

Norbert Krapf: *Bloodroot: Indiana Poems*
A Reader's Guide

Deep Currents

In the Foreword, what does Indiana historical novelist James Alexander Thom mean when he says, "...the whole work rides on deep undercurrents of time, place, ancestry, and work." Can you cite specific poems in which this happens, in addition to "The Forefather Arrives" and "Sycamore on Main Street," to which Thom refers?

Sports

Discuss Krapf's poems on basketball, baseball, and football, such as "Basketball season Begins," "Barnyard Hoops," "The Dropped Pigskin" "Prayer to Peyton Manning," and "Dream of a Hanging Curve." What kind of social, moral, and spiritual values does the poet uphold in these sports poems?

Immigrants

Krapf edited and annotated pioneer German journals and letters from his native Dubois Co. in southern Indiana, in a book titled *Finding the Grain* (1996), on which he worked for 25 years. In what poems, besides the first two in the book, do you find Krapf incorporating such details from immigration history? How does he portray German immigrants and their descendants. See especially the first two poems in the book, the prose poem "Letter from a Star Above Southern Indiana," "What the Map Says," and "Coming into the Valley,"

Things German

What picture does Krapf paint of German customs and heritage in such poems as "A Terre Haute Story," "The Schneebrunzer" (what might a mischievous little boy do in the snow?), "The Labor Day Boxes," "The Horseradish Man," "Two Bottles of Beer," "Rockroading." Other collections in which Germany and German customs figure prominently are *Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany* (1997) and *Looking for God's Country* (2005,) two sections of which are set in Germany but not represented in *Bloodroot*.

Storytelling/Narrative

In "The Storyteller," Krapf describes the strategies and qualities of those who tell stories. In what other (narrative) poems in the book do we find the author, or the speaker, telling stories? What kinds of stories does Krapf tell in these poems, and about what kind of people?

Family History

Discuss Krapf's preoccupation with family history in this collection, such as "Two Bricks and a Board," "The Forefather Arrives," one of his most popular and often taught poems, and others.

Nature

In many poems, Krapf describes our relationship with the natural world, in poems about trees, wildflowers, other plants, animals, and birds. There is a German tradition of "Ding Gedichte," thing poems, which is relevant to these poems. Which of these nature poems do you relate to most, and why? See especially "The Language of Species" and "What We Lost in Southern Indiana."

Sense of Place

Krapf has been praised as a "poet of place." In a review of the collection *Somewhere in Southern Indiana*, in *The Sycamore Review*, John Groppe observes that "Like Kentucky poet Wendell Berry, Krapf's forte is in recognizing the spiritual interaction between a people and their place." In the Foreword, James Alexander Thom says, "Krapf's spirit of place can be specifically local and immediate while encompassing centuries and other homelands." In the poem "The Language of Place" and in other poems in this collection, as well as in *Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany*, show evidence that these generalizations by Groppe and Thom are valid or invalid. See also the epigraph at the beginning of the book from Indiana prose writer Scott Russell Sanders from *Staying Put*.

Whitman

Walt Whitman is a poet whose work figures in "A Civil War Veteran from Indiana," "Arriving on Paumanok," "Pastoral Poetics," and "Whitman's Web." What connection do you find between Whitman and Krapf? Why might Krapf have been drawn to Whitman, especially during his years of living and teaching American literature on Whitman's "Paumanok," the Algonquian word for Long Island? What Whitman poem title does the section "Arriving on Paumanok" echo?

Poems as Prayers

One poem in *Bloodroot* is titled "Woods Hymn." In addition to "Purple Trillium" and "Patoka Lake Morning," what other poems in the collection might be considered poem-prayers?

Catholicism

Krapf grew up in the German-Catholic town of Jasper, Indiana. In what poems besides "Return to a Mighty Fortress," partly set in St. Joseph's Church, built by his ancestors and their friends, and "Rosary" do you find evidence of Krapf's Catholic background and heritage? What aspects of Catholic liturgy, ritual, imagery and belief do you find in these poems? To what extent do you find that the author's "spirituality" is Catholic?

Indiana Epigraphs

Why does Krapf use, and to what effect, epigraphs (quotations from other works) by Indiana prose authors Scott Russel Sanders, James Alexander Thom, Susan Neville, and Kurt Vonnegut? Which of these epigraphs do you find most relevant to the poems in this book?

Titles

Krapf has said that he considered titling this retrospective collection *Local News*, but instead used that title, also the title of a poem, as the section title for the new poems gathered at the end of the book. Why might he have thought of titling this book *Local News*? Is *Bloodroot* a better title? Why or why not? What does this poem about a beloved Indiana wildflower suggest about blood ties and rootedness? What does it mean to be rooted, according to the James Alexander Thom epigraph from *The Spirit of the Place: Indiana Hill Country*?

