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Shooting Arrows Through Myth and History: The Evolution of the Robin Hood Legend

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Shooting Arrows Through Myth and History:
The Evolution of the Robin Hood Legend

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

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English Monarchs—Plantagenet through Stuart

Henry II (1152-1189)

Richard I (1189-1199-The “Lion Heart”)

John I (1199-1216-“Lackland”)

Henry III (1216-1272)

Edward I (1272-1307-“Longshanks”)

Edward II (1307-1327)

Edward III (1327-1377)

Richard II (1377-1399)

Henry IV (1399-1413-“Bolingbroke”)

Henry V (1413-1422)

Henry VI (1422-1461)

Edward IV (1461-1483)

Richard III (1483-1485)

Henry VII (1485-1509)

Henry VIII (1509-1547)

Edward V (1547-1553)

Jane Grey (1553-Disputed)

Mary I (1553-1558-“Bloody Mary”)

Elizabeth I (1558-1603-The “Virgin Queen”)

James I (1603-1625)

Charles I (1625-1649)

Oliver and Richard Cromwell (1649-1660-Lords Protector)

Charles II (1660-1685)

James II (1685-1688)

House of Plantagenet

House of Lancaster

House of York

House of Tudor

House of Stuart

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INTRODUCTION

A little luck, a lot of skill, and a slight squint were all that were required for Errol Flynn's Robin Hood to split an arrow in half at an archery contest in Nottingham (Figure 1). This is perhaps the most famous of Robin Hood's many feats as known in the twentieth century. People with little knowledge of the myth of Robin Hood can usually associate him with the man who split an arrow, an outlaw who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. It has become a cliché in the past ninety years or so. Robin has remained a prominent figure in English popular culture since he first began battling the Sheriff of Nottingham seven centuries ago.

This study begins with an examination of Robin Hood as he appeared in popular media from the fourteenth century through the twenty-first century. Some aspects of the Robin Hood myth have remained constant from the beginning (such as Robin's challenge to authority), but far more "staples" of Robin Hood lore have accumulated over the centuries (for example, Robin's superior skill with a bow and arrow). Chapter One's focus will trace how the myth has evolved and how the media have been affected by the cultural climate during their eras of production.

Historians and their work on Robin Hood are analyzed in Chapter Two. "Historical" texts about Robin Hood appear as early as the fourteenth century, when Robin was portrayed as one of Simon de Montfort's rebels. The purpose of this chapter is to study how historians' views on Robin have evolved, and determine how that development is a product of historical trends, such as a fear of communism in the nineteenth century and the move towards liberalism in the

twentieth century. The methods and motivations of Scottish historian Andrew of Wyntoun's 1420 text *Orygynale Chronicle* vary greatly from those of modern academics such as J.C. Holt and Stephen Knight, two of the more scientific Robin Hood historians. The earliest historical texts about Robin treat him as an actual figure of English history, a real hero whose past accomplishments fascinated all classes of society. On the other hand, more recent Robin Hood scholarship employs scientific methodology to discover historical truths about the man *and* the myths themselves.

My conclusion analyzes the patterns of evolution on the part of both popular media and serious historical writing and examines the effect of each century on the representations of the legend and historiography. The evidence suggests that historical scholarship on the subject of Robin Hood did not truly begin to develop on its own until the 1850s, having previously been blurred with popular representations of the myth. Some of the early "historians" used ballads as their biographical texts on Robin the man, but later historians study the ballads for their own sake, and for their historical value, while using medieval records and historical scholarship about the time period to determine what is fact and what is fiction regarding Robin Hood and his myth. Some of these modern authors write in the genre of historical revisionism, and most search for anachronisms or other inaccuracies in either their predecessors or the myths themselves.

The works of popular culture all share one crucial trait: each is heavily influenced by its cultural milieu. The main goal of these artistic works (be they literature, film, or painting) is to represent their own society through the mask of a medieval adventure. As the centuries passed, some of the myth's themes were retained, while novel ones were later added and adapted to better serve the author's aim in his own generation. The pleasure of the audience was oftentimes the chief objective; occasionally the author referred to Robin as an illustration of a theme, such

as robbing from the rich and giving to the poor.

The popular traditions follow a rather linear pattern of transition with each generation's popular representations of Robin Hood maturing and changing from the previous. The popular expressions followed closely the patterns of development of their respective societies. The evolution of Robin Hood historiography, however, is more complex. Early on, historic documents relied heavily upon popular myth of their period, and in fact, history and popular culture overlapped and closely followed parallel tracks until the nineteenth century. While the artistic tradition continued to follow similar themes and patterns, the historical works underwent a sharp adjustment in style and method in the mid-1800s, with the work of the English writer Joseph Hunter, forever separating the previously intertwined paths of history scholarship and popular media regarding the Robin Hood legend.

CHAPTER ONE

ROBIN HOOD IN POPULAR CULTURE

Few figures in English memory have withstood the test of time as well as the mythological hero Robin Hood. Entertaining audiences for as long as seven centuries, Robin's well-known antics most famously include archery and helping the poor. However, a twentieth century version of Robin, clad in green tights and wooing a beautiful Lady Marian, would have seemed foreign to fourteenth century listeners. Robin's dress, actions, motives, talents, friends, title, and very purpose have been transformed over the centuries, serving each successive public audience in a way most conducive to its own times. Even an original, core canon is difficult to point to as hard evidence, for the Robin Hood cycle remained less organized even than that of the other great English mythic champion, King Arthur. Unlike many of Arthur's stories, most of the earliest Robin ballads remain anonymous. Robin Hood circulated; he was talked about, acted out, and complained about. Through the centuries, Robin existed as the plaything of the people. He was such a stock character in the popular mind that he could easily become whatever the people wanted, and needed, him to be.

Most scholars of the Robin Hood legend agree that the earliest popular reference to Robin Hood occurred in William Langland's 1377 poem, *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*. Langland's attack on the hypocrisy of the clergy includes a quick allusion to "rhymes of Robin Hood,"

which are well known to one of the poem's characters. The problem, of course, is that while he is intimately familiar with Robin's deeds, he does not know his Paternoster (the "Our Father" prayer).¹ Langland's poem is a famous example of fourteenth century English poetry, as well as a relevant critique of his own society. That he casually includes a reference to Robin Hood suggests that readers were as acquainted with the outlaw as Langland himself was. Interestingly, the chief motivation behind mentioning Robin seems to be Langland's supreme irritation at what he views as a lack of religious sentiment. One can almost hear the distaste in his voice as he complains that Robin Hood is a more popular subject than God. This tone fails to portray Robin as an attractive figure, from Langland's perspective. However, it does give later readers insight as to what was considered popular in 1377. Robin was already famous; though no earlier text has been officially connected to the Robin Hood ballads, it is clear that his stories were already in wide circulation by this time. Langland's contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer, the most famous of all Medieval English writers, made what might be an allusion to Robin Hood in his 1380 play *Troilus and Criseyde*, when he mentioned a popular bowman, which, in later versions of the play, would translate directly to Robin Hood.² Chaucer's play had nothing to do with Robin, but the outlaw was popular enough to be included in a work by this famous author.

Fans of Maid Marian and Friar Tuck would be disappointed with what is, to date, considered to be the "original," written, Robin Hood ballads, compiled in the *Littel Geste of Robyn Hode* and other solitary stories associated with it. No exact date has been assigned to the *Geste*, which is anonymous and actually a series of ballads, some of which repeat themselves. The most recent scholarship has determined the ballads to be from the late 1300s or very early

¹ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, trans. George Economou (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 61. Originally written in England, 1377.

² J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 133.

1400s, and perhaps not printed together until the mid 1500s. The *Geste* has many inconsistencies, and should not be read in any particular order; it is not a coherent storyline. The reader is never told in these ballads why Robin is an outlaw; explanations will come in later adaptations. The ballads, in fact, do not provide much information that has come to be considered "dogma" of Robin Hood. He is not an earl or a knight; he is a "yeoman," a term much analyzed by Professor A.J. Pollard. Robin does not have Marian as his ladylove; he does, however, have a special devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus (interestingly, Marian is a variation of the name Mary). "Robyn loved Oure dere Lady... Wolde he never do compani harme That any woman was in," the *Geste* proclaims of its hero.³ With this basis, it would have been quite easy to later insert Marian as a love interest for Robin. In a seventeenth century text now grouped by one historian with the ballads of the *Geste*, Robin marries a woman named Clorinda.⁴

While a 1283 French play entitled *Robin et Marion*, by Adam d'Arras, used the same names as the modern hero and heroine, no official connection has been discovered. The play, a short piece concerning a shepherdess, her immature lover, and a knight, bears no resemblance to the Robin ballads,⁵ especially when one considers that the Marian character was not officially connected to Robin and his men until the sixteenth century.⁶

Marian was not a prominent character in these early ballads; however, other staples of Robin Hood lore did appear: the character who would later be referred to as Will Scarlet appears

³ Mike Dixon-Kennedy "The Littel Geste of Robin Hood," *The Robin Hood Handbook: The Outlaw in History, Myth, and Legend* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2006), 233.

⁴ Dixon-Kennedy, "Robin Hood's Birth, Breeding, Valour, and Marriage," 369.

⁵ Adam D'Arras, *Robin et Marion*. "Robin Hood Legend." <http://www.robinhoodlegend.com/play-robin-marion-le-jeu-de-robin-de-marion-2/> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁶ A.J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood* (London: Routledge, 2004), 14.

in the form of "Wyllyam Scarlock", and "Much, the millers son," but the most important man to Robin is "Lytell Johnn." These men operate not in Sherwood Forest, but in Barnesdale forest. However, their location does not prevent Robin's arch-enemy from being the "hye sherif of Notyngingham." The ballad "Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar" may refer to Friar Tuck, but he is not mentioned by name. The friar does, however, carry Robin across a stream on his back, which would later become a popular scene in Robin Hood lore.⁷

The *Geste* begins by addressing its audience as "gentilmen That be of frebore blode." The audience for Robin Hood stories was composed not of serfs, but "yeoman" like Robin himself. Historians will later debate the nature of the people who made up the original ballad audience. The very first line in the *Geste* dispelled any ideas that Robin's tales were on sole behalf of the oppressed feudal serfs. It appears that the ballads were for entertainment's sake; Reformation Bishop Hugh Latimer would bitterly complain in 1549 that nobody would listen to his sermons on "Robin Hood's day," which upset him greatly, as Robin was a "traitor and a thief."⁸ Robin was popular enough, by the middle of the sixteenth century, to be celebrated on a special day, and on May Day (along with Maid Marian)⁹ though his reputation as an outlaw clearly disturbed some. Indeed, there was much in the *Geste* to justify Bishop Latimer's grievance. The stories are violent; Robin displays a particular hatred for men of the cloth, and one of the main villains in the *Geste* is an abbot. Robin does appear to have an affinity for the king, who is called "Edwarde, our comly kynge" in the *Geste*.¹⁰ However, Robin was not nearly as complacent with

⁷ Dixon-Kennedy, "Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar," 321-326.

⁸ Hugh Latimer, "Sermons Preached Before King Edward VI: April 12, 1549," Project Canterbury. <http://anglicanhistory.org/reformation/latimer/sermons/edward6.html> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁹ Pollard, 14.

¹⁰ Dixon-Kennedy, "Littel Geste of Robin Hood," 273.

the sheriff of Nottingham. Robin shot the sheriff with his bow and arrow, and then “smote of the sherifs hede with his bright bronde.”¹¹

As he is characterized in the *Geste*, Robin Hood did not seek to destroy the monarchy or the hierarchical society in which he lived. Robin respects the king; he agrees to work for the king for a time, before he grows bored with the service. Robin and his men do not loathe the idea of hierarchy; rather, they believe that the men who occupy those privileged positions happen to be corrupt and cruel, mistreating those beneath them. This idea is consistent with the thoughts of the people involved in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Popular leader Wat Tyler had no troubles with the king, Richard II. The people’s hero, then, would not have a problem with their king, whom they believed enjoyed divine favor and who was at the top of their feudal hierarchy. The fourteenth century hero would question and punish those who misused power entrusted to them from that king, whom they viewed as “their imagined champion.”¹²

Alexander Barclay’s English version of Alsatian satirist Sebastian Brandt’s 1494 work *The Ship of Fools* (which appeared in England in 1509) provides another example of Robin Hood as a “household name.” Barclay was the first to link Robin Hood with Maid Marian, though he did not explicitly state that the two were part of the same myth cycle. Rather, Barclay names Marian as another figure whose stories were popular at the time.¹³ Brandt/Barclay also brought up the same point Hugh Latimer would make forty years later, that the Bible had been

¹¹ Dixon-Kennedy, 272.

¹² Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 373.

¹³ David Baldwin, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked* (Gloucestershire, UK: Amberley Publishing, 2010), 30.

replaced in its truth by “a folysshe yest of Robyn hode.”¹⁴ William Langland’s fear of the previous century continued to carry on, and Robin Hood continued to be popular enough to be recognized.

The *Geste* placed Robin’s activities at the time of one of the King Edwards. Anthony Munday’s 1598 plays about Robin Hood set the story during the 1190s, the time of King Richard I and his brother, Prince John, setting a precedent for Robin Hood lore for the next four hundred years. Munday most likely developed his ideas for the plays from historian John Major. The playwright took some ideas from the *Geste*, such as Little John’s antagonism with the Sheriff of Nottingham. Marian appears as Robin’s lover, but she is called both “Marian” and “Matilda” interchangeably. Scarlet and Scathlock both appear, as a set of brothers. The villain is not Prince John, however, but the Prior, who eventually kills Robin.¹⁵ In the traditional ballad *The Death of Robin Hood* (not thought to be recorded until the seventeenth century¹⁶) it is Robin’s female cousin/aunt at Kirklees Abbey who bleeds Robin to death. The poet Michael Drayton, whose poems about Marian helped to secure her place by Robin Hood’s side, influenced Munday.¹⁷ Drayton’s “Matilda the Faire and Chaste daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater” was published in 1594. Munday was also influenced by his political situation, being surrounded by men

¹⁴ Sebastian Brandt, *The Ship of Fools*. Alexander Barclay, trans. (W. Paterson, 1874), 72. Originally published in Switzerland (German: *Das Narrenschiff*).

¹⁵ Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren, “Introduction” to Anthony Munday’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington* in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997). Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/dowdeint.htm> (accessed November 2, 2011).

¹⁶ Dixon-Kennedy, Introduction to “The Death of Robin Hood,” 384.

¹⁷ Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, “Outlaws and Highwaymen.” <http://www.outlawsandhighwaymen.com/drayton.htm> (accessed November 3, 2011).

supportive of the English Reformation, who approved of making the Catholic a villain.¹⁸ When Munday's plays were performed, Queen Elizabeth I was the reigning monarch, the Protestant daughter of the Reformation King Henry VIII. This might perhaps be part of the reason why Robin's devotion to Jesus' mother, Mary (a Catholic tradition), was gradually replaced by the form of an actual female character, Marian.¹⁹ One of the most important features of Munday's plays is the title he gave to Robin Hood: the Earl of Huntington (sometimes spelled Huntingdon, depending on the source). With these two plays, Robin achieves noble status, a theme that would later on become integral to Robin Hood folklore.

Geoffrey Chaucer has achieved heroic status in the literary world as the first of the giants of English literature. Robin was significant enough to be mentioned by Chaucer. Over two hundred years later, however, Robin Hood achieved even more "status" by being alluded to in a play by the most famous of all English writers, William Shakespeare. The Bard's comedy *As You Like It*, performed in 1602 but published in 1623, includes two sets of opposing brothers. When one of the Dukes goes to live in the forest, being separated from his brother, the character Oliver inquires about the Duke's new living arrangements. The character Charles replies that the Duke is living in the forest with "a many merry men," living "like the old Robin Hood of England."²⁰ The characters in the play are French, which is perhaps why Charles feels the need to point out that Robin Hood is "of England." Shakespeare's play serves the same function as Chaucer's; the character of Robin is hardly crucial to the plot of the story. However, what is important to note is that these two authors incorporate the "pop culture reference" of Robin Hood in their works,

¹⁸ Knight and Ohlgren.

¹⁹ Pollard, 189.

²⁰ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/asyoulikeit/full.html> (accessed October 30, 2011).

because they assume that their audience will be familiar with the character. In the third century of Robin Hood culture, his name had hardly declined in importance. Two centuries later, English author Robert Southey would refer to Shakespeare's play in his 1812 work *The Doctor* and comment, "while England shall be England, Robin Hood will be a popular name."²¹

In 1632, a "historical" text, Martin Parker's *A True Tale of Robin Hood* included a frontispiece that featured the main hero (Figure 2). Robin, however, bears little resemblance to a medieval yeoman, or even a medieval nobleman. Rather, he is dressed more like one would expect Oliver Cromwell to dress. Robin does not carry a seventeenth century musket, but everything from his hat to his shoes is contemporary to the publication of the book. There was little or no effort here to adhere to a historical representation of the hero. The artist behind the frontispiece either had no access to medieval art or simply did not care that his characters were dressed anachronistically. While it is easy to criticize past artists for these errors, it is much more legitimate to condemn modern artists who fail to keep with the proper time period, in an age of mass communication and abundant historical resources. In an earlier example of inaccuracy in art from 1450 (Figure 3), Robin is displayed in a woodcarving carrying a longbow, which was not in popular use until the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). An ordinary forest yeoman of the late twelfth century would have used a much shorter bow; in the *Geste*, while the characters are archers, they often prefer to use a staff.

Many of the works that are currently classified with the ballads of the *Geste* were written down or edited in the eighteenth century, but Robin Hood lore grew in importance in the nineteenth century and would continue through the twenty-first century, and for this reason the eighteenth century does not need to be studied here.

²¹ Robert Southey, *The Doctor*, (Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), 105.

The Romantic period in English literature, which began in the 1790s, produced famous poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron. The movement was, to a considerable extent, a reaction to the new ideas of utilitarianism and the material culture of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Romantic art and poetry stressed nature, emotions, and spirituality, and rejected, for the most part, pure reason. The young poet John Keats, most famous perhaps for his “Ode to a Nightingale,” published in 1818 the poem “Robin Hood to a Friend,” responding to a Robin Hood poem by his friend John Hamilton Reynolds.²² One of the elements of Romanticism was nostalgia for the medieval, a time that would be highly romanticized and viewed in an ideal light. John Keats’ poem certainly regarded the Middle Ages with fond remembrance, which he did not define in a specific time frame but rather referred to it as the time in which Robin Hood lived. “No! those days are gone away,” Keats began, and he proceeded to describe the medieval period with awe, lamenting the disappearance of that exemplary era. “Honour to the Lincoln green,” Keats exclaimed, referring to a description in the *Geste*. Marian and Robin would, Keats believed, “weep” and “craze” over the destruction of their forests in favor of dockyards and progress. The main element that Keats praised from the Robin Hood legend was nature, but the poet referred to Robin’s abilities with a bow and arrow as well.²³ None of the violence that occurred in the early Robin Hood ballads appeared in this poem; Keats’ purpose was merely for praise of an era long past.

The Robin Hood myth entered a period of pure romanticism in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Reynolds’ and Keats’s work was the beginning. Sir Walter Scott would follow them. In 1819 Scott published *Ivanhoe*, a very important historical novel that followed

²² Knight, *Mythic Biography*, 101.

²³ John Keats, “Robin Hood to a Friend,” Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/rh/keats.htm> (accessed November 1, 2011).

Keats' medieval nostalgia. The title character is the hero of the novel, a friend of King Richard I and a veteran of the Third Crusade. In the nineteenth century Scott was given much credit for the Medieval Revival, though twentieth century critic Alice Chandler would argue that Scott's work was merely a manifestation of common interest throughout the century before Scott's publication.²⁴ Sir Walter Scott was the first to refer to Robin Hood, who plays a small but crucial role in *Ivanhoe*, as "Locksley." Like Munday's Earl of Huntingdon, Scott's Locksley would take on a very important role in future Robin Hood traditions. *Ivanhoe* was also the first occasion in which Robin Hood split an arrow. The following year, English poet Leigh Hunt wrote a series of Robin Hood poems linking him to the character of Gamelyn, whose story had been associated with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Hunt used Locksley as Robin's home, following Scott.²⁵

Twentieth century Robin Hood historian Stephen Knight refers to author Thomas Love Peacock as the man who "set up the outlaw hero in his new positioning, as a vigorous patriotic English heterosexual, in touch with natural law and noble in both birth and values."²⁶ This description ably relates the Robin Hood stereotype. Peacock's 1822 work *Maid Marian* referred to "Robert" as both Locksley and the Earl of Huntingdon, drawing on the previous authors. The purpose was a love story, which seems accurate given the title. Peacock was the first and possibly the only popular author to set Robin Hood's story solely during the reign of King Henry II (1154-1189). Later Howard Pyle would begin with Henry II and end with Henry's son,

²⁴ Alice Chandler, "Sir Walter Scott and the Medieval Revival." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* Vol. 19. No. 4 (March 1965): 315-332, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2932872> (accessed November 4, 2011).

²⁵ Leigh Hunt, Robin Hood Cycle, Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester, e-book, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/rh/huntchld.htm> (accessed November 19, 2011).

²⁶ Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 123.

Richard I. With Peacock's work, the "modern" Robin Hood was established. Peacock influenced several contemporary authors who continued to write about Robin with this romantic view, using much more "castle" and much less "forest".²⁷ Robin's relationship with Marian was sealed and his popularity continued to soar throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1843, G.P.R. James published *Forest Days*, a novel that featured Robin Hood as a secondary character. James set the novel during the time of Henry III (1216-1272), because Robin was portrayed as one of Simon de Montfort's (died 1265) rebels.²⁸

Howard Pyle toned down the highly romanticized relationship between Marian and Robin slightly for the children's novel *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown of Nottinghamshire*. Pyle's 1883 book set the tone and the plot for several of the Robin Hood renditions that would follow. This Robin is the "quintessential" Robin Hood, from a modern perspective. He robs from the rich and gives to the poor. He comes from Locksley Town. Henry II is the king at the beginning of the novel, but his son Richard I will eventually succeed him and will be the "lion-hearted" king so revered in many representations. Little John bests Robin in a fight with staffs. Friar Tuck carries Robin across a river on his back. Even the traditional Sir Richard Lea is a character. The novel accounts for Robin's collection of "merry men," and then chronicles some of their activities, ending with Robin's death at Kirklees Abbey. The story begins in the springtime, and Robin turns to thoughts of his Maid Marian, as many lads do at such a time.²⁹ This description is reminiscent of Chaucer's General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*.

²⁷ Knight, *A Mythic Biography*, 123.

²⁸ Ibid., 143.

²⁹ Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown in Nottinghamshire* (New York: Junior Deluxe Editions, 1883), 16.

Pyle's book would create a "canonical" list of Robin Hood events. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that Pyle was an American. His children's novel was published in the United States. The Robin Hood lore would become extremely popular in the United States, where the legend would continue to grow in the twentieth century.

