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Robin Who?
Representations of an Honourable Outlaw in the
Twenty-First-Century

Alexander Mohammed

A Thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research in English Literature

University of Huddersfield

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	Page
Introduction	4
Chapter One: Robin Hood in drag? Robin, Marian and the Question of Gender.	12
Chapter Two: Location, Location, Location	25
Chapter Three: Robin Hood: A Class Act?	36
Conclusion: Robin Who?	51
Bibliography	56

Abstract

Robin Hood is a subject which has received plenty of attention in recent years. However, many of the studies conducted in the field focus on either establishing a historicist basis to the myth or comparing it to similar outlaw tales. There is also a lack of investigation into twenty-first-century Robin Hood texts. To this end, this thesis combats the necessity of a historicist approach to the novel by accepting it as a myth, whilst also examining Robin Hood stories published after the year two-thousand, leaving the study relevant and contemporary. This thesis uses one of the first Robin Hood stories as a control text to examine how much the myth has changed in the twenty-first century, but as well as this, the thesis offers pathways of how these changes came about. There are three themes examined which are gender, location and social class, and these demonstrate the depth of change to the character and the malleability of the myth as a promotion of the author's ideals. Whilst the many authors of Robin Hood texts attempt to individualise their own interpretation of the character, without exception, they are unable to escape the truth of their lineage. Despite this, each new Robin Hood text adds new elements to the character, and this evolution is the reason that Robin Hood has remained in the public sphere for hundreds of years.

Introduction

Catching Smoke: The Robin Hood Tradition

Robin barely got her sword up in time. Pain lanced through her arm as she blocked the forceful blow, her whole body trembling as she strained to hold of the heavier man. She thanked all the days she had spent in cudgelling practice, which gave her the strength now to fend off his attack. But how many more such strikes could she block? This was no comrade she sought to fell, and while a rap from a cudgel might mean a bruised rib, a rap from this sword would mean death. As Robin parried Gisbourne's crippling blows, she feared that he would indeed bring about her end before this bout was finished (ArceJaeger 2012: 239)

This opening quotation demonstrates some of the elements present in the Robin Hood myth as the public perceive it: a battle of good versus evil, an entertaining fight scene, and of course the titular character. But there is also a very noticeable difference – Robin is described as “she”. Everyone familiar with the myth is aware that Robin Hood is a *male* outlaw, yet this text reimagines the character as a female. It is this and other reinterpretations of the representation of the character, which this thesis examines.

Robin Hood has, in recent years, received plenty of interest from literary scholars, including James Holt, John Bellamy and Stephen Knight. However, in this thesis, I investigate parts of the Robin Hood tradition which have not been given as much attention as other areas of Robin Hood studies. I place the character and his new manifestations and stories primarily in the twenty-first-century. I begin this introduction with summarising some of the research already conducted in this scholarly field.

The most established literary scholar of the Robin Hood field is Stephen Knight. Knight has had several books published on the subject, containing but not limited to *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* and *Robin Hood: a Mythic Biography*, both of which are illuminating reads for anyone intrigued by the character of Robin Hood. In these texts, Knight not only examines the early Robin Hood ballads, but also investigates whether the character may not have simply been a fictitious creation, but based on a “real” Robin Hood, who in turn inspired the stories of the character's exploits. Knight even goes so far as to say that ‘the first question for any journalist and many members of the public is “Did Robin Hood really exist?”’ (Knight 2003: xii), and certainly upon reading several other scholars' research, the possibility of a real Robin Hood appears much more likely, even to a sceptic such as I. However, Knight, unlike several other Robin Hood scholars, notably accepts that attempting to locate the real Robin Hood is impossible, or as I would put it, trying to catch smoke, and therefore does not fall into the trap of finding a Robin Hood who may not be there to be discovered.

Furthermore, he provides reasons as to why the character has remained popular, such as the character's evolution from a "moral outlaw" as he is portrayed in the earliest Robin Hood manifestations of the early ballads, into more recent depictions which see the character as a figure of resistance and combater of unjust authority. There are numerous examples of this in popular culture, including the 1973 Disney working of the tale, entitled *Robin Hood*, in which Robin and his men are re-imagined as animals in Sherwood Forest, and resist the authority of the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and of Prince John through stealing from the rich and giving to the poor – an ethos which only emerged in Robin Hood tales in the last century or so. Much closer to the present is the 2010 film, also titled *Robin Hood*, and directed by Ridley Scott, featuring Russell Crowe as the infamous outlaw. This representation views Robin as Robin of Locksley and sees him rebel against the unjust taxation of the people who live on his lands. Additionally he helps stop a civil war, and helps rebel a Norman invasion, making the character into somewhat of a national hero – another characteristic which the outlaw has developed in the past century or so. Further twenty-first-century Robin Hood texts will also be examined relating to the aforementioned topics, including the television series, *Arrow* (2012-) and other characters that bear remarkable similarities to the outlaw, such as Katniss, the protagonist of the popular film (and book series), *The Hunger Games* (2012).

There are several other prominent Robin Hood scholars as well as Knight who deserve recognition for their work, and the influence they have had on my own subsequent work in the field. James Holt examines the backgrounds of several real life people with names similar to Robin Hood who could have been the inspiration for the character, and further examines the influence of other, real outlaws such as Fulk FitzWarin and other fictitious tales such as that of *The Tale of Gamelyn*. Though Holt in his *Robin Hood* does focus on trying to unmask a real life Robin Hood, he admits that 'the identity of the man matters less than the persistence of the legend' (Holt 1989: 7) and my own Robin Hood studies intend to do the same; they will provide some context but concern themselves more with the *presentation* of Robin Hood in twenty-first-century texts.

John Bellamy is another of the most well renowned Robin Hood scholars. In his *Robin Hood: an historical enquiry*, Bellamy seeks to place the character in the time when he first appeared in writing and examines the need for such a character at that time, which he identifies as around the 1320s. He also makes some comments regarding which social class Robin Hood would belong to, which pose significant questions to long-considered facts about the character's low-born position. He is also one of the scholars inclined to believe that Robin had a real life base, stating that 'increasingly few have been inclined to write him [Robin] as a myth' (Bellamy 1985: i). Anthony James Pollard is the final Robin Hood scholar I shall make mention of. His work, *Imagining Robin Hood* is similar to that

conducted by the aforementioned scholars, however he does investigate some other avenues, including analysing when Robin Hood changed from simple outlaw to when 'in the early nineteenth century, Robin became an Anglo-Saxon freedom fighter' (Pollard 2004: 15) an action which changed the character immeasurably by leading to increasingly widespread portrayals in text and in film. One of the most evident of these is Ridley Scott's film, in which the character not only helps his fellow man, but leads an attack against the invading French. This element further added to the allure of the character as a nationalistic symbol. This is a point which is further examined in my second chapter: Relocation, Relocation, Relocation.

My aim in this thesis is to bring Robin Hood firmly into the twenty-first-century, as much of the aforementioned critics' research has yet to be applied to Robin Hood texts produced since the year 2000. To this end, I have carried out the vast majority of my research from texts concerning Robin Hood which have been published in the twenty first century. I have incorporated both literary sources and film sources so as to give a more rounded view on the myth as it stands in the twenty-first-century both in a reading and a film culture. Brian Baker states that, 'the rise of cinema, the interaction of writers with film [and] the screen adaptation of literary texts, brings this connection [between film and literature] to the fore' (Baker 2013: 1). As both literary texts and visual texts have a co-dependent relationship, I believe that a twenty-first-century examination of the Robin Hood myth should incorporate both types of texts, especially when we consider there are Robin Hood texts from both film and literature since the new millennium. From examining several Robin Hood texts which have appeared in recent years, I was able to decide on several research questions which would help me investigate how Robin Hood has evolved over the years, and would also enable me to provide a completely modern viewpoint of the character. I decided to approach the myth through three different channels of inquiry: gender, location and social class.

Before I reveal the texts I chose to examine in this thesis, and what one can expect to find in the following chapters, there is a need to examine how the presentation of these three elements of the Robin Hood character were shown when the character first entered into literature. Without a source for comparison, how much the character has now changed in the twenty-first-century would be impossible to judge, so I must first mention the early Robin Hood text which I use to help examine the recent portrayals of the character.

So, what is required is one of the earliest of the Robin Hood ballads to draw on as a source of information for how the character was presented when he first appeared in text. It is worth remembering that before Robin Hood was put onto paper, he would likely have featured in the stories told by bards and the other storytellers who walked the lands. According to Stephen Knight,

'seven of the ballads survive from before 1600' (Knight 1994: 7) so it is reasonable to believe that these would have been orally recited in the 15th and 16th centuries. Certainly Pollard is of this opinion, stating that 'one can be reasonably certain that Robin Hood stories were recited in halls, in taverns, in marketplaces and almost anywhere people gathered on special occasions' (Pollard 2004: 9). If this is indeed the case, then the character may have already changed somewhat from its earliest oral portrayals to having the myth fixed on paper. However, as it is impossible to know if there was a change in the character between these different methods of telling the tale, we as readers have to accept that the earliest ballads are the best original source material we have access to. The only issue I had to confront was which of the early Robin Hood ballads I would choose to help to examine the modern interpretations of the tale. After some deliberation I decided on a ballad entitled *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, or as it is sometimes referred to as, *A Lyttell Geste of Robyn Hode* as the choice for my original Robin Hood source material. This ballad has been argued to be the quintessential Robin Hood ballad, for reasons I have outlined below. For the rest of this essay I will refer to the text as *A Gest* so as to save time. *A Gest* is a worthwhile choice for several reasons, other than the fact that it is one of the earliest ballads.

A Gest, according to many Robin Hood scholars, should not be thought of as a simple singular Robin Hood tale, but as containing elements from multiple Robin Hood stories. Pollard, Bellamy, Knight and many others believe that *A Gest* is the epitome of several of the earliest tales and that later tales simply build on the groundwork left standing by *A Gest*. *A Gest* was originally printed around the year 1500, although the other Robin Hood tales that it draws from clearly came out some time before this date. Bellamy believes it may have been in circulation even earlier, stating that 'even those which may date from the fifteenth century, may well be nothing more than the development of particular themes which figure in *A Gest*, mere spin-offs' (Bellamy 1985: i). If we are to consider this as the case, then *A Gest* becomes the quintessential Robin Hood ballad. *A Gest* has many of the elements which a Robin Hood story is now widely regarded to contain. It has a number of the Merry Men, including Little John, Much the Miller's son and Will Scarlet. Robin robs people on the road; however he also helps those who he feels need his help, and as such can be considered a good man - as he is often portrayed in Robin Hood tales since. Other elements familiar to Robin Hood readers which are present in *A Gest* include an archery contest and hatred for the unjust Sheriff of Nottingham; Robin Hood winds up in service to the King for some time as an advisor, and ultimately is killed by a prioress. All of these elements have at some point or other appeared in the more recent Robin Hood tales, with some sticking to this interpretation of the story rigidly, while many others may only make use of one or two of the tale's elements present in *A Gest*. From this, I had a substantial basis from which to examine my modern day Robin Hood texts, for which *A Gest* will be

somewhat of a control text; one I can return to and draw comparisons to. This will help show just how much Robin Hood has changed in the numerous centuries he has been present in our books and thoughts. Now that a basic understanding of why *A Gest* is present in this thesis has been established, I will describe what one can expect in the upcoming chapters.

The first chapter, entitled “Robin Hood in drag?” investigates the subject of gender. In particular, it asks why and how Robin Hood’s gender became indeterminable in recent years. To investigate this question there are several elements of the modern takes on the myth which need to be examined. Of course, the first thing has to be to demonstrate that the character’s gender really has become more ambiguous. To do so I have numerous texts to look at which have their Robin Hood character as a female. I examine the role Maid Marian has played in the myth and the evolution of the character as a root to the new female Robin Hood interpretations. I pay particular attention to R.M. ArceJaeger’s *Robin: Lady of Legend* and Nancy Springer’s *Rowan Hood: Outlaw girl of Sherwood Forest*, aimed at a young audience, and examine how they differ from the Maid Marin centred texts. I also examine other gender changes of well-known characters which have occurred in the twenty-first-century, and examine some of the reasons for these reinterpretations. Furthermore, I investigate the integration of traditionally masculine and feminine traits in certain characters of the Robin Hood myth, and the idea of gender performance through the device of cross dressing. Finally, I inspect some of the real criminal women of the Middle Ages, and argue that these provide some element of believability to these twenty-first-century interpretations of the Robin Hood myth. In the Middle Ages, lower class women tended to be left to cook, clean and look after the family, or work as servants for the upper classes. In the twenty-first-century, gender roles are much more varied – women are now as often the breadwinners as men. One critic suggests that in the twenty-first-century ‘with more young women represented in higher education, labour market analysts project that women will outnumber men in the labour force, at least for the foreseeable future.’ (Park 2011) and this demonstrates the complete change of role for women since the Medieval Period.

My second chapter revolves around the subject of the location of the myth and enquires why location varies in modern tales. Robin Hood has become something of a national hero, a character which apparently demonstrates the best characteristics the English possess, and some of these texts question his accepted routes in Nottingham and Sherwood, with some even imagining the character in a different country. This idea is not only intriguing but challenges “English” characteristics by removing the character from the country and lending his characteristics to a different one. The early Robin Hood ballad which I am using as something of a control text, *A Gest*, demonstrates many of the elements of the Robin Hood myth now integral to the portrayals of the character. I examine

whether Sherwood and Nottingham have always been synonymous with the outlaw, but also investigate Barnsdale, another of the possible locations where the Robin Hood myth is based. I challenge the idea that these locations are the best to place Robin Hood, and use the diminished forests and woods of the areas to argue that there is a lack of believability in placing the myth in either Sherwood or Barnsdale. I investigate Stephen Lawhead's *Hood* (2006), which moves the legend to Wales, and examine his reasons for this relocation. Furthermore, I examine some twenty-first-century portrayals of the character which move him from the forest to an urban space, and the connotations of doing so. I also examine a French Robin Hood character, *Thierry La Fronde*, as well as the connection between Robin Hood and national identity, and what effect the portrayals which shift the Robin Hood myth to a different country have on the character, as well as our idea of the character as a national symbol. Finally, I question whether such interpretations can still be considered as the same character.

My final chapter deals with the social class of the character and questions how Robin Hood can be perceived as a member of all different social classes by different authors. There is also an in-depth analysis of whether the character could have been more than a simple outlaw even in the earliest Robin Hood texts. Firstly, I examine *A Gest* to determine whether Robin Hood could have been more than the simple yeoman that is presented to us through examining the actions and mannerisms of the character and deciding whether they are consistent with what we would expect with someone from that social class at the time *A Gest* was published. It is clear from my examination that there is some ambiguity of class surrounding the definition of yeoman and where this class is generally perceived to be, and this is perhaps why so many envision the character from different classes. There are many modern texts (and some not so modern) which see the character as something more than his - often simplified - yeoman routes suggest. I also examine the idea that Robin Hood characters adopt characteristics from different social classes, and possible real-life inspirations. The aforementioned 2010 film *Robin Hood* directed by Ridley Scott and the titular character played by Russell Crowe is one such interpretation, and we actually see the character's class change as the film progresses, making it somewhat unique. I also examine the role which taxes have played in the Robin Hood myth, and their continued presence in twenty-first-century representations, like Scott's *Robin Hood*.

