

Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

78

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 78

Michelle Lee
Project Editor

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Preface

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PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Thomson Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips, 32-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*. Vol. 63, edited by Michelle Lee, 34-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005.

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John Masfield

1878-1967

English poet, novelist, short story writer, autobiographer, playwright, essayist, critic, editor, and author of children's books.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most celebrated poets bridging the Victorian and Georgian periods of English literature, Masfield served as Poet Laureate of England for thirty-seven years, from 1930 until 1967.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Masfield was born June 1, 1878, in Ledbury, Herefordshire, England, and the countryside around his childhood home greatly influenced his later poetry. His mother died in childbirth when he was six and he was raised by various relatives who gave him free access to his grandfather's library; by his own account, he became a voracious reader. When his father died in 1891, Masfield left the King's School in Warwick, which he had attended for three years, and decided to become a sailor. He began training aboard a merchant-navy school ship, the *H. M. S. Conway*, which was his home for the next three years. He read a great deal while on board and became known among his shipmates for his storytelling abilities. In 1894 Masfield signed on as an apprentice aboard the *Gilcruix*, a ship of the White Star line, and underwent a stormy voyage around Cape Horn, an experience that inspired some of his later verse. His poor health led to his release from duty and his return to England. A year later, however, he set sail for New York, where he worked at a variety of odd jobs, from pot boy in a New York City bar to worker in a Yonkers carpet factory. In 1897 he returned once again to England, again in poor health. From 1898 to 1901 he worked as a bank clerk in London and began publishing his poetry in various periodicals, among them the *Outlook*, the *Tatler*, and the *Speaker*. He made the acquaintance of John Millington Synge, Lady Augusta Gregory, and William Butler Yeats, whose work he had long admired. In 1902 he published his first volume of poetry, *Salt-Water Ballads*, dedicated to Constance de la Cherois Crommelin, twelve years his senior; a year later the couple married and eventually had two children, Judith and Lewis. At the outbreak of World War I, Masfield enlisted as a medic and served on the

Western Front, although his age at the time would have made him exempt from service. He spent part of the war years on lecture tours of the United States, reporting back to the British government on the mood in America regarding the war and, on his second tour in 1918, encouraging the American troops who were about to join the conflict.

Although Masfield had little formal schooling, he was awarded honorary degrees from ten universities, including the University of Liverpool (1930), St. Andrews (1930), Cambridge University (1931), and the University of Wales (1932). In addition to the laureateship, he was awarded the Order of Merit in 1935 and in 1937 became the President of the Society of Authors. In America, where he had a great many admirers, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1930.

In the late 1940s, Masfield began to slow his normally hectic pace due to illness, although he remained mentally alert and intellectually curious for the rest of his life. His many interests included gardening and animal husbandry, music and, most especially, the ballet. He continued to produce poetry—although not with the frequency that characterized his earlier career—publishing his last volume of verse at the age of eighty-eight. His son Lewis had been killed in action in World War II and Masfield dedicated a volume of poetry, *On the Hill*, to him in 1949. His beloved wife Constance died in 1960 following a long illness, after which Masfield became increasingly reclusive. On May 12, 1967, a few weeks shy of his eighty-ninth birthday, Masfield died at Clifton Hampden, Oxfordshire. His ashes reside in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

MAJOR WORKS

Masfield's writing career spanned more than six decades, from the early years of the twentieth century to just before his death in 1967. During that time he published thirty volumes of poetry. His first, *Salt-Water Ballads* appeared in 1902; it reflects his experiences at sea and contains poems that give voice to the common sailor. Its poems were heavily influenced by a number of other writers, most especially Rudyard Kipling and Masfield's friend William Butler Yeats. His next major work, *Ballads and Poems* (1910), presents poems that were more original, including "Captain Stratton's

Fancy" and the well-known "Cargoes." In *Dauber* (1913) he again chose the sea as his subject matter, this time to tell a story. From this point in his career, the long narrative poem would become his most successful genre.

