



Talking Doll
By J.HOPE STEIN

Reviewed by MARIA GARCIA TEUTSCH

Ladies and Gentleman,
I'd like to introduce you to the collection, *Talking Doll*, by J. Hope Stein, published by Dancing Girl Press. What Ms. Stein has wrought here is Genesis and the Big Bang birthing a corporate reality where everything and nothing is co-opted.

In the beginning there is "The Inventor's Last Breath," inspired by Thomas Alva Edison, but taken inward to that space in our lizard brains where we are all inventors:

*Ladies & Gentlemen The body
is the soul's model T
A factory of microscopic men tug the diaphragm We breathe
into stomach not chest Ladies & Gentlemen
these are the principles that guide the machine
you see before you The Inventor's final secret
found by the great-great-granddaughter
of the mistress of the Inventor
Ladies & Gentleman if
we were to voluntarily stop breathing we would
lose consciousness and the tiny men would take over*

The final stanza in this poem tells us: "The story of a man/can be told in a single breath," how true. This first poem serves as a Greek chorus for the rest of the collection. The inventor says let there be light and "names his disciples: The Insomniacs." The inventor "births the Talking Doll." The inventor here gives form to every dream you ever believed to be true. The secret every girl throughout centuries knows for sure is that dolls have always been able to talk. Ms. Stein guides us through the depths of our very stem cells of what we love and hold dear. It is the inventor who

keeps us firmly rooted in reality and says, “the motivation/for evolution is dollars & problems—
“ There is a masculine philosophy counterbalanced by the perceived feminine. In the “Invention
of Light Bulbs, Hand Massage 1890” the feminine is made manifest:

*She rubs the factory from his palms
salutes each finger like an admiral—
Removes the ring
and begins on the bark of his hands.
It feels good to him when it's off
& she makes putty
from elbow to finger.
She slips the ring back on. (It feels good to him
when it's on) & how he finds himself by daylight.*

In “Boneless Squab & Virginia Ham” we return to the world of men, and the dichotomous tightrope walk of this collection: science versus the natural world. Where men create and destroy and women “see inside your bones.” There is a *Franny and Zooey* moment when the inventor says: “when I drink milk I get God he says./My legs throb and sell. GOUT not GOD.” But there is no Buddhist moment of Aha! Here, there is a man complaining, not seeking enlightenment, but rather a wish to command enlightenment. The inventor is not seeking god, the inventor believes he is god. In the poem “John D. Rockefeller & Charles Schwab,” Orville Wright enters the narrative and “whittles his wood by the paw/makes true monument & insult to gravity.” These men seek to conquer life in an attempt to conquer death, but the maleness stays the same, the need to conquer is inherent.

Finally, there is much to admire in the construction of the collection, *Talking Doll*. There is a precision of language and word choice that is at once anthem and chant as exemplified in the poem “Starfish and Pinheads:”

*Man is microscopic starfish.
When man dies, the starfish move on,
swarm with new starfish to become
cat or asparagus.*

The collection ends with the poem “The Inventor’s Last Breath 2,” and this bit of wisdom: “all there is/to know about a man is in his breath.”

This collection reminds us that between the inhale and the exhale there are galaxies upon galaxies of potential within each one of us, to create, to destroy, or to do both.