

## Prague Fall

My mother, just back from Prague, tells me that the city has an important museum devoted to its most famous lawyer, Kafka the writer.

She has never been inside. The museum is always closed.

Perfect.

True story.

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One must wonder, of course, whether the building she saw is really a museum.

Perhaps there really is a Kafka museum, but elsewhere, in another building, in another part of the city (that is still Prague?), that one never reaches until late in the day, only to find it closed.

I failed to ask my mother – of course, who does not? – if she explicitly had been denied entrance, perhaps by some sort of gatekeeper? Was there talk (surely no promises?) about the possibility of future entrance, some time when the museum might open?

Or had she merely been unable to enter, maybe unwilling, overcome by a sudden wave of nausea or lethargy or distracting sights in the street, until it had been too late?

I suggested that it simply could not be the case that a civilized country, even one at times led by a playwright, would have a museum that was always closed. There must be some middling official with whom one could make arrangements? At least one could make inquiries regarding the possibility of entering the Kafka museum. But to whom?

Who could be responsible for unknowable museums? The very idea of an unknowable museum is absurd, for what is the museum but the people's demonstration of their own history to themselves? Any museum that was never open would not be a museum, whatever else it might be.

And no government official could be responsible for "whatever else it might be."

Surely determining "whatever else it might be" is just the sort of question that we must answer for ourselves, that is, the whatever else it might be that is not, at least

not now, a museum could only be opened for us. If, of course, we know to ask the right question.

But the very fact that we must come from our several countries, seeking history, demonstrates that history is unknown to us, that we do not know what has been and so must be quite uncertain with regard to what might be, that we do not know how to ask the question that, if answered, would tell us how to enter.

Presumably that is what the museum, if there were a museum, would have been intended to teach, if teaching were even necessary or possible.

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This is as good a place as any to stop. Other commentators, no doubt, would have seen matters in other ways, perhaps more clearly because not linked by blood, although on the contrary perhaps without a certain intimacy, for while the story itself is quite clear . . .

No doubt serious business must be returned to, must be if, must be . . .