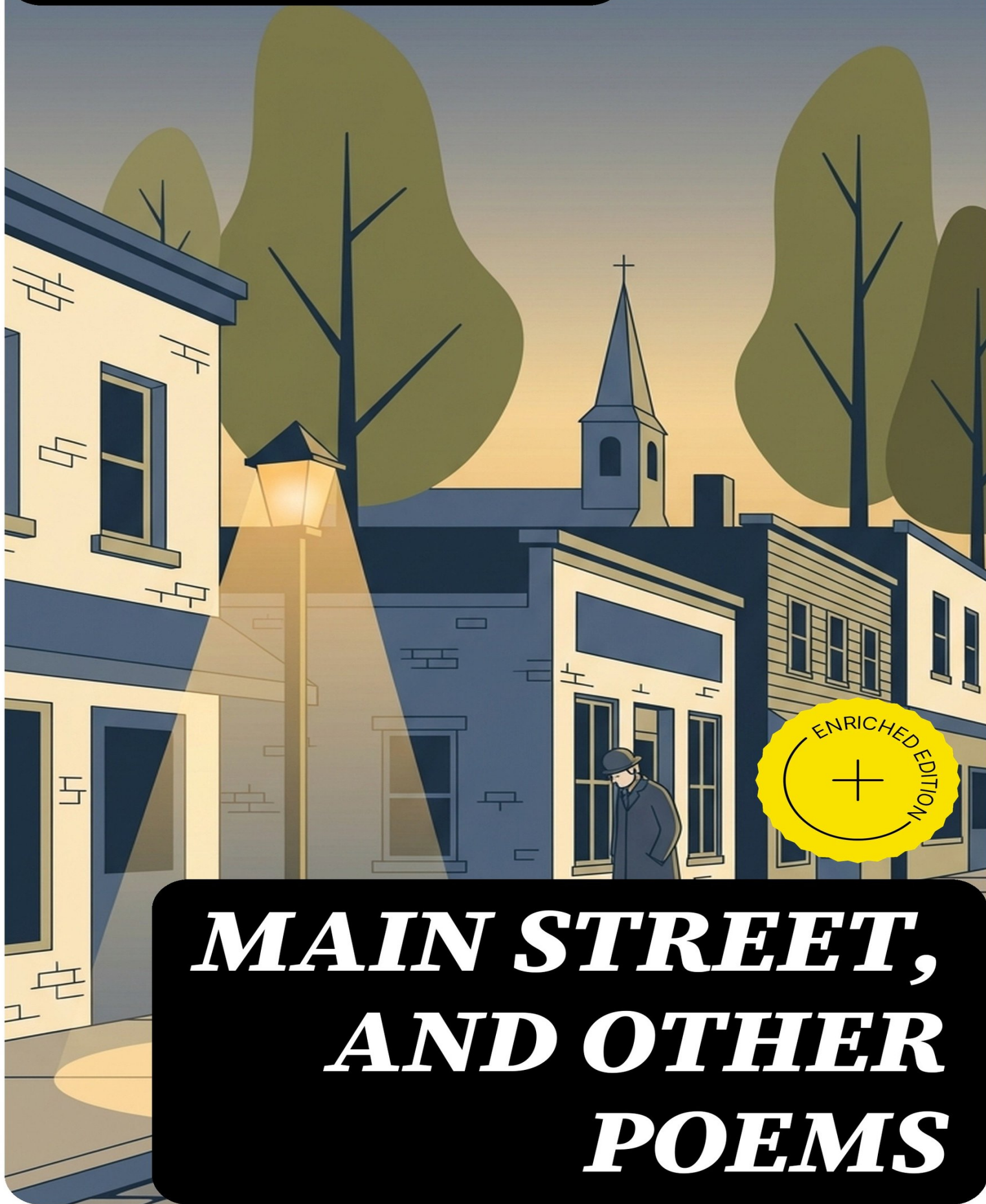


JOYCE KILMER



***MAIN STREET,
AND OTHER
POEMS***

Joyce Kilmer

Main Street, and Other Poems

Enriched edition.

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Sydney
Caldwell*

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Introduction

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Main Street, and Other Poems is a single-author collection of lyric verse by Joyce Kilmer, first published in 1917. It gathers poems written in the years surrounding the First World War and arranges them as a varied yet coherent testament to Kilmer's vision. The volume's scope is not encyclopedic but representative: it presents original poems alongside one translation, and assembles occasional pieces, memorials, and meditations whose subjects range from city streets to sacred mysteries. The title poem supplies a civic axis, while the remaining pieces radiate outward through personal dedications, shaping a portrait of the poet's friendships, affections, and public concerns during a formative period.

