

Peter Hughes was born in Oxford in 1956, and now lives on the Norfolk coast, with his wife Lynn, in a coastguard cottage which is creeping ever closer to the cliff edge. His first publication was in 1983, since when a number of chapbooks and pamphlets have appeared, as well as a Selected Poems, *Blueroads*, from Salt (2003), and two full-length collections from Shearsman Books: *Nistanimera* (2007) and *The Summer of Agios Dimitrios* (2009). Peter Hughes is also the editor/publisher of Oystercatcher Press, which publishes a number of chapbooks every year, and which won the inaugural Michael Marks Award in 2009.

Born in 1960, Simon Marsh moved to Milan in 1984. In 2008, he left the city for the village of Valverde in the Oltrepò Pavese. He now lives in the nearby town of Varzi.

In addition to poetry, he writes and performs music with a group based in Milan. He is also interested in combining music and image or physical place, (e.g. *Goat Suite*, for a large goat shed), and performs occasional guitar pieces.

His published works include *Bar Magenta* with Peter Hughes (Many Press), *The Ice Glossaries* (Poetical Histories), and *The Vinyl Hat Years* (Tack/Many Press).

The Pistol Tree Poems

How sweet it is when mother Fancy rocks

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&
Simon Marsh

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The Pistol Tree Poems

this morning I'm listening to a little country music
 by Schubert & liaising with the weather—
 the naked sun did lift the sky but then it rained
 & now it's putty & porridge cloud
 dragging everybody's heaven to Leicester
 ignoring my plans to mow the lawn
 & plant some wild sweet pea seeds
 under the gloomiest section of holly
 where Schubert has finally arrived too
 did you manage to plant your rhubarb?
 I think it needs a well-manured soil
 & a little chimney to grow in
 so it doesn't get smoke in its eyes
 but grows long & firm in the dark
 not like a shrivelled penis in the North Sea
 teaching phonics to KS1 for £9 a year
 didn't make Schubert very exuberant
 nor did beer with Mayrhofer
 the poet who eventually threw himself out of
 the government building where he worked
 as a censor: talk about performance management
 what grim times for artists & citizens
 the public interested only in dance fads
 & minor celebrities sucking each other's faces
 Metternich kicking out Joseph II's reforms
 banning controversial t-shirts in the capital
 abolishing trial by jury in certain cases
 5 years in prison for breaking an ASBO
 over 3 million DNA samples held on file
 damaging GM crops defined as terrorism
 the Anti-Terrorism Acts making it an offence
 to advocate the violent overthrow of dictators
 your internet history available
 to entire herds of minor government voyeurs
 citizens extradited to America with no evidence
 profiles of 37% of black men held by police
 peace campaigners prosecuted for causing
 US servicemen "harassment, alarm & distress"
 by holding a sign outside an American base

saying GEORGE W. BUSH? OH DEAR
here the rain it raineth every day
even now in early May
but Berlusconi has been shown a door vero?
Schubert was soon into deep mid-winter
I have done nothing wrong
that I should shun mankind
the road I have to take
has always been a one-way street
I heard a cuckoo at 6.15 this morning
& the house martins are back & building
the sun is trying to see us all again
for the cup final & rhubarb
is shaping to wave goodbye to this grey sky

May 2006 Norfolk

the sky over the Po Valley reads like a Bisto pack;
it's a duff way to pay the rent:
describing the describable,
and yet I've watched these hills for days and nights,
caught up in an infinitesimal part
of this huge tectonic sigh.
Once grounded, the rain's designated path is a slew
of mud and road-strewn stones,
each taken so far then gripped,
nudged against unevenness;
too much friction is something to hold fast to:
much in the way that Mrs. Pina's goat
is more an extension of herself,
even when, dizzy and drawn by illusions of freedom,
it bolts down the wet hill at gusty dawn
while due to leverage and tree-root shift,
the entire garden sways, imperceptibly plied
for an instant, ever so slightly from sloped earth.
It's perhaps because there's only so much slack
to take up at any given time
that what remains flaps free:
a soft awning of Ligurian wind,
which billows deeply sifted,
somehow leaves colours of the inter-tidal zone
mixed with tree leaf and shadow, and Rhubarb?
Rheums tube their 'neathward way hereabouts,
but on the surface? Nothing.

