Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements

Early Robin Hood Stories

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Introduction

The earliest known stories about Robin Hood emerged in late medieval England. Robin Hood and his band of violent, pious outlaws are presented at home in the Edenic or paradisical greenwood, where they enjoy comfortable, secure, and honourable fellowship away from the dangers of the outside world. The utopian greenwood resolves or harmonises tensions between outlaw life and royal approval. In terms of apocalypticism and millenarianism, the stories represent a trajectory that emerges from the theological ideas associated with the English uprising of 1381, otherwise known as the Peasants' Revolt. The violent expectations of an imminently transformed England in 1381—a golden age run with the interests of peasants and emerging 'middling sort' in mind and where all things would be shared in common—were effectively seen as fulfilled in Robin Hood's Edenic greenwood. Given the widespread popularity of Robin Hood across social status, the greenwood lent itself to a variety of interpretative possibilities. For some, the stories offered justifications for violence or fantastical solutions to existing social and class antagonisms. For others, the stories reflected the achievement of a better world in the here and now, such as through fraternities and guilds. And, of course, others still may have thought little about such meanings and enjoyed them as entertaining tales.

Late Medieval Robin Hood

Whatever the extent and history of pre-existing stories, it is in the 1370s that we get the first clear indication of Robin Hood stories. Here, in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, there is a vision of the seven deadly sins where Gluttony gets sidetracked en route to Mass by the temptations of an ale house. Then appears Sloth—a priest and parson who does not know the paternoster but does know the "rymes of Robyn hood." For Langland, the tales are an indication of a lack of piety, hence Sloth is further occupied with idle tales in the ale house at the expense of his priestly duties, the words of the Gospels, or the lives of the saints. He is more likely to be able to find a hare in a field or furlong than Psalm 1:1 and Psalm 128:1 (*Piers Plowman* B 5.385–421). Complaints about the lack of piety provoked by the stories of Robin Hood continued in the fifteenth century and beyond (e.g., *Dives and Pauper* 1.51; cf. Dobson and Taylor 1976, 2–3; Knight 1994, 269; Field 2002, 8; Pollard 2004, 163; Luxford 2009; Rigby 2024b, 27–29). As these complaints suggest, Robin Hood stories were popular.

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Robin Hood also appears in sayings and legal records that mention his appearance, prowess with a bow, and association with the woods (Dobson and Taylor 1976, 1–4; Rigby 2024b, 3–4). The English legend (placed in the thirteenth century) is known and summarised in Scottish chronicles. According to the brief mention in Andrew of Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* (c. 1420), *Robert* Hood and Little John were goodly wood-dwelling outlaws or *waythmen* (Andrew of Wyntoun 1907, 136–37). In the fifteenth-century *Scotichronicon*, Walter Bower's continuation of John of Fordun's chronicle, has one "Robert Hood," a famous "armed robber" (*siccarius*) active alongside Little John and their followers. Meanwhile, backhanded indications of his popularity remain present: "the foolish common folk eagerly celebrate the deeds of these men with gawping enthusiasm in comedies and tragedies, and take pleasure in hearing jesters and bards singing [of them] more than in other romances" (Bower 1990, 354–55). Robert Hood was also associated with the seclusion of the woods, clashed with the local authorities, and was especially impressive in a fight, easily taking the spoils from his enemies. But despite the accusations of inappropriateness of the stories, this Robert Hood was praiseworthy too, notably for his intense devotion to Mass (Bower 1990, 354–55).

These summaries reflect the typical features of the early Robin Hood stories (e.g., devotion, outlaw, forest life, violence, clash with authorities). We get much detail of the content of the first known complete stories of Robin Hood from the second half of the fifteenth century: *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. The play *Robin Hood and the Sheriff* from this era survives as a fragment. On other possible fifteenth-century stories, see Rigby 2024b, 14–15.

