *find* their voice. One writer said, quote, “Voice begets character and character begets plot – voice is everything!”

Mima Tipper, a graduate of VCFA who now works as an intern for a literary agency. She wrote a wonderful article that perhaps many of you read. I will quote from it: “Develop voice. Yes I, too, have read many articles about the importance of voice. And from a reading/writing perspective all of us writers know voice is crucial. Thinking from an agent-evaluative standpoint, however, voice takes on a new level of importance. Bottom-line is that an agent’s got to love the heck out of a book’s voice in its rough and murky state to want to follow it through the possible dark of a l-o-n-g revision.” (end quote)

I thought I knew what voice was when I determined to lecture on it. I knew it when I saw it in other people’s work. I had sometimes been known to say to a student, you have really found your voice in this piece. When describing a good book, I had been known to use the reprehensible term, *voicy*. I had even kindly been told my own books had voice. Surely lecturing on voice would not strain me too badly.

But I learned in my research that voice may be nearly as hard to define and to teach as it is to acquire.

First, of course, one defines ones terms. In a sentence or two, I thought, I will define voice. Not trusting to my own wisdom, I turned to craft books and articles to find an overall definition.

The first thing I read said that voice was the voice of the author, his personality and world view, as in the personality of Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain’s voice is so distinct that no matter what he writes, it is instantly recognizable. But then I thought of two books I love by M. T. Anderson. This is the first sentence of his book *Octavian Nothing*.

“I was raised in a gaunt house with a garden; my earliest recollections are of floating lights in the apple-trees. I recall, in the orchard behind the house, orbs of flames rising through the black boughs and branches; they climbed, spiritous, and flickered out; my mother squeezed my hand with delight. We stood near the door to the ice-chamber.”

This is the first sentence from Anderson’s book, *Feed*:

“It was maybe, okay, maybe it was like two days after the party with the "never pukes when he chugalugs" that Violet chatted me first thing in the morning and said she was working on a

brand-new project. I asked her what was the old project, and she was like, did I want to see the new one? I said, Okay, should I come over to su casa? I've never been there, and she was like, No, not yet. Let's meet at the mall. I was like, Okay, sure, fine, whatever swings your string, and she was all, Babycakes, you swing my string, which is a nice thing for someone to say to you, especially before you use mouthwash."

I found it difficult to pinpoint the values, beliefs and moral vision of a single author in these two pieces. And yet they are so very obviously deep in voice.

Could anyone surmise, if they did not know, that the same personality, values, beliefs and moral vision were behind *Keturah and Lord Death* and *My Book of Life* by Angel?

Perhaps the answer to this was to be found in this quote from *Literary Terms* by M.H. Abrams:

"The term voice in criticism points to the fact that we are aware of a voice beyond the fictitious voices that speak in a work, and a person behind all the dramatis personae, and behind even the first-person narrator. We have the sense of a pervasive authorial presence, a determinate intelligence and moral sensibility which has invented, ordered, rendered and expressed all these literary characters and materials in just this way. Critic Wayne Booth prefers the term *implied author* over voice in order better to indicate that the reader of a work of fiction has the sense not only of the timbre and tone of a speaking voice, but of a total human presence. Booth's view is that this is the implied author, although related to the actual author is nonetheless part of the total fiction, whom the author gradually brings into being.

That was very deep. I have often wondered what my English degree has to do with my writing. But I am fascinated by the idea that before character, plot and setting I am inventing an implied author, who is part of the fiction and who stands between me and my work. I wonder about her. Is she nice? What does she think of me? Is she the one that refused to write the book that never came to be? I feel like there's some truth in Abram's statement, but it's a bit too ethereal to be of much use to me when I'm facing the blank page.

