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ROBIN HOOD AS SHERIFF IN MEDIEVAL ESTATES MODEL LITERATURE

by

MACKLIN COWART

Under the direction of Robert S. Lightsey, PhD

ABSTRACT

In his book, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, John Bellamy asserts that the lack of a study of the relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff stems from very little evidence in the ballads and external sources. However, the *Robin Hood* ballads originate in the fourteenth century when tales of justice and chivalry experienced widespread appeal alongside complaint literature addressing social upheaval bubbling to the surface of English life; why would an audience celebrate an outlaw during this time and long after Gawain and Arthur fade in popularity in the ensuing centuries? There must be more to the relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff of Nottingham. In order to find a deeper relationship between the outlaw and lawman, the estates model should be used as a framework from which to begin the study of Robin Hood and his shrieval desires and not as a specific exercise of explication and application. By doing so, one can see that Robin Hood does assume the role of the sheriff in the early ballads by assuming his duties of managing the forests, collecting money from individuals within the community, albeit mostly from dishonest clergy, maintaining an army for defense, and settling disputes between various parties within the shire. By examining the shrieval position Robin attempts to fill as imagined through the estates model and the period's accepted role of sheriff, Robin Hood appears as the idealized form of the sheriff in a real-world environment that could not support the ideal.

INDEX WORDS: Robin Hood; Sheriff; Shrieval; Medieval; Estates; Jill Mann

ROBIN HOOD AS SHERIFF IN MEDIEVAL ESTATES MODEL LITERATURE

by

MACKLIN COWART

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2015

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by

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August 2015

DEDICATION

For Audrey, always. “Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.”

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I would like to acknowledge my committee chair and members for seeing this project through; your suggestions and guidance are greatly appreciated and act to further support my ideas as they have taken shape and continue to grow. To my family: your unending support over the years has helped this rural South Georgia boy reach far above what he could see. Lastly, I thank the One who truly gives me the strength and ability simply to be more.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, John Bellamy states that “The relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff in the ballads where they both figure is one of bitter hostility, although the nature of the enmity is never made clear [. . .] No one has, I think, sought or suggested any cause behind this” (43). Bellamy believes the lack of a study of the relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff stems from very little evidence in the ballads and external sources. Bellamy has, in effect, limited the scope of finding the root of the animosity between the outlaw and sheriff. One might argue that the antagonism is natural: the law enforcer pursues the law breaker. However, the *Robin Hood* ballads originate in the fourteenth century when tales of justice and chivalry experienced widespread appeal alongside complaint literature addressing social upheaval bubbling to the surface of English life; why would an audience celebrate an outlaw during this time and long after Gawain and Arthur fade in popularity in the ensuing centuries? There must be more to the relationship between Robin Hood and the sheriff of Nottingham.

Two questions should be asked: Does the early *Robin Hood* corpus fit into the literature of estates satire?; and, Does Robin Hood become the sheriff or pursue the shrieval role in the early ballads in order to tear down estate parameters? The first question appears to be the easier one of the two because of Ruth Mohl’s convenient list of the necessary items for an estates model text. Mohl notes that estates literature contains a record of the estates, lamentations for the failure of the estates, ordination from God for the estates and therefore justification for their continuance, and a sought after remedy for their shortcomings (6-7). She claims that each work does not have to incorporate all four elements, but the more they have, the closer the work is to

the model. The estates model should be used as a framework from which to begin the study of Robin Hood and his shrieval desires and not as a specific exercise of explication and application. The three earliest extant texts in the corpus, the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, and *Robin Hood and the Monk*, clearly address of the shortcomings of the estates, confront the divine appointment of each estate, and provide solutions to the problems encountered. Thomas Ohlgren and Stephen Knight, in their edition *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, note that the *Geste* was printed around 1510 (there is no surviving manuscript); *Robin Hood and the Potter* survives in one manuscript from around 1500; *Robin Hood and the Monk* exists in manuscript form from around 1450. These three preeminent texts tackle the issue of the oppression by the Church and the aristocracy through high taxes, corruption, and suppression of upward mobility. The sheriff represents the aristocracy because he collects money for and directly reports to the king. They oversaw contracts or binding agreements which usually occurred between a lord and tenant in order to ensure each end was fulfilled as agreed. The corruption occurs when the sheriff forgets or ignores his duties of being the impartial manager of a shire and begins to look after his own interests due to the consequences associated with unfulfilled duties to the king, namely failing to raise enough revenue through taxation. These personal interests centered on job security became tied to anything relating to power and authority and money; those with all three tend to want it to stay out of the hands of the middle and lower classes. Although attempts to curb growing resentment of seigniorial demands are noted in both Edward I (in 1290) and Edward III's (in 1340) reign, they were short lived and actually led to more intense extortion and harassment of lower classes through abuse of *oyer et terminer* (to hear and determine). In *Thomas Wright's Political Songs*, an unnamed individual is noted as complaining that Edward III's tax collectors, i.e. sheriffs, "hunt us as hounds do a hare on the hill" (152). Simon Walker,

in *The Lancastrian Affinity, 1361-1399*, gives an example of a 1370s under-sheriff in Lancashire, William Chorlegh, who amassed wealth beyond his means to rightly do so. Walker states that Chorlegh “acquired so much wealth by his extortions while in office that, although his lands and rents were worth only £10 a year, it was well known that the annual expenses of his household exceeded £200” (163). Bellamy notes that “The list of supposed malpractices ranged from being responsible for false indictments, imprisonments and appeals, to taking heavy ransoms, ‘unjust and intolerable distrains’, a variety of extortions and the peculation of tax monies” (49). The complaints of the shrieval office lie in the sheriff’s limited oversight and generations of stagnation and status quo. Each of the three estates satisfies the divine ordination through the continued oppression by higher social classes who believed that a disruption in the estates model would cause it to collapse and thus result in social chaos. However, the chaos existed partly by corruption; also, the middle class did not fit the model because they were somewhere in between that could not be accounted for. The middle class either had to move up, which was not desired by the aristocracy, or return to the peasantry, which the yeomen did not want to do. The deviation from the model could not be divinely inspired if the pieces would not fit.

Several solutions to the disruptions within the estates model exist. One solution entails keeping every class like it is so no problems would arise. Another solution would be to offer a budding yeoman the opportunity to prove his work prowess in a more intense environment while setting him up to fail so that others who may aspire to shake up the estates model would think twice if the outcome proved to be detrimental to the individual. The *Robin Hood* ballads, however, demonstrate that yeomen are capable of more challenging endeavors and can succeed within those endeavors without succumbing to the pitfalls associated with power and authority.

This alternate approach exposes the flaws with the estates model while offering a new opportunity for the middle class to establish a stronger foothold in the emerging social model.

For example, in the eighth fitt of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* it states

“I drede our kynge be slone:
 Come Robyn Hode to the towne, iwys
 On lyve he lefte never one.”
 Full hastily they began to fle
 Both yemen and knaves,
 And olde wyves that might evyll goo,
 They hypped on theyr staves. (lines 1710-1716)

The townspeople are frightened to see neither the sheriff nor the king but rather Robin and hundreds of men wearing his Lincoln green color. The fear they have is the suggestion of corruption as an inevitability of the office of sheriff. The townspeople are conditioned to feel “hunted” like the hare when authority approaches. They misread the outlaw’s intent because they rely on memory and experience to justify their response. Only after they recognize the king as he allays their fears do they calm down:

The kynge loughe full fast,
 And commanded theym agayne;
 When they se our comly kynge,
 I wys they were full fayne.
 They ete and dranke and made them glad,
 And sange with notes hye; (*Gest* lines 1717-1722)

The townspeople are assured by the king that all is well in the shire and that what they are witnessing is authorized; instead of feeling fear, the king extends the townspeople a commitment to rightful justice within the emerging social order. By wearing Robin's livery, condoning the outlaw's behavior to the shire folk, and offering a place for Robin within his court, it is as if the king has agreed to Robin replacing the old sheriff. Since sheriffs are only answerable to the king, Robin Hood's acceptance by the king demonstrates the possibility of upward mobility. If Robin succeeds in his new role as sheriff, others with questionable backgrounds would feel that they, too, could aspire to manage a large land area with duties requiring interaction with all classes and the handling of large amounts of money. In theory, it sounds good to let those who might have the ability to try it, but in the end the estates should go as unchanged as possible because it means social stability for the aristocracy; however, estates model satire and complaint literature oppose this status quo.

Secondly, Robin Hood does assume the role of the sheriff in the early ballads after killing the officially appointed sheriff and assuming his duties. In fact, in the *Gest* the king accepts the outlaw and his men into his court as if Robin were to care for it as a sanctioned high sheriff would care for any other royal vill. In all the ballads, Robin managed the forests, collected money from individuals within the community, albeit mostly from dishonest clergy, maintained an army for defense, and settled disputes between various parties within the shire. For all intents and purposes, he was the sheriff as the sheriff should have been before corruption tarnished the position. More than money or property or fame, Robin sought honesty and integrity from his men and those he encountered outside of his band, and his fulfillment of shrieval duties places him squarely in the position of sheriff. By examining the shrieval position Robin attempts to fill as imagined through the estates model and the period's accepted role of sheriff, Robin Hood

appears as the idealized form of the sheriff in a real-world environment that could not support the ideal.

Robin Hood scholarship has not addressed this aspect of the outlaw tradition. The sheriff has always garnered the necessary derision and humor within various studies the early minstrels intended him to have, but my study looks at the deeper social contexts implied by such a strong character presence in the ballads. Essentially the question comes down to answering “Why target the sheriff?” without rehashing obvious socio-political arguments raised over the last fifty years, most notably by J. C. Holt and Rodney Hilton. Those arguments focus on looking for a specific sheriff who would fulfill the aims of the characterization as it is presented throughout the *Robin Hood* corpus. The early discussion of historical figures gathered steam with the debate between Holt and Hilton in the 1950s and early 1960s and continued to pepper the writings of Keen, Dobson, and Taylor from the 1970s, and Knight and Ohlgren from the 1980s to the present. These studies have produced more viable answers to historical sheriffs and manuscript ownership than has the search for an historical Robin Hood, such as with Thomas Ohlgren’s 2007 book, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts, and Ideology*, Evelyn Perry’s “Thieves and Outlaws in Medieval Folklore”, and Julian Luxford’s fascinating discovery of a Robin Hood mentioned in the English Chronicle during Edward I’s reign in “An English Chronicle Entry on Robin Hood”, but they have overlooked why important characters are presented as stereotypically corrupt or heroic, for example, over long periods of time. Other studies have specifically addressed the market structures and forces within the fourteenth and fifteenth-century economies, such as Elliot Kendall’s article “Gift and Market in *Robin Hood and the Potter*”, Claire Sponsler’s *Drama and Resistance Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*, and Knight’s *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*.

Knight and Kelliher, in *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript*, and Chiykowski, in *The Court of Beast and Bough: Contesting the Medieval English Forest in the Early Robin Hood Ballads*, examine the role and life of Medieval foresters, which are interesting character studies but do not address the shrieval and complaint elements of my study. These types of historical studies have proven to be important in the degree of public involvement within the ballads which help to open the door to a thorough study of each character in relation to historical context and why certain elements of each character remain in the tales. Numerous children's books center on the outlaw, too, but those books address a much more modern construction of Robin Hood emerging from the nineteenth century and focusing on moral building in children. There are *Robin Hood* plays, but those theatrical productions are closely associated with the early Tudor era, as Knight and Ohlgren point out in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, and are not part of the time period of my work. The overlooked question, then, becomes why is there such vehemence directed at the shrieval position? Demonstrating how the *Robin Hood* ballads support Robin Hood's rightful reestablishment of the shrieval office will effectually illuminate a small, but important, aspect of medieval studies and offer a more thorough study of the early *Robin Hood* corpus.

