

# Hot Author

## Painter

What follows is my career as a professional voice actor.

Every day I perform the articulation of the English language. There is a hyper-awareness of the buzzes and clicks that whirr around my teeth, tongue, and palate. This awareness is theatrical. One layer of me produces the sounds; another observes them.

My parents were the only Scots I knew, so I would lie awake in my bed mouthing short vowels to myself: *bath, grass, gasp*. Over time, other words became important: *braw, bairn, breeks*. One year, we sang the National Anthem into a tape recorder. We used a printout with the Arabic words written phonetically in Latin letters, *Wa-l-yadom mo 'ayadâ, Âhelân momajadâ*. I never learned what the words meant, but I can still remember the melody.

I once helped a French-speaking student who was required to read a text in English for an exam. The catch was that she had an elementary level: outside of the rehearsal, we spoke French. I taught myself the phonetic alphabet; their arcane symbols littered the print-outs we used as a grubby, heavily-underlined score. I remember the buzzing strain of her voice, a kind of a shaking flatness, as she laboured to produce the right sounds.

My voice was recently featured on an arts podcast. My father sent it to my uncle, a retired carpenter who lives in the Highlands. My uncle texted my dad, “She has lost her accent but keeps it on the most important word.”

My dad made me guess the word. It is *painter*. I listened again to the podcast and I noticed how every time I said the word, I skipped the T. *pain'er*. Every single time.

Skipping a T is a characteristic called the glottal stop, which looks like this: ʔ. It is made by the closing of the glottis, which blocks the airstream and the vibration of the throat. It is not articulation, in the normal sense of teeth and tongues: it is behind articulation, a stoppage of voice.

You can use the Scottish glottal stop to comic effect in such words as *bottle of water*. A Spanish friend once told me that *bottle of water* was the hardest thing for her to understand when she lived in Edinburgh.

## Mirror

A candle flame is a source of both heat and light: the two cannot be extricated from each other. This material marvel is one that *painters* think about: with which medium can I express this peculiar colour that is both white-hot and white-light? How can I put the flame in the painting?

George Eliot, in her career as a writer of realist novels, used an abundance of unusual metaphors sprung from the material world and its technological development. In *Middlemarch*, she uses the image of a mirror which has been extensively scratched through use and polish. In the metaphor, the reader is encouraged to imaginatively illuminate this mirror by way of a candle. “The scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun.”<sup>1</sup> The reflection of the candle shows the scratches as neat arcs of gold. The messy continuity of the mirror’s endlessly flawed surface is hidden in shadow: we see only an itchy yellow halo.

It’s a parable of illumination and texture. Eliot explains: “The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person...”<sup>2</sup> The world is seen as we wish to see it (the halo of scratches), as it pertains to and echoes our ego (the candle). Vanity as a rosy glow, self-knowledge as a blind spot.

## Author

What kind of shadow does an author cast?

Authors have the power of naming their works, and names traditionally follow the parameters of genre. *Nude self-portrait*, for example. Genre produces the work; it creates the conditions for it be seen.

But how do you name a work that bypasses genre all the way? For example: *Self-portrait as a scratched mirror*.

Authorship is a mode; it has to do with vocalising, naming, claiming. Does authorship only happen when it is recognised? By which I mean, is a diary-writer also an author?

Authors have voices, but a voice is not necessarily content. Voice is water gushing out of a fountain. The inner workings of the fountain, how Gothic its contortions, as well as the secrets of its fluid dynamics—such factors will affect its vocal expression. But the content is the same for all fountains.

Water is full of texture. Spurting in air, it diffuses and spits, forming globules and springy ribs. It brims with flattened vowels, tripped-up syllables, swallowed consonants. But how does the fountain articulate its speech? If we turn off the water supply, do we close the glottis? (A fountain in winter is pre-speech).

The flesh of the body as medium. *Naked* is an adjective: it describes a state. I can be naked, so can you. *Nude* is also an adjective but we could think of it as an object pronoun: the nude is someone we look at. Only *you* can be nude. What would be *nude* as subject pronoun? An unclothed diarist?

Nudism is a noun (it's a philosophy), the logical consequence of which is that everyone is without clothes, including the reader. With nudism, clothing is not shed, it is just irrelevant. The flesh is clothes.

We think an accent is a style that is inherited—but our environment leaches into it, and we modulate it at will. Accent is brushstrokes. The *painter* is a fountain technician.

Voice is what is inside a receptacle, being affected by said receptacle, being affected by the environment, what springs out of said receptacle. Voice actors inhabit a vessel for a while: a body, a fountain, a *bottle of water*. Then they move on.

1. Eliot, Middlemarch, p.269
2. Ibid.

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