

= Joyce Kilmer =

Joyce Kilmer (born as Alfred Joyce Kilmer ; December 6 , 1886 ? July 30 , 1918) was an American writer and poet mainly remembered for a short poem titled " Trees " (1913) , which was published in the collection *Trees and Other Poems* in 1914 . Though a prolific poet whose works celebrated the common beauty of the natural world as well as his Roman Catholic religious faith , Kilmer was also a journalist , literary critic , lecturer , and editor . While most of his works are largely unknown , a select few of his poems remain popular and are published frequently in anthologies . Several critics ? including both Kilmer 's contemporaries and modern scholars ? have disparaged Kilmer 's work as being too simple and overly sentimental , and suggested that his style was far too traditional , even archaic . Many writers , including notably Ogden Nash , have parodied Kilmer 's work and style ? as attested by the many parodies of " Trees " .

At the time of his deployment to Europe during World War I , Kilmer was considered the leading American Roman Catholic poet and lecturer of his generation , whom critics often compared to British contemporaries G. K. Chesterton (1874 ? 1936) and Hilaire Belloc (1870 ? 1953) . He enlisted in the New York National Guard and was deployed to France with the 69th Infantry Regiment (the famous " Fighting 69th ") in 1917 . He was killed by a sniper 's bullet at the Second Battle of the Marne in 1918 at the age of 31 . He was married to Aline Murray , also an accomplished poet and author , with whom he had five children .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early years and education : 1886 ? 1908 = = =

Kilmer was born December 6 , 1886 in New Brunswick , New Jersey , the fourth and youngest child , of Annie Ellen Kilburn (1849 ? 1932) , a minor writer and composer , 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 . He was named Alfred Joyce Kilmer after two priests at Christ Church in New Brunswick : Alfred R. Taylor , the curate ; and the Rev. Dr. Elisha Brooks Joyce (1857 ? 1926) , the rector . Christ Church is the oldest Episcopal parish in New Brunswick and the Kilmer family were parishioners . Rector Joyce , who served the parish from 1883 to 1916 , baptised the young Kilmer , who remained an Episcopalian until his 1913 conversion to Catholicism . 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 Rutgers College Grammar School (now Rutgers Preparatory School) in 1895 at the age of 8 . During his years at the Grammar School , Kilmer was editor @-@ in @-@ chief of the school 's paper , the *Argo* , and loved the classics but had difficulty with Greek . He won the first Lane Classical Prize , for oratory , and obtained a scholarship to Rutgers College which he would attend the following year . Despite his difficulties with Greek and mathematics , he stood at the head of his class in preparatory school .

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

At Columbia , Kilmer was vice @-@ president of the Philolexian Society (a literary society) , associate editor of *Columbia Spectator* (the campus newspaper) , and member of the Debating Union . He completed his Bachelor of Arts (A.B.) degree and 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) .

= = = Years of writing and faith : 1909 ? 1917 = = =

In the autumn of 1908 , Kilmer was employed teaching Latin at Morristown High School in Morristown , New Jersey . At this time , he began to submit essays to Red Cross Notes (including his first published piece , an essay on the " Psychology of Advertising ") and his early poems to literary periodicals . Kilmer also wrote book reviews for The Literary Digest , Town & Country , The Nation , and The New York Times . By June 1909 , Kilmer had abandoned any aspirations to continue teaching and relocated to New York City , where he focused solely on developing a career as a writer .

From 1909 to 1912 , Kilmer was employed by Funk and Wagnalls , which was preparing an edition of The Standard Dictionary that would be published in 1912 . According to Hillis , Kilmer ' s job " was to define ordinary words assigned to him at five cents for each word defined . This was a job at which one would ordinarily earn ten to twelve dollars a week , but Kilmer attacked the task with such vigor and speed that it was soon thought wisest to put him on a regular salary . "

In 1911 , Kilmer ' s first book of verse was published , entitled Summer of Love . Kilmer would later write that " ... some of the poems in it , those inspired by genuine love , are not things of which to be ashamed , and you , understanding , would not be offended by the others . "

In 1912 , Kilmer became a special writer for the New York Times Review of Books and the New York Times Sunday Magazine and was often engaged in lecturing . He moved to Mahwah , New Jersey , where he resided until his service and death in World War I. By this time he had become established as a published poet and as a popular lecturer . According to Robert Holliday , Kilmer " frequently neglected to make any preparation for his speeches , not even choosing a subject until the beginning of the dinner which was to culminate in a specimen of his oratory . His constant research for the dictionary , and , later on , for his New York Times articles , must have given him a store of knowledge at his fingertips to be produced at a moment ' s notice for these emergencies . "