Chapter one will place the early *Robin Hood* ballads within the general framework of the estates model and show the satiric intention of the tales. The estates model not only legitimizes the ballads as serious social discourse, but it also allows them to join the works of figures like Geoffrey Chaucer, disrupting the standard model in which three estates are no longer sufficient to reflect late Medieval society, by adding a range of middle- and lower-class concerns. No one knows for sure why this genre came about, whether it was motivated by a desire on the part of the peasantry to improve its lot, or a growing public displeasure with the Church's mounting extravagances, but its appearance contributed to the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries'

intensifying examination of the fabric of Medieval society. By the fourteenth century, the genre was in full swing and being applied by those who would eventually become staunch foundations of the literature of the Middle English period, i.e. Chaucer, Gower, and Langland—in whose work Robin Hood is first named—to name a few, as well as drawing attention to and support for the Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

Estates literature develops in England during the fourteenth century due to social conditions prime for complaint. One of the biggest contributors to the social changes was the plague of the mid-fourteenth century and its effects on the workforce. The plague attacked more of the city workers than the rural farmers which created a vacuum in the city labor force during the latter half of the fourteenth century. The employers needed more workers and began paying higher wages than the farmers were earning which helped to create an urban migration of peasant farmers. As they made more money, they improved their lot through more personal consumption and the desire for education, i.e. reading literacy. Chaucer, writing in English instead of Latin, and other anonymous authors gained widespread appeal with their satiric exposure of the social classes and how they were beginning to fail. English translations of the Bible also increased discontent within the emerging middle class, helping to stoke the flames of change. So even though a new middle class was emerging and moving up the social scale, those in the aristocracy did not welcome the change because it meant that they had less control over society. Of course, no class wanted to lose any authority it had; as a result, the entrenched power structures pushed back against an increased fervor on the part of the commoner to gain a more secure social foothold. The Statute of Laborers in 1351 attempted to settle the labor problems by limiting wages, but the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 forced the marketplace to set wages, benefitting the laborers. With the nobility, the Church in its ardent suppression of translated Bibles, and the

peasantry in a state of great change, writers experienced golden opportunities to reflect on these disruptions.

In light of these events, one can see how a figure such as Robin Hood would emerge and become popular over a wide audience, especially the yeomanry and peasantry. His character provides an important foundation on which the middle class could rally and through which the estates model is addressed. Although the *Robin Hood* ballads are not formally estates model satire, they share many of the aims of the genre of estates complaint. Referencing Mohl's four points inherent to estates literature mentioned earlier, the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *Robin Hood and the Potter* clearly parallel the genre by specifically addressing the estates' shortcomings and one's contentment within his estate because of divine ordination, and it offers a solution. The works directly address the problems with the Church officials in their treatment of collecting rents and with the sheriff's duties in upholding the king's laws, especially as they affect the non-aristocracy. Also, Robin is clearly not content within his assumed pre-outlaw estate of the peasantry and so establishes himself within the parameters of the yeoman class. His upward movement warrants attention because it is not without merit; he clearly commands authority and has considerable means at his disposal, however ill-begotten they may be. Although the audience never knows why Robin is outlawed, the fact remains that his advancement has not pleased the power structures and thus must be dealt with according to the law. Any animosity that might otherwise be applied to the outlaw due to his illegal behavior is transferred to the sheriff, a symbol of the king's power extended to a very personal, local level, whose aim reflects the desire of the traditional estates structure to remain intact. Therefore, the audience of the ballads immediately recognizes the antagonistic connotations implied within the

text and celebrates Robin as one who understood their struggles and fought to enact change which they might have felt restrained from attempting themselves.

However, Robin Hood cannot be assumed to fit exactly within the socio-historical framework of the late fourteenth century. Jill Mann states that “it is, of course, generally recognised that satire practises both selection and distortion, and that its relationship with ‘historical reality’ is therefore impossible to define with exactness. But [. . .] satire takes on a historical life of its own, perpetuating both specific ways of observing reality and conceptual frameworks within which it can be organised” (8). Estates satire cannot give an exact reality within its literature because the scope becomes too large or is forced to consider too many facets requiring too much detail to resolve. The Church, for example, is enormous, and addressing the corruption at every level would be difficult to sufficiently resolve. But the Church is active on the local levels and engages both the aristocrat and peasant on a daily basis; those interactions within the town or shire become the focal point which, arguably, are systemic problems occurring at the top as much as the bottom. The smaller scale makes dealing with the issues of complaint more readily addressed and illustrated. When Robin Hood instructs his men to target bishops in the *Gest*, the rationale behind the decision appears meaningless until the corruption is clearly seen in how the bishops are trying to illegally confiscate Sir Richard Lee’s land. This land, or land like it, is land that yeomen and peasants in the audience know, work on, and see every day. The bishops, too, are people these yeoman and peasants encounter regularly and are supposed to take care of their eternal souls. These local complaints are what drive the *Robin Hood* ballads and make them widely popular; their relevance is common enough to evoke support and empathy. Therefore, the *Robin Hood* ballads become the outlet that the late fourteenth and fifteenth-century middle class needs to celebrate in order to frame their

experience with pieces culled from different areas at various occasions. Over time, as Mann implies, the stereotypes that surround Robin Hood become infused with historical events so that fact and fiction cannot be separated, but that have shared experiences.

V.J. Scattergood states that Robin Hood “is made to fulfil all the latent aspirations of his yeoman audience: he is rich and free, not tied to service or toil, not dominated by authority, in no way a starved and hunted criminal but an agent for moral good who rectifies the abuses of contemporary society” (367). Although the lifestyle of the outlaw is celebrated and glamorized in contrast to its stark reality, Robin Hood’s actions were meant to be encouraging to the middle and lower classes. By engaging the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *Robin Hood and the Potter*, one can see how Robin’s actions are the result of his performing the duties of a sheriff. The evidence, although subtle, supports this claim while fulfilling another pillar of the estates model developed by Mohl which is the “attempt to find remedies for the defections of the estates” (7). Of course, in light of Robin’s attempt to reconcile the shrieval role to its original intent of fair, just authority, the final pillar seems to counteract the third pillar of being content in the estate God has ordained for everyone. The early *Robin Hood* ballads are not perfect fits within the Estates model, but they do reveal cracks within the system that cannot account for the middle class.

Chapter two will provide a background to the shrieval post and how the sheriff in the three early ballads fails in fulfilling the moral and social requirements for the role. The history of the sheriff in Medieval England must be understood to properly address the sheriff in the *Robin Hood* corpus. The shrieval position in the late Middle Ages stems from the Norman Conquest as a primary tool through which the new rulers could extend their reach directly into the lives of the local English communities. Anglo-Saxon England had sheriffs, in the form of

shire reeves, but their duties were much more localized and diversified. Essentially, the reeve was responsible for maintaining order, settling disputes, and collecting the taxes within his community. Like many things that changed in England as a result of the Conquest, the reeve's role evolved into a corruptible position due to the demands placed on it by the king and the lack of supervision or clear avenues for the redress of grievances. By the earliest documented time Robin Hood appears in literature of the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in the 1370s, the sheriff had the means, opportunity, and expectation to be corrupt and thus appears to be but a shadow of his former figure. John Bellamy notes in *Robin Hood: An Historical Inquiry* that one probable individual from whom the sheriff of Nottingham is modeled is Henry de Faucumberg, who served as sheriff from 1323 to 1331. During this time, Faucumberg amassed over £285 in debt in one year, demanded from the peasantry extra food be prepared and readied for traveling Scottish and English envoys, and was ultimately investigated for corruption; the court records are silent on his sentence, but since he remained sheriff after these inquiries one can safely assume they were satisfactorily resolved (49-50). The uniqueness of the shire reeve, or sheriff, position derived from the fact that a peasant could assume the role and thus have potentially more power and influence than the aristocracy. Of course, with that extra authority and little to no supervision, the sheriff tended to become corrupt. Richard Firth Green, in "Medieval Literature and Law", explains that corruption within the law was widespread enough that fourteenth-century writers addressed it and did so through general attacks on the institutions. Green notes that most writers of Medieval legal satire perceived laws and the enforcement of them as "good old laws that have fallen into neglect" and needing the attention of the king to reform the administrators of the laws (419). Green's position comes from numerous instances during the course of the mid to late fourteenth century in which courts, justices, and the sheriffs involved in

holding court and making arrests were disrupted to the point of near anarchic collapse. Green states that “people in the Middle Ages had far higher expectations of justice than we do [...] medieval people trusted it to mirror a higher order, and their indignation was correspondingly all the greater when it failed them” (416). The sheriff’s corruption, then, potentially affected everyone in the shire, and those with limited resources, i.e. the peasants, would have virtually little recourse for redress apart from living outside of the law.

Chapter three will examine how Robin Hood and his men mirror shrieval “society.” The outlaw band exists in a hierarchical environment in which the leader, Robin Hood, has no guarantee of leadership since the men seem to have the freedom to challenge his role and usurp the position if they can. These challenges usually present themselves from inside the band through challenges by Little John, but in other stories outsiders have beaten Robin Hood and been offered, at the minimum, a position within the outlaw band. *Robin Hood and the Potter* demonstrates how a lowly potter beats Robin in a duel and is given a position within the outlaws; Robin then sells his pots, and the potter is given well over a year’s pay for his trouble. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Little John seeks employment outside of the outlaw band because he feels mistreated by Robin Hood, but he eventually saves the outlaw leader and is offered the leadership role after his valiant service. In Robin’s mind, he serves as long as those he serves desire him to serve, and anyone can take that position if they are strong enough. Similarly, the sheriff serves at the discretion of the king as long as the community in which he serves continues to benefit from the service. These brief examples show how the shrieval role should be fulfilled; the arbiter of justice within the community should be respected enough to carry out his duties while humble enough to be replaced when necessary. In many ways, then, the community surrounding the sheriff and sheriff’s administration must exist in harmony. When that

community falters, so does the sheriff; but the faltering is also in direct correlation to the sheriff's corruption which seems to be instituted as a way to hedge against a shortfall for the king. If the sheriff does well, the community does well, and the king does well. When the sheriff gets out of line, the other two elements become disjointed, too. A clear example occurs in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* when Robin becomes an unofficial high sheriff, spends all his gain on frivolous courtly connections, loses his men and reputation, and crawls back to the forest seeking forgiveness from his community and acceptance as a low ranking member of the group. They, however, see his contrition and return the outlaw to his position of power. Robin Hood's band also mimics the shrieval force by having one person in charge, and several men immediately below who help carry out the responsibilities of the office. A posse is at the ready at a moment's notice to defend the community, which happens to be a shrieval duty.

Robin Hood studies have long neglected close readings of characters and the reasons they are presented in particular ways. There are ongoing developments in the social and political aspects surrounding the early ballads, but they center on the actions of audience projections in the mercantile arena and group dynamics. Group dynamics are important for my research, but I intend to look at individuals and individual reasons that influence those group dynamics. The main historical elements influencing my arguments are the plagues of the fourteenth century and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. These events help dictate how estates complaint literature addresses significant upheaval in fourteenth and fifteenth century England and how they shape English society in light of a crumbling estates model and emerging middle class. Robin Hood has stood the test of time by becoming timeless because his characterizations and those who interact with him share commonalities that many people find appealing and attractive, but more importantly, these commonalities help lend a voice to those less empowered to be heard in the

latter Middle Ages. Therefore, each character should be engaged in order to shed light on the outlaw's popularity and give further insight to such an immediately recognizable antagonist, the sheriff. Without the sheriff, there would be no outlaw, and without the outlaw, there would be no sheriff; thus it makes sense to begin character studies with an integral participant while integrating the outlaw tradition into the estates model.

