

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Lee Rossi: Three Poems

Lee Rossi · Thursday, November 5th, 2015

Lee Rossi is too modest to mention his large and enduring impact on contemporary culture. The secondary literature about him and his work already fills several feet of library shelving. In fact, Google had to buy an additional cloud to accommodate all the internet interest. That being said, he would simply mention that his two most recent books of poetry are *Wheelchair Samurai* and *Ghost Diary*. *Wheelchair Samurai* is available from [Plain View Press](#).

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## The Aerialist

She wears her shrink-wrap skin like Venus  
wears her toga, revealing, not concealing  
the pure marble of her muscles.  
For two acts she tantalizes,  
seated on her tiny garlanded swing,  
with fawn-like looks and legs  
chiseled by the daily conquest of gravity,  
this not quite human girl  
who seems all hydraulics  
and tubular steel. I wonder  
at the will that produces such compact  
concentration. Even her breasts  
are miracles of compact concentration.

Perhaps the gods adore her too.  
I can almost feel their jealousy,  
as finally in act three she throws  
herself on air and soars  
so close to their realm, this Icarus  
who has pared her body  
until it lifts like an aileron  
in the breath of our attention.

How can they face their own desire?  
Is that what makes them gods,  
the knowledge that immolated

in the fire of the moment,  
they will somehow survive  
to suffer the next?

Who else can face that blaze?  
And yet we try, faces upturned,  
dazzled by the spotlight  
as she grips the bar with one foot,  
spreading her arms to receive  
our embrace. We give her wings,  
who fear for her, who ache  
at her ascension. Too late  
the memory of our roots, buried  
safely in the ground.  
The quickening in our skin,  
the knot of pleasure in our groins –  
our love destroys us.

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## The Beauty Operator's Son

After the sex-change operation  
my life wasn't much different.  
I still dated men, and women, still saw  
my therapist three times a week. Decisions.  
My mother called the morning  
I got back from the hospital, thinking  
I was still a man. She forgets  
I've been her best girlfriend ever  
since I was six. She'd talk to me for hours  
about my dad and his women,  
the blonde, the redhead,  
finally the mousy brunette  
in Fairfax with the two kids.  
They were like my other family  
and I'd imagine my father  
over there at night  
talking to the girls  
about their day in school  
and bringing them presents  
of candy. He could read the paper there  
in peace, without my mother's constant  
demands to tell her how great  
her hair looked. It was always a guessing  
game, my mother's hair of the week thing,  
what color it'd be, ash-blonde,  
ivory, mint-frost. One year she went  
through all the colors Clairol made,

and all of Revlon's the next.  
Somewhere in the middle  
of the second year, her hair  
fell out or snapped off  
and all that remained was  
a thin reddish glow  
a stubble covering her cracked  
scalp like a shower cap.  
She looked like a camp survivor  
or a cancer victim  
but what the cancer was  
I couldn't have told you  
until years later when  
it had eaten away parts of me.

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## Boys with Breasts

You see them waddle  
along the pool's edge  
stealing looks at girls  
whose flat stomachs  
gleam with cocoa butter.  
You can hear their upper thighs  
rub together, raw, red.  
From the 10-foot board  
their entry into water  
organizes the world  
into concussion and spray.  
Yet once submerged  
water and air conspire  
to keep them  
at the margin,  
slick heads keen  
for oxygen's sweet burn,  
soft pale bellies and backs  
no denser than milk,  
buoyant and nude. At night  
they lie in bed, one hand  
between their legs,  
the other cupped  
to a tensile nipple, afloat  
on some darker sea.

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