

Classic Poetry Series

**Clive Sansom
- poems -**

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Clive Sansom(21 June 1910 - 1981)

Clive Sansom was a British-born Tasmanian poet and playwright.

Sansom was born on 21 June 1910 in East Finchley, London and educated at Southgate County School, where he matriculated in 1926. He worked as a clerk until 1934, and then studied speech and drama at the Regent Street Polytechnic and the London Speech Institute under Margaret Gullan. He went on to study phonetics under Daniel Jones at University College London, and joined the London Verse Speaking Choir. He lectured in speech training at Borough Road Training College, Isleworth, and the Speech Fellowship in 1937-9, and edited the Speech Fellowship Bulletin (1934-49). He was also an instructor in the Drama School of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

Sansom married the poet Ruth Large, a Tasmanian, in 1937, at the Quaker Friends Meeting House in Winchmore Hill, and subsequently joined. Sansom was a conscientious objector during the Second World War. He was also a committed conservationist. The couple settled in Tasmania in 1949, where they were both supervisors with the Tasmanian Education Department, in charge of its Speech Centre. Clive Sansom died in Hobart, Tasmania in 1981. A commemorative volume appeared in 1990.

As a poet, Sansom was best known for his performance poetry and his verses for children. He also wrote a number of plays. His Passion Play was a novel based around the Oberammergau Passion Play of 1950.

Mary Of Nazareth

It was like music:
Hovering and floating there
With the sound of lutes and timbrels
In the night air.

It was like waves,
Beating upon the shore:
Insistent with a rhythm, a pulsing
Unfelt before.

It was like wind:
Blowing from off the seas
Of other, far other
Lands than these.

It was like wings,
Like whirring wings that fly
The song of an army of swans
On the dark sky.

It was like God:
A presence of blinding light,
Ravishing body and soul
In the Spring night.

Clive Sansom

Mice And Cat

One mouse, two mice
Three mice, four,
Stealing through their tunnel,
Creeping through the door.

Softly! Softly!
Don't make a sound,
Don't let your little feet,
Patter on the ground,

There on the hearthrug,
Sleek and fat,
Soundly sleeping,
Lies Old Tom Cat.

If he should hear you,
There'd be no more,
Of one mouse, two mice
Three mice, four.

So please be careful
How far you roam,
For if you should wake him,
He'd chase-you-all-home!

Clive Sansom

Snowflakes

And did you know
That every flake of snow
That forms so high
In the grey winter sky
And falls so far
Is a bright six-pointed star?
Each crystal grows
A flower as perfect as a rose.
Lace could never make
The patterns of a flake.
No brooch
Of figured silver could approach
Its delicate craftsmanship. And think:
Each pattern is distinct.
Of all the snowflakes floating there –
The million million in the air –
None is the same. Each star
Is newly forged, as faces are,
Shaped to its own design
Like yours and mine.
And yet... each one
Melts when its flight is done;
Holds frozen loveliness
A moment, even less;
Suspends itself in time –
And passes like a rhyme.

Clive Sansom

The Carol Of Three

Three kings came a-riding
Through tempest and through cold;
Their coats were of the silken thread,
Their crowns were beaten gold.
A star shone in the sky before,
The storm it rolled behind,
And as they rode their cloaks drew out
Like clouds along the wind.

Three shepherds left their shivering flocks,
Came stumbling through the night;
The song of angels drowned their ears,
Their eyes were blind with light.
They groped along the courtyard wall,
Unpinned the stable door,
Then halted all with steaming breath
To stare upon the floor.

Three strangers lodged within the barn
That night of frost and storm,
With ox and ass for company
And straw to keep them warm.
One stranger stood with hand on stall,
One knelt in folds of blue,
And one there lay in shadowed sleep
As mortal children do.

The halted shepherds bowed the head,
The kings they bent the knee,
And marvelling they worshipped there
In silence, three by three.
The tempest fell; a cock crowed thrice;
The shepherds' task was done.
The kings re-mounted in a dream
And rode towards the sun.

Clive Sansom

The Centurion

What is it now? More trouble?
Another Jew? I might have known it
.These Jews, they buzz around the tail of trouble
Like lascivious flies. Do they think we're here
Because we love them? Is it their climate
That holds us here? Why, think, Marcellus -
By God, just dream of it. Today in Rome,
Less than two thousand thirsty miles away,
Fountains and squares and shadowed colonnades,
Men with smooth chins and girls that sometimes wash.
Well, who is it? ... I see.
Another to be taken to the bonehill.
They're coming now. Just listen to them! -
You'd think they had a dozen there at least.
My sword, Marcellus. I'll be back to dinner,
Unless this fellow`s a reluctant dier
Who loves the world too well.

