

## Blueroads: Selected Poems

PETER HUGHES was born in Oxford in 1956. He is a poet, painter and teacher with a particular interest in the interrelationships between the various arts. After gaining an M.Litt. in Modern Poetry from Stirling University, he moved to Italy where he worked as a teacher and translator from 1983 to 1991. Since then he has been based in Cambridge. He is currently Deputy Headteacher at Newnham Croft School.



# Blueroads

SELECTED POEMS

PETER HUGHES



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*to Lynn*



## Contents

Departure	1
Bedroom	2
Interval	3
La Madonna di Monte Berico	4
Christmas Morning, L'Aquila	6
Pot-Plant	7
Blues Cassette: Side 1	8
Blues Cassette: Side 2	9
Premonition	10
The Seasons	11
Near Luton	17
Ode on St. Cecilia's Day	18
The Metro Poems	24
OTTAVIANO	24
FLAMINIO	26
SPAGNA	27
BARBERINI	28
REPUBBLICA	29
TERMINI	30
VITTORIO	31
MANZONI	32
S. GIOVANNI	33
RE DI ROMA	34
PONTE LUNGO	35
FURIO CAMILLO	36
COLLI ALBANI	37
ARCO DI TRAVERTINO	38

PORTA FURBA	39
NUMIDIO QUADRATO	40
LUCIO SESTIO	41
GIULIO AGRICOLA	42
SUBAUGUSTA	43
CINECITTÀ	45
ANAGNINA	46
VIA CAVOUR	47
COLOSSEO	48
CIRCO MASSIMO	49
PIRAMIDE	50
GARBATELLA	51
S. PAOLO	52
MAGLIANA	53
MARCONI	54
FERMI	55
LAURENTINA	56
LAURENTINA	57
Quintet for St. Cecilia's Day	58
Education Policy	61
Apples	62
Night Driving	63
Psyche in the Gargano	64
Paul Klee's Diary	68
Epistolary Poem to Simon Marsh on Bank Holiday Monday	
Nearer Keats' Bicentenary than Shelley's Accidentally	99
To Peter Riley on his Sixtieth Birthday	101

Ode on Hearing Simon Fell Play "Improvisation: On Seeing Barry Guy in Sainsbury's"	103
West Coast	105
Tenor Legacy	106
Keith Tippett Plays Tonight	107
Joe Pass Live in Every Hedge	110
Real Book	111



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## Departure

Going the other way, a Russian goods train  
hauls a load of snow towards Padua.

Bonfires of vine prunings haunt the plain.

At the end of the platform a shovel  
with its handle split is half-buried,  
like aspiration,  
in a luxurious pile of cold soot.

## Bedroom

a ripple flits over cold urine  
in an old pot

the last field maple leaves  
leave the tree

your last breath

your father strides the fields  
having hoovered the living room

he weeps with frustration  
as your dog wiggles upside down  
scrubbing the fur on the back of its neck  
into a slightly putrified bird

then shakes itself up  
walking away with its head high  
in the garland of its new odour

## Interval

How are you in such a storm  
that will be as a distant memory by morning?  
Lightning on the fig plant and turning record  
catches a sudden human movement  
occupying the vast spaces  
between the harmonies of the quartet.  
Milan stretches away like Milan.  
You turn from the cluttered table  
to your daughter who holds her hands  
between big shadows and the windowed moon.  
She sways under just one year of the world's  
dissonances in a segment of night  
that has seen your perched cigarette become  
a gentle snake of ash.

## La Madonna di Monte Berico

The flat is opened like a box by morning  
who creeps further into the wild west  
disregarding this pug and flexing church.  
It's stuck on the sky like some animal head  
cut out from the back of an old Kellogg's pack.  
The windows shudder like British soil  
when the pregnant planes set off for Brussels,  
Alicante or the back streets of Tripoli.  
Was that someone for me or a lorry's air brakes?  
And that: something passing the window,  
a trace in the developing tank, a smear  
on old glasses, a kick in the sky's abdomen?  
It's rained and you can't see the door swelling  
in the puffy afterlight. Today it won't close.  
The letter flap whines like hearsay,  
draughts instead of thumps and rustles.  
You could believe at this hour that passers by  
were crucially changed. It can't be checked  
and tomorrow won't be the same not having  
changed at all. The Paul Klee print holds  
its own questions: along the highways and byways  
of 1929, what characters in the first green field  
dance at the foot of four vistas?  
What smelling tyre stains garnish the road?

The steep and porticoed pilgrims' way  
crumbles pleasantly under morning graffiti.  
But what are the long white lines  
slashed right across the piazza by the church  
of the hovering Madonna? A landing strip?  
I wonder if she'll be sighted this Spring  
barrel rolling over the Bay of Naples,  
flattening out over the island where  
the mosaics of Jove's Villa are wiggly  
as baby teeth under your tread.

Where, from the villa's heights, the ferry  
back to the mainland looks as redeemable  
and irrelevant as Four Eyes' rubber  
in the school swimming pool, or a sapphire  
tessera thrown up against the sky  
to be photographed by the experts.  
I wonder if she'll be glimpsed  
through the iridescence of a banking aircraft's glass,  
dropping piety, sowing grace.

## Christmas Morning, L'Aquila

At first the city is the husk of night  
below dawn's initial suggestions.

I'm squatting at that level of the sky  
where draining of the blackness begins  
and pines climb up across the slope.

This mountain haunch stinks of trodden grasses  
dripping juniper and queer south winds  
as thinning trees mark and stalk the track  
that leads to thinning constellations.

## Pot-Plant

that pot-plant didn't last long

stranded on its reflections  
in the glass table like a drowned trick

its little claw of roots  
wouldn't keep a dandelion  
in the manner to which it's accustomed

so instead I give you that tree  
outside the window by the river -  
although I don't know to what extent it's mine  
or to what extent it could be yours

you don't bring it in in Winter  
its roots go under the road

you don't water it in Summer  
its roots go into the river

you don't keep it  
from the direct rays of the sun

its branches dress the light that wakes us

## Blues Cassette: Side 1

Woke up this morning, the trodden Tom Waits  
Tape as unspooled and stuck as last night's pasta.

I need to make a charm against the silence  
That smothers the seed of arrival –

A talisman bidding the wheel spin on  
Long after the engines have stopped.

This mark could be fixed over the door,  
A tuning-fork to sing faintly in the dark  
Tapping the heart's beat through air and floor  
When under the bed dust turns in a draught

Haunting the sleeping tips of your fingers.  
It might be bound with the remains of this tape,

Sticky with whisky, perhaps at today's estuary,  
And would be luminous with your name's reflection.  
Then as dusk tightened the heart's vice,  
With these leaves over water we might tend still.