



Dear Darkness

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Las Vegas, Nashville, the Midwest, his family's Louisiana home, the state of despair: these are the places that Kevin Young visits in this, his powerful sixth book of poetry. Facing the sudden loss of his father, Young pays homage to his significant clan: to aunts and double cousins, and a great-grandfather's grave in a segregated cemetery. At the book's heart is a series of highly original food odes, poems that grow out of hunger and pain and find a way to satisfy both. Whether in Ode to Pork (I know you're the blues / because loving you / may kill me) or in addresses to collard greens, catfish, and kitchen grease, Young counts his losses and our blessings, knowing inside / anything can sing. And Young is still singing the blues, though now with a touch of country and western, burnished by loss and a hard-won maturity, delivering poems that speak to our cultural losses, even as he buries his own, sadder than / a wedding dress / in a thrift store. What we love will leave us or is it we leave what we love, Today, belly full enough to walk the block after all week too cold outside to smile-- from I shall be released

Dear Darkness Details

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Andrea says

A really lovely collection of poems, many of which circle around death in some way. Many, many odes—Young often uses odes as a way to memorialize a loved one (ode as entry point of elegy) and his language is crisp and sassy and right on.

Steven Matview says

I'd read a whole book that was just Young's odes to various foods. And then I'd get hungry and, subsequently, big boned.

Bill Stutzman says

I love Young's ability to take the most ordinary of experiences (like favorite foods, upon which he draws repeatedly in this volume) and seamlessly move in and out of expressing deeper grief, memory, and joy. This is a beautifully composed collection and a sweet invitation to enter into the sorrow of loss in a most human and personal way without getting lost in the muck.

Ashley says

I heard Kevin Young read a few of the odes at AWP Atlanta and have eagerly awaited the release of this collection since then. I found it heartbreaking and brilliant. The mixture of odes to food as remembrances to a time past mixed in with the longing that comes from the death of his father are just amazing. Young has such a grasp with language. He knows how to make a poem sing, and these definitely do. I never wanted it to end.

Mike says

I read Book of Hours before this, which on the strength of that collection enticed me to read everything by Kevin Young I could find. This collection had its moments, but Book of Hours was so good that I treated it like a page-turner wondering if he could keep up the sublime pace and heaviness of subject. Book of Hours did. Dear Darkness had its moments but with a collection containing so many poems, it's bound to be uneven in spots. I thought it interesting in that it used food to explore the family and creates an important exploration of food and the culture of family.

Brian says

Kevin Young speaks with deep love as a son of the African American South (and won't it be nice when the "conversation" gets to the point where we don't have to qualify the South). As you read through these poems you'll find yourself flipping to the back cover photo, discovering new details in the portrait of Young's father and grandfather. Here's a taste:

"...You can't date/ the photo from either face--/ my grandfather baked/ dark from the fields, my father's/ baby fat holding up glasses/ the only giveaway of age." (Hurricane)

"I wake to the cracked pane/ of moon being thrown/ across the room--/ that'll fix me/ for trying to sleep./ Lately even night/ has left me--/ now even the machine/ that makes the rain/ has stopped sending/ the sun away." (Serenade)

Roger DeBlanck says

In this heartfelt volume of poems, Young explores subjects that range from homage to his large, extended family and grief over the loss of his father to the solace he finds in celebrating the foods and meals that sustained the camaraderie of his family. Whatever challenges Young faces, his poems reach out with a questioning and yearning for answers. As he revisits painful memories from his past, he is never afraid to show his vulnerability, for he knows his poetry serves as catharsis. Young's trademark style of smooth, accessible free verse is a pleasure to read. He wants to make sure the emotion of his work rings true, and he succeeds. This is an outstanding poetry collection.

Ann Marie says

Where else can you experience an ode to chitlins, crawfish, and greens? Loved the poems about family and the 70s nostalgia of it all. A poem about riding your Big Wheel and hurrying inside so as not to miss The Love Boat and Fantasy Island is not to be missed. Poignant poems about family and loss as well.

Maughn Gregory says

I've read a lot of Kevin Young by now and this was the best so far. His autobiographical story poems are sad and beautiful; his many odes to soul foods and body parts are hilarious and touching. Count me as a huge fan!

René says

This collection isn't as cohesive as the other 2 collections by Young I've read (Jelly Roll and Book of Hours). The poems in those other collections all revolved around one singular theme and there was more of a clear momentum that moved the reader along from start to finish. Instead, this collection has several different themes (music, food, family, death, grief, regional identity) that tie some of the poems to each other, along

with a number of poems that are less directly related to any of the others. So this collection doesn't provide the reader with as much of a catharsis or definite emotional direction as Young's other collections, but on a singular level some of the poems here are among Young's best. A few of my favorites were "Ode to the Midwest," "Bachelorhood," "Aunties," "Ode to Gumbo," "Ode to Grits," "Ode to Greens," "Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere," "I Am Trying To Break Your Heart," "Daylight Savings," "Hang Dog Blues," and "On Being the Only Black Person at the Johnny Paycheck Concert."

Alarie says

Despite the title, *Dear Darkness* is much lighter and more humorous than Young's recent *Book of Hours*, which had already secured him a place on my Top Ten Poets list. Perhaps the other book has more universal appeal, but *Dear Darkness* sure did delight this Southerner. My favorite poems (and there were many) were mostly about family ["Aunties," "Uncles (Blood)," "Uncles (Play)"] or about Southern food. I saw my own family in "Ode to Pork," "Ode to Kitchen Grease," "Song of Cracklin," and "Ode to Hot Sauce." When Young writes, "My father/never admitted anything/was too hot/for him," I see my brother in a Chinese restaurant, popping the Sechuan pepper in his mouth that the waiter had just cautioned us not to eat.

Nick Jordan says

I would guess that in the course of my first reading I read every poem two or three times, trying not to miss a drop of all the goodness. I loved all the odes to food, the many blues, and the deep God-talk going on here too. And as this was from the library, I immediately bought it and his earlier collection, **Jelly Roll.**

Brandi says

This was a relatively short book of poetry. Very quick read. That being said, while there were several poems that I enjoyed due to the imagery, most of it wasn't something that I could relate to. Being from Texas, I just don't really identify with Louisianan culture, and that's the bulk of the poems. So, while there are many who will appreciate this book, unfortunately, I'm not one of them. The poems themselves are quality, and the writing is great, it's just not my thing.

Mack says

One of the best contemporary collections of poetry I've ever read.

Kristin says

Liked it. It was a bit uneven as a collection when compared to Black Maria or Jelly Roll: some poems were brilliant, others were so-so. But when he's good, he's very very good.
