

# The Music of the Hemispheres

Poetics for Young Children

*a e i*

*g h*

*q r s*

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Royal Fireworks Press

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*m n*

For Myriam Borges Thompson

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## Preface

Poetry, real poetry, is an extraordinary art form.

Being a poet is much like being a composer of symphonies. Just as a composer writes each note on a musical staff, and composes harmonies for the different instruments, and knows when to enhance the percussion or the woodwinds, a great poet has an array of tools and techniques at hand, and puts each sound on the page, one sound at a time, in a deliberately chosen rhythm, for a reason. A poet might spend a year carefully perfecting a fourteen-line sonnet.

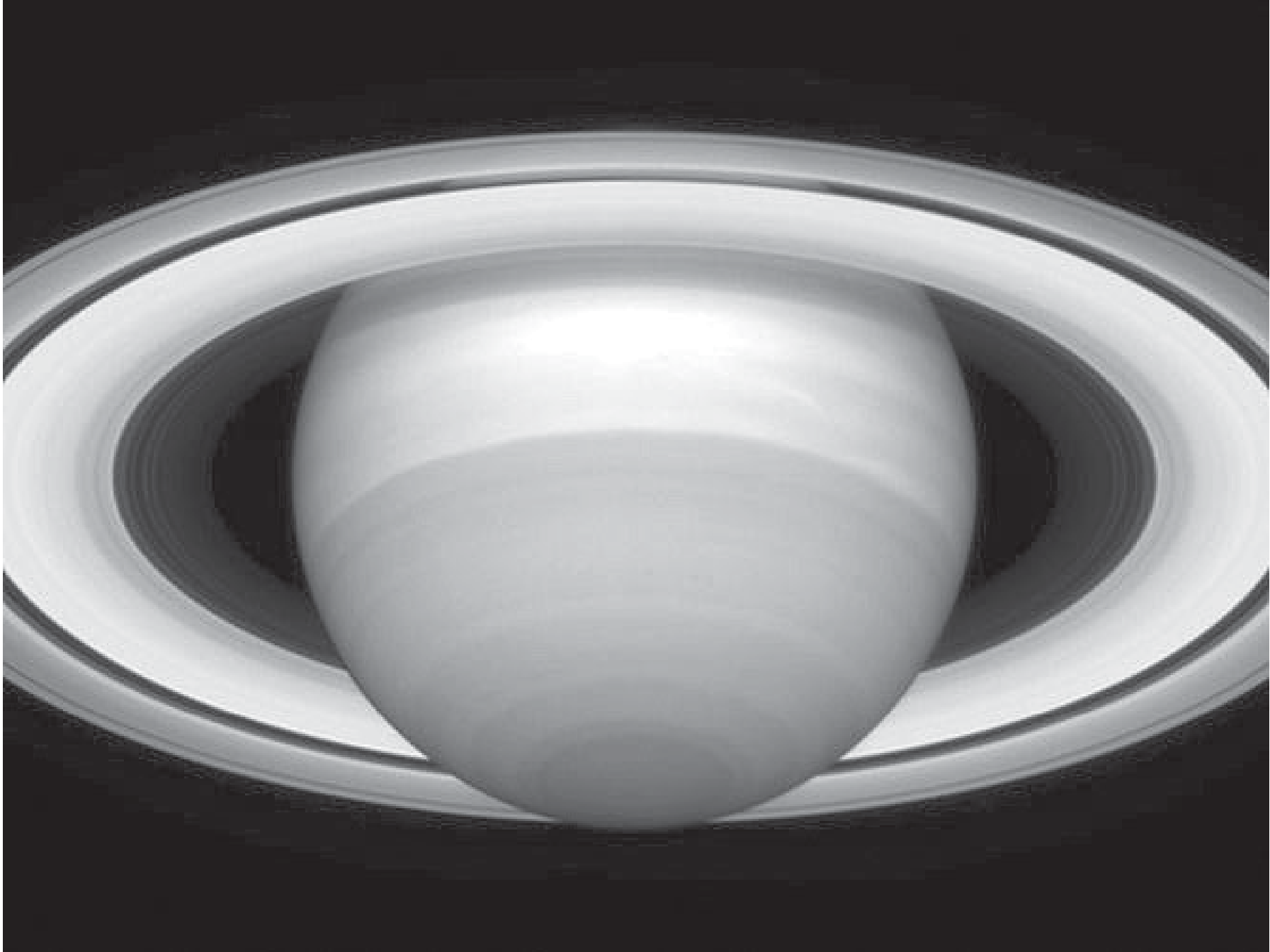
This book, though it explores many powerful and technical things that poets can do with the sounds of words, is only a hint. It just cracks open the door, giving you a peek inside the huge world of creative life that poets live in.

Though this is but an introduction, it is nevertheless an introduction to the real thing. The purpose of this book is to find ways to reveal the reality of poem power, to give students an eyeball-to-the-letter closeup of what goes on in a poet's thought. The architect Mies van der Rohe said that God is in the details; I hope that by putting a microscope on the beautiful details of poetry, I can show how wonderful they are.

