

# Amelinda Bérubé



*The Dark Beneath the Ice*  
*Here There Are Monsters*  
*The Ones Who Come Back Hungry*

[www.metuiteme.com](http://www.metuiteme.com)

BlueSky, Instagram:

@metuiteme

# VOICE

## **The way a character talks**



What makes a person sound like themselves vs. anybody else?

What does it tell us about them?

# See the difference?

Stacey was mean.

Stacey gossiped about people behind their backs.

Stacey kept her smile on until Betty left the room. Then she rolled her eyes.

## **Voicely dialogue**

“Like I’d take advice from Betty,” Stacey sneered. “That haircut makes it look like something crawled onto her head and died.”

## **Voicely narrator – first person**

Like I’d take advice from Betty. That haircut makes it look like something crawled onto her head and died.

## **Voicely narrator – third person**

Like Stacey would take advice from Betty. That haircut made it look like something crawled onto her head and died.

Imagine an actor giving a  
monologue

In a lot of ways, writing is  
time-delayed acting!

# What are some things we notice about how someone talks?

- accent and regionalisms
- word choice (contractions? slang? swearing?)
- turns of phrase
- analogies and metaphors
- tone (e.g. sarcastic)
- style

## Choosing the narrator's voice

Will we see people's thoughts or only what they say and do?

Whose thoughts do we need access to? Whose thoughts do we need to NOT have access to?

What kind of story is this? How is it being told?

# When you're in a character's head

## **What's going on in there?**

- \* self-talk: harsh? self-satisfied?

  - “I won, somehow, despite missing that high note AGAIN”  
vs. “Of course I won, I'm awesome”

- \* who are they trying to be (or not be)? Is it working?

  - “She could have kicked herself. Ladylike, dammit.”

- \* what do they notice / pay attention to / focus on? what do they gloss over?

- \* is there a contrast between “inside voice” and “outside voice”?

**Can we trust them?** (Are they right? Are they telling the truth?)

**Do we know things they don't? Do they know things we don't?**

There is not a chance in hell that Johnny doesn't know what Cal used to do. "Nope," Cal says. "I was a police officer."

Johnny raises his eyebrows, impressed. "Fair play to you. That's a job that takes guts."

"It's a job that pays the mortgage," Cal says.

"A policeman's a great thing to have handy, in an outa-the-way place like this. Sure, if you'd an emergency, you'd be waiting hours for them eejits up in town to get to you—and that's if they bothered getting up off their arses at all, for anything less than murder. There was a fella I knew one time—naming no names—he took a bit too much of a bad batch of poteen and went mental altogether. He got lost on the way home, ended up on the wrong farm. He was roaring at the woman of the house, wanting to know what she'd done with his missus and his sofa. Smashing all round him."

## From THE HUNTER by Tana French

Cal does his part and laughs along. It's easier than it should be. Johnny tells a story well, with the air of a man with a pint in his hand and a night of good company ahead.

"In the end he hid under the kitchen table. He was waving the salt-shaker at her, yelling that if she or any other demon came near him, he'd sprinkle them all to death. She locked herself in the jacks and rang the Guards. Three o'clock in the morning, that was. It was afternoon before they were arsed sending anyone out. By that time the fella had slept it off on her kitchen floor, and he was busy begging the poor woman to forgive him."

"Did she?" Cal asks.

"A

What's different between Cal's voice and Johnny's?

What do their voices suggest about them as people and about their relationship?



# What can go wrong

Voice can end up...

...stereotypical / like a caricature

...inaccurate

...distracting or hard to read

...getting lost partway through

...at odds with the setting

So it feels LESS real instead of MORE

# “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie”

“Whether or not they succeed in the end will depend largely on Kelson’s personal ability to manipulate the voting.”

“Can he?” Morgan asked, as the two clattered down a half-flight of stairs and into the garden.

“I don’t know, Alaric,” Nigel replied. “He’s good—damned good—but I just don’t know. Besides, you saw the key council lords. With Ralson dead and Bran Coris practically making open accusations—well, it doesn’t look good.”

“I could have told you that at Cordosa.”

“Whether or not they succeed in the end will depend largely on Kelson’s personal ability to manipulate the voting.”

“Can he?” Morgan asked, as the two clattered down a half-flight of stairs and into the **White House** garden.

“I don’t know, Alaric,” Nigel replied. “He’s good—damned good—but I just don’t know. Besides, you saw the **key committee chairmen**. With Ralson dead and Bran Coris practically making open accusations—well, it doesn’t look good.”

“I could have told you that at **Poughkeepsie**.”

“Now, I submit that something has gone wrong. The book from which I first quoted is not fantasy, for all its equipment of heroes and wizards. If it was fantasy, I couldn’t have pulled that dirty trick on it by changing four words. You can’t clip Pegasus’ wings that easily, not if he has wings.”

- Ursula Le Guin

and get sent to the front attached to a necromancer's legion. Not for Gideon a security detail on one of the holding planets, either on a lonely outpost on an empty world or in some foreign city babysitting some Third governor. Gideon wanted a drop ship—first on the ground—a fat shiny medal saying INVASION FORCE ON WHATEVER, securing the initial bloom of thanergy without which the finest necromancer of the Nine Houses could not fight worth a damn. The front line of the Cohort facilitated glory. In her comic books, necromancers kissed the gloved palms of their front-liner comrades in blessed thanks for all that they did. In the comic books none of these adepts had heart disease, and a lot of them had necromantically uncharacteristic cleavage.

This had all played out in Gideon's imagination on many solitary nights, and often she had indulged in a wilder flight of fancy where Harrowhark would open an envelope galaxies and galaxies away, and read the news that Gideon Nav had won a bunch of medals and a huge percentage of prize money for her role in the initial strike, a battle in which she was both outstanding and very hot. Harrow's lip would curl, and she would drawl something like, *Turns out Griddle could swing a sword after all*. This fantasy often got her through a hundred reps.

From GIDEON THE NINTH by  
Tamsyn Muir

Sometimes jarring contrast in  
voice can be deliberate (and  
very funny!)

# Exercises

Use the following bland sentences as writing prompts for a paragraph (or more if you like!)...but jazz it up with voice! Try it in 1<sup>st</sup> person, then rewrite it in 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**They place the tiara on my head.**

as said by a... - fae queen

- child beauty pageant winner
- trouble-making teen anarchist

who is... - terminally shy

- brimming with rage
- desperate for this moment
- dreading this moment

**It took three hours to clear the snow from the driveway.**

...as said by a...

- suburban father and homeowner
- teenaged entrepreneur
- monster watching from the woods

...who is...

- excited
- depressed
- angry

**The courtyard was a mess.**

- ...as said by a(n)...
- aristocrat
  - servant
  - visiting dignitary
  - enemy in disguise

- ...who is...
- resigned
  - gleeful
  - furious
  - terrified