So I turned to less high-brow sources and found *many* divergent definitions of voice. Here are some of them:

- 1. voice is a combination of diction, sentence patterns and tone**
- 2. voice is determined first and foremost by point of view**

3. **voice is attitude, the attitude you bring to your writing**
4. **voice is a writer's natural narrative tendencies**
5. **voice comes from theme, imagery and symbolism, pacing and structure**
6. **voice has to do with making fictions seem real and consistent – voice is authenticity**
7. **voice has to do with appropriate and well-modulated levels of emotion**
8. **voice is style, and style, according to Strunk and White, is a mystery**
9. **(Ann Lamott:) “Voice is what you write about. If there is one door in the castle you have been told not to go through, you must. Most human beings are dedicated to keeping that one door shut. But the writer's job is to see what's behind it – to turn the unspeakable into words.”**
10. **“In MFA parlance, voice may actually mean a hypercharged, galloping, contextless spree, choked with metaphors, overwritten, edgy, hip, cool, self-conscious, rapid-fire, disguising any honesty and sincerity in writing.”**
11. **“voice is too vague to be useful for anything”**

I began to see that my confusion regarding voice in fiction was not without some justification. I couldn't find consensus in the writing community even on whose voice we were talking about, never mind a consistent description of what it was. I read that in addition to the dangers of having too little voice, you can have too much voice. You can have an imitative voice, or you can try too hard in your attempt to create an original voice. The dangers and pitfalls were everywhere.

Then I got a bit stubborn and defensive in behalf of my budding VCFA students, picturing them being blown about by every wind of doctrine, and I decided to form opinions.

I must grant that, as others have said, point of view and fresh diction and imagery and style and tone and natural narrative tendencies are all *part* of voice. I can well believe that that a writer's personality and world view are *part* of voice. I can accept that voice is *partly* what I write about.

But here is truth: if I had to sit down to my work of a morning and say, today I will write a sentence and in it will be point of view and fresh diction and imagery and style and tone and a natural narrative tendency... and furthermore I will write this sentence with my world view and my implied author ready at hand – I say that if I had to think about all that at once, I would give up before I had begun.

So, as writers, or for the purposes of this lecture, at least, we must simplify.

the theory of everything

The way I am going to define voice in this lecture: **voice is what you hear in your mind's ear as you read.** Voice is *not what the book is about* – a short person with furry feet has to drop a ring in a volcano. Voice is *how you say it* – “When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.”

Eudora Welty said, “Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't hear. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers—to read as listeners—and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. The sound of what falls on the page begins the process of testing it for truth.”

This may mean that every book has a voice, it's just that some are like reading lines from a phone book, and some are magical. So with my definition firmly in hand, my next problem was how to get that magical voice.

how to get voice

Just as virtually every book or article I read had a different definition of voice, so they each had a wide variety of ideas about how to find or develop your voice. A book I read called *Finding Your Writer's Voice* had some of the most interesting suggestions for finding your voice:

- **write in the pitch dark**
- **dress all in one color while you write**
- **if you're right-handed, write with your left hand**

One blog I read said it will be easier to find your voice if you **write naked**. I don't know about you, but writing is often something I do between loads of laundry. While my husband encouraged me to try it, I'm certain other members of my family would be much alarmed.

One writer adamantly and passionately declared how you get voice:

“Endless experiment with technique, rigorous effort, deep training in the canon, elaboration and enhancement rather than sanguine discovery by subtraction, the possibility of change over time, crossover (positive and negative) effects between genres, the linkages connecting one to the important developments in the reign of the language.”

He sounds so clever that I have to believe he's right, but this idea for enhancing my voice just made me tired. I would rather do my laundry in the nude.

So once again I was forced to form opinions. My opinion is that we can discover, develop and strengthen voice if we adhere to a number of good practices. I'll begin with the more practical thoughts, and end with my big idea, the principle I think most helps us find our voice.