His early years and the countryside surrounding his childhood home were the inspiration for many of the poems in *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912), *The Daffodil Fields* (1913), and *Reynard the Fox* (1919), considered his masterpiece by many scholars. His fascination with early British history, particularly the Roman occupation of Britain and the Arthurian legends, provided the inspiration for poems included in several of his poetry collections, from his first published book in 1902 to *Grace before Ploughing*, which did not appear until 1966. Nearly all of the twenty-two poems in *Midsummer Night and Other Tales in Verse* (1928) are based on legends of King Arthur.

Although Masfield was most famous for his verse, he also wrote in a number of other genres. During his long career, he published twenty novels, several volumes of juvenilia, and a number of collections of prose sketches and short stories. He also wrote seventeen plays—many of them in verse—as well as essays, literary criticism, and autobiographical sketches, the latter collected in *In the Mill* (1941), an account of his time in the carpet factory, and *So Long to Learn* (1952), a personal history of his life as a writer. In one nine-year period early in his career, he wrote over two hundred book reviews for various literary magazines, at the same time that he was publishing poetry and fiction, making him one of the most prolific writers in English literary history.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

The critical response to Masfield's work has been generally favorable. Most often the early poetry, heavily influenced by Yeats and Synge, is not as highly prized as his later work, when Masfield seemed to find his own poetic voice. Muriel Spark comments on Masfield's friendship with the two writers, noting that "the actual influence they exerted on his work is very strong; it was not always and entirely a favourable influence." At the same time, however, Spark acknowledges its value to the young writer just starting to make literature his career rather than his avocation. By 1911, according to Spark, with the publication of *The Everlasting Mercy*, Masfield had come into his own and was producing more original work, less dependent on those early influences. Sanford Sternlicht asserts, though, that even the early poems, originally considered "sometimes imitative, sometimes flawed, and not very profound," became more popular over time and "are today among the most loved and most remembered pieces that survived the Edwardian Age."

The reduced circumstances and hardships of Masfield's early life after the death of his parents had their effect on his work, according to some critics. Henry W. Nevins (see Further Reading) contends that the "mixture of harsh experience with artistic perception . . . produced a poet of unusual quality." Gilbert Thomas notes that Masfield's years aboard ship contributed to his reputation as "perhaps the greatest of English sea poets," although Thomas also praises his poems on other subjects, such as "August, 1914" written at the beginning of World War I and constituting Masfield's only poetic response to the war. This poem, according to Thomas, "fuses Masfield's characteristic qualities—his love of the English soil and its traditions, his passionate humanity, and his keen sense of tragedy resolved by spiritual vision—into almost perfect expression." It was one of Masfield's most successful poems and Fraser Drew calls it "one of his finest utterances." L. A. G. Strong praises the narrative poem *Dauber*, contending that the work represents "Masfield's first real success in a form he was soon to restore to its lost place in English literature, the poem that tells a story." F. Berry also comments on Masfield's storytelling abilities, concluding that although the poet also produced novels, "his best stories are in verse; his best poems are stories."

Masfield's love of his country and the landscapes of his youth are a recurring element of his poetry. One of his most frequently anthologized poems was an early effort from *Salt-Water Ballads* titled "The West Wind," written in praise of the English countryside of his early childhood. Drew notes that many of Masfield's major narrative poems are set in the country, among them *The Everlasting Mercy*, *The Widow in the Bye Street*, *The Daffodil Fields*, and *Reynard the Fox*. According to Drew, "at times the land, its weather, and its plant and animal life reflect and intensify the moods of the characters in the poems; again, the landscape is often in contrast to the action, as Masfield employs his favorite device of the juxtaposition of ugliness and beauty, or of the contrast of peace in nature, tumult in man." One such example, *The Daffodil Fields*, involves adultery and murder set against the idyllic beauty of the Shropshire countryside.