In search of a remedy,
I side-scroll the OS map, reshuffle whole counties
and select a corner of the Rhubarb Triangle,
which gets dragged south to Valverde,
accompanied by the idiophonic metal ping
of a successfully concluded desktop event:
distant pickers grope dim forcing sheds and emerge,
heroic and blinded by searing hill light,
to the hypnotic film score tones of octet for rhubarb,

goat,

virtual jukebox,

aching root,

petioles,
found objects,
soul-lack
and Prepared Triangle.
Somewhere between Liszt
and the Ottoman marching bands
dwelt the as yet unfelt, explicit
valvey hoof-click
of the bebop scale, and
Steve Reich's audient knitting:
a holding pattern; purl one,
a lossless,
ectopic
beat.

June 2006 Valverde / Milan

edging the lawn with worn long-handled shears
 just above sea level it's hard to understand why maps don't tally
 with what we're walking up & down on
 or why what's in the papers doesn't chime with anyone we know
 & why of two rhubarb plants
 the first should unfurl & rise like a magic Arabian tent
 all high red poles & voluminous masses of cool green shade
 whispering spices while the second is barely alive
 should we dig it up & replace it with ginger & a few ears of wheat?
 measuring the garden for new fencing
 the figures change strangely depending
 on which end I start from—
 it's impossible to get your bearings futile & indispensable to try
 I wonder if Heine's last note ever got to Camille?
 a perfect fix will give only an impossible point
 to dance upon: a cocked hat at least gives a small
 badly-prepared triangle to cultivate & live in
 where a robin flits through a white poplar
 & an arpeggio of goldfinches veers into the birches
 as for courses to steer
 what with all these uncertainties of tidal stream & weather
 boat speed & appetite cross track error
 horizontal dilution of precision still steer we do
 I'd even choose rope not for its qualities of strength
 knot & give but with reference to our shared cack-handedness:
 polypropylene makes a poor enough rope
 but at least it floats when you misjudge & drop it
 down the crack between some country or other
 & the side of your dilapidated boat -
 & it'll still stop the goat going off-piste for a go at
 the artichokes herb garden or other goat
 tonight I'd rather navigate like the Polynesians once did
 imagining position from the sway
 & underlying tendency of the waves
 while assembling lyric maps which trace the shapes
 made by the clearest of these clear stars
 the Plough upended on The Wash
 Scorpis gradually wheeling past the back garden
 using bits of driftwood seaweed flotsam finger marks

reflecting on a change in the weather & unusual sea level
Schumann on the radio paints in some extra sand-banks
for the oystercatchers & seals & Heine's Fly
I often put in yellow instead of blue
& recall Buy Ballot's Law:
the low pressure area should be on your left
if you stand with your back to the wind
the house martins fussed & keened & banked all evening
till the light slid off the edges of the sea & land
in the hours after dark you can feel them
 tucked up under the eaves of the house
 you can feel them breathing
as the tide quietly rocks towards the moon they're watching

June 2006 Norfolk

What B.B. sought to calibrate on the train
 – *was it from, or to Utrecht?* –
 might have been a wolf note:
 the jute sack with the brass suppressors
 slouched forgotten on platform 2,
 a stop trick, and it was gone:
 as if drawn through a fantascop of melodeon air
 less than a sheng hoot away!

I never could say sphygmomanometer
 quick enough to work the magic spell;
 the diamond mirror turned on yourself,
 to free you from Armide's

caresses

the witch's g-string hummed, alright:
 a mad flash of panties
 and Clorinda was as if long forgotten:
 caught up between love itself
 and a sort of seasonal pitch shift
 in the atria of the heart.

What if your rope were wound with tarred hemp?
 Paid out from the barque,

from The Wash to the Oltrepò

there's not much knicker in Delacroix,
 but there are boats; in Dieppe, for instance,
 where the waves' dark pleats
 are like ruffled coal.

A mooring hitch; a rough-hewn cleat,
 pack your astrolabe
 and stuff the hold with Heinz:
 one tin for each navigational star,
 sit back and sense
 the ocean's swell,
 where serpent stars fade
 tangled into day.

Dawn said Charlie Chestnut Is the crack between worlds.
 And if we dropped the rope right there?
 The copper core feeding uploaded Pistols
 onto the sharp rim
 of earth's perceptible curve.