Continuing the American tradition, Reginald de Koven and Harry B. Smith wrote an opera in 1891 that was performed at the Standard Theater in New York City. The plot is a familiar one: Robert, the Earl of Huntington, loses his title and becomes Robin Hood, an outlaw who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. The opera was a pure romance revolving around Robin and Marian, but the Sheriff of Nottingham appeared with other characters such as Little John, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet, Allen a Dale, and Guy of Gisbourne. The opera was complete with an archery contest and the hero clad in Lincoln green.³⁰

Victorian Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson continued the tradition in its native land with his 1892 play *The Foresters*. Robin is the Earl of Huntington. Maid Marian is the daughter of Sir Richard Lea. In the Koven opera of the previous year, Marian was the daughter of Lord Fitzwalter and a ward of the English crown, a theme explored in later film versions of the tale. Tennyson kept to the traditional ballads by using Richard Lea as a character, that original "good knight" of the *Geste*. Most of the famous characters are here, and King Richard I is indeed the monarch. Tennyson considered Robin to be the greatest hero since Hereward the Wake, an early medieval outlaw hero who predates Robin Hood. Tennyson's work will be influential for the later film portrayal of Robin Hood in 1938, with regard to the entrance of King Richard, back from Crusade. Robin asks the unidentified knight if he is for Richard or for John, displaying Robin's loyalty toward the rightful king. *The Foresters* is a very Victorian play, displaying

³⁰ "Robin Hood," Guide to Musical Theater.
http://www.guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows_r/robinhood.htm (accessed November 3, 2011).

typical Victorian public views towards sexuality. Marian declares that she will not kiss Robin until they are wed, but their devoted love to one another is obvious.³¹ Tennyson's characters were chaste compared to other representations that evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.

A series of Victorian prints in historian David Baldwin's book *Robin Hood: the English Outlaw Unmasked* reveal a highly colorful, nature-themed, and romanticized look at outlaw culture and the Robin Hood myth. While the costumes on these characters are, for the most part, medieval, in one drawing the king, presumably Richard I, is shown wearing the double colors of red and blue, the heraldic shield of both the English throne and the French. However, the first English king to claim both titles was Edward III (1327-1377), and so this man could not possibly be Richard I (Figure 4). Baldwin points out that the typical "children's" version of Robin Hood is often seen in clothing "two or three centuries too late for the real Robin Hood"³² (Figures 5 and 6).

With the twentieth century came a new medium through which popular stories could be exhibited: the moving picture. The first film rendition of the myth came in 1908, with *Robin Hood and His Merry Men*. In 1922, larger audiences were able to *see* Robin Hood—a hero who had been words on a page or lyrics in a ballad for nearly seven centuries. There was no better actor to portray Robin Hood than Douglas Fairbanks, who himself had become a popular hero as one of the first idolized male movie stars, who happened to be married to the first "sweetheart" actress, Mary Pickford. Giants of the movie industry, Pickford and Fairbanks could do no wrong for America's audiences. Handsome and masculine, Fairbanks embodied what would become the

³¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Foresters*. Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/rh/forest.htm> (accessed November 3, 2011).

³² David Baldwin, Picture Insert.

twentieth century Robin Hood (Figure 7).

Fairbanks' film recalled the Keats Romantic mentality. The film was silent, of course, but the title cards displayed the director's feeling towards the subject matter: "make live again the days of chivalry." King Richard was described as "England's immortal king." Interestingly, the film, properly titled *Douglas Fairbanks in Robin Hood*, put forth a good effort regarding visual historical accuracy: the women's dresses were quite medieval; castle life included dogs running about inside; the knights wore chain mail.³³ However, there was a lot of prancing involved that most likely would not have occurred in Sherwood Forest. Robin was the Earl of Huntingdon, complete in feathered cap, and the film's actions were rather violent, true to the *Geste*. Twenty-first century critic Thomas Leitch writes that Fairbanks' Robin Hood was a "pre-World War I American hero, who [...] returns from the continent with all the exuberance that we have come to associate with the Roaring Twenties and the Jazz Age."³⁴ Leitch remarks that Fairbanks referred to his film as the "rehabilitation of Robin Hood as a national hero."³⁵ The English myth, here, became what best served America's purpose in the 1920s.

1938 was a landmark year for the modern representation of Robin Hood. The legendary Errol Flynn took on the role of Robin, who was portrayed as Locksley, not Huntington. The film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, was nominated for several Academy Awards. Flynn's film adopted a representation of Robin Hood as an English nationalist at a time when an unstable Europe was being further drawn into nationalism at the onset of the Second World War (1939-

³³ *Douglas Fairbanks in Robin Hood*, directed by Allan Dwan (United States: Douglas Fairbanks Pictures, 1922), DVD. Starring Douglas Fairbanks and Enid Bennett.

³⁴ Thomas Leitch, "Adaptations Without Sources: The Adventures of Robin Hood," *Literature Film Quarterly* 36 (2008): 21-30.

³⁵ Ibid.

1945). Robin was an outlaw and a Saxon; Marian, ward of King Richard, was a Norman, as was her unsuccessful suitor, Guy of Gisbourne, and his silly friend, the Sheriff of Nottingham. Robin's fight was not necessarily against the Normans, but rather against injustice (just as the fight of the ballad Robin was against corruption and not the monarchy). Robin was, however, a firm defender of the oppressed Saxons and blamed Marian's "Norman friends" for the injustice.³⁶ A touch of American rhetoric was infused in this medieval myth.

The Sheriff in this film was not the main enemy; Prince John filled that role quite nicely. Olivia de Havilland personified the ideal romantic Maid Marian: beautiful, sweet, intelligent, and helpful, but eventually passive, allowing Robin to save the day and rescue his beloved. The film borrowed some ideas from the Fairbanks version, but on the whole its epic qualities set it in a class by itself, using immense star power to solidify the myth's place as a staple of classic Hollywood cinema.

In 1952 Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* came to the silver screen, reminding audiences that the Locksley in the novel is in fact Robin Hood, though he is hardly as important as the hero of the film, Robert Taylor's character Ivanhoe. Biblical and medieval epic films, such as *Ben-Hur*, were very popular in America in the 1950s. In the same year as *Ivanhoe*, Disney released a version of the myth, *The Story of Robin Hood and his Merrie Men*.

The 1950s were a time of great prosperity for the American people, and the favorite new way to enjoy that prosperity was the television. Richard Greene starred in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, a 1955 children's television show, which was originally British but was also broadcast in the United States. By this time, Robin Hood had become as much an American hero as an English one. Each episode featured Robin and his men getting into some sort of half-hour

³⁶ *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, directed by Michael Curtiz. (United States: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1938), DVD. Starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland.

action. The show lasted for four seasons of Robin, the former Knight of Locksley, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor.³⁷

As mass media continued to produce dozens of versions of the Robin Hood myth, the twentieth century American public became as well acquainted with the English hero as were the audiences of Chaucer and Shakespeare. So as not to overdue the traditional story, American producers sought to find new and innovative ways to tell the Robin Hood tale. Frank Sinatra's "Rat Pack" would star in 1964's *Robin and the 7 Hoods*, a Prohibition-era film about gangsters loosely based on the *idea* of Robin Hood.³⁸ In 1973 Walt Disney Pictures released an animated version of the film that was practically a clone of the Errol Flynn picture, but using foxes and other animals as the characters. Robin, a fox, was dressed remarkably like Errol Flynn, and his lady-fox friend Maid Marian is as close as she can be to Olivia de Havilland³⁹ (Figure 8).

In 1976, the Robin Hood legend took on mature and modern themes as part of its original ideas and representations. Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn, in her first film in nine years, starred in *Robin and Marian* (Figure 9), a sad, poignant film that had much more depth than the antics of a group of foxes. Robin, an old man, returns home after the death of King Richard in 1199 at a French castle. This Robin is a rather progressive thinker, as were most of the Robins of the twentieth century. Disgusted with Richard's violence in France and remembering his atrocities at Acre during the crusades, Robin returns home to England, only to find that Marian has become a nun. This does not prevent the two, who are still quite in love, from reuniting,

³⁷ "The Adventures of Robin Hood," (UK: ITV, 1955-1960), Produced by Hannah Weinstein. Starring Richard Greene.

³⁸ *Robin and the 7 Hoods*, directed by Gordon Douglas. (United States: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1964), DVD. Starring Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin.

³⁹ *Robin Hood*, directed by Wolfgang Reitherman. (United States: Walt Disney Productions, 1973), DVD. Starring Brian Bedford and Peter Ustinov (voices).

prompting Marian to scandalously proclaim that she loves Robin “more than God.” Marian had attempted suicide after Robin left her. These mature themes took the Robin Hood story to a different level than the previous novels and films exhibited. Though it was only somewhat successful with critics and audiences, who may have disliked it either because of the intensity of the themes or because, aside from those themes, the plot of the story is rather thin, *Robin and Marian* nevertheless was a turning point in the Robin Hood saga, bringing the story back to its intensity in the fourteenth century renditions and moving the myth away from the children’s realm that it had been inhabiting in the twentieth century.⁴⁰

The television tradition continued in Britain with the 1984 show *Robin of Sherwood*, which incorporated some traditional, pagan, mystical qualities and used two separate characters to fulfill the title role, Locksley and Huntington, both of whom fought the Normans, the Sheriff of Nottingham, and Guy of Gisbourne. Guy’s character was eventually discovered to be the half brother of Robin. The series also featured a Muslim Saracen character, Nasir.⁴¹ Later versions of the myth would incorporate this new, “global” feature.

Kevin Costner (Figure 10) received heavy criticism for his role as Robin in the 1991 version of the tale, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. In an effort to be contemporary and relevant to modern audiences, the film “comes out firmly for civil rights, feminism, religious freedom and economic opportunity for all,” as one reviewer states. Morgan Freeman played Azeem, an Islamic friend of Robin, in the spirit of the 1980s television show, but as a review explains, the film was attempting to be “relevant” to its audience, thus allowing Robin to strongly defend his

⁴⁰ *Robin and Marian*, directed by Richard Lester. (United States: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1976), DVD. Starring Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn.

⁴¹ “Robin of Sherwood,” (UK: ITV, 1984-1986), Created by Richard Carpenter. Starring Jason Connery and Michael Praed.

Muslim friend in the midst of Crusader ideology.⁴² Costner was especially criticized for his American accent (despite the hiring of a dialect coach), which he did not bother to alter. Mel Brooks, in 1993's *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (Figure 11), a spoof, attacks Costner's performance as Robin.⁴³ Regardless of that, Costner's film was at least entertaining, true to the original spirit of the ballads.

As the twentieth century came to a close, modern ideals were still being incorporated into the Robin Hood legend, and film producers continued to envision new ways in which to market Robin to varied audiences. In 2001, Keira Knightley starred as Robin's daughter (Figure 12) in *Princess of Thieves*, a children's version which put the power in the hands of a young woman taking care of her famous but aging father. A far cry from marketing yeoman peasants, this film's goal was to win over young girls.⁴⁴

The BBC continued its tradition of Robin Hood television in 2006 with *Robin Hood* (Figure 13), a liberal and entertaining show that incorporated an Islamic character, this time a female (Djaq). The costumes on the show were rarely medieval; the character of Marian, a spitfire, was more often than not just as important a heroine as Robin was a hero. She herself thought up a scheme in which she can rob the rich and give to the poor. Robin was a master archer; his tricks with a bow and arrow make watching the program engaging. The villain was excellent as well: the Sheriff of Nottingham reached new levels of evil and twisted psychology. Guy of Gisbourne was once again revealed to be Robin's half brother, which added flavor to the

⁴² Vincent Canby, "A Polite Robin Hood in a Legend Recast," *The New York Times*, June 14, 1991, C1.

