

ON MEETING KAFKA IN CHICAGO

George Curran

I, the wanderer,
with wet shoes and coat
that blended with the concrete,
crest-fallen, melancholy, searched for
god in the cityscape.

Through the night a saxophone called;
its raspy notes tumbled off city walls.

I yanked my trenchcoat tight
against the sagging evening air
that cloaked the city in
shimmery gray silk
that gathered at puddles
by my feet.

I remember—Mr. K. invited me,
a constant companion,
for tea and misery,
and crucifixion of the mind
. . . but he told me no time.

And entreated, I wandered,
meeting at each corner
narrow streets of salt-dulled cars,
brownstonehomes, and
ghost-haloed streetlamps
which all called my name
with each echoed footfall.

Through the night the saxophone could be heard;
its raspy notes fell from a gold window blurred.

Drops of rain hung from the cross bars
of Spanish iron fences, spiked and black,

that line the streets,
enclosing rectangular plots of grass
like graves lined back to back.

People came and went, cars cruised by.
Bits of conversation escaped
from briefly opened doors that slammed tight
entrapping one building's cries and lies
as another trivial drama elapsed.

As I walked on past a towering black oak
a huge dog emerged and blocked my path,
growling, glaring, baring yellowed teeth.
I resisted, desisted, and crossed the street.

Through the darkness the saxophone blared
from up above where the window glared.

Wet and cold, I approached
a begger in a black cotton coat.
Gray-faced, bespectacled,
crouched over the sidewalk like
dirt over an empty grave,
he shot a glance at me,
but stayed his tin cup.

To the left, at the base of the lamp,
weirdly defying the cold and damp,
stood a praying mantis whose angled green stalk,
filament legs, and bulbous eyes strained upward
into a primitive offering of raised claws.

And I, staring objectedly,
unflinchingly, raise my eyes above
to the blurred golden window
of indecision's demise
and felt but a push
and throbbing silence
as the speeding car swerved
into the night.