You can't cull lunes from accessory fruit,
but you can make rhubarb crumble,
or lace the cornstarch base
with local hooch
to put hairs back on your shirt.
Slipping down through these hills can be imperceptible,
or like getting out of bed on an achy morning;
oncoming cars hurl themselves into bends
in a massive display of serial wanking
and poppies cheat last light
at the road's edge:
crimson shadow-hearted folds
clutch the sun's cruel retainer.

June/July 2006 Valverde / Milan

if I could only clear my desk of goats
 notes & rhubarbarian hooliganism—
 at least I've learned that goats have preorbital vacuities
 & so does the fundamentalist gonging on
 the radio impersonating a dalek in a popemobile
how shall we tell the sheep from the goats? he creaks
 how about goats have 60 chromosomes not 54
 a little beard they hold their tails up & look a lot like fucking goats
 the continent takes so long to drag itself sideways
 the speed of our fingernails growing or oil paint drying
 in the subduction zone the floor disappears
 locality transformed into possibility
 yet according to the King's Lynn Tide Tables
 it's still 2290 sea miles to La Spezia
 on the journey swallow certain details of the planet's surface: first catch your rhubarb
 & get your left hand down among its little crotches give one stem a savage
 leg-break tweak then do 5 more completing the over cart your flappy booty to
 the end of the garden & strip off the leaves for organic pesticide when boiled with
 2 litres of water (or just boil the pests) or a satisfying tea when brewed with 200 ml
 for the man on the radio ignore the classical smalls on the line bad for the
 blood pressure back in the kitchen manoeuvre your curved length under a
 cold tap 3 times then turn the tap on so water celebrates all over this crisp & bitter
 structure then chop it up to rhubarb-size chunks with a light knife that will stop
 against anything stringy prompting you to raise the offending baton to edge back
 the superficial by alternating pushes of the still-articulated sections transfer to
 your worst saucepan with a lisp of fresh water a whisper of sugar & a wish of
 cinnamon & ginger stir with attractive wooden paddle-shaped implement over a low
 heat & a bluesy background like Zucchero's *She's My Baby* when the bridge kicks in
 again turn the heat up without warning for 20 seconds & flick in a spit of white wine
 turn heat back down for next track to
 reassure rhubarb then get some Greek yoghurt blob this into the syrupy juices all
 tangy & translucent with a pollen of freshly-grated nutmeg seven little hedgerow
 berries & an icing of vodka breath straight from the expiring freezer & that is actually
 the goat
 looking in through the kitchen window what or whom is it standing on?
 a pile of papers ready for recycling a million words on athlete's foot & string theory
 new food frocks & hybrid skateboards
 if an atom were a solar system a string would be a tree
 under the tree the guests are fleeing as Typhon tries to crash the party

almost everyone runs & manages to turn into an animal except Pan
who plunging into the river only does the job by halves underwater he's all
fish-tail
above he still plays the goat Zeus laughs his rocks off
& nails Capricornus up beyond the sycamore forever mind you
Typhon's still banged up under Etna stuck inside his chimney we've all been
there
the stars shine down on the papers & mint my nephew's buggy abandoned
after he's betrayed by heat heart & midsummer afternoons:
a light summer drizzle filters the sun & Sam sees a bee in a flower in the rain
he cups it in his hands nursing it towards the shelter of the house & cries out as it
stings deep in his tender palm do you recall your own key inoculations?
our fashionable goat is thrilled by recent DEFRA guidance:
if you applied a tattoo before 9th July 2005 that you can no longer read
you can replace it with another tattoo
now I'm making this compress for stings from nettles & desktop-clutter
say the sideways-moving jaws of the face with the goatee

Cambridge July 2006

A glass of chilled Gavi after the morning sauna
 has the same effect as a dollop of cranberry jelly in your draught lager
 and now I am haunted by imaginary German words for mystical fish.
 I should never have summoned the witch in N^o.4,
 she came to me in dream two nights ago
 so I let the earth's once spin shake off and compact what I recall:
 did she really force mauve felt plums into my mouth?
 Tall enough to hook my neck in her elbow pit
 and draw me in from a deep, long lonely sense of touchlessness;
 the passage from powder shade to wan moonlight
 and the quivering tenderness I have sought so long.
 I found my tattered Byron Foot Club membership card
 in this frock coat pocket
 only it was my knee, the magnetic resonance said,
 And the *referto* was Clorinda's heart, made out of iron-filings on the
 whitest paper.