XXXIII

Emily Dickinson

How happy is the little stone  
That rambles in the road alone,  
And doesn't care about careers,  
And exigencies never fears;  
Whose coat of elemental brown  
A passing universe put on;  
And independent as the sun,  
Associates or glows alone,  
Fulfilling absolute decree  
In casual simplicity.




In the medieval ages,  
philosophers believed that each planet,  
as it zoomed around in orbit,  
made a sound...

a note.

The sound of all the planets in space  
was called *the music of the spheres*.

Today, we say the human brain  
has two hemispheres,  
and through the magic of human language  
we have poetry,  
the *music of the hemispheres*.



Language is human.  
Many animals make sounds,  
but only human beings make language.

We love language for lots of reasons,  
and one of the most important  
is that **we love the beautiful  
sounds of language.**

Words are made of sounds.

When we write words,  
we show the sounds with letters.





Some sounds sound like  
woodwinds  
or horns  
or wind in the trees.



*ee<sub>e</sub>*

*whwh*

*u*





plop

trickle

sh  
drip

splash



There are two main kinds of sounds:  
**vowels**, and **consonants**.

Vowels sound like singing:

*a e i o u y*

and consonants sound like clicks, and taps, and bumps:

*b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x z*

We can even do a  
**vowel-consonant split**,  
by putting vowels and consonants  
on different lines.

What words are these?

i e  
cr ck t

o e  
fl w r

u e  
p ddl



# umma

By splitting the vowels away  
from the consonants,  
we can see and hear them more clearly.  
We can even sing a word like a song!

**baseball**

a e a

b s b ll

**b ay... ss b ahh... l...**



Do you see that in the word *baseball*,  
the first *a* and the second *a* have different sounds?

The first *a* in baseball sounds like *ay*,  
and the second *a* sounds like *ah*.  
There is even a third *a* sound, as in *bat*.  
And the *e* in baseball is silent!

So the vowels in baseball  
sound like *ay-ah*!

English has more sounds than letters  
so letters have to make several sounds,  
and also join with other letters to make  
special combined sounds, like  
*sh, th, ch*, and others.



The sounds of words almost  
have personalities, like people.

The letter



*m*

is soft, like a hum,  
and reassuring.  
We find *m* in *mama*,  
and *Romeo*.

When the Scottish poet Robert Burns  
wanted to communicate the  
gentleness of love,  
he filled his poem with *m*:

*My Mary's asleep  
by thy *murmuring* stream*

There are lots of consonants  
that are **soft**,



zein

and other consonants  
are **scratchy**, rough, or pounding.

*t*

*x*

*b*

*k*

*d*

*g*

*g*

*stock*

Some consonants  
are **hissy**, breathy, or windy.





*h f S*

In William Shakespeare's  
love story, *Romeo and Juliet*,  
a play he wrote in poetry,  
he wrote soft, beautiful sounds  
for Juliet's lines.

Juliet asks Romeo  
why he has to be named  
*Romeo*. Their two families  
are enemies, so Romeo  
is the child of her father's foe:

A large, light gray, serif capital letter 'R' is positioned on the right side of the page. A thin, light blue circle is drawn around the bottom loop of the letter.A large, light gray, cursive lowercase letter 'th' is positioned on the left side of the page.

O Romeo, Romeo,  
Wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father,  
and refuse thy name.

*(Wherefore means why!)*

But in William Shakespeare's  
witch story, *Macbeth*,  
also a play he wrote in poetry,  
he wrote sharp, harsh, scratchy, evil sounds  
for the witches to speak,  
sounds like *ake*, *kaw*, and *boi*:

Fillet of a fenny snake,  
in the cauldron,  
boil and bake.

Sometimes, poets hide  
animal sounds  
in their poetry,  
and you hear them without  
really realizing that you do.

In his tiny poem “Splinter,”  
Carl Sandburg used the *s* sound to  
represent a cricket’s chirp,  
and then stopped, to let us feel the loss.

Do you hear the little cricket?  
It stops, but then it returns and reassures us,  
with a pretty *s* and *i* song.



SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS



The voice of the last cricket,  
Across the first frost,  
Is one kind of good-bye.  
It is so thin a splinter of singing.

SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS SS

In his poem “The Cloud”  
the English poet Percy Shelley  
used drenched, **rainy** sounds,  
such as **rs**, and **sh**, and **fr**,  
to capture the sound  
of rain.

Shelley imagined the cloud  
as if it were a person.  
“I bring...” says the cloud.  
Portraying an object as a person  
is called *personification*.





S



I bring fresh showers  
for the thirsting flowers  
From the seas  
and the streams.

