

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Joyce Kilmer**  
**- poems -**

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## Joyce Kilmer(1886-1918)

Kilmer was born on December 6, 1886 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the fourth and youngest child of Annie Ellen Kilburn (1849–1932) and Dr. Frederick Barnett Kilmer (1851–1934), a physician and analytical chemist employed by the Johnson and Johnson Company and inventor of the company's baby powder. Joyce was named Alfred Joyce Kilmer after Alfred R. Taylor, the curate; and the Rev. Dr. Elisha Brooks Joyce (1857–1926), the rector of Christ Church, the oldest Episcopal parish in New Brunswick, where the Kilmer family were parishioners. Rector Joyce, who served the parish from 1883 to 1916, baptised the young Kilmer. Kilmer's birthplace in New Brunswick, where the Kilmer family lived from 1886 to 1892, is still standing, and houses a small museum to Kilmer, as well as a few Middlesex County government offices.

Kilmer entered the Rutgers College Grammar School (now Rutgers Preparatory School) in 1895 at the age of 8. During his years at the Grammar School, he....

"...won the Lane prize in public speaking and was editor-in-chief of the *Argo*, the school paper. He loved the classics, although he had considerable difficulty with Greek. In his last year at Rutgers, he won the first Lane Classical Prize, a free scholarship for the academic course at Rutgers College, and one hundred dollars in money. Despite his difficulties with mathematics and Greek, he stood at the head of his class in preparatory school."

After graduating from the Rutgers College Grammar School in 1904, he continued his education at Rutgers College from 1904 to 1906. At Rutgers, Kilmer was associate editor of the *Targum*, the campus newspaper and a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity. Unable to complete the rigorous mathematics requirement in the curriculum at Rutgers, facing a repeat of his sophomore year and under pressure from his mother, Kilmer transferred to Columbia College of Columbia University in New York City.

At Columbia, Kilmer was vice-president of the Philolexian Society, associate editor of *Columbia Spectator*, the campus newspaper, and was a member of the Debating Union. He completed his Bachelor of Arts (A.B.) degree and was graduated from Columbia on May 23, 1908. Shortly after graduation, on June 9, 1908, he married Aline Murray (1888–1941), a fellow poet to whom he had been engaged since his sophomore year at Rutgers. The Kilmers had five children: Kenton Sinclair Kilmer (1909–1995), Michael Barry Kilmer (1916–1927), Deborah ("Sister Michael") Clanton Kilmer (1914–1999) who was a Catholic nun at the Saint Benedict's Monastery, Rose Kilburn Kilmer (1912–1917), and Christopher

Kilmer (1917–1984).

Within a few days after the United States declared war on Germany and entered the first World War in April 1917, Kilmer enlisted in the Seventh Regiment of the New York National Guard. In August, Kilmer was initially assigned as a statistician with the U.S. 69th Infantry Regiment (better known as the "Fighting 69th" and later redesignated the 165th Infantry Regiment), of the 42nd "Rainbow" Division, and quickly rose to the rank of Sergeant. Though he was eligible for commission as an officer and often recommended for such posts during the course of the war, Kilmer refused stating that he would rather be a sergeant in the Fighting 69th than an officer in any other regiment.

In September, before Kilmer was deployed, the Kilmer family was met with both the contrary emotions of tragedy and rejoicing. The Kilmer's daughter Rose had died, and twelve days later, their son Christopher was born. Kilmer sailed to Europe with his regiment on October 31, 1917, arriving in France two weeks later. Before his departure, Kilmer had contracted with publishers to write a book about the war, deciding upon the title *Here and There with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth*. Kilmer wrote home, stating "I have not written anything in prose or verse since I got here - except statistics - but I've stored up a lot of memories to turn into copy when I get a chance." Unfortunately, Kilmer never was to write such a book. During his time in Europe, Kilmer did write prose sketches and poetry, most notably the poem "Rouge Bouquet", which was written after the First Battalion of the 42nd Division, which had been occupying the Rouge Bouquet forest northeast of the French village of Baccarat, which at the time was a quiet sector of the front—was struck by a heavy artillery bombardment on the afternoon of March 12, 1918 that buried 21 men of the unit, of which 14 remained entombed.

Kilmer sought more hazardous duty and was transferred to the Regimental Intelligence Section, in April 1918. He wrote to his wife, Aline that, "Now I'm doing work I love - and work you may be proud of. None of the drudgery of soldiering, but a double share of glory and thrills." According to Hillis:

"Kilmer's companions wrote: "He was worshipped by the men about him. I have heard them speak with awe of his coolness and his nerve in scouting patrols in No Man's Land." This coolness and his habit of choosing, with typical enthusiasm, the most dangerous and difficult missions, led to his death."

During the Second Battle of Marne, there was heavy fighting throughout the last days of July 1918, and on July 30, 1918, Kilmer volunteered to accompany Major William "Wild Bill" Donovan when Donovan's First Battalion was sent to lead the

day's attack.

During the course of the day, Kilmer led a scouting party to find the position of a German machine gun. When his comrades found him, some time later, they thought at first that he was peering over the edge of a little hill, where he had crawled for a better view. When he did not answer their call, they ran to him and found him dead. According to Father Duffy: "A bullet had pierced his brain. His body was carried in and buried by the side of Ames. God rest his dear and gallant soul." Kilmer died, likely immediately, from a sniper's bullet to the head near Muercy Farm, beside the Oureq River near the village of Seringes, in France, on July 30, 1918 at the age of 31. For his valor, Kilmer was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) by the French Republic.

Kilmer was buried in the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery and Memorial, near Fere-en-Tardenois, Aisne, Picardy, France. Although Kilmer is buried in France in an American military cemetery, a cenotaph is located on the Kilmer family plot in Elmwood Cemetery, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. A memorial service was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan.

# A Blue Valentine

(For Aline)

Monsignore,  
Right Reverend Bishop Valentinus,  
Sometime of Interamna, which is called Ferni,  
Now of the delightful Court of Heaven,  
I respectfully salute you,  
I genuflect  
And I kiss your episcopal ring.

It is not, Monsignore,  
The fragrant memory of your holy life,  
Nor that of your shining and joyous martyrdom,  
Which causes me now to address you.  
But since this is your august festival, Monsignore,  
It seems appropriate to me to state  
According to a venerable and agreeable custom,  
That I love a beautiful lady.  
Her eyes, Monsignore,  
Are so blue that they put lovely little blue reflections  
On everything that she looks at,  
Such as a wall  
Or the moon  
Or my heart.  
It is like the light coming through blue stained glass,  
Yet not quite like it,  
For the blueness is not transparent,  
Only translucent.  
Her soul's light shines through,  
But her soul cannot be seen.  
It is something elusive, whimsical, tender, wanton, infantile, wise  
And noble.  
She wears, Monsignore, a blue garment,  
Made in the manner of the Japanese.  
It is very blue --  
I think that her eyes have made it more blue,  
Sweetly staining it  
As the pressure of her body has graciously given it form.  
Loving her, Monsignore,

I love all her attributes;  
But I believe  
That even if I did not love her  
I would love the blueness of her eyes,  
And her blue garment, made in the manner of the Japanese.

Monsignore,  
I have never before troubled you with a request.  
The saints whose ears I chiefly worry with my pleas  
are the most exquisite and maternal Brigid,  
Gallant Saint Stephen, who puts fire in my blood,  
And your brother bishop, my patron,  
The generous and jovial Saint Nicholas of Bari.  
But, of your courtesy, Monsignore,  
Do me this favour:  
When you this morning make your way  
To the Ivory Throne that bursts into bloom with roses  
because of her who sits upon it,  
When you come to pay your devoir to Our Lady,  
I beg you, say to her:  
"Madame, a poor poet, one of your singing servants yet on earth,  
Has asked me to say that at this moment he is especially grateful to you  
For wearing a blue gown."