However, there are also instances in modern interpretations in which the character simply assumes the role of higher nobility to gain access to something he requires, such as through the use of acquiring clothing worn by the nobility. Does this idea suggest that the character's class is indeed fluid? I argue that this is because of the lack of clear definition when defining the yeoman social

class. I argue that class can be perceived as a performance in some Robin Hood texts, as gender roles are performed in some Robin Hood texts. Finally, there are other versions of the character which have appeared on our television sets, though not bearing the name of Robin Hood so as to differentiate themselves from the myth. These characters are clearly based on the infamous outlaw, but provide him with modern technology so he can be a hero more suited for the twenty-first-century. One of these can be found in the TV series *Arrow* featuring the adventures of the previously mentioned DC comic's Green Arrow, and the other is the aforementioned Hawkeye, Marvel's take on Robin Hood, who has been seen in the recent Marvel Cinematic Universe *Avenger's Assemble* and *Avenger's: Age of Ultron*, both of which have been immensely successful. I also examine why the portrayals of these characters have been so well received and draw parallels between the two and Robin Hood.

Additionally, the idea that a criminal can be admired despite the illegality of their actions is a subject which is inspected, both in my location chapter regarding national identity, and my following chapter, investigating social class. Spraggs takes the viewpoint that the activities of figures such as those who inspired the idea of Robin Hood were actually well thought of by the public of the middle ages; noble and peasant alike. Spraggs states that 'for centuries, England had been a notorious place for robberies...and for much of that time the English had taken a strange sort of pride in boasting about their robbers' (Spraggs 2001: 2). It seems ridiculous that real people were celebrating or even emulating the acts of real life outlaws: not only did they not care that their lives had been put at risk, but they admired the very figures that put them in danger. One explanation for this peculiar behaviour is that 'a man who commits robbery must be brave as well as desperate, and bravery of that kind is a distinguishing characteristic of the English' (Spraggs 2001: 3). At the time, and to some extent still in the present day, the English view themselves as moralistic people. In *The Telegraph* there was an examination of core British values and one of these was a sense of 'fair play' (Telegraph View 2014) and this is not only in sport but in life in general; helping your fellow man, and stepping in if one sees injustice occurring. This is similar to the situations faced by some of these outlaws who were unjustly placed into circumstances beyond their control, such as impossible taxation. By conducting highway robberies they demonstrate their bravery, but with a character such as Robin Hood, they demonstrate the courage deemed inherent in the English. Often these highwaymen would be upper class, and conducted their business with the airs of their rank. These concepts will be further analysed in this thesis.

In essence then, at the end of this thesis the character and the myth of Robin Hood is understood in its new twenty-first century context, and light has been shed surrounding how the myth has been

reinterpreted in its modern representations. Furthermore, I have provided the reasons for the changes inherent to these modern versions of the myth, and explained why the myth remains ever popular, despite the fact that it has been around as long as eight hundred years. This fact itself reveals the longevity and ongoing popularity of the myth, which mean that new interpretations will continue to be written, and why over the last century so many have found their way onto the silver screen and into our book shops.

Robin Hood in drag? Robin, Marian and the Question of Gender

‘Since cross-dressing, provocative homosocial behaviour among (sometimes feminised) male characters, and compelling female characters whose behaviour and appearance often “perform” masculinity are endemic to the corpus, the films about the Robin Hood legend are especially fruitful for examining constructions of gender and sexuality’ (Ramey 2007: 199)

This quotation is specifically aimed at the *films* which have appeared making use of the Robin Hood legend, but it can equally apply to Robin Hood novels which have appeared in recent years. These most recent texts not only question the idea of specific gender roles and gender performance, but actually change the sex of some of the characters synonymous with the myth of Robin Hood. Not only has this occurred in several fictitious texts which have come into production since the new millennium, but we have also seen a film in which the Robin Hood character is female, namely *Princess of Thieves* (2001) directed by Peter Hewitt and featuring Keira Knightley as the daughter of Robin Hood, who inherits many of the characteristics that the standard Robin Hood figure possesses. Now audiences and readers have started to see Robin Hood tales which not only have Maid Marian as one of the most important characters and Robin Hood’s love interest, but there are some authors choosing to focus their tales around her instead of the outlaw, or even as the outlaw.

This new formatting of the tale tends to transfer some of the characteristics which Robin Hood has to the newly reimagined Marian. This has been pointed out by numerous critics, including Cohoon, who suggests that ‘Maid Marian figures blur gender boundaries and demonstrate women’s significant participation in the symbolic economies, social structures, and sexualities of the court, town and forest’ (Cphoon 2007: 209). This is no clearer than in two of the texts I will primarily be examining in this chapter. These are R.M. ArceJaeger’s *Robin: Lady of Legend* and Nancy Springer’s *Rowan Hood: Outlaw girl of Sherwood Forest* and both of these texts take the Robin Hood character but change the sex of the outlaw. The resulting characters bear many of the same characteristics as their male counterpart, but changing the characters’ sex from male to female brings new issues and themes into the foreground; these texts have a strong feminist message and provide some commentary on issues which are still ongoing in present day society, and do so by having their female Robin Hoods’ dealing with gender related issues in the time periods in which they are set.

These two texts have different approaches in bringing their Robin Hood legend to life, but do also contain some similarities. Both authors choose to place their female Robins in a medieval setting, and obviously this was when Robin Hood myths first began to appear. By doing so, their Robin Hood figures not only have their gender changed, but have some of the historically accounted conditions of the time placed upon them, in turn affecting their story arcs. In Springer’s text, *Rowan Hood:*

Outlaw girl of Sherwood Forest we are shown a young girl, Rosemary, born in the forest who knows that Robin Hood is her father. On the death of her mother, she sets off to find her father.

Throughout the story, the protagonist takes the name Rowan and pretends to be a boy to protect her identity. She comes from a commoner background and the tale takes place in Barnesdale Forest, like *A Gest*, which states near the beginning of the ballad, 'Robyn stode in Bernesdale' (Knight 1997). So, there are some elements from the original Robin Hood ballads, but there is also an added mysticism to the tale which arises from Rosemary's extraordinary healing abilities.

One of the main features of the tale is the difference in circumstance of a person depending on whether they are born a boy or a girl. Rosemary often ponders what her life would have been had she been born a boy. There are multiple points through the story in which this point is reinforced. Rosemary asks herself before she sets off to find her father why he had never come to look for her, and wonders 'Was it because he did not want her? Was it because she was a girl?' (Springer 2001: 14). This uncertainty is present through the majority of the novel, and this doubt leads to her disguising herself as a boy, so as to gain access to the outlaws' camp in which her father resides. However, having to disguise herself is not something she necessarily considers a bad thing. She accepts the need for it quickly, for 'to go where a girl could not venture, she would travel as a boy' and she also 'liked to pretend to be a boy sometimes' (Springer 2001: 15) so she does not consider the act to be a demeaning one. She resents the position her own sex holds in society, stating that 'I'm a girl and I don't want to be. I don't want to be owned by some man.' (Springer 2001: 22). Here is where the author's feminist viewpoint comes across most clearly. Power was patrilineal in Medieval society, demonstrated by the fact that houses and wealth were passed down to the male heir not the female, and this text is set in those times. However, by refusing to conform to the patriarchal societal demands, she promotes equality between sexes, and whilst such a view would have been radical in medieval times, modern readers appreciate that to have choices forced upon you, no matter your sex, is wrong. This is especially important when we consider that the text is aimed at a younger audience, many of who will be girls. By having one of their heroes a female character, and having "Robin" do what is right no matter what society expects from her, it promotes these young readers to have the same values in their lives, promoting equality and morality in modern society. To this end, Rosemary becomes something of a role model to younger readers. To emphasise this, the actual Robin Hood accepts his daughter with open arms once she reveals to him her real identity and casts off her boyish disguise, and there is a happy ending, with the author's meaning clearly being, "be who you want to be" to the young readers of her tale. Jean Boreen (1999) suggests that 'many of us who teach adolescents are proponents of the idea that we can use novels to promote their thinking about the type of people they will or should become' (Boreen 1999)

and this is occurring in the above text. Boreen also adds that there is a 'lack of strong female models in much of the fiction' (Boreen 1999), and these texts are addressing this issue by creating female characters intended to inspire.

Springer's text is certainly written for children, making use of simple language and having quite clear themes and a simple story to follow. ArceJaeger's *Robin: Lady of Legend* also aims at a young audience and contains the same feminist undertones; however, its more complex themes and story arc suggest it is aimed at a slightly older audience than the younger children that Springer's tale is clearly written for. In this text, Robin is the daughter of Lord Robert of Locksley, and upon learning of an arranged marriage (to the Sheriff of Nottingham) which she is none too happy with, flees to the safety of Sherwood Forest. It is also worthwhile mentioning that Robin's sister is Marian, and whilst Robin is outspoken and opinionated, Marian is somewhat the opposite. The two sisters are conflicting visions of femininity; Robin rebels against social norms, attempting to control her own life and have her own opinions, whilst Marian does as she is bid by her father, again, reflecting the dominance of the patriarchy at the time in which the tale is set. Even their appearances are contrasted, Marian 'with long brown hair, solemn blue eyes, and a petite yet womanly figure' and Robin's 'hair flaxen and thin, her frame lean and tall; even the hue of her eyes was different' (ArceJaeger 2012: 23), one (Marian) being how a woman is expected to look, and the other (Robin) moving away from the expectation of society. Robin even notices the difference between the two of the sisters. 'Marian's meekness irritated her sister, but then Marian had never been one to rebel against the expectations of others' (ArceJaeger 2012: 23) and this willingness to obey was what was expected from women in the Medieval Period. In the text, Lord Locksley believes this arranged marriage to be 'the greatest gift a woman can hope to receive' (ArceJaeger 2012: 19), and clearly his assumed knowledge of his daughters' – and girls in general – desires, implies at the presence of a patriarchal society. Robin's response to this unwanted and unchallengeable proposal however clearly promotes the feminist undertone present throughout the novel. Robin emphatically asks her father, 'Are girls to be bartered away like nags at market day, for naught more than the promise of good treatment?' (ArceJaeger 2012: 22) so she clearly feels the oppression of a society in which her opinion counts for less than the other sex. This attitude in turn brings her father to anger and to imply that a girl should not have a right to choose their fate as a man does, and that she should not speak her mind, which he considers unladylike. A woman should do what a man says, and be subservient to her male counterparts. This idea even takes hold in the forest, as is examined shortly.

Like Springer's take on the Robin Hood myth, the character continually challenges the established gender roles of the period in which it was set (again, the Medieval Period). Robin, like Rosemary in

Springer's tale, wishes she had the rights afforded to the other sex. 'If I were a boy...no one would try to make me marry someone I did not wish to wed' (ArceJaeger 2012: 26) and indeed, Robin has taken on the "male" role before – she has learned the way of the forester, and becomes extremely competent with the bow and arrow – both being recognised as talents which only men should employ. An intriguing point is that her father actually allows her to practice archery, albeit with apprehension at the fact that it is not something a lady should become accustomed to. Furthermore, Robin also uses cross-dressing as a means to escape her situation, and tells herself that 'for safety's sake and to keep from being identified, she would have to take on the guise of a man' (ArceJaeger 2012: 31). This subterfuge Robin considers as a necessary risk, despite it been illegal, as the consequence of wearing male attire 'was nothing compared to the perils a woman faced by travelling alone' (ArceJaeger 2012: 31) By donning the clothes of a man, she places herself outside the law; she becomes Robin the outlaw. By stepping outside of the traditional gender role and gendered clothing, Robin goes against societies demands, and this leads to her being branded a criminal. Once this action takes place, Robin flees to the woods, to escape the repercussions of her choice. When a band start forming around her she realises that her success with the disguise is down to one reason. 'She had no false illusions – only the ingrained belief that a woman could never achieve (and would certainly never try to achieve!) what Robin had done prevented her people from suspecting her gender' (ArceJaeger 2012: 133). Because of the norms inherent to the patriarchal society Robin inhabits, she is able to deceive her followers as they cannot conceive a woman carrying out such a role: because of this, her deception is safe. As she inhabits neither gender fully, she is invisible to both, and able to conduct her activities without being reprimanded. With cross-dressing being a dominant detail in both the aforementioned texts, the use of this device is examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Though both ArceJaegers' and Springers' texts reimagine Robin Hood as a female, this version of the myth has only appeared in recent years. Before these, many texts gave Maid Marian a more central role in the myth. Maid Marian first appeared in Robin Hood tales around the year 1500, and has remained an integral part to the myth ever since. These were the instigators for the newer female centric Robin Hood interpretations to the myth, and as such, at least deserve attention. As is clear from many of the early tales, what is normally depicted is "male bonding" in the forest over time... where women characters have been traditionally subservient or non-existent' (Gates 2006: 71). The evolution of Maid Marian's character, from bawdy outlaw to an extremely feminine and demure character, to twenty-first-century portrayals in which the Maid Marian character becomes the character which the Robin Hood myth revolves around with even his name being displaced onto this newest, female Robin Hood interpretation of the myth, perhaps demonstrates the change over time

in which women have gained more control over their own lives, portrayals such as ArceJaeger's and Springer's reflecting the more equal society we imagine the twenty-first-century to be. We're inclined to assume that there is greater gender fluidity in modern society, and in fact one critic recently labelled the new generation as 'the gender fluid generation' (Marsh 2016), certainly suggesting this is the case. Compared to medieval society, these new interpretations of Robin Hood reflect this viewpoint. As such, many of these more modern portrayals of Maid Marian incorporate the much changed cultural setting, and present Marian as a more equal member of the Merry Men. Some authors made Maid Marian the central character to their Robin Hood myths in the late twentieth century. These include, but are not limited to Jennifer Roberson's *Lady of the Forest* (1992) and Gayle Feyrer's *The Thief's Mistress* (1996). Both of these not only imagine Maid Marian as the major character that the Robin Hood myth revolves around, but they also make the character more opinionated, more independent, and unlike many of the texts since the early Robin Hood ballads which show Maid Marian to be a chaste character, these Marians are sexually charged young women, representing the freer attitudes of much of modern society, and the unconcerned airs of the earliest Marians.

