

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 battle-
fields, 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.