

Robin Hood and the Three Estates of Medieval Society

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of the three estates of medieval society in the early Robin Hood ballads, suggesting that they are echoing and stimulating social change away from the tripartite model of feudalism and towards a more equitable, if still hierarchical, social model. It will look particularly at the early texts "Robin Hood and the Monk", "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne", "Robin Hood and the Potter" and "A Gest of Robyn Hode" examining themes of violence, transgression, and fellowship to lead to a conclusion that the ballads are testing current laws and social norms to reveal their inherent weaknesses and to promote an idealised conception of the free common man.

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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Robin Hood and the Second Estate.....	14
Chapter Two: Robin Hood and the First Estate	48
Chapter Three: Robin Hood and the Third Estate.....	77
Conclusion.....	100
Bibliography	104

Introduction

*Ritual and literature, in their different ways [...] provide 'metalanguages' for discussing sociality [...] [they are] society talking about itself.*¹

The legend of Robin Hood has been part of the English cultural landscape for over six centuries, evolving from the yeoman outlaw of the earliest surviving texts to the dispossessed nobleman that we recognise as his more recent incarnation. This thesis will expand upon claims that have been made before, which suggest that Robin Hood texts demonstrate concerns with regard to the social status quo of medieval society, by displaying this focus in four early Robin Hood texts. The introduction continues with a review of scholarship regarding Robin Hood's position in a historical framework.

The binding motif throughout the evolution of this story is that of destabilisation as Robin Hood is historically a destabilising figure. Noted as a 'good outlaw'² he has achieved and maintained international appeal³ as someone that 'wants to or is willing to redress the balance.'⁴ He is, at the core, an anti-authority figure and thus has political significance. Indeed, his redemption from the social prejudices that held Robin Hood literature as 'the refuse of a stall'⁵ at worst and 'foolish tales'⁶ at best came about in no small part due to Joseph Ritson, who was himself full of admiration for the Revolution that was occurring in France when his collection of Robin Hood ballads was published in 1795.⁷ Ritson was convinced, however, that Robin Hood was a historical figure and indeed the majority of the scholarship on Robin Hood prior to the last two decades concerned the historicity of the outlaw, with attempts to authenticate the myth. Sir John Hawkins stated in 1773 that the history of the outlaw was unable to be proved to a scholarly standard due to the nature of the few and scattered fragments of evidence concerning him.⁸ He wrote of the ballads being 'totally devoid of historical truth, being in short metrical legends',⁹ an assertion dismissed by Joseph Ritson, who

¹ Victor Turner, "African Ritual and Literary Mode: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible?", *The Literature of Fact*, ed. Angus Fletcher, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 51.

² See Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007, p. 52, and Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. xi.

³ Jeffrey Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998, p. 1.

⁴ Russell Crowe in *The Real Robin Hood*, Dir. M. David Melvin, The History Channel, 2010.

⁵ Egertons, "Pieces of Ancient Poetry: From Authentic Manuscripts and Old Printed Copies", *Critical Review*, Vol. 4, London, 1972, p. 57.

⁶ R.B. Dobson and J. Taylor, "The Legend Since the Middle Ages", *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999, p. 172.

⁷ Joseph Ritson, *The Letters of Joseph Ritson Esq*, Vol. 1, ed. Sir Harris Nicolas, London: William Pickering, 1833, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

⁸ Sir John Hawkins, *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, (Vol. 3) London: J. Alfred Novello, 1853, pp. 410-14.

⁹ Hawkins, *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 1833, p. 413.

makes definite claims for a historical Robin Hood, casually dismissing Hawkins' reserve about authenticated facts.

In his *Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, Ritson describes Robin Hood as being born at Locksley, during the reign of King Henry II, at around 1100AD. Ritson gives him a noble lineage and states that his true name was Robert Fitzooth, 'which vulgar pronunciation easily corrupted into Robin Hood.'¹⁰ He also gives him the rights to the title of Earl of Huntingdon, lost to him due to debts owed for his youthful gallivanting and excessive lifestyle. Outlawed due to this, he sought refuge in the woods, later to be joined by other outlaws: 'Little John, (whose surname is said to have been *Nailor*), William Scadlock (Scathelock or Scarlet), George A Green, pinder (or pound-keeper) of Wakefield, Much, a millers son, and a certain monk or frier named Tuck.'¹¹ Ritson also envisages Marian as figure of historical accuracy, describing her as 'a female of whom [Robin] was enamoured'.¹² Ritson, for all his claims, provides no historically sound evidence for these postulations, and at one point he uses a portion of the "Gest of Robyn Hode" as sound proof of a religious miracle.¹³ Thomas Wright, in 1846, attacked Ritson's work as 'the barren production of a poor mind'¹⁴ as he argued that Robin Hood was entirely mythological, that he belonged 'among the personages of the early mythology of the Teutonic peoples'.¹⁵

John M. Gutch followed on from Ritson's work in 1847, stating that it is impossible to believe that the principal hero of the ballads and tales of Robin Hood, or the actions contained within them, are entirely fictitious.¹⁶ In 1852, Joseph Hunter began an earnest historical enquiry into Robin Hood to prove his historical foundations. Using evidence from exchequer accounts, title deeds and court rolls from the manor of Wakefield, Hunter was able to show that 'Robyn Hod' and 'Robertus Hood' were living during that time. He claimed that Robin Hood was a real person, the rebel Earl of Lancaster, who lived in the reign of Edward II and served as a member of his court.¹⁷ This liberation of the outlaw from the bounds of imagination and fantasy into a real historical figure, and therefore a true English hero, was celebrated for some time but ultimately fell into disrepute as Professor F. J. Child

¹⁰ Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, London: Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820, p. iv.

¹¹ Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, 1820, p. v.

¹² Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, 1820, p. v.

¹³ Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, 1820, p. xii.

¹⁴ Thomas Wright, *Essays on Subjects Connected With the Literature, Popular Superstitions, and History of England in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 2, London: John Russell Smith, 1846, p. 201.

¹⁵ Wright, *Essays on Subjects Connected With the Literature, Popular Superstitions, and History of England in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 2. 1846, p. 211.

¹⁶ John Mathew Gutch, *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode: With Other Ancient and Modern Ballads and Songs Relating to this Celebrated Yeoman to Which is Prefixed His History and Character*, ed. F. W. Fairholt, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1847, p. 2.

¹⁷ Joseph Hunter, "The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelly of English: Robin Hood, His Period, Real Character etc. Investigated", *Critical and Historical Tracts IV*, London: Smith, 1852, pp. 28-38.

failed to be impressed by the series of circumstantial evidence and coincidences, and dismissed Hunter’s study, stating that Robin Hood was the creation of ballad muses.¹⁸

However, as P. Valentine Harris notes in *The Truth About Robin Hood*,¹⁹ some historians still support Hunter’s notions and Harris suggests that the vindication of Hunter’s thesis can be found in an examination of some evidence that was unavailable during Hunter and Child’s publications. Examining the Contrariant’s Roll in the Wakefield Manor Office and Court Rolls from the beginning of the fourteenth century, Harris discovers a Robert and Matilda Hood living on and later evicted from land on Bichill in Yorkshire. He adds the discovery of a Roger de Doncastre also living within Yorkshire in that time, within ten miles of Kirklees, thereby leading to the conclusion that the tale of “A Lytell Gest” was grounded in fact. Harris’ case continues on to find names of men similar to those mentioned in Gest and leading him to the conclusion that Robin Hood was real, died at Kirklees and that his death was blamed on the Prioress and her supposed lover. However, as with Hunter before him, while the similarities in names and geographical locations are tantalising, his case is circumstantial.

John Bellamy took a historical approach to the discovery and validation of Robin Hood and sides with his contemporary historians in being unwilling to write Hood off as simply a myth, implying that those that do so are only doing so due to a lack of source material. While Bellamy does not have any new material *per se*, he puts together what he calls a ‘new logical scheme’²⁰ but is unable to prove to a scholarly standard that his particular Robin Hood was the real one. A myriad of other likely candidates are put forward by scholars in the field. The table below indicates some of the Robin Hoods identified as the potential historical figure.

Prospective Robin Hood	Date he was claimed to have lived	Cited by
John Hood, residing near Wakefield.	1202	J.C. Holt ²¹
Robert Hood, employee of the Abbot of Cirencester.	1213-1216	Stephen Knight ²² J. C. Holt ²³
Robert Hod, a tenant of the Archbishop of York. Attributed the alias of ‘Hobbehod’.	1225-1226	D. Crook ²⁴ J. C. Holt ²⁵
William Le Fevre, son of Robert, a member of an outlaw	1261-1262	D. Crook ²⁶

¹⁸ F. J. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Boston and New York: Dover, 1995, p. 42.

¹⁹ P. Valentine Harris, *The Truth About Robin Hood*, London: C. H. Gee, 1952.

²⁰ John Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, London: Croom Helm, 1985, p. iii.

²¹ J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1989, p. 51.

²² Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. 194.

²³ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 54.

²⁴ D. Crook, “The Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood: The Genesis of the Legend?” in *Thirteenth Century England*, vol. 2, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1988, p. 60.

²⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 54.

group. Known as 'William Robehod fugitive'. Crook notes the change indicates that this is a nickname given to robbers who hid their faces.		
Adam Hood, a forester in the service of Earl Warrene.	1265-1295 and 1274	J. W. Walker ²⁷
John Rabunhod. Charged with murder in Hampshire.	1272	David Crook ²⁸
Alexander Robehod. Charged with theft in Essex.	1272	Phillips and Keatman ²⁹
William Robehod. A robber in Berkshire.	1272	Phillips and Keatman ³⁰
Richard Hood Of Sowerby, West Yorkshire; his son, John Hood; and John's sons, both called Robert Hood, active from 1313.	1274-5	J.C. Holt ³¹
Gilbert Robehod appeared in court in Sussex.	1286	J.C. Holt ³²
Robert Robehod. Charged with stealing sheep in Winchester.	1294	David Crook ³³
Gilbert Robynhod of Fletching. A tenant of the Liberty of Leicester in Sussex.	1296	J.C. Holt ³⁴ Dobson and Taylor ³⁵
Robert Hood, of Newton, near Wakefield. He, or his son also named Robert, died in 1341-2.	1308	Scott Nollen ³⁶
Robert Hood the Grave.	1309	Scott Nollen ³⁷
Robert Hodde of Sowerby, West Yorkshire.	1314	Bellamy ³⁸
Robertus Hood, purchased land at Bitchill, Wakefield before he was declared an outlaw.	1316	J.C. Holt ³⁹ Joseph Hunter ⁴⁰
Robert Hood of Wakefield, included in a summons of Earl Warrene to join Edward II's forces against Scotland.	1316/18	J. C. Holt ⁴¹
Robyn Hod.	1324	Joseph Hunter ⁴²

²⁶ Crook, "The Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood: The Genesis of the Legend?" in *Thirteenth Century England*, 1988, p. 59.

²⁷ J. W. Walker, *The True History of Robin Hood*, Wakefield: West Yorkshire Printing Company, 1952, p. 1-2.

²⁸ Crook, "The Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood: The Genesis of the Legend?" in *Thirteenth Century England*, 1988, p. 59.

²⁹ G. Phillips and M. Keatman, *Robin Hood: The Man Behind the Myth*, London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1995, p. 56.

³⁰ Phillips and Keatman, *Robin Hood: The Man Behind the Myth*, 1995, p. 56.

³¹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 51.

³² Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 53.

³³ Crook, "The Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood: The Genesis of the Legend?" in *Thirteenth Century England*, 1988, p. 59.

³⁴ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 52.

³⁵ R.B. Dobson and J. Taylor (eds.), *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw* (3rd edition), Sutton: Stroud, 1997, p. 12.

³⁶ Scott Allen Nollen, *Robin Hood: A Cinematic History of the English Outlaw and His Scottish Counterparts*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co, 1999, p. 46.

³⁷ Nollen, *Robin Hood: A Cinematic History of the English Outlaw and His Scottish Counterparts*, 1999, p. 46.

³⁸ Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, 1985, p. 114.

³⁹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Hunter, "The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelsy of English: Robin Hood, His Period, Real Character etc. Investigated" in *Critical and Historical Tracts*, 1852, p. 63.

⁴¹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 57.

		Holt ⁴³
Robyn Hod.	1324	Joseph Hunter ⁴⁴ J. C. Holt ⁴⁵
Katherine Robynhod, daughter of Robert Hod, Common Councillor for the Vintry Ward, recorded in a coroner's roll.	1325	Dobson and Taylor ⁴⁶
Robert Hodde of Sowerby, West Yorkshire.	1331	John Bellamy ⁴⁷
Robert Robynhoud, from West Harting, Sussex.	1332	J.C. Holt ⁴⁸ Dobson and Taylor ⁴⁹
The name 'Robin Hood' had become an epithet. A person who commits offences in the Forest of Rockingham.	1354	J.C. Holt ⁵⁰
Misdoers in Derbyshire likened to Robin Hood.	1439	Scott Nollen ⁵¹

While some of these figures were not argued as the basis of the cultural tradition of the 'real' Robin Hood, that is to say the outlaw figure that we have come to recognise as Robin Hood, the claims of each of the above figures being a candidate for a historical Robin Hood are made using Court Rolls, land lease documents, title deeds, court orders and other such legal and bureaucratic manuscripts, but there is still a definite lack of confirmation. No contemporaries speak of any of them or their adventures, for instance. With such a vast number of potential Robin Hoods, and being unable to differentiate easily between which were legitimate names and which were epithets, what aspect of the story was true and what was fiction, and there being a lack of documentary evidence to prove or disprove any of these potentials, makes definitively identifying even the most likely of candidates still, as Holt calls it, a shot in the gloaming.⁵² The sheer volume of possibility and the lack of evidence has led to scholars such as J. C. Holt⁵³, Dobson and Taylor⁵⁴, and Barbara Hanawalt⁵⁵ to disregard them all. Stephen Knight suggests that it is the 'power of individualism and empiricism'⁵⁶ that is the

⁴² Hunter, "The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelsy of England: Robin Hood, His Period, Real Character etc. Investigated" in *Critical and Historical Tracts*, 1852, p. 63.

⁴³ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Hunter, "The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelsy of England: Robin Hood, His Period, Real Character etc. Investigated" in *Critical and Historical Tracts*, 1852, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, 1985, p. 115.

⁴⁸ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 52-3.

⁴⁹ Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 54.

⁵¹ Nollen, *Robin Hood: A Cinematic History of the English Outlaw and His Scottish Counterparts*, 1999, p. 47.

⁵² Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 7.

⁵³ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robin Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Ballads and Bandits: Fourteenth Century Outlaws and the Robin Hood Poems' in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context, Medieval Studies at Minnesota*, 4, 1992, p. 154.

⁵⁶ Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 14.

driving force behind the desire to find the single real figure and it is only that force that suggests the conclusion of his actual existence. Knight, too, dismisses the question of a historical Robin Hood.⁵⁷

As such, the legend necessarily takes precedence. The debate regarding the historical Robin Hood began reasonably late in the general timeframe of the legend. As the table above demonstrates, the name 'Robin Hood', and its variants, had been a recurring feature in justice and court rolls from the mid-to-late thirteenth century and argued to have been monikers, pseudonyms and aliases,⁵⁸ a name that was synonymous with outlawry and general roguery. The common use of the name suggests that the legend was already widespread enough to be easily recognisable and accessible to the masses. Certainly, by the time of the first literary allusion to the figure, in William Langland's 1377 manuscript of *The vision of Piers Plowman*, the throw-away manner in which he is mentioned indicates that the author assumes immediate familiarity on the part of his audience with Robin Hood.

“If I sholde deye bi this day,” quod he, “me list nought to loke.
I kan noght parfitly my Paternoster as the preest it syngeth,
But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,
Ac neither of Oure Lord ne of Oure Lady the leeste that evere was made.”⁵⁹

The fact that Sloth indicates his knowledge of the rhymes of Robin Hood is superior to his knowledge of the Lord's Prayer demonstrates that, though the material is no longer available to the modern reader in a literary form, earlier references to the legend did exist and that the legend had already been formed to some extent.

The allusions to Robin Hood literature continue through the fifteenth century with the author of *Dives and Pauper* admonishing the sinful masses who prefer to 'heryn a tale or song of robyn hode or sum rubaudry than to heryn messe or martynes'⁶⁰ in 1410, and a decade later, a figure assumed to be the historically true Robin Hood makes his first appearance in Andrew of Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle of Scotland* under the year 1283.

Lytil Ihon and Robyne Hude
Waythemen were commendyd gude,
In Yngilwode and Barnysdale
Thai oysyd all this time thare trawale.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, 1994, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood : An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, pp. 1-64, and Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, pp. 40-62.

⁵⁹ William Langland, *The Vision and Creed of Piers Ploughman*, Vol. I, ed. Thomas Wright London: J.R. Smith, 1856, p. 101.

⁶⁰ Harry Parker, *Dives and Pauper*, London: Pynson, 1493, Chapter LI.

⁶¹ Andrew of Wyntoun, *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, ed. David Laing, Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872, p. 263, ll. 3523-6.

This early reference signifies the way in which the Robin Hood myth can become tangled with the ideological beliefs of the writer, albeit perhaps unwittingly. The *Chronicle* is political propaganda, demonstrated by its strong pro-Scottish stance evident within its treatment of Sir William Wallace to a Scottish knight of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, revered as a national hero for his role in resisting the English forces during the Wars of Scottish Independence. That he mentions the two outlaws and describes the high praise with which they were held, Stephen Knight suggests, implicitly denotes an approval of the outlaws due to the fact that they too were enemies of the English monarchy and its officers.⁶² Indeed, as Lewis Spence notes, many people came to associate Hood with Wallace in later years.⁶³ Furthermore, the Scottishisation of the myth can be seen in the reference to Barnsdale, assumed in this particular case to be further north than the Yorkshire Barnsdale that is the setting for the action in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" by Wyntoun's mentioning both Barnsdale and Inglewood in the same line, thus possibly linking the location to the northern Inglewood. Although, in attempts to maintain the historicity of Robin Hood, critics such as Valentine have suggested that Wyntoun had confused Robin Hood with Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough and William Cloudesly, all medieval highwaymen who were assumed to frequent that particular area.⁶⁴ The association with the northern Barnsdale furthers the political agenda of the *Chronicles* by associating Robin Hood with the Earl of Huntington, owner of that land and connected closely with the royal house in Scotland.⁶⁵ Thus the figure of Robin Hood demonstrates an ability to display political values. He becomes a signifier of the Other, of antagonism, of dissent, and of opposition to unjust authority. Indeed, as Daniel Mersey suggests, the literary cycle that has emerged around Robin Hood began to incorporate tales about other medieval outlaws 'adapted and interpolated into the legendary life of the presumably more popular Robin Hood,'⁶⁶ denoting the value of this legendary figure.

Another early possible reference to Robin Hood in English literature comes from Geoffrey Chaucer, who in his late-thirteenth century epic of *Troilus and Criseyde* echoes an old English proverb. Criseyde, irritated by the denigration of love by those who have never experienced it, exclaims

⁶² Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (2nd edition), Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p. 24.

⁶³ Lewis Spence, "Robin Hood in Scotland." *Chambers Journal* 18 (1928), pp. 94-6.

⁶⁴ Harris, *The Truth About Robin Hood*, 1952. See also Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997.

⁶⁵ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 24. See also Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, 1994, p. 31. It is worth noting also that the Rutland Barnsdale to the south was also linked closely to the Scottish royal family (see Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. 5), thus Wyntoun could possibly have made a mistake with regards to geography when linking the area to Inglewood but the Scottish link remains in either case.

⁶⁶ Daniel Mersey, *Legendary Warriors: Great Heroes in Myth and Reality*, London: Brassey's, 2002, p. 113.

manere folk, I gesse,
Defamen love, as no-thing of him knowe;
Thei speken, but they bente never his bowe.⁶⁷

This echoes the old proverb of 'many men speak of Robin Hood who never drew his bow,'⁶⁸ again signalling the existence and indeed the proliferation of Robin Hood tale in that medieval society.

The poems and tales that *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer reference unfortunately did not survive for examination today. Their echoes survive only in fragments, such as that by Andrew of Wyntoun above or an early Robin Hood lyric was discovered in Lincoln Cathedral Library Manuscript 132, dating from the fifteenth century.

Robyn hod in scherewod stod
hodud and hathus hosut and schold
ffour and thuynti arowes
He bore in his hands.⁶⁹

The Robin Hood figure here bears the hallmarks of the icon that he remains to this day, an icon that is recognisable in the earliest surviving narrative ballad.

"Robin Hood and the Monk" is preserved in Cambridge University Manuscript Ff.5.48, and was assumed to date from shortly after 1450,⁷⁰ though revised later by Ohlgren to suggest a later date, from around 1465.⁷¹ Although "A Gest of Robyn Hode", the 'most substantial and most ambitious'⁷² of the medieval texts, was considered to be an earlier ballad, Knight and Ohlgren state that "Robin Hood and the Monk" is the oldest extant example of the 'rymes of Robin Hood' referred to by Langland,⁷³ and the narrative, therefore, falls into place in the late fourteenth century. It is a short ballad, made shorter by the missing portion after line 120, assumed to be caused by a missing leaf in the original manuscript,⁷⁴ and tells the story of Robin Hood's desire to attend mass in Nottingham, his falling out with Little John, his arrest and imprisonment and subsequent rescue by Little John and Much. The ballad has received mixed critical responses, from 'a blood and thunder adventure',⁷⁵ a 'shallow tale'⁷⁶ to 'very perfection in its kind'⁷⁷ and 'the most distinguished and artistically

⁶⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Troilus and Criseyde" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 501.

⁶⁸ See Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, pp. 1-64, and Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, pp. 288-92.

⁶⁹ As noted in Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 24. See also Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, 1994, p. 31.

⁷¹ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 20.

⁷² Douglas Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems", *Poetica* 18 (1984), p. 22.

⁷³ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 31.

⁷⁴ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 32.

⁷⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 30.

accomplished of all the Robin Hood ballads'.⁷⁸ Gray calls it a 'vivid narrative [...] a splendid performance',⁷⁹ indeed the ballad refers to itself as a 'talkyng',⁸⁰ signalling a performative function.

"Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" survives the British Library Add MSS 27879, dated to the mid seventeenth century. Despite this date, Knight and Ohlgren suggest that the ballad could be much older, dating it to the fifteenth century as the manuscript is 'clearly [...] a collection of pre-existing material.'⁸¹ Indeed, Fowler suggests that it 'may well be one of the earliest of all the Robin Hood ballads.'⁸² The ballad has been described as 'one of the most important as well as intriguing ballads in the Robin Hood canon because of its exceptionally violent tone and concise dramatic qualities'⁸³ and indeed it is quite grim as it relates 'the bloody end of a medieval bounty hunter.'⁸⁴ The narrative is a 'mysterious story',⁸⁵ relaying the events that come to pass after a Robin Hood has a bad dream about being captured by 'two wight yeoman'⁸⁶ in the forest. This ballad echoes many of the elements present in "Robin Hood and the Monk", from Robin Hood's anger and threats of violence towards Little John, to the friendly game of shooting he engages in with Guy of Gisborne. When Little John is captured, there are more echoes of the blood and thunder narrative as the Sheriff ties him to a tree and threatens that he shall be 'drawn by dale and downe' (l. 78) and 'hanged hie on a hill.' (l. 80). The vivid violence continues in the second part of the narrative when Robin Hood reveals his true identity to Guy of Gisborne and the two engage in combat, Robin defeating Guy and mutilating his severed head in order to fool the Sheriff. The ballad engages in 'brutal, ritualistic, nearly theatrical'⁸⁷ storytelling, very much in line with the material in Robin Hood and the Monk and quite distinct from the following ballad as it is 'completely devoid of the characteristic earthy humour of the other Robin Hood ballads.'⁸⁸

⁷⁷ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1995, p. 95.

⁷⁸ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 113.

⁷⁹ Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems", *Poetica*, 1984, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Unknown, "Robin Hood and the Monk" in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p. 48, l. 355. All subsequent references to this text will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

⁸¹ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 169.

⁸² D. C. Fowler, "The Ballads" in *The Manual of Writings of Middle English, 1050-1550*, Vol. 6, ed. A. E. Hartung, New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980, p. 1782.

⁸³ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, pp. 140-1.

⁸⁴ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 36-7.

⁸⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 30.

⁸⁶ Unknown, "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p. 173-180, l. 7. All subsequent references to this text will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁷ Stuart Kane, "Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, ed. Thomas G. Hahn, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000, p. 101.

⁸⁸ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 7.

“Robin Hood and the Potter” survives in Cambridge E.e.4.35 and had been assumed to be from around 1503.⁸⁹ However, a reference to a royal wedding in the manuscript led Thomas Ohlgren to date it, and thus the ballad, to around 1468,⁹⁰ making this the second oldest of the surviving ballads. There is a shift in tone between this ballad and the previous one, “Robin Hood and the Potter” being significantly lighter, revolving around trickery and fellowship. It is, significantly, devoid of any death. This ballad has Robin Hood engaging in a battle with a potter in Sherwood, losing with mirth and grace, befriending the potter and taking his wares to the town to sell them. While there, he tricks the Sheriff of Nottingham into returning with him to the Greenwood and robs him of his possessions. Dobson and Taylor regard this ballad as a ‘much less skilful work of literary composition’ than “Robin Hood and the Monk”⁹¹, with Holt referring to the tale as ‘trite’ and ‘dependent on comic situations’.⁹² Knight is more sympathetic, noting the parody of mercantile practices⁹³ as Ohlgren notes the clever and unorthodox manner that Robin Hood employs.⁹⁴

“A Gest of Robyn Hode” exists in printed form from around 1495, though there is no manuscript version. The texts exist as fragments printed as the ‘Lettersnijder edition’ in Antwerp around 1510,⁹⁵ and an edition by Wynkyn de Worde, printed possibly before the Lettersnijder edition.⁹⁶ Child and Dobson and Taylor used Lettersnijder as a base to be amended and filled from Wynkyn de Worde’s edition, a decision that Knight and Ohlgren support as ‘correct’ as ‘Wynkyn has more errors and seems less close to their exemplar than the Antwerp text’.⁹⁷ The poem, however, is a collection of stories knitted together to form a single narrative.⁹⁸ There are some logical and narrative inconsistencies in the text. For example, Little John is able to get from Nottingham to Barnsdale in less than a day.⁹⁹ Indeed, he wakes late, and is still in the sheriff’s house at noon (ll. 621-2). After waking, fighting with the steward and the butler, eating and drinking his fill and then fighting with the cook for over ‘an owre’ (l. 672), he is still able to get to Barnsdale to rejoin the men. And it is still light; the sheriff is still out ‘Huntyng with houndes and horne’ (l. 726). Child argues that these inconsistencies point towards two separate ballad cycles being merged¹⁰⁰ and indeed towards an

⁸⁹ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 123.

⁹⁰ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 21.

⁹¹ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 124.

⁹² Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 34.

⁹³ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*, 1994, pp. 54-5.

⁹⁴ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 84.

⁹⁵ D. C. Fowler, “The Ballads” in *The Manual of Writings of Middle English, 1050-1550*, 1980, p. 1769.

⁹⁶ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 80.

⁹⁷ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 80.

⁹⁸ See Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 37.

⁹⁹ Unknown, “A Gest of Robyn Hode” in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p109, ll. 617-705. All subsequent references to this text will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰⁰ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1995, p. 51.

adoption and adaptation of the legends surrounding the outlaws Fulk Fitzwarin and Eustace the Monk.¹⁰¹ William Clawson suggested that twelve ballads had been incorporated into “A Gest of Robyn Hode” with ‘admirable artistic skill’,¹⁰² though Knight and Ohlgren state that this position is weakened as ‘only four reasonably close contacts with existing ballads can be found.’¹⁰³ It is worth noting that presumably, the possibility is always present that there could be other ballads that have not survived for scrutiny. Holt considers the joining of tales to be artificial¹⁰⁴ and unconvincing,¹⁰⁵ a stark contrast to Clawson’s praise and to Gray’s statement that the ‘construction has been neatly done’.¹⁰⁶

These four early texts will form the cornerstone of this thesis, which will argue that these early texts served their own ideological purposes by engaging in criticism of the governmental system that developed in England in the medieval era. The argument is in part an extension of the dispute regarding the audience of these early texts. While historians and early literary critics of the texts were by and large silent on the matter of the potential audiences or assumed that the texts ‘served some antique organic community now lost in the mists of time’,¹⁰⁷ the audience has become more prominent in recent criticisms. Rodney Hilton aligned the early ballads with the Peasants’ Revolt, claiming that the dissidence within them was a reaction to and about the Revolt of 1381, a ‘by-product of the agrarian social struggle’.¹⁰⁸ Maurice Keen held a similar position in his introduction to the first edition of *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* in 1961, a position he revised in 1977 for the second edition due to considerable opposition by J. C. Holt. Holt argues that the ballads were ‘not of a discontented peasantry, but of the gentry’¹⁰⁹ due to lack of agrarian social complaint and to the presence of aristocratic cultural values. Holt continues to argue that the ‘original audience was not concerned with alleged or actual class conflicts, of which the ballads are remarkably free, but with hospitality and its formalities, and with the precedence which arose from service and status.’¹¹⁰ Maurice Keen, in his revised 1977 edition of *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, wrote ‘[i]n 1961 I argued emphatically that the Robin Hood legend rose to popularity in the later middle ages because it gave expression to the social grievances of the ‘common people’, and I equated the ‘common

¹⁰¹ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1995, p. 43.

