

The Stranger

Have you ever been nervous about something new before? New things can be scary since we have no idea what to expect from them. That's what Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Stranger" is about, except it deals with people of another race. Kipling is afraid of other types of people that are different from him.

Kipling lived and wrote during a time when England was an imperial power in the world, and colonized countries like India and places in Africa. The people of those lands were much darker-skinned than the English, and they followed much different religious and social beliefs. The line was always drawn, it seemed, between the dark and the light, the conventional and the non-conventional. This conflict is well established in this poem through the imagery.

In the poem, there are five six line stanzas, known as sestet. And while the meter is not completely consistent throughout, most lines are in trochaic trimeter. And each stanza follows an A-B-C-B-D-B rhyme scheme, meaning that while the second, fourth, and sixth lines all rhyme, the first, third and fifth lines do not.

There's personification in this poem, like where line 4 says "feel his mind" or line 16 says "reasons sway his mood." There are also two refrains: "The stranger within my gate" in stanzas 1 and 3 and "The men of my own stock" in stanzas 2 and 4.

The poem is also rife with symbolism. "The stranger" refers to a foreigner, and "the men of my own stock" are people who are of the same race as the narrator. "Corn" and "grapes" might represent people and the bitter "bread" and "wine" could be the effects of biracial relationships.

The speaker here is a man who is afraid and feels alienated by another race. Because he is afraid of unfamiliar people, he takes a pretty close-minded stance. He's proud of his culture, and doesn't want to mix it with others. He knows that his race isn't perfect, but at least he knows what shortcomings to expect from his own people. He prefers the comfort and familiarity his people give him versus the relative unknown of other races. The theme is the unwillingness to accept people different from yourself, and the fear of new things being added to once-comfortable surroundings. How would you feel? Would you be uncomfortable by new types of people around you?