- **Read the best books.** This may seem obvious to us – here at VCFA I am preaching to the choir. But I know of people who want to write but who rarely read. To find your voice, you must read a lot and read like a writer. Someone has said to figure out what makes you jealous, because that might be a clue to what your natural narrative tendencies might be. As you read, you will be absorbing, by osmosis, the infinite varieties of voice. But don't read just anything. Be wary about reading trash. Garbage in, garbage out, as my mother used to say. And don't just read. Study how that writer does it. Analyze her syntax and diction and savor her sentences. Read a particularly good sentence many times. Look for the sleight of hand behind the magic.
- **Read aloud.** Some people have a tin ear. They are insensitive to the niceties of the language. It isn't their fault. I have a tin ear when it comes to music. Also, I have no ambitions to be a composer. But if you are searching for your voice, you could try reading great books aloud to yourself or to children. I read aloud to my own children every night for over thirty years. It was good training.
- **Research primary sources.** If your story takes place in medieval England, you have to do your research. But take time also to read the stories and poetry and songs of the day. See if you can find journals. I read a lot about prostitution in preparation for Angel – sociology textbooks and so forth. But the memoirs and poetry written by prostitutes were more meaningful to me in helping me find my voice. Now I'm writing Calvin, I read

lots books about schizophrenia for the research, but every night before bed I read Calvin and Hobbes cartoons. Listen to young people. Be aware that if you are over the age of 19, you are writing outside your culture. Be respectful.

- **Try imitation.** Imitation is not a bad place to begin. Choose a favorite writer, or a favorite book, and try to write another made-up chapter that could fit seamlessly into that book. As a young adult I tried for years to imitate Ursula K. LeGuin. I never achieved it, of course, but in the trying, I began to understand how voice influences word choice and syntax, how it essentially influences every decision you make when you're writing. Imitation can be a legitimate starting point for discovering your voice.

On the faculty forum, Margaret Bechard recommended this technique, saying, "I have a friend who is widely published who told me that sometimes she sits down and just copies out parts of books that she really loves. She said she has even copied out the entire text of some shorter chapter books to kind of get the feel of the words and the voice into her body."

Louise Hawes will sometimes ask a student who is struggling with voice to "pick a passage or poem she admires and then write something with the same structure and language (use a noun wherever a noun is used, a verb for a verb, adjective for adjective). She can write on any subject she wants, but she'll inherit the pace, the eyes, the language."

Sarah Ellis said, "I think picture book immersion can inspire good writing. Read five picture books each day. Read them out loud and read them slowly."

- **Notice when you get it right.** This is something I do with every book. I take a paragraph out of my writing that has the perfect voice I'm looking for – a part that shines, a paragraph that, when I read it, I know why I write. I post it above my monitor, or glue it on the inside of my binder. I insist that all other paragraphs sound like that on some level, meet that standard, echo that voice. They won't all, but in the attempt, the voice will get stronger.
- **Relax.** Dare to be dreadful. Sometimes the novice writer has been the victim of a faulty education. I once did a reading in a classroom where the teacher explained with a conspiratorial smile, "I told my students, said is dead." Which, of course, is exactly not true. This and other rules like it can produce a writer whose voice is stilted and suffocated by *the rules*. I have had students whose writing is wonderfully proper, all high

collars and long skirts – I can't find a grammar or punctuation error anywhere. But a voice can't be heard if there's no breath because the corset has been drawn too tight. George Bernard Shaw said, "In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language; the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it." Do not overwrite, do not explain too much, and avoid fancy words – unless you are Cormac McCarthy. Forget the knuckle-rapping you got in the past, and write with confidence. You can always go back and fix it after.

I just want to stop here and remind you that, while I'm busy telling you to imitate, copy, study and analyze, in the end, voice is not an engineered thing. It involves some letting go.

- **Let the language lead you.** I didn't make that up. I heard it somewhere sometime and knew it was true. Let the music and rhythm of language tell you what the next word should be. If you are a keyboard writer, and you're unsure of the voice, try writing with pen and paper. When I write by hand, I'm searching for the perfect next word even as I write the current one. Perhaps, I'm thinking, perhaps a little alliteration or consonance, or a word that creates just the right rhythm. To the extent that voice is in diction and syntax, slowing down might help you. It helps you choose the right details. Donald Maass said, "The details... are a secret source of what critics glibly refer to as voice...Details are an automatic voice all in themselves."

