



# THE COURTESAN



*Rainer Maria Rilke*

translated by James Lasdun

Venice; alchemical daylight  
Touches my hair: a ravel of sunstruck gold.  
My eyebrows arch like her bridges; look:  
Under their angled shadows runs a cold

Glitter of my eyes; canals  
Quietly trafficking while the sea  
Ebbs and surges inside them, a brimming  
Blue-green dilation... Whoever looks at me

Enviest my lapdog on whose pampered coat,  
Distractedly, I sometimes rest a hand;  
Jewelled, invulnerable, white as my own throat...

Nighttime finds my chambers manned  
By our illustrious families' cherished youth,  
Who fall as if by poison at my mouth.