Lorinda Cohoon in *Transgressive Transformations* comments on this, stating that Marian in the earliest texts is bawdy and her sexuality is explicit, whilst in these more modern texts aimed at young adults, such as Springer's and ArceJaeger's texts, 'the explicit sexuality [is] muted' (Cohoon 2007: 211). Roberson's and Feyrer's texts go back to these early portrayals of Marian, and therefore are texts which are aimed at an adult audience whilst Springer's and ArceJaeger's take on the Robin Hood myth discards this interpretation to create a tale deemed appropriate for a younger audience, with less adult themes on show. It is clear that just in the last couple of decades these female Robin Hood tales have changed dramatically, especially when they are written for different audiences. Gates makes an assertion regarding these modern Robin Hood tales aimed at children. According to Gates, they 'have the function of maintaining conformity to socially determined and approved patterns of behaviour, which they do by offering positive role models, proscribing undesirable behaviour, and affirming the culture's ideologies, systems and institutions' (Gates 2006: 76). In these modern interpretations depicting Robin Hood as female, Robin Hoods' build on the ground set by the Maid Marian centred tales before them, promoting equality whilst also destroying the established gender roles confining girls to only do what was socially acceptable, bringing the myth into a useful position to comment on modern society. Despite this, there is one question which remains unanswered. What is the difference between a female Robin Hood tale and bringing Maid Marian to the fore?

Again, this would appear to come down to equality. Although bringing Maid Marian to the fore and imbuing her with some of the qualities associated with Robin Hood has led the way to female Robin Hoods, she is still a separate character and to many of the lesser read Robin Hood admirers, is perceived as timid and chaste, and in some ways an opposite to Robin Hood. This is not necessarily an accurate view, but it is one which many films and texts have made popular in the public eye. Although Maid Marian came later to the Robin Hood myth, some of her early depictions contrast greatly to the Maid Marian often portrayed on both screen and page over the centuries. In one of the earliest ballads, for instance, she is shown to be a great warrior and equals Robin Hood's own abilities with a blade. Pugh describes it like this; 'Maid Marian...is known for her beauty, but she is often depicted as Robin's equal as a warrior. In the ballad "Robin Hood and Maid Marian", they fight while both are wearing disguises and thus remain unknown to each other' (Pugh 2012: 71). Despite this, because of the popular view of Maid Marian, she will always have those aforementioned values synonymous with her personality and characteristics. A female Robin Hood, however, can have all the characteristics of the male Robin Hood, without the stigma from some readers which may see them refute what they see as a change to what is the most prominent female character in the Robin Hood myths. Cohoon, regarding Maid Marian and the way she is presented by female authors, states that 'in their retellings, women writers have been concerned with the possibilities of whether and how these versions of Marian can retain and extend the power of the legend, which in turn links to the potential "historical reality" of the tale' (Cohoon 2007: 217). By discarding this foregrounded Maid Marian figure and replacing her with a female Robin Hood, this issue of "historical reality" is muted in favour of a new approach to inspire and encourage young readers to be open minded about gender roles and what one can accomplish, never mind their gender, and gender changes of male characters to female characters is something which is occurring quite consistently in twenty-first-century pop-culture.

Robin Hood is not the only character who has received a change of sex in recent times. In fact, changing the sex of established characters seems to be becoming something of a popular choice for writers and film-makers alike. The Marvel character Thor was recently reimagined as a woman. When the writer of the series of comics, Jason Aaron, was asked why he made the change to the character, he responded that it was 'kind of a time honoured Thor tradition' to change the character in some way or other every once in a while, but also that he'd 'always gravitated toward strong female characters' (White 2014). Changing Thor's sex, then, was for Aaron's own preference of character, but also to "mix up" the accepted character, something he deems should happen with the character from time to time. Thor is one of the strongest and most popular heroes in the Marvel Universe, and reimagining the character as female is, whether intentional or not, quite a statement,

as it suggests that women and not just men can reflect the epitome of physical strength, a much more equal view of the sexes which does away with established gender stereotypes of women being unable to accomplish the same roles as men; strength is no longer a masculine characteristic but an ambiguous one. Most of the popular Marvel Heroes tend to be male, so by having one of the strongest of these now female demonstrates a willingness to promote equality and not thrust certain characteristics on one sex of character or the other.

Additionally, sticking with Marvel, the upcoming *Dr Strange* film starring Benedict Cumberbatch will feature the villain the Ancient One. The Ancient One, first appearing in 1961, has always been a male character, yet Tilda Swinton has been cast in the role, again meaning another character in the Marvel universe is changing sex. These two instances demonstrate the fluidity of gender roles present in modern society, where men and women should be viewed as equals, and as such this equality should be reflected in comics by there being a similar number of powerful male and female characters. Brad Petrishen argues that the world of comics is a 'male-dominated world' (Petrishen 2015) so with more female characters being introduced to the comic-book genre, the hope is that more female readers will be attracted.

There are several other instances of a character's gender being reimagined in recent times. After Daniel Craig has decided to step down from the James Bond role several actors have said they would like to take up the mantle. Two of these are female actors: Emilia Clarke of *Game of Thrones* fame, and Gillian Anderson. Both have played down the idea that they will get the role but have voiced their enthusiasm at the proposition of playing the character; however they would be Jane Bond, not James Bond, similar to when the Robin Hood myth uses Maid Marian as the main character, and not a female Robin Hood. A Ghostbusters reboot has also hit the silver screen, and the new cast are all female stars. This reboot has been met with some criticism, mainly because it fails to stand on its own two feet. Film critic Peter Debruge hints at this when he states, 'the problem isn't that Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, and Ernie Hudson created characters too iconic to surpass; the fault lies in the fact that this new "Ghostbusters" doesn't want us to forget them, crafting its new team in the earlier team's shadow' (Debruge 2016). The film was greeted with less pleasant remarks however, one critic labelling the film as 'racist, man-hating mediocrity' (Nolte 2016), so the use of female characters instead of the original male characters was critiqued more because of the jokes aimed at men, than the actual film itself being poor. Despite this, the number of these different gender interpretations of established characters clearly hints at authors and directors wanting a greater number of female-led novels and films. That they choose to reinterpret male characters or films with males in the lead role, rather than create their own female texts is perhaps due to the

difficulty of creating a unique or original character; most new characters have some element of a character which has appeared before, the new Robin Hood interpretations being a prime example.

In the twenty-first-century, women can display masculine traits or perform a traditionally masculine role, without the repercussions that doing so in the medieval period would incur. The 'gendered division of labour' (Neal 2008: 4) that occurred in the Middle Ages has been replaced by a more equal number of both genders performing the same roles. Many Robin Hood interpretations play around with the idea of gender performance. Not only do we have the Maid Marian figure displaying what could be considered as masculine characteristics, such as in the ballad, *Robin Hood and Maid Marian* in which Marian fights –to an equal standard – with Robin Hood, but there have also been interpretations in which male characters have their masculinity reduced. One such example is *Maid Marian and her Merry Men* (1989-2004), in which Marian is the leader of the merry men, whilst Robin is an incompetent ex-tailor, and his incompetence leads to a lack of masculinity as he cannot complete his role to the extent needed. Most often though, gender performance is critiqued through the female characters taking on a traditionally male gender role, such as that demonstrated by some incarnations of Marian. According to Pugh, Robin Hood's 'masculinity is predicated upon resistance to external corruption' (Pugh 2012: 73) but not only could this be read as a resistance to authority, but also as a resistance to women taking on long considered male roles in society. When a female character can accomplish a role better than a male character, then this could be viewed as an attack on that character's masculinity. Therefore, 'the numerous cinematic Robin Hoods depict varying and even contradictory paradigms of masculinity' (Pugh 2012: 74) depending on the behaviour of the female characters surrounding them. Other reasons for Robin Hood's masculinity being unstable have also been given.

Pugh has further suggested that 'Robin's masculinity borders on the illicit due to his criminality' (Pugh 2012: 70). Robin Hood's masculinity depends on his resistance to unjust authority and the manner in which he resists. By defying the established authority through unlawful acts himself, his masculinity becomes unstable as he is obtaining it through means he should not employ. On the other hand, in more modern takes on the myth, Robin is an outlaw who does these illegal acts to help those in need, which could be a "good" masculinity in the form that he takes charge and protects his fellow man, woman and child, and is relied on for the typical male role of hunter-gatherer. As with many of the elements of the Robin Hood myth, it depends at which time period one investigates the Robin Hood myth as to which presentation of the character is given. Robin Hood tales tend to reflect the cultural anxieties of the times in which they are written, so in the twenty-first-century interpretations for example equality is promoted as the search for greater

equality between men and women is an issue which authors such as ArceJaeger and Springer still feel the need to address.

Furthermore, female characters attack not only this physical presence of masculinity, but the homosocial relationships which are established through the male society which springs up in the forest and takes the shape of Robin's Merry Men. Breitenberg is of the opinion that these texts present 'woman as an Other who either confirms or disrupts masculine identity' (Breitenberg 1996: 21). This is a trope which appears in many texts and is extremely relevant to Robin Hood tales. The Robin Hood myth, especially in recent years, has seen Maid Marian move into a more central role, and as has been shown, even Robin Hood has been reinterpreted as female. The idyllic masculine identity which Robin and the Merry Men form in the forest becomes shattered once a female character enters. In different portrayals their masculinity is affected in varying ways. In some interpretations Marian can be intellectually superior, such as in *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men*. In others, such as ArceJaeger's, the female protagonist displays the most skill at something which has always been considered masculine; in this instance archery, a feat synonymous with Robin Hood. What is certain is that when these female characters intrude on the masculinity present in the forest, this masculinity inevitably breaks down, or at least begins to look less than solid. Pugh makes a statement regarding this. He argues that, 'no matter the many times that their stories are rewritten and their values re-signified for new audiences...masculine strength and honour persist, colouring their legends with the heady allure of an inviolate masculinity' (Pugh 2012: 80). Even in the tales in which Robin is reimagined as a woman, this is still the case. These female representations inherit the masculinity inherent to the Robin Hood myth by performing the masculine role to a greater extent than their male counterparts, creating what one could argue is a crisis of masculinity, as even the homosocial space afforded by the forest proves it is not gender but *gender performance* which leads to acceptance. As such, 'the malleability of gender roles in the many retellings of the tales, for these heroes, no matter the consistencies and variations among their legends, can always be re-envisioned to incarnate distinct and unique versions of masculinity reflective of modern desire' (Pugh 2012: 80) and this masculinity is indistinct to the gender of the character performing it.

Whilst these modern interpretations of the Robin Hood tales do promote equality by either introducing female characters into more prominent roles, or having them as the protagonists, one feature appears in many such texts, especially those set in the medieval period. This is that to perform the more masculine role in the band of outlaws, Marian is often seen to cross-dress. This has been noticed by many critics, including Cohoon, who states that 'as a woman who is a Merry (m)an, Marian dons men's clothing and uses gender-bending performativity to display her skill at

sports and feats conventionally reserved for men' (Cohoon 2007: 210). The implication here though is that it is only by cross-dressing that she can be accepted by the Merry Men and "fight" on equal grounds. As aforementioned, cross-dressing plays a part in both ArceJaeger's take on Robin Hood and Springer's tale also. In both of these instances once the ruse is up it is greeted with disdain by some of the male characters, especially those who have taken orders from the female Robin when she was in her guise as a man. So, whilst Marian (and the female Robin's) are accepted whilst everyone believes them to be male, as soon as the actuality of her sex is realised 'Marian [becomes] a figure whose gender disrupts the band of outlaws' (Cohoon 2007: 228). The obvious implication is that it is the cross-dressing which provides the female Robin Hood characters with their power. Garber examines cross-dressing, and reasons why people and fictitious characters choose to employ this device.

Garber argues that people who partake in cross-dressing do so for several reasons. She states that 'each is "compelled" by social and economic forces to disguise himself or herself in order to get a job, escape repression, or gain artistic or political "freedom"' (Garber 1993: 70). In particular, to "escape repression" really hits a chord with regard to these female centric texts. The characters are forced to dress as men in order to accomplish roles in which a woman is not allowed to perform. Therefore, they 'embrace transvestism unwillingly, as an instrumental strategy' (Garber 1993: 70) as to not do so would be detrimental to the roles they need to complete. Cross-dressing in these tales then is usually employed for negative reasons to demonstrate the issues present within a patriarchal society, but on a more positive note, these tales also try to provide a tale which young, twenty-first-century readers can learn from.

According to Gates, these modern interpretations of the Robin Hood myth attempt to project the values of modern society whilst in-keeping with their settings in the Middle Ages. He argues that 'aspects of these texts suggest a simultaneous subversion of the universalistic metanarrative being championed, whereby the representation of class, religion and gender are shown in relation (and in reaction) to the mores of current society' (Gates 2006: 77). Gates suggests here that the newer representations of Robin Hood reflect twenty-first-century viewpoints of concepts like class and gender, and one such example of this being the case is the on-going US TV series, *Arrow* (2011-). Red Arrow (who also goes by the name of Speedy in the TV series) is portrayed by Willa Holland, and like the Green Arrow clearly takes inspiration from the Robin Hood myth, although she dons a bright red rather than the Lincoln green of the traditional Robin Hood. This character demonstrates how the Robin Hood myth can be brought forward into the 21st century and still be relevant and promote a female superhero in the process. She and the rest of the hero characters of the show protect their

city from terrorists and those who would do it harm, and as such reflect the values of the Robin Hood character which emerged when he was changed to be a champion of the people and not just a simple outlaw. In particular, in the fourth season of the show, the lead villain attempts to become the mayor of the city they reside in, so there is a clear connection between these events and the defiance to unjust authority which would undoubtedly be imposed if a villain reached such a position of power. Red Arrow also hints at the much more relaxed gender roles in society in the 21st century. She is just as strong a fighter as her counterpart the Green Arrow, and in the TV series even helps fill his mantle when he disappears for some time. The point could also be made that there is no need for cross-dressing so despite what could be considered as a masculine role, she can do so in her own attire as clothes are less gendered in 21st century society, whilst in the Middle Ages both men and women 'dressed in the symbols of their legitimate space' (Hanawalt 1998: 73), meaning that depending on their role in society, they would have to dress a certain way, which reflected their gender. As such, there is no affront to masculinity from wearing "male clothes", which is of course what concerned the male characters in Robin Hood texts set in the Middle Ages. Gates has also suggested that the Robin Hood myth 'transcends the setting and particularities of incident and character' (Gates 2006: 77). In this quotation, Gates hints at the universality of the Robin Hood tale, implying that it is a tale which will remain popular despite the changes to character and the different events which occur in each telling. It does not matter whether the Robin Hood character becomes female, or is an effeminate male; the underlying message is a tale which promotes combatting unjust authority, and despite the gender chosen by the different authors of numerous Robin Hood tales, this is what the essence of a Robin Hood tale comes down to.

