

Strange Terrain – New Hampshire State Poet Laureate at The Bookery

“Strangeness is a jolt of Oh! – a punch-line, a vacation, a wake-up call. We get to feel refreshed and freed from habits. Isn’t that why we sometimes go looking for strange terrain?” – Alice B. Fogel, Strange Terrain

“Bookshops are time machines, spaceships, story-makers, secret-keepers, dragon-tamers, dream-catchers, fact-finders, & safe places.” – Jen Campbell, The Bookshop Book

Isn’t that the most exotic reason we travel – to see strange terrain? To explore the unknown? Make room for the illogical, the mysterious, discover the not-so-figured-out things? All of these things can happen in two metaphorical ways we can travel without the airport – through poetry and a good independent bookstore.



D. QUINCY WHITNEY

At 7 p.m. Tuesday, Alice B. Fogel, New Hampshire Poet Laureate (2013-2018), will give a reading to celebrate the opening of The Bookery, a new independent bookstore in downtown Manchester. In addition, Ella McGrail, New Hampshire Youth Poet Laureate – a project instigated by Fogel during her term as Poet Laureate – will also give a reading.

Fogel earned her BA in art and literature from Antioch College and her

MA in poetry from the University of New Hampshire. She is the author of four poetry collections – *Be That Empty* (2007); *Interval: Poems Based on Bach's Goldberg Variations* (2015); *A Doubtful House* (2017); and *Strange Terrain: A Poetry Handbook for the Reluctant Reader* (2009). Fogel is an eight-time Pushcart Prize nominee; her poems have appeared in numerous anthologies. She has been a Fellow at the Carl Sandburg National Historic Site and an NEA recipient among other awards.

In *Strange Terrain*, Fogel masterfully constructs a believable, accessible “backstory” to poetry – demystifying, elucidating, and remystifying her readers not just about how to read poetry but how to occupy it with comfort.

Fogel calls us to let ourselves dwell inside a poem – without try-

ing to “get it.” Instead let it wash over you like water, allow yourself to live with wonder rather than analysis. Fogel: “It’s not so much poetry’s job to answer as to ask, not its responsibility to tie everything up neatly for you. Rather it may set up a montage of sensations, a hall of mirrors, by means of its words, sounds, images and other elements, and your reactions to them.”

Lessons in how to read

a poem might correlate with how to court a new bookstore.

Accessibility is exactly what Liz Hitchcock, a marketing executive, and Liz Cipriano, a librarian, had in mind as partners in founding The Bookery just six weeks ago – to create a downtown gathering place – open seven days a week – that brings literature into the social equation.

Whitney

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE A-3

Cipriano, whose lifelong dream has been to found an independent bookshop, said The Bookery will feature “a curated selection of everything you didn’t know you should read, classics, local authors and books that fly under the radar.”

As an author who recently toured the east coast on a book tour, I cannot say enough about the passion, perspective and hard work that independent bookstores owners give to the world of authors and books. There is nothing like it – and it is the lifeline of the literary life.

Even as the first Amazon.com bricks and mortar bookstore opened last summer in Columbus Circle in New York City, independent bookstores are not only alive and well, they are growing in numbers, according to Jen Campbell, author of *The Bookshop Book* in which she re-

views 300 bookshops across six continents. Campbell concludes: “Book Towns are sprouting up all over the world, to save local economies and form stronger communities.”

In fact, the American Booksellers Association reported that there are presently 2,321 independent bookstores, up from 1,651 in 2009.

Fogel correlates the shape of a poem to the difference between looking out the kitchen window and the view as seen by a bug on the ground. “The lawn looks like solid green thing from a distance, but to a bug crawling through it it contains a whole lot of air. The light of day in all that air surrounding it also highlights each line of poetry. Get out there and read it as if you were that bug on a blade of grass. Crawl up one side and down the other of every line.”

As Frost says, writers of poetry “must believe” a poem into being. So too, for the local bookshop. A bookshop thrives through the attention and attendance of those that sustain it, in

author signings, live music, book chat groups – all of which build it as a gathering place.

According to Fogel, part of the mystery of poetry lies in the mysterious multiple meanings of words. “The meanings of words are simultaneously familiar to us all, and strangely malleable... words do new things here (in poetry) that yank us out of our usual expectations of them.... Staring right in the eye of some aspects of life makes them look away, like a dog. In poetry, we are saying what we mean, but we may be... saying something else we also mean.”

Cast a wide net, then – in reading poetry, writing poetry, and in approaching a new bookshop that has no preconceived template, a bookshop owned by those invested in the bookish culture they want to foster. You may not know what you are looking for and that is a journey, too.

As Fogel says, metaphor provides a poet’s passport and traveling papers. Metaphor urges us

to think across the gaps between things that seem not to fit – but then do fit with the recasting of thought, shaped by the way the poet crafts each line.

For Fogel, poetry moves like a camera lens – from concrete to abstract, alternating between closeups and panning for a wider view. Fogel: “...the concrete element...inspires me, and the abstract sneaks in...I get to be a grassfire, a dragonfly. I get to connect myself to the things of this world.” Fogel captures the magic of reading with her three-year old son:

Learning to read –
not evening meaning to –
we tie down the forms, tell
them which way
to go. They lose most of their
freedom

while we gain much of ours.
Loving the story, his hand
caresses the paper
with the same yearning tenderness as mine...

In my own old, best, repeated
dream

I float down a river on an open
book...

Reading a poem is not unlike entering a new bookstore – make room for the mystery of unknowing. Fogel reminds us that poetry “imparts not less than it literally means but more than it verbally says.”

As Charles Simic once said: “There is truth with eyes open and truth with eyes closed and the two don’t always recognize each other on the street.”

Fogel’s “strange terrain” is the geography of a poem. Reading a book, courting the mystery of a poem can often lead to empathy. It might even make us kinder. Fogel: “Practice your unknowing tolerance level...you may even get along better with your significant other and your boss. You’ll be able, in general, to tolerate more uncertainty, fewer answers, more unfixables, less linear logic, more stimulation of what-ifs, and have less fear of strangeness.”

Quincy Whitney is a career journalist, author, historian, biographer and poet and a lifelong New Hampshire resident. Contact her at quincysquill@nashuatelegraph.com or quincy@quincywhitney.com.