2 CH. 1: PLACING THE *ROBIN HOOD* BALLADS IN THE ESTATES MODEL

According to Jill Mann in *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, estates satire is a “medieval literary genre which is closely concerned with the life of society” (2). Although Mann focuses her work on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, her description of Medieval estates satire applies to other works apart from Chaucer's. As Mann notes, the *Middle English Dictionary* defines “estate” as “A class of persons, especially a social or political class or group; also a member of a particular class or rank” (Mann 3), and she goes on to explain that her use of the term when applied to literature, and Chaucer in particular, will focus on “works which satisfy the more rigid definition of estates literature---which deal with a fairly large number of social classes in sequence, and expound their duties or criticize their failings in a relatively direct way--but also works in such literary forms as debate, narrative, or drama, in which estates satire can play a more or less dominant role” (Mann 3). Her contention is that Chaucer and other anonymous writers of the latter Middle Ages did not adhere to one literary form to satirize certain groups which then allowed for greater freedom of expression. Mann notes that estates literature “depends on and exploits the frameworks known as ‘social stereotypes’” as a type of mirror in which one draws examples from real life while creating perceptions within literature from those examples (8). In the case of the *Robin Hood* ballads, then, the sheriff is presented as corrupt because real life sheriffs were observed to be corrupt, so this picture helps create the illusion that

all sheriffs are corrupt because we see only corrupt sheriffs in the *Robin Hood* ballads while offering a solution to the satirized problem. Thus, estates satire produces a world that moves beyond merely placing individuals and their respective groups in social context and looks at how those individuals, groups, and contexts interact to inform, entertain, and instruct the audience of a particular work.

Mann, though, explains that Chaucer is not merely a good representative of expanding and evaluating the estates model simply because he wrote the best Medieval example of it; Mann notes that Chaucer is extremely economical in his presentation of the pilgrims in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* because he wants the reader to experience the pilgrims as part of a larger profession or group and not as individuals (12). The result provides one with the overview necessary to begin accepting the stereotypes inherent to estates satire and complaint literature. The *Robin Hood* ballads are no different in their explanations of who Robin Hood is. Notice the economy of description used for Robin Hood in two of the three earliest ballads:

Herken, god yemen,
Comely, corteys, and god,
On of the best that yever bare bowe,
Hes name was Roben Hode.
Roben Hode was the yemans name,
That was boyt corteys and fre;
For the loffe of owre ladey,
All wemen werschepyd he. (*Robin Hood and the Potter* lines 5-12)

And:

I shall you tel of a gode yeman,
His name was Robyn Hode.
Robyn was a prude outlaw,
Whyles he walked on grounde:
So curteyse an outlaw as he was one
Was never non founde. (*A Gest of Robyn Hode* lines 3-8)

Curiously, *Robin Hood and the Monk* includes no such introduction of the outlaw but does include the ubiquitous commentary that it is Springtime in the greenwood. The compiler(s) of

these three ballads knows that using simple descriptions of Robin Hood like “outlaw,” “proud,” “yeoman,” and “good” will be enough to place Robin Hood within the outlaw stereotype while elevating him to something more noble, from the use of descriptions “courteous,” “free,” “comely,” and “good.” The ballad compiler leaves the rest of the assumptions to the audience’s experience with outlaws, sheriffs and the entire law construct, and others within the middle class identity.

So how does the early *Robin Hood* corpus fit into estates satire? In Ruth Mohl’s book *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, she notes that estates literature will contain any combination of the following four elements: a record of the estates, lamentations for the failure of the estates, ordination from God for the estates and therefore justification for their continuance, and a sought after remedy for their shortcomings (6-7). Even though Mann applies both form and content of Chaucer’s *Prologue* to Mohl’s definition, the purpose here is geared toward content. The distinction between form and content is significant because the nature of the early *Robin Hood* ballads not only provides a record of the estates, but also seeks a solution for their failings.

In order to understand how estates model satire works within Medieval outlaw literature, one must see how the model helps create the emerging middle class by following the long established genre of outlawry. Until now, Medieval outlaw literature has remained in a vague descriptive field of “outlawry” which includes, aside from Robin Hood, other well-known stories of Hereward the Wake, Eustace the Monk, and Fouke Fitz Waryn. But these outlaws are static in their appeal, generally one dimensional, and present local reactions with little national influence although their creation and celebrated actions were brought about by oppression from established or establishing authority. The Conquest of England by William in 1066 destabilized the

emerging national identity, as the formerly sovereign nation became subject to foreign colonists speaking a different language, enacting new laws, and creating social upheaval, bitterness, and displacement. “The Normans and their followers were bent on domination in part because they sought permanent accommodations in England, and some of their means of domination, such as intermarriage, commercial relations, rapid settlement and enfeoffment of lands, and political deal making, were pacifying and integrating as well as repressive”, according to Susan Crane (36), while literature of the period reflects the same sentiment. For example, William of Malmesbury succinctly states England has shifted to a place of “residence of foreigners and the property of strangers [who] prey upon its riches and vitals” (*Chronicle*). The goodness of the English land and its people was being swallowed up and pushed to the peripheries by oppressive measures and people. This new Norman identity that emerged left the English inhabitants of the island seeking an outlet to express both their displeasure toward the new governmental procedures, and their desire for their past Anglo-Saxon existence. The lower classes, those non-aristocrats below the status of a knight, could not return to their pre-Norman way of life, but they could celebrate those individuals who confronted the change that would, ultimately, bring about feudalism and an estates structure. In longing for the past, these lower classes show early signs of parts of Mohl’s definition the aspects of lamenting shortcomings and seeking a remedy. The result birthed a new literary genre extolling outlaws: people who willingly accepted life outside of the confines of the law in order to preserve their identity and pre-colonized way of life.

Medieval outlaws played an important part of the social and cultural development of the native English population after the Norman Conquest, and scholarship has traditionally overlooked this aspect of English social development. Outlaws, and those who preserved their stories, created an identity of social customs and shared past experiences that local communities,

as well as the nation as a whole, could relate to and identify with. Maurice Keen, author of the influential book *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, states that “legend is largely born of the working of popular imagination on the situations of the workaday world, but in the process of weaving them into myth it changes them. They become tinged with the beliefs and aspirations of those who tell the story...what it was that men really believed in and what they really desired” (7). The creation and retelling of outlaw tales served as an expression of suppressed national identity within an evolving estates model in which three outlaws, Hereward, Fouke Fitz Waryn, and Robin Hood, and the literature that grew about them, embodied the struggle against the colonization by the Normans and the hierarchical society that developed over time after the Conquest. By the time Robin Hood appears in the latter fourteenth century, the hierarchical estates model was perhaps just as oppressive to those “situations of the workaday world” as the social upheaval that caused them. Thomas Ohlgren, in the introduction to *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, follows Eric Hobsbawm in noting that banditry “seeks to right wrongs, avenge injustices and restore the traditional order of things” (xxiii-xxiv). Medieval outlaw literature, then, provides an initial outlet which examines the effects of the Conquest on English national sentiment and identity through the reaction of those celebrated outlaws and grows into a complaint movement attacking those authoritative structures that began in 1066.

Patterns of resistance to authority tend to migrate with advancing power, matching the geographic spread of colonization, and indeed the development of the outlaw tales of Hereward, Fouke, and Robin Hood seem to follow the initial growth of the Norman Conquest and extension of governmental control of England from the southeast to the west and north over a period of roughly three hundred years. The early outlaw tales of Hereward and Fouke depict complaint literature in its infancy. Hereward’s tale, recorded in an early twelfth-century manuscript, occurs

in the Peterborough area beginning in 1068, not far from the initial resistance to William. Once Hereward's outlawry was resolved at some point before William's death (the record is unclear, but the *L'Estoire des Engleis* mentions a Hereward fighting for William in Maine and the *Domesday Book* notes a Hereward owning lands in Warwickshire at the time of William's death), the issues of authoritative resistance moved to the contested borderlands of the Welsh March. Here, Fouke Fitz Waryn rebelled against King John until 1203, according to E.J. Hathaway, et al, in *Fouke Le Fitz Waryn*. In Fouke's case, instead of a new colonizer displacing others, a colonial Norman king with nearly 150 years of regal ancestry ruled the country. The geographical distance had grown since Hereward's time, but the distance was not so great as to prevent the king from eventually seeing the operations against Fouke as William had done against Hereward. When Robin Hood is first made mention of in Langland's *Piers Plowman* in the late 1370s, the resistance to the king's authority takes place in Barnesdale and Nottingham, areas greatly removed from the king's seat of power and were thus harder to control. In response to authoritative measures believed to be inhibiting social growth (wealth, professional development, education, etc.), e.g., Statute of Laborers, the marginalized population sought to reestablish its identity, using outlawry to reaffirm its defining relationship with its surroundings. Until 1066, the identity of England's largely rural population had been formed and reinforced through generations of traditional English life, at which time the Norman French infrastructure was imposed from without.

The society of post-Conquest England was a society of the marginalized seeking to maintain an identity in the context of an invading culture. Within the elements of community and country lie the cultural aspects of this identity. Tangible elements can include property (land, home, possessions), local social constructs (i.e., towns or communities, or social norms),

and native country. The intangibles of personal identity, such as genetic makeup, social customs, and language associate those individuals with particular assumptions leading to societal norms of class and social standing. Therefore, the higher the social standing, the more property and status a person can potentially possess. Scholars such as Elaine Treharne, in *Living Through Conquest*, and Seth Leher, in “Old English and its Afterlife,” also note the significance of the language change in relation to the Conquest due to the “social and political identities, and for aspects of perceived ethnic allegiance” (Treharne 11). For the Anglo-Saxons, dispossession by the Normans meant losing the ability to easily pass that inheritance on to their kin. However, reiterating Keen’s comments on the memory of the common people, Treharne asserts that the English language was the one common unifier of the conquered Anglo-Saxons in that “English was, beyond doubt, from the late ninth century onwards, the language of a nation’s ideology, its songs, and its history, and in works like Ælfric’s homilies, Wulfstan’s sermons, and Eadwine’s Psalter, English was a language of salvation—at least for those hundreds of thousands who could understand it” (187). Treharne’s eleventh-century based conquest claims help illuminate the initial oral tradition, in English, of the *Robin Hood* ballads of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a unifying element of oppression resistance and identity establishment. These previously mentioned elements of identity and community form individual persons, but when those elements of inheritance and social customs are removed and replaced, individuals seek to maintain familiar norms within the new order. According to Anne Kershen, identity depends on another to identify itself against (2). This disparity causes conflict in that one will attempt uncharacteristic actions to return to the former self instead of adopting an alternate, imposed identity. A separate identity will be formed but only in order to return to the former self at which time the separate identity is shed. This identity conflict can be observed as the Normans

resettled England, and their foreign identity became the established authority. However, within the estates model a representation for the middle class did not exist, so identity elements came from both the upper and lower classes with an emphasis on the ideals associated with those classes. Thus, when social rebellion occurs, there is a vehicle in place to move it along.

By examining how the Conquest shaped the identity of the colonized Anglo-Saxons and later English through the analysis of the creation, popularity, and longevity of the outlaw texts, one can observe within the literature the outlaws' reactions, as well as their authors' reactions, to authority and what that action symbolized within the audience. The colonial society of post-Conquest England was a subculture of the marginalized seeking to establish its own identity against an imperial culture. In much the same way later English colonized countries, such as those in the Americas and Africa, responded to their imperial inhabitator, the Anglo-Saxons reacted by celebrating an individual who sought his identity amidst the turmoil of colonization. Michael Hogg, Deborah Terry, and Katherine White state that an identity "emerges from people's roles in society" (256), and "it is through social interaction that identities actually acquire self-meaning" (257). Medieval outlawry reflected the way colonial Medieval England was viewed in terms of its creation and reshaping of identities, specifically on a localized level. The outlaws' popularity depended upon local identity for sustenance because the communities in which outlaws developed had to connect to the outlaw struggle in order to establish these stories within their local dialogue. Hereward, Fouke Fitz Waryn, and Robin Hood interact within society that define them as outlaws, but they must fill this role in order to protect and return to their pre-outlaw identities or establish new identities in a new framework, thus illustrating the Janus aspect woven into outlaw literature. Hereward embodied the struggle to maintain an independent, counter-Norman identity in the new national construct, fought for his ancestral

home, and had his deeds recorded by a local monk; Fouke Fitz Waryn responded to the antagonisms of a Norman king who sought to marginalize a less desirable subject for a more morally corrupt yet easily controlled baron and had his deeds in the Welsh March recorded for a particular purpose with which those inhabitants could relate; Robin Hood symbolized the class struggles of a small but growing group oppressed by localized power structures and local oppression most people could relate to across the nation, in the form of the sheriff and church officials who were determined to extract as much property and static order as possible from their residents. Robin Hood, though, is not seeking a return to an older way of existence because that would put him in an endless cycle of fighting the same types of oppression. The *Robin Hood* ballads advance the outlaw narrative to establish a new system that destroys the estates model.