The Hunger Games film series also features a Robin Hood type character who is a woman. The protagonist, Katniss Everdeen utilises the bow and arrow as both a tool for hunting, and later in the films, as a weapon. The bow and arrow is usually the weapon of choice for Robin Hood, and in fact, in *The Hunger Games* first film, there is a scene in which Katniss is hunting deer, and some Robin Hood tales feature a similar element, as both are conducting their hunting activities illegally. Furthermore, Katniss becomes a symbol of hope for rebellion against an evil dictator, and even the dictator, President Snow, states that 'Hope is the only thing stronger than fear' (Jacobson 2012), and Robin Hood has always been a symbol of hope against unjust authority, such as that presented by President Snow in *The Hunger Games*. Unwittingly, Katniss instigates a rebellion against the unjust upper class, and as the film series progresses, becomes an integral part to the rebellion. Again, the similarity to the character of Robin Hood is not difficult to see. Katniss then, is yet another female Robin Hood, but one who does not bear the same name. Katniss, like other female interpretations of the Robin Hood character, aims to inspire young female readers, with the series being aimed at a

young adult audience. She is yet more proof that writers and film-makers feel there needs to be a greater abundance of inspiring female role models, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

There are other reasons as to why authors could now be deciding to reimagine the character as a female, some relating to the historical context of when the Robin Hood myth emerged. Though the Robin Hood myth has murder and highway robbery at the heart of its story, real life figures existed, and some of these were indeed women. Shahar states that 'the number of women charged with murder was considerably smaller than that of men' (Shahar 1983: 17) so it is clear that there were existing women involved in such nefarious activity, however small in number. However, the Robin Hood myth is more centred on stealing. It is this factor regarding crime in the Middle Ages which is worth examining. According to Stuard, 'although a murderess occasionally finds her place in fourteenth century crime she is less common than the thief, the burglar, or the receiver of stolen goods' (Stuard 1976: 125), suggesting that women of the period could very well be involved in activities displayed by the mythical outlaw. Furthermore, Stuard suggests that 'in 84.2 percent of the robbery cases they [women] had companions' (Stuard 1976: 129) and this hints at the presence of bands such as that reflected by Robin's Merry Men, and more specifically, the presence of women in such bands as were conducting such activities. Such real life figures could have provided the possibility for imagining a female Robin Hood, an idea which writers such as ArceJaeger and Springer may have known when writing their tales.

Has Robin Hood's gender become indeterminable in recent years? How has this occurred? Robin Hood has become an extremely malleable character, even in regards to sex, and Springer's and ArceJaeger's texts are just two twenty-first-century examples of how the character's gender has become open to interpretation. Gender roles have long been toyed with in Robin Hood tales, and these modern takes are no less frustrating to a subject which in twenty-first-century society appears to be even more open to interpretation. These female Robin Hood incarnations hint at this in a way which is not even subtle. One such example is that both of the female characters perform the standard male role better than their male counterparts, both when cross-dressed and when not. Furthermore, the reactions to the characters when they reveal that they are women are positive, and the male characters who oppose the idea that women could perform such feats are ridiculed. According to Seal, outlaw heroes – which is clearly what the Robin Hood character presents itself as – appear when 'people believe they are the victims of inequity, injustice and oppression' (Seal 2009). That the myth has re-gained the public eye and is becoming ever more popular suggests that the inequality and oppression of which Seal speaks is still present in current society. For these authors then, inequality in gender is something which the myth can be used to address, especially when an

integral part to the myth is to fight against oppression; inequality being a form of oppression. Twenty-first-century retellings of the Robin Hood myth not only deal with an inequality of wealth, but gender inequality as well, and as readers and viewers alike, we can expect that fighting against the inequality of such issues will remain at the heart of new interpretations of the Robin Hood myth.

Chapter 2 – Relocation, Relocation, Relocation

If one were to ask a person at random on the street where they would locate the myth of Robin Hood, they would in all likelihood answer with either Nottingham or Sherwood Forest. Finding the “real life” Robin Hood is, again, like “catching smoke” but what can be determined is whether the places of the original Robin Hood myth are still synonymous with the Robin Hood myth in the twenty-first-century. In the previous chapter on gender, it was extremely clear that the character and the myth have undergone many changes in recent years, both to promote issues which the authors feel the need to address and to add to the popularity of the story in general. As such, it is reasonable to expect that the location of the myth changes for similar reasons. In this chapter, I not only examine why Nottingham and Sherwood may no longer be synonymous with Robin Hood, but provide and explain some of the implications of relocating the myth, sometimes even to a different country. This not only moves the character elsewhere, but challenges the character’s connection to an English national identity; I investigate why this is an important feature for the Robin Hood myth in the twenty-first-century. I examine why, in some modern interpretations, the hero-outlaw has moved from a setting of dense woodland to an urban context and what this means for the myth in the twenty-first-century.

As well as Sherwood and Nottingham, more well-read Robin Hood scholars may also be familiar with Barnsdale (this is discussed below) – though there are various spellings for this location. To begin with, I give a quick investigation into the reasons why these places are the ones most often associated with the Robin Hood myth, before moving onto some of the twenty-first-century texts which either reinterpret the location of the myth, or stick to the accepted locations of the Robin Hood legend. The main reason for these places to be considered as the origin of the Robin Hood myth comes from two quotations from the fifteenth century. In around 1410, ‘Robin Hood in Sherwood stood’ (Fortunaso 2016) was written on a manuscript found in Lincoln cathedral, and is perhaps also why the outlaw’s famous “Lincoln green” colouring came to be synonymous with Robin Hood. Fortunaso also states that in 1429 a judge was quoted as saying ‘Robin Hood in Barnsdale stood’ (Fortunaso 2016). So, by 1429 at the latest both Sherwood and Barnsdale were places associated with the legend of Robin Hood. Most people are aware that Sherwood Forest is located in central Nottinghamshire, however Barnsdale no longer exists and it is pertinent to give a definition as to where it could be found.

According to Fortunaso, ‘Barnsdale or Bennysdale was known as a region between Pontefract and Doncaster, a lightly wooded area that was not officially a forest, but it was a place of ambush in the fourteenth century’ (Fortunaso 2016). Holt also believes that this is the case and is inclined to think

that Barnsdale was a place dangerous to the casual passer-by, stating that ‘already in 1306 Barnsdale was known as an area of special danger to travellers’ (Holt 1989: 52), as an escort guarding a prisoner transfer was increased ‘on account of Barnsdale’ (Holt 1989: 52). If this is the case, then there were outlaws or other criminals in the surrounding area. This would naturally lead to a good place to situate the Robin Hood legend, which clearly revolves around such individuals.

There is another answer as to why these two locations are considered as the places where the outlaw originated, one of which implies that a connection has been missed between Sherwood and Barnsdale. Joseph Ritson, in his work, *Robin Hood*, argues that ‘a place by the name of Bryunsdale was part of Sherwood Forest’ (Ritson 1972: vii). Is it possible that Barnsdale and Bryunsdale have been confused at some point through time, and that the legend of Robin Hood should be synonymous with Sherwood and Nottingham and not Barnsdale? Furthermore, whilst Barnsdale was aforementioned as a ‘lightly wooded area’, Sherwood Forest ‘occupied about one hundred thousand acres of central Nottinghamshire in 1609, and for at least the four centuries previous’ and ‘was over twenty miles long and eight miles wide’ (Fortunaso 2016). This would surely have been a more convenient place to hide an outlaw band, (or situate a mythical one), and successfully avoid any law officials such as the Sheriff of Nottingham, elements which are often present in the Robin Hood tales. Alternatively, Sherwood and Barnsdale would have been less than forty miles apart; a negotiable distance on horseback for those bards and writers telling the tale of Robin Hood, and this relatively small distance could have led to both places telling the Robin Hood tales at similar times, leading both to become synonymous with the tale. Still, it should be recalled that the Robin Hood of the fifteenth century ‘was more often associated with Barnsdale than Sherwood’ (Fortunaso 2016) so it is possible that Barnsdale was the original location for the Robin Hood myth.

The density of the woodland and forests at the heart of the Robin Hood legend has been suggested as one of the reasons for relocating the myth. It has already been mentioned that Barnsdale was little more than a wood, spread thin and unlikely to be useful when the intention is to hide an entire outlaw band. Sherwood Forest was much larger, and much denser. However, this does not necessarily mean it is the ideal place for the situation of the story. For some authors, Sherwood and Barnsdale just don’t appear to have the “believability” factor. Stephen Lawhead, author of the *King Raven* series, argues that ‘It would have been exceedingly difficult for Robin and his outlaw band to actually hide in England’s ever dwindling Sherwood’ (Lawhead 2006: 436), even in a Middle Ages setting, and he cites this as one of the major reasons for his displacement of the myth. The backdrop of the Robin Hood tales though, is nearly always wooded and forest areas. For Holt, ‘the woods where they [Robin Hood and his outlaw band] live and roam were, both in legend and real life, the

haunt of criminal and guerrilla alike' (Holt 1989: 8) so keeping the myth in a wood or forest setting gives the myth more believability as these were the areas in which outlaw bands flourished.

Lawhead also has a suggestion as to why so many places and people consider the character of Robin Hood to be from their own region. He argues that, 'As the minstrels wandered around Britain...they spread the fame of the beloved rogue far and wide, often supplying local place names to foster a closer identification' (Lawhead 2006: 433). Barbara Hanawalt argues that 'late medieval society was largely an oral culture' (Hanawalt 1998: ix), so it is reasonable to assume that Robin Hood tales were common at that time. This would explain why so many places can lay claim to the Robin Hood name. If the people who told the story of Robin Hood adapted the whereabouts of the legend as they travelled, just one minstrel could supply the populace with numerous locations for where the Robin Hood legend spawned from, leading to many places and people believing that the myth originated in their area.

This idea of there being abundant Robin Hood locations is clear in the number of cultural references to Robin Hood throughout Britain. Two examples are the Robin Hood Airport Doncaster Sheffield and Robin Hood public houses, which there are a number of all across Britain. There are several reasons as to why the airport has the name it does. The area in which the airport is based was once part of Nottinghamshire, and as such is synonymous with the Robin Hood legend which largely takes place in Nottingham. Furthermore, it is a relatively short distance from the airport to Sherwood Forest, which is again an integral part of the Robin Hood myth. Finally, the name "Robin Hood" raises publicity for the airport as many people are aware of the Robin Hood myth, and this marketing opportunity will have been made by some astute people in the hope that a famous name will bring more people to the airport, and the area, resulting in higher profits as well as helping the local economy by an increased number of visitors. There is also a large number of Robin Hood public houses dotted around the country. A few of the locations these can be found in are Southampton, Bristol, Cardiff, Silsden, Wakefield and Hebden Bridge. These few manage to demonstrate just how far the legend and its influence have reached. There are pubs in the south of England, in Yorkshire which some people associate specifically with the myth, and even some in Wales. The myth has become widespread, and this means that narrowing the actual location as to where the myth was first told is practically impossible. It is therefore more useful to evaluate some of the places in which the legend of Robin Hood has being reinterpreted. The reasons for why it should matter where the Robin Hood myth began and has since moved to has also being examined further in this chapter. The widespread nature and number of locations which possess some connection to Robin Hood could be one of the reasons why there are so many relocations of the myth. Even the aforementioned Robin

Hood pubs could have originated from someone arguing that the myth started in that particular area, so the relocation of the myth to these areas may have some historical basis.

Wales is an appealing choice to relocate the Robin Hood legend for several reasons. As aforementioned, Sherwood Forest and Barnsdale have been criticised as not being deep or dense enough to conceal an outlaw band, so it makes sense to relocate the myth to a location which, at the time, would have had larger, more untouched forests, encompassing a density useful for hiding, Lawhead describing the area as 'a fearsome wilderness' (Lawhead 2006: 436). On approaching the forest in *Hood*, the Robin Hood character (Bran) describes the forest: 'the ancient woodland rampart rose before him in vast dark folds, like a great bristling pelt' (Lawhead 2006: 115). This sort of primeval forest would have all but vanished in England, but in Wales, such forests remained unscathed from human influence, except by local hunters. This is one of the reasons why Lawhead in *Hood* decides to have his Robin Hood in Wales, and also set earlier in time than the legend often is: the early Robin Hood ballads often placed him in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Lawhead's work is set in AD 1093, not even 30 years after the Battle of Hastings. Within two years of the Norman invasion, all of England had been subdued, however the Welsh remained very much their own people and a barrier of sorts was established between the two countries. It is this barrier which serves as Lawhead's forest setting, and he refers to it as "the March", a place which would have been predominantly 'primeval forest' (Lawhead 2006: 436). The author goes on to describe his decision further; 'While the forests of England had long since become well-managed business property where each woodland was a veritable factory, Wales still had enormous stretches of virgin wood, untouched except for hunting and hiding' (Lawhead 2006: 436).

The forest for Lawhead provides more than just a place for hiding though, it provides actual protection. The lair of the outlaws in Lawhead's text seems to be protected by the forest itself. It is described upon entry in this way; 'On the other side of the oak arch was a hedge wall... a great wide greensward of a valley in the heart of the wood, bounded by a ring of towering trees' (Lawhead 2006: 254). In particular, here, oak trees are mentioned by name. White suggests that, 'the ancient oak forest...is explicitly linked to "those bands of gallant outlaws"' (White 2009) and from the above quotation from Lawhead's *Hood* it is clear to see that the oak trees, and the rest of the forest surrounding the outlaws, provides safety from enemies. However, more can be read into the use of oak. 'The oak symbolised those virtues with which the English modestly sought to identify themselves: reliability, durability, strength' (The Guardian: 2002), and though this quotation is specifically aimed at the English, in this instance it could just as easily be applied to the rest of Britain. Certainly, there was no love lost between the English and the Welsh even before the

Norman invasion, as the English often crossed the uneasy borders between the two countries, but here the oak demonstrates the unwillingness to bend to the aspiring Norman's conquest into Wales, and additionally, it has been suggested that 'the oak, above all trees, permeates the language and culture – though in England more than in Scotland and Wales because England had the greatest profusion of oaks'. (The Guardian: 2002). The oak, as well as the people who inhabit the British Isles then, has an identity to protect, and therefore helps the Welsh by protecting them with its boughs and branches. This sense of a national identity in relation to the myth of Robin Hood is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The forest also permits Lawhead's protagonist, Bran, to sound of the forest, allowing him to spook the French. 'In a voice that seemed torn from the very forest round about, shrieked out a cry of raw animal rage that resounded through the forest, echoing amongst the treetops' (Lawhead 2006: 381). Furthermore, 'the forest answered with a low groan and the shuddering creak of tree trunks cracking' (Lawhead 2006: 381), so not only does it help Bran scare away the French but the forest's own sound becomes mystical and acquires the ability to protect the outlaws in its midst. If the forest had been less dense and less untouched then this effect would not have occurred as it would not have been thick enough to create such illusions and play on the minds of the French.

