

Classic Poetry Series

Aaron Fogel
- poems -

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Aaron Fogel(1947 -)

Aaron Fogel was born and raised in New York City. He graduated from Columbia and Cambridge Universities, and holds a Ph.D. from Columbia. Fogel currently occupies a space on the Boston University faculty, a position he has held since 1978. He lives with his wife Barbara and his son Adam in Cambridge, MA.

Works

Aaron Fogel's books include Chain Hearings (poems) and Coercion to Speak: Conrad's Poetics of Dialogue (criticism). Backdoor Books will soon publish his chapbook, Ornery Language Philosophy. His poems have appeared in such places as The Best American Poetry, Boulevard, AGNI, and Slate.

Awards

2001: Kahn Award for The Printer's Error

1987-88: Guggenheim Fellow

1967-69: Kellett Fellowship

Cobblestones

The coffin, set up as coffins always are, near the grave, contained the father. The sentence, set up as sentences always are, on the page, contained the words. The meat package, set up as meat packages always are, with cellophane covering, contained the chops. The synagogue, set up as synagogues always are, for people, contained the rabbi. The classroom, set up as classrooms always are, for chairs, contained the professor. The coffin, set up as coffins always are, beside the grave, contained the mother. The word, set up as words always are, beyond hearing, contained the syllables. The prose, set up as prose always is, in census-rectangles, contained the phenomena. The nation, set up as nations always are, in questionnaire rooms, contained the sworn. The can, set up as cans always are, with ornate paper covers, contained the chicken o'noodle soup, with the circular noodles. Abacus, guitar, and quipu, set up as abacus, guitar and quipu always are, hieratically on notional strings, contained tobacco's troubadours. The coffin, set up as coffins always are, next to the grave, contained the sister. The elegy, set up as elegies always are, dishonestly, contained the family. The steak, set up as steaks always are, artificially reddened, contained the fat. The rectangular venetian blinds, set up as rectangular venetian blinds always are, in the windowframe, contained the slats. The DNA, set up as DNA always is, in double helixes, contained the and. The word people, set up as the word people always is, in writing, contained the o.

Aaron Fogel

P.S.

P:The statistician and the poet need each other,
But not yet.

S:You need us now.
Without a theory of probability
To guide you -

P:Not the unguided but the unguarded moments
Are the most beautiful

S:Poetry is measure and measure now is population
All signs signify groupings: we count people.

P:There are nonmeasurable groupings that defy
Time and space and run wild as numbers

S:We call that Brownian motion, stochastic.

P:Stochastic rain, stochastic snow, the populace,
The monkeys who sleep in different groups each night
Unpredictable in the rain forest.

S:I seem to remember that image from the work of Cohen,
A statistician of monkey sleeping groups

P:This is the rain forest and it has no scientists
Only invaders, stripminers, depopulators
The clever critic made a joke about the word
Depopulator and the sophomores laughed.

S:What you need isn't the apocalypse but the apocalyx
Taking off the green shield of the flower
In whose middle you'll find the new peopling

P:Number may be the sine qua non of lyric
But without number lyric is still lyric
Without number or the space or time it yields it is still lyric
But strip statistics of number and there is nothing

S:There is collective rhythm

P:The next dance then?

Aaron Fogel

Pupils Slip Up

I have several questions.
For a few months
A radio business channel
In Boston carried

Thrice hourly reports
On the stock market--
The Bloomfield report.
Suddenly it was gone
And replaced by a
Monotonous religious channel.

I couldn't find it
Anywhere on the dial.
Why did that happen?
Massac came from Casamusetts.
Cassam came from Massachusetts.

They tell you that vitamin E,
Grape juice, and aspirin
Thin the blood and
Reduce cholesterol buildup
But if you take two
Or three of these

Substances regularly, do they
Thin it too much,
Causing other, unforeseen
Dangers of an interactive sort?
Massac came from Casamusetts.
Cassam came from Massachusetts.

If all politics is a lie
We tell ourselves, if
People who think they are
Conservative have horrible
Anarchic lives, raping children

And people who think
They are radical, and
Tell you so, typically,
Are repressed, authoritarian, and
Thinly frigid in their
Personal bearings,

Leaving the world on both sides
To be divided up between
Aggressive territorial types
Finding ideological excuses
To kill other people's children--
If all this is patently,

Obviously so, so that
Only poetry, and not
Politics can save us--
Is there any hope for us then?
Massac came from Casamusetts.

Cassam came from Massachusetts.

Aaron Fogel

The Man Who Never Heard Of Frank Sinatra

The man who had never heard of Frank Sinatra: he lived
A perfectly ordinary life in America. Born in 1915,
He followed all the fads, read the newspapers, listened

To Television, knew who Dean Martin and Sammy whathisname
Were (Sinatra's friends), but somehow, by a one in a
Zillion fluke, whenever Sinatra came up, he was out of the room.

Or his attention was diverted by something else, and
(You will say this is impossible, that it cannot be), never
Heard him sing, like a man in my generation who somehow

Missed the Beatles though he had heard everything else.
Once, just as he was about to hear the name Frank Sinatra
A plane flew overhead--he was fifty-five years old--his hearing

A little more impaired. He had heard of Humphrey Bogart,
Of Elizabeth Taylor, of Walter Cronkite, and of perhaps a hundred
Forty thousand other celebrities names by the time he died,

And yet he had never heard of Frank Sinatra. The Greeks had
That famous saying, "The luckiest man is he who was never born."
Which is kind of gloomy, but I think they were wrong.

The luckiest man is he who never heard of Frank Sinatra.

Aaron Fogel

The Printer's Error

Fellow composers
and pressworkers!

I, Chief Printer
Frank Steinman,
having worked fifty-
seven years at my trade,
and served five years
as president
of the Holliston
Printer's Council,
being of sound mind
though near death,
leave this testimonial
concerning the nature
of printers' errors.

First: I hold that all books
and all printed
matter have
errors, obvious or no,
and that these are their
most significant moments,
not to be tampered with
by the vanity and folly
of ignorant, academic
textual editors.

Second: I hold that there are
three types of errors, in ascending
order of importance:

One: chance errors
of the printer's trembling hand
not to be corrected incautiously
by foolish professors
and other such rabble
because trembling is part
of divine creation itself.

Two: silent, cool sabotage

by the printer,
the manual laborer
whose protests
have at times taken this
historical form,
covert interferences
not to be corrected
ensoriously by the hand
of the second and far
more ignorant saboteur,
the textual editor.

Three: errors
from the touch of God,
divine and often
obscure corrections
of whole books by
nearly unnoticed changes
of single letters
sometimes meaningful but
about which the less said
by preemptive commentary
the better.

Third: I hold that all three
sorts of error,
errors by chance,
errors by workers' protest,
and errors by
God's touch,
are in practice the
same and indistinguishable.

Therefore I,
Frank Steinman,
typographer
for thirty-seven years,
and cooperative Master
of the Holliston Guild
eight years,
being of sound mind and body
though near death
urge the abolition
of all editorial work

whatsoever
and manumission
from all textual editing
to leave what was
as it was, and
as it became,
except insofar as editing
is itself an error, and

therefore also divine.

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