

Do Not!

By Stevie Smith

Do not despair of man, and do not scold him,
Who are you that you should so lightly hold him?
Are you not also a man, and in your heart
Are there not warlike thoughts and fear and smart?
Are you not also afraid and in fear cruel,
Do you not think of yourself as usual,
Faint for ambition, desire to be loved,
Prick at a virtuous thought by beauty moved?
You love your wife, you hold your children dear,
Then say not that Man is vile, but say they are.
But they are not. So is your judgement shown
Presumptuous, false, quite vain, merely your own
Sadness for failed ambition set outside,
Made a philosophy of, prinked, beautified
In noble dress and into the world sent out
To run with the ill it most pretends to rout.
Oh know your own heart, that heart's not wholly evil,
And from the particular judge the general,
If judge you must, but with compassion see life,
Or else, of yourself despairing, flee strife.

Stevie Smith, "Do Not!" from *New Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1972 by Stevie Smith. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.

Source: *The New Selected Poems of Stevie Smith* (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1988)



Although the nursery-rhyme-like cadences of her poems and the whimsical drawings with which she illustrated them suggest a child's innocence, Stevie Smith was much concerned with suffering and mortality. (Her macabre sense of humor can shock, as in her most famous poem, "Not Waving But Drowning.") Born Florence Margaret Smith in Hull, Yorkshire, she moved with her family to London when three, then lived in the same house the rest of her life. She published several collections of short prose and letters as well as nearly a dozen volumes of verse. Glenda Jackson portrays the eccentric poet in the 1978 movie *Stevie*.