Joyce Kilmer

# A Valentine

My songs should be as lilies fair,  
And roses made of crimson light,  
To lie amid the fragrant hair  
And on the breast of my delight.

Such glory is for them too high;  
I'll scatter them adown the street,  
And when my love is passing by  
They will rise up and kiss her feet.

Joyce Kilmer

# Age Comes A-Wooing

With shameless and incessant lust  
Thy tremulous hot hands are thrust  
Upon my body's loveliness.  
O loathsome Age, thy foul caress  
Puts on my heart a deadly blight,  
Withers my hair to leprous white,  
Binds fetters on my eager feet  
That once on Springtime's road were fleet  
To bear me to Love's shining goal.  
Now bitter tides of sorrow roll  
To drown me in a sea of woe  
And God looks on, and wills it so!

Give over thy pursuing, Age!  
Fearest thou not my lover's rage?  
For he is young and strong of limb,  
Thou canst not stand a bout with him.  
Ah, surely he will laugh to see  
So wan a suitor wooing me.  
Then with wild scorn his heart will swell  
And he will fling thee back to hell.

O Love, that stronger art than Death,  
Enfold me from the burning breath  
Of Age that has grown amorous,  
That sears and blasts me. Even thus,  
Men say, his passionate embrace  
Spoils maids and flowers of their grace,  
And every woman's fate is cast  
To be his paramour at last.  
And so all lovely things are made  
Shameful, and in the ashes laid,  
To die alone, uncared for. Such  
Is the pollution of his touch.

Stars that have shone since Time began,  
Rivers that saw the birth of man,  
And mountains that are fair and green,  
And were, when Helen was a queen,

White dreams that never can grow old,  
Stories of love and glory told  
By Homer once, and ballads sung  
Eons ago- ye still are young.  
Tell me the secret of your youth.  
Can any weeping fill with ruth  
Age, that is harsh and pitiless?

Nay, they are blind to my distress.  
They have not feared the grasping hand  
Of Age, and cannot understand.  
Love saw my whitened hair and laughed  
And bid me drain my bitter draught.  
While in my lover's startled eyes  
A lurking terror strangely lies.  
There is no place in which to hide  
When Age comes seeking for his bride.

Joyce Kilmer

# Alarm Clocks

When Dawn strides out to wake a dewy farm  
Across green fields and yellow hills of hay  
The little twittering birds laugh in his way  
And poise triumphant on his shining arm.  
He bears a sword of flame but not to harm  
The wakened life that feels his quickening sway  
And barnyard voices shrilling "It is day!"  
Take by his grace a new and alien charm.

But in the city, like a wounded thing  
That limps to cover from the angry chase,  
He steals down streets where sickly arc-lights sing,  
And wanly mock his young and shameful face;  
And tiny gongs with cruel fervor ring  
In many a high and dreary sleeping place.

Joyce Kilmer

# Apology

For blows on the fort of evil  
That never shows a breach,  
For terrible life-long races  
To a goal no foot can reach,  
For reckless leaps into darkness  
With hands outstretched to a star,  
There is jubilation in Heaven  
Where the great dead poets are.

There is joy over disappointment  
And delight in hopes that were vain.  
Each poet is glad there was no cure  
To stop his lonely pain.  
For nothing keeps a poet  
In his high singing mood  
Like unappeasable hunger  
For unattainable food.

So fools are glad of the folly  
That made them weep and sing,  
And Keats is thankful for Fanny Brawne  
And Drummond for his king.  
They know that on flinty sorrow  
And failure and desire  
The steel of their souls was hammered  
To bring forth the lyric fire.

Lord Byron and Shelley and Plunkett,  
McDonough and Hunt and Pearse  
See now why their hatred of tyrants  
Was so insistently fierce.  
Is Freedom only a Will-o'-the-wisp  
To cheat a poet's eye?  
Be it phantom or fact, it's a noble cause  
In which to sing and to die!

So not for the Rainbow taken  
And the magical White Bird snared  
The poets sing grateful carols

In the place to which they have fared;  
But for their lifetime's passion,  
The quest that was fruitless and long,  
They chorus their loud thanksgiving  
To the thorn-crowned Master of Song.

Joyce Kilmer

# As Winds That Blow Against A Star

(For Aline)

Now by what whim of wanton chance  
Do radiant eyes know sombre days?  
And feet that shod in light should dance  
Walk weary and laborious ways?

But rays from Heaven, white and whole,  
May penetrate the gloom of earth;  
And tears but nourish, in your soul,  
The glory of celestial mirth.

The darts of toil and sorrow, sent  
Against your peaceful beauty, are  
As foolish and as impotent  
As winds that blow against a star.

Joyce Kilmer



# Citizen Of The World

No longer of Him be it said  
"He hath no place to lay His head."

In every land a constant lamp  
Flames by His small and mighty camp.

There is no strange and distant place  
That is not gladdened by His face.

And every nation kneels to hail  
The Splendour shining through Its veil.

Cloistered beside the shouting street,  
Silent, He calls me to His feet.

Imprisoned for His love of me  
He makes my spirit greatly free.

And through my lips that uttered sin  
The King of Glory enters in.

Joyce Kilmer

# Dave Lilly

There's a brook on the side of Greylock that used to be full of trout,  
But there's nothing there now but minnows; they say it is all fished out.  
I fished there many a Summer day some twenty years ago,  
And I never quit without getting a mess of a dozen or so.

There was a man, Dave Lilly, who lived on the North Adams road,  
And he spent all his time fishing, while his neighbors reaped and sowed.  
He was the luckiest fisherman in the Berkshire hills, I think.  
And when he didn't go fishing he'd sit in the tavern and drink.

Well, Dave is dead and buried and nobody cares very much;  
They have no use in Greylock for drunkards and loafers and such.  
But I always liked Dave Lilly, he was pleasant as you could wish;  
He was shiftless and good-for-nothing, but he certainly could fish.

The other night I was walking up the hill from Williamstown  
And I came to the brook I mentioned,  
and I stopped on the bridge and sat down.  
I looked at the blackened water with its little flecks of white  
And I heard it ripple and whisper in the still of the Summer night.

And after I'd been there a minute it seemed to me I could feel  
The presence of someone near me, and I heard the hum of a reel.  
And the water was churned and broken, and something was brought to land  
By a twist and flirt of a shadowy rod in a deft and shadowy hand.

I scrambled down to the brookside and hunted all about;  
There wasn't a sign of a fisherman; there wasn't a sign of a trout.  
But I heard somebody chuckle behind the hollow oak  
And I got a whiff of tobacco like Lilly used to smoke.

It's fifteen years, they tell me, since anyone fished that brook;  
And there's nothing in it but minnows that nibble the bait off your hook.  
But before the sun has risen and after the moon has set  
I know that it's full of ghostly trout for Lilly's ghost to get.

I guess I'll go to the tavern and get a bottle of rye  
And leave it down by the hollow oak, where Lilly's ghost went by.  
I meant to go up on the hillside and try to find his grave

And put some flowers on it -- but this will be better for Dave.

Joyce Kilmer

# Delicatessen

Why is that wanton gossip Fame  
So dumb about this man's affairs?  
Why do we titter at his name  
Who come to buy his curious wares?

Here is a shop of wonderment.  
From every land has come a prize;  
Rich spices from the Orient,  
And fruit that knew Italian skies,

And figs that ripened by the sea  
In Smyrna, nuts from hot Brazil,  
Strange pungent meats from Germany,  
And currants from a Grecian hill.

