
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](#).

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.

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.

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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