From the mid-fifteenth century, *Robin Hood and the Monk* (as the story later came to be called) tells of the escapades and trickery of Robin Hood the outlaw yeoman, Much the Miller's Son, and Little John. The story includes the Sheriff of Nottingham capturing Robin, who is later saved by Little John and Much. The story covers further tensions with the authorities, including certain monastic orders (e.g., Little John and Much tricking and beheading a monk), while stressing Robin's loyalty to the king. The story includes many references to Robin's piety, including his devotion to Mass and the Virgin Mary. There are indications in the opening lines of Robin's home as an Edenic greenwood setting of bright trees, birds singing, and deer finding shade under the leaves, an idyllic communal existence for Robin's band beneath the leaves which stands in sharp contrast to the disorder of the outside world.

From the second half of the fifteenth century, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, as it later came to be called, is the least violent Robin Hood story of this period. Other features, however, are familiar. *Robin Hood and the Potter* provides another Edenic-style opening in the joyful summer, casting Robin as a trickster but an emphatically courteous yeoman devoted to the Virgin Mary. Disguised as a potter (thanks to his new friend of that occupation), Robin tricks the Sheriff of Nottingham by winning an archery contest and luring him back to the greenwood. While the greenwood remains a joyful world of green leaves and birdsong for Robin and his followers, for outsiders like the Sheriff, it is a dangerous place. The Sheriff is stripped of his possessions and sent back to Nottingham. Back in the forest, Robin gives the Potter generous compensation and proclaims that he is always welcome in the greenwood. The story ends with a blessing for Robin's soul and all good yeomen.

The influential *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (or *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode*) survives in various printed editions dating from around 1500 onward. *Gest* brought together, if somewhat patchily, pre-existing stories into an overarching narrative, marking a milestone in the development of the Robin Hood legend at "the intersection of popular manuscript materials and the new technology of printing" (Knight and Ohlgren

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2000, 7).

The greenwood remains a bountiful place for Robin to live and welcome guests, and a dangerous place for his enemies. Based around Barnsdale, Robin is a proud, courteous, and freeborn yeoman who listens to three masses a day, one for the Father, one for the Holy Ghost, and one for the Virgin Mary. Robin is again presented as especially devout towards Mary, and part of this devotion is that Robin would never harm a company that included women. Others, too, are to be protected. Robin says not to steal from the ploughman, yeoman, or goodly knights and squires; should they get the chance, they ought to take from bishops, archbishops, and the Sheriff of Nottingham.

With the regular blessing of the Virgin Mary, much of the story in *Gest* concerns helping the character of the Knight, who has fallen on hard times and owes money to the rich Abbot of St Mary's Abbey, as well as Robin's ongoing tensions with the Sheriff of Nottingham (including the famous story of Robin winning an archery contest). Robin's loyalty to the King (here named as Edward) is again emphasised, and the King is likewise impressed by Robin, even to the point of bringing him into court. But Robin is eventually tempted back to the merry greenwood. The story ends with the wicked Prioress of Kirkely seeking Robin's downfall by ensuring that Robin bleeds to death but expresses hope that the crucified Christ have mercy on the good outlaw's soul.

For general treatments of the development of the Robin Hood stories, see, e.g., Dobson and Taylor 1976; Keen 1987; Holt 1989; Knight 1994; Pollard 2004; Ohlgren 2007; Ohlgren and Matheson 2013; Basdeo 2019; Rigby 2024a.

Social Settings of the Early Robin Hood Stories

For whom, to whom, and by whom were the early Robin Hood stories written?

There were significant disagreements in the 1950s and 1960s about the precise social location of the producers and original audience of these stories, with suggestions ranging from disgruntled peasants to gentry households (see, e.g., Hilton 1958; Holt 1960; Aston 1961; Holt 1961; Keen 1961). More recently, the emphasis has shifted to thinking about the dissemination of the Robin Hood stories across classes. We know that audiences ranged from those attending and organising popular and localised Robin Hood games, days, and plays (see Marshall 2024, with bibliography) to those who would know the stories well enough to make Robin a gentleman from the sixteenth century onward (Holt 1961, 17; 1989, 128; cf. Gairdner 1904, 185). The popularity of the stories went to the very top: Henry VIII seems to have been fond of them (Hall 1809, 513, 582).

