FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

King Baby
Lia Purpura
Alice James Books
978-1-882295-68-5
(March 31, 2008)

Lia Purpura is an essayist and a poet, who, in either genre, absorbs her subjects with an intensity that ends up mapping the consciousness as closely as it maps the exterior world.

In *King Baby*, she goes herself one better. The collection of untitled poems comprise a meditation upon the mind itself, particularly as it attempts to understand the emptiness we sometimes name Baby, sometimes King, sometimes God, and sometimes Devil.

Purpura accomplishes this in short poems that are not at all abstract, and yet which exist as koans: "Are you hungry, King Baby? I haven't even asked. / There are two of us in the kitchen tonight / and you are not one of us." And "If deep in a cave, it's so dark you can't see, / what does going deeper mean?" Endlessly fascinating, each poem is a facet of a jewel, as if she has taken the emptiness and, as she says she does with King Baby, "laid your parts / to dry before the coiled radiator. / If you thought these gestures were extinct, / think again. Here: I give you / Nabokov, holy in his way, whose/ acts of precision purify and surprise."

The poems are exquisitely tender and reverent, each temporarily holding emptiness in place with images and stories, each looking for something that can stand for holiness. Those of us who like narrative in our poems will not be bored for a second with this abstraction: the movement of the poems is inherently narrative, like a symphony motif returning. The series has a trajectory, from the narrator's fishing King Baby out of the river, examining it, and considering her relation to it, to her gradual welcome and acceptance of it—even further, her awareness that she may have been the one chosen look after the emptiness, indeed, may herself be Baby.

The series ends with the speaker living "for a while / in the calm of not-knowing." The voice is so entirely authentic, the images the same ones we live with every day, that as one poem puts it, the series feels like "an old, old fable reconstituted."

Purpura has published two collections of essays. *King Baby* is her third book of poems. She has won the Towson University Prize in Literature, a Fulbright fellowship, and a NEA Fellowship in Prose. Her collection of essays, *Increase*, won the Associated Writing Programs

Award in Creative Nonfiction, and her collection of poems, *Stone Sky Lifting*, won the Ohio State University Press / *The Journal* Award. She is currently Writer-in-Residence at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland.

Fleda Brown