I stood in front of an unfinished house on the side of a freeze-frame hill;
 a cement mixer abandoned in the grassless yard:

A probe fallen
 clumsily
 to earth.

But now I'm back on my old Claud Butler again,
 back rim still slightly buckled
 from the legendary Ramsgate harbour fall
 brought on by the heavy bar room malady of unrequited love
 and one too many pinch bolts bartered for draught Spitfire.
 The irregular wheel transmits a wobbly pulse
 and at every pedal push
 the sun draws more visible light toward one last point,
 which if you think that

*pulleys and lines are weightless
 no energy is lost due to friction
 lines, supposedly, do not stretch
 and the total force on the pulley must be zero*

probably means I'm slowly winching another day off its own edge
 though with no block and tackle in sight to speak of.
 Then the sun bobs upwards behind cloud,
 leaving the fishmonger's window somewhere between splatter
 and pollack by Pollock.

Kids on the passing tram fry their brains with rap
 —I'd swear one's shouldering a jute sack—
and was that a goat or the space cowboy at the filthy window?
Typhon and Pan are arguing with the ticket inspector
'cause we ain't got DEFRA pet guidelines on Milano ATM,
where a hunting dog is a *what is it doing or what is it for* question.
Rail side tree lymph clogs at the base
and brittle-tipped, limp leaves are a sure sign
That root creak has set in
and like it or not they're in the loop
of what we have to hand,
which is not so much carelessness as uncaring:
and constantly on the threshold of how outspoken that can be

Valverde / Milan July 2006

from a rusting garden deck-chair I sense bats cavort & squeak
 extra satellites of love roll overhead forging the future
 grain & powder whisper censored secrets in dark & concave steel
 things go round & round echoing in & out & in the head
 I lost my way with words for those few years reaching rock bottom
 & virtual dyslexia when I turned up at Claud's toga party as a goat
 the worst of Tasso is maybe the best at any time of personal crisis
 so any time really Torky said: I'll make up lovely bits
 so we can cope without heroin when history slams us back
 against the wall
 that modest flat in Beirut have you any idea of what it took?
 shifts in stars & bucks helping to trade adverts for animal skins
 & oil from the plains to make the deposit *blauaurenfisch*
 Aladine (Sid James) is trolling about on the battlements
 with his hands stuffed up his sleeves & a moustache that comes off
 in the rain
 while Rinaldo hides his red card & lives out a 3-match ban watching DVDs
 of Bush & Blair roasting Armide for her own good
 Ismen said the conquest of Jerusalem would always be temporary
dig your nails into your own palms what's the writing about?
 & Monteverdi & Rossini can coexist thank you Melvin
 when I bring on the mirror guys pretend to be self-aware
 these bloody goats you lent me have upset 8 sets of neighbours
 I hitched them to the washing line so they could run up & down the garden
 but they found that by working together they could give each other a bunk-up
 into next door this could cost me more than your damn holiday
 in Disneyland what with all their salad-crops cropped to earth
 towers of ant-ridden artichokes trampled underfoot
 enormous sweet potatoes reduced to chiselled radishes their legs-in-the-air
 rhubarb-leaf
 oxylic acid highs & where the blues comes from is: the G-string always will unravel
 wound or unwound it will always spoil your D chords
 (as though they were any different from anyone else's)
 this is where the words of others grow walking the dog
 brushing against the backs of your hands like growing oats
 breathing in & out like the pre-dawn estuary waters wearing boats
 here in the level meadows watered by snowmelt from neighbouring countries
 the story crosses & recrosses the low plains of our private embarrassments
 with a suggestion of ¾ time haunting the broad meanders

we've come to a temporary settlement there's all to negotiate
we came along back lanes down this track to the allotments
how about: after harvest festival I get your bicycle you get my goat
I never really mastered the serenade
in spite of rubbing many instruments up the wrong way
shouldering these bagpipes Clorinda & inflating the scrotum & garters
& non-existent moustache
I go back to those heady days of day-long head
not to mention the thrush banging a snail on the end of your dick
when daylight or darkness were evensong enough
those days are these & we are living them with the things of this world
& in the multiscreen complexes of our hearts: plunge your hand again
into this popcorn box from which I've cunningly removed the base
the lights dim coughing dies music starts gently

Winchester / Oxford / Cambridge July 2006