

Men Who Feed Pigeons **by Selima Hill**



Selima Hill grew up in a family of painters in farms in England and Wales, and has lived in Dorset for the past 40 years. She received a Cholmondeley Award in 1986, and was a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Exeter University in 2003-06. She won first prize in the Arvon International Poetry Competition with part of *The Accumulation of Small Acts of Kindness* (1989), one of several extended sequences in *Gloria: Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books, 2008). Her most recent collections from Bloodaxe are *The Hat* (2008); *Fruitcake* (2009); *People Who Like Meatballs* (2012), shortlisted for both the Forward Poetry Prize and the Costa Poetry Award; *The Sparkling Jewel of Naturism* (2014); *Jutland* (2015), a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation which was shortlisted for the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize and was earlier shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize; *The Magnitude of My Sublime Existence* (2016), shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize 2017; *Splash like Jesus* (2017); and *I May Be Stupid But I'm Not That Stupid* (2019). *Men Who Feed Pigeons* is her 20th collection of poetry.

Reviews

'Like the authors of the classical epigrams that are these poems' ultimate model, Hill uses a spare, brief span that can give gravity to light matters as well as supporting the weightiest. Hill's poems, however small, feel complete.' – *William Wootten*, *Literary Review*

'Born in 1945, Hill might be the heir to Stevie Smith: both are wholly original voices who pay no heed to anyone else's idea of what a poem should be; funny writers whose humour can leave the reader startled, puzzled or uneasy as often as amused.' – *Tristram Fane Saunders*, *The Telegraph*

'Despite their brevity, and their role in the larger narrative, these poems are far from fragmentary, being tightly self-contained, whilst also articulating with one another within the collection's wider scope... Overall, this is a remarkable collection, demanding considerable revisiting, and it is set to pierce very deeply.' – Beth McDonough, *Dundee University Review of the Arts*

Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro

I ask too many questions,
why's the orange orange, what's that noise,
who is Offa, how can it be shown
flamingo lilies purify the air?
Who called Kilimanjaro Kilimanjaro,
which is worse, jealousy or envy,
does he agree with the so-called Moral Relativists

that what is right for some is wrong for others
and why do drag queens seem to love the 50s –
mackintoshes, shampoo and sets?
And, by the time I ask him if the doctor
has mentioned blepharitis, he's asleep.
His eyes, already small, look even smaller,
defeated, like two pigs in a poke.

The Doctor

From up high in the branches like a hunter
I watch the so-called *Doctor* in his gardening gloves
examining his disappointing gooseberry bushes.
Does he have a different way of touching?
A way of touching that is barely human,
a way of touching how a fish might touch?
His fingers when he passes me my medicine
are scrubbed so clean they feel like the lips
of bony fish in mourning for their ocean.
But what is the opinion of his patients?
And does he even have any patients?
Is he or isn't he a doctor?
And, after my ordeal, does he know
that all I got was one propelling pencil?

Summertime

You paint all night. At dawn you stand up
and start the long cold walk to the hospital.

You haven't seen your family for years.
You haven't even told them where you live.

You live so far away that, for them,
when it's winter here, for them it's summertime.

Discussion Ideas

- 'Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro' is from a sequence of poems called 'Billy' relating to a friendship between a man and a woman. What's the nature of the friendship in the poem?
- Is 'Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro, Kilimanjaro' a sonnet?
- Who is high up in the branches in 'The Doctor'? A child or an adult? What difference does the imagined age of this character make to your understanding of the poem?
- Why gooseberry bushes, why not currant bushes or raspberry canes? Is the myth of babies being born under gooseberry bushes relevant to a reading of the poem?
- 'Summertime' is the last poem in a book of c300 poems. What do you think it might be summing up, or concluding? Or is it a poem that invites the creation of another 300 poems?

Other books by Selima Hill

Trembling Hearts in the Bodies of Dogs: New and Selected Poems (Bloodaxe Books, 1994)

Gloria: Selected Poems (Bloodaxe Books, 2008)

Splash Like Jesus (Bloodaxe Books, 2016)

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selima_Hill