In *Piers Plowman*, we recall, it is the priest who enjoys the rhymes of Robin Hood. It seems that there was indeed some interest from clergy. The owner of the surviving manuscript of *Robin Hood and the Monk* appears to have been a priest (Fowler 1999, 72–76; Ohlgren 2007, 33–39 [cf. 51–65]). It is not difficult to envisage the stories being popular among sections of the clergy hostile to certain monastic centres, similar to the hostilities exploding in the English uprising (see the CDAMM article on John Ball). Tellingly, clergy turn up regularly in records of banditry and crime in medieval England. Whenever the outlaw Friar Tuck may have appeared in the reception of the written Robin Hood stories, the use of his name as an alias and

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relevant associations were already turning up in legal records in the early fifteenth century in deeds of crime and banditry associated with clergy (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1911, 84, 141; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1907, 10).

Positive reference to yeomen is prominent in early Robin Hood stories. This emphasis has led scholars to focus on the label 'yeomen' representing a socially ascendant group who both consumed and produced the stories. Even so, the label 'yeoman' is used in the stories in what were then recognisable, if fluid ways (e.g., youth, service, loyalty, courtesy—for full discussion of the term, see Foroughi 2024). Contemporary medieval uses of the term, which complement uses in the stories, include a well-armed outdoorsman protecting royal or lordly lands (cf. Chaucer, General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* 1.101–17), the independent landowners emerging from the peasantry, one who offers service to a lord or king, and journeymen and craftsmen. An influential view in scholarship suggests that the outlaw yeomen associated with Robin—with their craft skills, extravagant dining habits, livery, membership, and a patron saint—mimics and reflects the interests of fraternities and guilds coming into their own in the fifteenth century (for discussion, see, e.g., Tardif 1983, 132–43; Pollard 2004, 41–50, 161; Knight 2021, 177–82; Foroughi 2024, 135).

Focus on the interests of a socially ascendant 'middling sort' has been a major feature of scholarship since the 1970s (cf. Dobson and Taylor 1976, 10, 31–36; Nagy 1980; Tardif 1983; Gray 1984; Coss 1985, 73–74; Keen 1987, xxiv–xxvi; Holt 1989, 109–58; Hanawalt 1992, 154; Richmond 1993; Knight 1994, 51–52; Knight and Ohlgren 2000, 8, 16–17; Ohlgren 2000, 16–17; Field 2002, 9; Pollard 2004, 24–25, 29–56, 156–83, 211–12; Knight 2006; Taylor 2013, 313–39; Basdeo 2019, 26–28). For instance, Richard Tardif argues that the early stories replicate ideas of yeomen still latching on to feudal values concerning land while engaging in conflict with master guilds and other authorities socially above them (Tardif 1983, 132–43; see also Knight 2021, 177–82). Some scholars have understood the stories as yeomen appropriating behaviours once expected of knights (e.g., chivalry). This transfer of values from one group to another, it is argued, reflects opposite class trajectories of both in late medieval England (Tardif 1983, 139–40; Ohlgren 2000, 17; Pollard 2004, 98–99; Ohlgren 2007, 135–82; Brown 2024, 95).

A similar argument has also been made that the yeomen in the stories reflect the incorporation of mercantile interests. Thomas Ohlgren (2000, 19–28; 2005; 2007, 82–96, 135–82), for instance, sees the association with the power of the guilds and their commercialism coming to the fore in *Gest* (e.g., royal charters, patron saints, masters and fellows, associated freedoms, apprentice training, fees, ceremonials, processions, money lending, cloth selling, conflict with traditional authorities). In this respect, it is worth noting arguments about ports and trading as locations for the dissemination of the stories and that the manuscript of *Robin Hood and the Potter* was connected with the mercantile world (see further Gray 1984, 23; Ohlgren 2001; Knight 2008, 25–29; Rigby 2024b, 11–12).