Outlaw tales were local reactions to a national situation, but the survival of these outlaws could only exist with the help of an author/compiler. Authorship reveals local sentiment and quite possibly interjects personal responses and motivations within the tales in order to produce a particular reaction, shaping the attitudes of the intended audience for a desired outcome. The various outlaw tales over the centuries, with authorial assistance, represent a united feeling of resentment and persecution without a conscious movement to produce a sense of unity during the lengthy period. This united feeling was possible because the outlaws that survived through the literature appear in altered but recognizable form every sixty to one hundred years, as succeeding generations addressed their issues by availing themselves of familiar storylines. As the Norman colonization of England persisted and became normalized, these issues would change from institutional replacement to unjust taxation to corrupt local officials which led to the survival of relevant outlaw storylines of complaint. Soon after the Norman Conquest, historical chronicles began appearing in an attempt to seamlessly unite the Norman and English while sweeping the

problems under the rug. For example, Geoffrey Gaimar's circa 1140 *Estoire des Engleis* links Anglo-Saxon history with Norman history through accounts of Haveloc and William Rufus; the circa 1210 *Waldef* connects Norman *Le Brut* and *Tristan* tales with English history. These particular links remain tenuous, though, because they are Norman-based stories loosely intertwined with English history used as a way to make conquest more familial. The approach was certainly one William the Conqueror and those loyal to him used as a legitimate rationale for his claim to the English throne. However, these "histories" are constructions and manipulations of the past in order to rationalize a future trajectory of royal interest through oppression. All persons affected by oppression and injustices, peasant and aristocrat alike, needed to know that governmental egregiousness would eventually impact everyone. Those who saw fit to record the deeds and exploits of these outlaws felt a compelling desire to rally their oppressed brethren with stories of hope and change from the perspective of successful underdogs. Ultimately, the surviving outlaw stories, like those mentioned above, culminate with positive results for those outlaws in their struggles to maintain either their pre-imposed identities or providing new ones while providing a model for existing within the new forms of governing.

Oral delivery in English, that "language of salvation" mentioned earlier, provided a means through which the illiterate masses could engage the outlaw's tales of complaint. Representing the growing yeoman social class in the mid to late fourteenth centuries, Robin Hood provided an outlet for groups exerting themselves against an oppressive, county power structure under the umbrella protection of the king. Targeting sheriffs and church officials, Robin counters his benevolent morality against the greed and maliciousness of unjustly enforced laws and a corrupt Church as he seeks the remedy for this longstanding problem. Although Robin Hood was probably not an actual person, his popularity far surpassed other historical

outlaws, such as Hereward the Wake and Fouke Fitz Waryn, because more individuals could relate to his struggle to be recognized for who he was in a changing world against newly entrenched authorities. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, in their general introduction to *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, note that accounts of an historical Robin Hood are “a tissue of non-historical materials straight from folklore or fiction” and that the name, by the fourteenth century, is a general reference to anyone acting outside the law (4-5).

So it should come as no surprise that through oral delivery and common goals with an emerging middle class that the Medieval outlaw narratives culminate with Robin Hood. Various elements of the stock outlaw character, such as disguises and traditional enemies, have been so developed and shaped over time since the Conquest that a character like Robin Hood emerged. The sentiments of the English people at the time of the first manuscript of a Robin Hood story in the mid-fifteenth century were obviously not the same as those of their eleventh-century forbears. No longer being conquered by a foreign power, colonial England was moving out of the Middle Ages and into a new period. Systems of government that had been strange centuries before were commonplace, and Norman influence was being swallowed up by distinct Englishness. The most distinguishing characteristic of Englishness was the native language reemerging from the shadow of Norman French in the mid-fourteenth century. According to Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, the yeoman class that developed after the plague of 1349 were English speakers and they conducted their business in English (142-143). Because of their success in the marketplace, the English language took hold of government, law, and social life and formed the society to a more English-centered, though not homogenous, culture (Baugh and Cable 143).

But the mid-fifteenth century was not the first mention of Robin Hood in print. William

Langland's character Sloth, in the circa 1377 *Piers Plowman* (1886 W.W. Skeat edition), states that

If I shulde deye bi this day
me liste noughte to loke;
I can noughte perfilty my pater-noster
as the prest it syngeth,
But I can rymes of Robyn hood
and Randolf erle of Chestre,
Ac neither of owre lorde ne of owre lady
the leste that evere was made. (lines 399-406)

Sloth, a churchman, claims to know more about Robin Hood than his prayers and liturgical texts, leading to the conclusion that at least as early as the latter quarter of the fourteenth century, Robin Hood was known well enough for an author to make use of the outlaw in the text without the reference being lost on the audience. Roughly one hundred twenty years after Fouke Fitz Waryn's death and forty to fifty years after a resurgence of that outlaw's popularity, England had another outlaw in whom to celebrate. But this outlaw exhibited slightly different attributes from Hereward or Fouke as he continued their tradition of mirroring the identity of the audience who popularized his struggles. History, though, does not provide information about an actual person named Robin Hood, and it is not my intent to try to unravel whether he actually existed. More important here is the persona he embodied based on the early texts of the outlaw and how he used that persona to contribute to social change.

In the "General Introduction" of *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Knight and Ohlgren discuss the outlaw's popularity based on audience. R.H. Hilton notes, in the 1976 publication *Peasants, Knights, and Heretics: Studies in Medieval Social History*, the peasantry of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, while J.C. Holt, in *Robin Hood*, points to the lower gentry as consumers of the *Robin Hood* ballads. Knight and Ohlgren state that "As a result of these debates there now seems general agreement that the audience was not single, that it represented

the social mobility of the late Middle Ages, and the myth was diffused across a wide variety of social groupings who were alive to the dangers of increasingly central authority, whether over town, village, or forest” (8). R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, in *Rymes of Robin Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, note that “the earliest ‘rymes’ of Robin Hood were disseminated not simply throughout great households, but also through the medium of fairs where minstrels played to popular audiences” (40). Robin Hood, then, became popular with the common people because he was fighting corrupt local officials who affected a broad range of the populace. Though the term “common people” here refers to most of the non-aristocratic classes from peasants up to knights, those who were knighted were close enough to Robin’s social order of yeoman to be considered potential sympathizers, so a strict delineation of those on the peripheries of this yeoman class becomes impossible to maintain. Not all knights were of equal wealth, and as the knight presented in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* showed, they could be targeted and oppressed by more politically powerful individuals. For example, the aforementioned knight, Sir Richard, owes £400 to fulfill a contract paying bail for his son’s lawful killing of a “knyght of Lancaster/And a squyer bolde” in a jousting tournament (*Gest* lines 209-210), but the day he is to pay the contract he only has ten shillings. The money is owed to the abbot of St. Mary’s with Sir Richard’s land held as security. Even though Sir Richard says that “An hundred winter here before/Myn auncetres knyghtes have be” (*Gest* lines 187-8), the legal system is stacked against him and his ancient title which makes Robin Hood’s orders to “bete and bynde” the bishops, archbishops, and the sheriff more understandable (*Gest* line 58).

The petty bureaucrats and church officials targeted by Robin Hood were essentially local, or county, individuals in positions of far reaching power. Robin Hood was not targeting the king specifically for any wrongdoing, but instead concentrated on those who worked for the king.

Each sheriff answered directly to the king, and generally one sheriff was appointed per county. Robert Palmer notes that any attempt to thwart the sheriff from doing his duties could be considered an obstruction of royal power, which is an obstruction of the king's will (33). Because sheriffs had to cover so much area, they would often have a staff to help with the work load, thereby extending the arm of the king's power through even more local officials leading to the potential for more legitimized corruption. Also, sheriffs could receive amercements, which were fines levied against individuals, from court decisions as part of their salary (Palmer 36). Knowing that the potential for making money out of every court decision was possible might have led some sheriffs to take advantage of the situation. If county problems were dealt with without causing attention, the king might not care what went on in the counties as long as taxes continued to fill the coffers. Historical accounts support the assertion. Bellamy notes that in one instance in 1321 of a sheriff actually being investigated, "The list of supposed malpractices ranged from being responsible for false indictments, imprisonments and appeals, to taking heavy ransoms, 'unjust and intolerable distrains', a variety of extortions and the peculation of tax monies. We do not know what the outcome was, but since it was left to the sheriffs to summon the presenting jurors it is unlikely the formal charges were too damaging" (49). There apparently was little recourse for those with few means outside the legal system to address the corruption within it, thus the corruption continued. However, the *Robin Hood* compiler(s) understood the audiences' sentiments and structured the ballads in the satiric complaint form, which seemed to be one of the few avenues to rally widespread support.

Church officials were also not immune to immorality and could just as easily fall victim to the corruptible effects of power and money. During the fifteenth century, "the Church was massively endowed with land [...] [and] was therefore the landlord of a high proportion of the

population” (Hicks 10). Controlling land controlled those who lived on that land through rent, taxation, and production. Though Church corruption and unfair taxation were valid reasons for revolt, the fact that no historical figure has been proven to be the basis for Robin Hood cannot lead to a certain explanation of what drove the outlaw to a life of crime. But it is clear that his actions were against the local governing bodies for their corruption against a lower class of society that the Hereward and Fouke tales had largely ignored. In the three earliest *Robin Hood* ballads, the outlaw befriends a potter, a destitute knight, the sheriff’s cook, the sheriff’s wife, and the entire working class of Nottingham all while actively attacking the sheriff, the church, and, to a lesser degree, the king.