¹⁰² William H. Clawson, *The Gest of Robin Hood*, Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1909, pp. 125-8.

¹⁰³ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Gray, “The Robin Hood Poems.” *Poetica*, 1984, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Rodney Hilton, “The Origins of Robin Hood”, *Past and Present*, 14 (Nov. 1958), p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ J. C. Holt, “The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood”, *Past and Present*, 18 (Nov. 1960), p. 90.

¹¹⁰ Holt, “The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood”, *Past and Present*, 1960, p. 100.

people' – over-exclusively, I think, - with the rural peasantry.¹¹¹ Keen notes that the ballads cannot be interpreted in terms of attitudes 'exclusive to any class'.¹¹² Dobson and Taylor maintain that Robin Hood 'from the moment he stepped onto the historical stage [...] is presented as a yeoman hero for a yeoman audience',¹¹³ and as Singman notes with regard to the historicity of the hero, 'if Robin Hood did exist he was a commoner'.¹¹⁴ In his later book, Holt devotes a chapter to this issue, arguing that texts are more representative of the lesser land-owning gentry and their concerns.¹¹⁵ P. R. Coss adds to the discussion by noting the diffusive element of culture, that lower classes can, and do, adopt the habits and cultural values of the higher classes as the aristocratic model created a top-down model of cultural dissemination in feudal society.¹¹⁶

Holt, however, seems to disregard the fact that Robin Hood and his men are presented as, and are known to be, yeomen outlaws. The medieval audience, whether agrarian or noble or a mixture, would know what this means in terms of everyday life. Furthermore, as they are outlaws, these tales are not concerned with agrarian complaints; as wolf heads, those are concerns that are no longer theirs. He and his men are representative of an oppositional force, such as those mentioned by M. I. Ebbutt; 'men who, loving liberty and hating oppression, took the law into their own hands and executed a rough and ready justice between the rich and the poor which embodied the best traditions of knight-errantry.'¹¹⁷ This does not mean that the ballads were for a strictly peasant audience, nor will this thesis argue this to be the case. They are not for a particular class so much as they are for a particular cause.

This thesis will examine the way in which these early texts engaged with the three estates of medieval society, engaging with the theoretical works of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin and Karl Marx to demonstrate an ideological imperative that exists within them to reorder medieval society away from the tripartite system. Beginning with the second estate, the first chapter will examine how the limitations placed on peasants, their curtailed freedom and denial of their agency, led to discontentment and misrule and, significantly, violence, despite the press to create docile bodies. Examining the actions of and directives to the second estate, as represented in literature of the time, I will argue that the transgression and the violence that is evident in the early texts display discontentment from the peasantry manifested in an encroachment on the prerogative of the knight and indeed a directive towards continued violence against an unjust system.

¹¹¹ Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London: Routledge, 1977, p. xiii.

¹¹² Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 1977, p. xiv.

¹¹³ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 34.

¹¹⁴ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, pp. 109-58.

¹¹⁶ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ M. I. Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race*, London: Harrap, 1915, p. 314.

The second chapter will engage with the First Estate, a rejection that their carnivalised representation performs a safety-valve effect and the argument that Robin Hood texts are positing an alternative structure to the society that currently exists, one that acknowledges and audits the corruption that is known to exist in the ecclesiastical hierarchies using their own methods of surveillance. The chapter will also note that the texts are aware of the power that church officials had in the private lives of the congregation and that they actively subvert that power through a refusal to engage with a primary source of their interference as they do not engage with aspects of sexuality. As Singman notes, 'the world of Robin Hood is overwhelmingly masculine in both content and perspective. Maid Marian was not part of the premodern Robin Hood ballads, and sexual elements only enter the legend tangentially [...] never do they penetrate the fastness of the greenwood.'¹¹⁸

The final chapter will draw all these themes together while examining the representation of the third estate of medieval society. The chapter will discuss the homosociality in the texts, the driving force of fellowship, and the spirit of camaraderie. This spirit, Singman notes, is not straightforward and amicable, but rather 'a relationship in which loyalty and competition are inextricably linked.'¹¹⁹ Using P. R. Coss' work on cultural diffusion, I will examine the use of the sportful combat motif as presented by the yeomen, the representation of chivalric ideals, and the protection and comfort derived from the Greenwood as a space of communality. Finally, I will examine the texts through Marxist hermeneutics, suggesting that the texts present a hero who is neither aristocratic nor mercantile, that the yeoman have a 'highly developed sense of personal self-worth'¹²⁰ demonstrates their understanding that they are able to understand their ability to control the means of production. It is this understanding, and this keen concept of fellowship, that all four texts hold in common, despite their other differences.

The thesis will argue that the ideological functions of the texts are revealed by criticising current political climates, by testing the law and revealing its weaknesses, by representing a 'principled resistance to wrongful authority',¹²¹ and achieve this through a depiction of the outlaws as representative of the ideal free commoner.

¹¹⁸ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 38.

¹¹⁹ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹²⁰ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹²¹ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. xi.

Chapter One: Robin Hood and the Second Estate.

The first phase of the Robin Hood cycle, that is to say the four oldest surviving texts in Middle English, offers a steady critical engagement with the way in which society was ordered. “Robin Hood and the Monk”, “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne”, “Robin Hood and the Potter” and “A Gest of Robyn Hode”¹ emerged during the collapse of feudalism and in an age of turmoil, of social recalibration and of power struggles and resistance within societal hierarchies,² and provide not just a criticism of that established social hierarchy but also provide an alternative structure of society. The utopian ideal posited by the society of outlaws who, despite having a clear leader, are equal citizens, stands in stark contrast to the model of the tripartite society of the feudal system. The construction of the tripartite model was demarcated by the Church and endorsed by Aelfric in the early years of the eleventh century,³ and the conservative views of men such as Bishop Adalbero of Laon continued its propagation. In his poem *Carmen ad Rotbertum Regum*, composed between 1027 and 1031, he sorted society into three orders; the priest, the knight and the peasant, or those who pray, those who fight and those who work.

Triplex ergo Dei domus est, quae creditur una :
Nunc orant, alii pugnant, aliique laborant.
Quae tria sunt simul et scissuram non patiuntur ;
Unius officio sic stant operata duorum ;
Alternis uicibus cunctis solamina praebent.
Est igitur simplex talis conexio triplex ;
Sic lex praeualuit, tunc mundus pace quieuit.⁴

(Therefore, triple is the house of God, which is believed to be one.
Now, some pray, others fight, and others work.
These three are connected and suffer no scission:
the workings of two thus stand on the office of one;
each one in turn offers support to the others.
This threesome is therefore single.
As long as this law prevails, the world enjoys peace.)⁵

¹ The versions of the ballads considered in this thesis will be from Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren’s *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997.

² See Robert Bartlett’s introduction to *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 1-3 for an overview of England as a conquered land, and the socio-political nature of conflict in David Nirenberg in *Communities of Violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 10-11. See also Claire Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England*, Hamsphire: Ashgate Publishing, 2003 and Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, particularly p. 12.

³ Bernhard Jussen, *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 108.

⁴ Adalbero of Laon, *Carmen ad Rotbertum Regem*, ed. Sébastien Bricout, <http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/adalbero_laodunensis/carmen.html> [2004: accessed 15.6.2013]

Gerard of Florennes, the Bishop of Cambrai, laid these social foundations out in the early eleventh century, when he wrote ‘from the beginning, mankind has been divided into three parts, among men of prayer, farmers, and men of war.’⁶ As Georges Duby notes, Gerard distinguished between men an essential inequality and preached recompense by way of ‘charity, mercy and mutual service within the framework of divinely ordained natural law.’⁷ Though in a clearly stratified pyramid of power, with the king as God’s chosen representative on Earth, the system that Gerard of Florennes endorsed relied heavily upon the populace accepting their rank and position in life, on the feudal concepts of homage and fealty, and therefore on the institution of the Church to preach the importance of knowing one’s place in society, thereby admonishing any ambitions of social elevation in line with biblical teachings contained in Ephesians 4:1-3: ‘I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’⁸

It is within this tense, segregated society of the English high Middle Ages that the early Robin Hood ballads begin to emerge and it is these social anxieties that are thrown into relief. This chapter will examine the legal and social limitations placed on peasants, the restriction of their agency and the attempt to create docile bodies through an engagement with the second estate of medieval society. Through a look at some contemporary literature, I will argue that the transgression and violence that is evident in the early ballads display discontentment with the current structure of society from which manifests in an encroachment on the prerogative of the knight, namely violence, and indeed a directive towards continued violence against an unjust system.

Though there are discrepancies in the dating of the earliest extant Robin Hood ballad, “Robin Hood and the Monk”, as discussed by Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren in their introduction to the ballad in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*,⁹ the manuscript collection in which it was discovered was thought to be written around 1450,¹⁰ though now revised to be around 1465.¹¹ However, as

⁵ Translation from Tomaž Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 24.

⁶ As quoted in Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 13.

⁷ Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, 1980, p. 38.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 204.

⁹ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, pp. 31-2.

¹⁰ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1993, p. 15.

¹¹ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 20.

Knight and Ohlgren note, the tale itself outdates the manuscript collection by at least eighty years as it is ‘the oldest extant example of the “rymes of Robin Hood” referred to by Langland in the 1370s.’¹² The king in this narrative is unnamed but the king in “A Gest of Robyn Hode”, generally considered to be a literary compilation of the shorter rymes of Robin Hood,¹³ is named as ‘Edwarde’ in line 1533.¹⁴ The table below displays the reigning monarchs from the Middle Ages and the three likely candidates for the king mentioned in the ballad.¹⁵

Reigning Monarch of England	Years of Reign
Henry II	1154-1189
Richard I	1189-1199
John	1199-1216
Henry III	1216-1272
Edward I	1272-1307
Edward II	1307-1327
Edward III	1327-1377
Richard II	1377-1399

Of the three Edwards above, the only one to have made a known visit through the royal forests of northern England, Yorkshire, and Lancashire, all the way through to Nottingham, was Edward II.¹⁶ The poet also refers to Edward as ‘cumly’ and ‘comly’ (lines 1513 and 1549 respectively) leading to the conclusion that Edward II, a king noted for being handsome¹⁷ and known to have traveled through the royal forests, is the king that Robin Hood and his men have dealings with and setting the ballad, and by extension “Robin Hood and the Monk” as one of the pieces that form it, in the early fourteenth century.¹⁸ Therefore, though the manuscript editions of all three ballads examined in this

¹² Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 31.

¹³ See Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 80-1 and Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1993, p. 15.

¹⁴ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 80-1 and Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1993, p. 138.

¹⁵ Information for the table is adapted from Ian Crofton’s *Kings and Queens of England: The Lives and Reigns of the Monarchs of England*, London: Quercus, 2008, p. 8.

¹⁶ Joseph Hunter, “Journal of the Mission of Queen Isabella to the Court of France, and of Her Long Residence in That Country” *Archaeologia*, xxxvi (1855), pp. 42–57.

¹⁷ Antonia Gransden draws together a large number of chronicles and documents in support of this assertion. For instance, the entry from the *Polychronicon* (p. 1) declares him ‘handsome’ and the *Vita* includes an assertion that he was ‘a fine figure of a man, handsome and strong’ (p. 35). From *Historical Writing in England: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, London: Routledge, 1996.

¹⁸ Edward IV has also been suggested as the model here (see Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*, 1994, pp. 47-8 and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, pp. 149-50) as he was famously described by contemporaries as being very handsome and tall (see Charles Derek Ross, *Edward IV*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 9-11). However, there is no record of Edward the IV having travelled through the royal forests of northern England. While it is possible, Ohlgren suggests that it is likely that the ‘poet/compiler

thesis date from a later time in the mid-fifteenth century, there is a clear indication that the ballads posit themselves in the early to mid-fourteenth century.

The concerns that “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne” and “Robin Hood and the Monk” raise as ‘blood and thunder’ adventures¹⁹ reflect the social and political anxieties of this period, one which precedes the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 by engaging with the subject of the disenfranchised population of medieval society. To understand the manner in which this interaction takes place in the early Robin Hood texts, we must consider what it meant to be a peasant in that era, where the bulk of the population was the peasant class, segregated into two groups: the free (yeoman) and the unfree (serfs, from the Latin ‘servus’, meaning ‘slave’).²⁰ Lehmborg, Meigs and Heyck note that serfs required permission to marry or to provide their children with an education, to move to cities or other manors, or to enter religious orders. They could not buy, sell, or bequeath land or property and legal recourses accorded by the system of Common Law were unavailable to them.²¹ The lords of their manors ruled almost every aspect of their lives and over the course of the twelfth century, this lack of freedom, or at least severely curtailed freedom, of the majority of the population became increasingly prominent from when they became enshrined in the judicial processes with the introduction of the *Laws of William I* and the ruling that ‘serfs shall not leave their lands nor seek devices to defraud their lord of the service they owe.’²² Furthermore, prohibitions were placed upon free citizens from helping a runaway, from receiving them or their livestock, and they were instructed to compel them to return to their lands and duties.²³ Though the plague that swept through England in 1348 resulted in better working conditions and more pay than peasants had before enjoyed,²⁴ Christopher Dyer suggests that this may have caused a rise in the expectations of the workers²⁵ which were then curtailed by the landowners and by the formalisation of the Statute of Labourers in 1351. This statute prevented peasants from demanding increased payment for

updated his sources to fit the historical, political, and economic developments of the time’ (Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 150).

¹⁹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1993, p. 28.

²⁰ Joachim Bumke notes that in the Middle Ages ‘about ninety percent of the population lived on the land in a state of dependency’ in *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p. 38. Bartlett also offers an analysis of the statistics provided in the Domesday Book in his *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 2000, pp. 290-7.

²¹ Stanford E. Lehmborg, Samantha A. Meigs and Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History* (3rd edition), Chicago: Lyceum Books, 2008, pp. 116-17.

²² As quoted by Bartlett in *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, 2000, p. 322.

²³ Samuel Heywood, *A Dissertation Upon the Distinctions in Society, and Ranks of the People Under the Anglo Saxon Government*, London: W. Clarke and Sons, 1818, p. 421-2.

²⁴ Christopher Dyer, “The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381” in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton, and T. H. Aston, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 9.

²⁵ Christopher Dyer, “The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381”, *The English Rising of 1381*, 1984, p. 10.

labour and limited the wages to those paid in the years preceding the plague.²⁶ The statute also limited the movement of serfs in order to prevent them from acquiring work that may have paid a higher wage,²⁷ thereby binding them to their lord and his manor.

The bound nature of the serfs is demonstrated clearly in an account by Reginald of Durham who wrote about a man of Middleton in Northumbria who was 'frequently burdened' by his lord with 'heavy and wrongful claims'²⁸ and who was pursued like an escaped slave when he packed up his family and possessions to leave the county. This was not an isolated incident for, as Robert Bartlett notes, kings issued writs to secure the return of runaway tenants to their lords and such instructions eventually became a matter of course.²⁹ Though the tale of the Middleton man above did end happily as he found refuge with a sympathetic lord in Lindisfarne, it demonstrates how easily a man without any legal recourse of his own could fall into the margins of society and be forced into outlawry, literally outside the law and devoid of any protection that his ruling lord can provide.

Despite the prohibition of slavery and slave trading by William the Conqueror in his *Laws*, serfs could be bought and sold as the writ served to only protect the citizens against the piracy involved in supplying slaves to Ireland, a regular trade that was eventually abolished in 1109.³⁰ The writ itself states 'I prohibit the sale of any man by another *outside the country* on pain of a fine to be paid in full to me'³¹ thus implying that such trading can be made within the country. The decree could certainly be exploited and Baron Arnulf de Hesdin did exactly that as he included in his tithes to the church a 'villianus with five acres of land.'³² Gilbert fitz Ralph announced the sale of 'Aluric, son of Stannard the fuller, who was my man, with all the progeny that has descended from him or will descend from him forever'³³ for 24 shillings. As such, people were ascribed not only a place in society from the birth but also a monetary value. This value was not only apparent in the trading of human livestock (as is the case with Aluric) but also in judicial matters where people literally had a different value according to their rank. Under the system of wergild, or 'man-price', the family of a

²⁶ "The Statute of Labourers" in *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R.B. Dobson, London: Macmillan Press, 1986, p. 64.

²⁷ "The Statute of Labourers", *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 1986, p. 65.

²⁸ As translated and relayed by Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, 2000, p. 322.

²⁹ Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, 2000, p. 322.

³⁰ The Council of Westminster assembled in 1102 decreed 'Henceforth let no one engage in this wicked trade, which has until now been customary in England, namely the selling of human beings as if they were brute beasts', from *Councils and Synods*, I/ii, p. 678.

³¹ David Charles Douglas and George William Greenaway (eds.), *English Historical Documents, 1042-1189*, London: Routledge, 1981, p. 424.

³² Reginald of Durham, *Libbellus* 105, pp. 234-6.

³³ Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, 2000, p. 324.

victim could gain financial compensation for their death. Standardised initially by the Anglo-Saxon King Ethelbert of Kent,³⁴ wergild of a peasant was set at 200 shillings while the wergild for killing a nobleman was set at 1200 shillings.³⁵ After the Conquest, the Norman William I required that the old laws be maintained by ruling that 'all shall have and hold the law of the king Edward in respect of their lands and all their possessions, with the addition of those decrees I have ordained for the welfare of the English people.'³⁶

The curtailed freedom, the stripping of individual agency, the treatment of serfs as livestock that could be bought and sold at will, and the monetary value that became attached to a man served to eradicate individuality and identity which in turn served to suppress and oppress the majority of the population and lead to discontentment and misrule. With the increase in legal transgressions, the preservation of public order was in the forefront of aristocratic concerns³⁷ as the challenge to feudal hierarchies coincided with other social and political events to create a culture of violence within society. The crime rates were reaching purportedly endemic proportions by the fifteenth century as authorities struggled to control violent crimes. The annual rate of violent crime was around 20 per 100,000 of population; as a comparative figure, the rate for the same crimes was around 2 per 100,000 in the nineteenth century.³⁸ In order to maintain the regime's success, such behaviour required forced suppression³⁹ and the creation of 'docile bodies'. Michel Foucault argues that the mechanisms of punishment for legal transgressions, and the increase of corporal punishment in the middle ages as a remedy, provide 'an additional labour force' and create 'a body of 'civil' slaves',⁴⁰ which is clearly advantageous to the state's economy as it attains free labour. The creation of docile bodies, however, is not acquired through punishment alone and requires a culture of fear in order to suppress transgression. In the feudal hierarchy, one's position is dependent on the continued subjection of those below, so each individual has an investment in maintaining the whole. It is with this in mind that we turn to knights, who were figures of terror, whose central duty was to defend

³⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents 500-1042*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 389-92.

³⁵ Whitelock, *English Historical Documents 500-1042*, 1996, p. 470.

³⁶ Douglas and Greenaway (eds.), *English Historical Documents, 1042-1189*, 1981, p. 424.

³⁷ J. G. Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 1.

³⁸ L. Stone, 'Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300-1980', *Past and Present*, 101, 1983, p. 26 (pp. 22-33).

³⁹ R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI*, London: Benn, 1981, p. 129 and Simon J. Payling, "Law and Arbitration in Nottinghamshire 1399-1461" in *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. J. Rosenthal and C. Richmond, Gloucester: Sutton Publishing, 1987, pp. 140-60.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Penguin, 1977, p. 24.

the faith,⁴¹ and for whom martial prowess was a necessity. Though the chivalric knights posited by writers such as the French Chrétien de Troyes and the unknown English author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* cut idealised and romantic figures across wild landscapes as they battled against the odds and often won the hearts and hands of a distressed lady, the code of chivalry itself was more threatening and essentially served to protect the aristocracy to the detriment of those beneath their social order. Edward of Woodstock, the Prince of Wales and Acquitane, later to be known as 'Edward the Black Prince' was an aristocratic knight who established the Order of the Garter, who was religious, famed for his martial and tactical abilities, dutiful to those of his class but apparently ambivalent towards those that fell beneath him. He was known to use the military strategy of chevauchée, horse mounted charges into civilian enemy territories that aimed to create panic, to burn, to pillage and to destroy.⁴²

Violence is built into the very nature of the knight, nurtured and cultivated by society to fuel this aggression. Not only was death while in service to Christ considered glorious⁴³ but there was a distinct expectation that violence and bloodshed ought to excite the knight into action, into more aggression and more carnage. Peter of Blois (c. 1203) wrote '[a]s elephants are roused to battle by the sight of blood, so, and more fervently, does the sight of the Holy Cross and the remembrance of the Lord's passion rouse Christian knights.'⁴⁴ As Frantzen comments, in the era of the crusading knight, 'bloodshed begets more bloodshed, violence begets violence and this is bloody good.'⁴⁵ Peasantry of the time had fear of not only enemy knights on crusade, but also their own. Composed between 1279 and 1281,⁴⁶ the very popular⁴⁷ *Libre qui es de l'ordre de cavalleria* (*The Book of the Order of Chivalry*), Catalan philosopher and logician Ramon Lull lays out the knight's duties to protect the faith and the king, to go hunting, to host feasts and to fight in tournaments. He must protect and cultivate the land and do so by terrorising the peasantry as it is because 'of the dread that the

⁴¹ Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 76.

⁴² David Green, *Edward the Black Prince: Power in Medieval Europe*, Harlow: Pearson and Longman, 2007.

⁴³ Christopher Tyerman, "Were There Any Crusades in the Twelfth Century?" in *The Crusades: The Essential Readings*, ed. Thomas F. Madden, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002, p. 123.

⁴⁴ Bernard Hamilton, "The Elephant of Christ: Reynald of Châtillon", *Studies in Church History* 15 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 97–108.

⁴⁵ Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War*, 2004, p. 77.

⁴⁶ Anthony Bonner, *Selected Works of Ramon Lull (II)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 1262.

⁴⁷ Anthony Bonner relates the many translations and prints of this text in his *The Art and Logic of Ramon Lull: A User's Guide*, Leiden: IDC, 2007, p. 4.

common people have of the knights, they labour and cultivate the earth, for fear lest they be destroyed.'⁴⁸

Despite some critical objection to the idea in the past, the early Robin Hood ballads seem to be expressing a distinct connection with the above themes, namely the discontentment of the peasantry with the feudal system and the tripartite structuring of society, and use the motifs of violence and transgression as a means of engagement. There are arguments made by both Rodney Hilton and Maurice Keen that the yeomen in the early Robin Hood ballads represent dissatisfied peasants in the third estate,⁴⁹ Hilton in particular arguing a continuity between them and the dissident forces in the Peasants' Revolt.⁵⁰ J. C. Holt posits an objection to that position and argues that the dissident audience was in fact the lower gentry, their hangers-on and higher servitors and that rural issues are absent from the texts themselves stating that they were 'originally not the literature of discontented peasantry, but of the gentry'.⁵¹ He continues to state that 'they are not concerned to any significant or important degree with the agrarian discontents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.'⁵² In Dobson and Taylor's commentary in their collection of the ballads, though they acquiesce to some of Holt's assertions, they maintain that Robin Hood is 'a yeoman hero for a yeoman audience'.⁵³ Holt returned to the issue in 1982 with his book, entitled *Robin Hood*, and devoted a chapter to the discussion of who would have constituted the audience of these texts.⁵⁴ One problem with Holt's assertions is that his chapter considers the audience from the evidence in only "Robin Hood and the Potter" and "A Gest of Robyn Hode", both of which differ from "Robin Hood and the Monk" and "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" in terms of both structure and content. "Robin Hood and the Monk" notably lacks the humour and light-heartedness of those later Robin Hood ballads while displaying a hostility towards royal officials, the bloodshed, I argue, displaying an engagement with the struggles of power between these two estates in society.

The ballad opens with Little John happily enjoying a beautiful spring morning in the company of Robin Hood, who is himself unable to delight in the day due to his preoccupation at having missed

⁴⁸ Ramon Lull "The Book of the Order of Chivalry" in *Main Currents of Western Thought: Readings in Western European Intellectual History from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Franklin Le Van Baumer, Yale: Yale University Press, 1978, p.86.

⁴⁹ Rodney H. Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood" in *Past and Present*, 1958 and "Robin Hood: Peasant or Gentleman?" *Past and Present*, 19, 1961.

⁵⁰ Hilton "The Origins of Robin Hood", in *Past and Present*, 1958.

⁵¹ Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1960, p. 90.

⁵² Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1960, p. 90.

⁵³ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood : An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 34.

⁵⁴ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, pp. 108-58. For a more expanded discussion on matters of audience and reception of the ballads, see introduction.

mass for over a fortnight. Robin decides that he will set off to Nottingham to attend the services at St Mary's Church and refuses the counsel of his man Much, who advises that he take a bodyguard of twelve of his men with him. Robin elects to take only Little John as his companion and as they travel together amiably until they decide to have a friendly game of archery to pass the time and place wagers on the outcome. Little John defeats Robin in the game, who responds poorly to having been bested and strikes Little John, causing the two men to part ways. Robin proceeds alone to Nottingham and is standing at mass when a monk, robbed earlier by Robin Hood, recognises him and hurries to the sheriff to demand that the outlaw be arrested. The sheriff and his men attack Robin while he is still in the church and despite a valiant effort and the death of many men, Robin is captured. There is a gap in the narrative due to a missing page in the manuscript between Robin's imminent capture and his men hearing of the news. The page would presumably contain details of his capture, perhaps where he was taken to be imprisoned, and the news of his capture reaching his men in the woods, the narrative resuming at that point where most of his men in the Greenwood are left catatonic with grief. In response, Much and Little John mount a rescue mission whereby they locate the monk who is being sent as an envoy to the king with papers of Robin's capture. He and Much attain the trust of the monk and the page with whom he is travelling and kill them both before taking the papers to the king themselves. The king gives them an honorific title and places a seal upon the papers and instructs them to bring Robin Hood to him. When they return to Nottingham, the sheriff looks at the papers and receives them both well, offering them food and wine and drinking with them until he slips into a drunken sleep. Little John tricks the gaoler into admitting them entry to the holding cells and kills him before escaping over the castle walls and into Sherwood. Robin, chagrined by his poor treatment of Little John earlier, offers him the leadership role in their outlaw band but Little John refuses, preferring to remain a merry man as he had always been.

The ballad, despite being referred to as 'a shallow tale, but one well and crisply told',⁵⁵ keenly illustrates contemporary social anxieties as Robin and his men are depicted in a manner which replicates the social structure of medieval England while undercutting the established hierarchy in order to emphasise the deficiencies within the system. Robin, the leader of the outlaw band, is portrayed as a quick tempered and violent man, prone to assaulting friend and foe alike in a manner that echoes Lull's knightly code mentioned above. His defeat at a friendly archery contest is enough to provoke him to strike Little John, his man-at-arms:

With that Robyn Hode lyed Litul Jon,
And smote hym with his hande; (ll. 55-6)

⁵⁵ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 30.

In contrast to the reality of the medieval peasant audience, the victim of the assault in this case is able to take leave of his master for the unjust treatment that he had received at his hands, thereby indicating to the audience a lack in their own institutional structure where a man cannot escape an unjust master. Though Little John does return to Robin's band, even happily as his inferior (ll. 315-8), he does so of his own volition and after acknowledgement that he had 'done the a gode turne for an ill' (l. 305-6). Robin offers redress and implicitly admits to his poor behaviour, a further display of quasi-knightly behaviour through the admission of his being wrong and Little John being right, for though he tries to prevent Little John from leaving, he does so by offering Little John the leadership role in the band.

"Nay, be my trouth," seid Robyn,
"So shall hit never be;
I make the maister," seid Robyn,
"Of alle my men and me." (ll. 311-14)

By refusing the offer of leadership, Little John provides the audience with a restoration of the utopian society that the merry men have created in the forest which stands in stark contrast to the violence and the bloodshed that exists outside their society. Apart from the violence inflicted upon Little John by Robin as they journeyed, when alone in the church and at risk of imminent capture, Robin kills a dozen men, the deaths glossed over and relayed in an offhand manner with '[a]nd twelve he slew that day' (l. 110) demonstrating a disconcerting casualness with regard to the carnage. This is in itself a further demonstration of Robin's quasi-knightly role, as he fights valiantly and the offhand relaying of the death toll of that day creates an abstraction of the body caught up in violence. In his work on state punishment, Foucault notes that the law and justice applies 'not so much to a real body capable of feeling pain as to a juridical subject, the possessor, among other rights, of the right to exist.'⁵⁶ By subjecting the body to violence, the body becomes dehumanised and de-personified, and signifies the disposability of the person subjected to the violence. Though in this case the violence is enacted by Robin Hood, it is important to remember that violence was, as mentioned above, a particular pursuit of the second estate. The violent acts therefore perform the same complex social and political functions that Foucault expresses with regard to punishment⁵⁷ despite the power inversion.