Scholarship has also linked the fluid concept of the yeoman and tensions with the traditional order in the stories to the longer-term social changes in England following the Black Death (1348/49) and to concerns about social mobility for the middling sort. With the Black Death wiping out probably over a third of the population, the ensuing labour shortages led to demands for, and conflict over, better wages and conditions, affecting both the countryside and towns. Parliament, through the Statute of Labourers (1351), tried to cap wages, restrict mobility, and keep serfs tied to the land, which in turn generated resentment and further tensions. The 1381 uprising was one symptom of socioeconomic shifts. Nevertheless, the decline of serfdom, social aspiration and mobility freed from previous constraints, and material

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accumulation in the countryside continued into the fifteenth century. Another related symptom (as stressed by Tardif 1983) was the creation of new yeoman guilds, as labourers moving from the manors butted up against the established guilds and the Statute of Labourers. In other words, the early Robin Hood stories can be contextualised within the longer-term developments in the breakdown of feudalism and the accompanying changes in land and labour practices, both urban and rural.

However, while the idea of social ascendency may be important for understanding audiences, the stories have a concern for social decline and downward trajectories (Brown 2024). Moreover, the diverse audience for such stories, as well as the fluid uses of the term 'yeomen' (e.g., youth, loyalty, courtesy), means that they were open to a range of interpretations and sympathies across classes. The benefit of scholarship identifying the core interests and audience of the stories is not that it has necessarily done so, but that it offers plausible examples of how a certain audience might have appreciated the stories (Rigby 2024d). Of course, we should not overlook a basic point: some audiences would presumably enjoy the stories as little more than entertainment. Nevertheless, the varied audiences could also imagine which type of yeoman their man was in the liminal world of Robin's greenwood (see Pollard 2004, 56; cf. Dobson and Taylor 1976, 36; Richmond 1993).

Robin Hood and the Millenarian Legacy of the 1381 English Uprising

Direct connections between the ideas associated with the 1381 rebels and the stories of Robin Hood can no longer be made (the classic objections are found in Holt 1960). Indeed, there are notable differences. The Robin Hood stories do not openly address, challenge, or discuss the peasant-lord relationship or the declining institution of serfdom, and, with the rise of the free landowning yeoman farmer, English agrarian society had changed since 1381 (Pollard 2004,19–26). But while there is no obvious reference to the 1381 uprising in the Robin Hood stories, there would have been rebels familiar with them. The reference in *Piers Plowman* to the telling of the stories (and their reception among clergy) is from the eve of the revolt. Furthermore, Christopher Dyer (1994, 232) speculated about a 1380 reference in a court roll of Chevington (manor of Bury) to a brewer called John, who went by the nickname "Littlejohn." This tantalising reference may point to the local popularity of the stories in an area where the English uprising was especially violent, but is far from conclusive.

Whatever glimpses of specific points of contact there are, the comparison between the revolt and the stories is best understood at the level of overlapping interests, ideas, and their trajectories over the decades. The significance of yeomen and clergy among characters, readers, and hearers (in some cases, perhaps producers) points most obviously to overlapping concerns. Other occupations also point to shared concerns. For instance, the miller, so familiar among the rebels of 1381 and their understanding of the Bible, is represented among Robin's men (see the CDAMM entries on John Ball and William Grindecobbe). The near ubiquitous violence of the Robin Hood stories, from a readiness to use violence and the more diplomatic use of the threat of violence, is another obvious overlap (see also the CDAMM entries on John Wrawe and William Grindecobbe), though bishops and archbishops remain strikingly unscathed in the Robin Hood stories (Keen 1961, 7–8; Pollard 2004, 114–26). The hostility towards certain monastic houses in the Robin Hood stories further echoes that of the rebels of 1381. Both the 1381 rebels and the Robin Hood stories include many clashes with local authorities and officers, alongside an assumed, playful, or extravagant loyalty to the king. Against some scholarship, even if the greenwood represents an alternative

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society, the Robin Hood stories retain a positive view of the ideal role of kingship (see now Spencer 2024).

The outlaws of the Robin Hood story, with their sense of justice and fellowship, and their Edenic greenwood home, share some of the interests at play in the apocalypticism and millenarianism of the 1381 uprising, though (as we will see) the differences are just as significant as the similarities. In 1381, the priest John Ball and others believed, with claims to biblical justification and the support of Mary, that the summer of 1381 was the appointed time for the rebels to enact the divine plan to bring about their liberty through the violent transformation of England. Ball saw the ruling class, including ecclesiastical elites, as exploiting peasants in order to maintain their privileges. He looked to the stories of Adam and Eve to explain that serfdom was a later invention created in the interests of the elites. Transformation of the social, political, and religious order would, he argued, bring about a society with fairer distribution of power and resources ruled by a just king and a religious leader like himself. Ball also emphasised the labour involved in making the bread for the Eucharist as part of his stress on the liberation of the lower orders. In this future society, rebels like Ball looked to the early church as a model of all things being held in common, likely including access to parks, forests, rivers, and game. (See the CDAMM entries on John Ball and William Grindecobbe for more details.)