⁴³ *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, directed by Mel Brooks. (United States: Brooksfilm, 1993), DVD. Starring Cary Elwes.

⁴⁴ *Princess of Thieves*, directed by Peter Hewitt. (United States: The Walt Disney Company, 2001), DVD. Starring Keira Knightley and Malcolm McDowell.

rivalry between the two. Robin was the Earl of Locksley, displaced from his lands once again upon arriving home from fighting in the Holy Land with King Richard. The show was certainly flawed, but had its intriguing features as well.⁴⁵

Leaving no popular culture category behind, Robin Hood's myth was turned into a graphic novel in 2007 by Paul D. Storrie and Thomas Yeates, a team which had also adapted Greek myths and the English story *Beowulf* into graphic novels.

In 2009, English novelist Angus Donald began a series of Robin Hood novels. The first, *Outlaw*, featured Alan Dale as a main character, who joins Robin's band of cutthroats in Sherwood Forest. The character of Robin Hood, the Earl of Locksley, is portrayed as more cruel and fierce than previous renditions. Donald followed up *Outlaw* in 2010 and 2011 with *Holy Warrior* and *King's Man*.

In 2010, Ridley Scott directed Russell Crowe (Figure 14) and Cate Blanchett in *Robin Hood*, a film whose tagline was "the untold story behind the legend." The movie received mixed reviews. One *New York Times* reviewer acknowledged that the legend was bound to change with the times but that this new version was highly Americanized—"Don't tread on him [Robin]." He does praise Scott's direction of the opening scene of Richard I and his crusading army attacking a French castle in 1199, because it exhibits accurately the fighting techniques used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴⁶ The film featured a Robin Hood duality: Robert of Locksley, husband of Marian and friend of King Richard I, dies along with Richard in France. As he lay dying, Robert begs a simple archer, Robin Longstride, to return a sword to his father Walter in Nottingham. Upon arrival there, Robin Longstride assumes the role of Robert of Locksley in

⁴⁵ "Robin Hood," (UK: BBC, 2006-2009), Created by Foz Allan and Dominic Minghella. Starring Jonas Armstrong and Lucy Griffiths.

⁴⁶ A.O. Scott, "Rob the Rich? Give to the Poor? Oh, Puh-leeze!" *New York Times*, May 14, 2010.

order to protect Walter and Marian's land from the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. On a grander scale, a plot to weaken the new King John is afoot, so that the king of France, Philip, might invade England. Robin and Marian (who fights alongside him) lead a group of barons and forest orphans against the French, with the support of King John, who had promised the barons a charter of liberties. Upon the defeat of the French, however, John reneges on his promise, burns the charter, and declares Robin to be an outlaw. In the final scene, Robin and Marian tend to their outlaw band in the forest.⁴⁷

The film ends with the title card, "and so the legend begins." Scott attempted to create a "new" side to the legend, the backstory, to explain why Robin was an outlaw, something the *Geste* never did. He started to subvert history by introducing what would be later known as the Magna Carta, which was signed in 1215, not 1199. Scott remedied this flaw by, at the end of the film, having King John refuse to sign the charter and then burn it, angering the barons even further and perhaps giving reason for the 1215 signing. While medieval kings were believed to have ruled by the special favor of God, the concept of Divine Right truly emerged with the Tudors and Stuarts. In this film, however, King John declares his Divine Right to the throne and uses that as the reason to destroy the charter.

From the *Littel Geste of Robyn Hood* to twenty-first century film adaptations, Robin Hood has undergone many transformations: yeoman, earl, nationalist, socialist, romantic hero. The myth changed with the times; some artists altered the legend because of political purposes, or personal preferences. Other artists merely copied their predecessors. Some authors based their fiction on what the most recent historians had to say on the topic of Robin Hood, while others freely discarded history altogether. On the whole, each new piece of the Robin Hood legend was

⁴⁷ *Robin Hood*, directed by Ridley Scott. (United States: Universal Pictures, 2010), DVD. Starring Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett.

a product of its time, adapted to fit the needs of a new audience. Authors and artists were not the only people interested in Robin Hood, and they were not the only ones to be heavily influenced by social and political forces. Historians of the Robin Hood myth followed a similar pattern of development.

CHAPTER TWO

ROBIN HOOD IN HISTORY

Throughout the centuries Robin Hood has been more than just a popular character of lore. A cultural figure as prominent as Robin would naturally attract the attention of historians who wished to study his impact on society, and society's impact on his legend. Robin Hood's charisma and immense popularity amongst people of all classes and across multiple centuries have made him a popular figure amongst historians, who have been writing about Robin since the fifteenth century. What is important to note in this chapter is that the work of the earliest Robin Hood "historians" bore a close resemblance to popular culture. It was not until the 1850s and thereafter that historians began to branch out on their own, creating a Robin Hood historiography that was intrinsically separate and distinct from Robin Hood popular culture. For this reason, it is complicated for modern readers and historians to study the work of these early scholars and to use their material as objective historical sources. Further, Robin Hood historians have been as influenced by their own time periods as the authors of popular culture material were.

The earliest known *historical* text that mentions Robin Hood is the *Metrical or Orygynale Chronicle*, written by Scottish prior Andrew of Wyntoun in 1420. In his chronicle, written at the Scottish monastery of Loch Leven, Prior Andrew wrote for the year 1283: "Than litill Jhone and

Robyne Hude Waichmen were commendit gud In Yngilwode and Bernysdale.”⁴⁸ The prior’s history displays a heavy Scottish bias, especially regarding English King Edward I in his wars against the Scottish, and Robin’s characterization was linked to that of William Wallace (died 1305). Wallace and the Scottish wars were still prominent in the world of educated Scots a century later, when the prior was writing. Andrew placed Robin’s activities near the Scottish border, and there has been debate as to whether the reference to “Bernysdale” refers to the Barnsdale of the ballads, in Yorkshire, or if it refers to the Barnsdale in Rutland, closer to Scotland. Interestingly, Rutland’s Barnsdale had a connection to the Earl of Huntingdon, though Andrew did not mention this in his chronicle.⁴⁹ The earliest popular reference to Huntingdon was in Anthony Munday’s plays in 1598, and it is possible that Munday took this title from earlier historical texts about the hero.

It is unclear how Prior Andrew selected the date 1283 for his Robin Hood entry. Twenty years later, another religious Scotsman, Walter Bower, placed Robin in the year 1266. Bower’s chronicle was actually an updated version of one compiled about sixty years earlier, John Fordun’s *Scotichronicon* (1384). Fordun did not include Robin Hood, but Bower wrote of the “well-known cut-throat,” Robert Hood, whose popularity was immense in England, where they foolishly celebrated both his “comedies and tragedies.” Robin was portrayed as religiously devoted, often attending or celebrating a Mass, and, most importantly, he was described as one

⁴⁸ Andrew Wyntoun, “Metrical Chronicle” in Baldwin, 59.

⁴⁹ Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren, “Introduction” to Andrew Wyntoun’s *Orygynale Chronicle* in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997). Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/orygnale.htm>. (accessed October 27, 2011).

of the “disinherited.”⁵⁰ The term comes from the name given to followers of the noble rebel Simon de Montfort, who supported the Provisions of Oxford (1258), which demanded that the English king (Henry III) meet with Parliament three times per year. Henry and Simon continued to disagree, and in 1264 Simon led an uprising against the monarch. Simon suffered defeat and death the following year, although he had achieved something in January of 1265 when Parliament’s meeting included knights and burgesses as well as nobles.⁵¹ Robin’s connection to Simon would make him popular to audiences that distrusted too much monarchical authority and who favored a stronger parliamentary role.⁵² Robin’s association with the “disinherited” would explain why he was outlawed; however, it is not in keeping with the *Geste* in which Robin displays little antagonism towards the king, who happens to be one of the Edwards (1272-1377), not Henry III (1216-1272). Bower may have believed that Robin’s participation in the rebellion in 1264 explained his outlawry and thus would account for why Robin was solidified as an outlaw during the reign of Edward I eight years later. It is still unclear which Edward the *Geste* refers to, however, and is further ambiguous as to where Bower gathered his information about “Robert Hood.” Regardless of where his information came from, Bower’s was the first document, historical or otherwise, to give Robin a particular cause associated with his outlawry.

Both Wyntoun and Bower were Scottish and clergymen; neither would have been overly fond of an Englishman who terrorized monks, as exhibited by Bower’s remark that the English

⁵⁰ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, “Introduction” to Walter Bower’s *Continuation* to John Fordun’s *Scotichronicon* in *Robin Hood and Other Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997). Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/scotichr.htm> (accessed October 31, 2011).

⁵¹ Nigel Saul, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107-108.

⁵² Knight and Ohlgren, Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/scotichr.htm> (accessed October 31, 2011).

celebrate Robin “foolishly.” Bower may have approved of Robert Hood’s insurgence against the English king, but that king was Henry, not his son, Edward I (1272-1307), who began the wars against Scotland that would make famous Andrew of Wyntoun’s hero, William Wallace.

The earliest discovered English document that mentions Robin Hood was composed around 1460. Ranulf Higden, a Somerset monk, presented Robin as a criminal who “infested” Sherwood Forest and “other law-abiding areas of England with continuous robberies.” The implication is that Robin was not a beloved, peasant-helping young ruffian but rather a serious criminal whose offenses were imposed upon the English everyman. Higden’s words are difficult to accept as completely accurate, however. Being a monk would naturally have influenced Higden immensely, as it did Wyntoun and Bower.⁵³ That Robin was unpopular amongst the clergy seems reasonable.

In twentieth century popular culture, Robin Hood was the devoted follower of King Richard the Lion Heart. The same cannot be said for the Robin of the *Geste*, but the idea of King Richard came, initially, from historian John Major, who chose the years 1193-1194 for his entry on Robin Hood.⁵⁴ Major was also Scottish, but was not a monk. He was educated on the continent and published his *History of Greater Britain* in 1521. Being more worldly than his two Scottish predecessors, Major wrote with much less of a Scottish bias, and did not portray Edward I as viciously as did the earlier Scottish historians.⁵⁵ Major’s Robin more closely resembled the modern Robin: guardian of women and champion of the destitute, honorable, accompanied by

⁵³ Baldwin, 61.

⁵⁴ Holt, 40.

⁵⁵ Knight and Ohlgren, “Introduction” to John Major’s *Historia Majoris Britanniae* in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester.
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/historia.htm> (accessed November 1, 2011).

his devoted friend Little John, and extremely popular amongst the ordinary Englishmen. Historian Stephen Knight (writing in 2003) suggested that Major took this idea from the legend of Fouke le Fitz Waryn, who was an outlaw during the time of King Richard. Knight also states that Major's descriptions of Robin lay the groundwork for the future displaced nobleman version of Robin Hood⁵⁶ that would become quite popular in the nineteenth century.