He is the lord of goodly things  
That make the poor man's table gay,  
Yet of his worth no minstrel sings  
And on his tomb there is no bay.

Perhaps he lives and dies unpraised,  
This trafficker in humble sweets,  
Because his little shops are raised  
By thousands in the city streets.

Yet stars in greater numbers shine,  
And violets in millions grow,  
And they in many a golden line  
Are sung, as every child must know.

Perhaps Fame thinks his worried eyes,  
His wrinkled, shrewd, pathetic face,  
His shop, and all he sells and buys  
Are desperately commonplace.

Well, it is true he has no sword  
To dangle at his booted knees.  
He leans across a slab of board,  
And draws his knife and slices cheese.

He never heard of chivalry,  
He longs for no heroic times;  
He thinks of pickles, olives, tea,  
And dollars, nickles, cents and dimes.

His world has narrow walls, it seems;  
By counters is his soul confined;  
His wares are all his hopes and dreams,  
They are the fabric of his mind.

Yet -- in a room above the store  
There is a woman -- and a child  
Pattered just now across the floor;  
The shopman looked at him and smiled.

For, once he thrilled with high romance  
And tuned to love his eager voice.  
Like any cavalier of France  
He wooed the maiden of his choice.

And now deep in his weary heart  
Are sacred flames that whitely burn.  
He has of Heaven's grace a part  
Who loves, who is beloved in turn.

And when the long day's work is done,  
(How slow the leaden minutes ran!)  
Home, with his wife and little son,  
He is no huckster, but a man!

And there are those who grasp his hand,  
Who drink with him and wish him well.  
O in no drear and lonely land  
Shall he who honors friendship dwell.

And in his little shop, who knows  
What bitter games of war are played?  
Why, daily on each corner grows  
A foe to rob him of his trade.

He fights, and for his fireside's sake;

He fights for clothing and for bread:  
The lances of his foemen make  
A steely halo round his head.

He decks his window artfully,  
He haggles over paltry sums.  
In this strange field his war must be  
And by such blows his triumph comes.

What if no trumpet sounds to call  
His armed legions to his side?  
What if, to no ancestral hall  
He comes in all a victor's pride?

The scene shall never fit the deed.  
Grotesquely wonders come to pass.  
The fool shall mount an Arab steed  
And Jesus ride upon an ass.

This man has home and child and wife  
And battle set for every day.  
This man has God and love and life;  
These stand, all else shall pass away.

O Carpenter of Nazareth,  
Whose mother was a village maid,  
Shall we, Thy children, blow our breath  
In scorn on any humble trade?

Have pity on our foolishness  
And give us eyes, that we may see  
Beneath the shopman's clumsy dress  
The splendor of humanity!

Joyce Kilmer

# Easter

The air is like a butterfly  
With frail blue wings.  
The happy earth looks at the sky  
And sings.

Joyce Kilmer

# Easter Week

1 "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
2 It's with O'Leary in the grave."  
3 Then, Yeats, what gave that Easter dawn  
4 A hue so radiantly brave?

5 There was a rain of blood that day,  
6 Red rain in gay blue April weather.  
7 It blessed the earth till it gave birth  
8 To valour thick as blooms of heather.

9 Romantic Ireland never dies!  
10 O'Leary lies in fertile ground,  
11 And songs and spears throughout the years  
12 Rise up where patriot graves are found.

13 Immortal patriots newly dead  
14 And ye that bled in bygone years,  
15 What banners rise before your eyes?  
16 What is the tune that greets your ears?

17 The young Republic's banners smile  
18 For many a mile where troops convene.  
19 O'Connell street is loudly sweet  
20 With strains of Wearing of the Green.

21 The soil of Ireland throbs and glows  
22 With life that knows the hour is here  
23 To strike again like Irishmen  
24 For that which Irishmen hold dear.

25 Lord Edward leaves his resting place  
26 And Sarsfield's face is glad and fierce.  
27 See Emmet leap from troubled sleep  
28 To grasp the hand of Padraic Pearse!

29 There is no rope can strangle song  
30 And not for long death takes his toll.  
31 No prison bars can dim the stars  
32 Nor quicklime eat the living soul.

33 Romantic Ireland is not old.  
34 For years untold her youth shall shine.  
35 Her heart is fed on Heavenly bread,  
36 The blood of martyrs is her wine.

Joyce Kilmer

# Folly

(For A. K. K.)

What distant mountains thrill and glow  
Beneath our Lady Folly's tread?  
Why has she left us, wise in woe,  
Shrewd, practical, uncomforted?  
We cannot love or dream or sing,  
We are too cynical to pray,  
There is no joy in anything  
Since Lady Folly went away.

Many a knight and gentle maid,  
Whose glory shines from years gone by,  
Through ignorance was unafraid  
And as a fool knew how to die.  
Saint Folly rode beside Jehanne  
And broke the ranks of Hell with her,  
And Folly's smile shone brightly on  
Christ's plaything, Brother Juniper.

Our minds are troubled and defiled  
By study in a weary school.  
O for the folly of the child!  
The ready courage of the fool!  
Lord, crush our knowledge utterly  
And make us humble, simple men;  
And cleansed of wisdom, let us see  
Our Lady Folly's face again.

Joyce Kilmer

# Gates and Doors

There was a gentle hostler  
(And blessed be his name!)  
He opened up the stable  
The night Our Lady came.  
Our Lady and Saint Joseph,  
He gave them food and bed,  
And Jesus Christ has given him  
A glory round his head.  
So let the gate swing open  
However poor the yard,  
Lest weary people visit you  
And find their passage barred;  
Unlatch the door at midnight  
And let your lantern's glow  
Shine out to guide the traveler's  
feet

To you across the snow.  
There was a courteous hostler  
(He is in Heaven to-night)  
He held Our Lady's bridle  
And helped her to alight;  
He spread clean straw before her  
Whereon she might lie down,  
And Jesus Christ has given him  
An everlasting crown.

Unlock the door this evening  
And let your gate swing wide,  
Let all who ask for shelter  
Come speedily inside.  
What if your yard be narrow?  
What if your house be small?  
There is a Guest is coming  
Will glorify it all.

There was a joyous hostler  
Who knelt on Christmas morn  
Beside the radiant manger  
Wherein his Lord was born.  
His heart was full of laughter,  
His soul was full of bliss

When Jesus, on His Mother's lap,  
Gave him His hand to kiss.  
Unbar your heart this evening  
And keep no stranger out,  
Take from your soul's great portal  
The barrier of doubt.  
To humble folk and weary  
Give hearty welcoming,  
Your breast shall be to-morrow  
The cradle of a King.

Joyce Kilmer

# Houses

(For Aline)

When you shall die and to the sky  
Serenely, delicately go,  
Saint Peter, when he sees you there,  
Will clash his keys and say:  
"Now talk to her, Sir Christopher!  
And hurry, Michelangelo!  
She wants to play at building,  
And you've got to help her play!"

Every architect will help erect  
A palace on a lawn of cloud,  
With rainbow beams and a sunset roof,  
And a level star-tiled floor;  
And at your will you may use the skill  
Of this gay angelic crowd,  
When a house is made you will throw it down,  
And they'll build you twenty more.

For Christopher Wren and these other men  
Who used to build on earth  
Will love to go to work again  
If they may work for you.  
"This porch," you'll say, "should go this way!"  
And they'll work for all they're worth,  
And they'll come to your palace every morning,  
And ask you what to do.

And when night comes down on Heaven-town  
(If there should be night up there)  
You will choose the house you like the best  
Of all that you can see:  
And its walls will glow as you drowsily go  
To the bed up the golden stair,  
And I hope you'll be gentle enough to keep  
A room in your house for me.