The sheer volume of Masfield's work has led to the suggestion that not all of his poems were of the highest quality. Strong considers him "a copious writer, and one of the most uneven whom our time can show." Strong believes that *Reynard the Fox* is "a masterpiece" and that *Dauber* and *The Everlasting Mercy* are "first-class" narrative poems, but acknowledges that Masfield's position as Poet Laureate encouraged him to produce a great number of very forgettable poems, many of them occasional pieces. Sternlicht, too, notes "the damage that the laureateship did to a sensitive poet who had too much sense of duty" as he churned out celebratory verses—none of them very good—honoring various

events in the lives of members of the royal family and the British government.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Salt-Water Ballads 1902
Ballads 1903
Ballads and Poems 1910
The Everlasting Mercy 1911
The Story of a Round-House and Other Poems 1912
The Widow in the Bye Street 1912
The Daffodil Fields 1913
Dauber 1913
Philip the King and Other Poems 1914
Good Friday and Other Poems 1916
Sonnets 1916
Sonnets and Poems 1916
Lollington Downs and Other Poems 1917
Collected Poems and Plays. 2 vols. 1918
Rosas 1918
Reynard the Fox 1919
Animula 1920
Enslaved and Other Poems 1920
Right Royal 1920
King Cole 1921
The Dream 1922
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Collected Poems 1923
Sonnets of Good Cheer 1926
Midsummer Night and Other Tales in Verse 1928
South and East 1929
The Wanderer 1930
Minnie Maylow's Story 1931
Tale of Troy 1932
A Letter from Pontus and Other Verse 1936
The Country Scene in Poems 1937
Tribute to Ballet in Poems 1938
Some Memories of W. B. Yeats 1940
Gautama the Enlightened and Other Verse 1941
Generation Risen 1942
Land Workers 1942
Wonderings 1943
On the Hill 1949
The Bluebells and Other Verse 1961
Old Raiger and Other Verse 1964
Grace before Ploughing 1966
In Glad Thanksgiving 1967

Other Major Works

A Mainsail Haul (short stories) 1905
Sea Life in Nelson's Time (essays) 1905
A Tarpaulin Muster (short stories) 1907
Captain Margaret (novel) 1908
The Tragedy of Nan (play) 1908
Lost Endeavor (novel) 1910
William Shakespeare (criticism) 1911
The Faithful (play) 1915
Good Friday (play) 1916
The Sweeps of Ninety-Eight (play) 1916
The Trial of Jesus (play) 1925
The Midnight Folk (novel) 1927
The Hawbucks (novel) 1929
Basilissa (novel) 1940
Conquer (novel) 1941
In the Mill (autobiography) 1941
Badon Parchments (novel) 1947
So Long to Learn (autobiography) 1952

CRITICISM

Gilbert Thomas (essay date 1933)

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[In the following excerpt, Thomas discusses the influence of William Butler Yeats and Rudyard Kipling on Masefield's poetry.]

I

Tennyson, said Sir Edmund Gosse, kept poetry static through three generations. The statement, like most dicta of its kind, is an exaggeration. Poets as unlike Tennyson, and as unlike one another, as Browning, Swinburne, Arnold, Morris, and Hardy—though *The Dynasts* was not published until later—were writing during the latter part of Victoria's reign. Nevertheless, Tennyson, more fully than any single poet before or since, represented to the men and women of his day the perfect embodiment of their own perplexities, aspirations, and tastes; and so surely was he enthroned in popular adoration that his fame was still undimmed when, in 1892, he crossed the bar.

Reaction from such undisputed sovereignty inevitably followed. The revolt against Tennyson has been even more, in fact if not in theory, a revolt against the fawning ineffectuality of his followers. Whatever may be said for Tennyson himself—and he will be replaced, if

not on his old pinnacle, on a yet lofty throne—his influence, which for fifty years encountered no real challenge, was certainly debilitating. His characteristic faults and weaknesses became more and more accentuated in the feeble hands of his imitators, until the air grew languorous with faint echoes, against which it was only natural and healthy that sterner voices should be raised. If they had been raised earlier, Tennyson's own reputation might have suffered less for the poetical vapidities of those who, lacking his genius, had more than their share of his limitations.

