

No Men are Foreign

JAMES KIRKUP

About the Poet

JAMES FALCONER KIRKUP (1918–2009) was a prolific translator, writer of poetry and travelogues. He wrote several books that include six volumes of autobiography, novels and plays. Kirkup's first book of poetry, *The Drowned Sailor* was published in 1947. He was the first Gregory Poetry Fellow from 1950 to 1952 at Leeds University, making him the first resident university poet in the United Kingdom. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962. His contribution as a skilled writer of Haikus and Tankas is widely acknowledged. Many of his poems recalled his childhood days in the North East. In his home town of South Shields, the Central Library now holds a growing collection of his works, and artefacts from his time in Japan are housed in the nearby Museum. Red Squirrel Press published his last volume of poetry during the summer of 2008 and it was launched at a special event at Central Library in South Shields. He translated numerous books by French authors and a number by Japanese poets. Kirkup received the Atlantic Award for Literature from the Rockefeller Foundation, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, won the Japan P.E.N. Club Prize for Poetry in

1965; and was awarded the Scott Moncrieff Prize for Translation in 1992. Kirkup died in Andorra in May 2009.

About the Poem

The poem 'No Men are Foreign' is a simple poem with a noble message. The poet wants to communicate the message to both young and old in the simplest of terms. The regular features of poetry such as figures of speech and rhyme schemes do not figure here. 'No Men are Foreign' tells us that we should not consider anyone as foreign or 'strange'. Humanity is the same all over the world and in harming anyone we are harming ourselves. In destroying another country we are destroying our own earth. The poem tells us to look upon humanity as a unified entity. The poem is obviously a strong plea for universal brotherhood. It underlines the fact that the people of different countries have the same physical, mental and emotional experiences. Their fate is the same. They are in no way different even though they wear different clothes and speak different languages. Nobody should be viewed as a stranger and no country should be considered foreign. The poet emphasises the futility of hating those who belong to other countries. The dust and smoke caused by war weapons pollute the very air we all breathe.

No Men are Foreign

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

They, too, aware of sun and air and water
Are fed by peaceful harvest, but war's long winter starved.
Their hands are ours, and 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 recognise and understand.

Let us 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, and no countries strange.

Contemner

Glossary

strange:	not expected, usual or ordinary
uniforms:	a distinctive set of clothes worn to identify somebody's occupation, affiliation, or status
starve:	to go without food and water
dispossess:	to deprive somebody of the possession or occupancy of something, especially property
betray:	to act in a way that is contrary to a promise made, to expose someone
condemn:	to state that somebody or something is in some way wrong or unacceptable
defile:	to make something dirty or polluted