As with Hereward and Fouke, Robin Hood was morally superior to his enemies, but was more applicable to a wider audience than the aforementioned outlaws due to his yeoman status. Part of the outlaw tradition was to elevate the outlaw through his deeds, not through his title. Although to the government the outlaw was a criminal, the portrayal was one of justifiable actions on morally higher ground, thus helping to establish the complete aspect of estates satire and complaint literature. Robin Hood was a yeoman, but his morals were not prudish which showed that morality was not solely in the hands of the aristocracy nor dictated by a particular lifestyle. What he valued most was honesty and would test that value in individuals he encountered. A tradition Robin Hood observed in order to test individual honesty was not to eat unless he had the company of a stranger, in particular aristocratic strangers, which Little John, Will, and Much provided through abduction along the highway. After the meal, he would ask them how much money they carried. A lie resulted in the outlaw taking whatever money the person had; if the traveler told the truth, Robin Hood gave him additional monetary or mercantile supplements from his coffers. In his first encounter of the *Gest*, Robin Hood dined with a knight

brought to him by Little John, Will Scarlock, and Much. The knight, as was shown earlier, was traveling to St. Mary's Abbey to repay a loan of £400 against his lands to the bishop there, though he carried only ten shillings. Little John checked the knight's story, "and there he fonde in the knyghthes / cofer / But even halfe a ponde" (*Gest* lines 167-8). Pleased with the knight's honesty after the meal, Robin Hood loaned him the money and the knight was able to repay the debt and keep his lands. Robin Hood's next dinner guest was not as forthcoming about the money he carried. Little John, Will, and Much captured a monk from St. Mary's Abbey. The author does not present the church official favorably. Twice Little John referred to the bishop as a "chorle monke" (*Gest* line 873), and the monk did not remove his hat when greeting Robin "for curteyse can he none" (*Gest* line 908); then he lied about traveling to a destination with so much money (the amount of which he also lied). While the monk claimed to only carry twenty marks, Little John discovered eight hundred pounds which Robin Hood promptly confiscated. These two contrasting episodes of dinner guests depicted the importance of honesty to Robin Hood's identity while elevating him above his adversaries. To those who had nothing to fear from the outlaw, blessings were prayed over him; for those who feared him, he was called "a stronge thefe" and "of hym...never good" was heard (*Gest* lines 883-4). In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the monk turns the outlaw over to the sheriff, calls him a "false felon" (*Monk* line 87), and nearly succeeds in having the outlaw hanged. The retribution, in this case, is much more severe than in the other ballads; Little John

smote of the munkis hed,
 No longer wolde he dwell;
 So did Moch the litull page,
 For ferd lest he wolde tell. (*Monk* lines 203-206)

The actions and words of the enemies of Robin further justified the behavior of the outlaw to those who heard or read the tales, and the compilers and performers of the ballads knew it. A

strong devotion to St. Mary also elevated Robin Hood's moral status above his enemies because it appeared to be a purer devotion. Though Robin does pray to Mary in the fourth fitt of the *Gest* to ensure his money returns to him, his position was not to use religion and its social power to enforce materialistic gains as his enemies did. The outlaw's excuse "I drede Our Lady be wroth with me" showed that he was aware of his possible sins as reasoning for a late payment (*Gest* line 823). Robin Hood also puts himself in harm's way in *Robin Hood and the Monk* by attending mass in Nottingham alone, but the intent is to refresh his soul, as he states it has been "a fourtnet and more [...] / Syn I my Savyour see" (lines 25-26). There is not a similar scene in *Robin Hood and the Potter*, but that is probably due to it not helping move the story forward. These examples show that Robin Hood consciously gauged his actions in order to procure the salvation of his soul, and not the material pleasures of the world. The outlaw respects this in others, too, as he allows Sir Richard's faith in "Our dere Lady" as the only guarantee against the outlaw's loan of £400 (*Gest* line 259), thus illustrating how one should behave in light of the corruption of authority.

The sheriff's trickery was also portrayed negatively. The sheriff arranged a shooting contest for the best archers in Northern England and presented a silver arrow as a prize. The contest was quite possibly a trap in order to draw out Robin Hood because he was a particularly fine archer. Earlier in the *Gest*, Little John guided the sheriff of Nottingham to Robin instead of "a ryght fayre harte" of green with "seven score of dere upon a herde / Be with hym all bydene" as he was told he was going to find (*Gest* lines 736 and 739-40). Robin prohibited the sheriff from leaving, and after dining and sleeping uncomfortably that night, the sheriff promised, at the end of the third fit, never to harm Robin or his men. So Robin went to the shooting event in order to "wete the shryves fayth, / Trewe and yf he be" (*Gest* lines 1147-8). Robin won the

contest, and the sheriff, with no intention of keeping his word, led his men in an attack on Robin and his band, wounding Little John and causing the outlaws to seek refuge in the castle of Sir Richard, the knight Robin helped earlier. Robin eventually escaped to the greenwood, and later the sheriff captured Sir Richard for his helping the outlaw. Robin heard of the knight's capture and rescued him. The dangerous rescue culminated with Robin beheading the sheriff. Hiding in the forest, the outlaws awaited the king who came to Nottingham to settle the charges brought against the knight by the sheriff and to capture Robin if possible.

Eventually, Robin Hood is pardoned in the *Gest*. The king disguises himself as a monk in order to be captured by Robin Hood's men. The king and the outlaw dine, Robin discovers who the monk really is after an archery contest, and receives his pardon from the king due to his "goodnesse and...grace" shown to the king's men (*Gest* line 1647). Robin Hood also begs mercy from the king and is granted it. The only condition the king gives the outlaw and his men for their pardon is that they stay at court with him. While at court for fifteen months, Robin "spent an hondred ponde, / And all his mennes fe" (*Gest* lines 1731-2). The money is spent generously for gifts for those he came in contact with, but soon his band loses interest in court life and, having lost all their money to Robin's philanthropy, return to the greenwood save Little John and Will Scarlock. Upon seeing an archery contest at court, Robin longed for the days of old when he was an outlaw in the woods. Asking leave of the king to go on a pilgrimage he never intended to fulfill, Robin is granted a leave of "seven nyght" and "no lengre" (*Gest* lines 1771-2), but he stays away twenty-two years before being killed by a prioress. The king wants to keep Robin close to him because of his skills as a warrior and his ability to summon many men in an instant with more loyalty than the king's own knights. When he returns to the forest, Robin Hood's men continue their loyalty by readily accepting him back as their leader. In *Robin*

Hood and the Monk, a similar pardon is given to Little John and Much, to the later chagrin of the king. These two outlaws, disguised as monks and guilty of killing the monk who was originally the messenger, delivered letters to the king detailing the capture of Robin Hood. For their service, the king was incredibly happy and gave them “Twenti pound in sertan,/And made them yemen of the crown” (*Monk* lines 228-9). The latter award essentially gives these two outlaws carte blanche from their past wrongdoings and any future ones, but this event can only occur due to Robin Hood and their devotion to him. These events with the king illustrate Robin Hood’s outlaw struggle as a largely localized rebellion. He does not maliciously or knowingly attack the king but instead seeks his favor. Robin’s men, too, understand the nature of the struggle by leaving him at court (i.e., the national level) but welcoming him back in the forest (i.e., the local level). The resulting outcome of each offensive measure against the authoritative structures works to illuminate those incompetencies while trying to offer an alternative.

One interesting and often overlooked aspect of the *Gest* is the wrestling scene at the end of the second fit. Here, Sir Richard was returning to the greenwood to repay Robin Hood the £400 he borrowed twelve months ago. On the road, the knight spotted a wrestling match in which a yeoman was the best wrestler but was also a stranger in that area. A mob was beginning to rise against him until the knight and his men intervened, declared the yeoman the winner, and appeased the crowd with wine. The yeoman was winning a bull, a red-gold ring, a cask of wine, a pair of gloves, and a saddled horse. These gifts were extravagant for a wrestling match as Ohlgren notes that “the usual prize for a wrestling match was a ram” (*Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* 157). The numerous expensive gifts indicate that those sponsoring and participating were not average yeomen but possibly aristocrats. This small scene, which initially only serves the purpose of giving Sir Richard an excuse for meeting Robin late in the day,

illustrated resentment present during the late fourteenth century among members of the growing yeoman class. Here, a strong yeoman wrestled for expensive prizes but was attacked because he was not a local and because he was winning. If these other wrestlers and sponsors were aristocrats, as might be indicative of the prizes, a yeoman would not be someone they would want to have beating them and taking their property. The knight, a compassionate aristocrat who understood the importance a good yeoman could make, used his position to help. Robin Hood was appreciative of Sir Richard's actions, thanking him and saying "What man that helpeth a good yeman, / His frende than wyll I be" (*Gest* lines 1075-6). The scene evokes a colonial desire on the part of an up-and-coming social class trying to claim more than the established power would want them to obtain. With the "space" between the aristocracy and the peasantry growing smaller and smaller, feelings of contempt and anger would be natural, because one might feel threatened by the upward mobility of a new middle class. Though worlds apart in execution, this new advancement of a potentially threatening group was reminiscent of the Norman invasion. As has been pointed out with Hereward and Fouke, identities can cease to exist when threatened or overtaken by another identity trying to establish itself. Unconsciously, deep seated beliefs can cause involuntary reactions such as attacking those who pose a danger to a particular way of life. The yeomanry of fourteenth and fifteenth-century England had that potential. In the wrestling scene, there was no mention of the prizes being taken away as one might expect if the winner happened to be a peasant and the others being aristocrats. Instead, here the other people wished to kill the yeoman in order to retain some form of power and retain the prizes. There was no claiming the goods on account of social status reflecting the growing acknowledgment, and yet fear, of the new yeomanry, but it can be perceived in this scene.

So, Robin Hood gathers the outlaw tradition and brings it to a more accessible level because his stories were orally recited throughout the country, especially the northern regions, for at least seventy-five years before publication. Oral delivery provided a means through which the illiterate masses could engage the outlaw's tales. Representing the growing yeoman social class, he provided an outlet for groups exerting themselves against an oppressive, county power structure under the umbrella protection of the king. Targeting sheriffs and church officials, Robin counters his benevolent morality against the greed and maliciousness of unjust laws and a corrupt Church. Although Robin Hood was probably not an actual historical figure, his popularity far surpassed Hereward and Fouke because more individuals could relate to his struggle to be recognized for who he was in a changing world against newly entrenched authorities. For example, Hereward responds locally to William of Normandy's invasion and subsequent life-altering succession by fighting his armies so that he, Hereward, will not lose his property. For his peers outside the Ely area, Hereward's tough situation may have been unknown and uncared for. Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn, contemporaries in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, faced similar persecution of loss of lands and title but would have remained obscure outside the Welsh March borderlands. Robin Hood, however, elicits a different, wider appeal that extends even to the present consciousness through numerous popular culture references. In fact, in William Langland's circa 1377 *Piers Plowman*, Langland chooses what must have been an obviously popular character with the outlaw in order to connect with his audience and perhaps to show the failings of the Church on a small, local level. *Piers Plowman* was popular enough that there are roughly sixty surviving manuscripts and evidence of multiple print runs in the 1550s (Schmidt xvii-xx). A text this successful over several centuries had to make sense with the audience's point of view, so Langland would have been very careful

in even the choices of his characters' associations. In other words, the Robin Hood persona infused itself within Medieval society like no other outlaw, even to the point of being referenced in separate texts nearly one hundred years prior to being written down.

Whoever developed the *Robin Hood* legend and whoever composed the stories addressed the key issues discussed previously of local municipalities' power as well as a different issue of identity development. The main catalyst of this new emerging social order was the plagues of the mid-fourteenth century. The plague, or Black Death, of 1348-1349 had devastating effects on the population and was responsible for eliminating much of the urban workforce, who were far more susceptible to the disease due to the close living quarters and lack of proper sanitation. The loss caused a shortage in the labor force, and so many people moved from the country to the city for better wages. The urban employers paid better wages than those earned in the countryside which helped improve the overall quality of life for these upwardly mobile peasants. As this workforce increased its wealth, they were no longer as poor as peasants, yet they were not aristocrats. "Yeomen" was the term generally ascribed to this emerging middle class, and these were the main consumers of the *Robin Hood* ballads. The speaker in the *Gest* addresses those "gentilmen,/That be of frebore blode" to listen to the tale of a "gode yeman" (*Gest* lines 1-3). Ohlgren states that "'gentlemen' and 'yeomen' were used interchangeably in the early fifteenth century" and he "denotes a broad social rank below knights and squires" (*Medieval Outlaws* 316), thus the reasoning for "gentilmen" in the first verse of the *Gest*. Clearly, audiences of the early *Robin Hood* ballads understood this term "yeoman" since it also appears at the beginning of "Robin Hood and the Potter":

Herken, god yemen,
Comley, corteys, and god,
On of the best that yever bare bowe,
Hes name was Roben Hode.

