

Archaic Torso of Apollo

Rainer Maria Rilke - 1875-1926

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

We never knew his stupendous head
in which the eye-apples ripened. But
his torso still glows, like a lamp,
in which his gaze, screwed back to low,

holds steady and gleams. Otherwise the curve
of his chest couldn't dazzle you, nor a smile
run through the slight twist of the loins
toward the center that held procreation.

Otherwise this stone would stand mutilated and too short
below the translucent fall-off of the shoulders,
and wouldn't shimmer like a predator's fur;

nor shine out past all its edges
like a star: for in it is no place
that doesn't see you. You must change your life.

ARCHAÏSCHER TORSO APOLLOS

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,

sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.