INPAWS

As Indiana Poet Laureate, Krapf gave a reading at the annual conference of INPAWS, the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society in the Athenaeum, originally called Das Deutsche Haus, one architect for which was the famous Indianapolis author Kurt Vonnegut's grandfather, Bernard. (See "'For Kurt Vonnegut, Pilgrim Unstuck in Time,'" a tribute which Krapf recites with the backing of the Monika Herzig Trio). What poems from this book do you think Krapf read, or should have read, to INPAWS members?

Music

"Song of the Music Stand," "The Mandolin and the Tenor," and "Fiddler" deal with the love of music in Krapf's family. Can you relate this family musical heritage to poems like "Song of Bob Dylan," and "I'm Practically with the Band" in *Songs in Sepia and Black and White* (2012), which has a section of 26 poems paying tribute to music and musicians, 15 of them about Bob Dylan? Krapf did a poetry and jazz CD, *Imagine: Indiana in Music and Words*, with IU pianist and composer Monika Herzig and performs poetry and blues with Gordon Bonham, also his guitar teacher. You can listen to poetry and music audio files from performances with Herzig and Bonham on Krapf's Web site at <http://www.krapfpoetry.com/sepia.htm> (scroll to bottom).

Darryl Jones Photographer

Invisible Presence is a section of mostly meditative poems inspired by Indiana photographer Darryl Jones' Polaroid manipulations and transfers of Indiana poems from a coffee table full-color book with the same title and the subtitle, *A Walk through Indiana in Photographs and Poems*. <http://www.krapfpoetry.com/ip.htm>. See Krapf's essay "Collaborating with Indiana Photographer Darryl Jones" at http://www.krapfpoetry.com/collab_jones.html. What does the title *Invisible Presence* mean to you; if you find a copy of the book, see Jones' essay on his take

on the title and his relationship to American transcendentalism and Eastern thought. Which of the photo and poem combinations work best for you?

David Pierini Photography

Photographer David Pierini, who illustrated *Bloodroot* with b/w photos, worked for the Jasper newspaper The Herald for ten years. Which of the photographs in *Bloodroot* work best with poems, in your view? Which photos most deepen the impact and extend implications of poems? How does the Pierini colored photograph of a bloodroot plant on the cover affect or influence your understanding of the meaning of the book's title?

Frost

"Deep and Dark" is a tribute to Robert Frost, author of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." In *The Ripest Moments: A Southern Indiana Childhood*, a prose memoir, Krapf talks about his love of southern Indiana woods and his experience of hunting in them as a youth. Discuss what the woods means to Krapf in such poems as "The Woods of Southern Indiana," "Darkness Comes to the Woods," "What We Lost in Southern Indiana," "Where Trees Are Tall," "Deaton's Woods," "The Blue Road," "Woods Chapel," and others. What does this quote from a review in *Confrontation* of the volume *Somewhere in Southern Indiana* suggest about the Frost influence on Krapf's poetry: "The mix of sunny and dark images places the poet in a Frostian tradition as well as a Whitmanian one; Krapf's poems reverberate with the mystery of human character."

Portrait Poems

Krapf's *American Dreams: Revereries and Revisitations* (2013), an experimental collection of seven prose poem cycles include portraits, pays tribute to family members, the immigration history of Jasper and Dubois County, and concludes with a cycle in the voice of Bob Dylan, "The Minnesota Minstrel in Manahatta." What "portrait poems" besides "My Father Young Again," "The Mandolin and the Tenor" (maternal grandfather), and "Cutting Wood" (paternal grandfather) do you find in *Bloodroot*? What sort of portraits do you find of his mother in "Dorothy and the Jewish Coat" and the poems about her that follow it?

Section Titles

The titles of the first five sections of *Bloodroot* are the titles of individual volumes, with their dates, from which Krapf selected poems. What do these "section titles" tell us about Krapf's poetry, the world he writes about, the subjects he deals with, the themes his poems express? If you have read any of these Krapf volumes, what poems in them that Krapf left out in *Bloodroot* do you think he should he have included, and why? (The publisher limited him to 175 poems.)

The author wanted to subtitle the book *Selected Indiana Poems 1971-2006*, but that was reduced to *Indiana Poems*.

Somewhere in Southern Indiana

If you are a reader who has insecurities about reading and discussing poetry, what does the poem “Somewhere in Southern Indiana,” also the title of Krapf’s first full-length volume, tell you/us about his assumptions about poetry when he was growing up in a small-town Indiana, about what was the “proper” and “approved” view of what a poem must be about, and how accessible poetry can and should be? Discuss the use of irony in this poem. Why does this poem circle back to its beginning? Do you see this circling back to beginnings (and perhaps origins) in any other poems in the book?

The Past

Comment on this statement by Norbert Krapf in the introduction to his dual-language collection of legends from his ancestral Franconia (northern Bavarian), *Beneath the Cherry Sapling* (1988): “I find it impossible to live, fully, in the present without understanding where I have lived in the past.” How does this remark apply to particular poems in *Bloodroot*? Some readers might like to apply this statement to poems in *Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany* (1997), to which James Alexander Thom alludes in the Foreword. This volume appeared the year after *Finding the Grain* (1996).