Roben Hood was the yemans name,
 That was boyt corteys and fre;
 For the loffe of owre ladey,
 All wemen werschepyd he. (lines 5-12)

For the Medieval audience, “yeoman” carried the meanings of being comely, courteous, good, free, and, to some extent, Christian. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “yeoman” as “A servant or attendant in a royal or noble household, usually of a superior grade, ranking between a sergeant and a groom or between a squire and a page,” while the *Middle English Dictionary* adds to the *OED* by defining “yeman” as “a free-born male attendant in a royal or noble household holding a rank above that of groom and page but below that of squire, a household official; an attendant or assistant to someone of higher rank, a retainer; gentil-man” (def. 1) and “a member of the landholding class below the rank of squire; a man holding a small landed estate” (def. 2). Both of these sources indicate a connection with the middle area between the peasantry and the aristocracy with certain aspirations toward *gentillesse*, or those qualities of polite, refined behavior.

The term “yeoman”, though, does not seem to be as straightforward as these definitions suggest. There has been nearly sixty years of debate surrounding the term, beginning most notably with Rodney Hilton’s “The Origins of Robin Hood” article in 1958 which was then questioned substantively by J.C. Holt’s “The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood” article in 1960. Hilton notes that the *Robin Hood* audience is largely peasant, while Holt claims an aristocratic-based audience more in line with the *MED* definition. As Hilton and Holt continued to debate their respective stances, notably with the 1976 publication *Peasants, Knights, and Heretics: Studies in Medieval Social History* and the 1989 publication *Robin Hood*, respectively, other scholars merged the two sides into the widely accepted view that the early *Robin Hood* ballads were meant for a growing and fluid audience. Peter Coss notes that the early

ballads were enjoyed across a wide spectrum of society (“Aspects”), and Dobson and Taylor state that “the earliest ‘rhymes’ of Robin Hood were disseminated not simply through the great households, but also through the medium of fairs where minstrels played to popular audiences” (40). Knight and Ohlgren agree, too, with Coss and Dobson and Taylor on the audience for the early ballads as they note in their general introduction and tale-specific introductions in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. These critics interpret, then, that a yeoman audience comprises not only those staunchly within the middle class, but those that tended to reside on the peripheries of the upper peasantry and lower aristocracy. A.J. Pollard agrees with the modern criticism about the yeoman audience and clarifies that by the late fourteenth century, “yeomanry implied freeborn blood and free tenure” (53). In fact, as the fourteenth century ended and the fifteenth began, enough people considered themselves “yeomen” that the English government issued the Statute of Additions of 1413 that acknowledges and accepts the notion of an intermediary group. Ultimately, “yeoman” came to encompass “several overlapping shades of meaning and incorporated diverse social groups” (Pollard 53), but they are being established in the late fourteenth century. Furthering the argument against a more limited appeal to Robin Hood, Pollard disregards the idea of Robin Hood and his men being yeomen of the forest. This forester designation does not apply; Holt and Coss have argued against this title because Robin Hood and his men are never called foresters. The outlaws simply live in the forest because they seek the safety the forest provides (Pollard 57). Understanding the terminology to use in a variety of situations, that “specialist knowledge by which all men of worship may tell a gentleman from a yeoman” (Pollard 74), those upwardly mobile or downwardly mobile would learn the language of that which they aspired or had come from; thus, the wide appeal of the *Robin Hood* ballads within the social change of the late fourteenth century is reflected in the

language used in the texts, such as “yeoman” for the audience and Robin Hood and who not to attack (“husbonde”, “yeman”, “knyght”, “squyer” [*Gest* lines 51, 55]), reflecting audience and compiler expectations.

There were other factors contributing to Robin Hood’s popularity as a vehicle for complaint. Paul Strohm, in *Social Chaucer*, notes how the social landscape was changing in dramatic fashion in the mid to late fourteenth century. In his preface, Strohm establishes the idea of horizontal agreements gaining popularity as opposed to the entrenched vertical social contracts (x). The older, hierarchical contracts dictated the general estates model and ensured its longevity by maintaining the aristocratic status above the peasantry with no room for a middle class through a land or feudal tie. Feudalism demanded lifelong service of toil for the landlord. By trying to circumvent this type of vertical contract, peasants had few options, if any, of survival apart from the landlord; it is hopeless apart from God and lord, and it is lonely without the community support. The biggest influence, though, on the contractual change was the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381. The Peasants’ Revolt demanded a more just ordering of supply and demand of labor and earnings. The peasantry was not alone in this fight, either, since the business owners in the cities needed the workers to fill the gaps left by those killed during the plague outbreaks of the mid fourteenth century. If the urban business owners could not pay the workers from the farm what they wanted to due to legal restrictions imposed by the farm owners’ governmental protests to stem the tide of workers leaving, they could not fill the shortage in their businesses and would thus be losing money from loss of transactions. Ultimately, the Peasants’ Revolt and the victory it achieved centered on a community based need fighting a small group of wealthy, influential land owners bending the law to their will. The injustice of establishing a false social and natural order demanded change by those directly suffering the most under it.

Although other social changes were occurring in the fourteenth century, the peasants demanding payment equal to their skill and providing labor that was not tied to land for the duration of their lives moved the contract to a more horizontal plane. No longer sworn fealty, these contracts were oral, short lived, based on mutually agreed salaries, and voluntary. Strohm states that this new system of work and payment “encouraged a new perception of horizontal ties of affinity to those sharing one’s own class, rank, and social objectives” (*Social Chaucer* 14). Strohm further notes that the emerging system redirected loyalty to those within a common social group instead of a lord (21). The voluntary nature of the contracts created newly “freed” individuals. These free individuals became known as the yeomanry. Yeomen, still having ties to the peasantry and not quite noble, did not relate to the Romances of courtly literature. As a growing social class, the yeomen struggled against the local embedded power structures of the government, such as taxation and corrupt church officials, and so naturally championed a character who confronted those structures in order to correct them.

So, Strohm’s contractual argument shows a new, legally arranged system that works in conjunction with Medieval estates model satire and complaint literature. Strong evidence suggests the voluntary relationships of those contracts in the three earliest *Robin Hood* manuscripts *Robin Hood and the Potter*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. For instance, in *Robin Hood and the Potter* Robin Hood encounters a potter in his signature way of meeting, through force, from which a fight usually ensues. Little John bets Robin Hood forty shillings that he cannot make this “prod potter” pay the one penny road toll the outlaws expected all passers-by to pay (line 20). Robin Hood stops the potter and demands payment only to be rebuffed,

‘Wed well y non leffe,’ seyde the potter,
 ‘Nor pavag well Y non pay;

Awey they honed fro mey hors!
 Y well the tene eyls, be mey fay.' (*Potter* lines 49-52)

Retrieving a staff from his cart, the potter engages Robin Hood, who is armed with a sword, in a lengthy fight. Getting the better of the outlaw,

The potter, with an acward stroke,
 Smot the bokeler owt of hes honed.
 And ar Roben meyt get het agen
 Hes bokeler at he fett,
 The potter yn the neke hem toke,
 To the gronde sone he yede. (*Potter* lines 67-72)

As a result of Robin Hood being beaten, he loses the bet and takes a good ribbing from the other outlaws. However, Robin Hood knows a good man when he sees one and invites the potter to dine with him and his men in addition to letting him pass freely along the road from then on. From this encounter, the scene is set for the rest of the ballad in that Robin Hood disguises himself as the potter in order to fool and shame the sheriff. Upon agreeing to the deal to let the outlaw take his pots, the potter demands Robin Hood sell all of the pots or face another beating. This interaction is emblematic of the horizontal and short-term contractual relationship Strohm notes occurring in the latter fourteenth century. Robin Hood is always called a “god yemen” in the ballads, and the potter is considered the same by the outlaw (*Potter* line 90); the agreement they enter into is one of short-term gain in which only money will be exchanged. The potter is free to come and go within the band of outlaws and owes nothing to his social equals. Robin Hood holds up his end of the bargain by paying ““Of money feyre and fre;/And yever whan thow comest to grene wod,/Wellcom, potter, to me”” (*Potter* lines 317-19). As Strohm claims in *Social Chaucer*, this new desacralized form of retaining served both parties looking to advance their own interests (18). Robin Hood embarrasses the sheriff through a series of tricks, a capture, and a humiliating walk back home, and the potter sells his pots (without having to lift a finger)

for more than they are worth in addition to never having to pay the road toll exacted by the outlaws. The audience would understand this expanding relationship as a growing norm in the latter fourteenth century which allowed for more freedom and more opportunities to grow wealthier.

Also, during the mid to late fourteenth century the English language moved to the forefront as the national language rather than the Norman French that had been used since the Norman Conquest. Although writers such as Chaucer were using English as the primary language for their works, the yeomanry were also influential in its resurrection since the English language was a natural part within all aspects of their everyday lives. Because of the yeomen's success in the marketplace, the English language took hold of government, law, and social life and formed the society to a more English-centered, though not homogenous, culture (Baugh and Cable 143). Gradually, the wider populace of England was gaining ground in terms of voice and importance. Therefore, this new ballad form in England coincides with the emergence of the yeomanry and reflects their social class more directly than other forms of literature of the time. Also, a restructuring of the minstrelsy led to this coinciding of the ballad form and yeomanry.

Minstrels were traditionally the storytellers, either through reading or singing, in the court and nobles' halls who usually performed metrical romances. In the latter years of the fourteenth century, minstrels were pushed out of London to the baronial halls of the north and west of England. London was growing in importance, and the minstrels could not maintain the level of sophistication of the international city. The barons, at this time, were struggling with Richard II and Henry IV for power and were eventually suppressed. London, as David Fowler points out, became the commanding seat of power, and the barons could no longer support the minstrels as

they had in the past (8). With the loss of much of their financial support, the minstrels either had to find another trade or modify their profession to the changing environment.

Minstrels began to combine their practice of recitation to that of the folksong. Folksongs were at this time artistically composed combinations of history, religion, and myth but common enough to be recognized by the majority of the English population. The minstrels, in order to survive, needed to reach a broader populace who did not have the luxury of extended amounts of time to listen to lengthy recitations of a romance. Memorization became key, and because time was constrained, shorter narratives emerged. Minstrels soon realized that shortened narratives of romances were not as sought after by their growing popular audience. These yeomen and peasants could not relate to courtly tales of chivalry, but they could to the injustices of the aristocracy. For example, in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, Sir Richard owes the abbot of St. Mary £400 to pay the security debt on his property because his son

“slewe a knight of Lancaster,
And a squyer bolde;
For to save hym in his right
My godes beth sette and solde” (lines 209-212)

As a result of paying the abbot to keep his son safe from retribution by the knight of Lancaster’s family, Sir Richard says that his newly found poverty devastatingly affects his life:

“Where be thy frendes?” sayde Robyn.
“Syr, never one wol me knowe:
While I was ryche ynowe at home
Great boste than wolde they blowe.
And nowe they renne away fro me,
As bestis on a rowe;
They take no more hede of me
Thanne they had me never sawe.” (*Gest* lines 233-240)

The effect of Sir Richard’s happenstance on the outlaws is worth noting,

For ruthe thane wept Litell Johnn,
Scarlok and Muche in fere;

“Fyl of the best wyne,” sayde Robyn,
 “For here is a simple chere. (*Gest* lines 241-244)

Clearly, this brief initial conversation with the knight moves the outlaws to tears and grants Sir Richard their hospitality because they empathize with his plight against the abbey. A socially immobile audience would not care less if a knight who can trace his knighthood back “an hundred winter here before” had money problems stemming from a jousting tournament (line 187). Because of the emerging middle class’ desire for simply more, whether money or clothing or training or respect, Sir Richard’s situation illustrates the corruptibility within an established hierarchical order of the Church and how it can affect other established hierarchical orders. It’s not the details of the jousting tournament or the lineage of the knight of Lancaster that the audience wants, as one might fully expect in a Romance, but they need to hear how the knight faces a forced retributive event and comes through it positively only from the beneficence of Robin Hood, the good yeoman.