Several historians after Major wrote about Robin but added nothing to the canon; in the sixteenth century historians John Leland and John Stow merely summarized what was already "known" about the outlaw. An anonymous piece of the same period was the first to give readers a "hometown" for Robin--Locksley.⁵⁷

Wyntoun, Bower, Higden, and Major understood the tales of Robin Hood, written or spoken, to be fact, to at least some degree. Richard Grafton, a printer, was no different, though he tried to present his text as historically accurate. In his *Chronicle at Large* (1569), Grafton provided an outline of John Major's work and then proceeded to offer his own account of the "real" Robin Hood, whom he described as an outlawed earl, thereby continuing Major's new tradition. In an effort to be historical, Grafton referred to "recordes in the Exchequer" to prove that Robin was a wanted outlaw. Grafton further commented that he studied "an olde and auncient Pamphlet" as one of his historical sources.⁵⁸ Historian Stephen Knight writes that this "evidence" was either the *Geste* or simply invented by Grafton; Grafton's claims that he also studied Robin Hood's tombstone are also doubtful, but he was the first historian to make mention

⁵⁶ Knight and Ohlgren, Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester.
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/historia.htm> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁵⁷ Holt, 40.

⁵⁸ Knight and Ohlgren, "Introduction" to Richard Grafton's *Chronicle at Large* in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester.
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/large.htm> (accessed November 2, 2011).

of a grave near Robin's place of death at the abbey. Grafton wrote of Robin's death at "Birklies" Abbey in a tale similar to that of the *Geste*.

Knight further suggests that some of Grafton's evidence bore a closer resemblance to *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* than to *Robin Hood* (as he also remarked regarding John Major's work).⁵⁹

Grafton's chronicle is also significant because of its description of Robin as "Excelling principally in Archery."⁶⁰ Robin and his men are archers in the *Geste*, where an archery contest does occur; however, they more often prefer other methods of combat (such as hand to hand combat with a staff). Historian A.J. Pollard pointed out that archery became extremely important in English armies in the 1330s,⁶¹ because of the Hundred Years' War and the development of the English longbow, and this could account for Robin's increased skill with the bow.

In 1632, ten years before the outbreak of the English Civil War, ballad writer Martin Parker published his *A True Tale of Robin Hood*. Outlaw Robin was again given the title "Earle of Huntington" and a specific year of death, 1198. Parker described his work as "truth purged from falsehood," alerting the reader to the fact that his document should be taken more seriously than the previous centuries' ballads and histories. Stephen Knight observes that Parker's "true" stories were a blend of anecdotes from the *Geste*, Munday's plays, and Richard Grafton's history. Most importantly, Parker's piece is an example of a work heavily influenced by its context. Written in the early 1630s, the *True Tale* was composed during the reign of King Charles I, who would be beheaded seventeen years later. While the pre-Reformation monks in

⁵⁹ Knight and Ohlgren, "Introduction" to Richard Grafton's *Chronicle at Large in Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester.
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/large.htm>. (accessed November 2, 2011).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Pollard, 141.

Scotland were content to shame Robin for his attacks on the clergy, Parker readily demonized the Catholic church and praised the English government of the post-Reformation period.⁶² The 1630s and 1640s were a time of religious strife in England, and Parker was clearly supporting the Puritan regime (sincerely or otherwise). King Charles was the husband of a Catholic, and had Catholic leanings, but Parliament was staunchly Protestant, disapproving of Charles' High Church Anglicanism rather than Puritanism. Robin's assaults upon the government were frowned upon, and luckily (to Parker), Robin's antics would not be tolerated in the modern age of guns and proper government.⁶³ Parker finished his piece on Robin by assigning the outlaw a death date: 4 December, 1198.⁶⁴

Dean of York Thomas Gale (died 1702) recorded the epitaph on Robin's supposed grave (in the spirit of Grafton), stating that Robin Hood died on 24 Kalends of December 1247, which historian J.C. Holt explains is not an actual date.⁶⁵ Continuing the trend of "historicizing" Robin Hood by assigning gravestones, Richard Gough included Robin's epitaph in his *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain* (1786), though the names included on the stone bore little resemblance to previous histories: "Roberd Hude, William Goldburgh, Thomas." Where these names came from is a mystery, but obsession with the historical Robin Hood was underway and writers latched on to any "facts" they could find.⁶⁶

Antiquarian Dr. William Stukeley, an early founder of English field archaeology at

⁶² Knight and Ohlgren, "Introduction" to Martin Parker's *A True Tale of Robin Hood* in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Robin Hood Project at the University of Rochester.
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/trueint.htm> (accessed November 4, 2011).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 40.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 41.

Stonehenge, created a “pedigree” for Robin Hood in 1746. Stukeley fabricated the majority of the text and linked Robin Hood to a “Robert fitz Ooth” who died in 1274. Stukeley tried to explain Robin’s claim to the earldom of Huntingdon, but even scholars not long after Stukeley’s time criticized his counterfeit “pedigree.”⁶⁷

French historian Augustin Thierry published a lengthy text with an even lengthier title in 1825: *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans: Its Causes, and its Consequences in England, Scotland, Ireland, and on the Continent*. Thierry wrote an Introduction to the third edition of the text (1830) that exhibited his dedication to the work; the fact that it was reprinted several times after that gives it some credibility within the Robin Hood historiography. Thierry consulted primary documents as well as historical texts. In the introduction to his third edition, Thierry wrote that he “never departed from this rule, of one distinct purpose, in reviewing...my work with the most scrupulous attention to accuracy.”⁶⁸ For the year 1194, Thierry wrote of the “hero of the serfs, of the poor and of the low-in a word, of the Anglo-Saxon race.”⁶⁹ With this line, Thierry solidified the “rob from the rich, give to the poor” Robin Hood mentality that would gain so much popularity in the twentieth century. Thierry supposedly quoted John Fordun (who did not mention Robin Hood), so it is likely that he took his quote about Robin from Walter Bower.

Interestingly, Thierry wrote his own version of historiography, stating that he believed Robin was a peasant, following the yeoman tradition; the idea of Robin as an earl was something

⁶⁷ Holt, 42.

⁶⁸ Augustin Thierry, *History of the Conquest of England by the Normans: Its Causes, and its Consequences in England, Scotland, Ireland, and on the Continent*, 5th edition, ed. Charles C. Hamilton (London: Whittaker and Co., 1840), iv.

⁶⁹ Thierry, *History...*, 7th edition, trans. William Hazlitt (London: David Bogue, Fleet Street, 1847), 223.

added into the myth by later historians. Thierry referred to the “old English ballads” but placed Friar Tuck amongst the characters of these early pieces,⁷⁰ which is an error, as Tuck did not emerge until the sixteenth century. By naming Robin the “bandit chief” of the Anglo-Saxons, Thierry would set another precedent that continued throughout the twentieth century: that of Robin as a fierce warrior opposing the class discrimination of the Normans against the peasant Saxons. Thierry was writing in modern terms, concerned with class-consciousness and nationalism--important social themes in the nineteenth century. As the Robin Hood ballads suggest, however, the hero had little concern with overthrowing the “natural” order of his world. That Robin Hood was a real man Thierry did not doubt. Thierry did not attempt to “search” for the real Robin Hood with any vigor, as Grafton did with his tombstone and “auncient pamphlet.” Rather, Thierry compiled a narrative tale based on the works of previous historians and the ballads themselves. The *History of the Conquest* was pivotal with regards to later popular culture, because the idea of Robin as a national English hero would be repeated over and over throughout the twentieth century.

In 1847, J.M. Gutch edited a version of the *Geste*, and in his introduction Gutch supported both Walter Bower and Augustin Thierry. Gutch revived the Simon de Montfort concept in his article in the *London and Westminster Review* in March 1840,⁷¹ though his only real evidence was the history of Bower. Besides linking Robin Hood with Montfort’s “disinherited,” Gutch also supported Augustin Thierry’s claims that Robin was a peasant, not an earl. Gutch continued the tradition of repeating past historians, but he offered nothing novel.

Thierry was careful in his attempt to “do” history, but his work fell short because of his

⁷⁰ Thierry, 7th ed., 225.

⁷¹ R.H. Hilton, “The Origins of Robin Hood,” *Past & Present* 14 (November 1958): 33.

belief in his sources. Richard Grafton set himself apart by his references to Robin Hood's tombstone; however, because it is likely that this tombstone either did not exist or was a forgery, Grafton's work was also inadequate. In 1852, editor and historian Joseph Hunter published *Critical and Historical Tract no. IV*, "The Ballad Hero, Robin Hood." Hunter's writings, theses, and method were a major breakthrough for Robin Hood historiography.

Rather than simply summarizing the past, Hunter first postulated his thesis: that Robin Hood was a real man, not just a mythological figure, and that he existed during the reign of King Edward II (1307-1327). Most other historians had believed that Robin Hood was a real man. What differentiated Hunter was his method and reasoning. He believed that there had to have been a real man at the basis of all the myths, instead of simply believing that the myth was a history. Hunter proposed a new reason for Robin's outlaw status: Robin was a supporter during a rebellion, but not the uprising of Simon de Montfort. Instead, Robin was involved in the revolt of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, in 1322. Hunter hypothesized that one of the members of this insurrection, Godfrey of Stainton, was related to Elizabeth of Stainton, Prioress of Kirklees Abbey, and therefore connected to Robin Hood. In the ballads, King Edward (whichever Edward was intended) visited Robin in the forest; Hunter discovered that Edward II made such a journey northward in 1323. Lastly, Hunter located a payment in Edward II's records at the time of the 1323 trip made to porter "Robyn."⁷² J.W. Walker would invigorate Hunter's work in 1944.

The social problems of class, the laborer, and economic disparity in the nineteenth century were brought to a head, first by Freidrich Engels and then in 1848 with Engels' and Karl Marx's publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, one of the most important works of the modern period that continues to have strong reverberations into the twenty-first century. Communism

⁷² Hilton, 33.

posed a threat to any capitalistic, upper class or aristocratic European property owners, whose wealth, as perceived by communists, should be centralized by the State. H.C. Coote, in an 1885 article, denounced Robin Hood as a communist. Coote claimed “communism was publicly advocated in this country [England] in the reign of that too glorious monarch Edward III.”⁷³ Coote justified this remark with an explanation of the weakness of Edward III’s successor, Richard II, during whose reign the Peasants Revolt of 1381 occurred. This statement characterized Robin Hood as that champion of the plebeians that Thierry described. Coote blamed the “new order of proprietors, the yeoman” for these communistic ideals, and according to the original tradition, Robin was a yeoman. He attributed this “new social science” to the mentality behind the *Geste*. Coote made it obvious that he was championing the side of the “clergy and landed gentry” who were “ruthlessly” attacked by these yeomen, who first developed the communistic idea from the French. Coote called communism a “French plague” and disagreed with the idea that Robin was an Anglo-Saxon patriot against the Normans.⁷⁴ In his historical analysis of the ballads, Coote, who credited *Robin Hood and the Potter* as being one of the oldest tales, evaluates Robin Hood’s audience. The ballad suggested “illiteracy as well as archaism...showing clearly the sort of people to whom the *Epos* was addressed.”⁷⁵ Coote’s disdain was blatant. Supporting the established authority and aristocracy, both of the Middle Ages and in his contemporary time, Coote concluded with disgust that the version of Robin Hood’s tale in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* foolishly presented the story as “commemorat[ing]

⁷³ H.C. Coote, “The Origin of the Robin Hood Epos,” *The Folk-Lore Journal* Vol. 3. No. 1 (1885): 44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-47.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

the golden age of Britain.”⁷⁶

One hundred years after “The Ballad Hero, Robin Hood,” in 1952, historian J.W. Walker continued Joseph Hunter’s groundbreaking work with his *The True History of Robin Hood*, perhaps a play on the title of Martin Parker’s “history.” Walker, who had published some earlier work on the subject in 1944, had a romantic view of Robin Hood and his history. He was convinced that Robin Hood truly existed. Walker supported Hunter’s theory of Edward II; he found Robin’s name on court rolls in Wakefield. Walker was on a mission to prove his (and Hunter’s) theory. He also added to the story, using the Wakefield court rolls evidence to construct a family for Robin. After the rebellion against Edward II, Robert Hood and his wife, Matilda (close enough to Marian, he supposed), retired to Barnesdale. Walker viewed Robin as a man of the people, a different and more popular figure than the likes of King Arthur. Robin was a peasant Christian but a gentleman in spirit. He was critical of the bishops who abused their power. Walker explained his own goal: to link the historical, *real* Robin Hood of Barnesdale (that he and Hunter discovered) with the ballad Robin of Sherwood Forest.⁷⁷

Walker used popular culture references and sources as his historic evidence. As historian R.H. Hilton explained a few years later, his evidence was merely circumstantial and based on “unjustifiable links of reasoning;”⁷⁸ for example, in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* the author likened Robin Hood’s rhymes to those of Randulf, Earl of Chester, another popular figure. Randulf was a real person, and so Walker assumed Robin must be as well.