Compared to Sherwood Forest then, which many people knew and which had already reduced in size, the forests of the March seem a reasonable place to relocate the myth, whilst still endorsing the usual stealth and hiding aspects that fans of the Robin Hood myth have come to expect from a Robin Hood tale. For Lawhead, 'A Welsh location is suggested by the nature and landscape of the region' (Lawhead 2006: 436) and this is why the legend is relocated to Wales. Lawhead's interpretation combines the romance genre – which twenty-first-century reinterpretations of the Robin Hood myth seem to imagine it as - with environmental discourse, with his version of the Merry Men working to protect both their physical surroundings and their counterparts from the Normans' seeking to control their land and subdue their people. This is supported by real life events, such as the Welsh resistance to the Normans' attempts to move into their territory, which they combatted with a stealth like manner, using their surroundings to their advantage. Lawhead states that, 'Britons [The Welsh], took to the forest and from there conducted a guerrilla war' (Lawhead 2006: 437), something which would probably have been nigh impossible in Sherwood Forest. This is certainly the way that Lawhead's Robin Hood figure chooses to fight his battles. Upon running away from some Norman invaders, he makes for the large Forest of the March, knowing he can lose them in its vastness. 'Once amongst the trees, he had no doubt at all that he could elude pursuit without

difficulty. The Forest was a place he knew well.’ (Lawhead 2006: 115). The forest becomes a safe haven, and enables the Welsh approach to warfare which was so effective.

Some modern portrayals have taken the idea of the forest as a safe haven and changed it completely, by relocating the Robin Hood myth from its woodland home and into an urban setting. One of these newer representations can be found in the TV series *Arrow*, following the adventures of DC Comics Green Arrow. In fact, there are numerous comparisons made on the show between the character and Robin Hood, such as when a criminal is attacked by Green Arrow and goes to the police, an officer says ‘thanks for your statement, we’ll put an APB out on Robin Hood’ (Berlanti 2012) explicitly revealing the connection between the two characters. In the series, the safety provided by the trees in the early Robin Hood myths is exchanged for the high rises of the city, which function in much the same way. They provide cover when under attack, but also provide a quick getaway, with characters running on the rooftops of buildings because of the greater space above ground. The city interpretations of the Robin Hood myth are set in modern, twenty-first-century times, whilst the woodland portrayals tend to place the myth around the time it first came into being. Having the Robin Hood character in the twenty-first-century and an urban setting allows the character to be an outlaw hero for the modern generation, utilising new technology whilst in keeping with integral parts of the myth, such as standing up to unjust authority. For example, Green Arrow forces one of the unjust elite of the city to ‘transfer forty-million dollars into Starling City bank account...’ (Berlanti 2012) in order to give money back to people made poor through crimes committed by a rich criminal syndicate. This demonstrates two factors: forcing someone to transfer money replaces the actual highway robbery conducted by the early Robin Hoods, and also this type of approach is only applicable in recent times, in which online banking has become a reality. This different setting both physically and in time allows for an altogether different approach to the Robin Hood myth, and updates the myth for a present audience to enjoy.

If one of the elements most synonymous with the character of Robin Hood is the “steal from the rich and give to the poor” ideology, then the other is that he is an exceptional archer. This brilliance at archery and use of the longbow, according to Lawhead, is another reason he thought moving the legend to Wales made sense. Lawhead suggests that, ‘The Angles and Saxons actually learned the weapon and its uses from the Welsh’ (Lawhead 2006: 437). If we are to believe that the Welsh used the longbow much before the English, then a Welsh origin for a Robin Hood figure and relocation for the myth becomes more understandable, and again seems to demonstrate the necessity Lawhead feels for making his version for the myth as believable as possible. Lawhead’s assertions gain some support from Philip Warner, who states that ‘the Welsh demonstrated its [the longbow’s] potential

against the Normans in the eleventh and twelfth centuries' (Warner 1989: 32). From this, we can see that Lawhead has made his choices for moving the Robin Hood legend only after discovering these facts from his own research.

Lawhead also suggests that 'every single Welshman was ready for battle at a moment's notice; women, too, bore arms and knew how to use them' (Lawhead 2006: 435). For Lawhead's *Hood* this provides some authenticity behind how accurate his characters are when using their bows. The Welsh continued with archery in times of peace, and this suggests that the Welsh practiced regularly, and to an extent why they could use the weapon easily and well. It is also worth noting that these practitioners are peasants and of both genders, suggesting that everyone was able to become proficient with the weapon, and allowing for a greater number of Welsh people to become competent archers. The fact that both genders practiced with the weapon also hints at a greater equality between men and women, and gives support to the idea that there will have been female Robin Hood type characters in the Middle Ages, as argued in my previous chapter. This is probably the reason that the English, and later the Normans, struggled to make any headway against the Welsh when attempting to invade the country. Lawhead clearly was taken in by the authenticity a Welsh archer would create for a Robin Hood tale, as they were well practiced in the art of Robin Hood's favourite weapon, and furthermore were known to be the best archers at the time in which his tale is set.

One issue which arises from reimagining Robin Hood as a Welshman is that it takes away from the exploits of real Welsh heroes such as Owain Glyndwr, a Welsh ruler from the Middle Ages who instigated a revolt against the English. In recent years, Glyndwr has had a 600th year anniversary for a revolt against the English, has had stamps put into print with his picture, and has a university in Wales named after him, suggesting that he is still very much in Welsh hearts. Glyndwr is to the Welsh what the character of Robin Hood is to the English, a portrayal of the best characteristics of their country. Glyndwr was a true Welsh Outlaw, fighting to stop the oppression of his people, and this begs the question as to if one is setting an outlaw myth in Wales, why not use such a character as Glyndwr? Perhaps it is because he is less well known than Robin Hood; a name which is known throughout the world. However, there is a massive difference between Robin Hood and Glyndwr, in that Glyndwr was certainly a real figure, whilst Robin Hood remains a figure steeped in myth. Despite this, both of these characters have a strong association with national identity, which will be discussed shortly.

One may think that a Welsh Robin Hood is a peculiar idea; however, Lawhead is not the only one who imagines such a character in a different place. In France in the 1960s, *Thierry la Fronde* was

gracing their television screens. Translated into English this would mean “Terry the Sling”, and this television series followed a Robin Hood type figure who usurps authority in the Hundred Years War in France, around 1360. Rather than an Englishman or Welshman fighting against the Normans, here we have a role reversal with the English being the invaders, and Thierry la Fronde, the Frenchman, standing up to them. As the name no doubt implies, Thierry la Fronde did not use the bow, but the sling or slingshot. However with prodigious aim, and hit and run tactics, it is not difficult to notice the resemblance between the two characters. The reason Thierry la Fronde is worth mentioning is that there have been unconfirmed rumours of producing a modern version, though whether this will occur is open to debate. According to one source, ‘a pilot in two parts of 52 minutes is already in development’ (Muscarnera 2012), although this is now four years ago and there is still no sign of a remake coming to fruition. But why do the French also seek a Robin Hood type figure, and why change the character’s main weapon of choice from a bow to a sling?

Lawhead described one of the main reasons for his Robin Hood being Welsh as it is generally regarded that the Welsh were exceptional with the longbow. The fact that the bow is transferred for a sling suggests that the creator of Thierry la Fronde, Jean-Claude Deret, was aware that comparisons would be drawn between his character and the ever popular Robin Hood. By changing the weapon he allows for some differentiation between the two characters. On the other hand, it is somewhat peculiar that he did not utilise the bow as his characters’ weapon, as archers were much more common than slingers in the French army. Again, the most likely reason is to help reinforce the difference between the two characters. The other question raised was why the French would also seek to bring a Robin Hood figure back into the mainstream of twenty-first-century society, through a remake of Thierry la Fronde. The reason is most likely the same as why Robin Hood films are still popular and in production in England and America; they are great money-makers. For example, though the 2010 *Robin Hood* directed by Ridley Scott was met with middling reviews, it was still a box-office hit, making a substantial amount of profit. These romantic re-imaginings of old tales are ever popular in the public eye, and undoubtedly, the same could be said for Thierry la Fronde in France. According to one critic ‘the contemporary action film [is] the most profitable of global film genres’ (Gallagher 2006 : 45), and characters like Robin Hood provide the necessary allure to bring in large audiences and reach the desired profits.

Should we as readers view these re-interpretations of a long established English character as negative or positive? The previous impression given is one that suggests that there are only positive connotations to re-locating the Robin Hood myth; it allows for more people to become involved and entertained by the myth, and furthermore it allows more people to become involved or even

attached to the myth as they can argue that Robin Hood represents their own morals and values. However, this latter point can also be viewed as somewhat of a negative one from a nationalistic perspective. By having Robin Hood as a character which shows the best characteristics of more than one place, or even of more than one country, it takes away from the pride that many feel by knowing that the Robin Hood legend reflects all that is good about Britishness, as well as the character's influence on our nation as a symbol of national identity. In Nottingham, where the character is often placed in Robin Hood tales, there is even a statue of the outlaw, as well as a Robin Hood tour, visiting some of the locations synonymous with Robin Hood, including Sherwood Forest, and the castle inhabited by his nemesis: the sheriff of Nottingham. If one asked the public where Robin Hood originated, they would say he was British or English, and could even argue as to where in Yorkshire or elsewhere in England he inhabited. But should Robin Hood be defined as English rather than British? One explanation for the need for distinction can be provided by an examination of nationhood and a sense of national identity.

In a study investigating symbols of British culture among modern English and Scots people, a 'British sense of fair play' (McCrone 2015: 175) was one of the symbols most identified with as being distinctly British, by both the English and the Scots (though the Scots rated it more highly than the English). This may be why there is such a strong identification with the Robin Hood character; he reflects one of the most upstanding parts of what is considered as British, a strong sense of morality, of right and wrong, not unlike the symbolism of the oak examined earlier. The character is often seen putting himself on the line to help his fellow man when he sees injustice, and it is this aspect which British people see in the character and want to see in themselves. Therefore the character does not only become a strong moral compass, he becomes a strong moral *British* compass, but all parts of the British Isles like to think that the characteristics inherent in their own people are those which Robin Hood displays. To reimagine the character as French then, as Thierry la Fronde can be, is just as much an affront to this sense of English values as it is to impart them on some other area of the British Isles.

That Robin Hood has value as a national symbol of those characteristics that people want to see in themselves has been proved, but what about his potential influence on the nationhood of the late 11th and early 12th century, after the Norman invasion? Undoubtedly, the Normans will have had an effect on the invaded populace. In *The Construction of Nationhood* this issue is addressed. Adrian Hastings states that 'for many commentators, Norman rule is held to have wiped out whatever there was of nationhood existent in the preceding age' (Hastings 1997: 43). The suggestion is that the invading Normans destroyed the idea of a British nationality, subduing it through their acquisition of

much of the land held by the British. The integration of the Normans into the British Isles made for a number of changes to an idea of British nationhood, which included 'the wholesale substitution of a new ruling class, the replacement of the English language by French among the rulers and, eventually, for the law; the near disappearance of English Literary writing' (Hastings 1997: 43). With regards to the aforementioned Thierry la Fronde, the fact that an established English character with English values has been plucked from his home and had his characteristics attributed to a Frenchman makes the character not a national hero, but an international hero, and he therefore loses his unique standing in the country he is accepted to have come from.

It is for this reason why placing a Robin Hood figure shortly after the time of the Norman invasion is logistically a sound choice. At a time when an idea of Britishness had been all but shattered by the Normans, a hero who reflected those values thought of as British would have been a popular choice for the invaded people of Britain. According to Seal, 'outlaw heroes arise in historical circumstances in which one or more social, cultural, ethnic or religious group leaders believe themselves to be oppressed and unjustly treated by one or more groups who wield greater power' (Seal 2009), and this would certainly be the case for the weary and beaten English, any inspiration or hope would have been more powerful at such a time. This may somewhat explain as to why Lawhead chose Wales as the setting for his Robin Hood tale. Hastings comments that, 'the Cornish [and much of England] became English without for centuries forsaking their own vernacular; the Welsh never did' (Hastings 1997: 45). So, whilst the English integrated with the French, the Welsh remained apart from the invading Normans, by maintaining their own language, and for a long period, avoiding Norman rule. By placing a Robin Hood figure at such a time, he is elevated from being a simply moral man into a national hero. He defends the ideology of the British both by maintaining the characteristics that those people best believe they display, as well as challenging their invaders physically. The Robin Hood character and myth, and others like it demonstrate all that is best about the British at a time when they need to be reminded of this. It is this reason why several Robin Hood scholars believe that the Robin Hood legend will first have come into being in this period: the character would have been more inspirational when unjust authority was an ongoing concern for a great number of the inhabitants of the British Isles.

Why does it matter where the Robin Hood myth may have originated – in England, Wales, France or even elsewhere? The authors who reimagine the location of a mythological figure such as Robin Hood have their own reasons for their choice, whether it is just to adapt the myth in a new and exciting way, or because that is how they really believe the myth could have started, Lawhead being an example of the latter. No one can say for certain where the myth will have originated, and this is

not necessarily a negative aspect for the tale, as people can build their Robin Hood at different times and places and provide their own reasons for choosing that period and location as a means of authenticating their own interpretation of a myth which has been adapted and reinterpreted many times since it emerged in the Middle Ages. If the myth continues to be spread and be re-imagined then eventually these characters will be so different from the character that was the inspiration for them all that they will be defined as their own characters and not just as new spins on the Robin Hood myth. At this point a reinvented Robin Hood character will be so different from his/her origin that he/she will stop being Robin Hood, and stand apart. Inevitably, new locations will be suggested and research will go on into locating the real Robin Hood, but these adaptations are not confined by this. They take an idea and like clay, mould it to serve their desire in producing an enjoyable text. We as readers and viewers should not seek authenticity in tales built on myth, but enjoy the reinterpreted story of a much loved character. What we can do is examine the location changes in the twenty-first-century and provide reasons for these choices and the effect they have on the myth and that is what has been accomplished here.

What has been revealed is that the location of the character of Robin Hood is so varied in modern interpretations for several reasons. One is because of historical evidence, such as Lawhead's basis for moving the Robin Hood tale to Wales. Another is the necessity to adapt the myth to create a slightly different text so as to differentiate from similar tales which have gone before. Other interpretations of the Robin Hood myth have seen the character leave the safety of the forest and enter the city, with the city functioning in much the same way as the forest in the early Robin Hood tales; the protection of the trees replaced by the skyscrapers, cars and other urban furniture. Reinterpreting the location of the Robin Hood myth also has an effect on national identity, with the character often being used to represent what is best about a particular location. Like gender in the previous chapter, the location of the myth is now open to interpretation, and Robin Hood tales will continue to be adapted to inspire people from all walks of life.

Chapter 3 – Robin Hood – A Class Act?

This third chapter examines the social class of the mythical outlaw, and moreover, *which* social class the outlaw tends to belong to in representations. The main elements to be investigated in this chapter are how Robin Hood can be perceived as coming from different social classes by different authors, and whether he could have been more than a simple outlaw even from his first forays into literature. Firstly, I examine the class of the outlaw presented to us in *A Gest*, referred to as a “yeoman”, and give some reasons as to why it is not so easy to define the character with a deceptively simple label. By necessity, historical interpretations of social class, and the characteristics which were inherent to the different social positions of the Middle Ages are examined, so as to ascertain why twenty-first-century portrayals can be so malleable where class is concerned. Furthermore, I ask whether twenty-first-century texts tend to follow the example set by *A Gest* and envision their Robin Hood characters as yeomen, or whether they change his class to differentiate their own representations of the outlaw. Many adapt the social class of the character to help create a more entertaining prospect for twenty-first-century viewers and readers, and examples of this can be found in contemporary popular culture, such as the TV series *Arrow* and popular film and book franchise, *The Hunger Games*. What is apparent is that the social class of the character is extremely malleable, and this is reflected throughout the history of the mythical outlaw, and continues to be a feature of the character in the twenty-first-century.