The revolt took various forms. There was, firstly, the group of writers and artists associated with "The Yellow Book". Against the Tennysonian tradition of dignity and authority, against the optimistic vision of progress "broadening down from precedent to precedent", the Beardsley School flung the gauntlet of a studious despair. Many critics have endeavoured to find more than a superficial phase of reaction in this movement of "The Nineties". Mr. Osbert Burdett, in particular, has made, in *The Beardsley Period*, a highly ingenious attempt. With the zeal of the Jews in the Gospel, who would compass heaven and hell to make one proselyte, he covers nearly four centuries of social and literary history in order to present Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson, and their circle "in perspective". He goes back to the Council of Trent, which, failing to stem the Reformation, gave impetus to the modern thought that has disrupted "the pride and happiness of the mediæval mind". Subsequent history is represented as a growing warfare of private judgments, until, towards the end of last century, society through its long refusal to face uncomfortable facts, had, as a corollary, lost all vital contact with good. Beardsley and his friends, by presenting the vision of evil again to the human mind, restored to it also the power of comprehending virtue.

Mr. Burdett's theory is presented with able insinuation. It breaks down, however, at the crucial point, when the actual work of the "decadents" comes to be considered. Not even Mr. Burdett's skill can invest the drawings of Beardsley or the poems of Dowson with enough vitality to bring off the awaited climax. Indeed, the magnificent stage which has been erected serves only to emphasise the essentially minor artistry of the players themselves, when at last they appear upon the boards. "Behold," says the stage manager, "the housebreakers demolishing the long Victorian hypocrisy." But the musical whinings of Dowson, the exquisite perversion of Beardsley, and the self-conscious posturings of Wilde fall very flat. We admire Mr. Burdett's ingenuity and courage, but we remain unconvinced. The most that can be said for "The Yellow Book" school, apart from any justification that sympathisers with it may make on the score of "art for art's sake", is that it was a minor symptom of the disease of complacency which did, in some measure, afflict the Victorian repose. But, though a symptom may

help towards diagnosis, and may, therefore, play an indirectly healthful function, there is no glory in symptoms as such; and a morbid preoccupation with them will only aggravate the disorder they reveal. Of any healing or creative art the Beardsley school was quite barren, and Dowson wrote a fitting epitaph for himself and his colleagues when he said:

Vain things alone
Have driven our perverse and aimless band.

While the "decadents" were making of poetry a mirror in a heavily-scented salon, before which (to their own admiration and that of their friends) they paraded in various "æsthetic" and erotic poses, the young Masefield was learning, through hardship at sea, that "the only cure for the sickly in the mind is reality"

Then there was Mr. Kipling. Beneath the placid surface of the Victorian waters, the currents of Imperialism had begun to swirl. The Jubilee of 1887 was a portent for those who had eyes to see, and about that time there appeared the first book of the young author, born in India, who was to give full voice to the rising storm. Kipling burst upon the Victorian peace with a clatter of triangle and drum, and, until the Boer War and its sequel rang down the curtain upon the militarism which he represented, he captivated the public ear by the measures in which he proclaimed the gospel of Might. The Great War completed the eclipse of Kipling, as the poet of barbaric Force. But there were good as well as bad elements in Kipling's revolt, and to these better influences reference must be made if we would understand Masefield aright.

First, however, we may take a digressive glance at the Georgians. The Georgian movement began, roughly speaking, with the opening, in 1911, of the Poetry Bookshop in Bloomsbury, from which were issued, for more than a decade, the periodical collections of *Georgian Poetry*, edited by Mr. Edward Marsh. The Georgians had no actual organisation, and many poets sailed under a banner to which they owed but partial allegiance. Yet the "movement" was clearly enough defined, and marked a belated reaction against the Tennysonian bondage. "Tennyson and his followers," said the early Georgians in effect, "were too facile—facile in their emotions as well as in their writing itself. They sacrificed everything to euphuism." Against the "glibness" of Tennyson and his contemporaries, therefore, the Georgians opposed a standard of austerity and restraint. They would not pour out fluent "rhetoric" in praise of a faith they did not really hold; they would not fervently profess enthusiasms they did not actually feel; nor would they lose their hearts to a pretty line. They would write only about what did genuinely interest and move them—the homely delights of earth and fireside. Tennyson might seek to justify the ways of