Approving of Richard Grafton’s usage of tombstones, Walker endeavored to use the

⁷⁶ Coote, 52.

⁷⁷ J.W. Walker, *The True History of Robin Hood* (Yorkshire: EP Publishing Limited, 1952), 12.

⁷⁸ Hilton, 33-34.

same materials, drawing upon other writers' recordings of possible Robin Hood epitaphs. While this method may appear to twenty-first century historians to be naïve and unprofessional, simply repeating the chronic error of taking previous historians' words for granted, Walker redeemed himself by applying first-rate historical techniques to determine the validity (at least, what he believed was valid) of his sources. For example, one of Walker's tombstone sources was Sir George Armitage, an eighteenth century inhabitant of the Kirklees area. Walker denounced Armitage's epitaph, explaining that the roman letters used were not accurate for the fourteenth century.⁷⁹ While Walker's sometimes blind acceptance of past historians' work on the subject of Robin Hood discredited his work to some extent, his devotion to proving Robin Hood's existence on the basis of actual historical evidence is admirable.

Not long after Walker's attempt at scientific history, scholar R.H. Hilton published "The Origins of Robin Hood" in a respected historical journal. His article laid the foundation for future historians in the field, who continually refer to Hilton's work. A.J. Pollard described Hilton's 1958 article as "groundbreaking."⁸⁰ Hilton began his article with this thesis: "probably there was no such individual [Robin Hood], but his historical significance does not depend on whether he was a real person or not."⁸¹ Hilton summarized a brief historiography of the Robin Hood scholars, analyzed their work for its historical accuracy and legitimacy and offered his opinion on their conclusions. Hilton referred to the *Scotichronicon* of John Fordun as a Robin Hood source; perhaps he meant Walter Bower's updated version. Hilton sought to provide reasoning for past Robin Hood representations. He attributed the characteristics of Anthony Munday's

⁷⁹ Walker, 120.

⁸⁰ Pollard, 158. Hilton, *Past and Present*, 30-44.

⁸¹ Hilton, 30.

plays, for instance, as intended to “make the popular hero acceptable to the snobbish and pedigree-conscious upper class of Tudor and Stuart England.”⁸² Hilton was the first Robin Hood historian to attempt to study the previous historians and analyze their work for historical legitimacy instead of for simple sources. Hilton questioned what came before him, and used history to rationalize these sources. He was critical of Gutch, Hunter, and Walker, though he respected their efforts. In a statement that Maurice Keen would later argue against, Hilton claimed, “we must exclude the lords of manors from “the ballad people.”⁸³ He analyzed the ballads in context (such as “agrarian discontent”⁸⁴), studied the use of the term “yeoman,” and hypothesized that “the references to persons and situations imply a thirteenth or at the latest fourteenth-century origin.”⁸⁵

The most celebrated Robin Hood historian, Maurice Keen, a professor at Balliol College, Oxford, published *The Outlaws of Medieval England* in 1961. Keen considered the possibility that the Robin Hood legend actually originated in two *separate* cycles, one about an outlaw in the Sherwood Forest area and another in the Yorkshire area, which eventually came together to form the (shaky) Robin Hood tradition. Keen, like Hilton, linked some of myth to the Peasants Revolt of 1381. In the updated Introduction to his 1977 version, he described the context of the ballads as an “age plagued by lack of governance.”⁸⁶ Keen specifically pointed this out because he was slightly shifting one of his theses; in the 1960s, at the beginning of a decade that would

⁸² Hilton, 32.

⁸³ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁶ Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval England* (London: Routledge, 1977), xix. Originally published in 1961.

produce a social revolution, he supported Hilton's theory that commoners were rural peasants, and would be the only class of people interested in the tales of Robin Hood. Sixteen years later, Keen altered his position based on deeper research, explaining that it was this lack of governance, and not social unrest, that produced the Robin Hood ballads.

Keen described the forest of the Robin legend as a "sanctuary," which is a stark contrast to the lore of King Arthur. Keen considered Robin and Arthur "poles" of society. He originally stated that Robin's tales would not attract the high-class authors of romance that were so fond of Arthurian legend. To continue this theory, Keen noted that the "streak of class violence" was the "most striking feature" of the *Geste* and other ballads, but he rationalized this violence to the "order of the day." The authors of the ballads were realists, he argued, "true" to their violent period.⁸⁷ Keen criticized the medieval authors as believers in "stubborn conservatism in social thinking."⁸⁸ Here Keen displayed his modern and liberal views that were perhaps harsh on the seven hundred-year-old generation.

Keen analyzed other outlaw legends of the same time period as Robin Hood, and theorized that the Norman Conquest may have been partially responsible for the proliferation of outlaw legends. Hereward the Wake, one of these outlaw figures, was the early ancestor of a champion of popular rights and the oppressed poor.⁸⁹ While Keen may have taken this theory a little too far (in light of his admission to injecting 1960s popular opinion into his work), he was careful in explaining that the Robin Hood legends were not products of nationalism, as Augustin Thierry insinuated. Rather, Keen suggested that the legends arose out of "intense tribal loyalty"

⁸⁷ Keen, 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

and “arrogance” of the Anglo-Saxons versus their Norman conquerors. Richard I being the first English hero out of the Norman Conquest, as Keen wrote, made sense when put in the context of Robin Hood being popularly associated with the Lion Heart.

Keen analyzed the legends of “Foulk Fitzwarin,” and Gamelyn, as well as the history of the Scottish hero William Wallace, for the context they might provide for the Robin Hood legends. Keen continued his distaste for medieval thinking by claiming that the people of the period were “too conservative by instinct.”⁹⁰ While archery did not become extremely popular until the Hundred Years’ War, Keen also remarked that archery began to decline in popularity by the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as guns became prevalent. Keen placed the composition (but not the formal writing of the *Geste*) of the legend at around 1400, a time that would be “far away” to the populace of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and so the “validity” or accuracy of the stories were lessened.

Maurice Keen was far from a perfect historian; his prejudiced opinion oftentimes found its way into his analysis of the past. He described the medieval English mindset as having “limited political horizons”⁹¹ and the tale of Gamelyn as “liberal enough,” displaying his own political and historical bias.⁹² However, Keen “broke the mold” with his work, presenting a scientific method of history unreached in the previous centuries. As the twentieth century progressed, so did Robin Hood scholarship. Sir James Holt, Cambridge University professor, has a reputation as a leading figure in Robin Hood historiography in the twenty-first century. Holt began, in 1982’s *Robin Hood*, “this book is about a legend rather than a man...he cannot be

⁹⁰ Keen, 93.

⁹¹ Ibid., 92.

⁹² Ibid., 90.

identified.”⁹³ This was an answer to the past historians who worked so diligently to identify Robin Hood the man. Holt affirmed “the most remarkable thing about him [Robin]” was “the persistence of the legend.”⁹⁴ Holt changed the trend of Robin Hood history by focusing less on the figure himself and more on the historical factors that led to that figure’s survival over seven hundred years. Holt did spend time on previous historiography, chronicling others’ attempts to uncover the man behind the legend. He also imitated Keen in his chapter “The Original Robin Hood” by analyzing early outlaws that predate Robin.

Holt used geography and the ballads to track the legend’s locales, discussing what that meant for the evolution of the myth. Yorkshire and Nottingham were popular areas for the myth, but “the legend must have become a national one by the second half of the thirteenth century,” Holt stated, based on the popular usage of Robin’s name in records.⁹⁵ Holt’s evidence placed the formulation of the Robin Hood myth at an earlier date than did his predecessors. The phenomenon of men “playacting” as Robin Hood was recorded in the *Anominalle Chronicle* from St. Mary’s Abbey in York, in the 1390s.⁹⁶ Holt recounted this incident, identifying the location as ironic. St. Mary’s is where the abbot villian in the *Geste* resided, and Holt mentioned in his preface that previous Robin Hood scholars have overlooked this clue. Holt described the first audiences of the ballads as “patrons with resources in numbers and wealth.”⁹⁷ The audience

⁹³ Holt, 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 106.

could be diverse, lasting over centuries, because “Robin himself” changed.⁹⁸

In summary, Holt presented the problems with the Robin Hood legend: “it made heroes of outlaws...confused violence and crime with justice and charity...it presented some of the social problems of the Middle Ages as sharply cut issues of right and wrong...we can all enjoy it. But it is also useful to uncover it and understand what made it possible.”⁹⁹

Historian David Baldwin describes Stephen Knight as “a literary scholar...[who] has little time for the historical Robin.”¹⁰⁰ Knight, an English professor at Cardiff University, was responsible, however, for *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (along with Thomas Ohlgren, 1997), for which he provided an introduction to Robin Hood documents explaining historical context. “Robin Hood represents principled resistance to wrongful authority,”¹⁰¹ which explains his popularity amongst generations of people over centuries of time. Knight comments on an audience’s desire to “make figures human.” Humans have a need for biography, he explains, but Robin Hood is most importantly a myth that “should not be contained.” Knight claims that this desire for biography is a modern obsession to make Robin Hood real, but historians had been supposing him to be real since the fifteenth century. Knight describes his book as the “biography” of the myth of Robin Hood itself. Just as the character Robin Hood resisted authoritative constraints, Knight argues that the mythology of Robin Hood cannot be contained, either. Knight reports his view on the Robin Hood myth thusly: the “presence” of Robin Hood “that can be humanistically imagined is indeed at the heart of the tradition, but the crucial feature

⁹⁸ Holt, 153.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁰ Baldwin, 8.

¹⁰¹ Knight, *Mythic Biography*, xi.

is that this presence is radically reconstructed in different periods and genres.”¹⁰² Knight focuses on four identities of Robin Hood that he studied in his “mythic biography”: bold Robin Hood, the Earl of Huntington, Robin Hood esquire, and the Robin Hood of Hollywood. He understands Robin Hood lore to be something malleable that could easily be transformed for a particular generation and class of people, as has been done since its inception. Knight attributes Robin’s “endurance” to that resistance to wrongful authority, which he calls “the strongest value of Robin Hood’s mythic biography.”¹⁰³ A liberal thinker of the twenty-first century, Knight also explores the possibility that Robin’s original interests were not heterosexual, but that he was made that way as a product of twentieth century culture norms.¹⁰⁴

In 2004, A.J. Pollard, professor at the University of Teeside, published *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late-Medieval Stories in Historical Context*. Pollard presents as one of the major problems in Robin Hood historiography the fact that the Robin Hood ballads cannot be utilized as perfect primary sources for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, because by the time the stories were written down, they had already been circulating and changing. Though Keen felt that the ballads were legitimate sources, he also highlighted the “out of date” style the ballads would have had by the time they were in popular written circulation. Pollard devotes a chapter to the term “yeoman” and studies its implications for the legend, the audience, and the character. For Pollard, each generations’ subsequent “modern” additions to the tales are integral for determining the importance of the myth and its purposes. Listing “the growth of modern class

¹⁰² Knight, xvii.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 142.

consciousness, the development of the myth of the Norman Yoke”¹⁰⁵ and other historical eventualities, Pollard exhibits a dedication to contemporary historical tactics, refusing to observe the past through a present lens. He analyzes the English forest of the time period as the location of Robin’s activities, and studies medieval violence, crime, and legislation regarding these acts. Pollard reviews the ballads for their religious undertones, and also looks at the politics of Robin Hood. He attempts to cover all of the historic areas of the myth, while emphasizing Robin Hood’s “yeoman” status, which he believed was integral to the evolution of and popularity of the legend.¹⁰⁶ Maurice Keen called *Imagining Robin Hood* “fresh and challenging,” giving legitimacy to Pollard’s “thoroughly researched”¹⁰⁷ book.

