

THE SIEGE OF THE CASTLE

Sword-blade and axe-head, they killed our Duke,
with fire and slaughter they hollowed our fortress.

I was the one who led them to unguarded ways
and earned myself the name of traitor.

I was a necessity of the plot, the key to it all:
every Christ demands a Judas. I was he.

Do you blame me, as our ribs grew sharper,
while they roasted our cattle in range of our nostrils
and fished the valleys? Would they ever
have departed or simply waited out our deaths?

Who gained in the end? What endures?

Rape and looting doesn't make
a pretty picture though it might satisfy the moment.
Don't judge me harshly - was it a victory
or a defeat I opened the gates to?

No better martyr
than an aged man led to his death by burly soldiers,
a man of years, generous to his enemies but frail,
murdered by those he had treated with kindness.
They have our castle but we have the story,
– a hero, a traitor, his people who wept for him,
a stronghold of words that lasts longer than towers and
walls.

Derek Sellen