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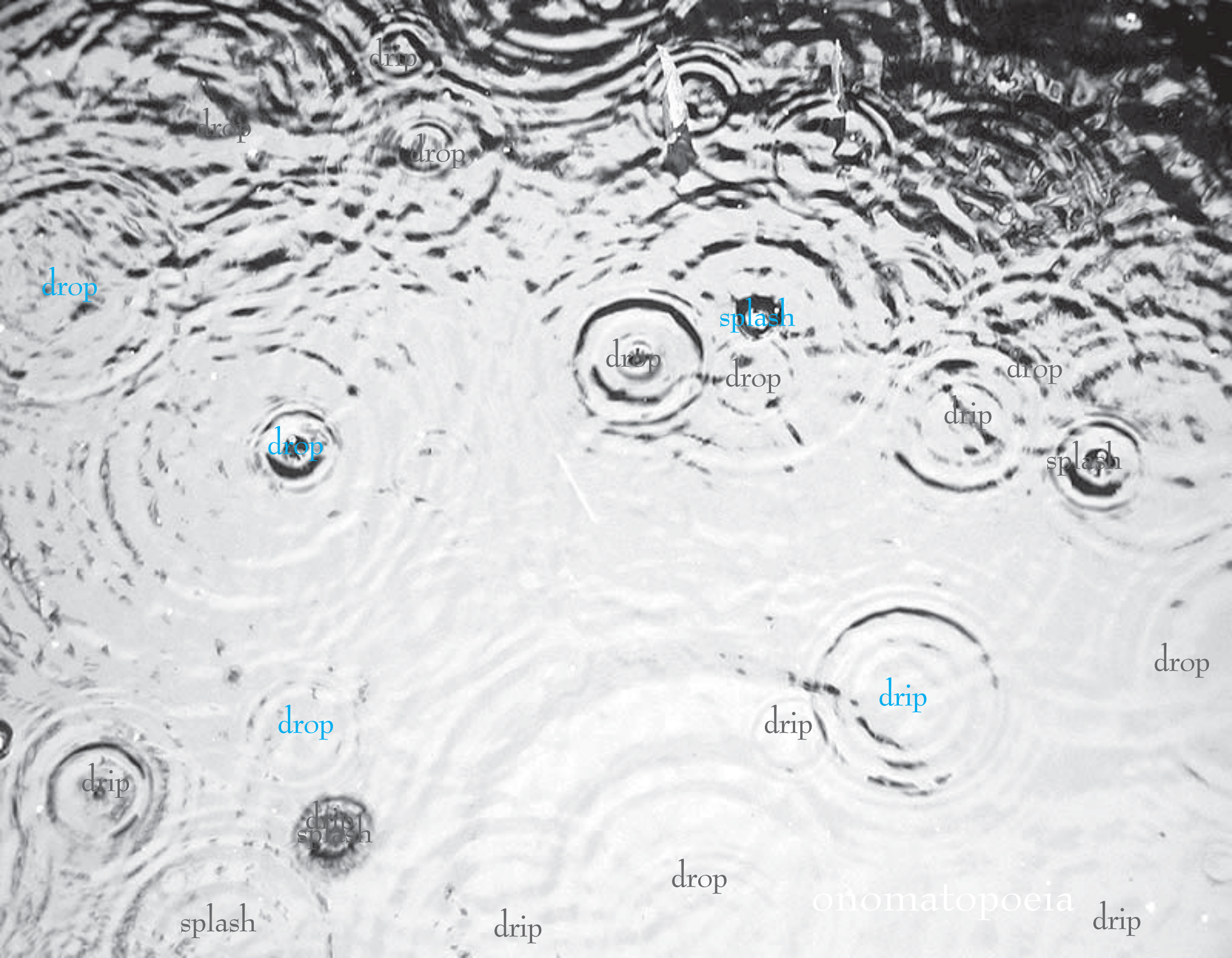
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*drip!*

You begin to notice  
that lots of words,  
such as *drip*, *drop*, *splash* and *trickle*,  
sound just like  
what they stand for.

The word *drip*,  
sounds like a *drip*.



drip

drip

drip

drip

splash

drip

drip

drip

drip

drip

splash

drip

drip

drip

drip

drip

drip splash

drip

splash

drip

onomatopoeia

drip

The word *whistle*  
sounds like a whistle,  
with its *wh* and *s* sounds.

Robert Burns used *whistle*  
to evoke the sounds of the blackbirds  
in his poem “Afton Water.”

Thou stock dove whose echo  
resounds thro the glen,  
Ye wild **whistling** blackbirds  
in yon thorny den  
Thou green-crested lapwing,  
thy screaming forbear—  
I charge you,  
disturb not my slumbering fair!

Another kind of sound,  
different from vowels and consonants,  
is the *stress*.

When we speak,  
we say some parts of words  
with more emphasis,  
more firmness,  
more volume.  
We stress certain parts of words.



# *mon*key

When we say the word *monkey*,  
the first syllable is stressed.

We say MONkey,  
not monKEY, and  
TIGer, not tiGER.

*Tiger!*