The function of the church in this episode is also important as it allows Robin to display again some acceptably knightly behaviour by defending himself against the breach of sanctuary, as will be

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, pp. 23-4.

discussed at some length later, but also the fact that the most violent episode, in terms of the scale of those injured and those killed, occurs in church during mass is noteworthy as the visibility of the violence replicates and inverts the spectacle of public punishment. Though the violence was certainly public, the way in which it is carried out, the fact that one man is able to withstand many before being taken has a distinct air of public protest about it. Additionally, the audience are led to wonder what would have happened had Little John been present by Robin's lamentation that "'Alas, alas!" seid Robyn Hode, / "Now mysse I Litull John.'" (ll. 101-2), and thus the struggle would have been two men against many. The implication here is that there is safety in numbers against any unjust regime⁵⁸ and that these regimes can be toppled. In this way, Robin Hood narratives are not merely a 'principled resistance to wrongful authority'⁵⁹ but a terse political statement against the social mores of the medieval world. Foucault notes:

[F]rom the point of view of the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be spectacular, it must be seen by all almost as its triumph. The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force.⁶⁰

Robin's capture, though spectacular, is not a triumph as the body count for the authorities was significant. By disrupting the public torture model through an outlaw publically using excessive violence, where he denies the public and the authorities his moans and cries, and denies the authorities any glory from capturing him, the narrative creates a space for the continuation of discourses of resistance to authority even as the transgressive figure is taken into custody.

The sheer volume of violent behaviour aside, the acts themselves are disconcerting, and deliberately so. Contrary to the assertion that the ballads present a problem for literary analysis due to 'the language [being] too formulaic and the texture disturbingly thin,'⁶¹ "Robin Hood and the Monk" displays remarkable sophistication by building and maintaining a rhetoric of destabilisation. Despite the hero of the story being presented as Robin Hood, a name that had been in the public consciousness for centuries prior to the ballad in this form,⁶² the first character the reader encounters is Little John, delighting in the beauty of nature and expressing his contentment. The narrative opens in the natural woodland that is the home of the outlaws.

⁵⁸ This episode with the monk, and the wrongful authority that he represents, is expanded on in the next chapter.

⁵⁹ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. Xi.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 34.

⁶¹ Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems" in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, 1999, p. 4. Gray does later express that the ballad is 'an excellent piece of vivid narrative' (p. 14.)

⁶² See previous chapter.

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song,

To se the dere draw to the dale,
And leve the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grene wode tre.

Hit befel on Whitson
Erly in a May mornnyng,
The son up feyre can shyne,
And the briddis mery can syng. (ll. 1-12.)

The 'mery', repeated twice in the above quotation, though speaking of the state of the forest and the birds' songs in the woods respectively, also serves as a means by which to ally Little John with the natural order of the forest as he is actually merry. The reader is lulled into this summertime reverie further by Little John's expression of joy and contentment with his lot that fair morning but is abruptly interrupted by Robin. Although he begins with a 'Ye', as if to agree with Little John, Robin continues with 'on thyng greves me,' (l. 21) thereby fracturing the narrative from the tranquillity that had been built over a course of five stanzas with just five words. This disturbance continues as the audience is led by the lyrical form to expect, as Douglas Gray says, that the grief is perhaps a romantic longing⁶³ and thereby hinting at sexuality but it is instead a desire to attend mass. The swiftness and the magnitude of the change in tone necessarily destabilises audience expectations by toying with the verisimilitude built by generic expectations.

In "Alterity, Parody, Habitus", Stephen Knight explicates the similarities in form and structure that "Robin Hood and the Monk", and indeed the other older texts, share with literature of their age, including romances, political tracts, religious lyrics and male-conflict semi-romances. Knight establishes the hybrid nature of the 'potent myth of the literary Robin Hood material' and suggests that "Robin Hood and the Monk" is a parody of romance.⁶⁴ Its parodic nature and hybridisation adds to the destabilising effect of the ballad.

Furthermore, Robin's character is quite complicated, and this serves as another means by which the audience are kept off-kilter. Although his persona in the ballads could be considered somewhat 'thin', and certainly he is prone to childishness and folly, his interactions with his men serve to create

⁶³ Gray, "The Robin Hood Poems", in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, 1999, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Stephen Knight, "Alterity, Parody, Habitus", *Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, ed. Stephen Knight, Turnhout: Brepols, 2011, p. 15.

a character with whom the audience is expected to sympathise. He is the leader of an outlaw band that reveres and defers to him. They call him 'dere master' (l. 17) and attempt to preserve his safety, as Much demonstrates by trying to persuade him to take a bodyguard of men with him (ll. 31-4). Derek Pearsall likens him to the Anglo-Saxon hero Beowulf in this determination 'to enter the dragon's lair alone' and even to Jesus 'amid his disciples in the Taking in the Garden',⁶⁵ and certainly Much's desire that he take twelve men (ll. 31-4) would present a Christ-like picture with twelve apostles. His men are driven to madness and catatonia at the news of his capture as the poet tells us that they 'fel inswonyng as thei were dede,' (l. 121) and that '[n]on of theym were in her mynde' (l. 123). This display serves to prove that the level of love and loyalty that he inspires in his men, which in turn indicates that he has the qualities that befit a rugged, well seasoned leader. And yet the audience is also privy to his mindlessness and impulsiveness. His sudden urge to attend mass, oblivious to the fact that he is an outlaw wanted by the authorities and, more pertinently, oblivious to the fact that he had robbed a monk from the very church he is planning on attending, is reckless. Though there are admirable reckless heroes,⁶⁶ Robin is not painted as such as his behaviour is generally poor. Though his decision to attend mass displays his devotion to Mary, which will be expanded on in Chapter Three, there are alternatives that were available and safeguards that could have been put in place. The fault must necessarily lie with Robin for, as Pearsall notes, the narrative prevents his men from suggesting an alternative church as 'such a proposition would be quite out of place in the heroic formula and wouldn't even begin to work.'⁶⁷ Robin's choice to simply walk in, without a disguise so that '[a]lle that ever were the church within/ beheld wel Robyn Hode' (l. 73-4) is similarly reckless. That he offers up a prayer to God and Mary to allow him safe exit from the church before entering highlights the absurdity of his actions by exhibiting that he is aware of the mortal danger into which he is placing himself but is refusing to, or is unable to, mitigate the potential harm. Though these may perhaps be the hallmarks of an admirable hero, they are clearly not the hallmarks of a good leader. Despite the allusions to great heroes that Pearsall makes, the audience is subtly guided by the narrative into considering the parameters of a good leader and the theme of violence, or martial ability, is a key element in this process.

⁶⁵ Derek Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, ed. Helen Phillips, Dublin: Four Courts, 2005, p. 44.

⁶⁶ See Susan Wittig Albert, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978 and Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, London: Routledge, 1967, pp. 71-5.

⁶⁷ Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, 2005, p. 44.

Robin's martial prowess has been commented on often, one critic stating that his ability with a bow 'veers on the superhuman.'⁶⁸ However, this early ballad displays a distinct lack of martial ability on his part as, despite putting up an admirable fight, he is bested not just once, but twice. His first defeat is at the hands of Little John in the archery contest, a defeat that belittles him significantly due to his attempt to undermine Little John in the preceding stanzas, particularly with the 'shockingly arrogant'⁶⁹ declaration that he would wager three pennies to Little John's one. This is a noteworthy portion of the tale, not just as a turning point in the narrative but also due to the manner in which violence (though this is a friendly archery contest, archery itself was, we must remember, a part of warfare and the bow and arrow were deadly weapons⁷⁰) became linked with a financial transaction and then, significantly, with a means by which to demonstrate superiority over another man. Robin's cocky wager was intended to assert his authority over Little John, whom he evidently saw as an underling as is suggested by his order that 'Litull John shall beyre my bow,/ Til that me list to drawe' (l. 37-8). Little John's refusal of this arrangement is not due to his objection to being a subordinate as Pearsall suggests⁷¹ as he is willing to accept Robin as his master and always refers to him as such during the course of the ballad. It is rather the case that he understands the power inherent in violence and wants to be involved rather than be forced into the position of an impotent bystander. Robin's anger at Little John, the unjustified lashing out is an attempt to regain his power in a manner akin to the knights of Lull, terrorising his subordinate into submission. However, Little John is not a peasant under the rule of a ruthless and unjust lord, he has weaponry to denote his power and he is able to react.

Litul Jon waxed wroth therwith,
And pulled out his bright bronde.

"Were thou not my maister," seid Litull John,
"Thou shuldis by hit ful sore;
Get the a man wher thou wille,
For thou getis me no more." (ll. 57-62)

The unsheathing of his sword is a powerful move on his part, particularly as he has already demonstrated that his martial skills with the bow surpass those possessed by Robin. We cannot ignore the phallic imagery here, either, as the 'bright bronde' is an extension of his masculine prowess. It is significant that Robin does not draw his sword here at all and that it breaks when he does eventually draw it in battle against the authorities (l. 112). Although Little John reins himself in

⁶⁸ Robert Segal, *Hero Myths*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, p. 94.

⁶⁹ Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, 2005, p. 45.

⁷⁰ See previous chapter.

⁷¹ Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, 2005, p. 44.

because he accepts that he is within a hierarchical social structure, his instinctive first response maintains his rank and position within the social structure of the merry men and secures his potent masculinity. In an episode that must have resonated with the serfs that could have been an audience to this ballad, Little John is able to leave his unfair master while maintaining his dignity.⁷²

Robin is also bested by the sheriff and his men in an episode that highlights Robin's short-comings as a military tactician. His refusal of the defensive strategy provided by Much the Miller's son leads, despite the death of twelve of the sheriff's men, to his inevitable capture. It is no coincidence that the number of men slain by Robin in this episode is exactly the same number of men Much advised he take with him, deftly drawing the audience back to Robin's mistake even as he has to admit to himself that '[n]ow mysse I Litull John' (l. 102). By contrast, when Little John hears of Robin's capture, he mounts a rescue mission and uses all the tools available to him, distinguishing himself from the rest of the company of outlaw men, who were by and large useless at this stage as

Sum fel inswonyng as thei were dede,
And lay stil as any stone;
Non of theym were in her mynde
But only Litull Jon (ll. 121-4)

With the aid of Much and his uncle, he sets in motion a plan by which to capture the monk, deceive the king and ultimately to free Robin from his cell. This military proficiency stands in stark contrast to Robin's only effort towards a defensive approach to the church with his ultimately vain prayer that 'God and myld Mary/ [...] bryng hym out save again' (ll. 69-70).

Little John's ability to control his temper as demonstrated by his refusal to strike Robin Hood earlier in the ballad demonstrates a cool precision regarding the deaths by his hand. Robin's killings are glossed over in one line, his victims are faceless men that had surrounded him and prevented his escape. Little John, by contrast, converses with his victim and defends his actions. His statement that '[H]e was my maister ... that thou hase browght in bale' (ll. 199-200) denotes clear passion but it is 'seid', denoting a calmness and logical approach to his actions, starkly contrasted with the emotionally driven and fearful 'crye' for mercy by the monk (l. 198). There is also an indication that Little John was reluctant to kill the monk but accepted the necessity of the action.

["]Shalle thou never cum at oure kyng,
For to telle hym tale."

⁷² It should be noted that Little John returns to the company of the merry men after he leaves Robin but, due to the missing section in the manuscript, it is impossible to know why he was there when the news of Robin's capture arrived.

John smote of the munkis hed,
No longer wolde he dwell; (ll. 201-4)

In contrast to the martial scene that Robin was engaged in at the church, Little John and Much were not outnumbered. Their victims were, however, out-matched. The outlaws were smarter and more physically capable than their victims. The writer makes it clear that the monk is not killed in an act of vengeance by describing Little John's calm state of mind and also by providing an explanation for the death as necessary in order to prevent his reaching the king and sealing the fate of the imprisoned Robin Hood. His murder of the monk, who has been represented as an odious man throughout the ballad, is justifiable as violence and violent acts are accepted within this social structure as permissible within certain contexts, even if they are sometimes regrettable. Much's role in the episode highlights this as the representation of the page he kills as a 'litull page' (l. 205) elicits some audience sympathy even while rationalising the decision as necessary 'lest he wolde tell' (l. 206). This episode also serves to remind modern audiences of the world in which the ballads were written where, as Pearsall notes, 'respect for the lives of the innocent, what we usually call a sense of honour and fair play'⁷³ are absent in the form in which we recognise it. The brutality of that world, the violence of that world, is laid bare in these calculated killings, a literary testament to bloodshed begetting more bloodshed.

This ballad thus effortlessly undermines the accepted leader of the outlaw society and builds up the common man, represented here by Little John as a man of simple and good nature, denoted rather sweetly by his desire to spend his winnings on the humble purchases of shoes and socks (l. 50). Within a feudal society where hierarchies existed through bloodlines and were maintained by brute force, Robin's offer to be subordinate to Little John at the end of the ballad is remarkable. Little John's refusal is also remarkable.

"Nay, be my trouth," seid Litull John,
"So shalle hit never be;
But lat me be a felow," seid Litull John,
"No noder kepe I be."(ll. 315-8)

This should not be viewed simplistically as a man accepting the place he was allotted in society for, as an outlaw, he has no place in society and he is literally and legally apart from it. Pearsall argues that this is an indication of a desire for 'the solidarity of fellowship'⁷⁴ an echo of John Ball's sermon

⁷³ Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, 2005, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Pearsall, "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" in *Robin Hood, Medieval and Post-Medieval*, 2005, p. 49.

on the brotherhood of men, and indeed it does serve this purpose. But Little John's refusal to lead has another significant function. The narrative has been consistently providing a contrast between the man that leads but clearly should not and the man that does not but clearly should. By refusing the offer, the audience are necessarily required to ask themselves why and by doing so Little John as a figure represents possibility to the audience and plants a seed of social change towards a fellowship of equals, towards a more equitable society, even while it seemingly accepts the existing inequalities of society and hierarchical feudal social structures.

"Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" maintains this 'brutal, ritualistic, nearly theatrical quality of [...] conflict'⁷⁵ and is in many ways very similar to the prior ballad. Though this ballad is generally marked with critical ambivalence,⁷⁶ Maurice Keen describes the ballad as having a 'sharp violent mood' but criticises it for having 'too many loose ends',⁷⁷ and indeed there has been some suggestion that the ballad is 'confused' or 'corrupt'.⁷⁸ However, it is also noted as being one of the 'most intriguing ballads' in the Robin Hood canon due in no small part to 'its exceptionally violent tone and concise dramatic qualities',⁷⁹ and Holt describes it as a deep and mysterious story,⁸⁰ a 'grim yarn' about the 'bloody end of a medieval bounty hunter'.⁸¹ The tale begins with a reverie that melds into Robin Hood telling Little John about a dream that he had had the night before wherein he had been captured by two yeomen in the forest. The dream is laden with the threat of violence, as Robin Hood feared that they had 'bete and binde' him and had taken his bow (ll. 9-10). The figures being yeomen cut a stark contrast to Little John and Robin Hood, who are both outlaws and wolfheads, clearly demonstrated in this ballad as Robin is being hunted by Guy of Gisborne. As Robin relays this dream to Little John, who tries to calm him by noting the strange nature of dreams, Robin still insists on setting out with Little John to 'seek yond wight yeomen' (l. 19) to be 'wrocken on both them towe' (l. 12). As they head into the forest, they spy a yeoman in the distance and Little John offers to go and investigate. Furious at the notion that he would need such protection and the suggestion that he stand back (l.31), Robin threatens to break John's head (ll. 35-42), which in turn causes them to angrily part company. Little John returns to Barnsdale to find that the Merry Men were under attack, the Sheriff having located them and slain two of the men. Seeing Will Scarlett running from a

⁷⁵ Kane, "Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, 2000, p. 101.

⁷⁶ Kane, "Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, 2000, p. 101.

⁷⁷ Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London: Routledge, 1977, p. 121.

⁷⁸ See Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 142.

⁷⁹ Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, pp. 141-2.

⁸⁰ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 30.

⁸¹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, pp. 36-7.

hundred and forty of the Sheriff's men, Little John takes aim, with his bow that breaks, killing only one man. Captured by the Sheriff, Little John is tied to a tree and threatened with dismemberment and hanging. Meanwhile, Robin Hood approaches the figure who the narrator reveals to be Guy of Gisborne. Robin learns that Guy is a bounty hunter, hired by the Sheriff, and hunting Robin Hood. As such, he keeps his identity hidden and engages Guy in a friendly shooting match, which he naturally wins. Having aroused suspicion, Robin reveals his identity and the two engage in serious combat, fighting for over two hours. When Robin trips, Guy stabs him on the left side. Robin offers a prayer to Mary and resumes the fight and kills Guy, beheads him, cuts his face, and mounts the mutilated head upon his bow. He then swaps clothes with the corpse and blows a horn indicating that Robin is dead. Having fooled the Sheriff regarding his identity, Robin frees Little John and hands him a bow, letting John kill the fleeing Sheriff by shooting him through the heart.

This ballad again sees Robin making some unsound decisions. His seemingly irrational desire to hunt down the two yeomen from his dreams actually works as a prophecy trope, a common theme in medieval literature whereby the dream links the mortal world to the divine as dreams were 'thought to foretell the future because they allowed the human soul access to a transcendent, spiritual reality.'⁸² Indeed, it begins with the conventional setting for a lover's prophetic dream⁸³ by painting a picture of an idealised spring day:

When shawes beene sheene and shradds full fayre,
And leeves both large and longe,
Itt is merry, walking in the fayre forrest,
To heare the small birds singe.

The woodweele sang, and wold not cease,
Amongst the leaves a lyne. (ll.1-6)

Melding this idealised scenery with one of violence, as Robin speaks of his fears that he had been beaten and bound (l. 9), exacerbates the violent imagery as the narrative makes an unexpected tonal change. The dream also creates an atmosphere of violence as it 'embodies the anticipation, deferral, and finally the performance of violence across the [...] bodies of its antagonists',⁸⁴ creating a rhetoric of violence.

⁸² Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 2.

⁸³ See, for example, A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, and Rosemond Tuve, *Seasons and Months; Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1974.

⁸⁴ Kane, "Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, 2000, p. 101.

The entire narrative is littered with violence and threats of violence, from the imagined violence that Robin suffers in his dream, to the threat that he would break Little John's head (l. 42), to Little John's discovery that 'two of his owne fellowes / were slain both in a slade' (ll. 49-50), to Little John killing William a Trent (l. 70), to Little John's own capture and subjection to threats of torture. Then there is the play violence that Robin Hood and Guy engage in with their shooting game, a 'symbolic'⁸⁵ form of violence which escalates to the most grisly part of the narrative, namely the beheading and mutilation of Guy of Gisborne.

And thus he came with an awkwarde stroke;
Good Sir Guy hee has slayne.

He tooke Sir Guys head by the hayre,
And sticked itt on his bowes end:
"Thou hast beene traytor all thy liffe,
Which thing must have an ende."

Robin pulled forth an Irish kniffe,
And nicked Sir Guy in the face,
That hee was never on a woman borne
Cold tell who Sir Guye was. (ll. 161-70)

This spectacular display of violence harks back to Foucault's ideas that the excessiveness of violence employed is one of the most glorious parts of punishment and execution⁸⁶ and that these forms of violence, and threats of violence, are used as means to control, to maintain docile bodies. Indeed, the body under threat, the body mutilated, the body in public view after death are all things that the Sheriff threatens Little John with as he says 'Thou shalt be drawn by dale and downe, / [...] And hanged hye on a hill' (ll. 78-80). The fact that these threats are carried out by Robin Hood upon the body of Guy of Gisborne uses the model of violence as a means of control but subverts it in order to critique it. Hent de Vries suggests that violence is used as a tool to critique violence: 'critiques of violence are not without violence [...] they are only successful if they turn the violence inside out, if they are somehow violent in turn, turning good violence against bad or the worst violence.'⁸⁷ Thus the violence in this ballad, as with "Robin Hood and the Monk", serves to critique and revise the rhetoric of violence in that era because, though violence itself may be negative, it is made positive through its use against other bad and worse forms of violence. Guy of Gisborne's death and

⁸⁵ Kane, "Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, 2000, p. 107.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 34.

⁸⁷ Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 137.

subsequent mutilation act as a means to subvert the nature of violence because those were the very threats made against Little John, who is generally held to be a good man.⁸⁸

The representation of the two principal outlaws is somewhat different in this tale. Robin Hood's anger at the beginning of the ballad at Little John's suggestion that he 'goe to yond wight yeoman, / To know his meaning trulye' (ll. 33-4) is not nearly so unreasonable nor so violent as the correlating episode in "Robin Hood and the Monk". In this instance, Little John's suggestion was calling Robin's leadership into question, as Robin notes:

A, John, by me thou setts noe store,
And thats a farley thinge;
How offt send I my men beffore,
And tarry myselfe behinde? (ll. 35-8)

After this incidence, Little John is notably silent, a tacit acknowledgement of his mistake but also perhaps an example of threats of violence maintaining order within ranks. However, again notably, Little John, despite these threats of violence, is able to walk away from his master entirely unscathed (ll. 44-5), a luxury that was not afforded to other members of the population. Additionally, at the end of the ballad, the climactic scene goes to Little John, who once rescued by Robin and handed Guy of Giborne's bow, makes the final kill of the ballad:

The sherriffe saw Litle John draw a bow
And fettle him to shoote.

Towards his house in Nottingam
He fled full fast away,
And soe did all his companye,
Not one behind did stay.

But he cold neither soe fast goe,
Nor away soe fast runn,
But Litle John, with an arrow broade,
Did cleave his heart in twinn. (ll. 230-4)

There is a certain degree of poetic justice involved in Little John killing his oppressor with the weapon of the man hired by oppressor, but also being given the liberty and opportunity to make that kill revels somewhat in the glorification of violence that Foucault mentions with the spectacle rendering the notorious thing defeated even while using their own tools to defeat them.

"A Gest of Robyn Hode", the longest of the medieval poems, is dated to somewhere between the mid and late-fifteenth century. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the poem is considered

⁸⁸ See Introduction and the historical references to Little John discussed within.

to be a compilation of shorter and older works and the vein of political activism and resistance relating to the Peasants' Revolt remains visible. The poem is divided into eight fyttes, beginning with Robin Hood in Barnsdale, bemoaning his lack of a dinner guest and refusing to eat before one is acquired, in a scene reminiscent of King Arthur's refusal to eat without a novel tale in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

[...] he wolde neuer ete
Vpon such a dere day er hym deuised were
Of sum aventurus þyng an vncoupe tale,
Of sum mayn meruayle, þat he my3t trawe,
Of alderes, of armes, of oþer auenturus⁸⁹

The poem introduces the theme of violence as a deliberate means of political, cultural and social assertion, a means by which to resist and a response to unfair and corrupt authority. As mentioned above, the repression and subordination of the peasant classes were a result of direct and consistent aggression from the aristocracy and that in turn was a foremost duty for a knight. Medieval literature, particularly the romances, however, presented a different knight. This form of literature was the creation of French writers during the latter half of the twelfth century and went from being incredibly popular into a state of rapid decline within the space of only a century⁹⁰ but before this decline in popularity, it had been exported throughout Europe and had taken a firm hold in England, first with the French-speaking courtiers and then into the vernacular languages of medieval England. The knights of chivalric romances were splendid figures of masculine and martial prowess, described in glowing terms. In Chrétien de Troyes *Erec et Enide*, for example, Erec is described in the following manner:

Mout estoit beax et prouz et genz,
Sor Se n'avoit pas .xxv. anz.
Onques nuns hom de son aage
Ne fu de greignor vasselage.
Que diroie de ses bonte?
Sor un destrier estoir montez:
Afublez d'un mantel hermin,
Vient galopant par le chemin;
S'ot cote d'eun dÿapre noble
Qui fu faiz en Costantenople.
Chauces ot de paile chaucies,
Mout bien faites et bien tailles,
Et fu es estriers esfichiez,

⁸⁹ Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 3, ll. 91-5. All future references to the Middle English version of the text from this source.

⁹⁰ Lee Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 2.

Uns esperons a or chaucez;⁹¹

(He was handsome and valiant and noble, and he was not yet twenty-five years old; never was any man in his youth so accomplished in knighthood. What should I say of his virtues? Mounted on a charger, he came galloping along the road; he was dressed in a fur-lined mantle and a tunic of noble, patterned silk that had been made in Constantinople. He had put on silken stockings, very finely made and tailored; he was well set in his stirrups and was wearing gold spurs,⁹²)

The figure of Erec is standard in the chivalric romance tradition; a well built, strong, sturdy, well dressed and well groomed knight atop a strong and noble steed. It is important to note that Chrétien de Troyes' works date from much earlier than the Robin Hood ballads. Though there is some contention regarding the dating of this text,⁹³ it is generally agreed to date from the latter third of the twelfth century and thus predates "A Gest of Robyn Hode" by around three centuries but there has been work retracing the influence of French *fin amour* texts,⁹⁴ such as those by Chrétien de Troyes, on medieval English romances, and indeed in *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, William Calin argues that the impact of the French tradition had hitherto been too narrowly defined. Calin states that the Old French romances were a 'generic and textual model for the English writers of chivalric narrative', the most important genre in Middle English after the court poem.⁹⁵ Nineteenth century scholars in romance grouped medieval texts together by subject matter, and approached the material mainly by way of the French romances, agreeing that the English material was derivative and generally inferior.⁹⁶ While the veracity of these claims have since been addressed and argued,⁹⁷ there is still a tradition of comparing the two forms, despite the temporal and socio-political distances between them⁹⁸ due to, as Calin demonstrates, intertextuality

⁹¹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, trans. Jean-Marie Fritz, *Livre de Poche Lettres Gothiques* 4526, Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992. Note: this is a single MS edition of BNF fr. 1376.

⁹² Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec and Enide" trans. Carleton W. Carroll, *Arthurian Romances*, ed. William W. Kibler, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 38.

⁹³ For an overview on the discussion on dating, please see Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chretien de Troyes*, Michigan: Yale University Press, 2001, pp.11-12.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Bernhard Donoghue, "The Reality of Courtly Love" in *Writings of Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Cooney, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp.7-27.

⁹⁵ William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, p. 427.

⁹⁶ Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, 1967, p. 1.

⁹⁷ See James P. Carley, "England" in *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*, ed. Norris J. Lacey, New York: Garland, 1996, pp. 1-82 and Sif Rikhardsdotti, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012, pp. 24-52 and pp. 76-80.

⁹⁸ Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, 1967, p. 1.

as both Anglo-Norman and late Central French texts are both relevant to the development of the English narrative tradition in court poetry and popular romance.⁹⁹

Thus, despite the fact that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is considered atypical in the canon,¹⁰⁰ there is a strong history of comparing this Middle English romance to Chrétien de Troyes works¹⁰¹ and indeed the intertextual links between the image of the chivalric knight presented in *Erec et Enide* and the hero in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a notable text here not only for the representation of the knight but also because it was contemporary to the Robin Hood ballads. The hero dressing for battle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is described in rich detail.

Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,
And syþen a crafty capados, closed aloft,
þat wyth a bryȝt blaunner was bounden withinne.
þenne set þay þe sabatounz vpon þe segge fotez,
His legez lapped in stel with luflych greuez,
With polaynez piched þerto, policed ful clene,
Aboute his knez knaged wyth knotez of golde;
Queme quyssewes þen, þat coyntlych closed
His thik þrawen þyȝez, with þwonges to tachched;
And syþen þe brawdren bryné of bryȝt stel rynges
Vmbeweued þat wyȝ vpon wlonk stuffe,
And wel bornyst brace vpon his boþe armes,
With gode cowters and gay, and glouez of plate,
And alle þe godlych gere þat hym gayn schulde
þat tyde;
Wyth ryche cote-armure,
His gold sporez spend with pryde,
Gurde wyth a bront ful sure
With silk sayn vmbe his syde.
When he watz hasped in armes, his harnays watz ryche:
þe lest lachet oþer loupe lemed of golde.
Bi þat watz Gryngolet grayth, and gurde with a sadel
þat glemed ful gayly with mony golde frenges,
Ayquere naylet ful nwe, for þat note ryched;
þe brydel barred aboute, with bryȝt golde bounden;
þe apparayl of þe payttrure and of þe proude skyrtez,
þe cropore and þe couertor, acorded wyth þe arsounez;
And al watz rayled on red ryche golde naylez,
þat al glytered and glent as glem of þe sunne.

⁹⁹ See William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, 1994. Particularly, though not limited by any means, pp. 427-33.

¹⁰⁰ See William F. Hodapp, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Gawain Poet: Remembering Troy" in *Sir Gawain and the Classical Tradition: Essays on the Ancient Antecedents*, ed. E. L. Ridsen, Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2006, pp.17-18; Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996, p. 159-10; Tony Davenport, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010, pp. 385-400.

¹⁰¹ Elisabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Sources and Analogues*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992, pp. 2-12.

Penne hentes he þe helme, and hastily hit kysses,
 þat watz stapled stifly, and stoffed wythinne.
 Hit watz hyȝe on his hede, hasped bihynde,
 Wyth a lyȝtly vrysoun ouer þe auentayle,
 Enbrawdē and bounden wyth þe best gemmez
 On brode sylkyn borde, and bryddez on semez,
 As papiayez paynted peruyng bitwene,
 Tortors and trulofez entayled so þyk
 As mony burde þeraboutē had ben seuen winter in toune.
 þe cercle watz more o prys
 þat vmbeclypped hys croun,
 Of diamauntez a deuys
 þat boþe were bryȝt and broun.
 THEN þay schewed hym þe schelde, þat was of schyr goulez
 Wyth þe pentangel depaynt of pure golde hwez.
 He braydez hit by þe bauderyk, aboute þe hals kestes,
 þat bisemed þe segge semlyly fayre. (pp. 16-18)

The length of the passage devoted to his decription is indicative of how Gawain here is intended to engage the senses. His various accoutrements are visually striking, as they gleam and sparkle. There is also movement, a sense of tactility, as people moved about him, clothing him, shodding him, taking care of him and his mount. There is a rich description of his every part, building upon the overall effect. He is intended to impress and awe the audience.

