

Flight of the Earls (Eavan Boland)

Princes, it seems, are seldom wise.
Most of them fall for a woman's tears
Or else her laughter – think of Paris
Whose decision stretched to ten alarming years.
Nothing would suit
Until he'd brought
The kingdom down around his ears.

Now in the Middle Ages see
The legendary boy of kind and queen:
A peacock of all chivalry
He dies at twenty on some battle-green
And ever since
The good Black Prince
Rides to the land of might-have-been.

Whether our own were foolish or wise
Hardly concerns us: death ran away with our chances
Of a meeting. Yet we strain our eyes
Hoping perhaps just one with his golden flounces
Has outwitted theft.
So are we left
Writing to headstones and forgotten princes.