

Poetry Series

Tom Cunningham

- poems -



PoemHunter.com

Publication Date:

2024

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Tom Cunningham()



PoemHunter.com

Brideshead Revisited

I lay awake in that dark hour and was reflecting on my life
From all the travelling I had done to the breakup with my wife
I was an architectural painter and was very successful too
And after leaving Oxford University that's what I'd wanted to do.

But winds of war were blowing and we were at war with Germany
And I, Charles Ryder had enlisted, as an officer in the army
It took me a while to accept, the harsh regime of the military
Because I'd been a free spirit and answered to no one but me.

I learnt that soon we would be moving to a secret location
To prepare for our deployment to a middle eastern nation
The camp was a hive of activity as we were preparing to go
Where we were going was a mystery, nobody seemed to know.

We marched to the railway station it was a cold and dark night
The train with its blacked out windows looked a forboding sight
We all boarded the train and then settled down for the journey
To that place unknown, that had been shrouded in secrecy.

After a couple of hours the train stopped at an unknown railway station
We all disembarked and lined up and marched to our secret destination
After a couple of hours we'd set up camp and settled down for the night
Then everything became quite peaceful, that is until morning light.

The sounds of vehicles and men, woke me up from my slumber
And where this transit camp was, I couldn't help but wonder
I got dressed and headed for the mess tent for some morning tea
And as I gazed up at the grey sky line, it stood majestically before me.

It was if someone had shone a bright light into my distant past
Old memories resurfaced and I just stood there totally aghast
Brideshead Castle looked magnificent in the grey morning light
And I remembered being invited there by Lord Sebastian Flyte.

It had been well over twenty years since I had first been here
After befriending Lord Sebastian at Oxford in my first year
He'd invited me to stay over, to meet his aristocratic family
I'll never forget their kindness and how they'd all welcomed me.

My thoughts were shattered by Hooper, my lieutenant driving a jeep
Who said 'I've just been in the big grand old house for a peep
There's statues of men with trumpets, paintings and all kinds of bling
Outside in the gardens, giant fountains, you never saw such a thing'

I answered 'Yes I did Hooper, I have been here many times before'
He said 'Then you know all about it and it's magnificent splendour'
I told him 'Better go and get the platoon ready' he said 'Righty oh '
And I was again left alone in my deep thoughts of a time long ago.

I had breakfast and then walked up to the house, it's layout was vast
And I wondered if my visit would encounter any ghosts from the past
I saw the family's Nanny Hawkins and she immediately recognised me
She made some fresh tea and brought me up to date about the family.

It had brought me some kind of closure as I'd left under a cloud
And looking back I'd let the family down of which I was not proud
I left after about an hour and said goodbye, and went on my way
And hoped unpleasant memories of my past would now fade away.

Written on the 18th September 2022.

Inspired by the opening scene of Brideshead Revisited, a television series
produced in 1981 by Granada Television and was based on the book of the
same name written by the English author Evelyn Waugh.

Tom Cunningham

The Bodie Lynchings

(Inspired by the 1943 classic western, *The Oxbow Incident* which starred Henry Fonda, Dana Andrews and Anthony Quinn. It followed a posse who set out to seek vengeance for the murder of a rancher, as the movie progressed the posse became a lynch mob taking the law into their own hands with harrowing consequences.)

THE BODIE LYNCHINGS.

Five strangers rode into Bodie, a small gold mining town
They didn't look at anybody and kept their heads down
At the Citizens bank they halted, it had been a long ride
Four then entered the bank and one kept watch outside.

The sheriff heard shots and came running, but they got away
Bar one who was badly wounded and on the dust he lay
But the bank teller and two townsfolk were now lying dead
The sheriff called on the townsfolk, 'we need a posse' he said.

The Sheriff was concerned that the gang would come back
To rescue the robber who'd been wounded in the attack
He deputised a posse to pursue them, to pick up their trail
But stayed behind in town, to ensure any rescue would fail.

A posse and deputy assembled then rode out of town
And took the trail due west as the sun was going down
After about three hours riding they saw a flicker of light
They all checked their weapons; ready for a gunfight.

They dismounted their horses and walked half a mile
'We've got them' said the deputy who gave a big smile
'They'll be doing no more thieving we'll make sure of that'
Around a roaring camp fire three men and a boy sat.

The deputy ran forward and drew his colt forty five
Ready to take the outlaws; either dead or alive
The posse then joined him told the men to keep still
Told them if they moved, they wouldn't hesitate to kill.

One of men said' whats going on? , we're just camping here '
A posse member lashed out and drew blood from his ear
The deputy asked them 'where's the money from the bank? '
They looked at each other bewildered, all their faces a blank.

One of the posse saw something that caught his eye
He kicked it away from the fire and let out a loud cry
'It's a money bag from the bank; I think we've got our men'
'That's not ours' said one of the men' you are mistaken'.

The young boy then spoke up said 'I found it a way back
There was nothing in it; it was just an empty sack '
One of the posse said 'let's hang em there's a tree over there'
They protested their innocence, but the posse didn't care.

They tied the men up and marched them, over to the tree
One brought over four ropes to hang them, no trial or mercy
One of the posse protested 'what we're doing ain't right
If they were the outlaws they'd have put up a good fight'.

The others all ignored him and they got the nooses ready
Then sat them on their horses whilst two held them steady
The deputy drew his pistol and fired two shots in the air
Their horses bolted forward and they were left hanging there.

