The Heavenly City

By Stevie Smith

I sigh for the heavenly country,  
Where the heavenly people pass,  
And the sea is as quiet as a mirror  
Of beautiful beautiful glass.

I walk in the heavenly field,  
With lilies and poppies bright,  
I am dressed in a heavenly coat  
Of polished white.

When I walk in the heavenly parkland  
My feet on the pasture are bare,  
Tall waves the grass, but no harmful  
Creature is there.

At night I fly over the housetops,  
And stand on the bright moony beams;  
Gold are all heaven’s rivers,  
And silver her streams.


Source: *Stevie Smith Collected Poems* (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1983)

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*.  

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