The audience for the *Gest of Robyn Hode* is then taken into the abbey of St. Mary’s and hears a conversation between a prior monk and the abbot. The monk is clearly on the side of Sir Richard, so he thinks, by taking up for his near tardiness. The monk asks for more time: “it is full erely [. . .]/The day is not yet ferre gone” (*Gest* lines 349-350); he also mentions that Richard may be on crusade:

“The knight is ferre beyond the see,
 In Englode right,
 And suffreth honger and colde,
 And many a sory nyght. (*Gest* lines 353-356)

This upper level monk is concerned that the abbot will act too hastily in claiming the lands of Richard; it seems clear that the compiler wishes to show that the corruption and degradation of

the estates occurs at the top and not at the bottom levels while reinforcing the claims the middle level sought. The monk continues to press the abbot:

“It were grete pyté,” said the pryoure,
 “So to have his londe;
 And ye be so light of your consyence,
 Ye do to hym moch wronge.” (*Gest* lines 357-360)

The prior monk reveals that the abbot has little conscience about adhering to what’s right, and the compiler advances this scene by introducing the chief steward and chief justice as contributors to the scheme by showing their speculation that the knight is dead and therefore they should use the money “to spende in this place” (*Gest* line 367). This example also indicates Langland’s choice of a lowly monk celebrating Robin Hood as one holding deeper connections to the middle class and why all members of the Church hierarchy are not the outlaw’s targets.

But it is not just greed that fuels the desire, but corruption, too:

The hye justice and many mo
 Had take in to theyr honde
 Holy all the knyghtes det,
 To put that knight to wronge.
 They demed the knight wonder sore,
 The abbot and his meyne. (*Gest* lines 373-382)

These three men see the knight’s land as a way to make money and increase their personal holdings; of course, they are doing so in direct violation of King Edward III’s statute in 1346 forbidding justices from accepting robes and fees from anyone other than the king, as Francis Child notes in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (III, 52). The “hye justice” of line 373 is the same “syr sheryf” of line 427 who is retained “both with cloth and fee” by the abbot (*Gest* line 426). This statute existed to ensure that those individuals acting as “pleaders, attorneys, seigniorial bailiffs, and seneschals, as well as occasionally filling royal positions such as undersheriff, sheriff, and county clerk” from being bribed or acting in opposition to royal desire

(Palmer 89). The lack of animosity toward the king is reflected toward the end of the *Gest*, which will be discussed later. But the point is not lost on the audience who sees the corruptibility of the church and the law. Sir Richard is consistently held up as the shining example of lower aristocratic behavior coupled with the beneficence of the yeomanry used to maneuver the changing social landscape. The compiler nearly begs the audience not to see this abbey interaction as corruption of the higher estates on trial by the lower estates and losing that fight. Sir Richard begs the sheriff to “be [his] frende!” (*Gest* line 427) and the abbot to do so likewise “for [his] curteyse” (*Gest* line 430), but each swears by God that they will not help the knight. Sir Richard replies that “it is good to assay a frende/Or that a man have need” (*Gest* lines 447-448), meaning that tests of loyalty to either the faith of the Church’s doctrines or the law of the king. The knight finds both the abbot and justice false and without courtesy.

The audience must relate to this injustice in order for it to be included, because there is little by way of action that might intrigue a more lowly audience within the exchange of money from Robin Hood to Sir Richard and Sir Richard to the abbot of St. Mary’s. The focus is on testing through behavior and verbal sparring which is a more upwardly mobile determinate. Such a lengthy episode indicates the desire to learn how to behave when faced with illegal or unscrupulous officials. The lowly knight wins, but the battle for his land continues as a messenger from St. Mary’s Abbey is captured by the outlaws on his way to London “to holde grete mote,/The knyght that rode so hye on hors,/To brynge hym under fote” (*Gest* lines 1010-1012). This meeting never takes place because the message is never delivered; the second try for the land repeats the underhandedness of the abbot of St. Mary’s while furthering support for what Robin Hood is accomplishing.

The *Robin Hood* tales helped the minstrels regain some of their former prominence by specifically incorporating these certain elements of corruption and the necessary trappings of navigating the aristocratic world as a yeoman. The outlaw was easily approachable in that he lived in the forest and targeted not the king, but those who worked for the king (i.e., the sheriffs and church officials) as stated in the *Gest*

These bisshoppes and these archebischoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde;
The hye sherif of Notyngham,
Hym holde ye in your mynde. (lines 57-60)

Aside from these classic targets of the outlaw band which attracts the enthusiastic support of the audience, Dobson and Taylor note that an “earthy humor” underlies the Robin Hood ballads which seems to appeal to a wider audience (7). Through the use of the forest setting, county level adversaries, and base humor, minstrels crafted a legend that reflected “a deliberate appeal to the patronage of the yeoman rather than of the landed nobleman” (Dobson and Taylor 10). The effect then becomes that of pointing out the negatives of the upper class in order to instruct the audience on what the corruption to be aware of and how to respond with the greatest effectiveness. This response could either be direct action or support of those that could enact direct action. After all, satire’s ultimate goal is to instruct, not just make fun.

The text of *Robin Hood and the Potter* reveals the audience and qualities of Robin Hood not only in language used, but in several instances of the seemingly illiterate hand of the compiler. Immediately in the second stanza, the speaker requests that those “god yemen, / Comely, cortessey, and god” listen to the tale of Robin Hood (line 6), a fellow yeoman, “that was boyt corteys and ffre” (line 10). Although there is a sense that the language reflects a courtly image, it is clearly about a yeoman and aimed at a yeoman audience while taking desired elements from the peasantry and aristocracy and incorporating them for their own gain.

By the end of the fourteenth century, Robin Hood had the reputation of being well respected because the speaker never has to explain any familial background or past exploits of the outlaw. In courtly literature, valorous deeds, reputable bloodlines, or chivalric behavior were more often than not dwelled upon to the point of expecting it in any Medieval Romance or epic. Gawain, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, does not have to explain who he is because

And alle the men in that mote maden much joye
 To apere in his presense prestly that tyme,
 That alle prys and prowes and pured thewes
 Apendes to hys person, and praysed is ever;
 Byfore alle men upon molde his mensk is the most.
 Uch segge ful softly sayde to his fere:
 ‘Now schal we semlych se sleghtes of thewes
 And the teccheles termes of talking noble.
 Wich spede is in speche unspurd may we lerne,
 Syn we haf fonged that fine fader of nurture. (910-919)

Gawain’s reputation precedes him, and the audience is able to learn the implicit and explicit expectations of certain behaviors. By omitting these types of courtly elements, Robin becomes an approachable character to his popular audience. Even those he befriends are treated as equals, and often times his closest companions defeat the outlaw in either shooting matches or hand to hand fighting, essentially usurping Robin’s role as leader. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Little John beats Robin in a shooting match; in *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the potter beats Robin in hand to hand fighting; in *The Gest of Robyn Hode*, Little John and the king beat Robin Hood at shooting contests. The outlaw’s response leans to laughing it off and accepting the individual as an equal. This model of behavior is what replaces the unattainable chivalric model that fails in Gawain’s tale; it tells the audience to behave as one “comely, corteys, and god” (*Potter* line 6) and gives vivid examples of how that should be performed. Yes, Romances, Anglo-Saxon epics, and the king’s constructs present a model, but as Kaeuper notes the common people of the late fourteenth century were “sick to death of the taint and restrictions of villeinage, the unfree

condition of many villagers, and that they were outraged over the judicial failures and increasing economic exactions of the king's government" (98). The old models are ultimately unattainable and unsupportable. Kaeuper further states, in direct reference to the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, that "the evidence points overall not to an anarchic desire to destroy the governing frameworks, but rather to a radical movement of reform" (98). This radical reform is exactly what estates model satire has in mind, and the compilers and balladeers of the Robin Hood corpus use it their advantage by further cracking the system other contemporary writers were working upon, as well.

Other evidence indicating that the *Robin Hood* ballads catered to a yeoman audience, and therefore further establishing itself within estates satire, was the environment in which the stories were set. While most courtly romances took place in castles, large country estates, or faraway lands, the *Robin Hood* tales centered on the rural life. Interestingly, most Romances seem to avoid the forest and regard it as a place of evil and the unknown which should be avoided at all costs. For example, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the sequence of Sir Gawain's travels from Arthur's court to Bertilak's court is fairly short with only brief mentions of the cold, miserable weather and wild beasts the knight must fight, illustrating the notion that life apart from court or urban areas offers hardships and pain. Conversely, the greenwood of the Robin Hood ballads presents the main setting from which all of the outlaw's tales begin. There is a certain amount of safety offered from the law in the woods, but another reason could be that "An inherent conflict therefore existed between the king, who was keen to uphold the amenity value of the forests, and private landowners holding property within their bounds, who were more interested in the utility value of these lands. Resentment against the forests was widespread" (Campbell 199), so the people utilizing the forests sought more freedom to do so and did so

illegally through rife poaching and celebrated Robin Hood because of this direct rejection of the law. But Robin does move from the primary setting of the forest to small towns, rural contests, and individuals' homes. Even the people the outlaw encounters are generally common. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the outlaw interacts with a potter, local townspeople, the sheriff, the sheriff's wife, and the sheriff's men. In fact, the compiler makes sure the townspeople are heard; in stanza 35, a man casually comments to his wife that he wonders if the potter (Robin in disguise) will ever thrive due to the prices he has on his pots. The sheriff's wife is also depicted as laughing loudly in stanza 74; this display would rarely, if ever, be seen of a lady of the aristocracy in the Romances. These instances show that since the yeomanry was the intended audience, they play a more prominent role in the text, and are presented as they would appear normally. They are not misrepresented by any effect to artificially heighten their social status or to present one trade as more distinguished than another.

Robin Hood's similarity to the outlaws of Hereward and Fouke reveals itself in the struggle to establish and maintain an identity in the face of its removal. Traditional elements of harassment, the greenwood, and reconciliation were accounted for. What Robin adds to the tradition portrays a shift occurring historically at the time in England. No longer was the king being directly attacked, but his policies and those who enforced them or who were under the protection of the throne were targeted. The sheriffs represented the king himself and helped to fill the royal coffers. The Church possessed many lands which also raised money for the king but more so was allowed to behave the way they did due to the king's protection. These elements were entrenched power structures that expected certain behavior from certain groups. Robin Hood represented a new social class emerging that questioned the traditional roles of those structures. As that new class sought to identify itself, it met resistance. How could the Church

control the masses if its own servants reveled in the actions of an outlaw that targeted its officials as evidenced by *Piers Plowman's* Sloth? How could the king's authority maintain order if 143 men flagrantly took the king's property? New possibilities were emerging and being explored by those who previously never expected any change in the social structure. Just as Hereward and Fouke fought for changes in the early Medieval outlaw tradition, those hopes and desires were trickling down to others who sought to be identified properly. Robin Hood manifested these desires, and his popularity over such a broad span of time reveals his impact on those who believed in his cause. Chaucer's estates satire reached the reading literate class; Robin Hood's estates satire reached the larger masses filling the middle class void.

3 CH. 2: SHRIEVAL HISTORY AND HOW THE SHERIFF FAILS IN THIS ROLE

Robin Hood became popular with the common people because he was fighting corrupt local officials who affected a broad range of the populace. Though the term "common people" here refers to most of the non-aristocratic classes from peasants up to low ranking knights, those who were knighted were close enough to Robin's social order of yeoman to be considered potential sympathizers. Not all knights were of equal wealth, and as the knight, Sir Richard Lee, presented in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* showed, they could be targeted and oppressed by more politically powerful individuals due more in part to the perception of intra-social classism. Out of the three earliest ballads, the *Gest of Robyn Hode* lays out unambiguously who should be targeted and left alone. Robin Hood specifically ordered Little John, Will Scarlock, and Much the Miller's son, his three main followers, to "bete and bynde"/ "[t]hese bisshoppes and these archebischoppes/[as well as] the hye sherif of Notyngnam" (*Gest* lines 57-59). The outlaw also directed his men to

[...] do no husbonde harme,
That tilleth with his ploughe.