Robin Hood stories maintained popular concepts of an idealised social order previously associated with the apocalypticism and millenarianism of 1381 and its diverse sympathisers (on more general connections between 1381 and Robin Hood, see, e.g., Tardif 1983, 132; Coss 1985, 75–76). The fellowship in the Edenic greenwood echoes Ball's teaching on the beginning of human history in Genesis and a desire to share all things in common. The dangers of exploitation, corruption, and even boredom are typically present when the outlaws are removed from their Edenic base, a place in stark contrast to the world as it is. Like the 1381 rebels' hopes for access to game, water, parks, or woods as part of a world where all things are in common, Robin and his men take freely in such venues, even to the point of killing the king's deer in *Gest*. Other theological overlaps include an emphatic devotion to Mary shared between the Robin Hood stories and the letters attributed to John Ball, though this was not unusual for the time (Pollard 2004, 112–13; Knight and Ohlgren 2000, 32).

Robin's populist piety is foregrounded and given further credibility by the addition of the friar to the merry men (e.g., *Robin Hood and the Sheriff*, *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar*; on Robin's piety in context, see Heale 2024). It was noted above that Friar Tuck was a name associated with the clergy who had taken to banditry and crime. The chaplain Robert Stafford, for instance, was claimed to have assumed the name "Frere Tuk" and, along with his band, continued the sort of interests associated with the English uprising of 1381. In 1417, they were accused of poaching, violently entering parks and warrens in Surrey and Sussex, hunting and taking deer, hares, pheasants, rabbits, and partridges while threatening the keepers and burning their lodgings (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1911, 141, see also 84, and *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 1907,10).

Utopianism and Millenarianism

The differences between the 1381 uprising and the Robin Hood stories are as important as the similarities in understanding the trajectories of their comparable ideas over the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For instance, where the rebels of 1381 saw the need for violent struggle to help bring about

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millenarian transformation, the utopian world of the greenwood is, in one sense, more fantastical still—it is just *there*. The problems of poverty, exploitation, and malnutrition that troubled Ball are fantastically resolved in Robin's utopian greenwood; food consumed there is regularly luxurious, whether certain types of game, red wine, or (the then extravagant) white bread (Keen 1961, 9; Hanawalt 1992, 170).

While a range of forest, pastoral, and floral traditions feed into idealised understandings of the greenwood, Eden was an obvious reference point in medieval England. In general terms, the greenwood overlaps with, or at least has comparable functions to, the recognisable and wide-ranging medieval discussions about Eden and Edenic presentations of earthly Paradise, often infused with classical notions of a Golden Age (Pollard 2004, 73–81), and alongside associations between Mary and gardens, and ideas of Mary as a second Eve. These Edenic spaces could involve a setting full of protective trees, human dominion over animals and plants, enough food for a comfortable existence, and a location where work was not a necessity for survival (cf. Genesis 3:17) and where sharing all things in common was possible. Intellectually, Eden was, as Alastair Minnis put it, a utopian space for medieval theological guesswork "wherein the present-day situation of humankind could be set aside." The mind could wander to "a never-never-land or fantasy world, where speculation could be pursued without concern for practical consequence or contemporary relevance" (Minnis 2016, 1, with summary and discussion in, e.g., 1–23, 84–99). Of course, Edenic thinking could be about a fantasy or a long-lost world, but it could also function as a way to think more broadly about society with some contemporary relevance.