As in previous chapters, *A Gest* is a good a starting point for an investigation into the class of Robin Hood ‘as the first attempt to create a unified [Robin Hood] narrative’ (Pollard 2004: 6). *A Gest* actually contains a reference to Robin Hood’s class within its very first stanza. The narrator introduces the character; ‘I shall you tel of a gode yeman, His name was Robyn Hode’ (Knight 1997). Although the spelling is somewhat different, it is clear that the narrator refers to the class known now as “yeoman”. It is also mentioned within the first several stanzas of *A Gest* that Little John is also a yeoman - ‘and bi hym stode Litell Johnn, A gode yeman was he’, (Knight 1997) so from this we can deduct that it is not just Robin Hood, but those who follow him who can be considered yeomen. This is an idea which receives support from Pollard, who states that ‘Robin Hood and all his merry men are yeomen. He is not a gentleman, but he is not a peasant either. He is in between.’ (Pollard 2004: 212). In modern society they may be defined as part of the middle class. It may be difficult to envision fictitious characters such as Robin Hood and his band of outlaws as being members of the middle class when they have neither home nor money, however, further in this chapter it is revealed that these were not the only two factors in play when considering the class of any person. Historically speaking, Warner states that ‘Medieval bowmen had come from sturdy yeoman stock’

(Warner 1989: p. 30) and with the character of Robin Hood's most defining feature being that of his exceptional skill with the bow, it is easy to understand from where the connection between the yeoman class and the outlaw arises.

Defining what a yeoman is can be a difficult task. Goldberg states that 'The problem is that the boundaries between the upper peasantry...dubbed "yeomen" ... and the gentry are not clearly delineated' (Goldberg 2004: 99). Many scholars simply regard yeomen as a part of the peasantry, despite the fact that there were vast differences in the living standards of the lowly peasants and the often "rich" yeomen. This issue is highlighted by Schofield, who suggests that 'multi-identities wreak havoc with any mere simplistic notions of community' (Schofield 2003: 6). Schofield here refers to the clouding of social classes, such as the classing of the yeoman rank as one and the same as groups of peasants. He adds that "'peasant" is a label which can be applied generously' (Schofield 2003: 6) and this leaves establishing a clear view of a yeoman a difficult task. This discrepancy between the different peasant classes, in addition to the insubstantial divide between middle and upper classes, results in a Medieval class structure incredibly difficult to separate from each other.

In addition to the aforementioned complications when attempting to understand what a yeoman is, there is another reason why the term can be misleading. According to one Medieval historian, the word 'yeoman... derives from "young man"' (Goldberg 2004: 109) and if Robin Hood is referred to as a yeoman in the early Robin Hood ballads, (including *A Gest*), is it possible that this simply refers to his age and not his social class? If so, Robin Hood could have been either lowly peasant or a member of the gentry, as the term would simply refer to his age. However, it seems more likely that the character would have arisen from the lower ranks of society, for several reasons.

According to Goldberg, there were a 'number of families who aspired to aristocratic rank as a consequence of successful careers...or the acquisition of lands through marriage...' (Goldberg 2004: 6). So, yeomen were sometimes wealthy peasants or merchants who aspired to enter the aristocracy, and achieved this end through various means, such as marriage or their businesses becoming prosperous. This point is also hit upon by Day, who suggests that typically 'the yeoman, identified more with the nobility than with their own group [with] their chivalric ballads, celebrating the exploits of "gentleman outlaws" (Day 2001: 26). This reveals the extent to which the classes remain indeterminable from each other – if the yeomen consider themselves as occupants of the upper echelons of society through their own deeds and not money, then defining a gentleman or member of the gentry is not as simple as one may at first consider. As such, the lower classes could be considered as gentlemen. The outlaws in the popular medieval Robin Hood ballads exhibit some of these gentlemanly characteristics, as is demonstrated in the following two stanzas from *A Gest*.

"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.

"These bisshoppes and these archebischoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde;
The hye sherif of Notyngham,
Hym holde ye in your mynde." (Knight 1997)

The first notable element is that there is no "steal from the rich and give to the poor" ethos; as aforementioned in this thesis, this concept came to the character many years later. Second, the character has no ill will to any people he meets unless they are greedy with their money or personal enemies such as the Sheriff of Nottingham, who he asks his merry men to keep in mind should they see him. Furthermore, Robin asks of his men 'loke ye do no husbonde harme, That tilleth with his ploughe' (Knight 1997). Clearly there is respect for all classes: peasantry, clergy and nobility as Robin Hood also asks them not to bother any knight who appears to them of a good sort. It is these mannerisms of the character which suggest to some critics that Robin Hood in *A Gest* could have had a background in the nobility as they are characteristics attributed to the nobility, such as knights who practice the art of chivalry. Goldberg states that 'aristocratic culture...came to encompass a whole ethos known as chivalry, by which virtues such as courtesy, generosity and piety were grafted as a warrior culture' (Goldberg 2004: 119). Are not these some of the characteristics displayed by Robin Hood in the above selections from *A Gest*? Yet this statement refers to the aristocracy, and not the "good yeoman" which *A Gest* refers to. However, if we accept, as Goldberg and Day have suggested, that many yeomen aspired to be members of the gentility and the aristocracy, then it makes sense for them to adopt the virtues most associated with the best that social class has to offer. As Goldberg goes on to say, 'such values permeate contemporary literature, notably romances' (Goldberg 2004: 119). Whilst the Robin Hood ballads of the Middle Ages were not romances, the Robin Hood myth in the twenty-first-century is often presented as a romance, with the Robin Hood character having developed much more of this chivalrous and noble attitude in his recent outings, including Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010), discussed later in this chapter. By entertaining the possibilities that the class barriers were on occasion, a very slight line, we can assume that Robin Hood could have been from either yeoman stock or from some degree of nobility.

The speech and mannerisms of the character also seem to suggest that he is something more than a simple yeoman. Speaking of Robin Hood in *A Gest*, Bellamy states that “it concerns brigandage which was perpetrated with the graces and mannerisms of the upper classes” (Bellamy 1985: p. 134).

Bellamy clearly believes the Robin Hood of *A Gest* could have had an origin in the upper classes. He states that “the genteel deportment of Robin and others at meal times and when greeting others and so forth suggest a great household as source” (Bellamy 1985: p. 134). For Bellamy, it is not that Robin Hood is a simple outlaw, but one who employs characteristics from the upper classes, and as such, could originate from that background. Other scholars have also been inclined to believe that the mythological character had a noble background.

One such scholar is Stephen Knight. In *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, he states that, ‘In the notes of John Leland, antiquary to Henry VIII, he refers to Robin as “Nobilis”; the word can mean noble in moral or class terms, or both’ (Knight 2003: 83/4). This suggests that Robin Hood had (in Leland’s mind at least) become a real life individual or that from the Robin Hood texts available to him, appeared to be from noble stock. Bellamy suggests that one of the most plausible reasons for Robin’s behaviour in *A Gest* is that he spent time in the house of someone from the upper ranks of society. According to Bellamy, ‘the explanation of Robin’s great courtesy is surely that he must at some time have served in a household of a member of the upper class’ (Bellamy 1985: 41), which would explain how he gained many of the characteristics more associated with the nobility than the yeoman class. However, Bellamy attempts to find a real life Robin Hood to try and back up his theory, rather than accepting that the character was always a myth. He argues that Robin Hood could have been Robyn Hode, a chamber porter for King Edward, and that this would be where the character’s manners, in life and in text, would have arisen from. Knight also goes on to examine this real life Robin Hood figure. He states that ‘in 1324 King Edward II was in the Midlands and the North and among his household was a “valet de chambre” called Robyn Hode, who left the King’s service “because he could no longer work” (Knight 2003: 145). However, whilst Bellamy attempts to make Robyn Hode a certainty as to being the inspiration behind the famed character, Knight makes the assertion that ‘there is no sign that this character was an outlaw’ (Knight 2003: 145) and completely refutes Bellamy’s claim. Bellamy has clearly attempted to find a real life Robin Hood by examining the characteristics of the legend present in *A Gest*. He appears to believe that finding a Robin Hood of the class he presumes the outlaw to have originated from as proof that the outlaw did indeed exist. However, establishing that there were real individuals with names similar to that of Robin Hood and belonging to a certain class by no means results in a definite option for a real life source of the myth. What matters most from Bellamy’s assertion is that it reveals that to some critics, such as Bellamy, finding a “real” Robin Hood is more important than accepting that the facts that do not

support these individuals as a real Robin Hood, as he is perceived in the outlaw tales which bear his name.

Bellamy states of the writer of *A Gest* that 'his purpose, very likely his duty, seems to have been to tell a story about the lives of a number of men in 1322 to 1323 or thereabouts' (Bellamy 1985: 71). Note in particular the use of "a number of men", the implication being that the story he tells could have been based around the activities of more than just one real life source. Moreover, *A Gest* is clearly a 'piece of political writing' (Bellamy 1985: 71) aiming to stir up the common and the highborn alike, possibly against the clergy as there are many references to bishops and the such which would be considered as quite hostile. As has been reiterated several times through this thesis, Robin Hood tales often reflect cultural anxieties of the time in which they are written. Even the earliest examples such as *A Gest* are no different, projecting the views of the author, or sometimes the local populace, in order to present an opinion about a certain subject. In this instance it is hostility towards the clergy, in twenty-first-century texts it can be a recent issue, such as the feminism present in ArceJaeger's and Springer's Robin Hood tales.

Despite Bellamy's misplaced attempts at trying to locate a real Robin Hood who occupied some semblance of a place in the gentry, there is support for such a character from Spraggs, who 'suggests that many robberies were committed by men who had formerly been retainers in noble households' (Spraggs 2001: 4). If this is true, then it does support the idea that a Robin Hood character could have had a background in a noble house, as it would give the myth an element of believability. However, Spraggs later goes on to add that 'Brigand gentry of a similar stamp were not uncommon at the time' (Spraggs 2001: 6) so it is equally possible that Robin Hood, or a real life inspiration for the fictitious character, was from the nobility. That multiple classes were taking part in robberies helps to explain why it is so difficult to pin down the character's actual social class. If there was a mixture of real life classes involved in such enterprises, then the author of *A Gest* simply acquired features from many of the outlaws and brigands he heard about. This would result in a variety of characteristics inherent from several social classes being visible in his creation; there would be a mix of all the individualities the author thought reflected the best of all ranks of society. It is this reason which means the character of Robin Hood can at once be a lowly yeoman, yet also envelop the chivalry and courteous behaviour that is more often associated with only the nobility. This gives a reason for why so many critics and writers alike can envision the character as from a different social class. Each permutation can alter the class of Robin Hood because his behaviour is not confined to one class position, but several, and because of this, no matter which class is chosen to represent Robin Hood there is an element of believability applied to any new interpretation of the character.

Bellamy summarises, 'A *Gest* has a good basis of historical fact, and the major reason for this was that facts were necessary to gain credibility for what was a piece of propaganda as much as a piece of entertainment' (Bellamy 1985: 137). The author of the work most likely borrowed much of his material and background of the character from real life "Robin Hoods" in the hope of creating a more relatable character that the masses could get behind, despite class differences. The tale itself was likely performed by wandering minstrels, to yeomen and some of the lower peasant and merchant classes who could enjoy the tale and also be inspired by the exploits of a member of one of their own class, and probably in the banquet halls of the nobility, so many people would hear the tale. Day states that 'literature represents the world-view of a particular group' (Day 2001: 2). The literature that the character of Robin Hood begins with, and then inspired the creation of, demonstrates the features eponymous with how a certain group – in this case the author or the patrons of the author of *A Gest* – view themselves in the eyes of society. *A Gest* and Robin Hood reflect their idealistic self; the one they hope shows them in the best light.

Spraggs declares that highway robbery, and other criminal acts, could be seen 'as a way in which a mettlesome fellow might provide for himself while making a point about his manhood, while the penniless young gentleman who took a purse on the highway, or even burgled in house, was felt by many people to be showing the pride and courage that he had inherited from his ancestors' (Spraggs 2001: 7). There is a connection between the "brave" criminal activities and the exploits of their ancestors in wars decades, even centuries before these events were occurring. From a twenty-first-century perspective, the way that the public of the early Middle Ages appeared to view these crimes in a positive light and took the view that this was simply the way such people honoured their ancestors is one which is hard to understand. However, when we consider that this was a society so riotous and when such crimes were commonplace, it becomes easier to comprehend. It is for this reason Bellamy states that 'Robin's years were...ones when highway robbery must have flourished' (Bellamy 1985: 61) as this was when his actions, while considered criminal, could still be considered acceptable. A character such as Robin Hood would be viewed to be simply reflecting his ancestors' courage on the battlefields, and the addition of his morality simply makes the character more distinguishable; an honourable outlaw.

A regression to ancestral values has been applied to real life figures, as well as fictional characters such as Robin Hood. One of the possible inspirations behind the Robin Hood tales can be found in one of the earliest criminal gangs on record – the Folville brothers. According to historians, the Folville brothers were one of the first criminal gangs that were organised in England and they systematically conducted highway robberies, assaults, and even ransomed individuals in exchange

for money. The fact that they were aristocratic individuals and conducting such activities certainly provides some support for a Robin Hood figure bearing some characteristics of the nobility. Again, their exploits were celebrated by the local populace, as their actions, whilst undoubtedly criminal, seemed to many to be a reasonable enforcement of justice, and an acceptable moral action. Spraggs states that 'human society needs men like the Folville brothers – or at least, like the Folville's in their most famous and justifiable exploits...the killing of the unscrupulous land-grabber Bellers, and the ransoming of Willoughby, the unjust judge' (Spraggs 2001: 22). The Folville brothers provided a sense of justice to people who couldn't instigate such acts themselves, and as such were not hated by the common folk of the time, or at least, not when their actions were against people who the public deemed deserving of their harsh treatment.