Race Relations

What does “Fire and Ice,” winner of the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America (1999), say about Krapf’s view on race relations and how does this poem relate to “What Have You Gone and Done,” “On the Road with the Hampton Sisters,” “Etheridge Knight’s Blues,” and “Etheridge Knight at the Chatterbox” in the last section? All but the last of these poems were included in Krapf’s CD with Monika Herzig, *Imagine*. You can find a section of tributes to women musicians, such as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Cassandra Wilson, in *Sweet Sister Moon* (2009), poems about women. See also the Holocaust poems in the last section of *Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany* and the story of Klara Krapf.

Roots

How does the term “roots,” often a metaphor for ethnic heritage, family history, and a sense of place, apply to poems in *Bloodroot*? What does it mean to be “rooted,” a term often applied to Krapf’s poetry. See the Foreword and the epigraphs at the front of the book on this concept of “sense of place” and rootedness.

Audience

If you visit the “Poet Laureate Activity Gallery,” divided into eight quarters, at <http://www.krapfpoetry.com/laureate.html>, what do you notice about the kinds of venues Krapf gave readings and music and poetry performances at during his 2008-10 term as Indiana Poet Laureate? What do the kinds of people you see at these various events imply about the audience for poetry, as Krapf sees it?

Commentary

For critical comments and review excerpts about Krapf’s Indiana poems, see the *Bloodroot* page at http://www.krapfpoetry.com/bloodroot_comments.htm. See also John Groppe, “Hoosier Legacy: Norbert Krapf’s *Bloodroot: Indiana Poems*,” <http://www.valpo.edu/vpr/groppereviewkrapf.html>.

Farm Life

Krapf has shown in his prose memoir *The Ripest Moments* and *American Dreams* that his mother grew up on a farm and his father in a farming village in southern Indiana. In such poems as “Butchering,” “Milk Music,” “Gathering Hickory Nuts,” “Skinning a Rabbit,” “Chicken in the Woods,” “Sister Soap,” “Clothesline Saga,” “Hauling Hay,” “Tale of the Red Barn,” and others, what view of farm life does Krapf give us in *Bloodroot*? Which of these poems and others in *Bloodroot* would you put up on the wall of a barn at the Indiana State Fair, to show what farm life in Indiana was like during the 1940s and 1950s? Which Pierini photographs would you include to show farm life in later decades?

View of Poetry

What view of poetry, its elements, its devices, its purpose, its possibilities, do you find in such poems as “St. Meinrad Archabbey,” “Somewhere in Southern Indiana,” “One Voice from Many,” “Woods Hymn,” “Pastoral Poetics,” “The Storyteller,” “Bare Tree Song,” and “Corn Syllables”?

Airport Poem

The short part 3 of “In Transit,” in the last section of the book, was selected by English artist Martin Donlin to be included in one of the stained-glass windows he created for the Indianapolis International Airport that opened in 2008 (Gate A22). See a photo of the panel by clicking here. [link:]. One of the themes Donlin was looking for was “coming back home.” Why do you think Donlin selected this poem, from among those submitted in an open competition, and what does it say about Krapf’s feelings about Indiana, which he returned to, from the New York area, in 2004?

Coming Home

For 34 years, Norbert Krapf taught American literature, with a focus on poetry, at the CW Post Campus of Long Island University, before returning to Indiana to live in Indianapolis in 2004.

What do the poems in *Bloodroot* tell us about why he returned to Indiana, when he retired from teaching? See especially “The Time Has Come.”

Favorites?

Which of the poems in *Bloodroot* are your favorites, which are the ones you have most trouble with, and for both questions: why?

Interviews

Below are links to some interviews with Norbert Krapf that may enhance your reading of the poems in *Bloodroot* and other collections. Which ones do you find most interesting and helpful, and why?

<http://www.krapfpoetry.com/hoyt.htm> (conducted by email, in stages, over the years)

<http://www.connotationpress.com/poetry/899-norbert-krapf-poetry> (6 new poems included)

<http://ihspress.blogspot.com/2008/05/interview-with-norbert-krapf.html> (Ripest Moments)

<http://blues.gr/profiles/blogs/interview-with-poet-norbert-krapf-catholic-boy-blues> (poetry and music and love of the blues)

<http://www.indystar.com/story/life/2014/04/20/poet-laureate-confronts-childhood-abuse-priest/7946085/> (Catholic boy Blues)

Catholic Boy Blues

If you have read Norbert Krapf’s *Catholic Boy Blues: A Poet’s Journal of Healing* (2014), were you surprised to learn that he is a survivor of clergy abuse as a child? Does the author of the poems in *Bloodroot* seem to you to be the same author of the poems in *Catholic Boy Blues*? Why or why not? You might find that the introduction to this book by renowned theologian Matthew Fox helps you understand where this new collection fits into the context of Krapf’s entire work as a poet and prose writer. This Fox essay is the most comprehensive and enlightening treatment of the whole of Krapf’s work.