# In Memory of Rupert Brooke

In alien earth, across a troubled sea,  
His body lies that was so fair and young.  
His mouth is stopped, with half his songs unsung;  
His arm is still, that struck to make men free.  
But let no cloud of lamentation be  
Where, on a warrior's grave, a lyre is hung.  
We keep the echoes of his golden tongue,  
We keep the vision of his chivalry.  
So Israel's joy, the loveliest of kings,  
Smote now his harp, and now the hostile horde.  
To-day the starry roof of Heaven rings  
With psalms a soldier made to praise his Lord;  
And David rests beneath Eternal wings,  
Song on his lips, and in his hand a sword.

Joyce Kilmer

# Love's Lantern

(For Aline)

Because the road was steep and long  
And through a dark and lonely land,  
God set upon my lips a song  
And put a lantern in my hand.

Through miles on weary miles of night  
That stretch relentless in my way  
My lantern burns serene and white,  
An unexhausted cup of day.

O golden lights and lights like wine,  
How dim your boasted splendors are.  
Behold this little lamp of mine;  
It is more starlike than a star!

Joyce Kilmer

# Madness

(For Sara Teasdale)

The lonely farm, the crowded street,  
The palace and the slum,  
Give welcome to my silent feet  
As, bearing gifts, I come.

Last night a beggar crouched alone,  
A ragged helpless thing;  
I set him on a moonbeam throne --  
Today he is a king.

Last night a king in orb and crown  
Held court with splendid cheer;  
Today he tears his purple gown  
And moans and shrieks in fear.

Not iron bars, nor flashing spears,  
Not land, nor sky, nor sea,  
Nor love's artillery of tears  
Can keep mine own from me.

Serene, unchanging, ever fair,  
I smile with secret mirth  
And in a net of mine own hair  
I swing the captive earth.

Joyce Kilmer

# Main Street

(For S.M.L.)

I like to look at the blossomy track of the moon upon the sea,  
But it isn't half so fine a sight as Main Street used to be  
When it all was covered over with a couple of feet of snow,  
And over the crisp and radiant road the ringing sleighs would go.

Now, Main Street bordered with autumn leaves, it was a pleasant thing,  
And its gutters were gay with dandelions early in the Spring;  
I like to think of it white with frost or dusty in the heat,  
Because I think it is humaner than any other street.

A city street that is busy and wide is ground by a thousand wheels,  
And a burden of traffic on its breast is all it ever feels:  
It is dully conscious of weight and speed and of work that never ends,  
But it cannot be human like Main Street, and recognise its friends.

There were only about a hundred teams on Main Street in a day,  
And twenty or thirty people, I guess, and some children out to play.  
And there wasn't a wagon or buggy, or a man or a girl or a boy  
That Main Street didn't remember, and somehow seem to enjoy.

The truck and the motor and trolley car and the elevated train  
They make the weary city street reverberate with pain:  
But there is yet an echo left deep down within my heart  
Of the music the Main Street cobblestones made beneath a butcher's cart.

God be thanked for the Milky Way that runs across the sky,  
That's the path that my feet would tread whenever I have to die.  
Some folks call it a Silver Sword, and some a Pearly Crown,  
But the only thing I think it is, is Main Street, Heaventown.

Joyce Kilmer

# Martin

When I am tired of earnest men,  
Intense and keen and sharp and clever,  
Pursuing fame with brush or pen  
Or counting metal disks forever,  
Then from the halls of Shadowland  
Beyond the trackless purple sea  
Old Martin's ghost comes back to stand  
Beside my desk and talk to me.

Still on his delicate pale face  
A quizzical thin smile is showing,  
His cheeks are wrinkled like fine lace,  
His kind blue eyes are gay and glowing.  
He wears a brilliant-hued cravat,  
A suit to match his soft grey hair,  
A rakish stick, a knowing hat,  
A manner blithe and debonair.

How good that he who always knew  
That being lovely was a duty,  
Should have gold halls to wander through  
And should himself inhabit beauty.  
How like his old unselfish way  
To leave those halls of splendid mirth  
And comfort those condemned to stay  
Upon the dull and sombre earth.

Some people ask: "What cruel chance  
Made Martin's life so sad a story?"  
Martin? Why, he exhaled romance,  
And wore an overcoat of glory.  
A fleck of sunlight in the street,  
A horse, a book, a girl who smiled,  
Such visions made each moment sweet  
For this receptive ancient child.

Because it was old Martin's lot  
To be, not make, a decoration,  
Shall we then scorn him, having not

His genius of appreciation?  
Rich joy and love he got and gave;  
His heart was merry as his dress;  
Pile laurel wreaths upon his grave  
Who did not gain, but was, success!

Joyce Kilmer

# Memorial Day

"Dulce et decorum est"

The bugle echoes shrill and sweet,  
But not of war it sings to-day.  
The road is rhythmic with the feet  
Of men-at-arms who come to pray.

The roses blossom white and red  
On tombs where weary soldiers lie;  
Flags wave above the honored dead  
And martial music cleaves the sky.

Above their wreath-strewn graves we kneel,  
They kept the faith and fought the fight.  
Through flying lead and crimson steel  
They plunged for Freedom and the Right.

May we, their grateful children, learn  
Their strength, who lie beneath this sod,  
Who went through fire and death to earn  
At last the accolade of God.

In shining rank on rank arrayed  
They march, the legions of the Lord;  
He is their Captain unafraid,  
The Prince of Peace . . . Who brought a sword.

Joyce Kilmer

## Mid-Ocean In War-Time

The fragile splendour of the level sea,  
The moon's serene and silver-veiled face,  
Make of this vessel an enchanted place  
Full of white mirth and golden sorcery.  
Now, for a time, shall careless laughter be  
Blended with song, to lend song sweeter grace,  
And the old stars, in their unending race,  
Shall heed and envy young humanity.

And yet to-night, a hundred leagues away,  
These waters blush a strange and awful red.  
Before the moon, a cloud obscenely grey  
Rises from decks that crash with flying lead.  
And these stars smile their immemorial way  
On waves that shroud a thousand newly dead!

Joyce Kilmer

# Mount Hovenkopf

Serene he stands, with mist serenely crowned,  
And draws a cloak of trees about his breast.  
The thunder roars but cannot break his rest  
And from his rugged face the tempests bound.  
He does not heed the angry lightning's wound,  
The raging blizzard is his harmless guest,  
And human life is but a passing jest  
To him who sees Time spin the years around.

But fragile souls, in skyey reaches find  
High vantage-points and view him from afar.  
How low he seems to the ascended mind,  
How brief he seems where all things endless are;  
This little playmate of the mighty wind  
This young companion of an ancient star.

Joyce Kilmer

# Old Poets

(For Robert Cortez Holliday)

If I should live in a forest  
And sleep underneath a tree,  
No grove of impudent saplings  
Would make a home for me.

I'd go where the old oaks gather,  
Serene and good and strong,  
And they would not sigh and tremble  
And vex me with a song.

The pleasantest sort of poet  
Is the poet who's old and wise,  
With an old white beard and wrinkles  
About his kind old eyes.

For these young flippertigibbets  
A-rhyming their hours away  
They won't be still like honest men  
And listen to what you say.

The young poet screams forever  
About his sex and his soul;  
But the old man listens, and smokes his pipe,  
And polishes its bowl.

There should be a club for poets  
Who have come to seventy year.  
They should sit in a great hall drinking  
Red wine and golden beer.

They would shuffle in of an evening,  
Each one to his cushioned seat,  
And there would be mellow talking  
And silence rich and sweet.