The knightly figure in “A Gest of Robyn Hode” stands in stark contrast to the above model created by the romantic chivalric tradition.

All dreri was his semblaunce,
 And lytell was his pryde;
 His one fote in the styrop stode,
 That othere wavyd beside.

His hode hanged in his iyn two;
 He rode in symple aray,
 A soriar man than he was one
 Rode never in somer day. (ll. 85-92)

It is important to note that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a tale apparently intended for high society and represents knights to each other.¹⁰² The Robin Hood author is representing knights to each other, but also to others.¹⁰³ A key factor to determining this lies in the way that the Robin Hood texts engage with, play with and love the tensions in society in a way that the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* does not. In contrast to Gawain, the knight in *Gest* cuts a pitiful figure against

¹⁰² Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art, and Patronage of Medieval England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 108.

¹⁰³ See introduction for a more detailed discussion on the Robin Hood ballad audiences.

the backdrop of another summer's day in the glorious Barnsdale woodlands. He is slumped in his saddle, his sorry countenance and loss of all hope almost comically exaggerated by his feet: one properly in a stirrup and the other one waving dolefully beside it. The poverty hinted at by the knight's attire in this first encounter becomes apparent soon after he is forced to dine with Robin and his men. Having been obliged to pay the wergild for a knight killed in a joust by his son, he had landed himself in crippling debt and was about to lose his lands and properties to the Abbot of St. Mary's. Robin, having been moved by the plight of this knight, offers to lend the knight the £400. Although Little John refers to the transaction as alms ('It is almus to helpe a gentyll knyght, / That is fal in poverté.' ll. 275-6), Robin makes it clear that the sum was a loan and not charity. There are conspicuously clear terms of repayment as he initially requires a guarantor for the loan ("Hast thou any frende," sayde Robyn, / "Thy borowe that wolde be?" ll. 245-6) and the knight and he then set a collection date:

"Whan shal mi day be," said the knight,
"Sir, and your wyll be?"
"This day twelve moneth," saide Robyn,
"Under this grene-wode tre. (ll. 313-6)

The representation of the knight within the poem, prior to Robin's aid, depicts a failure in the social system where good men of high social standing fall and the chivalric ideals of Raymond Lull are better displayed by outlaws than knights. The knight's duty, to look after their own, was ignored by the knight's friends, who had all abandoned him:

"Where be thy frendes?" sayde Robyn.
"Syr, never one wol me knowe:
While I was ryche ynowe at home
Great boste than wolde they blowe.

"And nowe they renne away fro me,
As bestis on a rowe;
They take no more hede of me
Thanne they had me never sawe." (ll. 233-40)

The knight is a catalyst in the representation of the flaws in the feudal hierarchy system. Apart from the poor manner in which he has been treated by those within his own social tier, the greed and dishonesty of the church officials bares the corruption of the entire system.¹⁰⁴ Though Holt uses this lack of compassion from the church officials, their bullying of this knight, particularly when contrasted with the treatment and friendship offered by Robin Hood, to argue for a lower gentry audience for this poem,¹⁰⁵ it represents more than just the flaws in the relationship between the first

¹⁰⁴ This is corruption is discussed further in the proceeding chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood" *Past and Present*, 1961, pp. 96-8.

and second estates. The knight's representation as a broken figure stands as a metaphor representing a broken ideal.

The tale the knight tells about his wergild debt not only harks back to the *Laws of William I* mentioned earlier but also ties together two of the poem's prominent concerns, as this narrative is particularly involved with money, intricately so. The knight needs money to retain his lands. In fact, he remains nameless until his land is secured, referred to only as 'the knight' or 'the gentyl knight' in the first two fyttes. It is not until his lands are secured that he is named in the poem as 'Syr Rychard at the Lee' (l. 1253), signalling the importance of money and its link to a person's worth. The wergild is of particular interest here.

"I hade a sone, forsoth, Robyn,
That shulde have ben myn ayre,
Whanne he was twenty wynter olde,
In felde wolde just full fayre.

"He slewe a knyght of Lancaster,
And a squyer bolde;
For to save hym in his ryght
My godes beth sette and solde.

"My londes beth sette to wedde, Robyn,
Untyll a certayn day,
To a ryche abbot here besyde
Of Seynt Mari Abbey." (ll. 205-16)

The knight's descent into his current state is due to having to pay the gold price for another man's life, a notion that subtly allows the audience to consider the fact that Robin Hood, a man worth not even the 20 shillings of a freeman due to being an outlaw, is able to save the knight's livelihood with £400, thereby denoting the notion that a man's worth may be measured in non-financial terms.

Furthermore, at the suggestion of Little John, the knight is also given a number of gifts, beginning with many yards of cloth. Little John reminds Robin that he has a large range of cloth in his stores, cloth of

[...] scarlet and grene, mayster,
And many a riche aray;
Ther is no marchaunt in mery Englund
So ryche, I dare well say." (ll. 281-4)

It is important to note here that the Black Death which had raged through Britain in the Fourteenth Century had devastated the population, causing the death of a third of the population of England

within the space of twelve months.¹⁰⁶ This had an effect on the third order of medieval society as workers became scarce and thus had more power to make more demands. If we consider Michel de Certeau's notion that culture is designed to conceal political and social conflicts,¹⁰⁷ we can see that the higher orders were struggling with the newfound power of the lower order. In order to maintain the tripartite structure of society, laws were rushed through to maintain the caste system, including the laws mentioned above regarding the ownership of serfs. More, the caste system was required to remain visible on a cultural level. Under the English Sumptuary Law of 1363, the dress of different classes of people could not exceed certain amounts as restrictions were placed upon the 'outrageous and excessive apparel of divers people against their estate and degree, to the great destruction and impoverishment of the land.'¹⁰⁸ Though there had been other sumptuary laws regulating dress codes, the law in 1363 is explicitly concerned with class and representation.¹⁰⁹ As such, in accordance to the law, peasants were required to look like peasants. The fact that Robin and his men had such a large hoard of cloth is another thing that would resonate with the peasants that would have been an audience to this tale. The cloth was likely not honestly gained, as suggested when Little John attracts the bemusement of Much and the mirth of Will Scarlok. Commenting on Little John's over-generous measuring, Wil Scarlock remarks 'By God Almyght,/ Johnn may gyve hym gode mesure,/ For it costeth hym but light' (ll. 294-6). Much's distress and Wil Scarlok's comment denote that they understood the value of the cloth, but the monetary value of items are glossed over in favour of other concerns, namely the concern they have for the knight.

Little John continues to make gifts to the knight, obtaining for him a courser and saddle, a palfrey, some boots and some riding spurs (ll. 304-14). Although the poem lacks the lingering description employed by Chrétien de Troyes and the *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* author, there is still a significant contrast set up between the attire and semblance of the knight when he first appeared and his attire and semblance as he left the forest. Apart from a lesson that attire does not relate to one's station in life, the cloth that the merry men had serves to display not only a disregard for the law but, through their generosity, the merry men stand in stark contrast to the manner in which the knight's friends had behaved and indeed to the manner in which the church officials will later behave. Thus the gift giving episode, on top of the loan of a significant sum of money, lifts the

¹⁰⁶ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950 – 1350*, London: Penguin, 2003, pp. 107-9.

¹⁰⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 186.

¹⁰⁸ A.R. Myers, *English Historical Documents Volume 4 1327-1485*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 1153-4.

¹⁰⁹ For further information, see Claire Elizabeth McIlroy, *The English Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004, pp. 129-30.

esteem of the outlaws while simultaneously drawing attention to the indecency of the ruling classes in a covert manner.

Thomas H. Ohlgren states that one of the striking features of "A Gest of Robyn Hode" is the 'incongruity between Robin's social class - yeomanry - and his repeated display of knightly customs and etiquette'¹¹⁰ by offering liveries, assisting the wife of the bankrupt knight, awaiting a guest before eating dinner, and hand-washing before meals. Although J. C. Holt identified the yeomen with the retainers and dependants of the crown, the aristocracy, and the landed gentry¹¹¹ in opposition to the assertions of Rodney Hilton and Maurice Keen, who argued that the yeomen in the early Robin Hood poems represent dissatisfied manorial peasants,¹¹² the above provides evidence to suggest that the dissatisfaction of the third estate with the social hierarchy that was present in "Robin Hood and the Monk" continues to be a theme in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" as Robin Hood uses the tropes of knighthood and knightly behaviour to subtly critique the class system.

Another important feature of "A Gest of Robyn Hode" is an interconnection of violence and fiscal matters. In the first instance, providing a frame for one arc of the narrative, the compulsion to dine with Robin carried the threat of violence in order to force compliance from their guest and a price tag at the end. Though Robin did not rob nor brutalise the knight, there is no doubt that he would have had his story proved to be false as indicated by his second dinner guest, a Benedictine monk, who was untruthful and for that was robbed of the £800 he was attempting to conceal (l. 998). The poem clearly draws a parallel here to the knight's encounter, as 'Lytell Johan spred his mantell downe,/ As he had done before' (ll. 985-6, emphasis mine). The poem had already made clear that violence was to be used unsparingly when dealing with church officials as Robin instructs his men to 'bete and bynde' (ll. 57-8) these figures at the root of 'civil and ecclesiastical oppression and corruption'¹¹³ and indeed, Robin and his men have a history of such assaults against the clergy as "Robin Hood and the Monk" demonstrates with the murder of the monk and his page.

As mentioned above, the financial aspect of the tale serves to bare the corruption and the hypocrisies in the feudal tripartite system. The violence in conjunction with this acts as a means by which to resist and overthrow the system, particularly so when aided by the figures of violence and

¹¹⁰ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts, and Ideology*, 2007, p. 135.

¹¹¹ Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood" *Past and Present*, 1961.

¹¹² Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1958, 30-44; Keen, "Robin Hood - Peasant or Gentleman?", *Past and Present*, 1961.

¹¹³ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 150.

terror: the knights of the second estate. Though the following chapter will discuss the Lollards in greater depth, the sermon made by John Ball to the rebels is of interest here. In 1381, he wrote,

Good people, things cannot go right in England and never will until goods are held in common and there are no more serfs and gentlefolk but we are all one and the same. They are clad in velvet while we go around dressed in coarse cloth. They have wines, spices and good bread, we have straw and we drink water. They have shelter and ease, we have hardship and toil the wind and the rain. Let us go to the king and show him how we are oppressed and tell him that we want things to be changed or else we will change them ourselves.¹¹⁴

Endorsements such as these came to the third estate through not just the first estate but also from the second estate through Lollard knights. Henry Knighton names some of the aristocratic supporters of the Lollards in his Chronicle¹¹⁵ while discussing their part in the movement.

Cumque aliquis pseudopredicator ad partes alicuius istorum militum se diuertet predicacionis causa, incontinenti cum omni promptitudine populum patrie conucare, et ad certam locum uel ecclesiam cum ingenti sollicitudine congregare satagebat ad audiendum uoces eorum [.]¹¹⁶

(Therefore when one of the sham preachers came into the neighbourhood of those knights to preach, they at once and without delay called all the people of the district together, and bustled about to assemble them and hear them in some place, or in a particular church[.]¹¹⁷

The knights did not simply protect and promote Lollard preachers and teachings, they also made valuable monetary gifts. Their wills often lacked the common bequests of other knights to bestow gifts upon the church, thus indicating a desire to ‘curtail gifts to the structure and ministrations of the church’ and instead remember the poor and the needy.¹¹⁸ If we consider that one’s proximity to the king in socio-political discourse has great importance, as they are able to influence decisions, having the endorsement of knights lends weight to the revolt.

Considering “A Gest of Robyn Hode” in Victor Turner’s terms, where literature is viewed as a social artefact or social discourse,¹¹⁹ the poem provides “metalanguages” for discussing sociality [...] [they are] society talking about itself.¹²⁰ Where medieval romances had tended to pretty them up, “A Gest

¹¹⁴ John Ball, as quoted in Edmund King, *England, 1175-1425*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 175.

¹¹⁵ Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*, trans. G. H. Martin, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p. 295.

¹¹⁶ Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*, 1979, p. 294.

¹¹⁷ Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*, 1979, p. 295.

¹¹⁸ Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, Cornwall: Robert Hartnoll, 1984, p. 160.

¹¹⁹ Victor Turner, *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. ix.

¹²⁰ Turner, “African Ritual and Literary Mode: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible?”, *The Literature of Fact*, 1976, p. 51.

of Robyn Hode” demonstrates that the knight is war machinery and could be a powerful ally to the peasant classes. Robin Hood is a vehicle of principled resistance to corrupt authority, himself with some military experience as denoted by his prowess with a bow. As M. I. Ebbutt states,

it was therefore natural in these latter days that a class of men should arise to avail themselves of the unique opportunities of the time- men who, loving liberty and hating oppression, took the law into their own hands and executed a rough and ready justice between the rich and the poor which embodied the best traditions of knight-errantry, whilst they themselves lived a free and merry life on the tolls they exacted from their wealthy victims. Such a man may well have been the original Robin Hood, a man who, when once he has captured the popular imagination, soon acquired heroic reputation and was credited with every daring deed and every magnanimous action in two centuries of ‘freebooting’.¹²¹

Robin possesses the qualities of a good knight, as demonstrated by his chivalry and generosity, while remaining in opposition to the feudal system and the knight establishes himself as a sympathiser in the second fyfte, when he removes the fineries that the outlaws had given him before entering St Mary’s Abbey and seeing the Abbott, to whom he owes a financial debt, and thereby becomes a trickster figure.

Than bespake that gentyll knyght
Untyll his meyné:
"Now put on your symple wedes
That ye brought fro the see."

They put on their symple wedes,
They came to the gates anone; (ll. 385-90)

Mary Douglas views the trickster phenomenon as having the social function of dispelling the belief that any given social order is absolute and objective,¹²² an assertion supported by William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, who state that ‘the trickster contributes substantially to the birth and evolution of culture’.¹²³ As such, the knight’s trickster act signal his dissatisfaction with the current social order and his sympathies as a reformation supporter. Furthermore, the knight, returning to pay his debt to Robin, brings gifts of a hundred bows and a hundred sheaves of arrows.

He purveyed him an hundred bowes,
The strynges well ydyght,
An hundred shefe of arowes gode,
The hedys burneshed full bryght;

And every arowe an elle longe,

¹²¹ Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race*, 1915, p. 314.

¹²² Mary Douglas, “The Social control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception”, *Man*, 3, p. 365.

¹²³ William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, *Mythical Trickster Figures*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993, p. 23.

With pecok wel idyght,
Inocked all with whyte silver;
It was a semely syght. (ll. 521-8)

This weaponry from a figure of violence carries a tacit approval of violence, especially as the knight is returned to his complete military form.

He purveyed hym an hundreth men,
Well harnesssed in that stede.
And hym selfe in that same sete,
And clothed in whyte and rede.

He bare a launsgay in his honde,
And a man ledde his male, (ll. 529-34)

The knight's description still lacks the leisurely description of the beauty of his clothing and accessories as those made by the *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* author, however he is no longer a sad, dreary figure and is strikingly equipped with a retinue of well-armed, well horsed men, a hundred of them travelling as an army of sorts. The image is powerful and military in a way that the other knights were not, the starkness of the description adding to the effect that he was war machinery rather than decoration. He is returned to his decreed state as a figure of imbued with death and violence, and the gift he gives Robin, though marked with tremendous beauty, is at heart a tacit approval of violence and an encouragement towards continued violence.

The king in this poem supports the trickster tradition by displaying the lack of absoluteness in contemporary social order. The king is introduced to the poem as a military figure, determined to capture Robin Hood and hold him accountable for his crimes, his entry to Nottingham mirroring the knight's re-entry to the forest as they are both accompanied by an army of sorts and thus form a powerful image of might and potential violence. When he is unable to locate Robin after six months (ll. 1457-60), he accepts the advice of a forester and dons a disguise to trick Robin Hood out of hiding.

"Take fyve of the best knyghtes
That be in your lede,
And walke downe by yon abbay,
And gete you monkes wede.

"And I wyll be your bedesman,
And lede you the way,
And or ye come to Notyngham.
Myn hede then dare I lay

"That ye shall mete with good Robyn,

On lyve yf that he be;
Or ye come to Notyngnam,
With eyen ye shall hym se." (ll. 1469-80)

The inclusion of the forester in this tale adds a further dimension of feudal angst. Forests were a 'legal construct designed to preserve the king's supply of deer and provide revenue',¹²⁴ a point that the poem makes when the king takes his retinue to a park, presumably in order to hunt and is faced with a lack of suitable deer for sport.

Tyll he came to Plomton Parke;
He faylyd many of his dere.

There our kyng was wont to se
Herdes many one,
He coud unneth fynde one dere,
That bare ony good horne. (ll. 1427-32)

By 1350, fifteen percent of England was under forest law and the landscape itself bore a 'powerful imprint of social status'.¹²⁵ The forest was land reserved for the second estate where only the king and his favoured men had any hunting rights. Unlike the forest in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which was a 'place of mystery, fear and danger',¹²⁶ the forest in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" reflected the medieval reality of being 'strangely populous and mixed landscapes, playing an economic role in the agrarian history of Europe and harbouring the criminal or outlaw.'¹²⁷ The forest was a legal concept, land which had been officially set aside from the rest, exclusively for the pleasure of kings and aristocrats, who could hunt within them for sport. There were areas within forests that could be used for farming, and thus were inhabited and worked in order to maintain production. Simon Shama notes that the 'differences to living within or without the forest was simply that there was more woodland, more pasture and the inhabitants were subject to a specific code of law designed to protect the vert and venison.'¹²⁸ While the rich could buy hunting rights in the forests from the king, the poor were not even permitted to carry hunting weapons and only hunted when forced into the position by dire poverty.¹²⁹ The punishment for hunting in the royal forests was severe¹³⁰ and enforced by the foresters, who were figures of whom Adam of Anchism said 'to them violence is law,

¹²⁴ Chris Given-Wilson, *An Illustrated History of Late Medieval England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 28.

¹²⁵ Given-Wilson, *An Illustrated History of Late Medieval England*, 1996, p. 28.

¹²⁶ Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 1993, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London: Harper Collins, 1995, pp. 144-5.

¹²⁹ Sandy Bardsley, *Women's Roles in the Middle Ages*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007, p. 60.

¹³⁰ Frank McLynn, *Lionheart and Lackland*, London: Vintage, 2007, pp. 355-6.

pillage is praiseworthy, justice is hateful, innocence is guilt. From their evil ferocity, no rank or condition of man, save the king himself, can escape unharmed.'¹³¹

Frank McLynn relays the story of Hugh the Scot who, in the early thirteenth century, killed a deer and was pursued by foresters and forced to seek sanctuary in the church before escaping in disguise and being labelled an outlaw.¹³² This episode with the king and the forester resonates with Hugh the Scot's tale, not only due to the donning of disguises but also because of the outlaw status that he is then given. Though the king in the poem is initially 'wroth withall' (l. 1433), having met and experienced not only the hospitality of Robin Hood and his men but also their loyalty to him as their king ("I love no man in all the worlde / So well as I do my kynge;" ll. 1541-2), the king is moved to not only forget his anger at these outlaws but to even invite them all to live at court with him:

"And come home, syr, to my courte,
And there dwell with me." (ll. 1657-8)

Though this could indicate the fickle nature of kings and their acting on whims, there is through the other relevant factors (including the trickster motif) an indication that there is an element of social change being discussed here, particularly as the king refers to an outlaw as 'syr' and thereby elevates him to the social ranks of the second estate, against the teachings of the likes of Bishop Adalbero of Laon and Gerard of Florennes mentioned previously. Here, the king displays that social ranks can be changed and can be earned, just as Robin Hood again later displays that one can choose one's position in life as he becomes listless with court life.

"Me longeth sore to Bernysdale,
I may not be therfro;
Barefote and wolwarde I have hyght
Thyder for to go." (ll. 1765-8)

Giving it up, he returns to Barnsdale and lives as an outlaw again, where 'he herde the notes small / Of byrdes mery syngynge,' (ll. 1779-80) directly reflecting the joy that Little John enjoyed in "Robin Hood and the Monk" over a simple summer day. The contentment with his lot is palpable as Robin Hood

[...] slewe a full grete harte,
His horne than gan he blow,
That all the outlawes of that forest
That horne coud they knowe,

And gadred them togyder,
In a lytell throwe;

¹³¹ John Tate Appleby, *Henry II: The Vanquished King*, London: Bell, 1962, p. 323.

¹³² McLynn, *Lionheart and Lackland*, 2007, p. 356.

Seven score of wyght yonge men
Came redy on a rowe.

And fayre dyde of theyr hodes,
And set them on theyr kne:
"Welcome," they sayd, "our mayster,
Under this grene wode tre."

Robyn dwelled in grene wode,
Twenty yere and two; (ll. 1785-98)

His return to the forest and the acceptance of those outlaws that dwelled within it indicates a society that is willing to accept social mobility, both up and down the ladder.

To summarise, the political aspect of these early texts takes a two-pronged form as the texts engage with the first and the second estates of society. This chapter suggests that though the texts were recorded some time after the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, they still contain a mark of some of their political inclinations prior to the time of recording. The texts engage with the idea of an abolition of the feudal system by engaging with the second estate of that system whilst suggesting that a hierarchy where the king is still the head of the society can be maintained. The figures from the second estate, and the replication of the injustices that are suffered by the common man at the hands of the unjust rulers, provide fuel for revision while maintaining that a hierarchical system may still remain in place, though with greater scope for mobility within it.

Chapter Two: Robin Hood and the First Estate

As the previous chapter argues, the utilisation of violence in the early texts provided a means by which to engage the second estate with a political discourse on the feudal nature of medieval society. The representation of violence was also used to display a direct resistance to the wrongful authority of the first estate. Moran and Skeggs suggest that violence 'is for safety and security'¹ and, as noted in the previous chapter, the second estate used violence as a means of maintaining social order and controlling the third estate in order to secure their own positions in society. However, the second estate's threats of violence necessarily cause insecurity and instability within the lower ranks of society and this in turn 'shapes the whole public imaginary of violence.'² Though the appropriation of violence from the second estate by yeoman outlaws destabilises power and could cause societal unease, the outlaws are absolved of this by the virtue of their character. Stephen Knight notes that a good outlaw 'tests contemporary law, reveals its weakness, and holds out a promise of freedom',³ and Robin Hood and his band are represented as good outlaws, particularly so when contrasted with their victims. Church officials can, therefore, be violently accosted and murdered without audience sympathy as there is a subtext mitigating the harm of such actions and validating the behaviour as a form of principled resistance due to the corruption in the clergy. Violence, thus, may be represented as good even if it is not legal due to the way in which the governmental and church officials in the texts are carnivalised figures whose exaggerated inadequacies allow the creation of a new order in the liminal space created by the texts. This chapter will discuss the manner in which the early Robin Hood texts engaged with the first estate of medieval society. Though the corruption was noted and discussed by other medieval writers in the same moment, the Robin Hood texts engage with the notion of control with visibility and with punishment for transgression, which in turn serves to establish violence as something good even if it is not legal and by extension questions the teachings and moral authority of the church officials. Where the first chapter demonstrated the manner in which the texts used violence, a particular pursuit of the second estate and their method of maintaining control, to engage with the political discourses of the time, this chapter will discuss the manner in which the texts engaged with the first estate by utilising their primary sources of control: surveillance and manipulation.

¹ Leslie J. Moran and Beverley Skeggs, *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 1.

² Moran and Skeggs, *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety*, 2004, p. 1.

³ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. xi.

This chapter will examine the engagement of the texts with the first estate and suggest that their carnivalised representation does not perform a safety-valve effect. I will suggest that the Robin Hood texts are positing an alternative structure to the hierarchical society that existed through not only the acknowledgement that higher echelons of society were corrupt but also an imperative to audit the corruption in the ecclesiastical orders using their own method of control, namely surveillance. The chapter will demonstrate an awareness in the text of the power that church officials had in the private lives of the congregation and I will suggest that the texts actively subvert that power through a refusal to engage with a primary source of their interference; these Robin Hood texts view the church as complicit in corruption and therefore keep the church officials at a distance from their lives through having the merry men not engaging with sexuality, unlike actions elicited in some other contemporary texts where sexuality, and indeed priestly sexuality, is present.

Carnival, as the temporary suspension of set hierarchies, creates a space for licensed misrule. Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that carnival opposes 'all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organisation' adding that these are suspended only during the time of the festivity.⁴ Bakhtin emphasises the 'playful' relationship between the fictive and the real⁵ while stating that the spatial framework of carnival festivities creates uncertainty with regard to its interventionist politics. This space, referred to as a 'marketplace', is one of 'official order and official ideology'⁶ which can at first glance signify empowering independence. In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin states that imitations of life create a 'surrogate of life'⁷ which to a large extent constitutes 'wishful thinking',⁸ allowing marginalised groups the illusion of living life, of participation and protest in a space that can then be neutralised. It provides a 'safety-valve model'⁹ whereby acts of protest and discord are legitimised and allow the participant to blow off their social and political frustrations, without actually challenging or disrupting the status quo. The question of whether Robin Hood activities perform a carnivalesque function by reaffirming 'existing social order under the guise of

⁴ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, p. 255.

⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 2009, pp. 39-40.

⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 2009, p. 154.

⁷ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p. 76.

⁸ Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, 1990, p. 76.

⁹ See, for example, Chris Humphrey, "Bakhtin and the Study of Popular Culture: Re-Thinking Carnival as a Historical and Analytical Concept" (pp. 164-72), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, ed. C. Brandist and G. Tihanov, Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 170 and Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, London: New Left Books, 1981, p. 148.

festive misrule' was raised by Peter H. Greenfield¹⁰ with regard to the Robin Hood games that were popular in the early modern period, when churches used them for social purposes and sometimes adopted the tales for fundraising purposes. Greenfield's question with regard to the plays of whether people experience cathartic release of their resentment at social constraint through the figure of Robin Hood¹¹ is pertinent here, particularly when considering the representation of church officials in the early ballads.

In "Robin Hood and the Monk", the monk provides his history of his dealings with Robin Hood to Sheriff of Nottingham as he relates the tale of his being robbed by the outlaw. 'Under the grene wode lynde; / He robbyt me onys of a hundred pound' (ll. 91-2). Although the poet is relaying a crime against the monk, he intends to illicit no sympathy from the peasants who would form the greater portion of the audiences of the ballad and represents him negatively by calling him 'gret-hedid' (l. 75). This story of the robbing of a monk is assimilated into "A Gest of Robyn Hode" with a similar episode and the monk is there referred to as 'fat heded' (l. 363) indicating that there was an underlying insult to the epithet in the original ballad. The poet of "Robin Hood and the Monk" also wishes ill on the monk, praying 'to God woo he be' (ll. 75-6), guiding the audience away from sympathising with the monk. The proceeding four stanzas of the ballad display a petty man, who declares that 'Hit is long of the [...] And ever he fro us passe' (ll. 87-90) in an effort to goad the sheriff into immediate action because his injured pride desires vengeance, as he says of the offence 'Hit shall never out of my mynde (l. 94). This desire for revenge may perhaps be ignored but for the exemplary behaviour of Little John in this ballad (as noted in the previous chapter), where vengeance does not motivate poor behaviour when he is refused his winnings by Robin Hood. With Little John's actions in mind, the pettiness of the monk dwelling upon this offence and his need for retribution is harder to ignore. This is not merely unseemly, though. As a monk, he is required to take vows that state he will strive towards being an exemplar of moral behaviour, particularly the *conversatio morum suorum* which requires a 'conversion of manners' to live obediently by God's rule.¹² The monk in this ballad, through his actions, draws attention to the popular frustration of the conflict between Christian ideals and their corrupted manifestation in society. Although the church had other mass-goers in attendance (l. 73) who recognised Robin Hood as the outlaw that he was, they remained where they were. The monk, by contrast, left the mass in a display of selfishness: 'Out

¹⁰ Peter H. Greenfield "The Canivalesque in the Robin Hood Games and King Ales of Southern England", *Carnival and the Carnivalesque*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, Wim N. M. Hüsken, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, p. 19.

¹¹ Peter H. Greenfield "The Canivalesque in the Robin Hood Games and King Ales of Southern England" in *Carnival and the Carnivalesque*, 1999, p. 20.

¹² Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996, p. 483.

at the durre he ran, / Ful sone and anon;' (ll. 79-80). Though the monk presumably was not delivering mass, leaving during it draws to attention the hypocrisy of the clergy as he is wilfully disobeying the very prayers delivered at mass and making a travesty of the paternoster and its instructions to 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'¹³ Furthermore, as his demands for immediate action, that is to say a violent arrest of Robin Hood, are preceded by the statement 'I have spyed the false felon / As he stondis at his masse,' (ll.86-7) he is wilfully ignoring and encouraging the sheriff to ignore the sanctity of the church grounds and the right to asylum within the church building. This act is represented negatively by the poet through the prior characterisation of the monk in contrast to the simple epithet given to Robin Hood as 'gode Robyn' (l. 77). Although Robin Hood is clearly the criminal, there is an intersection at this point regarding what is good and what is legal, displayed by the engagement of the text with the concept of sanctuary.

