

Kafka's Bar Mitzvah

"... one can never be alone enough when one writes... even night is not night enough" (Kafka, *Letters to Felice* 156).

As if a spirit had descended and said
This is the kid of a friend of mine:

They brought out fine bone china.
All the wives of Prague's Old Town helped
with the cooking, their husbands offered toasts
to an eternal adolescent's manhood./ Applause
crowded K.'s ears. He twisted in his chair
with indigestion./ What should have been done silently
in Prague, this city of pogroms, broke
into gaiety and joy./ When called to speak, K. burst
into his dream, where the chandeliers were swirling,
chains being lifted and dropped through the roof
danced the infinite figure-eight. He dove for them
through the dark just over candle flames.

Legs tucked, afraid to plunge into the party,
K. hung on— a bat clutching to the shadows
of the ceiling, sinister with eyesockets
foretelling his sister's deaths./ He hid his face
in the fabric of his wings, hoping to vanish
completely in a night blacker than night.