Elegy for Joyce Kilmer Belleau Woods, July 30, 1918

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Elegy for Joyce Kilmer
Belleau Woods, July 30, 1918
by Margaret Berg

The oak woods reached toward the
Sky, in whose blue pastures grazed
High cirrus clouds the size and shape
The French peasants called God’s lambs.

He did not feel the wingless bee as it
Stung, and when he fell, it was between
The great roots of an oak tree, spread
Like the legs of a woman in labor, a breech.
He lay, his cheek on the soft green moss
And he could smell leaves and humus, mush-
Rooms and truffles, the quiet, last night’s
Rain and the cool ferns; while the sunlight
Stenciled his khaki uniform with patterns
Of leaves as he melted away into the forest.
He became the trees, the leaves and branches,
One tree, a poem. His thoughts circled the
Oak tree like a wild grape vine, and followed
The paths in the bark, up through the leaves
And branches into the light, circled up

And reached toward the sky, in whose blue pastures
grazed the high cirrus clouds the size and shape
The French peasants called God’s flock of lambs.