

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Fred Voss: Three Poems

Fred Voss · Thursday, October 20th, 2016

Fred Voss has had 3 collections of poetry published by Bloodaxe Books (U.K.), the latest of which, *Hammers and Hearts of the Gods*, was selected a Book of the Year 2009 by The Morning Star (U.K.) and is just published in a new reprint American edition by Pearl Editions (Long Beach CA) available on Amazon. His first novel, *Making America Strong*, is also available on Amazon.

Steel Communion

When I was 12 years old I put on my white shirt
each Sunday
and went to church and felt the body and blood of Christ in white wafer and red wine
on my tongue
now
at 63
I feel the skin of grimy steel blocks in my hands turning my fingerprints
black
as I drop the steel blocks into a vise and cut them on my milling machine
when I was 12 I was told all men were my brothers
in Christ
now
I look across this factory floor past rolling vertical gantry mill slick with oil
and 2-ton drop hammer I hear once crushed a man's skull and see
Ruben from a holy mountain in Guatemala
on his tube bending machine bending steel
the same steel dust on our skin
the same drops of sweat glistening on our backs
and necks
as the time clock ticks
the same muscles
tightening in our fingers and arms and shoulders as we lift
steel
in our ragged torn T-shirts that will never see the inside
of a church
our church
in our hearts

our communion
 in our smiles
 as we buff and polish the steel we've cut and bent
 we do not need to put on a white shirt and kneel before an altar
 to feel holy
 we do not need to pretend wafer and wine
 are body and blood
 we have the blood flowing in our veins
 and pouring from our cut fingers
 the muscles
 rippling on our backs
 the brotherhood
 in our hearts real
 as shiny steel.

Einstein Sticks Out His Tongue

A poem should be understood by a man
 wrestling a roaring shaking jackhammer in his fists
 a poem should turn like an axle
 cut like a drill
 be warm as the first ray of sun falling through a machine shop window onto the arm
 of an engine lathe operator after a storm
 sit on a table like the jaw
 of a T-Rex
 leap
 into the air and wiggle like the marlin hanging above the sea and pointing its sword
 toward the sun
 a poem should sit in the palm of the hand like a flower
 shine in the eyes and swing with the stride of any man or woman walking down any street
 in the world
 a poem should be clear
 as the hooting of the owl during the total eclipse of the sun
 common
 as heartbeat necessary
 as gravity a poem should roll
 like a locomotive squirm
 like Houdini the moment before the straightjacket falls
 from his back a poem
 is a can opener
 a stick of dynamite
 Van Gogh's paintbrush dipped in yellow oil
 it should gleam
 like the sweat on the back of the man with his fists on the rake stirring the red-hot
 molten steel in the foundry flow
 like the blood of the soldier dodging machine gun bullets to keep us
 free explode

like Krakatoa hang
 in the air like Nureyev stick out its tongue
 like Einstein laugh
 like the world's greatest pool hustler sinking a shot even he
 thought impossible get
 up off the canvas just before the referee counts 10 and put up its gloves
 and throw another punch a poem
 cannot be held in a musty book or captured in a university classroom a poem
 is Chaplin's cane Dempsey's fist Cleopatra's naked back it crawls with the snail roars
 like the lion grows like the grass waits all-knowing like the dust on the windowsill falls
 like the tear from the eye of the bride as she kisses the groom who's just been given a new heart
 by the doctor a poem
 does not keep its hands clean a poem
 is a steel cutter shoving a filthy 1-ton bar of 4130 steel into the mouth
 of a white-hot blast furnace and laughing
 because he's still alive.

Hanging Onto Our Selves

We fill egg trays with 30 identical beryllium copper electrical connectors each
 stack the trays
 until they reach for the machine shop ceiling
 we make hundreds
 thousands hundreds of thousands of identical beryllium copper electrical connectors
 until they come out our ears
 and we dream them in midnight dreams and seem to eat them
 for breakfast but we
 are each so different Merlin
 sleeps in his van he parks in the Home Depot parking lot all week
 after driving from the high desert over the mountains 90 miles
 to work
 and sings opera
 at his machine until he cries then smiles like some crazy clown saint doing a comical waltz
 around his machine as his fingers cut to shreds by the sharp copper connectors drip
 stinking cutting oil
 Ishmael
 keeps swordfish swords propped against his workbench by his toolbox with the pictures
 of the thousand pound swordfish he once pulled from the sea
 says the sea
 is his woman and talks of how he wants to cruise her with a harpoon in his fist a swordfisherman
 once again as soon as he can and we worry
 Ishmael will cut off his fingers reaching for electrical connectors next to razor-sharp cutters
 as his eyes glaze over
 and beautiful swordfish leap from the sea as he hurls the harpoon
 in his mind
 those shiny red-brown beryllium copper electrical connectors stack
 toward the factory ceiling

each identical to within thousandth-of-an-inch blueprint dimensions

as we

stare across our machines at each other and try to be as different

as we can

Carl

still furious at the 10 years he spent caged in prison for killing a man

with his bare hands on a downtown L.A. street corner staring

at the tin walls as his machine runs until his eyes fill with tears

that never fall

as he balls his fists up and turns those tears into punches

at the air

and me

a million miles away in my mind running as far as I can from the numbing boredom

of a million identical electrical connectors to seize

these poems out of thin air

and set myself free.

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