Sanctuary has scriptural justification through God's command to Moses that cities of refuge be built to receive and protect those being pursued due to their violent acts.¹⁴ It also has legal protection as from the reign of the Emperor Constantine, sanctuary became a privilege in the Christian church¹⁵ and, England following the directives of the Roman church law adopted the concept of asylum as part of its patrimony.¹⁶ King Alfred (who reigned as the King of Wessex from 871 to 899 and styled himself as the King of the Anglo Saxons¹⁷) established a legal system that incorporated the codes of earlier rulers and Biblical principles, which included a definition for the rights of sanctuary. In the 'Doom Book' he wrote, 'we fix this peace for each church that a bishop has consecrated: if a man at feud reaches it riding or running, let no one pull him out for seven days.'¹⁸ The concept of sanctuary

¹³ The Lord's Prayer. Furthermore, Biblical sources repeatedly state that vengeance is for God alone, not for mankind. Deuteronomy 32:35: 'To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.' Proverbs 19: 11: 'The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.' Romans 12:17-21: 'Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' Hebrews 10:30: 'For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, and I will compensate, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people'

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 19:4.

¹⁵ J. Charles Cox, *The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Mediaeval England*, London: George Allen and Sons, 1911, p. 2.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis, see Berman, *Law and Revolution*, 602, n. 11.

¹⁷ Anonymous, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. James Ingram, ed. James H. Ford, El Paso: El Paso Norte Press, 2005, p. 174 and p. 185.

¹⁸ As quoted by Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p. 272.

grew over the course of the centuries¹⁹ and by the reign of the Plantagenets, the institution had become national and respected by all.²⁰ During the reign of Richard II, canon and common law lawyers stated that sanctuary was available to the subject of a case where the crime was punishable by death or mutilation²¹ and theft, one of Robin's primary pursuits, certainly carried those punishments.²² Having stolen a hundred pounds from the monk, a verdict of execution was certainly a distinct possibility for Robin Hood and accordingly sanctuary ought to have been afforded to him. By demanding immediate action from the sheriff, while Robin was still within the church, the monk establishes himself as both breaking the ethical codes by which he was supposed to live and also manipulating the legal system to his own ends.

The monk here is representative of all clergymen. In line with the rules of carnivaleague, he is not just *a* monk, his actions and character are perceived to be true of *all* monks. In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", Robin expressly orders his men to 'bete and bynde' (l. 58) the bishop and archbishops that wander into the forest without any reprimand from the poet nor a word of dissent from his men. He robs a monk of eight hundred pounds (ll. 988-92) when the monk lies to his men, and the abbot is depicted as a corrupt, money-grubbing villain (ll. 343-63). This is clearly a very direct means of resistance to the church, where corruption is displayed prominently and signifies a clear concern of the contemporary audience. These stereotypes of church officials also exist in other later medieval texts, most notably in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer represents the monk in his general prologue as obviously wealthy; described as 'a fair for the maistrie'²³ (l. 165), '[a]n outridere' (l. 166), and one who possessed 'Ful many a deyntee hors' (l. 168) and '[g]rehoundes [...] as swift as fowel in flight' (l. 190). His attire is also commented upon in a manner initially reminiscent of that used to describe knights in romances:²⁴

I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
And for to festne his hood under his chyn,
He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.

¹⁹ For a historical overview of the changes and developments of sanctuary law, see William C. Ryan, "The Historical Case of the Right of Sanctuary", *Journal of Church and State*, 29, 1987, pp. 209-32.

²⁰ Norman Trenholme, "The Right of Sanctuary in England" in *University of Missouri Studies*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1903, p. 317.

²¹ Thomas J de Mazzinghi, *Sanctuaries*, Stafford: Halden and Son, 1887, p. 46-7.

²² John G. Bellamy, *The Criminal Trial in Later Medieval England: Felony Before the Courts from Edward I to the Sixteenth Century*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 70.

²³ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Canterbury Tales" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 26. All subsequent references to this text will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ See previous chapter.

He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;
 His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,
 That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
 His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.
 Now certainly he was a fair prelaat;
 He was nat pale as a forpyned goost.
 A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
 His palfrey was as broun as is a berye. (ll. 193 – 207)

Descriptions of the richness of the clothing which the monk was wearing soon give way to statements that can be seen as insults, creating a destabilising effect for the audience. The monk is shiny, oily, with unattractively large eyes, without any air of penitence and with a taste for the finer things in life, thereby ignoring his vows of poverty. Chaucer's monk represents the disparity between the teachings of the church and the behaviour of its officials as he compares the bridle of his 'hors in greet estaat' (l. 203) to the ringing of the chapel bells (l. ll. 170-1), a distinct indication of the incongruity between the riches of this man and the subordinate monastery in which he was a prior (l.172).

This obsession of the clergy with money is also noted in the Robin Hood texts, not only as mentioned above in the monk's dwelling upon the money that was robbed from him, but also in the longer poem and the abbot of Saint Mary's Abbey, to whom the knight owed his debt. An analysis of the first lines spoken by the some of the main players of this poem assists with the reading of the characterisation of these figures and demonstrates some of these features of carnivalised figures.

Character	Line	Line number
Little John	"Maister, and ye wolde dyne betyme It wolde doo you moche gode."	ll. 19-20
Robin Hood	"To dyne have I noo lust, Till that I have som bolde baron, Or som unkouth gest.	ll. 22-4
Sir Richard	Who is thy maister?" sayde the knyght; [...] "He is gode yoman," sayde the knyght, "Of hym I have herde moche gode.	ll. 101-4
The Abbot	"This day twelfe moneth came there a knyght And borrowed foure hondred pounde.	ll. 43-4
The Monk	"He is dede or hanged," sayd the monke, "By God that bought me dere, And we shall have to spende in this place Foure hondred pounde by yere."	ll. 365-8

It is worth noting that the abbot and the monk are known simply by their offices, devoid of individuality by being devoid of any names, adding to the notion that they represent the group

rather than the individual and in line with carnivalised figures. Where the initial lines of Little John, Robin Hood, and Sir Richard all focus on people and by extension on society, companionship and social well-being, the first lines of both the abbot and the monk are in reference to the debt that is owed and the sum of money. This is further reflected in Little John's attending to the knight in the forest:

"Welcom be ye, gentyll knyght,
Welcom ar ye to me.
"Welcom be thou to grene wode, (ll. 95-7)

Little John welcomes the knight three times, in quick succession, which is also the exact number of times the abbot and the monk mention the sum of the knight's debt: 'And borrowed foure hondred ponde' (l. 344), 'He borrowed foure hondred ponde' (l.345), and 'Foure hondred ponde by yere' (l.365). The fact that the Trinity is an integral part of the religion²⁵ makes the number of repetitions significant due to the significance of the number three in Christian theology. The text also brings the importance of this number into relief early on when it states that

A gode maner than had Robyn;
In londe where that he were,
Every day or he wold dyne
Thre messis wolde he here.

The one in the worship of the Fader,
And another of the Holy Gost,
The thirde of Our dere Lady, (ll. 29-35)

Thus the text identifies the number three with religiosity and with Christian ideals. The contrast between Little John's welcoming of the knight and the clergymen's repetition of the sum of money that they desired speaks directly to their carnivalised representation as those who are fiscally obsessed. Indeed, the monk, by exclaiming 'By God that bought me dere' (l. 366), links salvation and money by using monetary terms to denote matters of a spiritual value. 'Dearly bought' is a common Anglo-Saxon expression, appearing in such Anglo-Saxon poems as *Christ III* in the Exeter Book, where Christ says 'I took on your pain so that you might enjoy my kingdom, happy and blessed; and with my death I dearly bought you lasting life[.]'²⁶ Thus the phrase can, and indeed did, get used without any criticism and was related to the redemptive element of salvation.²⁷ In this case, however, the

²⁵ For a review of the material on this subject, see Roger E. Olson and Christopher Alan Hall, *The Trinity*, Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002.

²⁶ S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo Saxon Poetry*, York: Phoenix, 2012, p. 309. See also, Robert Boenig, *Anglo-Saxon Spirituality: Selected Writings*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000, p. 144; David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800 -1200*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, p. 286.

²⁷ Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti, *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014, p. 182.

already heavily financial nature of the situation and the overwhelming greed of the abbot conspire to create a more critical reading of the phrase.

In addition, when a prior raises the question of conscience to the abbot, the abbot's response invokes Saint Richard (l. 362), the patron saint of Sussex rather than one of Yorkshire, where the action of the poem takes place. Saint Richard, canonised in 1262,²⁸ was during his living years known as a defender of the clergy and, as Mark Lower notes, he imposed a severe penance on knights who attacked priests.²⁹ Unlike Saint John of Beverley, the patron saint of the Yorkshire region,³⁰ the invocation of Saint Richard fuels the growing image of the abbot as a man who is entirely caught up with self-preservation and greed. This, in conjunction with the first lines that the abbot speaks to Sir Richard (which were 'Hast thou brought my pay?' l. 412), again characterises these church officials, who represent all church officials, as selfish and obsessed with money.

This motif is further touched on in the *Shipman's Tale*, where Chaucer's monk takes advantage of a merchant's wife, supposedly lending her a hundred franks in order to pay off her debts in return for an agreement that 'he sholde al nyght / Have hire in his armes bolt upright' (l. 314-5). He had, however, borrowed the money from her husband and when asked to return the sum, he informs the merchant that he had repaid the sum to his wife to give to him. The wife offers the merchant her 'joly body have to wedde; / By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde!' (ll. 423-4). The monk here is clearly a scoundrel, negotiating sexual favours for the loan of a sum of money that was not his, but he is charming and funny. His good looks are referred to twice in the space of four lines: 'a fair man and bold' (l. 25) and 'so fair of face' (l. 28), imbuing him with pleasantness from the beginning of the tale. The goodness of the merchant, also referred to twice in the space of a handful of lines (lines 29 and 33), and his love and affection for the monk casts the monk in a good light. Furthermore, before the nature of the monk is revealed, he is referred to as a 'noble monk' (l. 62) and admired for 'his thynges seyde ful curteisly' (l. 91). Even as he begins with his sexual transgressions, there is a degree of good humour to it.

[“]But deere nece, why be ye so pale?
I trowe, certes, that oure goode man
Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan
That yow were nede to resten hastily."
And with that word he lough ful murily,
And of his owene thought he wax al reed. (ll. 106-11)

²⁸ Alban Butler and Paul Burns, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1999, pp. 17-18.

²⁹ Mark Anthony Lower, *The Worthies of Sussex*, Lewes, Sussex: Sussex Advertiser, 1865, p. 244.

³⁰ Susan E. Wilson, *The Life and After-life of St. John of Beverley: The Evolution of the Cult of an Anglo-Saxon Saint*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 133-42.

His advances are also notably not rejected by the wife, thus making him lecherous but also likeable. Furthermore, the monk is not punished in any way. The episode, therefore, despite concluding with the host's apparent hope that 'God yeve the monk a thousand last quade year!' (l. 438) reads more like an observation than a genuine critique of the way in which church officials behave. *The Shipman* uses the carnivalised monk figure, agrees that corruption exists in the clergy but is not particularly pushing for clerical reform. This particular representation of monks forms a sort of festive misrule, which, while being able to protest against the existing order, can also maintain that order.³¹ In this manner, as carnival can have both a social and an antisocial tendency, the *Shipman's Tale* stands as an observation of the way things are rather than how they ought to be; the text is not a protest.

In contrast to the above model, William Langland wrote with indignation about these characters, his reformist ideologies evidenced in *Piers Plowman*. Langland treated the ecclesiastical hierarchies with satire and constructed his hero as a 'symbol of the idealised English labourer, the people's Christ who walked English fields and inspired men to throw off the shackles of a corrupt Church and State.'³² Edwin D. Craun suggests that reformist discourses 'crowd *Piers Plowman*, moving in and out of the seven dreams and twenty narrative passus of its B-version.'³³ Passus XX is particularly of note here as priests forsake Conscience for silver:

Coomen ayein Conscience--with Coveitise thei helden.
"By the Marie!" quod a mansed preest, was of the march of Irlonde,
"I counte na moore Conscience, by so I cacche silver,
Than I do to drynke a draughte of good ale!"³⁴

Unlike Chaucer's tales, *Piers Plowman* is imbued with a moral imperative against corruption and there is admonishment for the poor behaviour of these corrupt officials. The allegorical nature of this work requires the critic and the reader to be involved in an 'intense self-consciousness'.³⁵ Furthermore, there is an integral presupposition that the text will say something and mean something else, which means that 'the relation between the work and its meta-language is a straight-forward one of parallelism.'³⁶ In medieval texts particularly, there is critical thought to

³¹ Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, New York and London: Routledge, 1985, p. 25.

³² Derek Pearsall, *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Langland*, Stillwater: University of Michigan Press, 1990, p. x.

³³ Edwin D. Craun, *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 57.

³⁴ William Langland, *The Vision and Creed of Piers Ploughman*, ed. Thomas Wright, London: J.R. Smith, 1856, p. 438.

³⁵ Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 281.

³⁶ Ruth Morse, *The Medieval Medea*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996, p. 123.

suggest that allegory was a means by which to move 'towards divine truth [...] a guarantee of language's adequacy to express the essential.'³⁷ Thus the allegorical nature of the *Piers Plowman* poem demands through generic verisimilitude that there be a moral component to the tale, an admonishment for the corruption that is witnessed in the tiers of society.

The poet of the Robin Hood texts is writing in the same social moment and writing about the same social structure, providing another viewpoint which is positioned linguistically and ideologically between these two others and pitching to a different audience. Given their representations of their characters, all three seem to agree that clergymen are corrupt but where Chaucer views them as figures worthy of ridicule, Langland and the Robin Hood poet both see them as figures that ought to be ousted from society. Unlike Chaucer's figures, their clergymen do not simply give a means to experience subversion and dissention while maintaining the status quo. The Robin Hood texts are not allegorical, nor are they entirely carnivalesque though they use carnivalised representations of certain figures, because they state how society should be. They demonstrate the failings of the church officials and offer an alternative. In Bakhtin's terms, carnivals celebrate a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' through the suspension of 'hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions'.³⁸ However, the Robin Hood texts begin at a point where established order has been replaced by the societal disorder that is implicit where a functioning society of outlaws exists. The outlaw nature of the brotherhood means that the texts immediately engage with a tension that exists between what is good and right and what is legal and socially acceptable. The existence of corrupt and immoral clergymen allows Robin to be set apart from these other men; if there exists such corruption with the officials, who represent God's law, Robin would rather be an outlaw. Robin Hood's men represent an idealistic model of society; they are a good force but not a legal one, thereby creating a discursive opportunity about what it means to be good and what should be socially acceptable and harks forward to the way society ought to be structured.

In this second world, this alternative society which is created by the men in "Robin Hood and the Monk", the ballad promotes a sense of change with its opening reverie.

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song,

³⁷ Robert Stuart Sturges, *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in Literary Narrative*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991, p. 32. See also Maureen Quilligan, as referred to above.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 2009, p. 10.

To se the dere draw to the dale,
And leve the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grene wode tre. (ll. 1-8)

There is a sense of awakening and of renewal which suggests no indications of a temporary world but rather a projected ideal. This Edenic setting as the primary habitat of the merry men, and the absence of any church officials within it, serves to emphasise the way that the church officials have renounced the responsibility they owe society, thereby allowing a space in which to imagine an idealised new social order. The episode in the church where Robin Hood is captured depicts that the law is unjust, that violence is not moral, and as such creates a space for parodic legal forms of violence which can be used to resist unfair authority. These parodic forms of violence act not out of the moral good but rather act towards the moral good, toward the greater good. In this way, Little John is a parodic legal good. He becomes the just avenger according to a quasi-legal code. This is achieved by two means in "Robin Hood and the Monk": first by displaying the corruption in the ranks of the church, as mentioned earlier with regard to the behaviour and representation of the monk in the ballad; and secondly by the behaviour and representation of the good man, namely Little John and the way that he functions within the hierarchical social system created by the outlaws and not policed through surveillance and the threat of othering, by identifying difference to reinforce and reproduce positions of domination and subordination. The power structures at play in the ballads directly reflect the anxieties of surveillance.

In Hegelian terms, 'self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness',³⁹ as such the relationship of the self to the other is achieved by seeing, and this very surveillance, and the power intrinsic in being able to see in comparison to being seen, is used as a means of othering. The Christian idea of God as a shepherd to his flock is imbued with an innate sense of watching and being seen, of visibility and the inability to hide from the omnipresent gaze, highlighted in the architecture of the churches. In the eleventh century, Burgundian monk Ralph Glaber described the beginning of the century as a time of renewal. In *Histories* III.13, he wrote

Just before the third year after the millennium, throughout the whole world, but most especially in Italy and Gaul, men began to reconstruct churches [...] It was as if the whole world were shaking itself free, shrugging off the burden of the past, and cladding itself everywhere in a white mantle of churches. Almost all the Episcopal churches and those of monasteries dedicated to various saints, and little village chapels, were rebuilt better than before by the faithful.⁴⁰

³⁹ G. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 110.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Lynette Olson, *The Early Middle Ages*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007, p. 158.

Glaber viewed the physical churches as the manifestation of a need to 'assert the power of the Christian God over the external, pagan forces'⁴¹ associating them with a political motivation from early on in their construction. In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Victor Turner suggests that cultural symbols, including ritual symbols, originate in and sustain 'processes involving temporal changes in social relations [...] Symbols instigate social action.'⁴² If cathedrals can be considered a symbol of Christian devotion, imbued as they are with religious iconography, they became a constant reminder to the Anglo-Saxons that they were a conquered people, physically as well as spiritually. Post-conquest construction of Norman buildings in England saw the castle and the abbey becoming two indispensable expressions of Norman power.⁴³ Castles were power bases for the second estate and a visible symbol of a knight's right to rule as the fortresses were part of a complete militarisation of England. Castles were a symbol of the violence of the office of the knight. Churches were not part of that military endeavour and instead achieved domination through spiritual power.

The church was the very framework of society, integrated into the lives of all its parishioners. By the fourteenth century, there were around a thousand religious houses in England,⁴⁴ and an unknown number of parish churches and chapels, though 'they must have run into very many hundreds, even thousands.'⁴⁵ Thus the church was present in every community and, as the church played a central role in guiding 'souls to everlasting salvation', it was the primary institution in society.⁴⁶ Through the seven sacraments it provided, the church was able to gain access to every aspect of a parishioner's life, particularly as the sacrament of confession established a 'priestly monopoly of judgement and absolution, and the requirement of satisfaction for all sin committed'⁴⁷ giving the institution a great deal of power. Therefore, through the confession, Foucault writes, 'the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing penal truth [...] the confession renders the thing notorious and manifest'.⁴⁸

As Kathy Lavezzo states, power 'territorialises; it permeates, controls, and fashions space. Space, in turn, wields a kind of power, insofar as it visualises authority.'⁴⁹ As such, as it is 'impossible to

⁴¹ Quoted in Lynette Olson, *The Early Middle Ages*, 2007, p. 159.

⁴² Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 180.

⁴³ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 146.

⁴⁴ F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England*, Trowbridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 68. Logan notes that the numbers were just above a thousand if small cells and hospitals were included in the count or just below a thousand if they were excluded.

⁴⁵ N. J. G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Thomas H. Greer and Gavin Lewis, *A Brief History of the Western World*, Belmont: Clark Baxter, 2005, p. 247.

⁴⁷ W. De Boer, *The Conquest Of The Soul*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, p. 46.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 1.

exaggerate how greatly the life and the form of medieval towns were dominated by the church',⁵⁰ churches achieved a spiritual domination of the land by being visible, by dominating the landscape and by, in Foucault's terms, permitting 'an internal, articulated and detailed control' as architecture (or 'stones') can make people docile and knowable.⁵¹

This aspect of visibility and docility is present in the early Robin Hood ballads, particularly so in "Robin Hood and the Monk" where Robin's identification and subsequent capture occur in a church. The surveillance mentality of society that the church created is rendered manifest when Robin enters the church and 'Alle that ever were the church within / Beheld wel Robyn Hode.' (ll. 73-4), depicting the 'continuous and functional surveillance'⁵² nature of the church. The 'gret-hedid munke' (l. 75) fetches the sheriff to capture Robin drawing together the notion of surveillance and discipline as a connected system, in line with Foucault's observations.

By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an 'integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised. It was also organised as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised.⁵³

This sort of surveillance society, in conjunction with the sacrament of confession, necessarily blurs the distinction between the public and private lives of individuals as it is invisible and 'everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises'.⁵⁴ The disciplinary power that is tied into the surveillance imposes visibility on the subject in order to assure 'the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection.'⁵⁵ In this manner, Robin Hood's capture in the church during mass is particularly of note as there was an audience of all the mass goers that were congregated within. Though the ballad makes no particular mention of them, the fact that the sheriff took with him 'Many [...] moder son' (l. 97) and they all 'In

⁵⁰ David Watkin, *A History of Western Architecture*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005, p. 207.

⁵¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 172.

⁵² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 176.

⁵³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, pp. 176-7.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 177.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 187.

at the dures thei throlly thrast, / With staves ful gode wone;' (l. 99-100) implies that the congregation would have been unable to leave and thus would have been witness to the capture of Robin Hood, the struggle creating what Foucault refers to as a ceremony of objectification⁵⁶ and cementing the notion that visibility is a trap.⁵⁷

There is a distinctly subversive element to this, however. Despite the fact that Robin Hood is captured, he is not brought to justice as he is rescued before he can be punished. The panoptic nature of the church is called into question as, rather than inducing 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power',⁵⁸ the audience is encouraged themselves to be auditors of the behaviour of church officials, their corrupt and selfish natures creating a disjunction between what is legal and what is morally good. By turning the table on the viewer and the viewed, by viewing and displaying the members of the church hierarchy and the corruption within those ranks, these ballads rebalance the power dynamic. Apart from setting up these characters as odious people, the reduction of them to carnivalised characters establishes them as figures that are viewed from afar, observed even as they themselves are observers for the church. By thus representing them as viewed and viewers, the ballads offer a critique of the surveillance society which alienates and others its own citizens in order to maintain control and suggesting unity between the three estates.

The second estate, as discussed in the previous chapter, had a Machiavellian approach to leadership. Although Machiavelli was a 16th Century figure, and therefore not contemporary to the early Robin Hood texts, the social commentary that he provided with regard to his own society was significantly similar to the society in which these texts emerged that when considering the question of whether it is better to be loved or feared, Nicolo Machiavelli's response was, 'it is far safer to be feared than loved if you cannot be both.'⁵⁹ Machiavelli further asserts that 'love is held by the tie of obligation, which, because men are a sorry breed, is broken on every whisper of private interest; but fear is bound by the apprehension of punishment which never relaxes its grasp.'⁶⁰ This ideology is reflected in the obligation placed upon medieval knights to physically intimidate the peasantry.⁶¹ This intimidation was not limited to the second estate, however, and it is important to note that a large

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 187.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 200.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 201.

⁵⁹ Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532), in *The Prince; Utopia; Ninety-Five Theses: Address to the German Nobility Concerning Christian Liberty*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, New York: P. F. Collier and Sons, 1910, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince; Utopia; Ninety-Five Theses: Address to the German Nobility Concerning Christian Liberty*, 1910, p. 58.

⁶¹ See previous chapter.

portion of the violence immediately prior to and during this time had ecclesiastical sanction. In 1095, Pope Urban II urged knights who were terrorising their own countrymen, to march upon Jerusalem.

Let them turn their weapons dripping with the blood of their brothers against the enemy of the Christian Faith. Let them--oppressors of orphans and widows, murderers and violaters [*sic*] of churches, robbers of the property of others, vultures drawn by the scent of battle--let them hasten, if they love their souls, under their captain Christ to the rescue of Sion.⁶²

Using the 'expostulatory language already employed by the reformers when referring to their military supporters'⁶³ he described them as inspired agents of God, followers of Christ and soldiers of Christ.⁶⁴ He went on to state that those that died fighting would be 'purified by the fire of battle'⁶⁵, thus not only linking the church with the violence in this first of a set of brutal wars fought in Jerusalem but also making it explicit that violence can be morally good when used to serve some greater social cause.

In the twelfth century, in *The New Knighthood*, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that the knight of Christ may

strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves Christ when he strikes, and serves himself when he falls. Neither does he bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of the good. If he kills an evildoer, he is not a mankiller, but, if I may so put it, a killer of evil. He is evidently the avenger of Christ towards evildoers and he is rightly considered a defender of Christians. Should he be killed himself, we know that he has not perished, but has come safely into port. When he inflicts death it is to Christ's profit, and when he suffers death, it is for his own gain. The Christian glories in the death of the pagan, because Christ is glorified.⁶⁶

The religious violence abroad was mirrored at home in the massacre of Jews in York 1190, where the animosity had built for some time and the attack was a considered 'another instance of crusading sentiment spilling over against the Jews.'⁶⁷ The church and its military ventures were clearly adding to the culture of violence already in place in medieval society and adding to the discourse of when violence is permitted, when it is good, creating a relationship between the institutional church and

⁶² As quoted in Jennifer G. Wollock, *Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly Love*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011, p. 26.

⁶³ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, 2nd Edition, New York and London: Coninum, 2005, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Riley-Smith, *The Crusade: A History*, 2005, p. 4; see also Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict between Christianity*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 1-3.

⁶⁵ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict between Christianity*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Translated and quoted in Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 70.

⁶⁷ Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 120.

violence. This can be seen in "Robin Hood and the Monk" as the monk that recognises Robin Hood in the church creates the conflict by inviting violence in.

"Rise up," he seid, "thou prowde schereff,
Buske the and make the bowne;
I have spyed the kynggis felon,
For sothe he is in this town.

"I have spyed the false felon,
As he stondis at his masse;
Hit is long of the," seide the munke,
"And ever he fro us passe. (ll. 83-90)

By thus goading the sheriff into immediate action, the monk instigates the massacre that ensues. It becomes a fitting circle, therefore, to have violence then used against him.

The death of the clergyman also acts as a metaphor for removing them from society, a society which modern audiences can relate to due to the depiction of society in Thomas More's *Utopia*. Published in 1516, *Utopia* was not contemporary with the earlier Robin Hood texts but posits the interesting idea that in a perfect society, priests would be unnecessary as people would be good. For More, the function of the clergy is to make people good. If people are good, then, the clergy would become redundant. This is arguably the case in the idyllic society that is created in the Robin Hood texts by the band of outlaws, who, while not perfectly good in an absolute sense, are devout and Christian, as evidenced by Robin Hood's desire to partake in mass in "Robin Hood and the Monk" (ll. 21-4). Within that forest dwelling, the men are all good, just and function as a complete society. Robin's need to partake in mass, thus taking him away from that society, creates conflict and causes the near collapse of the system specifically because the monk in Robin Hood's outer society is not good and therefore cannot make others good. Church officials can, therefore, be violently accosted and murdered without audience sympathy as there is a subtext mitigating the harm of such actions and validating the behaviour as a form of principled resistance due to the corruption in the clergy. Violence, thus, may be good even if it is not legal. The murder of the monk by Little John in "Robin Hood and the Monk" displays this by contrasting that with the murder of the little page in the same encounter, according that some degree of sympathy.

John smote of the munkis hed,
No longer wolde he dwell;
So did Moch the litull page,
For ferd lest he wolde tell. (ll. 203-6)

The use of the diminutive 'litull' and providing a justification of the death of this bystander, the death of the monk is made more menacing and the reason for the killing of the monk is brought into

stark contrast. Though Little John tells the monk that ‘Shalle thou never cum at oure kyng, / For to telle hym tale’ (ll. 201-2), there is no fear involved. The monk is killed so that ‘No longer wolde he dwell’. Furthermore, while Much’s killing of the page is tinged with some regret, the overwhelming emotion that Little John displays towards the monk is anger.

Be the golett of the hode
John pulled the munke down;
John was nothyng of hym agast,
He lete hym falle on his crown.

Litull John was so agrevyd,
And drew owt his swerde in hye; (ll. 191-6)

The monk has already established himself as petty, as an example of the corruption within the clergy of the time. As such, Little John is able to be the just executioner and perform those duties with righteous wrath.

This theme continues in “A Gest of Robyn Hode” and its discussion of violence in relation to the first estate. The early Robin Hood texts are not at all subtle in their loathing of the clergyman that were instilled in the church’s hierarchy within positions of power. Daniel Mersey discusses the corruption rife in the echelons of the feudal system and that it was ‘natural in these latter days that a class of men should arise to avail themselves of the unique opportunities of the time – men who, loving liberty and hating oppression, took the law into their own hands and executed a rough and ready justice between the rich and the poor which embodied the best traditions of knight-errantry, whilst they themselves lived a free and merry life on the tolls they exacted from their wealthy victims.’⁶⁸ The texts, featuring as they do corrupt abbots, and selfish, unsympathetic monks, encourage the celebration of Robin Hood’s harassment of these church officials.

By the time of the Robin Hood texts, despite the propaganda⁶⁹ that had so roused the populace, the effects of the holy wars and crusades could be seen in the bodies of those that were returning from battle. The knight in “A Gest of Robyn Hode”, as noted in the previous chapter, cuts a sorry figure across the landscape with his dreary and miserable semblance. The discussion between the prior and the abbot in the second fytt reveals that they assume him to be ‘ferre beyonde the see, / In Englonde ryght’ (ll. 353-4), fighting in the cause of England in the crusades. The knight, having done

⁶⁸ Mersey, *Legendary Warriors: Great Heroes in Myth and Reality*, 2002, p. 314.

