

Dear Anna,

Thank you so much for writing such a fun book. It was a true delight to go *The Abbey of Saint Zosimos* a second time for this developmental edit and spend time with the characters in the abbey again. My developmental edit focus for this letter is on tone and narration.

Tone

Throughout the manuscript, the tone is whimsical, quirky, silly, funny—even slapstick-comedy-funny at times—and heartfelt. You do a lovely job of re-establishing the zany tone at the beginning of many chapters by mentioning fun, weird details of spells, potions, and magic, e.g., nose hair elongation spells (with a wonderful payoff later), slugs turning colors, and the sporadic appearance of daisies.

Once things get more serious, especially around the halfway point, with tax liabilities, fires, and fear of foreclosure taking center stage, there's a stretch with a lot less of the quirky fun details. Some of that fits the plot, like when Sister Kuolema's attempt to counter the love potion's effect makes the abbey repellent and puts everyone in a terrible mood, but for other parts of this stretch of the manuscript, sprinkling in a little bit more whimsy to counteract some of the seriousness could help the tone feel more consistent with the first half of the book. Starting in Chapter 48, the natural tone of the book re-emerges and it's there through the end.

Setting

The Vashon Island setting contributes to the overall tone of the manuscript, especially with the goat as unofficial mayor, the farmers' market scenes, and the unique island characters.

Because I lived on Orcas Island for six years, I found so many of the island aspects of the Vashon setting authentic and endearing. At the same time, I wondered if some island-specific elements would be clear to readers who aren't as familiar with the islands of Washington state. One way to address that would be to lean into the island setting more and earlier, and using these new, early mentions of aspects of island life to give a brief explainer.

One quick example: I've often found that people who've never spent time on the islands don't fully understand how ferries work, that they can transport cars and trucks, and picture something much more quaint and small. In the scene where Father Ben takes the ferry, this could be addressed more directly for the reader who isn't already in the know.

One way to amp up the Vashon setting and make it come into focus clearer for the reader would be to use more island jargon, like "on-island" and "off-island" and similar. Another would be to include more details related to island life earlier on. What strange, magical ingredients does the abbey need to import from the mainland because there just isn't anywhere to find it on Vashon? Do they save up all their grocery lists for big Costco runs to the mainland (or have a magical equivalent of the Costco run)? Are there quirky island traditions or holidays or customs (real or imagined for the sake of the story) that you could mention as part of island culture?

Another common island misconception I've found is that many people associate "island" with tropical, and there's extra potential for that here, with the story unfolding over a summer and early mentions of beaches, flip-flops, and sunscreen. Readers might picture palm trees more

than evergreens. More specifics of the setting—types of trees and greenery, weather and temperature—could create a stronger sense of the Pacific Northwest setting.

Narration and Point of View

The point of view shifts a lot throughout the manuscript with its ensemble cast of characters. Some chapters are solidly situated in one POV, especially the shorter chapters..

Other chapters have POV shifts that accompany scene changes. These could be addressed by inserting a section break within the chapter. These sorts of in-chapter section breaks are present later in the manuscript and done really well to match the shift of scene and POV.

Here are places you could use this technique in earlier chapters to the same effect:

- Ch 1 when Brother Threnody is introduced
- Ch 3 when we have a long stretch of Sister Kuolema's POV
- Ch 10 scene shift to Ruffina's POV in their room
- Ch 12 scene shift to Brother Hieronymus's POV
- Ch 15 scene shift to Ruffina's POV in their room
- Ch 29 switch to Brother Hieronymus's POV
- Ch 32 scene shift to Seviimli's POV cooking the love potion
- Ch 32 scene shift to Brother Hieronymus's POV
- Ch 34 after the love potion begins to boil, before it switches to Rotta's POV

Other chapters employ a Third Person Objective POV so that the reader experiences the story like a fly on the wall, able to see all the action in a scene. In these chapters, it's a bit like watching a movie. This POV is used especially in the chapters that have more physical, slapstick comedy, and the POV matches the tone very nicely in these cases.

Some chapters have a bit of a messier POV situation, with POVs switching mid-scene, several POVs presented in succession, or staying mostly in one person's POV throughout with slight deviations into other characters' perspectives. This can feel like "head-hopping," and can be disorienting to readers.

An early example of this occurs in Chapter 1 in the farmers' market scene. We're in Father Ben's POV, then Brother Threnody gets a call on his cell phone and we hear the part of the conversation that Father Ben wouldn't be able to hear. There are several other places where we're solidly in one POV and then get a glimpse into someone else's internal motivations that the POV character wouldn't be privy to, or see something they couldn't see given the scene.

You could address these by giving the POV character access to what's being described. Brother Threnody could put his phone on speaker, a POV character could watch something out a window or presume another character's motivations. Adding more chapter breaks is another way to address this. The last two chapters, especially, have a lot of POVs and are longer than most of your chapters, so they could be broken up to create more POV consistency.

I wish you the best of luck with your developmental edits and your book's publication journey, and I look forward to reading the final version!

Chrys Buckley