There is no peace to be taken  
With poets who are young,

For they worry about the wars to be fought  
And the songs that must be sung.

But the old man knows that he's in his chair  
And that God's on His throne in the sky.  
So he sits by the fire in comfort  
And he lets the world spin by.

Joyce Kilmer

# Pennies

A few long-hoarded pennies in his hand  
Behold him stand;  
A kilted Hedonist, perplexed and sad.  
The joy that once he had,  
The first delight of ownership is fled.  
He bows his little head.  
Ah, cruel Time, to kill  
That splendid thrill!

Then in his tear-dimmed eyes  
New lights arise.  
He drops his treasured pennies on the ground,  
They roll and bound  
And scattered, rest.  
Now with what zest  
He runs to find his errant wealth again!

So unto men  
Doth God, depriving that He may bestow.  
Fame, health and money go,  
But that they may, new found, be newly sweet.  
Yea, at His feet  
Sit, waiting us, to their concealment bid,  
All they, our lovers, whom His Love hath hid.

Lo, comfort blooms on pain, and peace on strife,  
And gain on loss.  
What is the key to Everlasting Life?  
A blood-stained Cross.

Joyce Kilmer

# Poets

Vain is the chiming of forgotten bells  
That the wind sways above a ruined shrine.  
Vainer his voice in whom no longer dwells  
Hunger that craves immortal Bread and Wine.

Light songs we breathe that perish with our breath  
Out of our lips that have not kissed the rod.  
They shall not live who have not tasted death.  
They only sing who are struck dumb by God.

Joyce Kilmer

# Prayer Of A Soldier In France

- 1 My shoulders ache beneath my pack
- 2 (Lie easier, Cross, upon His back).
  
- 3 I march with feet that burn and smart
- 4 (Tread, Holy Feet, upon my heart).
  
- 5 Men shout at me who may not speak
- 6 (They scourged Thy back and smote Thy cheek).
  
- 7 I may not lift a hand to clear
- 8 My eyes of salty drops that sear.
  
- 9 (Then shall my fickle soul forget
- 10 Thy agony of Bloody Sweat?)
  
- 11 My rifle hand is stiff and numb
- 12 (From Thy pierced palm red rivers come).
  
- 13 Lord, Thou didst suffer more for me
- 14 Than all the hosts of land and sea.
  
- 15 So let me render back again
- 16 This millionth of Thy gift. Amen.

Joyce Kilmer

# Queen Elizabeth Speaks

My hands were stained with blood, my heart was  
proud and cold,  
My soul is black with shame . . . but I gave Shakespeare gold.  
So after aeons of flame, I may, by grace of God,  
Rise up to kiss the dust that Shakespeare's feet have trod.

Joyce Kilmer

# Roofs

(For Amelia Josephine Burr)

The road is wide and the stars are out  
and the breath of the night is sweet,  
And this is the time when wanderlust should seize upon my feet.  
But I'm glad to turn from the open road and the starlight on my face,  
And to leave the splendour of out-of-doors for a human dwelling place.

I never have seen a vagabond who really liked to roam  
All up and down the streets of the world and not to have a home:  
The tramp who slept in your barn last night and left at break of day  
Will wander only until he finds another place to stay.

A gypsy-man will sleep in his cart with canvas overhead;  
Or else he'll go into his tent when it is time for bed.  
He'll sit on the grass and take his ease so long as the sun is high,  
But when it is dark he wants a roof to keep away the sky.

If you call a gypsy a vagabond, I think you do him wrong,  
For he never goes a-travelling but he takes his home along.  
And the only reason a road is good, as every wanderer knows,  
Is just because of the homes, the homes, the homes to which it goes.

They say that life is a highway and its milestones are the years,  
And now and then there's a toll-gate where you buy your way with tears.  
It's a rough road and a steep road and it stretches broad and far,  
But at last it leads to a golden Town where golden Houses are.

Joyce Kilmer

# Roses

I went to gather roses and twine them in a ring,  
For I would make a posy, a posy for the King.  
I got an hundred roses, the loveliest there be,  
From the white rose vine and the pink rose bush and from the red  
rose tree.  
But when I took my posy and laid it at His feet  
I found He had His roses a million times more sweet.  
There was a scarlet blossom upon each foot and hand,  
And a great pink rose bloomed from His side for the healing of the  
land.  
Now of this fair and awful King there is this marvel told,  
That He wears a crown of linked thorns instead of one of gold.  
Where there are thorns are roses, and I saw a line of red,  
A little wreath of roses around His radiant head.  
A red rose is His Sacred Heart, a white rose is His face,  
And His breath has turned the barren world to a rich and flowery  
place.  
He is the Rose of Sharon, His gardener am I,  
And I shall drink His fragrance in Heaven when I die.

Joyce Kilmer





# Servant Girl And Grocer's Boy

Her lips' remark was: "Oh, you kid!"  
Her soul spoke thus (I know it did):

"O king of realms of endless joy,  
My own, my golden grocer's boy,

I am a princess forced to dwell  
Within a lonely kitchen cell,

While you go dashing through the land  
With loveliness on every hand.

Your whistle strikes my eager ears  
Like music of the choring spheres.

The mighty earth grows faint and reels  
Beneath your thundering wagon wheels.

How keenly, perilously sweet  
To cling upon that swaying seat!

How happy she who by your side  
May share the splendors of that ride!

Ah, if you will not take my hand  
And bear me off across the land,

Then, traveller from Arcady,  
Remain awhile and comfort me.

What other maiden can you find  
So young and delicate and kind?"

Her lips' remark was: "Oh, you kid!"  
Her soul spoke thus (I know it did).

Joyce Kilmer

## St. Alexis, Patron Of Beggars

We who beg for bread as we daily tread  
Country lane and city street,  
Let us kneel and pray on the broad highway  
To the saint with the vagrant feet.  
Our altar light is a buttercup bright,  
And our shrine is a bank of sod,  
But still we share St. Alexis' care,  
The Vagabond of God.

They gave him a home in purple Rome  
And a princess for his bride,  
But he rowed away on his wedding day  
Down the Tiber's rushing tide.  
And he came to land on the Asian strand  
Where the heathen people dwell;  
As a beggar he strayed and he preached and prayed  
And he saved their souls from hell.

Bowed with years and pain he came back again  
To his father's dwelling place.  
There was none to see who this tramp might be,  
For they knew not his bearded face.  
But his father said, "Give him drink and bread  
And a couch underneath the stair."  
So Alexis crept to his hole and slept.  
But he might not linger there.

For when night came down on the seven-hilled town,  
And the emperor hurried in,  
Saying, "Lo, I hear that a saint is near  
Who will cleanse us of our sin,"  
Then they looked in vain where the saint had lain,  
For his soul had fled afar,  
From his fleshly home he had gone to roam  
Where the gold-paved highways are.

We who beg for bread as we daily tread  
Country lane and city street,  
Let us kneel and pray on the broad highway

To the saint with the vagrant feet.  
Our altar light is a buttercup bright,  
And our shrine is a bank of sod,  
But still we share St. Alexis' care,  
The Vagabond of God!

Joyce Kilmer

# St. Laurence

Within the broken Vatican  
The murdered Pope is lying dead.  
The soldiers of Valerian  
Their evil hands are wet and red.

Unarmed, unmoved, St. Laurence waits,  
His cassock is his only mail.  
The troops of Hell have burst the gates,  
But Christ is Lord, He shall prevail.

They have encompassed him with steel,  
They spit upon his gentle face,  
He smiles and bleeds, nor will reveal  
The Church's hidden treasure-place.

Ah, faithful steward, worthy knight,  
Well hast thou done. Behold thy fee!  
Since thou hast fought the goodly fight  
A martyr's death is fixed for thee.

