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NO MEN ARE FOREIGN

James Kirkup

James Kirkup (born April 23, 1918) is a prolific English poet, translator and travel writer. He was brought up in South Shields, and educated at Durham University. He has written over 30 books, including biographies, novels and plays. He became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962.

Amongst his honours, Kirkup held the Atlantic Award for Literature from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1950; he was elected the Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962; he won the Japan PEN Club Prize for Poetry in 1965; and was awarded the Scott-Moncrieff Prize for translation in 1992. In 1997, he was presented with the Japan Festival Foundation Award and invited by the Emperor and Empress to the Imperial New Year Poetry Reading at the Palace in Tokyo.



Universal brotherhood is the
paramount need of the hour.
Humans on the earth are alike.
They breathe, feel and weep in
the same way. Why differentiate
on the basis of caste, creed,
colour, gender or religion.

Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign;
Beneath all uniforms, a single body breathes
Like ours, the land our brothers walk upon
Is earth like his, in which we all shall lie.

They, too, aware of the sun and air and water,
Are fed by peaceful harvests, by war's long winter starved.
Their hands are ours, and in their lines we read
A labour not different from our own.

Remember they have eyes like ours that wake
Or sleep, and strength that can be won
By love, in every land is common life
That all can recognize and understand.

Let's remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brothers, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each other.

It is the human earth that we defile.
Our hells of fire and dust outrage the innocence
Of air that is everywhere our own;
Remember, no men are foreign, no countries strange.

Glossary

dispossess ˌdɪspəˈzɛs

dislodge; deprive.

betray bɪˈtreɪ

deceive.

condemn kənˈdem

to criticize something or someone strongly.

defile dɪˈfaɪl

make dirty; pollute.

outrage the innocence of /'aʊt.reɪdʒ/ðə/'ɪn.ɒ.sənts/əv/ violate the purity of.

Understanding the Poem

1. What does the poet mean by 'uniforms' in the poem?
2. What according to the poet makes all the people alike on the earth?
3. What outrages the innocence and beauty of this earth?
4. What message do you get from the poem?

Learning about the literary devices

1. Do you find any rhyme scheme in the poem?
2. What is the style used by the poet in the poem?

Discussion

1. What are the things that divide people today? Do you think that negotiations can resolve conflicts? If yes, how? if no, why? What should be done in the latter case?

2. How do wars affect our lives?

Suggested Reading

Under Siege by Mahmud Darwish.

Quote to remember

*Those who can win a war well
can rarely make a good peace
and those who could make a good
peace would never have won the
war.*

Winston Churchill

Tongue Twister

Swan swam over the sea,
Swim, swan, swim!
Swan swam back again
Well swum, swan!