I don't think many poets write on keyboards. They have to go very slow. I bet they use slippery pens and soft paper. I bet they feel the words in their fingers. That is why poets are always going on about voice. Poets know more about voice than the usual kind of writer. It may be in part because they go slow.

- **Cower at cliché.** And not just at the sentence level. If you suspect even remotely that your character has been done before, how can your voice be fresh? Refuse to be boring.
- **Use the language of the perceiving subject.** M.T. Anderson can write like *Feed* and he can write like *Octavian Nothing*, but he can't put them both in the same book. Make sure, if your main character sounds like a typical teenager that the exposition and description in the book don't sound like a 40-year-old person with two degrees. Douglas Glover teaches it this way: diction and figurative language should be drawn from the heart of the perceiving subject. He says that we should always let our characters talk and think in terms that reflect his passionate attachment to life, such as his desire and his significant history.

Keep in mind that young people often have a certain informality of diction. One line in *My Book of Life by Angel* could have read, “**He left without his wallet and his watch and his tie pin. I hid all of them under the mattress.**” But that is not my Angel’s voice. My Angel would say, “**He left without his wallet and his watch and his tie pin, which I hid all of them under the mattress.**” It isn’t grammatical, but it is precisely Angel.

Some people thought Dostoevsky was careless, or a poor stylist. He would use the same word five times in half a page and then never use it again. He used compound modifiers and misplaced his clauses. But this was not by accident – he wrote many pages of dialogue that never made it into the book – he was trying on the voices of his characters, and he knew how they must sound. He called it “learned ignorance – a willed imperfection of artistic means.”

- **Choose your distance thoughtfully.** David Jauss in his paper “From Long Shots to X-rays” says that textbooks when talking about point of view often focus on the angle of perception, first or third person, instead of focusing on the more important thing, which is the various degrees of narrative distance available to writers. He believes that the only real difference between first person and third person is that with third person we never question the truth of the narrator’s statement. We respond with complete trust. But in first person we sometimes do question it. Third person can be just as intimate and close as first-person, according to Jauss. And Martine.

I can’t go deeply into this because it would be another whole lecture. But I will try to illustrate briefly with a couple of examples. *The Dollmage* and *My Book of Life by Angel* are both told in first-person, but *Dollmage* has distance and Angel is very close. In *Dollmage* I needed distance because Annakey is too good and sweet and from her point of view it would have been icky and cloying. I needed the Dollmage’s sharp, acerbic voice. I close the distance to almost nothing in *My Book of Life by Angel*. Almost everything that happens of significance in this book happens in the mind and heart of my character. We needed to see her heart in contrast to her self-destructive behavior.

I’m not sure how much point of view matters in voice, but I am sure that distance matters very much. Choose your distance carefully.

- **A reason.** I often give my main character a reason to tell the story. A character’s reason for telling the story shapes in an important way the voice of the story. In *The Dollmage*, the old woman tells the story as a confession, a kind of repentance. This inspired me to

give her a brutally honest voice, one that spares no one, not even herself. This becomes an important element of the voice. *Tom Finder* writes the story in his notebook in an effort to try and remember who he is and where he came from. This gives his voice a seeking, questioning, uncertain quality, open to any ideas. In *Keturah and Lord Death*, Keturah tells the story around the fire – the voice of the story is like a tale. The fairy tale voice helps the reader move into the territory of the supernatural, to believe that Lord Death is a handsome man with a cool horse. It helps Keturah tell what could be a sad story in a rather matter-of-fact way, so it didn't become maudlin. In *My Book of Life by Angel*, as Angel writes her book of life, she is hoping that angels will read it someday. This affects the words she chooses to use and creates the tone. A book intended for angels should have hope and beauty in it, even if the writer is being abused on a daily basis.

