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Thompson-Nicola Regional Library and Kamloops Society for the Written Arts

PLOTTING, PANTSING, & POETRY with Shawn Bird

Strategies for writing poetry or novels from writing by the seat of your pants to strict form.
Which is better? Why?

Workshop notes

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Bio: Shawn Bird (BA, MEd) is a high school English teacher, an author, and a poet in the beautiful Shuswap region of British Columbia. She has written a 'noir-vella' *Murdering Mr. Edwards*, published by Coffin Hop Press, a series of teen novellas set in the fictional BC town of Laketon, the YA novel series *Grace Awakening* and several books of poetry. In her spare time, she trick trains her talented miniature poodle, plays the harp, and serves her community with Shuswap Rotary Club.

Readings: a selection from the short story chapbook *Nikki Knox & the Line of Chalk* and some poetry from *Life, Love, & Hope*

Definitions:

Plotting: planning your project ahead of time

- may be in great detail
- may be vague outline
- may be on paper
- may be in your head

Pantsing: just sitting down and writing with no idea where the story is going or how it will end

- may start at the beginning and write to the end
- may be a variety of scenes in a patchwork to assemble later
- “discovery draft”

‘Set forms’ in poetry

While the modern vogue is free verse poetry that has no set meter or rhyme scheme many types of poems follow a form

e.g.

- a sonnet has 14 rhyming lines written in iambic pentameter
- a haiku has 17 syllables on 3 lines, traditionally 5-7-5 count
- villanelle has 19 lines with 5 tercets & a quatrain with 2 rhymes in ABA pattern

Constraining your ideas into a structure forces you to be more creative! You need to choose carefully and opens surprises.

‘Set forms’ in novels

genre novels have accepted tropes that readers expect. They are happy to find the familiar...

- horror tropes like lurking evil, the basement, running up stairs, (not sparkly vampires)
- romance tropes like ‘friends to lovers,’ ‘love triangles,’ ‘second chance at love,’ etc
- crime writing tropes like the unreliable narrator, the irascible detective, intrepid reporter

Planning your novel:

variations based on the 3 Act structure:

- 6 stage plot structure (Michael Hauge) <https://www.storymastery.com/>
- 7 point story structure (Dan Wells)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcmiqQ9NpPE&list=PLL7D_RCJrhLzLiO17m7KcnG5WrjcUxGz

variations based on The Hero’s Journey (classic book by Joseph Campbell)

- beat sheets (Blake Snyder-Jessica Brody) <https://savethecat.com/>
- Snowflake method (Randy Ingermanson)
<https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>

Do what works for you. It’s your choice. Every project you can decide whether to

- plan a bit before you start writing
- plan thoroughly before you start writing.
- use planning sheets after your discovery draft as an editing tool
- pants the whole project

WRITE ON!