Keen also comments on the Folville brothers, but also gives a reason for why they were doing what they were. He states that 'lawlessness was rife in the 1320s; bands of armed men roamed at large and made business of robbery' (Keen 2003: 57) and that one of these bands was the infamous Folville brothers. However, he goes on to add that

'What was perceived as a rise in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, was often identified then (as by some historians since) as a side effect of the wars. Purveyance and exorbitant tax demands caused resentment, and occasionally resistance; disbanded or deserting soldiers could turn easily to organised crime' (Keen 2003: 127)

In this statement, we can take it to understand that taxes were high and this will have had some effect on both the nobility who were taxed by the King, and the peasants, who will have been taxed by their masters, all in the attempt to appease the King and pay for his wars. Unsurprisingly, if these taxes could not be paid there would be consequences, and some would prefer to turn to outlawry than face the justice, or injustice, of not being able to pay the taxes thrust upon them. Taxes, or more accurately, unjust taxation, has been at the centre of several twenty-first-century Robin Hood texts, including Ridley Scott's 2010 film *Robin Hood* and also features in Lawhead's *Hood* (2006). In Scott's *Robin Hood* taxes are increased in Nottingham and the surrounding area which leads to a peasant's revolt, as well as a nobility revolt by the Northern Barons against an unjust King. In Scott's *Robin Hood* the church taxes the people of Locksley by taking all of the grain from the inhabitants. This would lead to the starvation of many families as there would be no seeds for planting. Robin Longstride (the Robin Hood character) hears of what has occurred, steals the grain back, and along with his band of followers, plants the grain at night. This is a prime example of what the Robin Hood character stands for: helping those who cannot help themselves. In the twenty-first-century, this

morality of character is reflected in a tax named a Robin Hood tax. This tax seeks to help the people in society who struggle with money. That it bears the name of the outlaw implies at its underlying use of helping those that need it most. This tax will be examined shortly in this chapter.

Furthermore, in Lawhead's *Hood*, Rhi Bran, the Robin Hood figure, demonstrates the disillusionment with the new Norman leaders when the Norman lord who has taken over his land starts taxing the populace under his charge to an exorbitant amount which none of them can pay. This leads to many people fleeing to the greenwood to escape the unfair punishment for not being able to pay such taxes. Taxes which came from the King would affect all subjects below him, so the whole Kingdom, nobility and peasant alike, would suffer when taxes increased. It is for this reason both a noble and a common Robin Hood can oppose taxes, and be loved by the public, as they are standing up for a moral cause in the eyes of all. Interestingly, in the twenty-first-century, there is such a thing as a "Robin Hood tax". A Robin Hood tax is one which aims to achieve a redistribution of resources in the hope to achieve a more socially equal society, and usually it is a proposed tax on transactions made by financial institutions. The money that is raised by such taxes aims to combat poverty all around the world. As such it is clear why this name has been applied to the tax; it is mainly to help those most in need, and of course, this is one of the main characteristics which has been applied to the character, especially in more recent portrayals, but equally so in some of the early ballads, including *A Gest*.

Robin Hood has often been described as a yeoman yet, in the twenty-first-century, the term "yeoman" has become archaic, with social class often just split into three parts: lower, middle and upper. The yeoman class demonstrates that social position was not so easily determined in the Middle Ages, and hints at the difficulty of differentiating social class, even in the twenty-first-century. It would be exceedingly difficult to separate the lower and higher ends of the middle class from the lower class and upper class respectively, especially if we are to consider that many people are treated differently depending on which social class they are from. Should we examine tax in the twenty-first-century for example, which has already been studied in this chapter, one would know that as your wage gets higher so does the amount of tax you pay. However there is a cut off point for the tax percentage raising, and above this point the percentage of tax paid will not increase, meaning that the richest people will pay the same amount of tax as someone who earns much less. This is an example of unjust taxation in the twenty-first-century, as tax percentages should continue to increase with wages. In the twenty-first-century many of the lowest class struggle to pay even the smallest tax percentages that by law they are forced to pay, and these are the sort of people which Robin Hood would defend from injustice. Tax in the Robin Hood tales and the Middle Ages then, can

clearly be connected to present day problems with the same issue. It is quite worrying to consider that issues that were present in the Middle Ages are as troublesome in the twenty-first-century as they were then; have we really moved on at all or are these issues just perpetrated with different graces than they were back then?

Lawhead takes the idea of a Robin Hood from the nobility, however, his Robin does not bear the same name as the outlaw that we all know and recognise as a folk hero, his hero bears the name of 'Bran ap Brychan, Prince of Elfael' (Lawhead 2006: 1), a son of one of the Welsh kings. The killing of his father by a Norman raiding party leads to his embitterment with the Norman invasion, as well as the fact that they steal his ancestral lands. Furthermore, the punishment and subjugation of his people by the conquering Normans inspires his response and leads to the actions which we as readers associate with any Robin Hood figure, with the added amendment that as their Prince (and King once his father is killed), he is honour bound as his people's liege lord to defend and protect them in any way he can. It is this which reflects some of the qualities often associated with later Robin Hood portrayals, showing him as an extremely moralistic character.

Philip Warner, military historian, makes mention of one of the characters present in Lawhead's text; William de Braose. He states that 'William de Braose...was leading a small invasion force into Wales when one of his soldiers was wounded by an arrow which, dropping out of the sky, cut through the chain mail on his thigh, and then penetrated the horse' (Warner 1989: 32). It is much too coincidental for Lawhead to have used the name of a real life figure of Norman nobility in his text, and therefore we must assume that his version is based on the real life De Braose. Lawhead builds on the existing conflicts between the Welsh and the Normans by using Norman figures as the main antagonists for his version of the infamous outlaw. He takes real figures from the Welsh-Norman battles in his take on the Robin Hood legend, including 'Count Falkes de Braose', and a 'Baron de Braose' who 'intended to press them [The Welsh] into helping build the town the baron required – and the castles too if needed...' (Lawhead 2006: 208). It is resisting unjust authority and defending people who cannot protect themselves which later became some of the most admirable qualities of the character, but are also apparent in earlier Robin Hood texts, such as *A Gest*. De Braose in Lawhead's texts is presented as an arrogant and high minded Norman, who attempts to use the constituents of the land he has been given to build castles, without paying for any labour, and also taxes them to the point of starvation. When the Welsh do not at first appear he declares to one of the locals, 'I will not be commanded by the likes of you. Have fifty workers here tomorrow morning, or one holding will burn' (Lawhead 2006: 213) and when there are still not enough people the following day, he makes good on his promise. Furthermore, when a Welsh youth casts a stone at

him, 'Count de Braose tested the blade and then raised his arm and, with a fury born of frustration, yanked down the boy's trousers and struck the boy's exposed backside with the flat of his sword – once, twice, and again' (Lawhead 2006: 214). From this, it is extremely easy to see why the Normans are viewed as unjust authority figures in Lawhead's tale. Whether De Braose was such a figure in reality is unclear, but for the purpose of Lawhead's texts, he provides an enemy for Rhi Bran to show his bravery through acts considered unlawful, just as the original Robin Hood myths and ballads displayed.

There are several further twenty-first-century texts which reimagine or reaffirm Robin's social class from the early ballads. Springer's take on the Robin Hood legend, *Rowan Hood*, features the outlaws' daughter as the protagonist and takes the side of the many early Robin Hood ballads, describing the character and his band of followers as 'all yeomen' (Springer 2001: 71), a clear nod to his early forays in literature. However this does not mean that all of the other reinterpretations of the Robin Hood character do so. ArceJaeger's *Robin: Lady of Legend* similarly plays on the idea of the gender of the character - as examined in the earlier chapter on gender – however, like many of the more modern Robin Hood reincarnations, it takes the view that the character would have come from the nobility, with Robin being the daughter of Sir Robert Locksley. She also flees from her arranged marriage to that age old enemy of Robin Hood – the Sheriff of Nottingham. In this text, we have elements of both the older and newer takes on the character, combining them to create a tale with strong feminist connotations. It is also worth mentioning that in both these female oriented takes on the Robin Hood myth the female protagonists live in the greenwood, outside of patriarchal society and become figures of authority despite the male characters often attempting to assert their dominance and revert to a patriarchy. That they are only to escape the patriarchy by moving outside of it suggests that there is no way to combat it from within, and as such, anyone who attempts to escape the patriarchy must leave their houses and villages where the patriarchy is still enforced. This is despite the different social classes of the two protagonists; one being from the lower classes and one from the upper classes. This again links to the character's idealistic morals, but with a theme aimed more at a twenty-first-century audience, the intention being to display a new kind of bravery; to not be oppressed by out-dated gender roles.

As I have earlier demonstrated, writers who choose to reproduce the Robin Hood myth can put the outlaw into any social class they deem, because the characteristics inherent to the outlaw were attributed to multiple classes. However, why should they choose these particular class positions? It is possible that it is just down to preference or that they believe that the character was from a particular class, but there is another explanation. Both the aforementioned texts involve a young

person going out on their own into the world and making their mark, and by having two texts, using protagonist from different social classes, it demonstrates that no matter your own position and upbringing, you can be a strong and independent person. Class in the twenty-first-century tends to be synonymous with economic factors; however, these characters come from different social classes but have the same values and morals, like the yeomen social class of the Middle Ages has been shown to have.

Finally, we come to Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*. It is widely regarded as being a distinctly average film by the general public and critics alike; *The New York Times* described the film in a none too flattering way: 'the idea that an ordinary, anonymous person can have a big impact on world events is an attractively democratic notion — one systematically undermined by the rest of the movie, which loads Robin with trappings of heroism that prove paralyzing to the narrative.' (Scott: 2010) suggesting that though the idea behind the film is a good one, it fails to deliver on its premise. It nevertheless plays with the character's social class in an elaborate and unique way, with the character's class actually changing throughout the film. There are also several very clear references to the class of the Robin of the early ballads.

The film follows the trials of Robin Longstride, an archer at the turn of the twelfth century in King Richard's army. Following an impromptu attack on a French castle, Robin has a disagreement with the King and is put in the stocks. Following this, Robin flees the King's army upon the King's death, and whilst running back to the safety of England, Robin Longstride happens to be present at the death of Robert of Locksley (Marian's husband) and promises to the dying Robert to travel to Nottingham to return a sword to Robert's father, Walter. Upon arriving, he is persuaded into taking Robert's place in Locksley as Walter hopes this will help the people in his constituency, meaning his rank becomes one of the gentry and he also becomes Marian's spouse. The film then follows his attempts in trying to protect his new people, and ends with him being outlawed and living in the greenwood, as the Robin of the early ballads does. There are several unique elements of a Robin Hood tale in this film. Clearly the change of social class of Robin Hood actually occurring in the film is the most evident. At the beginning of the film, one of the Merry Men says to Robin 'We're common archers, Robin'(Scott 2010). "Common" certainly suggests that they all consider themselves as lower class individuals, although shortly after this they take armour, swords and other such items from people who were caught (and killed) in an ambush (one of whom is Robert Locksley) and attempt to give the impression that they are knights (and therefore, of a higher station) in an attempt to get back to England. This performance of class is reminiscent of the performance of gender of some of the female protagonists examined in my first chapter, in which the subterfuge allows the characters

to perform a role, that, traditionally, they would not be allowed to perform. In both instances it is their attire which allows them to perform these new roles, which hints at the importance of clothing in both gendering and defining which social class someone inhabits. Once a character leaves the norms of their gender or class they perform their new roles with the efficiency of characters who really were that gender or class, implying at the insubstantial nature of gender and social class, and that both of these social constructs are actually fluid concepts. Furthermore, when Robin and his men then travel to Locksley, Marian's father, Sir Walter Locksley, says of the name Robin Longstride; 'a common enough, but noble name' (Scott 2010). Could not this statement just as easily be about the yeoman class? The class would be defined as the lower class or today's middle class, but their aspirations were to join the gentry, and they tried to display the characteristics which were associated with the upper class. In this short quotation, as well as describing a name, Walter describes a whole class of people. The idea that Robin is a member of the lower class, or at least of a lower station than the Locksley family, is accentuated by a comment from Marian, who compares him to a yeoman. In the response to her father questioning as to whether Robin is handsome, Marian responds in the affirmative, adding 'in the way that yeomen sometimes are' (Scott 2010), again reaffirming the connection between the infamous outlaw and the yeoman class.

However, this is swiftly combatted by Walter Locksley's scheme to establish Robin Longstride as his returned son, in order to keep control of Locksley, and hopefully maintain a grip on his people's wellbeing and see that they are not treated unfairly. Walter Locksley asks of Robin Longstride 'I want you to become...my returned son...and Marian's spouse' (Scott 2010). This elevates him from a commoner or yeoman to a station of nobility. Therefore, Robin Longstride, at the behest of Marian's father, takes on the role of Marian's former husband, Robert Locksley, and states that 'I am Robert of Locksley' (Scott 2010), and by doing so elevates himself from his common archer status into a life of one of the gentry. It is also worthwhile mentioning here that Marian has little or no say in this plan, but is forced to obey her father's wishes, a very clear nod to the patriarchal society which the character's setting would certainly have been, and clearly demonstrating the power that a man had over a woman. However, for Robin Longstride, this is not done for personal gain, but to help Marian and her family and the servants and the people she protects who live on her lands. In this he reflects the common perception of the mythological character, as one who is moralistic and attempts to help those, not necessarily who are poor, but those he believes are deserving of help. Additionally the event of the common Longstride becoming the noble Locksley hints at the lower classes ambition to become members of the upper classes, an action which has been mentioned previously.

Finally, throughout the film there are several references to the greenwood as being the home for outlaws. This is of course where Robin and his Merry Men in the ballads reside, but is also where many real life outlaws and highwaymen made their home. Shortly after Robin first arrives in Locksley we learn from Marian that the 'Orphans run wild in the greenwood' (Scott 2010), the greenwood often being the backdrop for tales of outlaws as aforementioned. Furthermore, at the end of the film when Robin, his band, and even Marian have been branded outlaws by the new King, they flee to the greenwood for protection. As such, Marian states that 'The greenwood is the outlaws' friend' (Scott 2010) as it remains the one place where the King's (in)justice cannot reach them. This lack of reasonable living standard could be one substantial reason as to why it is difficult to accept Robin Hood as being one of the upper class – surely they would have a better livelihood. However, the greenwood also serves another purpose. As aforementioned in the previous chapter, it provides a safe haven from the injustice aimed at them from the King. It could even be argued that the outlaws symbolise nature or the forest, whilst the King and the sheriff of Nottingham represent the urban space, with nature rebelling against the ever growing urban environment. If considered in such a way, then the outlaws and the unjust authority figures become symbols for environmental discourse, and the rebellion takes place on a natural level, not just two human factions.

There have been other, less obvious reincarnations over the last few years. The popularity of comic book movies has resurfaced, and with it, two characters who clearly take inspiration from the Robin Hood character. Both Stephen Amell's Green Arrow on the TV series *Arrow* and Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye in Marvels' *Avengers* films have characteristics of the legendary outlaw, and both characters are deeply moral and unafraid to put themselves in harm's way for someone they do not know, or help those who need it. Contrary to Robin Hood, both Hawkeye and Green Arrow are clearly affluent. Green Arrow, aka Oliver Queen, is a billionaire, possessing all the money he needs to construct a lair, which functions in much the same as the forest as a tool for hiding and for protection as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as all the weaponry and explosives needed to combat his enemies and those who would threaten his city.