The deputy said ' we'll leave em, be to others a warning
We'll camp here tonight and head back in the morning'
At sunrise they got up and made their way back to town
Two riders approached them; the posse slowed down.

It was the sheriff and a deputy who drew alongside
Sheriff said 'they came back but their partner had died
But they're all safely in jail now we took em by surprise
The circuit judge is coming they'll all hang I surmise'.

There was a eerie silence as the sheriffs words sank in
They'd got the wrong folk who hadn't done anything
They told the sheriff everything who listened in silence
They'd hung four people who'd committed no offence.

He said 'we'll get a wagon and cut their bodies down
And give them a decent burial in the cemetery in town

You'll all have to go before the judge, we'll let him decide
Whether you acted within the law or committed homicide'.

Tom Cunningham

The Homecoming

It was in late October in the year nineteen seventy three
That the war in South Vietnam was finally over for me
I boarded the seven o seven and couldn't wait to get going
A non military plane, a bright blue and white coloured Boeing.

After a long flight we landed at San Fran; no signs of jubilation!
I hailed a passing yellow cab to take me, to Oakland bus station
Went to the ticket office, checked in my gear and boarded the Greyhound
And after having been away for five years, I was now homeward bound.

I'd been with the special forces, working deep behind enemy lines
And I'd seen many of my close buddies killed, with antipersonnel mines
I'd become hardened to what I'd seen; and for my friends I couldn't weep
The drone of the Greyhounds engine made me drowsy, and I fell asleep.

My mind was like a coiled spring with no avenue for release
And I couldn't help but wonder, if I'd ever again find real peace
I'd see images of villages that had been taken over by the Vietcong
Who had massacred all the villagers; and they'd done nothing wrong.

After six and a half hours we arrived in leafy West Virginia
Only a few more miles to home, at my folks farm in Triadelphia
We arrived in town and I got off the bus, and headed for Dennys
It felt strange sitting at a table and not in the jungle on my knees.

I finished breakfast and then walked, the three miles to my home
Passed by the Patuxent River and noticed, the rapids frothy with foam
I arrived at the bottom of the drive and noticed our house chimney
And could smell the wood smoke burning and drifting toward me.

As I neared the house, I made a crunching sound on the gravel path
I heard my father shout out loudly 'who in Gods name is that? '
The door then opened wide and he stood there with a shotgun
Stared at me and with a trembling voice, he said ' is that you son? '

I dropped my heavy kitbag and we walked toward each other
Tears were running down his face and he called out for my mother
She came running out, stood in shock and gasped when she saw me
And said 'everyday I'd prayed, that you'd come home to your family.

' We'd had some army men come out to tell us that you had died
And there hasn't been a day since I heard that, I haven't cried'
I told her I'd written a few times but my letters were never answered
But if I'd been listed as missing, then they'd have been censored'

I said 'I'd lived in the shadows and we were like spectres in the mist
We were ghosts behind enemy lines and to many we didn't exist'
It had been quite an emotional homecoming, tears continued to flow
Could I forget the horrors I'd witnessed? maybe in time, I don't know.

Tom Cunningham

The Loss Of The Andrea Gail

They that go down to sea in ships, that do business in great waters:

These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.

From the 107th psalm.

It's been the hub of the fishing industry for nearly four hundred years
And has witnessed heartbreaking tragedies that have ended in tears
The city of Gloucester in Massachusetts on Americas east coast
Is home to the Atlantic's brave fishermen that's no idle boast.

In nineteen ninety one on the twentieth day of September
A day families of a trawler crew will always remember
The captain and crew of the fishing boat the Andrea Gail
For the Grand Banks of Newfoundland on that day had set sail.

They arrived at the Grand Banks but their catch was quite low
So the boats captain decided to the Flemish Cap they'd go
An area that they hoped would reap them great rewards
The plan was to fill the holds quickly, then set course homewards.

The ice machine had broken down so now they had to abort
Their catch would have been spoilt, so they headed back to port
Meanwhile some high and low pressure was building up at sea
But something else was building up that they didn't foresee.

Another fishing boat made contact and tried to give warning
But contact was lost as a giant storm was now forming
Winds built up and got stronger then the storm unleashed hell
The roar of those strong winds was sounding the death knell.

Conditions slowed the boat down it couldn't go any faster
They were oblivious to the fact that they were heading for disaster
An experienced crew in bad weather; but this wasn't the norm
Hurricane Grace mixed with two fronts that created the storm.

There was seventy mile an hour winds and hundred foot waves
That sent the Andrea Gail crew to their watery graves
The boats owner was concerned that she was long overdue
He contacted the U.S. Coastguard out of concern for her crew.

On Sable Island the emergency beacon was found washed ashore
Along with some other debris but boat and crew were no more
The city of Gloucester had suffered yet another tragedy
With the loss of the boats crew who'd perished out at sea.

No one knows what really happened and many theories abound
And theories they remain because the boat was never found
The most popular were the holds were overladen with their catch
And sea water fouled the engines getting in through the hatch.

Fishing has been an occupation since sixteen twenty three
When Cape Ann in Massachusetts Bay became a colony
And since then ten thousand have been lost out at sea
That's why the city of Gloucester is no stranger to tragedy.

Written 3rd Of October 2020.

Tom Cunningham