God to man; but they were content to watch the cat drinking its milk upon the hearth. Nature was to be their favourite theme. But, even here, there was to be the same reserve. Nature was not to be "interpreted" to mean what for the Georgians she did not truly mean. Her external aspects, rather than any supposed inner significance, was the one legitimate theme for their Muse. Even Nature's external aspects were to be celebrated in carefully wrought and modulated cadences, and precise accuracy of observation was to replace the loose, generalised rhapsodies on "birds" and "flowers" and "hills" which characterised the work, not, indeed, of Tennyson himself, but of many of his disciples.

A fine sincerity inspired the Georgian movement at the start, and, within its limits, it produced many lyrics of fresh and individual charm. But it soon attracted imitators of its own, and, like all movements that lack fundamentally large vision, it wilted and died. Some of Masfield's poems, including "**Biography**", originally appeared in the bi-annual volumes of *Georgian Poetry*. Masfield, however, while not untouched by the movement, never really belonged to it. Other influences—particularly that of Mr. Yeats, Synge, and the writers of the Irish Renaissance—had moved him earlier. Mr. Yeats and Mr. Kipling have little enough in common; but youth likes to play "the sedulous ape" to masters of widely different styles. There is pseudo-Celtic glamour and twilight in such poems as "**The Ballad of Sir Bors**", and thin echoes of Mr. Yeats and Synge recur throughout the self-conscious cadences of Masfield's early prose. But Masfield was too vital to be cabined long by any "school".

Even the debt to Mr. Kipling was but partial. Master and pupil represent antithetical spirits. Nothing could be further removed from Mr. Kipling's materialism than Masfield's spirituality. But Kipling, if he himself filled them with very different vintage, at least made the bottles into which Masfield's best inspiration was later to be poured. Kipling, to change the metaphor, brought down the Muse from her lofty Victorian aloofness, and made her at home among vulgar haunts and common men. If we must look back to George Crabbe as "the father of modern realistic poetry"—and a comparison between Crabbe and Masfield would be interesting, if space permitted—realism in verse slumbered through the Victorian era until Kipling extended its range and gave it new vitality.

Mr. Kipling, by his vigorous magic, had made the common soldier a subject for song. Masfield's experience of the sea provided him with a complementary theme. He would hymn the common seaman. The influence of Kipling, both in matter and technique, is clearly apparent in *Salt Water Ballads*, as any passage, chosen at random, will show:

Oh yesterday, I t'ink it was, while cruising down the street,
I met with Bill.—'Hullo,' he says, 'let's give the girls a treat.'
We'd red bandanas round our necks'n' our shrouds new rattled down,
So we filled a couple of *Santy Cruz* and cleared for *Sailor Town*.
We scooted south with a press of sail till we fetched to a caboose,
The '*Sailor's Rest*', by Dago Tom, alongside '*Paddy's Goose*'.
Red curtains to the windies, ay,'n' white sand to the floor,
And an old blind fiddler liltin' the tune of '*Lowlands no more*'. . . .

There is something, too, of Kipling's drier, scientific realism in Masfield's "**Cargoes**":

Quinquireme of Ninevah from distant Ophir
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine. . . .

Dirty British coaster, with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting through the channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rail, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin-trays.

The manner of Masfield's early poems was that of Mr. Kipling, and Mr. Kipling suggested the sea and the common sailor as the theme. But a cursory reading of Masfield's first book is enough to reveal the fundamental difference in the two writers' outlook. In so far as Masfield is a "realist", in the colloquial sense of dealing with the commonplace aspects of life, he has been, from the start, a realist only in his rejection of formally poetic matter and in his method. Later he was to use realism for spiritual ends; but, at first, he employed it for purposes of romance. He was realistic in scope and form, but romantic at heart. Personal experience of seafaring life enabled him to supply reality of detail; but, apart from their detail, his early poems were such as any landlubber, gifted enough with fancy, might have written.

