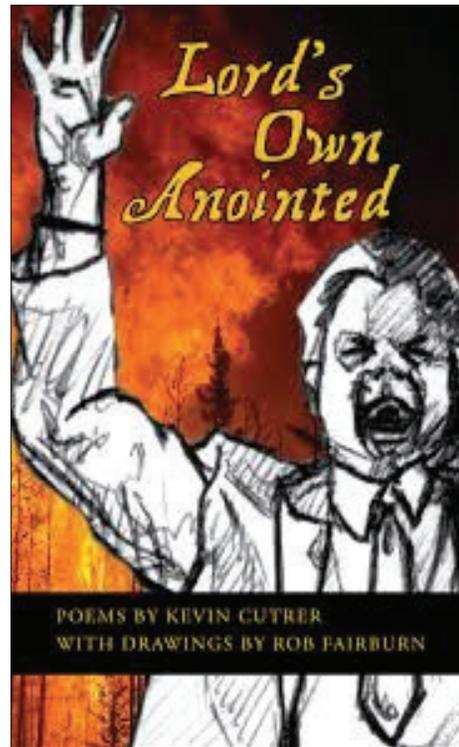


Lord's Own Anointed
Poems by Kevin Cutrer
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Review by Dennis Daly

Like a 2 X 4 to the head Kevin Cutrer's new poetry collection, *Lord's Own Anointed*, gets your attention fast. Set in rural Louisiana, Cutrer's lyrics preach everyday Southern life writ both large and small. He marbles in pointed comedy and homespun wisdom. His subject matter is the human condition and his regional angle works wonderfully well. The riveting drawings by Rob Fairburn, who hails from the same small town as Cutrer, capture the poet's tone perfectly.



From the opening poem, entitled *Sounding Out*, Cutrer harnesses a wide range of emotions to buttress his mature arguments. Here he narrates his persona's travails as a slow learner and, concomitantly, the rote methods used by his scowling, scary, overworked teacher. His mother supplied the antidote of love and patience. Listen to these first affecting, then magical lines,

*I don't know how others learned
but in my case my mother taught me
into the evening... a boiling cauldron
of butterbeans on the stove, that hated meal
which nourished me whether I wanted it or not;
the phone ringing so loud, so often, I thought
it would lose its voice the way I could shout
my own away. A sound that smarted, the little clang
lingered in my ears like a burn. The business line.*

*Even as she repeated yes and no
to the caller, she tapped the page gently
where I should pencil in, with one
of those thick, soft-pointed pencils
given to children (Merlin's wand at playtime)
letters that spelled my primer's totems,
the cat and dog, the happy family.*

Lord's Own Anointed, Cutrer's title poem and my favorite piece in this collection, does double duty, detailing the divine madness of preacher and poet. Henry Hebert, the protagonist, is not quite right. Not unlike a

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

few poets that I know. Bug-eyed and bulbous, Henry proffers an absurd appearance. But he has “the spirit” and his words matter. Cutrer concludes the piece describing pure artistry generically this way,

*Our preacher calls on him to pray each Sunday,
and every time he has a different prayer
more blessed than any message that young pastor
with all his years at college could invent.
He prays with all the energy a workingman
puts to his pillow every night to sleep,
that hard-won peace that only comes from struggle.
His words step slowly like a man who winds
on through the wilderness without a trail,
sure of the right way, moving tree to tree,
humming to free his spirit from the thick,
and sentence after sentence simply sings.*

If it wasn't so horribly sad, Cutrer's poem entitled Fall On Your Knees would be hilariously funny. Santa Claus shows up at Shorty's Tavern, a local bar, jolting childhood memories from the protagonist, who is drinking up a storm. A father/ son relationship hangs in the balance. Mortality and life's meaning (if any) are considered. I teared up reading the last stanza of this poem. That's a first. I won't spoil it by quoting; it needs the whole poem. Here's another section addressing Santa Claus at the heart of the piece,

*You know, my father always wanted us to believe
in you, and every year he had a scheme
to put out all our doubts once and for all.
One Christmas morning there were reindeer tracks
out in the front yard where the grass was thin
and it was muddy from a thunderstorm.
Well, that was all the proof it took for me.
Later I learned he'd sawed a hoof from a buck
his buddy killed, to fake those tracks. He went
to all that trouble just to fool his kids.*

Brother love can be a complicated affair. In the piece Phil Kills the Neighbor's Dog on Easter Sunday, Cutrer infuses his versified argument with passion, shame, and internalized anger (You can literally feel the acid burn.). Then he nails it. Consider these concluding lines,

*There wasn't any call for it,
but there it was. You can't pretend
it hadn't happened when you'd seen it.*

*Forgiveness is a lie we tell.
Sometimes there ain't no other way
To live, but live by lies we tell.*

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

*After what he'd done, what to do?
The men, we just stood around and spit.
The women tore him up like panthers.*

Perhaps the strangest poem in the collection is Truck Stop Chapel Testimony. It works as both a page poem and a performance poem. In fact I've seen the poet read this piece at the Hastings Room Reading Series in Cambridge Massachusetts. During the performance he morphed into a latter-day Elmer Gantry, stretching his repentant hands out of hellfire towards heaven and undeserved redemption. Cutrer's preacher rails against the Prince of Darkness,

*Sins are hard-headed, my repentance limp.
I'd turn a week's pay into a letter to Penthouse,
then weep clean the taint of my crimes, and worse:
I'd skip and sing the wide road back to go romp.*

*From his couch stained with evil, Satan-times-3
addles me to bad my good, turn rights to wrongs.
He holds my steel will-power in his tongs
to weld all kinds of wickedness to me.*

After reading this volume, grace (or presumptuousness) from the almighty (or the infernal one) descended (or ascended) upon me and I immediately reserved a retreat room in a Cistercian monastery located in the American South to deal once and for all with my unholy shortcomings. Cutrer is that good.