St. Laurence, pray for us to bear  
The faith which glorifies thy name.  
St. Laurence, pray for us to share  
The wounds of Love's consuming flame.

Joyce Kilmer

# Stars

(For the Rev. James J. Daly, S. J.)

Bright stars, yellow stars, flashing through the air,  
Are you errant strands of Lady Mary's hair?  
As she slits the cloudy veil and bends down through,  
Do you fall across her cheeks and over heaven too?

Gay stars, little stars, you are little eyes,  
Eyes of baby angels playing in the skies.  
Now and then a winged child turns his merry face  
Down toward the spinning world -- what a funny place!

Jesus Christ came from the Cross (Christ receive my soul!)  
In each perfect hand and foot there was a bloody hole.  
Four great iron spikes there were, red and never dry,  
Michael plucked them from the Cross and set them in the sky.

Christ's Troop, Mary's Guard, God's own men,  
Draw your swords and strike at Hell and strike again.  
Every steel-born spark that flies where God's battles are,  
Flashes past the face of God, and is a star.

Joyce Kilmer

# Thanksgiving

The roar of the world is in my ears.  
Thank God for the roar of the world!  
Thank God for the mighty tide of fears  
Against me always hurled!  
Thank God for the bitter and ceaseless strife,  
And the sting of His chastening rod!  
Thank God for the stress and the pain of life,  
And Oh, thank God for God!

Joyce Kilmer

# The Apartment House

Severe against the pleasant arc of sky  
The great stone box is cruelly displayed.  
The street becomes more dreary from its shade,  
And vagrant breezes touch its walls and die.  
Here sullen convicts in their chains might lie,  
Or slaves toil dumbly at some dreary trade.  
How worse than folly is their labor made  
Who cleft the rocks that this might rise on high!

Yet, as I look, I see a woman's face  
Gleam from a window far above the street.  
This is a house of homes, a sacred place,  
By human passion made divinely sweet.  
How all the building thrills with sudden grace  
Beneath the magic of Love's golden feet!

Joyce Kilmer

# The Ballade Of Butterflies

Because we never build a nest  
And no one of us ever sings,  
We are the butt of every jest  
That strutting loud-mouthed robin flings.  
Unless the field with laughter rings  
And we are meek in our replies  
His claws and beak to bear he brings;  
Have pity on all butterflies!

Since we are of no home possessed,  
And have no joy in courts and kings,  
And love on working-days to rest,  
The name of 'Idlers' to us clings.  
On all our gypsy travellings  
They follow us with jeering cries.  
From every rose a spider springs;  
Have pity on all butterflies!

A little thing is our request-  
Some peace from nets of sticks and strings,  
An hour to feel the sunlight's zest,  
To 'scape the deadly bee that stings.  
From hostile fortune's bolts and slings  
Give us release ere Summer dies-  
We dread the Winter's threatenings;  
Have pity on all butterflies!

L'ENVOI

Great Pan, kind lord of living things,  
Look on us now with friendly eyes.  
We pray to you on trembling wings,  
Have pity on all butterflies!

Joyce Kilmer

# The Big Top

The boom and blare of the big brass band is cheering  
to my heart

And I like the smell of the trampled grass and elephants and hay.  
I take off my hat to the acrobat with his delicate, strong art,  
And the motley mirth of the chalk-faced clown drives all my care  
away.

I wish I could feel as they must feel, these players  
brave and fair,

Who nonchalantly juggle death before a staring throng.

It must be fine to walk a line of silver in the air

And to cleave a hundred feet of space with a gesture like a song.

Sir Henry Irving never knew a keener, sweeter thrill

Than that which stirs the breast of him who turns his painted face

To the circling crowd who laugh aloud and clap hands with a will

As a tribute to the clown who won the great wheel-barrow race.

Now, one shall work in the living rock with a mallet  
and a knife,

And another shall dance on a big white horse that canters round  
a ring,

By another's hand shall colours stand in similitude of life;

And the hearts of the three shall be moved by one mysterious high  
thing.

For the sculptor and the acrobat and the painter  
are the same.

They know one hope, one fear, one pride, one sorrow and one mirth,  
And they take delight in the endless fight for the fickle world's  
acclaim;

For they worship art above the clouds and serve her on the earth.

But you, who can build of the stubborn rock no  
form of loveliness,

Who can never mingle the radiant hues to make a wonder live,

Who can only show your little woe to the world in a rhythmic dress

-

What kind of a counterpart of you does the three-ring circus give?

Well - here in the little side-show tent to-day

some people stand,

One is a giant, one a dwarf, and one has a figured skin,

And each is scarred and seared and marred by Fate's relentless hand,

And each one shows his grief for pay, with a sort of pride therein.

You put your sorrow into rhyme and want the world  
to look;  
You sing the news of your ruined hope and want the world to hear;  
Their woe is pent in a canvas tent and yours in a printed book.  
O, poet of the broken heart, salute your brothers here!□

Joyce Kilmer

# The Fourth Shepherd

(For Thomas Walsh)

I

On nights like this the huddled sheep  
Are like white clouds upon the grass,  
And merry herdsmen guard their sleep  
And chat and watch the big stars pass.

It is a pleasant thing to lie  
Upon the meadow on the hill  
With kindly fellowship near by  
Of sheep and men of gentle will.

I lean upon my broken crook  
And dream of sheep and grass and men --  
O shameful eyes that cannot look  
On any honest thing again!

On bloody feet I clambered down  
And fled the wages of my sin,  
I am the leavings of the town,  
And meanly serve its meanest inn.

I tramp the courtyard stones in grief,  
While sleep takes man and beast to her.  
And every cloud is calling "Thief!"  
And every star calls "Murderer!"

II

The hand of God is sure and strong,  
Nor shall a man forever flee  
The bitter punishment of wrong.  
The wrath of God is over me!

With ashen bread and wine of tears  
Shall I be solaced in my pain.

I wear through black and endless years  
Upon my brow the mark of Cain.

### III

Poor vagabond, so old and mild,  
Will they not keep him for a night?  
And She, a woman great with child,  
So frail and pitiful and white.

Good people, since the tavern door  
Is shut to you, come here instead.  
See, I have cleansed my stable floor  
And piled fresh hay to make a bed.

Here is some milk and oaten cake.  
Lie down and sleep and rest you fair,  
Nor fear, O simple folk, to take  
The bounty of a child of care.

### IV

On nights like this the huddled sheep --  
I never saw a night so fair.  
How huge the sky is, and how deep!  
And how the planets flash and glare!

At dawn beside my drowsy flock  
What winged music I have heard!  
But now the clouds with singing rock  
As if the sky were turning bird.

O blinding Light, O blinding Light!  
Burn through my heart with sweetest pain.  
O flaming Song, most loudly bright,  
Consume away my deadly stain!

### V

The stable glows against the sky,  
And who are these that throng the way?  
My three old comrades hasten by  
And shining angels kneel and pray.

The door swings wide -- I cannot go --  
I must and yet I dare not see.  
Lord, who am I that I should know --  
Lord, God, be merciful to me!

## VI

O Whiteness, whiter than the fleece  
Of new-washed sheep on April sod!  
O Breath of Life, O Prince of Peace,  
O Lamb of God, O Lamb of God!

Joyce Kilmer

# The House With Nobody In It

Whenever I walk to Suffern along the Erie track  
I go by a poor old farmhouse with its shingles broken and black.  
I suppose I've passed it a hundred times, but I always stop for a minute  
And look at the house, the tragic house, the house with nobody in it.