The Robin Hood stories clearly include fantastical speculations. With a summer setting of Robin's Edenic greenwood in the two early stories (*Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter*; cf. *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*), it is a lot easier to envisage or romanticise life in the forest than if it were set in the cold misery of winter with the band dining on root vegetables. Certainly, the killjoy reader could pose all sorts of practical questions about how the men survived out there. Can forest-dwelling yeomen live off theft, hunting, and conviviality alone? Clearly, as *Gest* shows, Robin and his men were assumed to be made of sterner stuff than the Sheriff who struggled with the chilly forest nights. But getting behind the story to the realities of everyday outdoor life—which the audiences presumably knew (Pollard 2004, 58–63, 71)—is not a significant concern in the early Robin Hood stories, where the well-ordered fraternity in the forest prevails.

The utopian greenwood resolves or harmonises the tensions that run throughout the stories between outlaw life and royal approval, and between criminality and obedience to the king. Here, and in contrast to the outside world, there is an idealised social order based on values such as honour, justice, respect, mutuality, fidelity, and piety (Nagy 1980, 205–6; Gray 1984, 35–37; Pollard 2004, 210). As Joseph Taylor (2013, 332) put it of the role of the Barnsdale wood in *Gest*, it is "an imaginative threshold wherein nature and politics intersect, where wildness and civility come together, and where natural law and positive law harmonize." For some, this world might have been an aspiration, a classic fantastical alternative to the difficulties of everyday existence. For the bandit-clergy, the greenwood might offer a romanticised version of a life of stealing game from the parks, forests, and lands. The potential, then, of a utopian goal and justification for class antagonism that would re-emerge in readings of Robin in later centuries was part of the lure of greenwood utopia. But the greenwood represents fantastical and idealised thinking that had wider contemporary relevance (Rigby 2024e, 232). Contextualised against the backdrop of the dreams from 1381, an idealised social order and all things in common were effectively answered in this Edenic greenwood. For others, such as yeomen audiences, fantastical though the resolution may have been at the

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level of the story, these dreams were, in reality, being transformed more practically into land or the language of existing fraternities and guilds. In this sense, struggle is redirected from a dramatic future transformation of England to the maintenance, protection, and advancement of such fraternal interests.

This transformation of the old struggles continued as Robin Hood was taken up by the gentry, the ruling class, and their sympathetic writers in the sixteenth century, reflecting his shifting social status toward that of a nobleman in the ongoing rewriting of the legend (Knight 2006). Yet the utopian dream of the greenwood in the early Robin Hood stories still echoes the interests of prominent rebels in 1381. Concerns for the world of the rural worker are present. Early in *Gest*, there is a warning not to harm the husbandman with his plough, perhaps also reflecting medieval notions of the honest Christian ploughman (Pollard 2004, 113–14), as presented in *Piers Plowman*. These stories can be seen as providing insights into desires for a better world in late medieval England, and as overlapping with those of the rebels of 1381, who included peasants among their ranks (see the CDAMM entry on John Ball). Indeed, the longer-term, socially ascendant middling sort emerging from the peasantry and associated with the yeomanry maintained a crucial role in articulating popular discontent among those below until the end of the sixteenth century (Wood 2007).

Again, receptions of the Robin Hood stories could also vary from social group to social group: a disgruntled lower clergyman or lesser yeoman might have had a different understanding of the Edenic alternative to that of a master, nobleman, northern lord, or Henry VIII. In this respect, the fifteenth-century stories of Robin Hood represent a bridge between a rebellious past and a different future. Indeed, the famous theme of Robin taking from the rich and giving to the poor was a later insertion into the stories, a gentlemanly charitable emphasis that took off in the sixteenth century. When *Gest* ends by remembering him as a good outlaw who “dyde pore men moch god,” this too may reflect an early stage of the so-called gentrification process of the legend (Ohlgren and Matheson 2013, 147; cf. Major 1740, 128; 1892, 156–57). The Reformation also had a crucial impact on the changing reception of the stories. By the time of Anthony Munday’s plays at the turn of the seventeenth century (*The Downfall of Robert Earle of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert Earle of Huntingdon*), Robin Hood had not only been gentrified but Protestantised, with the Catholic Church emerging as an enemy in the stories (Knight 1994, 88–97; Pollard 2004, 14–15; Knight 2021, 181–82).