⁶⁹ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict between Christianity*, p. 3.

his knightly and Christian duty,⁷⁰ despite promises regarding his soul, returns to be faced with destitution at the hands of a corrupt officials in the higher echelons of the church. In such a predicament, the only charity shown to him comes not from the church, whose abbot is attempting to subvert justice by having the knight bankrupted early (ll. 348-9), but by a band of outlaws who feed him, clothe him and give him the loan of the sum of money that would protect his land. The previous chapter noted that these actions served as a means by which to engage with the codes of chivalry and highlight the failings of the second estate, but they also highlight the failing of the first estate and the way in which it was shirking its duties to the needy.

The abbot's actions were perfectly legal. He is legally permitted to seize lands, and is backed by the justice and the sheriff (ll. 425-8). His actions are not, however, right in terms of the ideals of Christian charity. Charity as a doctrine promoted 'social integration and fraternity'⁷¹ and encouraged neighbourliness through the teachings of Christ as laid down in Luke 10:27 to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' by demanding that people perform acts of 'spiritual and corporal mercy'.⁷² This sympathy and willingness to be merciful is displayed by the prior in the poem as he states that

"The knyght is ferre beyonde the see,
In Englonde ryght,
And suffreth honger and colde,
And many a sory nyght.

"It were grete pyté," said the pryoure,
"So to have his londe;
And ye be so lyght of your consyence,
Ye do to hym moch wronge." (ll. 353-60)

The exclamation from the abbot in response that the prior was always in his 'berde' (l. 361) demonstrates his ruthlessness and lack of charitable intent, which is compounded by his exchange with the knight when he arrives, demanding an explanation for his presence and curtly refusing the knight's request 'To pray of a lenger daye' (l. 420). The following passage displays that the knight pleads on, with offers of friendship and appealing to courtesy, while the abbot remains steadfast to his position and in fact reacts angrily rather than charitably.

⁷⁰ The knight's involvement in the Crusades is discussed by the church officials, as will be noted on the following page. Though it should be noted that he himself does not state this to be the case, he does not deny it either and thus there is a reasonable assumption by the audience that it is true.

⁷¹ Daniel Bornstein, *Medieval Christianity*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010, p. 330.

⁷² Nancy McLoughlin, "The Deadly Sins and Contemplative Politics" in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sin*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan Janet Ridyard, Suffolk and New York: York Medieval Press, 2012, p. 137.

"Now, good syr abbot, be my frende,
For thy curteysé,
And holde my londes in thy honde
Tyll I have made the gree!

"And I wyll be thy true servaunte,
And trewely serve the,
Tyl ye have foure hondred ponde
Of money good and free."

The abbot sware a full grete othe,
"By God that dyed on a tree,
Get the londe where thou may,
For thou getest none of me." (ll. 429-40)

Thus, while within his legal entitlement, the abbot is displayed as having a moral lack in a manner akin to that displayed by the monk in "Robin Hood and the Monk" in his flagrant dismissal of doctrine. As an extension to this, when Robin Hood and his band rob the monk travelling through the forest in "A Gest of Robyn Hode", though they are doing something that is legally wrong, the morality of their action is not called into question as they have demonstrated that they are more likely to use the money in a more charitable manner than the church officials would. Furthermore, there is an aspect of the church officials getting their just desserts and the yeoman outlaws resisting a corrupt and dangerous force.

Violence here becomes a physical expression of resistance due to the nature of violence within society. The violence that is espoused by both the first and second estates within medieval society attempts to produce disciplined bodies akin to those postulated by Michel Foucault, where discipline and fear of punishment function as a means by which to increase the utility of the body while demanding and instilling obedience. As Foucault puts it, discipline 'dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.'⁷³ There is fear associated with discipline and, as the knight's story of misfortune and debt demonstrates, the corrupt church is more likely to exact unjust disciplinary measures.

Robin Hood's character in the texts, or more precisely the reaction of his men with regard to events that befall him, resist this model, a model which is not dissimilar to the Machiavellian model mentioned above. In his leadership model, it is love rather than fear that provokes action as Little

⁷³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 138.

John demonstrates in “Robin Hood and the Monk” when Robin unjustly attacks him but masterminds and conducts a rescue regardless of that offence, despite being angry enough to want to retaliate. The overwhelming impression that his men give of their feelings about Robin is those of ‘love’,⁷⁴ emotions of strong fidelity and respect. The micro society that the outlaws have made for themselves serves as an independent model to demonstrate that fear and corruption is not required to maintain loyalty and that violence against your own people is likely to cause a breakdown of the community rather than maintain it.⁷⁵ The early Robin Hood texts demonstrate the influence of fear as a means of maintaining power on a mental level in addition to the physical means exercised through both the practice and the threat of violence, and particularly the way in which the church was involved in these power discourses. The later medieval church was powerful and had a ‘significant degree of influence’ on the medieval peasant’s life and death.⁷⁶ Thomas H. Greer and Gavin Lewis state that the church had never before ‘been more dominant in the affairs of Westerners, nor has it been so since.’⁷⁷ It was wealthy through land acquisitions that were made by receiving properties as gifts from the rich⁷⁸ or by purchasing property with money acquired through tithing and other financial donations. Even where the populace were farmers without money, tithing was able to provide the church with economic resources as tithes paid in produce entered ‘the stream of commerce’⁷⁹ in the medieval market, thus enabling the church to maintain a financial hold on society.

The fiscal influence that the church had over the nation is apparent in the knight’s tale in “A Gest of Robyn Hode”, as discussed above, and also in the poem’s obsession with money. The sum of four hundred pounds, the bond that was required for the knight’s wealthy estate, is repeated no less than a dozen times, encouraging the audience to marvel at what would be an inconceivable amount to many. As Scarlok and Little John slowly count the money into twenty twenties (‘eightene and two score’ l. 272), the tactility of the sum is evoked, the unwieldy sum is rendered manageable and physical and, given the behaviour of the abbot in the poem, the thought of handing that money to an already rich institution when the audience is in such poverty, becomes increasingly distasteful. When the abbot receives his bond money, the audience is satisfyingly rewarded with the irony of his being put off his food as ‘The abbot sat styll, and ete no more, / For all his ryall fare’(ll. 485-6). There is also some satisfaction to be had from the abbot having lost some of his money.

⁷⁴ See previous chapter.

⁷⁵ See previous chapter.

⁷⁶ See Justin Clegg, *The Medieval Church*, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003, p. 5,

⁷⁷ Greer and Lewis, *A Brief History of the Western World*, 2005, p. 247.

⁷⁸ Robert C. Palmer. *Selling the Church: The English Parish in Law, Commerce, and Religion, 1350-1550*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Palmer. *Selling the Church: The English Parish in Law, Commerce, and Religion, 1350-1550*, 2002, pp. 31-2.

"Take me my golde agayne," saide the abbot,
"Sir justice, that I toke the."
"Not a peni," said the justice,
"Bi God that dyed on tree." (ll. 489-92)

It is not wealth itself that is depicted as unseemly or distasteful. Robin and his men have a large stash of money and wares. That he is able to lend the knight such a sum of money indicates that it is superfluous to his needs, though he insists that it is a loan and demands a guarantor as he asks "Hast thou any frende," sayde Robyn, / "Thy borowe that wolde be?" (ll. 245-6). Nevertheless, he willingly parts with the money for an entire year, indicating that he and his band are able to afford this deficit. Furthermore, at the suggestion of Little John, the knight is also given a number of other gifts from the band's hoard, beginning with many yards of cloth. John states that Robin has

scarlet and grene, mayster,
And many a riche aray;
Ther is no marchaunt in mery England
So ryche, I dare well say. (ll. 281-4)

Over-generous with his measuring, Little John attracts the bemusement of Much and the mirth of Will Scarlok, who remarks 'By God Almyght,/ Johnn may gyve hym gode mesure,/ For it costeth hym but light,' (ll. 297-9). The friendly nature of these exchanges, even when Much refers to Little John as a 'devylles drapar' (l. 294), suggests no real resentment on the part of the men, suggesting that the cloth, though expensive, is not necessary to the men. The behaviour of the merry men calls to attention the idea of surplus. Though the institution of the church is wealthy, as noted above, the officials jealously hoard the money for themselves. The abbot was enjoying 'ryall fare' (l. 486) even as he conspired to seize the lands of the knight, leaving him destitute. Urged by the justice to give the knight some recompense, the abbot offers a single payment of only '[a]n hundred pounde' (l. 469), a quarter of the income that the land would generate for the abbey annually (l. 367-8). As the abbey had been running without this income up until this point, and running well enough to afford the abbot fine fare, this additional income is surplus to their needs. As mentioned earlier, the church had wealth; it had land, goods, and money in excess. However, with this episode they are seen to demonstrably and jealously hoard their surplus, whereas Robin Hood and the outlaws in his company do not hoard their riches. This generosity is also a display of the reversal of feudal virtue, where knights in romances are stressed to be generous to their dependents.⁸⁰

John, Much and Scarlok heap generosity onto the knight, giving him a courser and saddle (l. 301-2), a palfrey (l. 305), some boots (l. 307) and some riding spurs (l. 310). Robin even lends the knight Little

⁸⁰ See Corinne Saunders, *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 49-50.

John: 'I shall the lende Litell John, my man, / For he shalbe thy knave (ll. 321-2). All of this points to the fact that wealth is not disparaged in and of itself, but rather that wealth without generosity, particularly given the doctrine of charity, is repellent. This is made further evident later in the poem, where Robin states that the next man that passes,

Whether he be messengere,
Or a man that myrthes can,
Of my good he shall have some,
Yf he be a pore man. (ll. 837-40)

Though this may indicate a moment of benevolent charity, Robin's motivations are quite particular. He twice repeats his fear.

For I drede Our Lady be wroth with me,
For she sent me nat my pay. (ll. 823-4)
...
I drede Our Lady be wroth with me,
She sent me not my pay. (ll. 939-40)

The similarity of these expressions demonstrating how pressing his anxiety is and his act of charity in this instance would have been a way to pay penance to the Virgin Mary whom he fears he has offended. Though this may mar Robin's motivations, it also highlights the behaviour of the church officials in the poem who are oblivious to any offence they may have caused to a higher power with their corrupt behaviour and who certainly offer no financial penance.

The wealth of the church was not unnoticed and attracted criticism, most notably from the Lollards and John Wycliffe. Though rebels and heretics had been encountered by the church before, Wycliffe's movement was on a larger scale and his efforts more concerted than those that had come before,⁸¹ giving him and his followers the traction that others had lacked. Though not thought to be the cause of the peasants' uprising in 1381,⁸² contemporary writers held Wycliffe's criticisms of the church in poor regard and considered them to be a call to civil dissent and unrest. Adam Usk wrote that Wycliffe 'most wickedly did sow the seed of murder, snares, strife, variance, and discords, which last unto this day, and which, I fear, will last even to the undoing of the kingdom.'⁸³ Wycliffe's writings on the third estate focussed predominantly on the poor peasant,⁸⁴ a figure that was seen to

⁸¹ Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, 1984, p. 1.

⁸² Helen Barr, "Wycliffe's Representation of the Third Estate" (pp. 197-216) in *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* ed. Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003, p. 197.

⁸³ Adam of Usk, *Chronicon Adae de Usk, 1377-1421*, 2nd edition, ed. E. M. Thompson, London: Henry Frowde, 1904, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴ Barr, "Wycliffe's Representation of the Third Estate", 2003, p. 198.

be closer to God through the simple life imposed upon him by his poverty.⁸⁵ Robin's explicit instruction in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" to his men to 'do no husbonde harme, / That tilleth with his ploughe' (ll. 51-2) and the end of the poem which states that he "dyde pore men moch god" (l. 1824) aligns the poem with the Lollard movement ideologically, particularly so when read in conjunction with the civil unrest that the dissent that the texts display and thereby add to the discourse of resistance that was happening in society at the time by positing a different model of fiscal responsibility than that which was in effect that the time.

In addition to the oppression of the masses through violence, the poet also keeps the interference of the church at bay by minimising or entirely eliminating a key aspect of their dominion over the masses, namely sex and sexuality. In *Alone of All Her Sex*, Marina Warner discusses the 'psychological obsession of [Christianity] with sexual sin'⁸⁶ and indeed Foucault's panopticon applies in this regard, too, as the church began to impose upon the personal and sexual lives of its parishioners. In addition to private confessionals and the disciplinary power that this provided as discussed above, where depravity was not able to be rooted out the church employed more public forums. Clerics in church courts summoned people before them on suspicion of their behaviour. Peter Larson notes that chapter houses and parish churches the English countryside conducted investigations into fornication charges against parishioners, a priest charged with fornication, and a pregnant woman without a partner.⁸⁷

Priests were told to 'vigorously' commend marriage by making 'fornicators' embraces repulsive by contrast'.⁸⁸ However, early medieval marriage could be entered into quite casually and had had little to do with the institutional church as can be seen in the warning that was distributed in 1218 in the statutes of the diocese:

marriages are to be celebrated with honour and reverence, not with laughter and ribaldry, nor in taverns, with public drinking and eating together. Nor should anyone bind women's hands with a noose made of reed or any other material, be it cheap or expensive, so as to fornicate with them more freely, for fear that while he considers himself to be joking, he binds himself with the rites of marriage. Nor should a promise be given to anyone from now on if not in the presence of a priest and three or four persons of good faith who have been called together for this purpose. (But if it has happened differently, a promise is not deemed to have been made to any woman,

⁸⁵ Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 31-33.

⁸⁶ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, New York: Vintage Books, 1983, p. 71.

⁸⁷ Peter Lionel Larson, *Conflict and Compromise in the Late Medieval Countryside*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 156.

⁸⁸ Conor McCarthy, *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 74.

even if copulation has occurred.) Nevertheless, since people entering into unions in this way trouble the church of God not a little and inflict dangers on souls, we have decided that such people should be handed over to us, and we will hand them on to the Holy See, as disturbers of the ecclesiastical peace and despisers of the ecclesiastical orders. And we order this statute to be read out to the people every Sunday.⁸⁹

Marriages were not just a contract but a religious event, eventually even a sacrament, and as sexual congress was only permitted within the bounds of marriage, sexuality became a focal point even within those confines. From the fourth century onwards, there was an increasing hostility to eroticism and an insistence that 'sexuality be divorced from pleasure in a moral life and linked only to the function of procreation.'⁹⁰ Saint Augustine wrote that sexuality came after the fall of Adam and Eve, though the ability to procreate was likely present before, his assertion regarding the 'tumultuous ardour of passion'⁹¹ created a tension between the body and the soul and imposed a sense of immorality in sexuality even within the confines of the marital union of Adam and Eve. Saint Jerome takes the stance further by stating that 'virginity is natural while wedlock only follows guilt'⁹² and that wedlock and marriage are only beneficial for their production of virgins: 'I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns, the gold from the earth, the pearl from the shell.'⁹³ In the thirteenth century, Vincent of Beauvais even took the matter far enough to state that 'a man who loves his wife very much is an adulterer'⁹⁴ as the only legitimate cause for sex within marriage was reproduction and that was a serious duty and this duty was itself heavily ritualised. The consummation of marriage was also heavily discussed and required for it to be considered valid as the husband had to have the ability to copulate and inseminate his wife.⁹⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas postulated that the marriage union, the taking of the vows, is not enough and that the union is not 'finally perfect as to its second act' with regard to its operation until it is consummated by copulation.⁹⁶ The church could annul a marriage that was unconsummated and could, therefore, be a presence in the marital bed of newly weds as it could demand intimate details of their sexual activities. Records exist of a woman accusing her husband of

⁸⁹ McCarthy, *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, 2004, p. 74.

⁹⁰ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 164.

⁹¹ Saint Augustine, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Books 7-12*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, New York: Newman Press, 1982, pp. 73-4.

⁹² Saint Jerome, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Rev. Henry Wallace, New York: Cosimo, 2007, p. 29.

⁹³ Saint Jerome, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 2007, p. 30.

⁹⁴ Saint Jerome, as quoted in James A. Brundage's *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 90.

⁹⁵ See Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality In Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 70-5.

⁹⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: (Part III, Second Section and Supplement)*, New York: Cosimo, 2007, p. 2780.

impotence in order to have her marriage annulled and 'matrons' (assumed to be prostitutes and thereby expert witnesses) handling the man intimately in order to discern whether he could be aroused and thus able to perform sexually. The details are graphic, with the woman reporting that she had exposed her breasts, warmed her hands, handled the penis of the man, kissed him and reported that 'the said penis was scarcely three inches long ... remaining without any increase or decrease.'⁹⁷

The church thus became a presence in the sexual lives of its married parishioners by ritualising their sexual conduct. Apart from consummation, all things taken into account, such as the day of the week, religious festivals that needed to be observed and so forth, the church's policing made it appropriate for a married couple to have sex on average only once a week. In this way, the middle ages were at once obsessed with and repulsed by sex, and by extension, by women. As Marina Warner writes,

In Christian hagiography, the sadomasochistic content of the paeans to male and female martyrs is startling, from the early documents like the Passion of saints Perpetua and Felicity into the high Middle Ages. But the particular focus on women's torn and broken flesh reveals the psychological obsession of the religion with sexual sin, and the tortures that pile up one upon the other with pornographic repetitiousness underline the identification of the female with the perils of sexual contact.⁹⁸

Augustine stated that there was 'nothing that degrades the manly spirit more than the attractiveness of females and contact with their bodies'⁹⁹, a sentiment picked up by a medieval poet who attacked women at length, as 'Woman is foul, burning to deceive, a flame of fury, our first destruction, the worst portion, the robber of decency. O cruel sin! [...] she is not even faithful to herself.'¹⁰⁰

Women were held in low esteem due to the Eve myth as Satan is seen to have attacked human nature where it seemed weakest. Tertullian, a father in the church second century, wrote,

Do you not realise that Eve is you? The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil's gateway, you desecrated the fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man against whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child's play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die!¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality In Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 2005, p. 71.

⁹⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1983, p. 71.

⁹⁹ Saint Augustine, as quoted by Michael Parenti in *History as Mystery*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1999, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard of Morval as quoted in Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1983, p. 59.

This early view was not one shared completely by all the Church Fathers as, Augustine for instance, declared both Adam and Eve guilty. However, even he held Eve somewhat more sinful as they were both equally guilty according to pride but she was more so according to sex.¹⁰² Cardinal Peter Damian, in the eleventh century, called women 'Satan's bait, poison for men's souls'¹⁰³ and this attitude remained in society in the thirteenth century, therefore during the time of the Robin Hood texts. Conrad of Marchtal, an abbot of that era, wrote that 'the wickedness of women is greater than all the other wickedness of the world, that the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less dangerous to men than familiarity of women, we have unanimously decreed for the safety of our souls, no less than for that of our bodies, that we will on no account receive any more sisters but will avoid them like poisonous animals.'¹⁰⁴

With all this in mind, it is interesting to note the complete lack of female characters in the earliest Robin Hood ballad. The action in "Robin Hood and the Monk" takes place in a number of different locations, from the forest dwelling of the merry men to the populous town of Nottingham and though there are a number of different characters that join the story, there are no women. Richard Tardif has argued that the social context for the early Robin Hood poems is urban rather than rural, that 'the town itself, almost invariably Nottingham, is the sole locus of social imagery - of occupation, trade, and political structures - for the cycle.'¹⁰⁵ Stephen Knight suggests that the Greenwood 'bore a powerful message about value in the modern world, a myth for their own culture's biography.'¹⁰⁶ The social imagery of the town in this ballad excludes women, and the myth of the culture excludes women but not in the misogynistic manner that is expressed by the church officials as discussed above. The ballad includes a female character in the form of the Virgin Mary, who is mentioned five times,¹⁰⁷ the 'myght of mylde Marye', mentioned twice (l. 28 and 40),¹⁰⁸ and her powers to help Robin Hood in situations of certain calamity as he 'prayed to God and myld Mary / To bryng hym out save agayn' (ll. 69-70). This non-misogynistic tendency is made clearer in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" as his devotion to her is laid out repeatedly but, significantly, he allies women with Mary, not Eve.

¹⁰² Augustine, "De Genesis ad Litterum" in *Oeuvres*, Paris: Desclée, Des Brouwer, 1936, XII, 11.35.

¹⁰³ Peter Damian quoted in David F. Noble, *A World Without Women: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science*, New York: Knopf, 1992, p. 132.

¹⁰⁴ Conrad of Marchtal quoted in Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1999, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Tardif, "The 'Mystery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts," in *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight, Cambridge: DS Brewster, 1999, p. 347.

¹⁰⁶ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. xiv.

¹⁰⁷ Lines 28, 69-70, 71 (in the name of the church where Robin Hood would be attending mass), 133 and 140.

¹⁰⁸ Lines 28 and 140.

Our dere Lady,
That he loved allther moste.

Robyn loved Oure dere Lady:
For dout of dydly synne,
Wolde he never do compani harme
That any woman was in. (ll. 35-40)

This devotion to all women stands in stark contrast to the suspicion and hatred that had been espoused by some church clerics and officials, and the absence of women in the earlier ballad is therefore not in line with those thoughts. The suspicion and hatred of church officials, however, is clearly marked out with Robin Hood's instructions to his men that 'These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes, / Ye shall them bete and bynde' (ll. 57-8). Taken together, and considering the vastness of the scope of power that the church had with regard to sexuality, the lack of women in "Robin Hood and the Monk", this displays a resistance to the first estate, and therefore the feudal hierarchy, by refusing to engage with one aspect of their power and refusing to be policed by the shame and fear associated with it.

"Robin Hood and the Potter", surviving only in the Cambridge E.e.4.35 manuscript dating from the 1500s,¹⁰⁹ is considered to be part of the early Robin Hood ballad cycle by Stephen Knight and Tom Ohlgren.¹¹⁰ Though it is also temporally removed from the events of the Peasants' Revolt, it still displays the sexual and political anxieties that are present in the early ballad cycle. The ballad tells the tale of Robin Hood encountering a potter in the forest on his way to market to sell the wares. Robin purchases all of the pots and takes them to market himself to sell them as part of an elaborate long-con to rob the Sheriff of Nottingham. The ballad's inclusion of the pseudo-courtship of the Sheriff's wife is particularly of note as it works with the tropes of the romances in vogue at the time which were somewhat of a revisioning of the way that women had been regarded up to that point. The songs of the troubadours about an idealised, passionate love had the poets begin to put women on a pedestal and created a literary space in which new standards of behaviour by which to measure men could be created.¹¹¹ Chrétien de Troyes *Launcelot and Guinevere*, for example, had Launcelot enduring danger to win the heart of Guinevere. At the request of Marie de Champagne, Andreas

¹⁰⁹ Assumed to be from c. 1500 by Joseph Ritson and 'very late fifteenth or, more probably, early sixteenth century' by Dobson and Taylor, *The Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, 1997, p. 123.

¹¹⁰ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 57.

¹¹¹ It is important to note that the movement was not a liberating one for women, despite placing women on a pedestal. It has indeed been described as a pedestal/doormat manoeuvre (see Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 84-132) and many of the texts have since been critiqued as misogynistic (see, for example, Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

Capellanus wrote *De Amore*,¹¹² depicting courtly love as a daring new form of literature which was against the teachings of the church as it focussed on sexuality, adulterous love and fantasies of devoted lovers quite out of line with the opinions of women and sexuality as discussed above. As mentioned earlier, these French texts were translated and brought to England, providing material and intertextual nuances for contemporary English poets. The poet of *Generydes*,¹¹³ for example, tells a story about adulterous love and sexuality. *Partonope* also depicts sexual love and congress outside of marriage,¹¹⁴ and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* contains many adulterous relations.

Thomas Ohlgren suggests that Robin Hood represents a shift from the chivalric hero to a mercantile hero, where despite the fact that 'he has appropriated the chivalric virtues of martial prowess, voluntary daring, quest for unpredictable risk, and loyalty to a revered lady',¹¹⁵ the adventure is not a knightly one and is instead a merchant adventure. While merchant heroes were not uncommon in medieval literature,¹¹⁶ for Ohlgren Robin Hood fulfils a specific role by satisfying the 'need for a mercantile hero to replace the knightly hero of aristocratic romance',¹¹⁷ a point he also makes regarding "A Gest of Robyn Hode".¹¹⁸ Though the ballad does display a shift from the ideological leanings of the chivalric romances, in contrast to those popular romances, in "Robin Hood and the Potter" the adulterous relationship hinted at is never carried through to consummation nor is there any intention to do so, thus representing some discord with the ideologies presented in romances in that period.¹¹⁹ The ballad hints at a romantic relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff's wife using the tropes of chivalric romances by giving her gifts by way of the 'pottys bot feyffe',¹²⁰ a 'golde ryng' (l. 247), and a 'wheyt palfrey' (l. 292). He also flatters and compliments her, telling her that she 'schall haffe of the best' (l. 152), says that she is 'foll godde' (l. 291), and states that the sheriff would have suffered a harsher fate had it not been for the 'loffe of yowre weyffe' (l. 294). He also declares his 'loffe' of her to her in person before presenting her with the gold ring (l. 247), all of which 'strongly suggests that the sturdy outlaw is appropriating the roles of the aristocratic courtly

¹¹² John F. Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center", *Speculum*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October, 1961) pp. 551-59.

¹¹³ William Aldis Wright (ed.), *Generydes: A Romance in Seven-line Stanzas*. London: N. Trübner, 1878.

¹¹⁴ William Edward Buckley, *The Old English Version of Partonope of Blois*. London: J.B. Nichols, 1862.

¹¹⁵ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale", for instance, relied and drew upon prolific portrayals of merchant figures in medieval texts. For more, see James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 83-96.

¹¹⁷ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Thoman H. Ohlgren, "The "Marchaunt" of Sherwood: Mercantile Ideology in A Gest of Robyn Hode" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression, and Justice*, ed. Thomas G. Hahn, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000, pp. 175-190.

¹¹⁹ Adulterous liasons were not the norm in Middle English literature, but they did occur and there are some very well known instances, notably Guinevere, Isult, and Bertiak's Lady.

¹²⁰ "Robin Hood and the Potter", l.142.

lover.¹²¹ Indeed, the ballad does appropriate the ideologies and virtues that are celebrated in courtly romance and presents them in an urban, lower class setting. Martial prowess is depicted in the shooting competition (ll. 173-213), solidarity with the group is represented by his return to his merry men, largess represented by the great price he paid the potter for wares that were not of the same value. His loyalty to a revered lady is more complex. Though he appears to engage in a flirtation towards an illicit affair, the ballad states early on that 'For the loffe of owre ladey, / All wemen werschepyd he' (ll. 11-2). Apart from identifying his loyalty to the Virgin Mary, this statement stands against the prevalent opinions of the church officials by aligning women with Mary rather than Eve. As such, Robin's lack of sexual engagement with women is not due to him being a 'scared little boy',¹²² as Knight once suggested, but a deliberate choice. The absence of sex acts as a means by which to avoid church interference in his life and highlights the way the church interfered in the sex lives of the general population. Ohlgren suggests that the moral 'is that the Virgin protects those who are faithful to her, even if they are sinners',¹²³ noting the religious nature of Robin Hood and his men. His religious faith also affords him 'flexibility and [an] enduring sense of positive force'¹²⁴, which is necessary to promote as he is a trickster figure and therefore could be potentially regarded as a malicious force.

In summary, the representation of the church officials in the texts are intended to demonstrate to the masses the corruption that lies within the feudal tripartite system, and indeed the hypocrisy inherent in the actions of the church officials is revealed through the actions of the yeomen outlaws. The carnivalised representation of the church officials, while consistent with some of the other writers of the era, performs the function of creating a liminal space in which an alternative social structure can be posited, one that removes power from the corrupt by disallowing them, in the first instance, the agency to interfere in the personal lives of their congregation. These texts empower the individual in a surveillance society by allowing them to turn the gaze back onto the corrupt machinery.

¹²¹ Ohlgren, "The "Marchaunt" of Sherwood: Mercantile Ideology in A Gest of Robyn Hode", *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression, and Justice*, 2000, p. 87.

¹²² Stephen Knight, "Out! Damned Robin", *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 12 2000, p. 5S, print.

¹²³ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, 2007, p. 55.

¹²⁴ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. xii.

Chapter Three: Robin Hood and the Third Estate

In his *Complete Study*, Stephen Knight writes that one of the prominent features of the Robin Hood tales is that they are always 'in some way social rather than private or merely aesthetic in direction'.¹ It is one of the more interesting facets of these tales, as Maurice Keen and Thomas Ohlgren have argued, that the Robin Hood ballads have integrated within them some exploits of real-life outlaws such as Eustace the Monk, Hereward the Wake, William Wallace and most Fulk Fitz Warrin.² The use of disguises, the escapes, the rescues and many of the exploits of Robin Hood are demonstrated by these scholars to be similar to those contained in the tales of these historical predecessors. A feature which distinguishes the Robin Hood tales from these other outlaw tales is the prominence of his outlaw band as his companions. This final chapter will draw together the themes of violence and transgression, as discussed in the first and second chapters, while examining the representation of the third estate of medieval society. The chapter will discuss the driving force of fellowship in the early texts, while looking at the way in which aristocratic values and ideals diffused into the lower ranks of society through an examination of the use and representation of sportful combat, the representation of chivalric ideals, and the protection and comfort derived from the Greenwood as a space of communality away from the literal ills of the city. Finally, I will look at some economic elements of the cycle and, through Marxist hermeneutics, I will suggest that the texts present yeomen who have a 'highly developed sense of personal self-worth',³ who are able to understand their ability to control the means of production.