In the first series of *Arrow* in particular there is a very clear connection to Robin Hood, as one of the main plot lines sees him targeting wealthy and evil men and syphoning their money into charities or the people they have wrongly acquired the money from. Green Arrow describes himself as 'the man who will bring justice to those who have poisoned my city' (Berlanti 2012), in which he refers to the corrupt elite who have taken advantage of people who cannot defend themselves. Green Arrow hunts down these people and forces them to return the money which they have stolen or unjustly acquired and sees to it that it is returned to those from which it was taken. This is very similar to the

ethos which entered into Robin Hood as the character has evolved – “steal from the rich and give to the poor”, whilst he continues the morals present in *A Gest* which see the character only take from those who deserve his justice. Additionally, like many of the Robin Hood incarnations before him, the public eventually get behind his actions, indeed, at one point he is referred to as a ‘guardian angel’ (Berlanti 2012) despite the illegality of his actions, and even the police see the connection between Green Arrow and Robin Hood as he is ‘Robbing the rich, trying to teach them a lesson’ (Berlanti 2012). He is not dissimilar to other such “billionaire superheroes” like Batman and Ironman, from DC Comics and Marvel comics respectively. Hawkeye is also not lacking in funds as he is a member of the Avengers, and as such, has all the money and technology that they possess available to him. Interestingly, in the recent *Captain America: Civil War*, in a battle between two factions of what would be considered the “heroes” of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, he is on the side which is considered as being outside of the law, just as his inspiration would have been considered. What is extremely clear for these two Robin Hood inspired characters is that whilst they take the morality and ideologies presented by Robin Hood, they implement his strategies through the use of their wealth and modern technology; the wealth of the very highest class. This is a near opposite of the original character they draw upon.

Furthermore, *The Hunger Games* series and films clearly draw upon the Robin Hood legend. Robin Hood has long had starvation due to unjust taxation at the heart of the myth, and *The Hunger Games* builds on this idea, where the wealthy have all the food and the poor are left to fend for themselves or starve. This situation has arisen as ‘a reminder of the rebellion’ (Jacobson 2012) and rebellion is at the centre of the Robin Hood myth, especially to unjust authority which is what the elite class inhabiting The Capitol in the film are. Additionally, Katniss Everdeen (the protagonist) eventually stands up to the unjust authority presented by the upper class, and inspires a revolution, and just as Robin Hood in many portrayals comes to be the centre of where a rebellion forms, so does this happen with Katniss. She also volunteers to take part in the hunger games so that her sister does not have to, saving her from near certain death; and this act of self-sacrifice is another characteristic of Robin Hood. Clearly then, there are similarities to the Robin Hood myth, but again this has been adapted for a modern audience; featuring a dystopian future, and aimed at a young adult audience, which many twenty-first-century adaptations of the Robin Hood myth seem to do. Two examples of this are Springer’s and ArceJaeger’s Robin Hood myths, which both reimagine the Robin Hood character as female.

This short study into the social class of Robin Hood has revealed that the term “yeoman” is deceptively simple and could have been used to describe a variety of people in a number of

circumstances, the connotations for Robin Hood being that the character's social class is not so easily determined, even in the earliest of Robin Hood Ballads, such as *A Gest*. Robin Hood's social class is extremely malleable, and as has been demonstrated, this is even more noticeable in twenty-first-century Robin Hood texts, whether these are texts which place the character in his original setting in the Middle Ages or whether they adapt the character for a modern audience or reader. Inspiration for the character has clearly been taken from all folds of medieval society, from aristocratic values, to the morality and presence of the ideologies of the peasantry. All modern day adaptations, whether they change the social class of the character or choose not to, always stick to the same principles – that the character is a force for good and that s/he has a strong moral capacity, portraying the best values of all classes. Twenty-first-century writers and directors take this idea even further to inspire a new generation, with some of the texts having strong female protagonists aiming to promote equality, whilst others place Robin Hood figures here in the twenty-first-century, giving him/her more modern equipment and leaving him/her as a fighter for justice when unjust situations arise, but creating a figure who envelops the same ideologies as their inspiration; the first moral outlaw: Robin Hood.

It is particularly clear that defining the social class of Robin Hood even at the time of *A Gest* is problematic. The term “yeoman”, often used to describe the character, is one which encompassed a great range of people of varying economic value, which tends to be how one divides social class in the twenty-first-century. Whilst this lack of clarity means that deciding what social class Robin Hood would inhabit today is impossible, it does allow for more flexibility when reinterpreting the character. Class malleability in the period that engendered the Robin Hood myth means that twenty-first-century retellings can move the character up and down the social hierarchy and retain a sense of mythic authenticity. Applying Middle Age definitions of social class to Robin Hood in the present day is as ludicrous as applying twenty-first-century definitions to those earliest portrayals of the character. Social class has come to be defined by socio-economic factors, whilst in the Middle Ages how one acted was also a major part of which social class you would be associated with. Social class, like gender and location, has often been adapted, and one can expect to continue to see various versions of Robin Hood, both in novels and in cinematic releases.

Conclusion: Robin Who?

‘Venison was just the start of the meal. Rabbit-and-onion pasties, boiled capon, and a delicious honey-and-curd dish soon followed in succulent succession. It was a fine feast indeed, and Robin wished that her people could be as lively and merry as they usually were at their mealtime gatherings, but the strange quiet that had gripped the camp ever since the Sheriff had entered persisted even through their supper’ (ArceJaeger 2012: 274)

The feast after a successful outing is a tradition which has been part of the Robin Hood myth for centuries. This occurs in *A Gest* where some of Robin’s band ‘waylay a knight who is invited to dine’ (Pollard 2004: 146) and has occurred in other interpretations of the Robin Hood myth since. Like many of the elements of the myth examined throughout this thesis, it has been adapted to suit new interpretations of the Robin Hood tale. This above quotation describes a meal in the forest, at which the Sheriff of Nottingham is present. The Sheriff has been captured by the outlaws, but instead of killing him, Robin Hood decides to demonstrate how the outlaws live in the heart of Sherwood Forest, in the hope that Robin can make him see the error of his ways in branding them all criminals. For the plan to work, ‘she had wanted...to make him see her people as children, wives and husbands, not outlaws’ (ArceJaeger 2012: 274), and she hopes to attempt to negotiate in an amiable manner. To create a friendly atmosphere, Robin has her band put on a performance, including sparring bouts and archery, with the intention of showing the Sheriff that he has nothing to fear from the outlaws, as long as he treats them with respect.

Several adaptations of the Robin Hood myth are present. Robin is a “she”, and as such, different from the “original” Robin Hood present in the early ballads, such as *A Gest*. Whilst not afraid to resort to violence against the Sheriff, she prefers to try and appeal to his reason – whilst the Robin Hood in *A Gest* ends up decapitating his nemesis. Again, this helps with differentiating this new Robin Hood from the early portrayals of the character. However, as in many of the tales involving the Sheriff of Nottingham, reason proves pointless. On leaving the outlaw encampment, the Sheriff states that ‘it heartens me to see such respect for the King and I, his deputy, even in the heart of Sherwood’ (ArceJaeger 2012: 274), obviously attempting to save his own neck and try to keep the outlaws on his own side, whilst planning his revenge. The Sheriff remains an implacable figure, as he does in his earliest portrayals, but the attempt to reason with him is a feature relatively new to the Robin Hood myth, and as such demonstrates the evolution that has taken place in the myth.

In my first chapter, I discussed why and how Robin Hood’s gender has become indeterminable in recent years. This change came about through the greater role Maid Marian has played over time in the myth. Furthermore, Maid Marian became the central character to some interpretations of the

myth, muscling Robin Hood out of the centre of his own tales, and this eventually lead to the female Robin Hoods which have been examined in this thesis. That Robin Hood has now been presented as a woman *and* a man in the twenty-first-century is the culmination of Maid Marian's shift to the centre of the myth, with the outlaw himself becoming female. Authors utilise a female Robin Hood to promote issues such as inequality of gender, but also to inspire younger readers and to diminish stereotypical gender roles, with Robin Hood performing the typically masculine role of leader and embodiment of masculine strength, as a woman. What is especially clear is that Robin Hood texts have, and continue in the twenty-first-century, to mock the idea of gender as binary, through the device of gender performativity. There is no longer a need for gender specific roles, and the "gender-fluid generation" of which the younger people of the twenty-first-century inhabit are proof that this has or is becoming the case.

I also examined location and social class, and in the feast scene above, these elements are also present. The changes to the original Robin Hood texts, the reasons for these changes, and how they have made the transition and are presented in the twenty-first-century have been the main focus of this thesis. The change of gender is the most obvious of the changes to the myth (if we consider *A Gest* our control text) revealed by these quotations, but changes in location are just as important.

ArceJaeger's tale takes place in Sherwood Forest as many of the early Robin Hood tales do, and there are also parts where the action moves to Nottingham, with an archery competition and a jail-break occurring in the town. Both Sherwood Forest and Nottingham are synonymous with the Robin Hood myth, and remain so in many twenty-first-century interpretations of the myth. The outlaw camp is deep in Sherwood Forest, and is encompassed by 'a tall oak' (ArceJaeger 2012: 272). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the oak is symbolic, and represents the best qualities of the English; sturdiness, reliability and strength, or at least those which the English wish they possess, for it is of course subjective. The oak was present in some of the early Robin Hood tales, and as examined in a previous chapter, became synonymous with outlaw tales, and the characteristics inherent in these "honourable outlaws". That it remains in this modern interpretation of the Robin Hood myth not only hints at the longevity of the oak as a tool of symbolic value, but also hints at the longevity of the Robin Hood myth, which has often incorporated the tree into its legacy. As both the oak and Robin Hood have been acquired by countries other than England as symbols of identity they can both be seen as malleable, as well as enduring symbols of national identity. Robin Hood, like the oak, is "replanted" in new contexts, and the associations made with the character and national identity move with him.

The tale also places its Robin Hood in the Middle Ages, so with regards to temporal location, this interpretation incorporates many of the traditional elements of the Robin Hood tale. However, the location of the character Robin Hood is much more varied in modern tales. Whilst many tales still choose to place the character in his original haunts of Sherwood Forest and Nottingham, many now move the character to an urban environment, and update the character accordingly. Such examples include Green Arrow and Hawkeye, both mentioned in this thesis. These new interpretations of the character keep the morality and weapon of choice of the character, but apply them to modern situations, with their opponents wielding guns and other high-tech weaponry, whilst their bows now have explosive arrows, and are made of metals rather than the wooden bows of the Middle Ages. They are also American interpretations of the character, displacing the character from his English roots, and both are characters from comic books. Whilst the original Robin Hood tales were enjoyed by all ages, these are aimed at a specific audience, with many comic-book readers being of the younger generation, and these interpretations create characters more relatable to a twenty-first-century reader, who is familiar with the technology which can be employed in such tales.

My third, and final, chapter asked how Robin Hood could be perceived as a member of various social classes by different authors, and whether he could have been more than a simple outlaw even from his first forays into literature. Even from the earliest portrayals of the character in ballads such as *A Gest*, Robin Hood has been a character whose social class has been open to interpretation. It became especially clear that the “yeoman” class was a movable and broad category, so to impose twenty-first-century class definitions rigidly onto the myth is nonsense. It has been demonstrated that he has been portrayed as both upper class and as commoner, and continues to be represented as either in twenty-first-century interpretations. Robin Hood has characteristics which have historically been viewed as those inherent to the higher classes, but is often a champion of the lower classes. It has further been argued that this is the reason why many twenty-first-century portrayals of the character have been open to making the character upper class, often changing the name Robin Hood to Robin of Locksley, and giving him a title, revealing him to be of the nobility. Social class, then, is as open to reinterpretation as location and gender, examined before it. This remains clear even from the opening quotation to this conclusion.

The feast described above is not unlike one would expect to hear coming from a great hall of the house of a member of the nobility or aristocracy. However, it takes place in the middle of Sherwood Forest, and not some extravagant building occupied by the rich. It is a civil affair; and, as such, not what one would expect to happen when we consider that these are outlaws and what we are lead to believe are not civilised people. Moreover, the Sheriff has been kidnapped and introduced to the

band of outlaws, but is treated with respect and courtesy (albeit somewhat unwillingly) by all. This point is one that has also been examined earlier in this thesis; that Robin Hood commits crimes, but has the mannerisms inherent to what one would consider as being those of the upper classes. The Robin Hood in Arcejaeger's tale does come from a wealthy background, an opposite of the original Robin Hood, despite the fact many critics have argued that the outlaw could have come from a noble house. Robin Hood, in this interpretation of the tale, has both the mannerisms and morality from the earliest Robin Hood portrayals, but added to this is the fact that she has the background to explain why she acts in this way and readers like to know the backstory of their favourite characters. Again, what these points demonstrate to us is that, like the gender and location arguments before this one, social class has also become a subject which is extremely malleable, and one which is appropriated by authors to present their Robin Hoods as having characteristics that envelop all that is best of certain classes, whilst in keeping with many of the traditional elements of the Robin Hood tales, such as crimes perpetrated with the graces of the gentility.

The number of Robin Hood books and films show no sign of slowing down in production. There are several Robin Hood movies in the pipeline, with several film companies hoping to build on the success that the character has received in his many portrayals on film, in pictures such as Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010). One critic asks, 'how hard has Hollywood fallen for the idea of a Robin Hood film? Warner Bros quietly has put one into development, but this makes four major movie projects on the same subject. Sony, Disney and Lionsgate have the others' (Fleming Jr: 2015). The sheer number of Robin Hood films in development demonstrates just how highly regarded the myth is, even now, nearly a millennium after the first Robin Hood tales are thought to have appeared. This suggests that in twenty-first-century culture, the appropriation of the myth into an interpretation of epic proportions – such as that attempted by Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010) is one which is desired, as they inhabit that most profitable of movie genres: the action film. One can similarly expect an influx of novels on the character to appear in the next few years, with knowledge of the character becoming even more world-wide if all the Robin Hood films in production are finished and reach the cinema. It has been suggested that the tale remains popular as 'it's a time-tested story of heroism, action and danger' (Fleming Jr: 2015), but I would add that it remains popular because of the many variations on the original text that have appeared, constantly adapting the myth and creating new versions for the viewing and reading public to enjoy.

Finally, throughout this thesis, many twenty-first-century interpretations of the Robin Hood myth have been examined. Whether they play with the idea of gender, whether they move the character away from his ancestral home in Sherwood forest or place him in a different time period, or even if

the social class of the character is changed, all Robin Hood tales have something in common. No matter how different these modern Robin Hood interpretations become, they will always bear the marks of Robin Hood's representational history. Even characters that bear different names, such as Katniss, protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, will still draw comparisons to Robin Hood, for the simple fact that she utilises a bow as her weapon of choice, and the series focuses on the theme of combatting unjust authority. Robin Hood is a composite; no matter the differences of these reinterpretations, one can always trace their lineage back to one character; the legend that is Robin Hood.

Word Count: 25,936

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