Violence

The potential of the Robin Hood stories to prompt public violence was known in late-medieval receptions. As part of his reading of the stories, Tardif noted violence and criminal activity associated with the struggles of yeoman guilds and their emergence and growth in the face of existing guilds and the Statute of Labourers (Tardif 1983, 134–35, 138–39; Ohlgren 2000, 20–21). In outlaw, criminal, and insurgent behaviour (or at least allegations), the name of Robin or others (e.g., Friar Tuck) was used (or accused of being using) as a menacing alias for a leader of a (potentially) violent or murderous gang or rebellion (see above and, e.g., Fabyan 1811, 687; Dobson and Taylor 1976, 4; Tardif 1983, 138–39; Maddern 1992, 108–9; Knight 1994, 51; Pollard 2004, 94–96, 109–10, 178–82; Knight 2021, 180–81). Robin Hood’s name was also invoked in the disturbances associated with the build-up to Jack Cade’s Rebellion (1450), and parallels between the outlaw story and that uprising have been noted by scholars (Harvey 1991, 65; Kaufman 2009, 175–94; cf. Luxford 2009, 75). Robin and related names could, then, justify violent acts,

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carry fear in the eyes and ears of authorities, or offer grounds to make accusations of criminality.

By the sixteenth century, the roles of Robin Hood and his followers were (as they would be for at least a century) established features of plays, May Games, and related celebrations. While the revelries varied locally, these popular events (also attested in Scotland) involved entertainment, sports, parades, dressing up, dancing, performance, fundraising, ale, merriment—and sometimes violence (see, e.g., Dobson and Taylor 1976, 38–43; Stokes 1986, 1–25; Knight 1994, 98–115; Johnston 1998, 27–44; Knight and Ohlgren 2000, 5–6, 269–73; French 2001, 130–34; Knight 2008; Foroughi 2024,140–43; Marshall 2024). As well as a parish and community identity, the festive spirit could sometimes prompt riots and disorderly behaviour. In 1497, Robert/Roger Marshall of Wednesbury, Staffordshire, seems to have been involved in rescuing a friend who had been arrested and was accused, with others (including a priest), of leading a riotous and sizeable assembly and of calling himself "Robyn Hood." He defended himself against the allegations, claiming he and his entourage were acting in the carnival spirit and fundraising for the church (*Collections for a History of Staffordshire* 1907, 80–82).

Unsurprisingly, the revelries could be overly disruptive in the eyes of authorities, and so some towns banned the games and clamped down on rowdy Robin Hoods (Johnston 1998, 27–28, 37–38; Pollard 2004, 173–77). But if the potential for violent outbursts remained in festive settings, it does not necessarily equate to the violent resistance against exploitation and the social order as seen in 1381, where the festival of Corpus Christi played an important role in millenarian violence (see the CDAMM entries on John Ball, John Wrawe, and William Grindecobbe). Even so, tackling the connection of festivity to real-world violence is also part of the story of the longer-term gentrification of Robin Hood. Stephen Knight argued that "conservative culture" addressing such challenges was part of the broader, sometimes slow process of reworking the "celebration of the outlaw and his crimes" and Robin as a yeoman outlaw resisting authorities toward "a nobleman only resisting a bad king and a corrupt clergy" (Knight 2021,181).

Sources

Texts of *Robin Hood and the Monk* are available in Ohlgren and Matheson 2013, 7–17, 21. For discussion of its manuscript and textual history, see, e.g., Dobson and Taylor 1976, 9–10, 113–15; Knight 1994, 52–54; Knight and Ohlgren 2000, 57–58; Ohlgren 2007, 29–67; Ohlgren and Matheson 2013, 3–6, 18–20; Basdeo 2019, 28–32; Rigby 2024b, 10–11.

The text of *Robin Hood and the Potter* is available in Ohlgren and Matheson 2013, 27–38. For discussion of its manuscript and textual history, see, e.g., Dobson and Taylor 1976, 9–10, 123–25; Knight 1994, 54–56; Knight and Ohlgren 2000, 57–58; Ohlgren 2007, 68–96; Ohlgren and Matheson 2013, 23–26; Basdeo 2019, 32–35; Rigby 2024b, 11–12.

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Rigby 2024b gives a comprehensive overview of the range of sources concerning Robin Hood in late medieval England.

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