II

England, as befits the island-home of a scattered race, is rich in sea poetry. Yet, much as it has haunted their imagination, none of our great poets has had intimate acquaintance with the sea. It has entered, through race-consciousness, into their blood; it has enlarged their mental and spiritual horizons; its music has often given its own depth and fullness to their song. Yet the attitude towards the sea of our poets in the past has been that of the observant and reflective longshoreman. English poetry abounds in beautiful descriptions of the sea as it

breaks upon the coast, and it has provided innumerable metaphors for meditation upon "the inconstant billows" of human life and the mysterious landfall of death:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our moments hasten to their end.

It is in a wealth of suggested analogy that the sea mainly echoes through English song. Our poets have not known from actual contact the vast solitudes of ocean with its "shipwrecking storms". Though his work reverberates indirectly with sea music, Shakespeare, so far as we know, never took a voyage; even Swinburne only made the Channel passage in steamboats. Masefield holds an unique place in English poetry as its first deep-water sailor. Our modern poets, going on lecture-tours to the United States, cross the Atlantic often enough in luxurious liners. Masefield, alone among them, knows the sea as it can only be known by those who have wrestled with it at firsthand, with no weapons but canvas.

It was not, however, until *Dauber* appeared that Masefield revealed himself as perhaps the greatest of English sea poets. There is little prophecy of *Dauber* in his early songs and ballads:

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea
and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the
white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn
breaking.

"The wheel's kick" is an authentic touch. Otherwise, pleasant enough though it be, there is nothing in the poem that might not have been written by any youth with a gift for versifying his dreams while gazing at the Pool from London Bridge.

Take, again, a characteristic ballad:

'I was in a hooker once,' said Karlssen,
'And Bill, as was a seaman, died;
So we lashed him in an old tarpaulin
And tumbled him across the side;
And the fun of it was that all his gear was
Divided up among the crew
Before that blushing human error,
Our crawling little captain, knew.'

Thus begins "Cape Horn Gospel". In the second stanza, Bill, the sailor thrown overboard, reappears as a spirit to his old comrades on their return voyage, and thus delivers himself:

'I'm a-weary of them there mermaids,'
Says old Bill's ghost to me;
'It ain't no place for a Christian
Down below—under sea.
For it's all blown sand and shipwrecks,

And old bones eaten bare,
And them cold fishy females
With long green weeds for hair.

'And there ain't no dances shuffled,
And no old yarns is spun,
And there ain't no stars but starfish,
And never any moon or sun.
I heard your keel a-passing,
And the running rattle of the brace,'
And he says, 'Stand by,' says William,
'For a shift towards a better place' . . .

Some genuine intimacy with the common sailor is reflected here, and "the running rattle of the brace" is not a landsman's phrase. But the ballad, as a whole, is more conspicuous for fancy and humour than for "realism". The same criticism—to take one other example—applies to "The Turn of the Tide":

An' Bill can have my sea-boots, Nigger Tim
can have my knife,
You can divvy up the dungarees an' bed,
An' the ship can have my blessing, an' the
Lord can have my life,
An' sails and fish my body when I'm
dead.

An' dreaming down below there in the
tangled greens an' blues,
Where the sunlight shudders golden
round about,
I shall hear the ships complainin' and the
cursin' of the crews,
An' be sorry when the watch is tumbled
out.

I shall hear them hilly-holloying the
weather crojick brace,
An' the sucking of the wash about the
hull;
When they chanty up the topsail I'll be
hauling in my place,
For my soul will follow seawards like a
gull.

There, again, are realistic detail and a natural familiarity with nautical terms. But the ballad is still romantic in essence.

If Masefield's earlier poems, however, give small promise of the true realism of *Dauber*, they yield hints of the human tenderness, the compassion, and the mysticism that usually accompany his later realism. Here, for instance, are the opening stanzas of "Christmas Eve at Sea":

A wind is rustling 'south and soft',
Cooing a quiet country tune,
The calm sea sighs, and far aloft
The sails are ghostly in the moon.

