

Elijah and the Hearth Cake

Norbert Krapf

Elijah was sick of his job,
telling bitter truths that made
enemies. Newspapers would
not run his columns. Libraries
would not book him. Taverns
turned him away. Life was
a string of rejection slips.

Elijah knew he was not doing
wrong, but the wages of doing
right for such a Taskmaster
were heavy. He needed time off.

He lay down in the shade of a tree
and wished he would never wake up.
He fell into a sleep dark and delicious,
like the death he longed for. Just when
he crossed the line beyond duty's
call he felt a pair of angel
hands grab and shake him.

"Here," said a voice that sounded
like the Ultimate Authority he knew,
"eat this hearth cake." Heat rose
from the loaf. "Here," said the same
imperial voice, "drink this." He saw
a cool earthenware jug waiting to be
lifted to his parched lips. Elijah knew
he could not say no and took a bite.

He chewed and ground down grains
with his worn teeth, swallowed,
took a slug of water from the jug
to wash the paste down. As he heard
a whir of wings rise up above the tree,
Elijah felt nourishment and strength
spread through his body, the old
flame leapt up into his spirit again,
and he vowed he would hurl
scalding words at the people.

He gave himself to his task
with an ancient fury. His job

was not to question any why
but to torch each and every lie.
As his vision heated up like a fire
spreading along the horizon,
he dared not look up on high
to where lightning scored the sky.
He closed his eyes and felt words
stir deep within like ravenous birds
lining up to take wing and fly.

Homage to Mr. Berryman

Norbert Krapf

Singing in Shakespearean
American you were
the ultimate in dead
serious and part facetious
moving to and fro
in new and old time
into timeless territory.

Huffing and puffing
on a bridge
of stretched language
you sang yourself
alive while half
in love with uneasy
death below. To you

we come as you bring
back the gov's wife
in her shivering splendor,
this your ultimate
love song for
an English language
transposed to wild America.

Her you summon
up out of the foxhole
and find a mate
worthy of your love
that is strangely Catholic
and devotional, always
lamenting and celebrating

something at least half
illicit but tied to
a past that invigorates
an empty present
that comes alive
most when it commingles
spirit and tangle of syntax

to speak out of
the great suspension
on the swaying
bridge of language
you inhabit as if
it were a home you
would live in forever.

Fighting with Angels

Norbert Krapf

Fighting with angels
is a losing proposition.

Their bones do not break.
Their egos rarely balloon.
They never rise to an insult
because their position
in the pantheon is assured.
They never grow weary
because the engine beneath
their long flight is full
of eternal approval.

You want to punch them out
and your fist goes through cloud.
Most infuriating of all, what's
on their side is almost always God.
Their knowing smile gives it away.

Marry one and she'll take you
right to bed, move through every
position higher love has ever known,
roll over, sleep for an eon,
forget you were ever there,
and move on to her next liaison

with another spirit-sick mortal.

Me, I've had enough of this.
Angels don't speak my language.
Don't tell me about the one
you say must be my guardian.
She gave up on me long ago,
though she pretends to care.
She has other ladders to climb.

I like keeping my altitude low.
I'm learning to live on the street.
Gutter talk is my new mother tongue.