Contemporary scholarship in Robin Hood studies makes note of the homosocial imperative in the cycle. The brotherhood of men living in the woods as a community is a fixture of the tradition that was present in its earliest recorded incarnations; even in the historical *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* (c. 1420), Andrew of Wyntoun writes of Robin Hood in association with Little John:

Lytyll Jhon and Robyne Hude
Wayth-men ware commendyd gud :
In Yngle-wode and Barnysdale
Thai oysyd all this tyme thare trawole.⁴

¹ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, 1994, p. x.

² See Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood" in Hilton, in *Peasants, Knights and Heretics*, ed. R. H. Hilton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 236-57; Keen, "Robin Hood – Peasant or Gentleman?", *Peasants, Knights and Heretics*, ed. R. H. Hilton, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 258-66; Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, New York: Routledge, 2000; and Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997.

³ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

⁴ Andrew of Wyntoun, *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, 1872, p. 263, ll. 3523-6.

Walter Bower's Continuation of John Fordun's *Scotichronicon* (c. 1440) places Robin Hood again in association with Little John, though it is less favourable about the men. Robin Hood and Little John are described as 'famosissimus sicarius'⁵, a term translated by Taylor, Watt and Scott to mean 'famous armed robber', though Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren convincingly argue that it rather means 'famous cut-throat'.⁶ Robin is in this entry positioned within a context of rebellion against Henry III situated alongside 'the disinherited': 'de exheredatis'. Though Bower's representation of Robin is decidedly negative, particularly in contrast to Wyntoun's, his account maintains the homosocial nature of the hero by placing him in company and even fighting towards a common end with the ranks assembled by Simon De Montfort.⁷

This notion of Robin Hood and his men representing a fellowship and a community can be seen to be recognised within medieval society, as displayed in a court record dating from 1439 where a rescued prisoner, with a company of men, went into the forest 'like as it had been Robin Hood with his meyny (band)'⁸. In 1441 in Norfolk, workers blocked a road and threatened to kill a local landlord they chanted 'we are Robinhoodsmen, war war war',⁹ thus linking the revisionist and reformist ideologies of the Robin Hood texts, as previously mentioned, with camaraderie and fellowship to a sense that unity amongst the ranks will bring a desirable outcome for them all.

In his study *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, Jeffrey Singman notes a spirit of community and fellowship among the band of outlaws in the ballads, pointing out that in "Robin Hood and the Potter", Robin offers his adversary fellowship ('A felischepe well thow haffe' l. 95) and noting that 'this concept of fellowship is integral to the yeoman world of the outlaw'.¹⁰ Indeed, after a springtime reverie, the ballad begins with an inclusionary couplet intended to unify the audience with Robin Hood as a community of fellows:

Herkens, god yemen,
Comley, corteys, and god,

⁵ Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon in Latin and English* (Volume 5), ed. Simon Taylor and D. E. R. Watt with Brian Scott, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1994, pp. 354. All further references are from this text unless otherwise noted.

⁶ See Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 2003, p. 5 and Knight and Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, pp. 25-6.

⁷ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 26.

⁸ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1965, p. 41.

⁹ From Stephen Knight, "Robin Hood: Politics and myth" [online], *Arena Magazine* (Fitzroy, Vic), No. 121, Dec 2012 - Jan 2013, pp. 42-46.

<<http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=334725251697181;res=1> ELHSS> ISSN: 1039-1010.> [accessed: 20 Jan 14].

¹⁰ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

On of the best that yever bare bowe,
Hes name was Roben Hode. (ll. 5-8)

This stanza serves to bring the audience together as an ideologically linked group in a number of ways. First of all, by using the term 'god yemen', the ballad explicitly and obviously establishes that group of people as good. Furthermore, as Singman notes, in the fifteenth century, 'yeoman' was synonymous with 'companion' ('colega') and translated as such in a Latin-English dictionary,¹¹ again serving to make connections between the audience. The addition of the bow also serves to unify the audience with Robin Hood as comrades. Though J. C. Holt points out that the longbow and expert archery would have been practised and appreciated within a wide social range and was not the domain of commoners,¹² Singman notes that 'the longbow was much associated with the stalwart commoner, and its prominent place in the legend is obviously related to the idealisation of the yeoman'.¹³ The longbow is, therefore, a symbol of one respect in which commoners were allowed positions of prestige and importance,¹⁴ leading to a way in which they were 'able to mythologise their own role in society' due to the success of English archery on the battlefield.¹⁵

The mention of weaponry evokes the violence discussed in the first chapter but it also displays here that the spirit of camaraderie that is pervasive in these early Robin Hood texts is by no means simple and amicable but rather 'a relationship in which loyalty and competition are inextricably linked'.¹⁶ This is where the 'sportful combat' motif comes in, and is displayed within this ballad in an early fight scene with the Potter. The outlaws here represent the ideal of the good yeoman and the principle of freedom inherent in their desire to adopt certain chivalric values and practise violence, especially in order to protect honour.¹⁷ This adoption of such values can be considered a parody, as noted by P. R. Coss in relation to the 'elaborate [and] excessive courtesy' displayed by Robin Hood and Little John.¹⁸ However, in adopting their cultural nuances, there is also an element of the reduction of the social distance between the two estates,¹⁹ creating a subversive rather than a parodic text on the nature of community, fellowship, and freedom, beginning with the yeoman's manifestation of a 'highly

¹¹ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹² Holt, *Robin Hood*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp. 142-3.

¹³ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 39.

¹⁴ See Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, pp. 39-40.

¹⁵ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 40.

¹⁶ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹⁷ A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 99.

¹⁸ P. R. Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 108(1) (1985), p. 75.

¹⁹ See Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1985, p. 75.

developed sense of personal self-worth.²⁰ Coss notes that the popularisation of the aristocratic model created a top-down model of cultural dissemination in feudal society,²¹ thereby indicating that along with literature and art, the behaviours and practices of the second estate were also disseminated to the third estate. The aristocracy set a 'literate culture that laymen sought to emulate'²² and with those, some of the ideals of chivalry contained in the literature, too.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Catalan philosopher and logician Ramon Lull's *Libre qui es de l'ordre de cavalleria* (*The Book of the Order of Chivalry*) became a sourcebook for the duties a knight was expected to perform, one of which was to fight in tournaments.²³ In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, King Arthur's return to Britain is marked by an elaborate feast, followed by a tournament, where the 'knights began an equestrian game in the form of a mock battle, the ladies looking on from the walls, inspiring their sport with burning flames of love.'²⁴ Popular texts of the period contained this element of chivalric duty. In *Erec and Enide*, Erec and Gawain both take part in a tournament; the description of it is quite magnificent:

A month after Pentecost the tournament gathered and was engaged in the plain below Edinburgh. There were many bright-red banners, and many blue and many white, and many wimples and many sleeves given as tokens of love. Many lances were brought there, painted azure and red, many gold and silver, many of other colours, many striped, and many variegated. On that day was seen the lacing on many a helmet, of iron or of steel, some green, some yellow, some bright red, gleaming in the sunlight. There were many coats of arms and many white hauberks, many swords at the left side, many good shields, fresh and new, of azure and fine red, and silver ones with golden bosses. Many fine horses – white-stockinged and sorrel, fawn-coloured and white and black and bay – all came together at a gallop.²⁵

The anonymous author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* also refers to a series of tournaments that the lords attending Christmas festivities engaged in while at Camelot:

With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best,
Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rich breþer,
With rych reuel oryzt and rechles merþes.
Per tournayed tulkes by tymeþ ful mony,
Justed ful jolilé þise gentyle kniȝtes,

²⁰ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

²¹ Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1985, pp. 35-7.

²² M. B. Parkes, "The Literacy of the Laity" in *Literature and Civilisation: The Middle Ages*, ed. D. Daiches and A. Thorlby, London: Aldus Books, 1973, pp. 555-76, p. 557.

²³ Lull "The Book of the Order of Chivalry" in *Main Currents of Western Thought: Readings in Western European Intellectual History from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 1978.

²⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae: A Variant Version Edited from Manuscripts*, ed. Jacob Hammer, Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951, p. 164.

²⁵ Chrétien de Troyes, "Erec and Enide" in *Arthurian Romances*, ed. William W. Kibler, trans. Carleton W. Carroll, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 63.

Syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make.
For þer þe fest watz ilyche ful fifteen dayes²⁶

The particularly offhand manner of references to tournaments engaged in in these texts, particularly in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, suggests a familiarity of the spectacle with the intended audience. In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", Sir Richard at the Lee also mentions his involvement in tournaments when the abbot accuses him of being a false knight (l. 451). In response to the accusation, Sir Richard states that he was never a false knight (l. 455).

Up then stode that gentyll knyght,
To the abbot sayd he,
"To suffre a knyght to knele so longe,
Thou canst no curteysye.

"In joustes and in tournement
Full ferre than have I be,
And put my selfe as ferre in press
As ony that ever I se." (ll. 457- 64)

The knight here defends his status as by linking it intrinsically with tournament jousting, interestingly the very reason that he was in this predicament. His son had killed a knight in a joust causing his father to mortgage his lands to pay the wergild (ll. 205-12). Despite the fact that the event had almost cost him everything he had, the knight recognises it as a point of valour and proof of position.

Though Johan Huizinga has suggested that chivalry had decayed as a code and that examples of it in romances were self-conscious affectations,²⁷ Maurice Keen argues that the chivalric code remained as real a governing force in the later medieval period as it had been earlier²⁸ and the tournament, established as a common experience in medieval literature was 'known to protagonists and audiences alike'.²⁹ As already noted, Coss argues that this will include commoners and nobles as an event and the ideologies contained therein are carried down from the aristocracy to the commoner in the motif of sportful combat.

Writing on the ballad "Robin Hood and the Potter", Singman suggests that the fight between the titular characters is not about money. Indeed, this can be verified using the text itself, where Robin takes significant monetary losses. He loses his wager for forty shillings to Little John without any

²⁶ J.R.R. Tolkien, and E.V. Gordon (eds.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd ed. Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 2.

²⁷ See Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study on the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, London: Edward Arnold, 1924.

²⁸ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 102-24.

²⁹ Catherine Hanley, *War and Combat, 1150-1270: The Evidence from Old French Literature*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003, p. 223.

argument (ll. 80-5). The actual fight in this episode acts as a symbolic questioning of the Potter's status as a free man. By this exchange, Singman concludes that 'the yeoman's position is determined by not external legal parameters, but by internal sense of personal worth and self reliance, as manifested by his willingness and ability to assert his status by violence if necessary'.³⁰ Indeed, as argued in the first chapter, there was a call to violence in the early ballads for revisionary purposes and to reduce social distance between the tiers of the hierarchy.

The response to the wager can be contrasted with the criticism of Robin Hood's behaviour regarding a similar wager in "Robin Hood and the Monk", as discussed in the first chapter. The loss of the wager in that episode elicited a significantly poorer response from Robin, where he reacted violently and petulantly regarding his loss. That episode, though, differs due to the nature of the ballad. "Robin Hood and the Monk" is a noticeably violent ballad, containing brutality, battles, and deaths in line with Foucauldian imperatives where violence and punishment are considered a political tactic.³¹ The body, as property in feudal society,³² is invested with power relations³³ and violence towards it becomes ritualised,³⁴ the trauma and suffering an emblem of the 'vengeance of the sovereign.'³⁵ Where a body is docile, it can be 'subjected, used, transformed'.³⁶ By creating a decidedly non-docile set of bodies in the figures of the outlaw yeoman band of merry men, the ballad is breaking the ritualistic cycle and resisting the subjugation and oppression in the feudal system. Robin's violent reaction to Little John, and particularly Little John's response, are symbolic of resistance to this method of governance and this type of society.

"Robin Hood and the Potter" retains the revisionist ideology of the other texts worked on in this thesis but does not employ violence as its primary technique. This ballad engages with the notion of fellowship instead. As already noted, the ballad begins with a unifying statement aligning audience and protagonist, already suggesting community and fellowship as a major theme. It progresses with that idea by using the word 'fellow' or 'fellowship' six times within the first fyfte, which consists of only 121 lines,³⁷ striking the point home with the repetition. The 'good yeoman' and good yeomanry is also a repeated theme. The audience are told to listen as 'god yemen' (l. 5); Robin Hood was a 'god yeman/ Among hes mery maney' (ll. 13-4); "Robin Hood and the Potter" fighting were 'to yemen [...]

³⁰ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36

³¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 23.

³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, pp. 24-5.

³³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, pp. 23-4.

³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 45.

³⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 135.

³⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, p. 135.

³⁷ Lines 40, 40, 95, 99, 107, and 110.

a god seyt to se' (ll. 61-2); and, when chastised about his behaviour, Robin accedes that the Potter 'seys god yemenrey' (l. 91). This repetition serves to link good yeomanry with ideals of fellowship and community.

The rebuke by the Potter is significant with regard to this alignment.

"Het ys fol leytell cortesey," seyde the potter,
"As I hafe harde weyse men sye,
Yeffe a pore yeman com drywyng over the way,
To let hem of hes gorney." (ll. 85-8)

The use of the word 'cortesey' links the text to the ideals of chivalry and chivalric text. If we consider, for instance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the importance of courtesy is made clear as he is said to be careful to use 'his cortaysye, lest crathayn he were' (l.1773-5). Chivalric courtesy is linked intrinsically with courtly community, chivalric codes being in place in order to protect and link the second estate. Thus the Potter's rebuke is to Robin is one that leads to the heart of the cause; the waylaying of one good yeoman is harmful to all yeoman. Robin accepts his chastisement well and agrees:

"Be mey trowet, thow seys soyt," seyde Roben,
"Thow seys god yemenrey;
And thow dreyffe forthe yevery day,
Thow schalt never be let for me."

By saying so, Robin and the Potter forge an alliance not only with each other but also with all yeomen, encouraging them all to work assist one another and to become united as fellows. The importance unity and of fellowship is highlighted by the prominent role of the outlaw band who accompany Robin Hood. Where most medieval heroes are distinguished for their martial prowess and their solitary nature, Robin's personal abilities are more limited.³⁸ As already stated in the first chapter, in "Robin Hood and the Monk", Robin was bested at archery by Little John and, even though he held off the sheriff and his men for some time, he did eventually get captured by them. In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", during a friendly competition in the Greenwood with the King of England in disguise, Robin was hit about the head because he failed to shoot his mark (ll. 1611-1630). For these short comings, and others, Robin Hood is reliant upon the men of his outlaw band with a distinct message that unity is strength. When the band fractures, they are often at mortal peril, as is the case in "Robin Hood and the Monk" and "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne".

This theme of unification is the crux of the issue. Britain in the medieval period was undergoing social change due to a number of pressing concerns and these are present in the ballads, which

³⁸ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 37.

become a form of social artefact or social discourse.³⁹ There were social anxieties regarding the structure of society. As mentioned in the first chapter, the ballads emerged in the period preceding the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, where serfs were treated as little more than slaves⁴⁰ and not allowed simple freedoms that were enjoyed by freemen yeomen,⁴¹ despite the small improvements in working conditions that were the result of the plague that swept through England in 1348.⁴² The formalisation of the Statute of Labourers in 1351 curbed these changes by preventing peasants from demanding increased payment for labour and limited their wages and the access to other employment opportunities.⁴³

These anxieties, the resistance of the masses against oppressive local authorities, are mapped onto the texts, where all three social classes of the tripartite society are represented, and are particularly evident due to Robin's status as a yeoman. One of the striking features of the early texts lies particularly in the way in which the outlaw band displays knightly behaviour and observes the etiquette and courtesy of that sphere, as well as performing and subverting the violence as mentioned in the first chapter. Ohlgren notes that in "A Gest of Robyn Hode", Robin offers liveries and fees to new members, offers aid to the bankrupt knight, and refuses to eat until accompanied by an 'unkuth gest'.⁴⁴ Aspects of chivalry are also present in other ballads. In "Robin Hood and the Monk", the desire to attend mass expressed by Robin early in the ballad contains elements of the chivalric duty of protecting the faith. The poem begins with a celebration of nature and with Little John revelling in the beauty of the day and his surroundings. Although he calls his own faith into light by saying 'a more mery man then I am one / Lyves not in Cristanté' (ll. 15-6), his lack of desire to fulfil his Christian duty to attend mass is emphasised by Robin's inability to enjoy the day having failed in his duty to attend mass (ll. 20-4). In addition, as mentioned elsewhere, his martial prowess, though not all encompassing, was still significantly developed. His ability to fend off the sheriff's men and killing a dozen men singlehandedly (l. 110) certainly exhibit his ability to match the prowess of any knight. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the only reason he was captured was that his sword broke, evidenced by his exclamation of '[t]he smyth that the made [...] I pray to God wyrke

³⁹ Kathleen Turner, "Introduction", *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. ix.

⁴⁰ Stanford E. Lehmborg, Samantha A. Meigs and Thomas William Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History* (3rd ed.), Chicago: Lyceum Books, 2008, pp. 116-7.

⁴¹ As quoted by Bartlett in *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225*, 2000, p. 322.

⁴² Christopher Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381" in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton, and T. H. Aston, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 9.

⁴³ "The Statute of Labourers" in *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R.B. Dobson, London: Macmillan Press, 1986, pp. 64-5.

⁴⁴ Ohlgren, "The 'Marchaunt' of Sherwood: Mercantile Ideology in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, 2000, p. 175.

hym woo!' (ll. 113-4). His predicament, he suggests, is due to his poorly made tools rather than a lack on his part. "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne" sees Robin engaging heavily and skilfully with his martial arts, beating Guy of Gisborne in the friendly archery competition (ll. 119-26) and then again in their combat using 'brondes' (l. 144). He also displays grisly skill with his 'Irish Kniffe' (l. 167) as he mutilates Guy's head and again as he frees Little John (l. 219). His faith is also affirmed as he calls out 'Ah, deere Lady!' (l. 155).

Thomas Ohlgren has stated that Robin Hood represents a 'newly emerging urban class of yeomanry' and that he has appropriated the chivalric virtues of as mentioned above; martial prowess, voluntary daring, quest for unpredictable risk, and loyalty to a revered lady.⁴⁵ With regard to "Robin Hood and the Potter" in particular, within this dialectical process, Ohlgren suggest that knightly adventures have been transformed into a merchant adventure. Robin therefore, as an outlaw of Sherwood, 'fulfils the need for a mercantile hero to replace the knightly hero of aristocratic romance.'⁴⁶ This stands closer to Hilton and Keen's argument that the early Robin Hood texts represent dissatisfied manorial peasants⁴⁷ and in some opposition to Holt's idea that the texts were literature of the gentry.⁴⁸ There is the suggestion that the Robin Hood texts adopted some of the forms and motifs of the romance ballads, the literature of the gentry, and adapted them for subversive purposes and for use in social criticism.

One way in which this occurs is with reference to the sexual and romantic love aspect of relationships, which were a particular feature of medieval romances. Robin Hood texts can be seen to engage with social anxieties that were linked to the plague that swept through the nation in the middle ages. These texts eschewed sexuality deliberately as a means by which to keep the clergy from taking take root in their lives, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, there is still a deep-seated anxiety in the texts from the commoner's perspective. The Black Death, by the end, killed between a third and half of the population of Britain.⁴⁹ Boccaccio, the poet writer of *Decameron*, wrote of the manner in which the plague ravaged the population of Florence, and of the way the disease caused relationships to fall apart as the cruelty of heavens and man caused the

⁴⁵ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1958, 30-44; Keen, "Robin Hood - Peasant or Gentleman?", *Past and Present*, 1961.

⁴⁸ Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood", *Past and Present*, 1960, p. 90.

⁴⁹ Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death, 1348 – 1381*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, pp. 3-4.

'healthy to abandon the sick'.⁵⁰ Though Boccaccio denigrates the behaviour of some of the populace as they adopt a nihilistic approach to life,⁵¹ he asserts unawareness regarding the cause of the plague, stating that the cause of it being 'the influence of the heavenly bodies or that God, justly angered by our iniquities, sent it for our correction,' was a matter of belief and that, indeed, the plague had been present and travelling for many years already.

In England, 1348, William of Edenton, the Bishop of Winchester, wrote a letter to all the clergymen in his diocese, including the following which explicitly links the plague with sexuality.

[W]e report with anguish the serious news that has come to our ears that this cruel plague has begun a similarly savage attack on the coastal areas of England. We are struck by terror lest (may God avert it!) this brutal disease should rage in any part of our city or diocese. Although God often strikes us, to test our patience and justly punish our sins, it is not within the power of man to understand the divine plan. But it is to be feared that the most likely explanation is that human sensuality – that fire which blazed up as a result of Adam's sin and which from adolescence onwards is an incitement to wrong doing – has now plumbed greater depths of evil, producing a multitude of sins which have provoked the divine anger, by a just judgement, to this revenge.⁵²

The plague as a punishment for sexuality was also suggested by the then Bishop of Rochester, Thomas Brimton, who wrote a sermon berating the populace for greed, covetousness, impurity of spirit and particularly lechery. Mentioning the pestilence that was upon the nation, he said

there is on every side so much lechery and adultery that few men are contented with their own wives, but each man lusts after the wife of his neighbour, or keeps a stinking concubine in addition to his wife [...] behaviour which merits a horrible and wretched death.⁵³

In a further sermon, he wrote that 'the corruption of lechery and the imagining of evil are greater than in the days of Noah, for a thousand ways of sinning which were unknown then have been discovered now, and the sin of the Sodomites prevails beyond measure.'⁵⁴

The plague was associated with various failings of mankind; though there were many sins listed in the surviving records, the offences of lechery and adultery come up often in the letters and sermons

⁵⁰ Boccaccio, "Decameron", as quoted in translation in Byron Lee Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 14.

⁵¹ See Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁵² William Edendon in *The Black Death*, ed. Rosemary Horrox, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 116.

⁵³ Brimton, *The Black Death*, 1994, p. 141.

⁵⁴ Brimton, *The Black Death*, 1994, p. 144.

collected by Rosemary Horrox.⁵⁵ For instance, Thomas Burton, a monk at Meaux monastery in East Riding, wrote that just prior to the plague taking hold in England, there were tournaments held by the nobility to which 'ladies, matrons and other gentlewomen were invited. But scarcely any married woman attended with her own husband, but had instead been chosen by some other man, who used her to satisfy his sexual urges.'⁵⁶ Henry Knighton implies causality in the presence of women at tournaments, who 'abused their bodies in wantonness and scurrilous licentiousness',⁵⁷ and the plague. John of Reading comments on the indecent clothing of the era where long full garments had been abandoned for 'clothes which are short, tight, impractical, slashed, every part laced, strapped or buttoned up [...] Women flowed with the tides of fashion in this and other things even more eagerly, wearing clothes that were so tight that they wore a fox tail hanging down inside their skirts at the back, to hide their arses.'⁵⁸

The general wickedness of sexual conduct, as represented by some clerics of the age, is present in the previous chapter. Linking this sexuality to the actual present danger and the devastating tragedy that was the plague would have caused some anxiety in the enjoyment of the literature of the day and the changes which had come about when troubadours sang songs about an idealised, passionate love with the patronage of the higher classes.⁵⁹ The Robin Hood texts already display a keen awareness of the romance tropes regarding chivalry and courtesy. In light of the link between sexual conduct and the plague, they also engage with this dialectic of sexual tension in relation to a society which has been severely affected by the Black Death by keenly aware of the rural and urban divide. This is not to say that the early Robin Hood texts promote the idea of love in the forest, but rather that the divide between town and forest in these narratives, and indeed a distinct need for these two separate topographies,⁶⁰ adds to this existing anxiety.

The plague, though noted by contemporary writers as being indiscriminate regarding its victims, was more pervasive in urban society in comparison to rural societies. Robert S. Gottfried notes that there

⁵⁵ It should be noted that the sin of lechery was considered not as serious a confessional sin if committed by one who had not taken vows. See F.N.M, Diekstra, *The Middle English "Weye of Paradys" and the Middle French "Voie De Paradis": A Parallel-text Edition*, Leiden: Brill, 1991, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁶ Thomas Burton in *The Black Death*, ed. Rosemary Horrox, 1994, p. 67.

⁵⁷ Henry Knighton in *The Black Death*, ed. Rosemary Horrox, 1994, p. 130.

⁵⁸ John of Reading in *The Black Death*, ed. Rosemary Horrox, 1994, p. 131.

⁵⁹ See Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 7-8 and June Hall McCash, "Chretien's Patrons" in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2008, pp. 15-25.

⁶⁰ Helen Phillips, "Forest, Town, and Road: The Significance of Places and Names in Some Robin Hood Texts" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, ed. Thomas G. Hahn, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000, p. 202.

were fewer deaths in rural societies but people abandoned these locations to move to cities and towns for the economic advantages that could be gained there.⁶¹ These abandoned locales became forests.⁶² Given that the rates of death and disease were higher in the places that these rural folk migrated to, the forest became a different place from that imagined in the romances. The forest is a focal point of these texts and source of comfort; it is home. This was not the untamed and dangerous wilderness that it represented for King Arthur and his knights where the forest was an ‘unknown world where the laws did not run and where wicked men and strange spirits found a refuge’.⁶³ It was a place of refuge for all people witnessing and suffering the quite literal ills of modern society, a place of ‘sanctity and purity.’⁶⁴ The beauty of the woodlands are a stark contrast to the bleakness of the plague-inflicted towns. “Robin Hood and the Monk” begins with a reverie:

In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song,

To se the dere draw to the dale,
And leve the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grene wode tre. (ll. 1-8)

It should be stressed that the texts do not actually mention the plague or any signs of illness. Indeed, the inhabitants of the towns that are encountered are generally healthy. However, the Edenic settings of the forests, the early mention of trees (‘grene wode tre’ l. 8, “Robin Hood and the Monk”; ‘Amongst the leaves a lyne’ l.6, “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne”; ‘lenyd hym to a tre’ l. 10, “A Gest of Robyn Hode”; ‘wodys’ l. 4, “Robin Hood and the Potter”) are evocative of both life and death. Trees are ‘the very symbol of strength, fecundity and everlasting life’⁶⁵ but that in itself carries the promise of an earthly death. Indeed, death features heavily in the ballads. In “Robin Hood and the Monk”, the death is doled out to his attackers in the town by Robin (ll. 110), and to the monk and a page by Little John and Much, for the harm that he had caused Robin (ll. 199-202). In “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne”, the inner sanctum of the Greenwood is breached by the Sheriff and his men, who kill two of the Merry Men. In “A Gest of Robyn Hode”, death comes by way of a tale into the forest, as the knight recounts his sorry state of affairs and traces it back to when his son ‘slew a knight of Lancaster, / And a squyer bolde’ (ll. 209-10). The deaths generally take place in areas away

⁶¹ Robert S. Gottfried, *Black Death*, New York: The Free Press, 1983, p. 135.

⁶² Byron Lee Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature*, 2004, p. 60.

⁶³ Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 1977, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Phillips, "Forest, Town, and Road: The Significance of Places and Names in Some Robin Hood Texts" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, ed. Thomas G. Hahn, 2000, p. 209.

⁶⁵ Ernst and Johanna Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees*, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1960, p. 13.

from the forest, but when they occur within it, it is so that the sanctity of that space may return when threatened with turmoil.

There is a distinct sense of an urban and rural divide in “Robin Hood and the Monk”, where the beauty of the forest, the tranquillity and equilibrium suggested by the opening stanza is cut through when there is a threat to one of its own. The outlaws left in the forest, when hearing of Robin’s capture, become overcome, ‘Sum fel swonyng as thei were dede, / And lay stil as any stone;’ (ll. 121-2). The imagery here replicates that of the forest, the swooning a darker reflection of the swaying of the ‘leves large and long’ (l. 2) at the beginning of the ballad, the stone a simple reflection of a common artefact found in a forest but now linked to the word ‘dede’. The wailing that Little John admonishes the men for (‘Let be your rule’, l. 125) mirrors the way the ‘briddis mery can syng’ (l. 12). Though the forest is not anthropomorphised, there is a distinct sense of it being a haven, an ecology, a self-sustained system. When the ecosystem is threatened, even in part, the inhabitants react to the threat in unison with their environment.

As noted earlier, forests in the texts are not actual medieval English forests, which were vigorous working societies, not separate and insular but rather connected to open-field manor societies.⁶⁶ The forest in medieval England was essentially a legal concept, land which was set aside for the enjoyment of the king and other select aristocrats in his favour for the purpose of hunting and other such sport.⁶⁷ The forests often maintained an existence of certain pockets of arable land, which were tilled and worked in the same as any land in a lord’s manor but with the inclusion of certain laws which were designed to protect the vert and venison for the sport of the gentry.⁶⁸ Pollard attacks the notion that the tales were literally set in the forests that are named in the texts by referring to the idea that Robin and his men were able to become lost in the unmapped terrain of the northern English wilderness, yet ‘no forest in England was an impenetrable wilderness.’⁶⁹ Simon Schama suggests that the location of the action is a known stereotype due to its remoteness, wildness and lawlessness, and the evidence that ‘northern England was none of those things’.⁷⁰ Schama concludes that it is likely that audiences were aware that Robin Hood and his men ‘inhabited only an imagined forest in an imagined northern world.’⁷¹ It acts, therefore, as a liminal space, a cultural symbol of sorts, in line with Victor Turner’s ideas where symbols originate in and sustain processes; ‘symbols

⁶⁶ Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 2004, p. 142

⁶⁷ William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 12-3.

