*Luxury, Blue Lace*, by S. Brook Corfman rev. by Hannah Cokash

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S. Brook Corfman is the author of the poetry collection *Luxury, Blue Lace*. Corfman has received awards, including the Autumn House Rising Writer Prize and the *Tupelo Quarterly* Open Prose Prize. In *Luxury, Blue Lace*, Corfman’s poems reveal and reflect on the intimacy of gender and identity through the rawness of a childhood experience. Growing up, children are going to ask questions about their sexuality, gender, and anatomy; it’s in their nature to be curious. But when family and society tell them what the norm is, what their gender is at birth, what their body is supposed to feel and look like in the mirror, who they can and can’t love, it’s difficult striding down their own path. These poems are about the hardships many go through when all they want is to feel comfortable in their own skin.

Corfman’s style of writing is not only beautiful in its simplicity but also thoughtful. The poetic aspects that stand out when reading *Luxury, Blue Lace* the most are its profound emotional depth, diction, form (couplets, stanzas, prose), sensory detail, and perspective. The impact Corfman creates about one’s place in the world stays with the readers long after. Through many complex, and powerful voices in this set, they are able to create a dynamic connection that immerses one into his poems. You can feel the impact Corfman carries from their past through the different speakers in their writing.

The first section of the collection, called “Processional (eight dolls),” focuses on the third person point of view from that of a doll:

“She sleeps each day done, porcelain

vase, ribboned, carried forth

in her bed. Upright she wakes, closes

when she falls down.

Only hard slats, no mattress, delicate design: dust like vines

matching at first the pattern

of the headboard

before exceeding it.”

Not only is the imagery of the doll effective here, so too is the imagination. Additionally, the enjambment creates a steady rhythm from couplet to couplet, trickling forward like the very embodiment of Corfman’s thoughts. This excerpt represents an identity, a voice, a recognition. Each doll depicts and portrays a potential different self, a different opinion, story, and body image to express. It’s a liberation of the individual who is speaking or being spoken about. In this sense, the dolls symbolize what it means to be a spectrum of identities, rather than just pigeonholed to just one. There isn’t one, tight narrative—there are multiple. It’s a metaphor for gender to be explored, as well as its fluidity and freedom.

One of my favorite passages illustrates a profound confession about transgender and gender-fluid children,

“I can feel myself saying, I used to want to be a girl—

long years of brackets close again in lines.

Fault from rock split space into which a sad animal,

plush, was placed.”

Corfman’s usage of caesura literally and metaphorically emphasizes self-exploration and expression. This excerpt stands out to me because of the way it handles the intimacy and personal depth of a child struggling with their identity. The narrator seeks solidarity with themself. In doing so, it explores what it means to be and not to be comfortable within their body. Corfman’s thoughts immediately grab the reader’s attention. Their writing asks you to come forward and admire what is being addressed.

Another engaging aspect that Corfman uses in *Luxury, Blue Lace* is the repetition of certain images such as a peach tree and orchard, the involvement of their psychiatrist, bodies of water like the sea, and the color of blue. This gives emotional weight to the objects and situations that Corfman remembers growing up. The color blue, the psychiatrist, the peach tree all are materialistic and become a very important detail in tracking memory and showing youthful adolescence.

This poetry collection was a delight to read. It values emotional depth and intensity, diction, form, and perspective. *Luxury, Blue Lace* is about the experience of selfhood and its multitudes, exploring the many identities a single person can contain. Corfman’s poems gesture toward the complex ways memory and loss can inhabit anyone. It’s a collection for those with both an open mind and an open heart.