

Richman, Elliot

FRANZ KAFKA'S DAUGHTER MEETS THE EVIL NAZI EMPIRE!!!

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In addition to seeing more than a thousand of his poems published in both commercial and small press magazines, Mr. Richman has authored three previous poetry collections. He has been awarded poetry fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts. This collection of verse, sub-titled "The Heroism of Roaches: Holocaust-tainted Poems," brings to mind the unsettling comic book *Maus*, except that in the volume at hand there are no illustrations other than those painted—all too vividly at times—with words. The premise of the title poem, an almost Ginsbergian epic, is that Franz Kafka, the German-Czech novelist whose work presaged the Nazi reign of terror, does not die of tuberculosis in 1924, but instead survives to marry his sweetheart and raise a family. His youngest daughter then goes on to witness or experience every one of the horrors her father imagined, and several which, in his timidity, he did not. The images appear and dissolve, as in dreams, with no regard for chronology. Yet they make sense on their own terms and as elements of the semi-coherent narrative Richman builds. The effect is indeed disconcerting, even excessive. Most disturbing of all is the smile that forms on one's lips while reading of gruesome events because the poet is, finally, wittier than he is maudlin. The verses are saturated with equal parts Jewish irony and *Galgenhumor* ("gallows humor").

It would be satisfying to dismiss a work with three exclamation points, raised like truncheons, in its title. But they serve as reminders, shibboleths of the century just past: gloved fists pounding on the door in the middle of the night.