

The Rose

Brian Swann

“Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch . . .”

—RMR

My favorite poet was scratched by a rose
while batting off the bees of the invisible.
I sit him down after he stumbles in from Brooklyn
reeking of pitch and turpentine, which
reminds me of Randy Turpin (my favorite
boxer) and Dick Turpin (no relation)
my favorite highwayman (and Black Bess
his trusty steed). I’m thinking that I’m
not well. He doesn’t look too hot either.
Would you like some fruit? *Fruchte?*
I ask. He is small, out of breath. It’s
all too much, he says (in German, natch).
I need a breather. And pretty soon there’s
pages of words floating in the air. A wind
gets up and whirls them around. I try
to snatch some, grab one which turns out
to be an instruction manual in couplets.
But it’s beyond me. I don’t know what
it’s instructing. It could be anything,
even how to write manuals. He is slightly
taller now, but still very slight. Modest
to a fault, he says: I borrowed everything,
but I gave it back, rearranged a bit.
Grab and grope. It’s called—*Dasein?* I say.
Right, he says. It’s all open-ended.
Urgrund? Right again. Keep the doors open,
he adds. Then he keels over, transfigured,
dying of blood-poisoning stuck again by a thorn
from the rose he plucked from the air to hand
me to make his point, and which I dropped.