

## The Voice You Hear When You Read Silently....

THE VOICE YOU HEAR WHEN YOU READ SILENTLY  
is not silent, it is a speaking--  
out-loud voice in your head: it is spoken,  
a voice is saying it  
5 as you read. It's the writer's words,  
of course, in a literary sense  
his or her "voice" but the sound  
of that voice is the sound of your voice.  
Not the sound your friends know  
10 or the sound of a tape played back  
but your voice  
caught in the dark cathedral  
of your skull, your voice heard  
by an internal ear informed by internal abstracts  
15 and what you know by feeling,  
having felt. It is your voice  
saying, for example, the word "barn"  
that the writer wrote  
but the "barn" you say  
20 is a barn you know or knew. The voice  
in your head, speaking as you read,  
never says anything neutrally—some people  
hated the barn they knew,  
some people love the barn they know  
25 so you hear the word loaded  
and a sensory constellation  
is lit: horse-gnawed stalls,  
hayloft, black heat tape wrapping  
a water pipe, a slippery  
30 spilled chirr of oats from a split sack,  
the bony, filthy haunches of cows...  
And "barn" is only a noun - no verb  
or subject has entered into the sentence yet!  
the voice you hear when you read to yourself  
35 is the clearest voice: you speak it  
speaking to you.

--Thomas Lux, *The New Yorker* July 14, 1997