Not long after Pollard’s work, Thomas Leitch, an American film and literature professor at the University of Delaware, published “Adaptations Without Sources: The Adventures of Robin Hood.” He argues that because the Robin Hood myth has no particular source, but rather a loose collection of sources that have shifted and changed over the centuries, “fidelity to an original text is impossible.”¹⁰⁸ Leitch produces a brief historiography and summary of popular culture references to Robin Hood; he disagrees that the 1938 film *Adventures of Robin Hood* starring Errol Flynn should be considered the “canonical” text to follow for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, because of the ever-changing nature of the myth itself, leading him to the conclusion that any Robin Hood adaptation is “one without a source.”¹⁰⁹ Though Leitch’s thesis

¹⁰⁵ Pollard, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Pollard.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Back Cover.

¹⁰⁸ Leitch, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 25.

seems obvious, he is quite correct to flesh out the idea in the article; historians and artists alike have spent so much time uncovering the “historical” Robin Hood that sometimes overlook the simple fact that the literary tradition of Robin is unorganized—that there is no “definitive” canon to follow.

In 2009, Julian Luxford of the University of St. Andrews uncovered a new document by Ranulf Higden mentioning Robin Hood that was dated to about 1460. Robin Hood was described as “infesting” England with crimes and robberies. Luxford suggests that this new document casts a shadow on the previous idea that Robin Hood was “loved by the good” and remarks that this document provided the world with a “rare” monastic attitude toward Robin. The text is suggestive of Edward I’s reign for the time of Robin Hood’s activities, and connects Robin to Sherwood Forest, the earliest historical, textual evidence that Robin worked in Sherwood.¹¹⁰ At the very least, it is an early *English* source, not Scottish.

David Baldwin rejects the idea that Luxford’s find was earth-shattering, noting that at this early stage (1460), Robin Hood was not thought of as the people’s champion, and he was unpopular amongst other clergymen of the time period. Baldwin, former professor at the Universities of Leicester and Nottingham, published *Robin Hood: the English Outlaw Unmasked* in 2010, with the opening statement that “one reason why researchers have failed to find the historical Robin Hood is...[they] have been looking in the wrong time and for the wrong person.”¹¹¹ He claims there are no proven connections between historical records and the ballads of Robin Hood. Baldwin rejects the idea of searching for an outlaw with the name of Robin

¹¹⁰ “Negative Attitude to Robin Hood,” *BBC News*, March 14, 2009.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/7941504.stm (accessed November 8, 2011).
 Baldwin, 60-61.

¹¹¹ Baldwin, 7.

Hood, which he believes might have been a popular name assigned to outlaws. Like many of his predecessors, Baldwin begins with an account of those forerunners before moving on to the themes of the book. Put in context, he argues, Robin's ballads were not for the purpose of producing an egalitarian society. Robin and his men understood feudal hierarchy. Edward I (1272-1307), Baldwin explains, put forth a series of poaching laws that were deeply resented by rural subjects; this policy can help to narrow down the time during which some of the Robin Hood ballads were composed.¹¹² Further, Baldwin argues that sheriffs were at their most powerful and most resented before Edward I. Sheriffs, he writes, were rarely given royal authority over forests after the 1250s.¹¹³ He places the date of original story composition before the year 1306 because of the sheriff issue. The ballads morphed with their audience, he argues. They were "instinctively updated" in a "desire to engage audience," not "confuse" them, and they therefore retained the same basic setting. Robin and Guy take part in feudalism, but that feudalism is oftentimes regarded as old-fashioned; fees were beginning to replace feudal policies, Baldwin clarifies, in the latter half of the fourteenth century. These fourteenth century characteristics were merely "acquired" as time passed.¹¹⁴

Baldwin criticizes Robin's character, denouncing him as violent, a vigilante, and a man who proclaims to be loyal to the monarchy but who, in the ballads, simultaneously breaks his promise to work with the king.¹¹⁵ Baldwin illuminates other historians' critiques of the popular hero as well. He explains "contradictions" in terms of "audience satisfaction." The ballads were

¹¹² Baldwin, 46.

¹¹³ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

manipulated and transformed depending on the people who were listening, be they peasant or lord. Baldwin notes the modern historian's obsession with the term "yeoman," (such as A.J. Pollard) but writes that this term was too broad to gain any real knowledge or evidence from it. J.C. Holt (author of *Robin Hood*, 1982) describes two types of yeoman, gentlemen valets or common rural freemen.¹¹⁶ The historians working in the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century have differing views on the importance of the term.

Baldwin presents several possible "Robin Hoods of History," using the Hunter/Walker method. From a modern perspective, however, Baldwin critiques Walker's work (1944 and 1952), saying that he "simplified the link" with Robert Hode and Robyn the Porter who worked for the king. He praises Walker's attempt but also points out several flaws in his methods. Baldwin then proceeds to analyze the main characters of the myth and explain their development within the Robin Hood cycle, including a list of possible kings. Bringing up the subject of the "disinherited," and studying two of the men associated with Simon de Montfort's rebellion, Baldwin postulates that these people were the "real" Robin Hood and Little John: Roger Godberd and Walter Devyas of Leicester. He spends the rest of the book describing and connecting these two men to the Robin and Little John of legend. Though his evidence is solid, Baldwin's argument cannot be taken as the final word on the origin of the Robin Hood legend. Holt and Knight had begun to shift the focus on Robin Hood historical scholarship away from the hunt for the "true" Robin Hood; Baldwin picks up where earlier historians left off, merely modernizing the techniques of Hunter and Walker. While Baldwin's sources are legitimate and well-researched, and many of his arguments illuminating and convincing, he also seems hostile to the possible explanation that a "real" Robin Hood did not exist.

¹¹⁶ Holt, 117-118.

The earliest Robin Hood historians were not centered on Robin at all. They mentioned him amongst dozens of other figures. Martin Parker, writing in the 1630s, was the first historian to use Robin Hood as the focus of his book. Because the earliest chroniclers based their histories on popular interpretations of the myth, rather than primary sources of a real man, their work was blended with literature and popular culture and not, in fact, history. This is not to discredit literature as a historical source; modern scholars also study popular culture, but do so in historical context, a sharp contrast to the work done by the earlier historians. This change in the method of historical writing began to truly take shape in the nineteenth century with Hunter's work, and continued to mature throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, solidifying a split between popular culture and history.

Conclusion

A figure as popular as Robin Hood needed to be flexible to span seven centuries. Beginning as a myth passed on orally, Robin's status escalated to a legendary hero, an English nationalist, a champion of the Saxon weak, a romantic lord fighting for rights. These descriptions of Robin Hood came from both popular artists and historians.

In popular culture, Robin's myth began by word of mouth as early as the thirteenth century, according to Professor J.C. Holt. The consensus for the first textual version of the *Littel Geste* is in the very early fifteenth century. Poets and playwrights continued to make mention of Robin Hood in their works, either referring to him casually, as Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare did, or using him as a character in one of their pieces, as did Sir Walter Scott. Anthony Munday, Thomas Love Peacock, and Howard Pyle centered some of their work on the Robin Hood legend itself. However he was used, Robin proved to be a popular character, one whose "canon" of legend changed from generation to generation.

The Robin Hood myth was first portrayed as contemporary with the authors and then took on an air of the past with the work of Michael Drayton and Anthony Munday at the turn of the seventeenth century. Yeoman Robin became the Earl of Huntingdon and then Locksley, or both. He was originally a mere forest bandit, but he eventually became known as a just outlaw, who robs from the ungrateful rich to provide for the desperate poor. While the legend itself changed piece by piece, the structure of that change remained constant. The popular culture

media followed a linear pattern of development, shifting its focus and norms depending on the mood of the time. The popular literary works were largely the results of politics. If Catholicism was on the decline, or, in fact, illegal, Robin's natural enemies would be abbots. If all popular heroes needed a woman by their side, then Robin needed Marian. If poets obsessed with the past and with nature chose to idealize the Middle Ages, then Robin Hood would become idealized too (what Stephen Knight calls "Robin Hood, Esquire"). If proud England and the United States were fighting a war as allies, then Robin Hood would be the daring champion they needed him to be, protecting the weak against unjust invasion or internal corruption. If the American people, weary of war in Vietnam, would despise a militant protagonist, then Robin Hood became a liberal philosopher, as exhausted by war as his audience (a persona drastically different from the violent Robin of the original ballads, a character true to his era). Whatever people at the time were feeling, Robin Hood could be made to satisfy their needs. He could be remodeled so easily because of the ambiguity of his origins. No matter the change, the pattern remains. The popular Robin follows cultural trends.

In history, as in literature, Robin was at first only a small entry in larger historical works, but he would later become a subject worthy of his own study with Martin Parker's *A True Tale of Robin Hood* in 1632. Rather than fluctuate between peasant, crusader, Earl of Huntingdon, and Lord of Locksley, as the literary authors presented him, the historians debated between Robin as a rebel of Simon de Montfort, or a yeoman, or a patriot. The historic "experts" placed Robin's dates during the reigns of Richard I, Henry III, Edward I, and Edward II. Early historians discussed Robin Hood as if the character of legend was a real man; later some historians would modernize this approach but still operate with the same mindset, searching for evidence that would lead to Robin Hood the man. Other historians working in the twentieth century would

abandon the search for a real man, and put forth efforts to examine the ballads and early historians for indications of historical trends and insights into medieval English life and culture. This difference of historical methodology in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was made possible only because of a very important divide that occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Modern historians can choose either path of Robin Hood scholarship (the search for a real man or the study of his myth) because of the innovative work of Joseph Hunter in his 1852 publication, *The Ballad Hero, Robin Hood*. The title draws attention to the fact that Robin is a *character*. Instead of writing about Robin Hood based on the word of mouth stories or fabricated graves, Hunter set about to uncover what he considered to be the “truth” about the man upon whom the legends were based. He used records, actual primary sources, as evidence. Hunter’s work marked a turning point in the field of Robin Hood history. Because of his methodology, historians in later years could choose to follow his path, critique his path, or develop their own paths. Previous historians had been unable to do this because of their assumption that the literary ballads *were* historical writings. The ballads are historical texts, naturally, primary sources that provide clues to the past. The ballads are not, however, writings in the field of history. They are not biographies. In 1420, Andrew of Wyntoun wrote what he had *heard* about Robin Hood. Because his work was recorded in a historical chronicle, it was taken by later historians to be *history*. Some historians before Hunter tried to be historically precise, but the result was invented dates and scenarios that were most likely the product of local fables.