Unquiet ripples lisp and purr,
A block there pipes and chirps i' the
sheave,

The wheel-ropes jar, the reef-points stir
Faintly—and it is Christmas Eve.

The hushed sea seems to hold her breath,
And o'er the giddy, swaying spars,
Silent and excellent as Death,
The dim blue skies are bright with stars.

Dear God—they shone in Palestine
Like this, and yon pale moon serene
Looked down among the lowing kine
On Mary and the Nazarine. . . .

That is typical of Masfield and foreshadows the best of his later work. The changes are rung upon realism and idyllicism. There is abrupt force of contrast; but, if æsthetic unity is sacrificed, spiritual unity is attained by the poem as a whole. Masfield is no poet, it must be admitted, for readers who demand purely æsthetic beauty. He addresses himself to “*The Seekers*” of a deeper beauty, beyond all art:

Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth nor
blessed abode,
But the hope of the City of God at the other end of
the road.

Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of mind,
For we go seeking a city that we shall never find.

We travel the dusty road till the light of the day is
dim,
And sunset shows us spires away on the world's rim.

We travel from dawn to dusk, till the day is past and
by,
Seeking the Holy City beyond the rim of the sky.”

Mr. Kipling too often mistakes braggadocio for strength. Masfield is sometimes needlessly assertive in expression, but his fundamental faith lies in “the strength that walks in ways of quietness”. It is seldom that he strikes the note of “*To-Morrow*”:

Oh yesterday the cutting edge drank thirstily and deep,
The upland outlaws ringed us in and herded us as
sheep,
They drove us from the stricken field and bayed us
into keep;
But to-morrow,
By the living God, we'll try the game again!

Oh yesterday our little troop was ridden through and
through,
Our swaying, tattered pennons fled, a broken, beaten
few;
And all a summer afternoon they hunted us and slew;
But to-morrow,
By the living God, we'll try the game again!

Even here a spiritual, rather than a literal, interpretation is possible. It is only towards evil itself, and not towards the doers of it, that Masfield, as a rule, is defiant. He

has never used his vigorous ballad gift to hymn military, national, or any other conventional kind of “glory”. Strongly as the pioneering spirit appeals to him, adventure, to his mind, only becomes real nobility when it is inspired and directed by enlightened spiritual purpose. “By progress,” says one of the characters in his novel *The Hawbucks*, “I don't mean drains and being able to travel at speed, but the growth of the religious spirit, and the linking of it to will and muscle; to the essential man, if I make myself clear.” He finds the truest heroism in the “unregarded Imperial regiments” of common men, bearing the daily burden with patience and laughter. If any marching music stir him, it is that, “on the long dusty ribbon of the long city street”:

Of the men many as sands, of the squadrons ranked
and massed,
Who are passing, changing always, and never have
changed or passed.

Masfield, however, does not (like some humanitarians!) love men only in the mass. The mass, as such, does not attract him. It is the sense of the unit in the crowd that makes its appeal. A depth of tenderness—of feeling for individuals and individuality—is in the lines:

Faces—passionate faces—of men I may not know,
They haunt me, burn me to the heart, as I turn aside
to go.

“*Of men I may not know*”! But, were it possible, how well worth knowing would they be! How well worth knowing is any individual, if real “understanding” be attained! And yet how difficult it is “to know intimately any human soul, even with love as a lamp”!

It is not surprising that one who holds that “a soul entirely known is life achieved” should view marriage and friendship sacramentally. Masfield's love poems breathe a passionate sincerity and humility:

Her heart is always doing lovely things,
Filling my wintry mind with simple
flowers,
Playing sweet tunes on my untuned strings,
Delighting all my undelighted hours.

She plays me like a lute, what tune she
will;
No string in me but trembles at her
touch,
Shakes into sacred music, or is still,
Trembles or stops, or swells, her skill is
such.

And in the dusty tavern of my soul
Where filthy lusts drink witches' brew
for wine,
Her gentle hand still keeps me from the
bowl;

She keeps me man, saves me from being
swine.