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Rilkeing
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RILKEING

The interview was in its second hour. He shadow boxed with deftness, the ornate shield of his privacy remained unscathed, intellectual vanities were waltzed away. We crossed, uncrossed our legs. He remained with both feet firmly planted on the floor.

Tea was served. He drank milk.

We tried dead fathers still dying, writing schedules and writing tools, professing, inglorious poets caught in unsuicidleness, confessing, the natural order of things, putting things in order,

relatives and absolutes, slaps on the wrist of time, errors in deception, has classical stress led the metre astray? Fleeing newspapers, subconscious objectors, and the time Glenn Gould (enraptured keyboard Quasimodo) fell off his stool in the middle of a Partita, salutary neglects, exponential statistics, failing uses of the sestina, winsome dinosaurs;

Rilke...

"Ah Rilke...Rainer M... now, there was a mess!" he delivered, and he let us guess.

"Rilke," he second thoughted, "was a jerk, according to Berryman."

We jumped into a 747, landed in Geneva, drove straight to Raron, and...(trou de mémoire) lost our way in this village we knew so well, wandered in and out of its flat, twisting streets, to find ourselves...pure chance, in the small square; parked the car in front of the *Familia* grocery store, and began the steep, winding climb to the *Feldenkirche*, stumbling now and then on the cobblestoned pedestrian path, narrow as the *Via Dolorosa*, flanked by low, ancient dwellings.

Knocked on the iron gate (was it open?) entered cautiously. The small churchyard cemetery was deserted, a dog sniffed at a grave. Narrow, graveled alleys framed the dormitory's immutable geometry;

Meandered toward the small lawned area at the backyard of the church that faces the expanding valley below. Beyond, eagles can be seen on a clear day, gliding in the violet shadow of the Alpine chain.

The headstone is firmly sealed into the church's smooth, ancient wall, tall as a citadel. The rose bush, with its five purpling flowers, thrives out of the grassy earth, a little to the right, where the head should lie. No dates are inscribed on the white marble below the name, just the fading epitath:

ROSE, OH REINER WIDERSPRUCH,
LUST,
NIEMANDES SCHLAF ZU SEIN
UNTER SOVIEL
LIDERN.

"Rilke," I said, "can you hear?" A
voice replied, "I listen."
"Berryman said you were a jerk."
The grass quivered:

Boundless gazer by distance and light revealed
Smoothed as though by nature's hand, John sits
with loosed hair beside us, silent.