

# Jarrell, The Bronze David of Donatello

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## The Bronze David of Donatello

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Randall Jarrell

A sword in his right hand, a stone in his left hand,  
He is naked. Shod and naked. Hatted and naked.  
The ribbons of his leaf-wreathed, bronze-brimmed bonnet  
Are tasseled; crisped into the folds of frills,  
Trills, graces, they lie in separation  
Among the curls that lie in separation  
Upon the shoulders.  
Lightly, as if accustomed,  
Loosely, as if indifferent, The boy holds in grace  
The stone moulded; somehow, by the fingers, The sword alien, somehow, to the hand.  
The boy David  
Said of it: "There is none like that."  
The boy David's  
Body shines in freshness, still unhandled,  
And thrusts its belly out a little in exact  
Shamelessness. Small, close, complacent,  
A labyrinth the gaze retraces,  
The rib-case, navel, nipples are the features  
Of a face that holds us like the whore Medusa's--  
Of a face that, like the genitals, is sexless.  
What sex has victory?  
The mouth's cut Cupid's-bow, the chin's unwinning dimple  
Are tightened, a little oily, take, use, notice:  
Centering itself upon itself, the sleek  
Body with its too-large head, this green  
Fruit now forever gleen, this offending  
And efficient elegance draws subtly, supply,  
Between the world and itself, a shining  
Line of delimitation, demarcation.  
The body mirrors itself.  
Where the armpit becomes breast,  
Becomes back, a great crow's-foot is slashed.  
Yet who would gash

The sleek flesh so? the cast, filed, shining flesh?  
The cuts are folds: these are the folds of flesh  
That closes on itself as a knife closes.

To so much strength, those overborne by it  
Seemed girls, and death came to it like a girl,  
Came to it, through the soft air, like a bird-  
So that the boy is like a girl, is like a bird  
Standing on something it has pecked to death.

The boy stands at ease, his hand upon his hip:  
The truth of victory. A Victory  
Angelic, almost, in indifference,  
An angel sent with no message but this triumph  
And alone, now, in his triumph,  
He looks down at the head and does not see it.

Upon this head  
As upon a spire, the boy David dances,  
Dances, and is exalted.  
Blessed are those brought low  
Blessed is defeat, sleep blessed, blessed death.

The right foot is planted on a wing. Bent back in ease  
Upon a supple knee--the toes curl a little, grasping  
The crag upon which they are set in triumph--  
The left leg glides toward, the left foot lies upon  
A head. The head's other wing (the head is bearded

And winged and helmeted and bodiless)  
Grows like a swan's wing up inside the leg;  
Clothes, as the suit of a swan-maiden clothes,  
The leg. The wing reaches, almost, to the rounded  
Small childish buttocks. The dead wing warms the leg,  
The dead wing, crushed beneath the foot, is swan's-down.  
Pillowed upon the rock, Goliath's head  
Lies under the foot of David.

Strong in defeat, in death rewarded,  
The head dreams what has destroyed it  
And is untouched by its destruction.  
*The stone sunk in the forehead, say the Scriptures;*  
There is no stone in the forehead. The head is helmed

Or else, unguarded, perfect still.  
Borne high, borne long, borne in mastery  
The head is fallen.  
The new light falls  
As if in tenderness, upon the face--  
Its masses shift for a moment, like an animal,  
And settle, misshapen, into sleep: Goliath  
Snores a little in satisfaction.

## Donatello, David

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Bronze. Museo Nazionale, Florence.