I never have seen a haunted house, but I hear there are such things;  
That they hold the talk of spirits, their mirth and sorrowings.  
I know this house isn't haunted, and I wish it were, I do;  
For it wouldn't be so lonely if it had a ghost or two.

This house on the road to Suffern needs a dozen panes of glass,  
And somebody ought to weed the walk and take a scythe to the grass.  
It needs new paint and shingles, and the vines should be trimmed and tied;  
But what it needs the most of all is some people living inside.

If I had a lot of money and all my debts were paid  
I'd put a gang of men to work with brush and saw and spade.  
I'd buy that place and fix it up the way it used to be  
And I'd find some people who wanted a home and give it to them free.

Now, a new house standing empty, with staring window and door,  
Looks idle, perhaps, and foolish, like a hat on its block in the store.  
But there's nothing mournful about it; it cannot be sad and lone  
For the lack of something within it that it has never known.

But a house that has done what a house should do,  
a house that has sheltered life,  
That has put its loving wooden arms around a man and his wife,  
A house that has echoed a baby's laugh and held up his stumbling feet,  
Is the saddest sight, when it's left alone, that ever your eyes could meet.

So whenever I go to Suffern along the Erie track  
I never go by the empty house without stopping and looking back,  
Yet it hurts me to look at the crumbling roof and the shutters fallen apart,  
For I can't help thinking the poor old house is a house with a broken heart.

Joyce Kilmer

# The New School

The halls that were loud with the merry tread of young and careless feet  
Are still with a stillness that is too drear to seem like holiday,  
And never a gust of laughter breaks the calm of the dreaming street  
Or rises to shake the ivied walls and frighten the doves away.

The dust is on book and on empty desk, and the tennis-racquet and balls  
Lie still in their lonely locker and wait for a game that is never played,  
And over the study and lecture-room and the river and meadow falls  
A stern peace, a strange peace, a peace that War has made.

For many a youthful shoulder now is gay with an epaulet,  
And the hand that was deft with a cricket-bat is defter with a sword,  
And some of the lads will laugh to-day where the trench is red and wet,  
And some will win on the bloody field the accolade of the Lord.

They have taken their youth and mirth away  
from the study and playing-ground  
To a new school in an alien land beneath an alien sky;  
Out in the smoke and roar of the fight their lessons and games are found,  
And they who were learning how to live are learning how to die.

And after the golden day has come and the war is at an end,  
A slab of bronze on the chapel wall will tell of the noble dead.  
And every name on that radiant list will be the name of a friend,  
A name that shall through the centuries in grateful prayers be said.

And there will be ghosts in the old school,  
brave ghosts with laughing eyes,  
On the field with a ghostly cricket-bat, by the stream with a ghostly rod;  
They will touch the hearts of the living with a flame that sanctifies,  
A flame that they took with strong young hands  
from the altar-fires of God.

Joyce Kilmer

# The Rosary

Not on the lute, nor harp of many strings  
Shall all men praise the Master of all song.  
Our life is brief, one saith, and art is long;  
And skilled must be the laureates of kings.  
Silent, O lips that utter foolish things!  
Rest, awkward fingers striking all notes wrong!  
How from your toil shall issue, white and strong,  
Music like that God's chosen poet sings?

There is one harp that any hand can play,  
And from its strings what harmonies arise!  
There is one song that any mouth can say, --  
A song that lingers when all singing dies.  
When on their beads our Mother's children pray  
Immortal music charms the grateful skies.

Joyce Kilmer

# The Snowman In The Yard

Joyce Kilmer

# The Subway

Tired clerks, pale girls, street cleaners, business men,  
Boys, priests and harlots, drunkards, students, thieves,  
Each one the pleasant outer sunshine leaves;  
They mingle in this stifling, loud-wheeled pen.  
The gate clangs to- we stir- we sway- and then  
We thunder through the dark. The long train weaves  
Its gloomy way. At last above the eaves  
We see awhile God's day, then night again.

Hurled through the dark- day at Manhattan Street,  
The rest all night. That is my life, it seems.  
Through sunless ways go my reluctant feet.  
The sunlight comes in transitory gleams.  
And yet the darkness makes the light more sweet,  
The perfect light about me- in my dreams.

Joyce Kilmer

# The Twelve-Forty-Five

(For Edward J. Wheeler)

Within the Jersey City shed  
The engine coughs and shakes its head,  
The smoke, a plume of red and white,  
Waves madly in the face of night.  
And now the grave incurious stars  
Gleam on the groaning hurrying cars.  
Against the kind and awful reign  
Of darkness, this our angry train,  
A noisy little rebel, pouts  
Its brief defiance, flames and shouts --  
And passes on, and leaves no trace.  
For darkness holds its ancient place,  
Serene and absolute, the king  
Unchanged, of every living thing.  
The houses lie obscure and still  
In Rutherford and Carlton Hill.  
Our lamps intensify the dark  
Of slumbering Passaic Park.  
And quiet holds the weary feet  
That daily tramp through Prospect Street.  
What though we clang and clank and roar  
Through all Passaic's streets? No door  
Will open, not an eye will see  
Who this loud vagabond may be.  
Upon my crimson cushioned seat,  
In manufactured light and heat,  
I feel unnatural and mean.  
Outside the towns are cool and clean;  
Curtained awhile from sound and sight  
They take God's gracious gift of night.  
The stars are watchful over them.  
On Clifton as on Bethlehem  
The angels, leaning down the sky,  
Shed peace and gentle dreams. And I --  
I ride, I blasphemously ride  
Through all the silent countryside.  
The engine's shriek, the headlight's glare,

Pollute the still nocturnal air.  
The cottages of Lake View sigh  
And sleeping, frown as we pass by.  
Why, even strident Paterson  
Rests quietly as any nun.  
Her foolish warring children keep  
The grateful armistice of sleep.  
For what tremendous errand's sake  
Are we so blatantly awake?  
What precious secret is our freight?  
What king must be abroad so late?  
Perhaps Death roams the hills to-night  
And we rush forth to give him fight.  
Or else, perhaps, we speed his way  
To some remote unthinking prey.  
Perhaps a woman writhes in pain  
And listens -- listens for the train!  
The train, that like an angel sings,  
The train, with healing on its wings.  
Now "Hawthorne!" the conductor cries.  
My neighbor starts and rubs his eyes.  
He hurries yawning through the car  
And steps out where the houses are.  
This is the reason of our quest!  
Not wantonly we break the rest  
Of town and village, nor do we  
Lightly profane night's sanctity.  
What Love commands the train fulfill,  
And beautiful upon the hills  
Are these our feet of burnished steel.  
Subtly and certainly I feel  
That Glen Rock welcomes us to her  
And silent Ridgewood seems to stir  
And smile, because she knows the train  
Has brought her children back again.  
We carry people home -- and so  
God speeds us, wheresoe'er we go.  
Hohokus, Waldwick, Allendale  
Lift sleepy heads to give us hail.  
In Ramsey, Mahwah, Suffern stand  
Houses that wistfully demand  
A father -- son -- some human thing

That this, the midnight train, may bring.  
The trains that travel in the day  
They hurry folks to work or play.  
The midnight train is slow and old  
But of it let this thing be told,  
To its high honor be it said  
It carries people home to bed.  
My cottage lamp shines white and clear.  
God bless the train that brought me here.

Joyce Kilmer

# The White Ships And The Red

(For Alden March)

With drooping sail and pennant  
That never a wind may reach,  
They float in sunless waters  
Beside a sunless beach.  
Their mighty masts and funnels  
Are white as driven snow,  
And with a pallid radiance  
Their ghostly bulwarks glow.

