

Mark Terrill

“A Poem for the Here & Now”

Coming up out of the subway into the unusually warm February sun just across from the gates of the big Jewish cemetery in the suburbs of Prague on a bright Sunday morning I'm the first one in as it opens promptly at nine — the old man in the gatehouse speaks no English but excellent German & gladly answers my query as to the location of Franz Kafka's grave & I go walking down wide paths lined with neatly trimmed hedges & beds of ivy dappled with sun & jagged shadows from the still leafless trees — the constant chirping of birds amplifying the spring-like ambience — all around me the elaborate marble & granite headstones monuments & statues with names like Goldschmidt Rosenberg & Bernstein & now & then a little official sign pointing the way to Dr. Kafka & finally I come around the last corner & there just across from the cemetery wall is the Kafka family plot under a layer of white gravel with a granite obelisk & offerings of dried flowers candles various trinkets & pages of books with notes scrawled in Japanese & Spanish & French & even a little glass wind-chime hanging in the small pine tree next to the headstone adding its soft tinkling to the musical birdsong & the scene is so entirely different than I had been expecting — not gritty-gray-neorealistic not black-&-white-gloomy not lonesome-foreboding-grim but rather more like a pleasant spring day in a park with twittering birds & the sun warm on my back under a bright blue sky & I look down to where Kafka is presumably resting in peace under the gravel & earth & suddenly have to wonder just what all that inner turmoil & existential angst was really about — considering how benign & beautiful it all turned out to be — right here in the here & now.