- **Circularity.** In connection with this, I love to have my books verify their own existence. I like them to have circularity, the snake swallowing its own tail. For example, *Tuk, Bighorn Sheep* begins this way: "Tuk was born in the snow and wind of early spring. He was the biggest lamb born on the lambing cliffs that season and for seasons out of memory." It ends this way: "Down in the meadow, the lambs pestered Dall for a story. For a long time she could not speak, but at last she began: 'Tuk was born in the snow and wind of early spring. He was the biggest born on the lambing cliffs that season, and for seasons out of memory...' It makes the whole book, perhaps, the very story she is telling. I can't explain why this thrills me so much and why I try to do it in every book I write in one way or another. But I do know that this element and the reason the story is being told is very helpful to me in establishing and shaping the voice of the story.

Those were all of my practical ideas for developing a magical voice. I also promised you a big idea, and the big idea is this: **love.**

I believe love is the essential ingredient for creating the voice that entrances: love for words, love for the reader, love for your character, love for the world and love for the work.

love for words

Marilyn Chandler McEntyre said, "Our task as stewards of the word begins and ends in love. Loving language means cherishing it for its beauty, precision, power to enhance understanding, power to name, power to heal. And it means using words as instruments of love."

Cynthia Ozick is a Pulitzer-Prize winning author who has been commonly acknowledged to have, quote “one of the most beautiful, natural voices imaginable.” But Ms. Ozick told her agent that she once spent an entire week of writing on a single sentence, tinkering with it, rearranging it until it was just right. That is what it can take to get your *natural* voice. As I said earlier, I was able to find more craft advice about voice from poets than I could from books about novel writing. I would suggest that your love for the word will grow as you **read poetry regularly**, much as the devout reads scripture. I’m not suggesting that you have to write poetry, but reading it can only strengthen your voice.

love for the reader

John Gardner said, when a story disappoints, leaves us cold, **“We cannot help wondering how much real interest (the writer) felt from the beginning in his characters and events: the conclusion suggests that he *used* them rather than *cared* about them. Don’t treat your reader as ‘poor dumb mules who must be hollered and whipped into wisdom.’**

I would suggest that a love for your reader would cause you to insist on just the right voice for your book. You wouldn’t be striving for a word count or thinking about the next big advance, you wouldn’t be thinking, how can I brainwash my young reader? You would be trying to tell a story that would make your young reader beg, “No, please don’t stop reading yet! Read another chapter!” If you love your reader, you won’t set out to preach or convert. If you respect your reader, you may arrive at some truth, but you will let your reader discover what that might be. Don’t force-feed her. Never be cold or detached, or a show off. Think of it this way. You are sitting knee to knee with your young reader. You reach out and take her hands in yours. You look in her eyes and say, I want to tell you a story. Imagine your reader this way, and it may be easier to find your voice.

love for your character

When Ursula LeGuin is between projects, when she is searching for a story, she is not so much looking for a topic or subject, but casting about in her head for a stranger. She wanders about in the mental landscape looking for *somebody* to begin telling her his or her story. She says, “It’s better to hold still and wait and listen to the silence. I have called this waiting ‘listening for a voice.’” A writer who loves her characters is willing to listen.

One of my talented students last semester who was writing a historical novel said something like this to me in her letter: “I have done a character sketch, drawn maps and

made a structural outline. I have weather information for the vicinity during the time period and photographs to use for correct description of time period. I have all this stuff but don't know the best way to put it together. I have read many how-to books and attended conferences and read writers magazines. But I don't know who has the best ideas or which ones make the most sense. How best for me to proceed? That's what I need to know. Teach me, please. I feel desperate to get something figured out."