⁶⁸ Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 2004, p. 145.

⁶⁹ Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 58.

⁷⁰ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 58.

⁷¹ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1995, p. 58.

instigate social action'.⁷² It is through the symbolic vehicle of the forest that social transformations can take place.

The legally constructed concept of a 'foreste' ("Robin Hood and the Monk", l. 3) becomes for Robin and his fellow outlaws, who were outside of the protection of the law, a source of refuge. There is a keen sense of rebellion in taking refuge on land that has been legally decreed as space reserved for the king because, as Phillips notes, medieval forests were not legally or politically neutral spaces, 'power and resistance, legality and illegality [...] were integral to them.'⁷³ Indeed, Robin and his men feast on the very things that forester laws have denied them. In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", he and the knight sit down to a meal including 'nombres of the dere' (l. 128) and 'Swannes' (l. 129), meat for which they would receive severe punishment if caught.⁷⁴ Though Richard Tardif has argued that the social context for the early Robin Hood poems is urban rather than rural as 'the town [...] is the sole locus of social imagery--of occupation, trade, and political structures-- for the cycle,'⁷⁵ the poem displays the manner in which the forest became a site of classist tensions as a knight and an outlaw eat a meal that is legally denied to them both.

These tensions are also inherent in voice, as rhetorical power links to social power. The table below outlines each of the speaking characters in "A Gest of Robyn Hode" and presents the number of lines they each had in the poem.

⁷² Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, 1975, p. 180.

⁷³ Phillips, "Forest, Town, and Road: The Significance of Places and Names in Some Robin Hood Texts" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression and Justice*, ed. Thomas G. Hahn, 2000, p. 209.

⁷⁴ William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature*, 2006, pp. 58-60.

⁷⁵ Richard Tardif, "The 'Mystery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts," *Worlds and Words: Studies in the Social Role of Verbal Culture*, 1983, pp. 130-45.

Character	Fytte 1	Fytte 2	Fytte 3	Fytte 4	Fytte 5	Fytee 6	Fytte 7	Fytte 8	Total
Robin Hood	113	-	29	150	24	31	54	37	325
Little John	39	-	65	45	45	-	-	-	155
Sir Richard	75	68	-	18	18	8	-	-	44
Much	5	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	4
Will Scarlet	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Abbot	-	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	24
Prior	-	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
Justice	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Monk	-	4	-	22	-	-	-	-	26
Porter	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Sheriff	-	1	31	-	-	7	-	-	39
Richard's Wife	-	2	-	-	-	13	-	-	15
Steward	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Cook	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	6
King	-	-	-	-	-	8	51	15	74
Unnamed Knight	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	-	10
Forester	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	-	14
Gilbert	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Villagers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Merry Men	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2

Robin Hood speaks in 325 lines of this poem, over four times the number of lines that the king has in the poem. It ought to be noted that the king appears later on in the poem, and it could therefore be argued that ground could not be made up in the amount of story space he was given. However, Little John, present as a speaker in four fyttes (though he is present in fytte 2, and talked to, he does not actually speak), speaks 155 lines, still over twice the number of lines given to the king. Though there are many conclusions to be extrapolated from the space given to each speaking character of the poem, it is clear that the peasant class, the yeomen, have more of a voice than the gentry, or even both the gentry and the clergy combined.

In “Robin Hood and the Monk”, the voice distribution is as follows:

Character	Line count
Robin Hood	28
Little John	84
Much	4
Monk	16
The King	26
Porter	6
Sheriff	5

As with *Gest*, the yeomen have more space than both clergy and gentry combined, though Robin Hood this time only slightly more than the king. But, as the first chapter notes, it is Little John who is the true yeoman hero of this particular ballad and it is he who has the greatest number of lines.

The distribution of the voices here should not be considered a mirror of society. In his study, Mark R. Cohen asserts that the poor have little voice in the middle ages, what little exists can ‘generally only be heard through record and observations compiled by their literate social superiors’.⁷⁶ Giving the denizens of the third estate a greater space for voices than those of the first and second estates is a subversive act, one which highlights the inequity of later medieval life, even while using the literary tools of the higher echelons.

The texts make use of the pre-existing mode and motifs available in medieval romances, appropriating the cultural capital of those texts.⁷⁷ Richard Tardif notes the knightly-chivalric ideology in the early Robin Hood poems and attributes the latter to 'ideology lag'; that is, the poems express customs and manners 'in the terms of an already-available value-system from the land.'⁷⁸ Though that is indeed evident, there is also evidence of a subversion of that very value system. An early indication of this is the manner in which romantic love is excised from the narratives, though the opportunity to engage in such matters may exist. As mentioned earlier, in “Robin Hood and the Potter”, there is a pseudo romancing of the sheriff's wife. In keeping with the courtly tradition, Robin presents the lady with three gifts: five pots (ll. 142-5), a golden ring (ll. 242-3), and finally a fair

⁷⁶ Mark R. Cohen, *The Voice of the Poor in the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 3.

⁷⁷ See Claire Sponsler, “In Transit: Theorizing Cultural Appropriation in Medieval Europe”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.1 (2002) pp. 17-39, where Sponsler examines and explicates cultural appropriation and the manner in which values are ascribed to objects, ideas, people.

⁷⁸ Richard Tardif, "The 'Mystery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts," *Worlds and Words: Studies in the Social Role of Verbal Culture*, 1983, p. 5.

palfrey (ll.286-8). He also proclaims that her 'bedying schall be doyn' (l. 155), in the manner of a courtly lover. Furthermore, as they leave the market, they send a maid home with the pots and follow her in (ll. 156-7), strolling by themselves in quite an intimate fashion and evidence of why J. C. Holt has seen the ballad as a 'distant distorted echo of courtly love'⁷⁹, particularly given that Robin declares his love for the woman twice (l. 242 and l. 289).

However, the early texts are, according to Singman, 'overwhelmingly masculine in both content and perspective.'⁸⁰ These ballads precede the romantic idealisation of Robin Hood; he is not questing for the hand of Maid Marian, a figure who will not enter the cycle for another century yet. Rather, there is an emphasis on homosociality, on the relationship of men with each other and how this may evolve. The Robin Hood we are presented with in "Robin Hood and the Potter" especially represents what Thomas Ohlgren refers to as an 'emerging class of urban yeomanry' as he has appropriated through his actions the 'chivalric virtues of martial prowess, voluntary daring, quest for unpredictable risk, and loyalty to a revered lady.'⁸¹ The lady here is not the sheriff's wife, with whom his affections had a decidedly ulterior motive, but rather the Virgin Mary, to whom he demonstrates utter devotion. In "Robin Hood and the Monk" is to 'Seynt Mary Chirch' (l. 71) that he longs to go when he is dismayed by his lack of attendance at mass, it is her name he evokes when he makes the decision (l. 25), it is she to whom he prays in order to bring him out safe again (ll. 69-70). In "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne", in his moment of mortal peril, he calls out to his 'deere Lady [...] both mother and may' (ll. 155-6). In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", the writer establishes early that he loved 'Our dere Lady / [...] allther most' (ll. 35-6); he would not attack companies that were travelling with women for the love of, and fear of, her (ll. 38-40); he would accept her as a security for a loan, as if he were to 'seche all Englonde thorowe / Yet fonde I never to my pay / A moche better borrowe' (ll. 262-4). He dreads disappointing her, and feels punished by her. When the loan is not paid in time, he twice repeats his fear that 'I drede Our Lady be wroth with me' (l. 824 and l. 939). In "Robin Hood and the Potter", he places his trust in 'Howr Ladey' (l. 110) to protect him in his venture.

Ohlgren suggests that the knightly adventure has been 'transformed into merchant adventure'; that Robin Hood begins to fulfill the need for a mercantile hero to 'replace the knightly hero of aristocratic romance.'⁸² Certainly, the ballads contain a large fiscal component. The manifestation of this is evident in "Robin Hood and the Monk" from the wager made with Little John.

⁷⁹ Holt, *Robin Hood*, 1989, p. 126.

⁸⁰ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 38.

⁸¹ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p.26.

⁸² Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 26.

"I wil not shete a peny," seyde Robyn Hode,
"In feith, Litull John, with the,
But ever for on as thou shetis," seide Robyn,
"In feith I holde the thre." (ll. 43-6)

This wager and Robin's self-confident, swaggering offer to match each of Little John's pennies with three of his own indicates a financially comfortable position. His refusal to pay his losses is not indicative of any financial lack on his part as the passage carries a degree of boastfulness by Robin, followed by an accusation of cheating (l. 55). The entirely over-the-top response of striking his man-at-arms over a loss in a friendly game of shooting carries the implication that his refusal is motivated by wounded pride, not financial lack.

In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", Robin's assistance of the knight, the cost of the security of a wealthy estate, is handed over to the knight without much consideration, implying that money is somewhat superfluous in their stash. Little John, allaying the concerns of Much, represents it as alms to the poor:

"Is thys well tolde?" sayde litell Much;
Johnn sayse, "What greveth the?
It is almus to helpe a gentyll knight,
That is fal in poverte. (ll. 273-6)

This is in line with Proverbs 19:17: 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and his good deed will he pay him again.' Robin Hood, however, demonstrates some financial savvy and negotiates the transaction as very much a loan, with a set timeframe for repayment and with someone standing as security. His willingness to part with the money for a year indicates that it will cause the band no deficit, a fact further implied by other items in their stash. They gift the knight a number of expensive items, beginning with cloth for clothing, Little John making it clear that their stores are significant:

"For ye have scarlet and grene, mayster,
And many a riche aray;
Ther is no marchaunt in mery Englund
So ryche, I dare well say." (ll. 281-4)

Further to this, the men make gifts of 'a gray coursar' (l. 301), a 'saydle newe' (l. 302), a 'gode palfray' (l. 305), a 'peyre of botes' (l. 307), and 'peyre of gilt sporis clene' (l. 310). When the knight returns to repay the loan, Robin refuses to accept the sum as 'yf I toke it i-twysse, /A shame it were to me' (ll. 1085-6), and in fact gives the knight four hundred pounds of the money that he acquired from the monk as 'The monke over-tolde me' (l. 1104).

This is not to say that the poem attempts to mitigate the worth the money, or that money is used frivolously, though. As mentioned earlier, the poem repeats the sum of four hundred pounds no less than a dozen times, drawing to attention the significant sum as it is counted out, a tactile, physical entity with definite value. Money is the difference between the knight's appearance as a sorry figure at the beginning of poem and the courteous knight with a good palfrey (ll. 1049-53) that he became when he was financially solvent again. Robin also bids the knight to use the money that he gives him to purchase 'hors and harnes good, / And gylte thy spores all newe' (ll. 1107-8), indicating his knowledge of the importance of money in order to maintain appearances.

"Robin Hood and the Potter" is possibly the most fiscally involved of the four early texts. There are complex schemes intended to secure particular dividends. When Robin first enters the town to sell his wares, he appears to be as a bad businessman, as pots 'that were worthe pens feyffe, / He solde tham for pens thre' (ll. 137-8), and gave away the remaining five (ll. 142-5). However, this was an investment, one that pays off when Robin robs the sheriff of his horse and possessions. The investment is recognised by his wife, who laughs and states 'Now haffe yow payed for all the pottys / That Roben gaffe to me' (ll. 306-7). Robin is perhaps closest to Ohlgren's mercantile hero in this ballad. However, financial gain is not the primary motive here. For the two nobles worth of pots that he took (l. 314), Robin pays the potter ten pounds (l. 318). Though he is able to keep all of the sheriff's possessions, he sends a palfrey back to his wife. His intention is not to make financial profit, but rather to humiliate the sheriff. This is in contrast to the King and Subject ballad genre, where a similar story can be found. "King Edward the Fourth and a Tanner of Tamworth", begins with strikingly similar lines to "Robin Hood and the Potter": 'In summer time, when leaves grew green, / and birds were singing on every tree',⁸³ as compared with 'In schomer, when the leves spryng, / The bloschoms on every bowe,' (ll. 1-2). "King Edward the Fourth and a Tanner of Tamworth" dates from around 1564,⁸⁴ and is assumed to be based on the older "The King and the Barker", which survives in Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.4.35, and in which a similar story occurs. The narrative of this tale has the King hunting in the forest when he meets a tanner, and the engage in conversation, reluctantly on the tanner's part. The tanner, not recognising the King for who he is, repeatedly insults him. In an episode similar to "Robin Hood and the Potter", the King purchases wares for more than they are worth and then rewards the tanner exponentially for the 'pastime' that he had provided (s. 37) by giving him lands. However, the King here, unlike Robin Hood in that ballad, is in

⁸³ Anonymous, "King Edward the Fourth and a Tanner of Tamworth" in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Francis James Child, Mineola: Dover, 2003, p. 75, s. 1. All subsequent references to this text will be from this edition unless otherwise stated.

⁸⁴ Linda Hutjens, "The Disguised King in Early English Ballads" in *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, p. 80.

disguise when he engages in a business affair with the person who will ultimately be rewarded. When Robin dons the disguise, his intent is not to engage with his subjects in order to test their loyalty, nor does he endure the King and Subject genre's tropes of rudeness, hardship and violence.⁸⁵ The Sheriff treats Robin well and it is Robin who subjects his host to those factors.

The King and Subject trope re-emerges in "A Gest of Robyn Hode", where the King dons the disguise of a monk in order to lure Robin Hood out of hiding in the woods (ll. 1481-96). His plan is successful as, while travelling through the forest with his knights similarly disguised, they are held up by Robin Hood and his demands for 'some of your spendynge, / For saynt charyté' (ll. 1511-12). However, apart from the indignity of being robbed, the King suffers no ill from Robin Hood, who is courteous (l. 1529), hospitable (ll.1545-6), generous (ll. 1572-2) and, without knowledge about to whom he spoke, openly loyal to his King: "I love no man in all the worlde / So well as I do my kynge; Welcome is my lordes seale' (ll. 1541-3). Again, as before, the tropes of the genre are at odds in this narrative as Robin Hood and the Merry Men cannot be rude, hard, nor violent to the King, as the ideological framework that is being reviewed is not one without a monarch. The love of the King in this poem, and the lack of the tropes that one would expect from a fytte obviously tied into the King and Subject genre, serves to highlight the the desire for not a complete dissolution of the social structures that exist but rather an overhaul of the aspects that are deeply flawed. Robin Hood expresses love for his King and that love is, in this idealised world, a reciprocal one where good men are allowed social progression.

Robin is neither the aristocratic hero nor the mercantile hero. The texts are very keen to point out that Robin Hood and his men are yeomen, a self-awareness that tends towards a Marxist reading. Though social historians tend to attribute the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 to the crippling poll taxes,⁸⁶ the self-awareness of the outlaws as to their position in life, and their flagrant dismissal of the rules to which they ought to be bound, demonstrate an understanding of their ability to control the means of production and thus overthrow oppressive class structures.⁸⁷

The texts have fellowship in common. "Robin Hood and the Monk", "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne", "Robin Hood and the Potter", and "A Gest of Robyn Hode" all have discrete storylines and

⁸⁵ Hutjens, "The Disguised King in Early English Ballads" in *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, 2009, p. 84.

⁸⁶ See R.B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, London: Macmillan, 1986, p.117 and P.J.P Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 178.

⁸⁷ Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p.164 and Mark O'Brien, *When Adam Delved and Eve Span: A History of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, New York: New Clarion Press, 2004, p. 81.

indeed Robin Hood as a character is quite different in each of these; petulant and arrogant in the first, a trickster and a hero in the second, smart and charming in the third, and courteous and shrewd in the fourth. While certainly the texts contain a large fiscal proponent, which Ohlgren notes was carried through to some degree to the plays, which were performed in order to raise money for the church,⁸⁸ it is not money that is the crux of the matter but rather the nature of commodity and the means of production that the was peasant class.

In "A Gest of Robyn Hode", Robin tells his men that peasant folk were not to be harassed:

"Loke you no hudsonde harme,
That tylleth with his ploughe.

"No more ye shall no gode yeman
That walketh by grene wode shawe,
Ne no knyght ne no squyer
That wol be a gode felawe." (ll. 51-6)

Read through a Marxist hermeneutical lens, this passage performs a number of functions. It highlights that the 'husbondes' are the means of production as they till the land. They are the abused already, they are the ones fed on by capital, which 'vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.'⁸⁹ As such, they are to be harmed no further.

By making reference to the 'yeman' and the 'knyght', the poem is also aware of class distinctions. In light of this, the struggles that the texts contain, whether they 'proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes'.⁹⁰ These collisions are conditioned by the development of economic positions,⁹¹ a particular concern of this poem with regard to the monies that are owed between all classes. The knight, of the second estate, owed money to both the first and third estates, borrowing funds as he did from both the abbot and Robin Hood. Robin Hood claims money from the first estate and gives it as a gift to the knight. The King, who makes Robin his man, is in debt to Robin.

Robyn," sayd our kyng,
"Now pray I the,
Sell me some of that cloth,
To me and my meyné."

"Yes, for God," then sayd Robyn,

⁸⁸ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 27.

⁸⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy - The Process of Capitalist Production*, ed. Friedrich Engels, New York: Cosimo, 2007, p. 257.

⁹⁰ Friedrich Engels in "Preface", *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx, Rockville: Wildside Press, 2008, p. 13.

⁹¹ Engels in "Preface", *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 2008, p. 13

"Or elles I were a fole:
Another day ye wyll me clothe,
I trowe, ayenst the Yole." (ll. 1673-80)

Unlike with Sir Richard, where the cloth was given as a gift, this passage makes it clear that Robin is selling the cloth to the King, though without immediate payment. That Robin collects on his debts is clear from the actions of this poem. The King, thus, is beholden to him. Robin, the outlaw yeoman, exerts financial superiority over the other classes, displaying the undertones of classist conflicts in the text. The opening passage also draws together the threads of the existing ballads with regard to fellowship, as noted above. It calls for unison among the ranks and, indeed, the potential to seek out 'felawes' from other classes. This is especially important when considered alongside the gifts that Sir Richard presents to Robin when he repays his debt.

He purveyed him an hundred bowes,
The strynges well ydyght,
An hundred shefe of arowes gode,
The hedys burneshed full bryght;

And every arowe an elle longe,
With pecok wel idyght,
Inocked all with whyte silver;
It was a semely syght. (ll. 521-8)

The knight presents to Robin Hood a hundred bows and a hundred sheaves of arrows, a significant arsenal to arm a company of men. The choice of weapon is worth noting, too, as archers were a formidable military tool and, according to historians, a pivotal part of victories won in medieval battles.⁹² The length of the arrows being an ell, around 45 inches,⁹³ attributes to these archers a significant degree of skill as well as making them remarkably lethal: arrows of that length could pierce armour.⁹⁴ The knight himself was a piece of military machinery. He would have had expensive armour, an expensive horse, weaponry, ammunition, and his own men who would have been similarly well fitted for battle. Despite his humble and broken appearance at the beginning of the poem, he was a figure of death and violence and the gift he gives Robin, though marked with tremendous beauty, is at heart a tacit approval of and encouragement towards a continued violence. The beauty of the arrows themselves lends an allure to the violent act, certainly codifying the violence with a degree of positivity. The gift, a knightly gift of violence, implies tacit allegiance to the yeomen and their cause and indeed the imperative to fight for one's fellow. It is a fellowship akin

⁹² Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1985, pp. 91-115.

⁹³ Herbert Arthur Klein, *The Science of Measurement: A Historical Survey*, New York: Dover, 1988, p. 57.

⁹⁴ Christopher Gravett, *English Medieval Knight 1400-1500*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001, pp. 30-2.

to that which is later found between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the two great classes of capitalist society.⁹⁵

Thus, the hegemony that was consolidated through the use of force, with the instruction of violence as noted in the first chapter, or the 'Repressive State Apparatuses'⁹⁶ is seen to be wavering as violence increasingly becomes the domain of knight and yeoman alike. The consolidation of the hegemony through ideology and socialisation is on similarly loose footing. Self-policing, in line with the Foucauldian ideas of a surveillance society as established by the first estate, and discussed in the second chapter, is also failing. These 'Ideological State Apparatuses'⁹⁷ are failing as people are no longer willing to believe the ruling class. The proletariat no longer believes that this is the best of all possible worlds.

In summary, the homosociality in the texts, the fellowship, the spirit of camaraderie, is not necessarily a simple and amicable force, but 'a relationship in which loyalty and competition are inextricably linked.'⁹⁸ The texts engage with this by representing certain chivalric ideals and their adoption into the behaviours and practices of the yeomen in the texts. The Greenwood also provides a source of communality, through which the yeomen can express a 'highly developed sense of personal self-worth'⁹⁹ as people able to control the means of production. They are, thus, the ideal free commoner.

⁹⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950, pp. 46-7.

⁹⁶ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London: New Left Books, 1971, p. 136.

⁹⁷ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", 1971, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

⁹⁹ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

Conclusion

A tale so often told must be profoundly significant to the society that retells it. It would not be revisited so frequently if it did not answer some deep need, nor can it be so many times repeated without having substantial cultural impact.¹

Roland Barthes, in his influential text entitled *Mythologies*, wrote that myths are stories that society tells about itself, that they are produced by historical and social forces and that they convey particular ideologies.² In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss asserts that myths presented users (particularly those users ‘without writing’³) with coherent systems of connection between things in order to understand the world around them.⁴ Claire Sponsler suggests that these systems of connection work so efficiently in part because their various elements are easily identifiable and can be manipulated ‘in a variety of improvised combinations to create new meanings.’⁵

Many critics in the field of Robin Hood scholarship have discussed the idea of Robin Hood as an anti-authority figure. His function as such has evolved slowly, as he went from the yeoman of the early texts to distressed and dispossessed nobility. However, even in the medieval era, we can see the machinery of appropriation, as Robin Hood became iconic, as the myth became stylised, for ‘style is pregnant with significance.’⁶ As discussed in the introductory chapter, Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Original Chronicle of Scotland* establishes Robin Hood as a historical figure, Walter Bower’s *Scotichronicon* in 1445 lists Hood as a follower of Baron Simon de Montfort while deriding the hero’s popularity as he notes that ‘the foolish people are inordinately fond of celebrating [him] in tragedies and comedies.’⁷ And he was popular. From the throw away references in literature of the time, as noted in the introduction, it can be deduced that the myth was popular.

Though we lack access to the early rymes, the ballads that are available to us represent a figure who embodies the heroic archetype. Despite his less than noble characterisation in “Robin Hood and the Monk”, despite his quick temper and pride in “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne”, despite his shortcomings in “A Gest of Robyn Hode”, and despite having to be taught a lesson on fellowship in

¹ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 1.

² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers, London, 1972.

³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and meaning*, London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 15.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 17.

⁵ Claire Sponsler, “In Transit: Theorizing Cultural Appropriation in Medieval Europe”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studie*, 2002, p. 22.

⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen, 1979, p. 18.

⁷ Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 1997, p. 26.

“Robin Hood and the Potter”, Robin Hood and his men represent heroes who are ‘leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain’.⁸

These texts are literature as social and cultural artefacts.⁹ They hold up a mirror to society in order to antagonise, subvert and ultimately attempt to change the status quo. With regard to violence, for instance, Philippa Maddern notes that violence is not a virus, that its presence does not necessarily imply social or political disorder. Rather, violence can be ‘purposive and culturally determined actions’,¹⁰ and certainly there is evidence that violence was used and advocated for use by the second estate to maintain a ‘certain way of life’.¹¹ By subverting the use of violence, by taking it away from the sole prerogative of the second estate for their own use, the texts destabilise the social order and use violence for revisionist purposes. As Rosenthal notes, violence is not inchoate or irrational in medieval society, that it can be regulated by social pressure.¹² These texts form part of that social pressure to remain united and to reform, despite the failure of the Revolt.

The texts are a discourse upon the lack of freedom of the free man. The yeoman outlaw is denied access to various facets of the state by the fact that he is an outlaw and therefore literally outside the law. However, the freedom that they have within their collective is a stark contrast to the restriction that is placed upon the peasant class. Robin Hood, for instance, offers up his leadership of the band to Little John:

I make the maister," seid Robyn,
"Of alle my men and me."

"Nay, be my trouth," seid Litull John,
"So shalle hit never be;
But lat me be a felow," seid Litull John,
"No noder kepe I be." (ll. 313-8)

This offer, and indeed the refusal, demonstrates a freedom in the outlaw group to engage with their own systems of governance and polity, and as a result their freedom in contrast to the supposed free man. Indeed, in Hegelian terms, a person is not truly free unless he is able to participate in the different aspects of the life of the state, such as property rights and relations, contracts, moral commitments, family life, the economy, the legal system and polity.¹³

⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1842), ed. Henry Duff Traill, vol 5, London: Chapman and Hall, 1897, p. 1.

⁹ Victor Turner, *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, 1990, p. ix.

¹⁰ Philippa Maddern, *Violence and Social Order*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, p. 12.

¹¹ Maddern, *Violence and Social Order*, 1992, p. 12.

¹² Joel T. Rosenthal as quoted in Maddern, *Violence and Social Order*, 1992, p. 12.

¹³ Georg H. W. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1821), trans. S. W. Dyde, New York: Cossimo, 2008.

In the fight between the Potter and Robin Hood, these themes are evident. Freedom and fellowship are commodities at stake, not the feudal toll that the men joke about. As Singman notes, by demanding this feudal toll 'Robin is symbolically questioning the Potter's status as a free man, a challenge to which the Potter can only respond by proving himself in combat.'¹⁴ There is an imperative to assert one's freedom and status through violence.

Robin Hood offers 'fellowship' in the texts. This expression is often repeated, particularly in "Robin Hood and the Potter", where 'fellow' or 'fellowship' are said 7 times in the space of 120 lines. In "Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne", the word 'fellow' occurs 9 times, 7 of these instances between Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne themselves, 3 of these instances before Robin is made aware that Guy is hunting him (lines 91, 92, 98). The audience is aware of the identity of the stranger in the Greenwood through the narrator's exposition ('let us [...] talke of Guy and Robin Hood' ll. 83-6) and also through the use of the phrase 'wight yeoman' to describe him (l. 33), the same phrase used to describe the dream nemeses who had bound and beaten Robin (l. 7). Indeed, the phrase is only used in reference to Guy of Gisborne in this ballad, once by Little John (l. 33) and once by the Sheriff, who mistakes Robin Hood for Guy (l.193). However, Robin is unaware of Guy's identity when he encounters him and his greeting of 'Good morrow, good fellow' (l. 92) and his offer to be Guy's guide through the forest, again using the phrase 'good felow' (l. 98), are offers of friendship, of fellowship. When their identities are known to each other, when fellowship is no longer an option as Guy is linked intrinsically to the Sheriff and his men who threaten the very notion by killing two 'fellowes' (l 49) in the Greenwood, the word is no longer used in the ballad. Fellowship is a binding force in this ballad. Despite parting company angrily (ll. 43-4), Robin Hood and Little John come together when there is grave danger and together, as fellows, they are able to withstand and claim victory over the combined forces of the Sheriff and his 'seven score men' (l. 53).

The expressions occur less frequently in "Robin Hood and the Potter" and "A Gest of Robyn Hode", three times in each, but as Singman notes, in the fifteenth century, 'yeoman' was synonymous with 'companion'.¹⁵ Companionship, camaraderie and fellowship are perhaps 'integral to the yeoman world of the outlaw',¹⁶ but the fellowship that is promoted in these texts is more ideologically potent than simple camaraderie. In "Robin Hood and the Monk", one of the utterances of fellowship are by the monk, the notably villainous character of the piece. He states that Robin Hood 'robbyt me and my felowes bothe' (l. 169). There is a sense that Little John's statement that 'Robyn Hode hase many a wilde felow' (l. 179) is an attempt to reclaim that word. He is, after all,

¹⁴ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹⁵ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

¹⁶ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, p. 36.

Robin Hood's fellow, as he makes plain when he says 'lat me be a fellow' (l. 317). The monk, for not being a fellow, for not being part of the cause, dies by line 203 as 'John smote of the munkis hed'.

While Ohlgren suggests that the early Robin Hood play-games may have performed a safety valve function, of the type mentioned in the second chapter, as they were created 'by the upperclass to contain or neutralise the unrest of the underclass', he also notes that there was also a 'real and cloaked purpose [to promote] social unification'.¹⁷ The texts also serve this social purpose. The fellowship that is promoted is one of unification. This theme of community and fellowship, the necessity of it, is highlighted by the prominent role of the outlaw band as figures that aide Robin Hood. Where many medieval heroes are distinguished for their independent prowess, 'Robin's personal abilities are more limited'.¹⁸ He is not only offering fellowship, but in return, depends upon it for his own survival, thereby demonstrating an effective social and societal structure.

To conclude, in Walter Benjamin's words, every story 'contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers.'¹⁹ This outlaw band, living on the outskirts of society, offering fellowship, demonstrating fidelity, and keenly aware of their own social and martial power point towards an ideology of revision, of social recalibration and of freedom. After all, this is Robin Hood. And 'he was a good outlawe, / And dyde pore men moch god.'²⁰

¹⁷ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560*, 2007, p. 27.

¹⁸ Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of a Legend*, 1998, 37.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations*, London: Pimlico, 1968, pp. 83- 108, p. 86.

²⁰ "A Gest of Robyn Hode", ll. 1823-4.

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