When the Kilmers ' daughter Rose (1912 ? 1917) was stricken with poliomyelitis (also known as infantile paralysis) shortly after birth , they turned to their religious faith for comfort . A series of correspondence between Kilmer and Father James J. Daly led the Kilmers to convert to Roman Catholicism , and they were received in the church in 1913 . In one of these letters Kilmer writes that he " believed in the Catholic position , the Catholic view of ethics and aesthetics , for a long time , " and he " wanted something not intellectual , some conviction not mental ? in fact I wanted Faith . " Kilmer would stop " every morning for months " on his way " to the office and prayed for faith , " claiming that when " faith did come , it came , I think , by way of my little paralyzed daughter . Her lifeless hands led me ; I think her tiny feet know beautiful paths . You understand this and it gives me a selfish pleasure to write it down . "

With the publication of " Trees " in the magazine Poetry in August 1913 , Kilmer gained immense popularity as a poet across the United States . He had established himself as a successful lecturer ? particularly one seeking to reach a Catholic audience . His close friend and editor Robert Holliday wrote that it " is not an unsupported assertion to say that he was in his time and place the laureate of the Catholic Church . " Trees and Other Poems (1914) was published the following year . Over the next few years , Kilmer was prolific in his output , managing an intense schedule of lectures , publishing a large number of essays and literary criticism , and writing poetry . In 1915 he became poetry editor of Current Literature and contributing editor of Warner ' s Library of the World ' s Best Literature . In 1916 and 1917 , before the American entry into World War I , Kilmer would publish four books : The Circus and Other Essays (1916) , a series of interviews with literary personages entitled Literature in the Making (1917) , Main Street and Other Poems (1917) , and Dreams and Images : An Anthology of Catholic Poets (1917) .

== War years : 1917 ? 1918 ==

In April 1917 , a few days after the United States entered World War I , Kilmer enlisted in the Seventh Regiment of the New York National Guard . In August , Kilmer was assigned as a statistician with the U.S. 69th Infantry Regiment (better known as the " Fighting 69th " and later re-designated 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 .

Shortly before his deployment to Europe , the Kilmers ' daughter Rose had died , and twelve days later , their son Christopher was born . 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 . The regiment arrived in France in November 1917 , and Kilmer wrote to his wife that he had 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 . " Kilmer did not write such a book ; however , toward the end of the year , he did find time to write prose sketches and poetry . The most notable of his poems during this period was " Rouge Bouquet " (1918) which commemorated the deaths of two dozen members of his regiment in a German artillery barrage on American trench positions in the Rouge Bouquet forest north-east of the French village of Baccarat . At the time , this was a relatively quiet sector of the front , but the first battalion was struck by a German heavy artillery bombardment on the afternoon of March 7 , 1918 that buried 21 men of the unit , killing 19 (of which 14 remained entombed) .

Kilmer sought more hazardous duty and was transferred to the military intelligence section of his regiment , in April 1918 . In a letter to his wife , Aline , he remarked : " 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 fellow soldiers had accorded him much respect for his battlefield demeanour ? " 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 . "

== Death and burial ==

During the Second Battle of Marne there was heavy fighting throughout the last days of July 1918 . On July 30 , 1918 , Kilmer volunteered to accompany Major " Wild Bill " Donovan (later , in World War II , the founder of the Office of Strategic Services , forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency) when Donovan 's battalion (1 ? 165th Infantry) 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 Francis P. 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 . ? A sniper 's bullet likely killed him immediately . According to military records , Kilmer died on the battlefield near Muercy Farm , beside the Ourcq River near the village of Seringes-et-Nesles , in France , on July 30 , 1918 at the age of 31 . For his valor , Kilmer was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre (War Cross) by the French Republic .

Kilmer was buried in the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery and Memorial , near Fere-en-Tardenois , Aisne , Picardy , France . A cenotaph erected to his memory is located on the Kilmer family plot in Elmwood Cemetery , in New Brunswick , New Jersey . A Memorial Mass was celebrated at St. Patrick 's Cathedral in Manhattan on October 14 , 1918 .

== Criticism and influence ==

= = = " Trees " = = =

Joyce Kilmer 's reputation as a poet is staked largely on the widespread popularity of one poem ? " Trees " (1913) . It was first published in the August 1913 issue of Poetry : A Magazine of Verse which had begun publishing the year before in Chicago , Illinois and was included as the title poem in a collection of poems Trees and Other Poems (1914) . According to Kilmer 's oldest son , Kenton , the poem was written on February 2 , 1913 when the family resided in Mahwah , New Jersey .

It was written in the afternoon in the intervals of some other writing . The desk was in an upstairs room , by a window looking down a wooded hill . It was written in a little notebook in which his father and mother wrote out copies of several of their poems , and , in most cases , added the date of composition . On one page the first two lines of ' Trees ' appear , with the date , February 2 , 1913 , and on another page , further on in the book , is the full text of the poem . It was dedicated to his wife 's mother , Mrs. Henry Mills Alden , who was endeared to all her family .

