

Adele Lee

The title 'September Song' seems inappropriate for a poem in which there is no rhyming scheme, no ordered syntax, a poem totally devoid of the traditional features of poetry. The word 'song' brings to mind lyric, melody, ode, the characteristics of which this poem fails to deliver. The most obvious feature of this poem is the problematic nature of its structure in that it lacks any ordered structure. It is written in open form, with the stanzas varying in length and the lines equally varying in the number of syllables they contain. The poem's fractured and disjointed form could be said to reflect the internal turmoil of the poet himself. The ramblings of the poet, his short, disjointed sentences, give the poem a sense of spontaneity as if he scribbled out the workings of his mind, and did not revise the poem afterwards. The images strung together, 'Zyklon, leather, terror' follow a stream-of-consciousness mode in that they are wholly subjective; only the poet can make the connection between them. Thus the reader of this poem feels alienated, left out.

The use of words such as 'estimated', 'sufficient' and 'Zyklon' seem out of place in poetry, belonging more to the discourses of science and mathematics. Perhaps Hill is deliberately attempting to incorporate a sense of modern life with its variety of jargons—judicial, medical and so forth. Language (and indeed life itself) have become sterile and rational, with a society in which urbanisation has led to the loss of community spirit, and people no longer chat in grocery stores but 'march' in and out of supermarkets as if part of one huge production line leading to death. Hill captures the fast pace of modern life in his poem, summarised in two lines:

As estimated, you died. Things marched,
sufficient, to that end.

The ambiguous 'you' to whom this poem is initially addressed lacks individualism. Perhaps 'you' denotes every person who slips into mediocrity during life, 'Undesirable' and oblivion in death.

It is the poet's aim, I believe, to transcend the mediocrity of the modern man, the death of individualism with the advent of industrialisation, when man became replaced by, and analogous to, machine. The death of individualism can be traced in the novels of Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh and James Joyce. In making 'an elegy for myself' Hill is attempting through poetry to be remembered after death. Yet Hill privileges the one (himself) above the many others who suffered at the hands of the Germans in the 1940s, thus poetry and poets have often been labelled capricious, loaded with egotism, the self-exalting 'I'.

The introspection of Hill is echoed in the poem's final line:

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

Hill is self-reflexively assessing his work; how ironic that he comes to the conclusion that this short disjointed poem, lacking any real theme or recurring image is 'plenty.' Perhaps Hill has come to the conclusion that at the time of his writing (1968) there is nothing to write about; creativity cannot flourish in a modern world. What can blossom from this 'stony rubbish' (The Wasteland), this 'a heap of broken images.'

The fourth stanza recalls the pastoral tradition of poetry, with the words 'vines' and 'roses' suggesting life and vitality. Yet the overall effect of these words, which are so out of context with the rest of the poem, is to further emphasize the clinical, stony mood of the poem in

general. As well as this the adjectives, 'fatten', 'flake' and 'drifts' of the fourth stanza reinforce the sense that things are crumbling, falling apart in society, and in 'September Song' itself which reflects the dissolution in its form.