

Stevie smith



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Margaret Smith also known as Stevie Smith was a famous English poet and novelist that lived from 1902 to her tragic death in 1971. Throughout her life Smith went through a lot of heartache with her family and especially within herself. When Stevie Smith became acquainted with the face of death, she was fascinated by the melancholy emotions of depression she began to feel.

As a result, Smith utilized her emotions relating to neglect, death, and war in much of her writing. Stevie Smith was best known for her poem “ Not Waving But Drowning,” which is about neglect. In this poem she portrays the speaker as saying “ goodbye” to his so called friends, and welcoming death. She praises grief and sorrow in her poem “ Happiness. ” Here she states that all happiness has been nonexistent in her life. War was another prominent theme in her writing. Much of her writing was drawn from her own life experiences but various work of literature was influenced by war, the middle class British life, and religion.

Her poem, “ I Remember,” was a war themed poem about an elderly man having flashbacks on the Second World War on his bridal night. Stevie Smith eloquently channeled her emotions from her troubling life experiences of death, neglect, and war, into moving works of literature. Florence Margaret “ Stevie” Smith was born in 1902 in Hull, England (Biography of Stevie Smith, Poem Hunter). At the age of three, after her father left the family to join the North Sea Patrol, she moved to Palmers Green with her Mother and her sister Molly (Spalding 3).

During her teenage years her mother passed away, leaving her and her sister to live with their Aunt also referred to as “ The Lion” (Stevie Smith, The Academy of American Poets). After attending high school she went to North

London Collegiate School for Girls where she began as a secretary with the magazine publisher George Newnes. She continued to become the private secretary to Sir Nevill Pearson and Sir Frank Newnes. Her first book, *Novel On Yellow Paper*, was published in 1936, which was about the uneasy feelings of World War I. Stevie Smith passed away in 1971, resulting from a brain tumor.

Stevie Smith's life was filled with death and grief beginning at age five and lasting until her death in 1971. At the age of five Stevie Smith was diagnosed with Tuberculous peritonitis (Barbara, and McBrien 23). After developing this disease she was sent to a sanatorium near Broadstairs. Smith had a very close relationship with her mother. Being away from home and her mother for such a long period of time caused her to experience much stress and anxiety. Smith's mother died of heart disease when she was sixteen years old, which was a very traumatic experience for Stevie Smith.

Even fifty years later during an interview Smith burst into tears when asked a question about her mother's passing (Huk 39). Unfortunately, she became preoccupied with the idea of death. Smith thought that if she forced death upon herself, her misery would end. Realizing that she hadn't died and life would continue another day only sustained her thoughts of death, eventually leading her into depression (Barbara, and McBrien 25). Being compelled by thoughts of death and grief, Smith frequently incorporated those themes in her poems.

In one of Stevie Smith's interviews she states, " They are written from the experiences, of my own life, its pressures and fancies, and they are written to give ease and relief to me" (Spalding 197). Smith implies that she writes

her poems not only for the enjoyment of her readers, but as a way of coping with her own emotions and feelings. Writing about her sorrows gave her inspiration to continue on and face her troubles. She writes more often about her struggles than her happiness, which is shown in her poem “ Happiness. In the poem “ Happiness,” Stevie Smith describes happiness as quiet and nonexistent when she writes, “ Happiness is silent, or speaks equivocally for friends” (In 1). All of Smith’s life was filled with misery. This poem is about how she never knew the feeling of happiness. She was unaware of how to find happiness because of all the negative experiences in her life that led to such despairing thoughts and emotions. “ Grief is explicit and her song never ends” (In 3). Smith indicates that she has known this feeling since she was a young girl, which, continued throughout her life.

Undergoing these difficult times throughout her life led Stevie Smith to develop a negative view of the world, which she exemplified in her poetry. Stevie Smith’s father owned his own business as a shipping agent. When she was three years old his business, as well as her parents’ marriage, was unsuccessful (Huk 23). As a result, Smith’s father left home and ran away to sea becoming a ship’s purser. She rarely saw her father and when he visited she would often ignore him. She resented the fact that he left and deserted their family.

Stevie Smith and her sister never forgave him and even refused to attend his funeral in 1949. Additionally, Smith’s Aunt directed negativity in her life. After Smith’s mother passed away, Smith and her sister lived with their Aunt. When Stevie Smith started to write her Aunt dismissed her works, calling them as unnecessary. Stevie portrays her feelings of neglect in her famous

poem, " Not Waving But Drowning. " This poem is about a man who is stranded out at sea. As he is thrashing in the seas, he is distressed trying to get the attention from the bystanders on shore.

They think he is waving " Hello", when he is actually attempting to get their attention. " Nobody heard him, the dead man" (ln 1). The people on shore can be seen as Smith's Father and Aunt, while Stevie Smith is the man stranded at sea. They both neglected and ignored Stevie, either by abandoning her family or insulting her work. " Oh, no no no, it was too cold always" (ln 9). This line indicates the loneliness of Smith's life due to the constant feeling of rejection, from the fleeing of her father and her Aunt doubting her writing capabilities. Stevie Smith grew up during both World War I and World War II (Severin 49).

After World War II Smith believed that women suffered in traditional marriages because they often experienced loss of their independence and energy. In her poem " I Remember" the speaker is an elderly man. He is with his bride on their wedding night while having flashbacks of the World War II. " Harry, do they ever collide? I do not think it has ever happened" (ln 7 and 8). Smith is pointing out the disappointment of women returning to their traditional gender roles during the post war periods. When the woman asks about the planes colliding, Stevie Smith is referring to the gender roles of men and woman.

She is asking if the roles of women and men overlap? She also indicates that these women will inevitably return to their pre-war traditional role as a submissive woman and essentially return to being unhappy. Stevie Smith has faced various negative experiences and emotions from a very early age.

Stevie Smith often wrote about death, neglect and war as shown in three of her poems, “ Happiness,” “ Not Waving But Drowning,” and “ I Remember. ” Being presented with a chronic disease, abandonment, death, and feelings of neglect, contributed to Stevie Smith’s negative view of the world.

However, Smith found hope and relief from her depressive mind through the means of writing poetry. Smith wrote not only for the enjoyment of her readers, but more importantly to cope with her adverse life experiences. She used writing as a way to ease of the pain of these events. Stevie Smith blended real life experiences with events that happened around the world to create her moving works of literature. This poem written by the famous English poet and novelist, Stevie Smith is about a war veteran who is having flashbacks of World War II. An elderly man is the speaker talking about his experiences in the war on the night of his wedding. His bride was a young woman who had tuberculosis and was asking him questions about the war. It seemed that she was asking the questions because she was slipping away and will soon pass.

The poem “ Not Waving But Drowning” by Stevie Smith told in the third person. It is about a man who is distressed and neglected by his friends. He is trying to gain their attention by waving his hands but the people at shore think he is just waving hello. This poem can be interpreted both metaphorically and literally. In the literal sense he was waving his hands trying to get attention and from the people on shore it looks like he’s saying hi. In the metaphorical sense, the man suffered from being ignored and neglected by his friends.

In this book Romana Huk expresses the different contributions that Stevie Smith has made to feminist literary modernism. Huk describes how Smith encouraged women's studies by examining the past and rewriting them in modern times. This book offers a new approach to go about analyzing Smith's works by analyzing certain poems and novels that were either forgotten about or written long ago.