The key flaw in Hunter’s project was his dedication to the ballads as holders of vital historic clues. While he recognized that the Robin in the ballads was a myth, he believed that that myth was based on reality, to the point where he used the journey of King Edward in the *Geste*

as a reference from which he followed a similar agenda of King Edward II. After finding a documented connection between a porter Robert Hood, the rebellious Earl of Lancaster, and the Prioress at Kirklees Abbey, Hunter was convinced that he had solved the Robin Hood puzzle. J.W. Walker continued Hunter's theories in the 1940s and 1950s, though his work was similarly conjectural. That Hunter's arguments were not as satisfactory as he hoped is less important than the legacy of his work. He laid the groundwork for modern historical methodology when it came to the Robin Hood legend.

Hunter was, however, like all his literary and historical predecessors, a product of his time. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, and Fiction*, literary critic Linda Hutcheon writes, "in the nineteenth century, at least before the rise of Ranke's 'scientific history,' literature and history were considered branches of the same tree of learning."¹¹⁷ The historian of whom Hutcheon speaks, Leopold von Ranke, was credited with establishing modern historical method in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before Hunter, Robin Hood historians used literature as textbooks. Robin Hood historiography appeared to be simply a more "legitimate" source for the past than plays or poems, but in truth, the two fields were so closely intertwined as to be barely distinct from one another.

Robin Hood documentation began with William Langland in 1377. He was followed by Chaucer, and sometime soon after, the *Geste*. The first historical source (to date), Andrew of Wyntoun, wrote forty years after Langland. He was quickly followed by Walter Bower, a Scot, and Ranulph Higden, the first English historian to write about Robin. The first two historical Robin Hood sources on record were Scottish, not English. Robin was circulating in English popular culture, and in Scotland's historic records, before he was mentioned in an English

¹¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, and Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 105.

historical text.

In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Alexander Barclay's translation of *Ship of Fools* became the first time Marian was truly united with Robin in writing. Ten years later, another Scottish historian, John Major, was the first historian to refer to Robin as an earl, and was also the first to assign Robin to the reign of Richard I, which would become an extremely popular setting for literary writers of Robin. However, it was not until the end of the century, with the plays of Robin Hood written by Anthony Munday, that literature would adopt the idea of Robin as a displaced earl during the reign of Richard I.

With the rise of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, John Keats, Walter Scott, and Thomas Love Peacock produced their idealized versions of Robin and the Middle Ages. Keats used Robin as an example of the splendor of nature.¹¹⁸ Scott was the first literary writer to refer to Robin as "Locksley," and more importantly, was the first to portray Robin Hood as a Saxon warrior against Norman tyranny. A.J. Pollard attributes Robin's status as a patriot to "the development of the myth of the Norman Yoke."¹¹⁹ Scott's Robin was the Saxon nationalist in 1819; six years later, Augustin Thierry became the first Robin Hood historian to associate a Saxon Robin with anti-Norman sentiment: "It cannot be doubted that Robert, or, more commonly, Robin Hood, was of Saxon origin," Thierry declared.¹²⁰ No previous historian had made the claim that Robin's main agenda was to fight the ruling Normans; Thierry's source, then, could have actually been Sir Walter Scott, a poet and novelist, though Thierry did use other historical sources in his work. Historical vision here was blurred.

¹¹⁸ Knight, 105.

¹¹⁹ Pollard, 188.

¹²⁰ Thierry, 224.

Author G.P.R. James' 1843 book *Forest Days* marked the first time that Robin Hood was portrayed in popular culture as one of Simon de Montfort's band of "disinherited." As Stephen Knight explains, in the nineteenth century de Montfort was hailed as "the founder of Parliament," and so associating Robin with de Montfort would have been a popular move. Curiously, the first historical text to connect Robin with the disinherited was Walter Bower's update of Fordun's *Scotichronicon* in 1446. Clearly, the idea did not take hold for quite some time, but it is likely that G.P.R. James took his setting from Bower.

From the fourteenth century through the nineteenth century, the Robin Hood legend gained new "facts" from sources that were both historical and literary. In some instances, trends begun by historians or writers took some time before crossing over to the other field of study; in other cases, an idea in one category bled over to the other subject very quickly. This phenomenon of fields intertwining came, for the most part, before what Hutcheon calls "the separation that resulted in the distinct disciplines of literary and historical studies."¹²¹

For the Robin Hood legend, this separation commenced after Joseph Hunter. Literature and popular culture media continued on the same path they had been following for centuries. Social and political context determined the way in which the myth would evolve. Howard Pyle wrote a children's book that came to be considered a classic; Tennyson published a quintessentially Victorian play about *The Foresters* in 1892. The myth continued to grow in both the United Kingdom and the United States, where it was remade over a dozen times for film and television. Each visual medium was appropriate to its time and audience, including foreign films that celebrated the hero. In the west, the films continued to adapt, including Islamic and African characters, liberal thinkers, feminists, and other modern norms, caring little for historical

¹²¹ Hutcheon, 105.

accuracy. Though many of the recent films hired dialect coaches or archery experts, historical analysts were not regularly included on staff. Political correctness, exciting action sequences, and romance are well attended to. While it is not often that historical facts are completely butchered in popular Robin Hood representations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they are certainly not treated with as much care as is given other issues (which filmmakers and most audiences consider to be more pressing). However, popular treatment of the Robin Hood legend has always been anachronistic. Paintings and other media as far back as the fifteenth century have displayed Robin Hood in clothing and with weaponry not consistent with twelfth century England (if the popular, Richard I setting is to be followed, which there is truly no basis for other than popular culture itself).

While novels and films were following a predictable but entertaining pattern, historians broke away from their literary past and formed their own Robin Hood historiography distinct from those prior to Hunter. In 1885, two years after the publication of the Pyle novel, H.C. Coote wrote an article that was far from similar to the poetic world. Condemning Robin Hood's popularity as communism, Coote denigrated Robin at every possible turn. While Coote's fears and accusations have not found popularity in the media and with popular audiences, he nevertheless exhibited his own theory and thesis that was quite separate from the common tradition.

Beginning in 1944, J.W. Walker continued Hunter's work, but was criticized in R.H. Hilton's 1958 article "The Origins of Robin Hood," which examined the historical methods of past Robin Hood historians. Hilton relinquished the idea of searching for Robin Hood the man, put his historical efforts into analyzing others' works for their accuracy, and studied the Robin Hood myth as a historical source. His method of history was continued by Maurice Keen in the

1960s, J.C. Holt in the 1980s, and Stephen Knight and A.J. Pollard in the 2000s. In 2010 David Baldwin followed the tradition of Hunter and Walker but incorporated more modern techniques to state his claims.

A topic that has fascinated audiences and historians for seven hundred years, Robin Hood still remains a mystery, though many scholars may claim to have discovered the truth. The evolution of the Robin Hood myth can be viewed as the development of historical methodology itself. The ever-changing cultural norms exhibited in the Robin Hood legends and popular media are indicative of broader sentiments of their eras. Originally emerging as something of a scoundrel, Robin Hood, in all his manifestations, is a history lesson all his own.

Images of Robin Hood



Figure 1: Errol Flynn in 1938's *Adventures of Robin Hood*
 (<http://t2.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQC1WG3Yxdt5PFTw2AbBUpSak0R1k4Ov-kpNmcWLckedCN1P95nlUNHje0H>)



Figure 2: Frontispiece to Martin Parker's *A True Tale of Robin Hood*, 1632
 (J.C. Holt's *Robin Hood*)



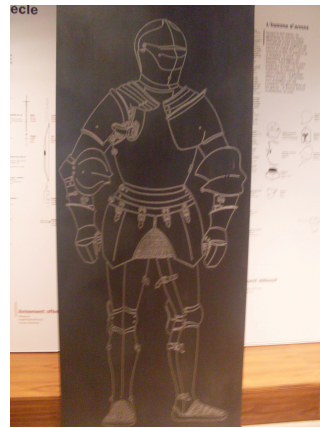
Figure 3: Woodcut, 1450. Notice the use of longbows.
(J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood*)



Figure 4: King wearing the heraldic shield of England and France
(David Baldwin, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*)



Figure 5: Robin Hood dressed as an archer—Supposedly 13th Century (Baldwin)



Figures 6: 13th, 14th, and 15th Century Warriors (Photographs by the Author, Les Invalides, Paris, France)

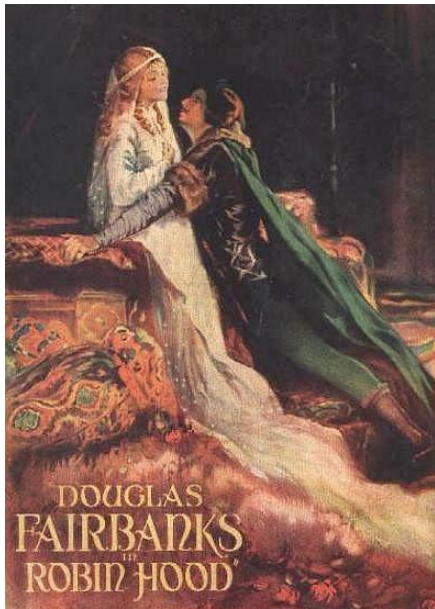


Figure 7: Douglas Fairbanks in *Robin Hood*, 1922

(<http://www.king-sheep.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/douglas-fairbanks-robin-hood-1922-film-poster-w-maid-mari-on.jpg>)



Figures 8: Robin, Marian, Friar Tuck, and Little John in *Disney's Robin Hood*, 1973

(<http://images2.fanpop.com/image/photos/12800000/Robin-and-Marian-walt-disneys-robin-hood-12866573-500-400.j>)



(<http://www.thecultureconcept.com/circle/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/robin-Marion-Sherwood1.jpg>)

(http://th06.deviantart.net/fs6/150/i/2005/033/9/0/Robin_and_Marian_by_AgiVega.jpg)



Figure 9: Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn in *Robin and Marian*, 1976
 (http://www.jollinger.com/barry/covers/robin_marian.jpg)



Figure 10: Kevin Costner in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, 1991
 (<http://www.moviemobsters.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/robin460.jpg>)

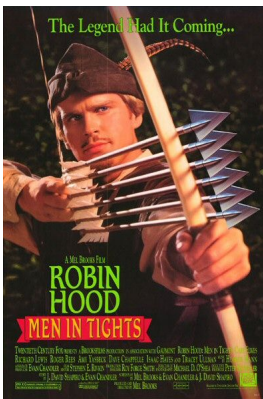


Figure 11: Cary Elwes in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, 1993
 (http://www.thelmagazine.com/binary/b81d/1274283707-robin_hood_men_in_tights2.jpg)



Figure 12: Keira Knightley as Robin Hood's daughter in *Princess of Thieves*, 2001
([http://i.ebayimg.com/t/KEIRA-KNIGHTLEY-PRINCESS-THIEVES-COLOR-24X36-POSTER-/15/!B6tfP8gCGk~\\$\(KGrHqV,!hsEyd!pp40RBMURzOPQ!~~-1_35.JPG\)](http://i.ebayimg.com/t/KEIRA-KNIGHTLEY-PRINCESS-THIEVES-COLOR-24X36-POSTER-/15/!B6tfP8gCGk~$(KGrHqV,!hsEyd!pp40RBMURzOPQ!~~-1_35.JPG)))



Figure 13: Jonas Armstrong and Lucy Griffiths as Robin and Marian in BBC's *Robin Hood*, 2006
(http://images.wikia.com/robinhood/images/8/8a/Robin_%26_Marian.jpg)



Figure 14: Russell Crowe as Robin in *Robin Hood*, 2010
(http://img2.timeinc.net/ew/dynamic/imgs/100510/russell-crowe-robin-hood_320.jpg)

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