Many locations including Rutgers University (where Kilmer attended for two years) , University of Notre Dame , as well as historians in Mahwah , New Jersey and in other places , have boasted that a specific tree was the inspiration for Kilmer 's poem . However , Kenton Kilmer refutes these claims , remarking that ,

Mother and I agreed , when we talked about it , that Dad never meant his poem to apply to one particular tree , or to the trees of any special region . Just any trees or all trees that might be rained on or snowed on , and that would be suitable nesting places for robins . I guess they 'd have to have upward @-@ reaching branches , too , for the line about ' lifting leafy arms to pray . ' Rule out weeping willows . "

The popular appeal of this simple poem is likely the source of its endurance despite the continuing negative opinion of the poem 's merits from scholars and critics . According to Robert Holliday , Kilmer 's friend and editor , " Trees " speaks " with authentic song to the simplest of hearts " and that " (t) he exquisite title poem now so universally known , made his reputation more than all the rest he had written put together . That impeccable lyric which made for immediate widespread popularity . " Its popularity has also led to parodies of the poem ? some by noted poets and writers . The pattern of its first lines (I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree .) is of seemingly simple rhyme and meter and easy to mimic along with the poem 's choice of metaphors . One of the best known parodies is " Song of the Open Road " by American humorist and poet Ogden Nash (1902 ? 1971) :

I think that I shall never see
A billboard lovely as a tree .
Indeed , unless the billboards fall ,
I 'll never see a tree at all .

= = = Influences upon Kilmer 's verse = = =

Kilmer 's early works were inspired by , and were imitative of , the poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne , Gerard Manley Hopkins , Ernest Dowson , Aubrey Beardsley , and William Butler Yeats (and the Celtic Revival) . It was later through the influence of works by Coventry Patmore , Francis Thompson , and those of Alice Meynell and her children Viola Meynell and Francis Meynell , that Kilmer seems to have become interested in Catholicism . Kilmer wrote of his influences :

I have come to regard them with intense admiration . Patmore seems to me to be a greater poet than Francis Thompson . He has not the rich vocabulary , the decorative erudition , the Shelleyan enthusiasm , which distinguish the Sister Songs and the Hound of Heaven , but he has a classical simplicity , a restraint and sincerity which make his poems satisfying .

Because he was initially raised Episcopalian (or Anglican) , Kilmer became literary editor of the Anglican weekly , The Churchman , before his conversion to Catholicism . During this time he did considerable research into 16th and 17th century Anglican poets as well as metaphysical , or mystic

poets of that time , including George Herbert , Thomas Traherne , Robert Herrick , Bishop Coxe , and Robert Stephen Hawker (the eccentric vicar of the Church of Saint Morwenna and Saint John the Baptist at Morwenstow in Cornwall) ? the latter whom he referred to as " a coast life @-@ guard in a cassock . " These poets also had an influence on Kilmer 's writings .

Critics compared Kilmer to British Catholic writers Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton ? suggesting that his reputation might have risen to the level where he would have been considered their American counterpart if not for his untimely death .

= = = Criticism of Kilmer 's work = = =

Kilmer 's death at age 31 removed from him the opportunity to develop into a more mature poet . Because " Trees " is often dismissed by modern critics and scholars as simple verse , much of Kilmer 's work (especially his literary criticism) has slipped into obscurity . Only a very few of his poems have appeared in anthologies , and with the exception of " Trees " ? and to a much lesser extent " Rouge Bouquet " (1917 ? 1918) ? almost none have obtained lasting widespread popularity .

The entire corpus of Kilmer 's work was produced between 1909 and 1918 when Romanticism and sentimental lyric poetry fell out of favor and Modernism took root ? especially with the influence of the Lost Generation . In the years after Kilmer 's death , poetry went in drastically different directions , as is seen especially in the work of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound . Kilmer 's verse is conservative and traditional , and does not break the formal rules of poetics ? he can be considered as one of the last poets of the Romantic era . His style has been criticized for not breaking free of traditional modes of rhyme , meter , and theme , and for being too sentimental to be taken seriously .

= = Works = =

1911 : Summer of Love (poetry)

1914 : Trees and Other Poems (poetry)

1916 : The Circus and Other Essays (essays)

1917 : Main Street and Other Poems . (poetry)

1917 : The Courage of Enlightenment : An address delivered in Campion College , Prairie du Chien , Wisconsin , to the members of the graduating class , June 15 , 1917 .

1917 : Dreams and Images : An Anthology of Catholic Poets . (poetry anthology , edited by Kilmer)

1917 : Literature in the Making by some of its Makers (criticism)

1918 : Poems , Essays and Letters in Two Volumes Volume One : Memoir and Poems , Volume Two : prose works (collected works) (published posthumously , edited by Robert Cortes Holliday)

1919 : Kilmer 's unfinished history of the Fighting 69th (165th Infantry) is posthumously printed in Father Duffy 's Story by Francis P. Duffy (New York : Doran , 1919) .

1921 : The Circus and Other Essays and Fugitive Pieces (published posthumously)