

The Summer of Agios Dimitrios

Also by Peter Hughes:

The Interior Designer's Late Morning, Many Press 1983

Bar Magenta (with Simon Marsh), Many Press, 1986

Odes on St. Cecilia's Day, Poetical Histories, 1990

The Metro Poems, Many Press, 1992

Psyche in the Gargano, Equipage, 1995

Paul Klee's Diary, Equipage, 1995

Keith Tippett Plays Tonight, Maquette Press, 1999

Blueroads: Selected Poems, Salt Publishing, 2003

Sound Signals Advising of Presence, infernal methods, 2006

Nistanimera, Shearsman Books, 2007

The Sardine Tree, Oystercatcher Press, 2008

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The Summer
of Agios Dimitrios

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church by the author.

for Lynn

& with thanks to Kelvin & Melanie

THE SUMMER OF AGIOS DIMITRIOS

1.1 Wednesday 12th September

only after take-off
do you see a range of places
where you could have walked the dog
if only you'd had one
& those oddly-shaped bodies of water
which are never there when you get back
our heads in the clouds
& in the inner distance
we heard goat bells on wild promontories
the sea almost too bright to see
feral sea-nymphs nudging the rudders
of sailors who scratch their heads
under sea-stained caps
lick a finger & stick it in the sky
shrug
then put in for a bottle of Mythos
& a cheese pie
on the plank outside
in the sunny dust
peaches
bleached French beans
& a row of slightly deflated
weeping purple figs
at the height of their powers

1.2 Thursday 13th September

all-day breakfast all day
peer into unfamiliar
books & rock pools
end up eating a goat
stew reading up on local lore
disguised as a deer
to escape the lust of Zeus
she nevertheless
crumpled under violence
& the outcome of more rape
was a foul taste
called Sparta
she hanged herself
on this vast mountain
continuing
beyond the horizon
became a dove
then one of the Pleiades
it never says anywhere
she became a corpse
looking eastwards
from the village at night
you register the shape
of the mountain
by the absence of stars

1.3 Friday 14th September

the mountain top clear
of cloud I can hear
the sea under star
shapes above the eucalyptus
cicada plucking at
distance some say
Cygnus some Northern
Cross either way almost
lost in a fertile haze of milky
way a mosquito followed a
bat through the night & out
the other side to morning
shadow of the jasmine on
a bowl as I rinse out
the mop some say it's all
written but I'd fold it
again & again
until it fits my smallest
pocket & walk
into the water

1.4 Saturday 15th September

sun swallows behind
the violet rim of land
between sea & sky
an unfamiliar breeze
pecks the table
questioning our intentions & spelling
this page is held down
by the clips they use
to anchor tablecloths
in tavernas along the coast
the paper is sun-bright orange
then grey
now lit by an electric glare & almost dead
if you don't know how to spell a word
you can always use another
the garden hose doesn't reach
the bottle brush tree
so we carry it six bowls of water
then back away
as it exhales

1.5 Sunday 16th September

the speechless water
Ritsos carried in his hands
reappeared in Elytis
near the church of St John
on whose day in midsummer
a child fetches water
from the local spring or well
& carries it back without speaking
every child in the village
places a small belonging
into the water
which is then covered
with a red cloth
the container is left
outdoors all night
so the stars may move over it
come morning
the cloth is removed
& each child's possession
is restored
now poems on
the future of the children
can be made

1.6 Monday 17th September

three people are poised
on the church tower
in Nomitsi
each at a different level
they allow
some sky into the structure
the next church
has a miniature door
& two long curving palm leaves
as tall as a person
framing the entrance
but the finest is
the last church
the metamorphosis
in which you hear
still the builders' voices
at different levels
the great clarity of the air means
you can shout really loud
many local calls can be made
without a phone
inside the church
a little light came in from here
& there the wooden offertory plate
was filled with change

1.7 Tuesday 18th September

early morning darkness
thins over the mountain
Venus a hand high
above the ridge
moving up and away
lights still on in the village square
but in the garden it's light enough
to read your own writing
the sound of waves
close & gentle
two boats heading out
say south west
maybe five degrees apart
leave the village
faster than they
leave each other

2.1 Wednesday 19th September

boil Greek French beans & pour rough red wine
just room on the Belling for a tiny frying pan
to perch—a latecomer with one cheek parked on
a hard shared chair—next to the fat pot of steam
room in the pan for three sausages chopped in half
push the six into different positions with onion &
peppers like that Chinese game they never invented before
shunting sausages into a siding to fry courgettes
fry savagely but do not burn garlic chop tomatoes & add to
onion add ouzo heat & tip into bowl that came free with tuna
multi-pack which if spun round fast may sling out
a tin to catch the neighbour's cat that squirts
the geraniums on its hip (offside/rear) pour bean
water into pot for rice then mix everything together
& squirt with lemon juice to give the illusion of 'cooking'
serve with $\frac{3}{4}$ gallon of cold white wine neighbour
affably wonders why cat has one eyebrow raised & limp

2.2 Thursday 20th September

four in the morning sea stirring
on three sides of peninsula
Orion flat out on mountain top
too tired & hot to stay in bedroom
mosquitoes stretching skin of air
tight like haunted drum in stomach
outside in a large darkness cool air sets
with jasmine scent all over the skin
you have to sleep sometime
then transplant this tree into
a hole in the earth
a dog comes up for a look
stares in the hole
stares at me
stares back in the hole & sighs
lies down
goes back to sleep
upside down in the dust
another line is written & changed
before the clay sets

2.3 Friday 21st September

it's easy now to get back
where we were
the place so hard
to reach at the beginning
just follow the road
& catch drops of rain
each fat as a fig
sleep involved much waking up
from dreams fuelled
by brown white wine & brandy
I couldn't save you from being pushed
into a woodland pond by a happy
animal part lassie part lion that
balanced its paws on your shoulders
until you toppled into waking
it's better to know the truth
sit on the step
& write in gentle rain