England

Casey Finch

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3091
he was alert and sad, like a sparrow.
on the day of his death, the rain
was merciless and tore, with its thousand
hooks, at the forests and the plowlands.
the rain was merciless and cold, as
in elegies, and broken umbrellas lay
like bats along the roads, with wind-
inverted ribs, abandoned, twisting and
flexing in the invisible air. on the
day of his death, for a tiny moment,
all the visionaries stopped shuffling
their marked, mysterious decks of
cards and gave back, to their customers,
the coins they had stolen. and in
the afternoon, the poets, happy to
seize on the fresh material, carried
the news of it to the drunken kings
of northumbria:

how, when he fought,
the sparks that rose from the
blade of his battle-axe covered
the canopy of stars. the sparks that
rose were counted, one by one, and
took their fixed, significant places in
the stories of his outrage and courage;
how, robbed, at last, of his friends
and retainers, he stared out, dumbly, from
the ridiculous solitude of the mead-hall;
how, in the end, an animal broke his
spine in two, like a cardboard shirt-
liner from the cleaners; how the companions-
arms gathered together and bore his
body on a shield over the blackened hills;
and how, at dusk, the sun, a kind of old
and rusted pinball, fell gracelessly
out of the air, down a ramp, and back
into the terrible belly of the earth. dusk
which smelled like his last meal of lamb raised by the labor of peasants whose farms he sacked when he was bored and ambitious.

he was alert and sad.
he used to stretch the evening sky across the lands he brought his battles to, to make of blood an ocean and throw the bodies of his enemies there, until the waves began to groan and plead that he release them, until the waves were choked with the deaths of men he might have liked, he might have fed and entertained at great expense.

he was strong and loved to brag and pity himself. he was alert and sad, like a sparrow. once all the crouched halls of the countryside shook with the episodes of his cruelty. once the moon itself grew hot and breathless when his sword and shining loins sparkled in the light with which it followed him around, like a dog.

but now he’s gone. now the mead-halls are emptied of their criminals and their feasts. only a handful of men continue the lies he initiated. and of the sons they send forth onto the bombed-out battlefields, into the torched buildings, fewer and fewer remember the noisy, unreluctant man whose hands and breath stank of mead, who, delicate and insane, pushed countries about with his feet, whose laughter was so frightening and rare.