All the texts herein are poems, though they adopt several modes. Readers will find intimate love lyrics such as A Blue Valentine and Houses; domestic and seasonal vignettes like The Snowman in the Yard; reflective urban pieces including Main Street and Roofs; and character or historical studies like Queen Elizabeth Speaks. The book also includes elegies and tributes—In Memory, Lionel Johnson, Father Gerard Hopkins, S. J.—and a translation, The Cathedral of

Rheims (from the French of Emile Verhaeren). Together these modes show Kilmer practicing hymn, ode, monologue, and occasional verse within a recognizably musical, metrical and rhymed tradition.

Throughout the collection, unifying themes emerge from the ordinary. Kilmer treats houses, gates, doors, roofs, roses, and streets as occasions for praise and moral attention. The dedications—For Aline, For S. M. L., For Amelia Josephine Burr, among others—anchor the poems in friendship and family life without narrowing their address. Love, gratitude, and humility order his gaze; even playful pieces like *The Big Top* keep faith with an underlying respect for creation. The result is a poetry of attention, seeking the beautiful and the good in common sights, and articulating how the familiar becomes luminous under a meditative, attentive eye.

The book also registers the pressures of a violent era. *Mid-ocean in War-time*, *The White Ships and the Red*, and *The Cathedral of Rheims* bear witness to conflict and its ravages upon sea and sanctuary. *In Memory of Rupert Brooke* and *Easter Week* (in memory of Joseph Mary Plunkett) extend that witness to kindred poets and patriots, setting elegy beside admiration. Other public pieces—*Kings*, and *Queen Elizabeth Speaks*—measure leadership against historical testing. Kilmer's approach to these subjects remains decorous and ardent: he prefers clear statement to ornament, and consolation to despair, yet he does not evade the sorrow his themes require.

A distinctly religious imagination shapes many pages. The Robe of Christ, The Annunciation, The Visitation, and related poems engage Christian doctrine and devotion directly, while Gates and Doors and Thanksgiving consider gratitude, vocation, and grace in more everyday registers. Dedications to clergy and fellow Catholic writers—among them the Rev. John J. Burke, S. J., the Rev. Edward F. Garesche, S. J., and the Rev. Charles L. O'Donnell, C. S. C.—situate Kilmer within a living conversation. His commemorations of Lionel Johnson and Father Gerard Hopkins, S. J., acknowledge artistic lineage, even as his style favors clarity and ordered music over experiment.

Kilmer's stylistic signatures are consistent and deliberate: regular meters, end-rhyme, plain diction, and a candid, ceremonious tone. The Proud Poet and Apology disclose his self-understanding as a craftsman of public feeling; Roses and Multiplication model his capacity for delight; Houses and Roofs demonstrate the art of finding symbol in structure without abstraction. Dramatic pieces such as Queen Elizabeth Speaks show his ear for persona, while Kings distills public conscience into measured counsel. The translation from Verhaeren broadens his reach, yet his center remains the local and the loved, rendered with piety, balance, and a preference for memorable, singable cadence.

As a whole, *Main Street, and Other Poems* offers an essential view of Joyce Kilmer's mature voice: American, urbane, devotional, and responsive to

history. It follows his earlier success with a volume that binds affection to duty and private gratitude to public witness. The collection's variety—love songs, city meditations, tributes, religious lyrics, wartime reflections, and a translation—reveals a single temperament committed to honoring the real. Its ongoing significance lies in that fidelity. These poems invite readers to recognize moral radiance in common places and steadfast courage amid upheaval, the very union that made Kilmer widely read in his own time and beyond.

Historical Context

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Main Street, and Other Poems appeared in New York in 1917, as the United States entered the First World War. Joyce Kilmer, born in 1886 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, had already achieved national recognition with *Trees* (1913) and had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1913. The new collection balances intimate, domestic affections with a widening geopolitical horizon. Its title piece, together with poems of roofs and houses, evokes the ethos of small-town America at a moment of rapid transformation. Yet dedications to friends, family, and clerics signal a community-based poetics, anchoring local sentiment while the nation mobilized and transatlantic events pressed inward.

In the 1910s, American urbanization and mass culture accelerated, centered in cities like New York where Kilmer worked as a journalist and editor after brief employment with Funk and Wagnalls. Against the glitter of department stores and skyscrapers, his poems cherish parlors, porches, and the rhythmic patterns of ordinary speech. Pieces dedicated to his wife Aline—such as *A Blue Valentine* and *Houses*—frame domestic love as a bulwark against dislocation. *Main Street* likewise idealizes neighborliness as a