Here is a Spanish galleon  
That once with gold was gay,  
Here is a Roman trireme  
Whose hues outshone the day.  
But Tyrian dyes have faded,  
And prows that once were bright  
With rainbow stains wear only  
Death's livid, dreadful white.

White as the ice that clove her  
That unforgotten day,  
Among her pallid sisters  
The grim Titanic lay.  
And through the leagues above her  
She looked aghast, and said:  
"What is this living ship that comes  
Where every ship is dead?"

The ghostly vessels trembled  
From ruined stern to prow;  
What was this thing of terror  
That broke their vigil now?  
Down through the startled ocean  
A mighty vessel came,  
Not white, as all dead ships must be,  
But red, like living flame!

The pale green waves about her

Were swiftly, strangely dyed,  
By the great scarlet stream that flowed  
From out her wounded side.  
And all her decks were scarlet  
And all her shattered crew.  
She sank among the white ghost ships  
And stained them through and through.

The grim Titanic greeted her  
"And who art thou?" she said;  
"Why dost thou join our ghostly fleet  
Arrayed in living red?  
We are the ships of sorrow  
Who spend the weary night,  
Until the dawn of Judgment Day,  
Obscure and still and white."

"Nay," said the scarlet visitor,  
"Though I sink through the sea,  
A ruined thing that was a ship,  
I sink not as did ye.  
For ye met with your destiny  
By storm or rock or fight,  
So through the lagging centuries  
Ye wear your robes of white.

"But never crashing iceberg  
Nor honest shot of foe,  
Nor hidden reef has sent me  
The way that I must go.  
My wound that stains the waters,  
My blood that is like flame,  
Bear witness to a loathly deed,  
A deed without a name.

"I went not forth to battle,  
I carried friendly men,  
The children played about my decks,  
The women sang -- and then --  
And then -- the sun blushed scarlet  
And Heaven hid its face,  
The world that God created

Became a shameful place!

"My wrong cries out for vengeance,  
The blow that sent me here  
Was aimed in Hell. My dying scream  
Has reached Jehovah's ear.  
Not all the seven oceans  
Shall wash away that stain;  
Upon a brow that wears a crown  
I am the brand of Cain."

When God's great voice assembles  
The fleet on Judgment Day,  
The ghosts of ruined ships will rise  
In sea and strait and bay.  
Though they have lain for ages  
Beneath the changeless flood,  
They shall be white as silver,  
But one -- shall be like blood.

Joyce Kilmer

# To A Blackbird And His Mate Who Died In The Spring

(For Kenton)

An iron hand has stilled the throats  
That throbbed with loud and rhythmic glee  
And dammed the flood of silver notes  
That drenched the world in melody.  
The blosmy apple boughs are yearning  
For their wild choristers' returning,  
But no swift wings flash through the tree.

Ye that were glad and fleet and strong,  
Shall Silence take you in her net?  
And shall Death quell that radiant song  
Whose echo thrills the meadow yet?  
Burst the frail web about you clinging  
And charm Death's cruel heart with singing  
Till with strange tears his eyes are wet.

The scented morning of the year  
Is old and stale now ye are gone.  
No friendly songs the children hear  
Among the bushes on the lawn.  
When babies wander out a-Maying  
Will ye, their bards, afar be straying?  
Unhymned by you, what is the dawn?

Nay, since ye loved ye cannot die.  
Above the stars is set your nest.  
Through Heaven's fields ye sing and fly  
And in the trees of Heaven rest.  
And little children in their dreaming  
Shall see your soft black plumage gleaming  
And smile, by your clear music blest.

Joyce Kilmer

# To A Young Poet Who Killed Himself

1 When you had played with life a space  
2 And made it drink and lust and sing,  
3 You flung it back into God's face  
4 And thought you did a noble thing.  
5 "Lo, I have lived and loved," you said,  
6 "And sung to fools too dull to hear me.  
7 Now for a cool and grassy bed  
8 With violets in blossom near me."

9 Well, rest is good for weary feet,  
10 Although they ran for no great prize;  
11 And violets are very sweet,  
12 Although their roots are in your eyes.  
13 But hark to what the earthworms say  
14 Who share with you your muddy haven:  
15 "The fight was on -- you ran away.  
16 You are a coward and a craven."

17 "The rug is ruined where you bled;  
18 It was a dirty way to die!  
19 To put a bullet through your head  
20 And make a silly woman cry!  
21 You could not vex the merry stars  
22 Nor make them heed you, dead or living.  
23 Not all your puny anger mars  
24 God's irresistible forgiving.

25 "Yes, God forgives and men forget,  
26 And you're forgiven and forgotten.  
27 You may be gaily sinning yet  
28 And quick and fresh instead of rotten.  
29 And when you think of love and fame  
30 And all that might have come to pass,  
31 Then don't you feel a little shame?  
32 And don't you think you were an ass?"

Joyce Kilmer

# To Certain Poets

Now is the rhymer's honest trade  
A thing for scornful laughter made.

The merchant's sneer, the clerk's disdain,  
These are the burden of our pain.

Because of you did this befall,  
You brought this shame upon us all.

You little poets mincing there  
With women's hearts and women's hair!

How sick Dan Chaucer's ghost must be  
To hear you lisp of "Poesie"!

A heavy-handed blow, I think,  
Would make your veins drip scented ink.

You strut and smirk your little while  
So mildly, delicately vile!

Your tiny voices mock God's wrath,  
You snails that crawl along His path!

Why, what has God or man to do  
With wet, amorphous things like you?

This thing alone you have achieved:  
Because of you, it is believed

That all who earn their bread by rhyme  
Are like yourselves, exuding slime.

Oh, cease to write, for very shame,  
Ere all men spit upon our name!

Take up your needles, drop your pen,  
And leave the poet's craft to men!



# Trees

I think that I shall never see□  
A poem lovely as a tree.□

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest□  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast; □

A tree that looks at God all day,□  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray; □

A tree that may in summer wear□  
A nest of robins in her hair; □

Upon whose bosom snow has lain; □  
Who intimately lives with rain.□

Poems are made by fools like me,□  
But only God can make a tree.

Joyce Kilmer

# Vision

(For Aline)

Homer, they tell us, was blind and could not see the beautiful faces  
Looking up into his own and reflecting the joy of his dream,  
Yet did he seem  
Gifted with eyes that could follow the gods to their holiest places.

I have no vision of gods, not of Eros with love-arrows laden,  
Jupiter thundering death or of Juno his white-breasted queen,  
Yet have I seen  
All of the joy of the world in the innocent heart of a maiden.

Joyce Kilmer

# Waverley

1814-1914

When, on a novel's newly printed page  
We find a maudlin eulogy of sin,  
And read of ways that harlots wander in,  
And of sick souls that writhe in helpless rage;  
Or when Romance, bespectacled and sage,  
Taps on her desk and bids the class begin  
To con the problems that have always been  
Perplexed mankind's unhappy heritage;

Then in what robes of honor habited  
The laureled wizard of the North appears!  
Who raised Prince Charlie's cohorts from the dead,  
Made Rose's mirth and Flora's noble tears,  
And formed that shining legion at whose head  
Rides Waverley, triumphant o'er the years!

Joyce Kilmer

# Wealth

(For Aline)

From what old ballad, or from what rich frame  
Did you descend to glorify the earth?  
Was it from Chaucer's singing book you came?  
Or did Watteau's small brushes give you birth?

Nothing so exquisite as that slight hand  
Could Raphael or Leonardo trace.  
Nor could the poets know in Fairyland  
The changing wonder of your lyric face.

I would possess a host of lovely things,  
But I am poor and such joys may not be.  
So God who lifts the poor and humbles kings  
Sent loveliness itself to dwell with me.

Joyce Kilmer