Halt! Stop that shouting. Why is he dressed like that?
(His robes are purple. On his head
A hedge-crown. Where the thorns are driven
Berries of blood leap up ...) 'My orders differ.
Remove that crown - at once - return his clothes.
Kingship can wait until his throne is ready.
Till then, safe conduct. Hold your lines -
Especially that to the windward: I've no fondness
For foreign spittle. Hold them. March... '

'Halt! Here's the place. Set down the cross.
You three attend to it. And remember, Marcus,
The blows are struck, the nails are driven
For Roman law and Roman order,
Not for your private satisfaction.
Set to work.'

(The grass is bare, sand-coloured : the hill
Quivers with heat.) 'What? As you please.
Seamless? Then dice for it.' (The sun
Is brutal in this land, metallic.

It works for death, not life.) 'Well, is it done?
Now nail the board above: 'King of the Jews.'
That turns the mockery on them. Watch them wince
At the superscription. Look, their faces!
Hate. Which man is hated most,
Myself or him? He'll serve for both:
They know their limitations. They know,
Greek, Jew or Roman, there is one command,
One only. What's his name? -
He takes it quietly. From Nazareth?
I know it well. Who would exchange it
For this sad city, and become
The food of flies? Marcus, there!
Give him some wine: he won't last long.'
That strain of wrist, the arm's tension
And scarecrow hang of chest. Ah, well,
Poor devil, he's got decent eyes.

Clive Sansom

The Engine Driver

The train goes running along the line,
Jicketty -can, Jicketty -can.
I wish it were mine, I wish it were mine,
Jicketty -can, Jicketty -can.
The engine driver stands in front ---
He makes it run, he makes it shunt;
Out of the town,
Out of the town,
Over the hill,
Over the down,
Under the bridges,
Across the lea,
Over the bridges,
And down to the sea,
With a Jicketty -can, Jicketty -can,
Jicketty -can, Jicketty -can,
Jicketty -can, Jicketty -can...

Clive Sansom

The Innkeeper's Wife

I love this byre. Shadows are kindly here.
The light is flecked with travelling stars of dust,
So quiet it seems after the inn-clamour,
Scraping of fiddles and the stamping feet.
Only the cows, each in her patient box,
Turn their slow eyes, as we and the sunlight enter,
Their slowly rhythmic mouths.
'That is the stall,
Carpenter. You see it's too far gone
For patching or repatching. My husband made it,
And he's been gone these dozen years and more...'

Strange how this lifeless thing, degraded wood
Split from the tree and nailed and crucified
To make a wall, outlives the mastering hand
That struck it down, the warm firm hand
That touched my body with its wandering love.
'No, let the fire take them. Strip every board
And make a new beginning. Too many memories lurk
Like worms in this old wood. That piece you're holding –
That patch of grain with the giant's thumbprint –
I stared at it a full hour when he died:
Its grooves are down my mind. And that board there
Baring its knot-hole like a missing jig-saw –
I remember another hand along its rim.
No, not my husband's and why I should remember
I cannot say. It was a night in winter.
Our house was full, tight-packed as salted herrings –
So full, they said, we had to hold our breaths
To close the door and shut the night-air out!

And then two travellers came. They stood outside
Across the threshold, half in the ring of light
And half beyond it. I would have let them in
Despite the crowding – the woman was past her time –
But I'd no mind to argue with my husband,
The flagon in my hand and half the inn
Still clamouring for wine. But when trade slackened,
And all out guests had sung themselves to bed

Or told the floor their troubles, I came out here
Where he had lodged them. The man was standing
As you are now, his hand smoothing that board –
He was a carpenter, I heard them say.
She rested on the straw, and on her arm
A child was lying. None of your crease-faced brats
Squalling their lungs out. Just lying there
As calm as a new-dropped calf – his eyes wide open,
And gazing round as if the world he saw
In the chaff-strewn light of the stable lantern
Was something beautiful and new and strange.
Ah well, he'll have learnt different now, I reckon,
Wherever he is. And why I should recall
A scene like that, when times I would remember
Have passed beyond reliving, I cannot think.
It's a trick you're served by old possessions:
They have their memories too – too many memories.

Well, I must go in. There are meals to serve.
Join us there, Carpenter, when you've had enough
Of cattle-company. The world is a sad place,
But wine and music blunt the truth of it.

Clive Sansom

The Ladybird

Tiniest of turtles!
Your shining back
Is a shell of orange
With spots of black.

How trustingly you walk
Across this land
Of hairgrass and hollows
That is my hand.

Your small wire legs,
So frail, so thin,
Their touch is swansdown
Upon my skin.

There! break out
Your wings and fly:
No tenderer creature
Beneath the sky.

Clive Sansom