This was my response: I will tell you how to proceed. Set aside all the research now and forget all the articles and the how-to. Close your eyes and become a boy, a boy in the 19th century, caught in the heart of the Civil War, one of the bloodiest wars ever. What does it feel like to be that boy? What does he see? What does he do? What does he do next? Now write down what he sees and what he does and what happens to him. Take it one page at a time. Make sure you live every moment with your boy. Never stop being that boy. You will be tempted to be "the writer" or "the researcher" or "the student." Do not give into that temptation. Don't think about the weather until he looks up at the sky – you've done your work so you'll know what he will see, but that knowledge will only matter to you if it matters to *him*. Now it is time to live one moment at a time with your boy, as your boy."
(end quote)

If you will close your eyes before you begin to write and use the powers of your imagination to become the character, if you will live inside her skin – it will require all your compassion and empathy and imagination, but you will find your voice.

After I finished being a teen prostitute, I became a bighorn sheep. What does a bighorn feel? What does he see and smell and taste? What matters to him? I had to overcome the silliness factor of this before I could write a word. My family and friends teased me about writing a book about a bighorn sheep, but when I was there with my pen and paper, I had to not care about them. I had to imaginatively enter the body of this creature. I actually found it rather glorious, and now one of my daughters says it is her favorite of my books.

In an important way you are your character and you must understand there is no difference between you and her.

In an important way you will *never be* and *can never be* your character. You can never truly understand her suffering, and so you bow before the mystery of being a voice for the voiceless. You must always be asking, Who are you? What is it like to be you? Tell me and I will listen deeper than anyone has listened before.

John Gardner said that the real enemy to good writing is faults of soul: sentimentality, frigidity, mannerism. Frigidity comes, says Gardner, when the author is less concerned about his characters than he ought to be. Sentimentality comes from false emotion, when you haven't taken time and thought to really know what your character is feeling and why she is feeling it and what she will do with those feelings. Finally mannerism comes from an author's wish to distinguish herself. You are in trouble if you are writing a book for publication rather than a story about a boy or girl or bighorn sheep who is profoundly real to you.

love for the world

John Gardner said, **“At heart all fiction treats, directly or indirectly, the same thing: our love for people and the world, our aspirations and fears.”**

Poet Ralph Angel said, **“By attending to things and beings, one forgets about oneself, and travels some distance. Language becomes voice in that open space.”** The open space he speaks of is created by the journey of the imagination, by its willingness to pay attention to the forms of life you find there, and to hear and to see and to discover.

Writers who love are curious about others – they ask questions. They observe without judgement. They try to understand – how can you write about people other than yourself if you are not a constant and ready student of humanity. The less time you spend thinking about yourself, the more time you have for thinking about the wonder and the mystery of this thing we call life, which is the subject of every story. If you are taking your own pulse all the time, when will you hear the hearts of other people?

The great Henry James said, “Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind, and the third is to be kind.” This is what makes that kind of writer.

A writer must love the world in groups of one. Love the world, and you will insist on finding your voice.

Of course, it is difficult work to love. Often we fail. In our awareness of our weakness and hard-heartedness, we find empathy and compassion for our villains.

finally, love for the work

The late great Ray Bradbury said the following, and I agree with every word: **“Love is the answer to everything. It's the only reason to do anything. If you don't write stories you love, you'll never make it. If you don't write stories that other people love, you'll never make it... (another powerpoint screen) Fall in love and stay in love. Write only what you love, and love what you write. The key word is love. You have to get up in the morning and write something you love, something to live for.”**

You may have to work hard and long to be your character's voice. Sometimes a character's voice is the last thing that comes to me, and once I have it, I must begin again. If you show up, if you persist, if you listen with all your being, you will hear.

conclusion

In conclusion, if you are not very good at loving, you must change.

Ms. Turner asks, “Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” A writer does. Of course it makes you incredibly vulnerable. To love the world is to be pained at all the threats against it. To love the work is to sacrifice whatever you have to in order to write: often that includes money and pride. To love your characters is to have to live in their skin for an extended period of time, and that can sometimes be a cold, sad thing. This is the price you pay to be a writer.

If voice is the thing that brings beauty to the work, think of the words of Louisa May Alcott who said, “Love is the great beautifier.”