“No more ye shall no gode yeman
 That walketh by grene wode shawe,
 Ne no knight no no squyer
 That wol be a gode felawe” (*Gest* lines 51-56)

and to leave women alone since “Robyn loved Oure dere Lady,” referring to the Virgin Mary (*Gest* line 37). The audience hears these lines as the rationale of the outlaws for attacking the powerful authorities who have the potential to oppress them every day through ecclesiastical legalities or the king’s law. Walker notes that through this oppression the “inevitable price [was] the pursuit of private interest by those charged with public office” (104). Nigel Saul, in *Knights and Esquires: the Gloucestershire gentry in the fourteenth century*, gives several examples of justices of the peace and constables routinely holding tenants ransom and consuming as much of others’ property as was humanly possible (266-7). The compilers of the *Robin Hood* ballads do not spend time explaining these offences wrought by justice. Since the sheriff and the corrupt legal system he is a part of are the objects of the *Robin Hood* ballads’ ire, one must come to understand the shrieval position from its history and its social perception and reception.

Corresponding to the upward mobility of the peasant class was the position of the sheriff. The sheriff’s role in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries derived from the reeve of the Anglo-Saxon and early Norman periods. As England grew, the reeve’s position took on more responsibilities in a larger area, the shire. His position also came to be intimately connected with the king, answering only to the crown. Of course, with that extra authority and little to no supervision, the sheriff tended to become corrupt. His corruption potentially affected everyone in the shire, and those with limited resources, i.e. the peasants, would have virtually little recourse for redress. In light of these events, one can see how a figure such as Robin Hood would emerge and become popular over a wide audience, especially the yeomanry and peasantry.

As discontent invariably grew from the peasantry as corruption increased with the sheriff's office due to greater responsibility placed on the position by the king through larger coverage areas and more laws, the longevity of the tenure, and answering to the king only, the Norman sheriff heightened that sentiment. Nearly every Anglo-Saxon sheriff not loyal to William was replaced by a Norman with notable effects on the local communities. Most visible were the expectations of having a castle as part of the position as had been the norm for the sheriffs in Normandy; this elicited a sense of separateness from those the sheriff should know and protect. In the circa 1087 poem *Rime of King William*, the speaker laments the steps William takes to control the land through hunting laws and building castles, which had the effect of "immediate impress of Norman life on English soil" (Lerer 16). They also approached the job with a more business-like manner by paying attention to the details of organization, keeping more thorough accounts of financial obligations, and exercising a military command heretofore not encountered in pre-Conquest England. Michael Prestwich, in "The Enterprise of War," notes that when it was time for recruiting soldiers for the many battles and wars throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the general male population was pressed into service. "An ordinance of 1363, frequently reissued thereafter, condemned the popularity of worthless games such as football, and ordered men to practise archery on every holiday" leaving the responsibility of the community to provide the cost of the necessary equipment (79). There are several shooting games portrayed in the *Robin Hood* ballads, and those can firstly be viewed as replicating those games and practices the sheriff would have to enforce in order to be troop-ready at the king's beckoning. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the sheriff and his men hold a shooting contest with the disguised Robin. After several rounds,

The screffes men thowt gret schame
The potter the mastry wan;

The screffe lowe and made god game,
 And seyde, "Potter, thow art a man.
 Thow art worthey to bere a bowe
 Yn what plas that thow goe." (*Potter* lines 209-214)

In the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, the king orders the sheriff to gather some troops for his arrival:

"Go nowe home, shyref," sayde our kyng,
 "And do as I byd the,
 And ordeyn gode archers ynowe,
 Of all the wyde contré." (lines 1301-1304)

Shortly after this discussion, the disguised king observes, in the majority of the seventh fitt, Robin and his men shooting and is well-pleased with the results he sees not just from their shooting abilities but also from their devoted obedience. The result of this arguably extreme oversight and personal involvement, according to Gladwin, was that the sheriff became "the dread agent of a hard and terrible king, was a hated foreigner in a hostile land, forced by circumstance if not by inclination to adopt the most brutal methods in order to exert authority over the shires where he and his kind were vastly outnumbered" (37). Part of the sheriff's responsibilities lay in his ability to know and enforce customs specific within each community, which could be different from the enforced law of the crown. With the evolving Norman sheriff more likely not know these customs nor care to figure them out made the transition from Anglo-Saxon society to Anglo-Norman society all the more difficult and brutal for those conquered since William could not tolerate rebellion. Regardless, a change in ruling nationalities did not change the corruption that often filled the sheriff's office and became more prevalent over time, thus pointing to the need for *Robin Hood* complaint literature.

Because the Norman sheriffs were generally picked from the aristocracy, and due to the growing responsibilities of the Anglo-Saxon sheriff at the time of the Conquest, the shrieval post eventually became one, under Henry III, in which only a land owner, and preferably an

aristocrat, could occupy so that he would be more visible and known to all within the community and have the ability to navigate the aristocratic behaviors in order to exact a better legal outcome. Later, in 1371, Richard Gorski notes in *The Fourteenth-Century Sheriff*, that the sheriff's lands must produce £20 a year in the hopes that the sheriff would be someone with scruples enough to dispense with the corruption associated with the office (69). These requirements certainly elevated the sheriff to higher social positions than were possible in the past, but they were not infallible because specific designations of how much land had to be owned and how certain property should be valued were never codified. Ostensibly, one not in the aristocracy could rise through the ranks of the military or some craft, purchase land and own enough livestock or goods to meet or appear to meet the requirements of the sheriff's office and as such equal some of the lower ranks of the aristocracy.

Regardless of the means by which the individual rose to the level of sheriff, it, according to Gorski, required the assets and connections to be granted the position (69). In terms of the *Gest*, little is known about the sheriff's holdings, but he is called the "hye shyref" in the sixth fitt (*Gest* line 1269). The high sheriff moniker originally meant that the man was a thegn, not from the peasantry, and that he specifically oversaw the king's property. The other common sheriffs, or reeves, dealt with any property falling outside the direct ownership of the king. As can be implied, the high sheriff would have exclusive access to the king, generally know his whereabouts, and move freely about within the upper echelons of each estate. The *Gest's* sheriff specifically addresses the king for help in dealing with Robin Hood to the point of the king traveling to Nottingham, which implies he knows where the king is at the time. The text states

The shyref thus had his answe,
Without any lesynge;
Furth he yede to London towne,

All for to tel our kinge. (*Gest* lines 1285-1288)

Wendy R. Childs notes in her article “Moving Around” that “Royal itineraries show that kings rarely spent more than two or three weeks in one place and could be on the move for several weeks at a time” (272). With this level of constant movement, the sheriff had to expect the king or his retinue to show up or know where the king was in order to deliver messages. The sheriff also cavorts with the abbots in the second fitt and refuses to address Sir Richard’s complaint of being treated rudely at the church. The sheriff seems to react mostly out of spite, pride, or both due to the level of importance in which he perceives himself to be, thus giving more credence to the idea that sheriffs, particularly high sheriffs, needed to come from the aristocratic class. Peter Coss, in “An Age of Deference”, points to the early thirteenth-century *Bracton* treatise calling for sheriffs to be “vavasours”, or substantial landowners. This was not always put into practice since the king could appoint whomever he chose, but “In 1258 the Provisions of Oxford demanded of the king that sheriffs should be vavasours of the counties they administered, rather than courtiers or professional administrators” (36), which then extended the potential shrieval candidates from which to choose while also tying them to the land more substantively.

The sheriff did not always hold such a position of ill-repute, and his long history up to the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was filled with many positive elements. Before the Conquest of 1066, the Anglo-Saxon reeve had many responsibilities essential within the community. Irene Gladwin, in *The Sheriff: The Man and his Office*, gives particular insight into the pre- and post-Conquest days of the shire reeve. Originally, the reeve was a free peasant chosen from within his community to order the agricultural seasons, provide and maintain social order between residents, collect money owed to the king, lord, and those who had wrongs inflicted upon them, and provide protection (15-17). Looking superficially at the ballads, one

can see the sheriff fulfilling most, if not all, of these duties. The sheriff responds to the monk's complaint of Robin Hood worshipping in *Robin Hood and the Monk*; the sheriff tries to adjudicate property claims for the Church in *Gest of Robyn Hode*; and the sheriff tries to catch the chief lawbreaker in his area in *Robin Hood and the Potter*. The uniqueness of the shire reeve, or sheriff, position derived from the fact that a peasant could assume the role and thus potentially have more power and influence than the aristocracy; few other positions could tout this extreme in social mobility. However, over time the shrieval position became such as to nearly always go to someone of means, but a yeoman still had the potential to become sheriff. Maddicott notes that one yeoman, John de Oxenford, was appointed sheriff in 1334 in Nottinghamshire and never rose to the rank of knight nor earned more than £8 a year from his lands, making him at best minor gentry (288-289). In light of these "shortcomings" of social rank and yearly earnings, he remained sheriff for the remainder of the 1330s, which supports the assertion that the sheriff needed to be easily recognized and respected, to a certain degree, across the social spectrum.

The reeve can easily be categorized as the community manager, and one might assume that the collection of money as part of this job would be the biggest problem with which to deal. However, upon closer inspection, the agricultural duties seemed to have far more importance because those decisions could have detrimental effects upon the community if mismanaged. Too much wood could not be taken from the forests, crops needed to be properly stored, everyone needed enough sustenance to survive, and the livestock needed enough grazing lands. Bruce Campbell, in his article "The Land," notes that

An inherent conflict therefore existed between the king, who was keen to uphold the amenity value of the forests, and the private landowners holding property within their bounds, who were more interested in the utility value of these lands. Resentment against the forests was widespread, which is one reason why tales

about outlaws who sheltered in the green wood and poached the king's deer were so popular. (199)

The idea is one that the land is a source of survival in nearly every aspect of that word for the Medieval individual; to tightly control the access to the forests and arable land meant some would break the law in order to simply exist. There becomes, then, a clear and perhaps necessary antagonism born out of need on the aristocratic and peasantry levels. Campbell also notes that as a result of the importance of what the countryside provided, "Townsmen may have despised husbandmen for being rustic, but none would have denied the indispensable nature of the latter's work" (181). The sheriff was the one responsible for maintaining this balance of value and need between the king and the populace.

The sheriff had "an unenviable job—out in all weather, bullying, coaxing, counting, watching—and a capable reeve needed physical stamina as well as sharp eyes and a masterful tongue" (Gladwin 16). Since most of the property was in the hands of the aristocracy, the Church, or the crown, a large percentage of the goods produced from that property would be theirs first with the remainder trickling down to the peasants. Gladwin correctly points to the sheriff's necessity of keen eyesight and a tactical wit in order to navigate the range of the estates, because if he failed to meet the needs of his superiors, the deficit would be made up from his own property, and he needed to stay sharp in order to preserve his well-being. The sheriff never knew when the lord or the king and his men might arrive, and provisions had to be available at all times. Herein lies the development of the problem with the sheriff: in order for him not to have to take from his resources, it benefitted him to collect a bit more than necessary as a safeguard for what might happen as a result of unanticipated royal visits or demands or even natural occurrences that would negatively affect agricultural production.

Another contributing factor to the rise in corruption of the shrieval position was the consolidation of powers of various peace keepers' roles, such as military and law enforcement, into a more united, stable commission of the peace during the reign of Edward III. The effects of this consolidation and streamlining of power led to less personal contact with the sheriff, removed the sheriff from direct litigation and judgment proceedings, and further separated the people from the more intimate involvement in their defense since many times these commissions were composed of either individuals from outside the community or "substantial men of the shire" (Walker "Yorkshire" 282). By the end of Henry IV's reign, the state had considerably consolidated power into the upper aristocracy and away from the lower ranking county gentry, who traditionally held these positions. The shire knights, too, were traditionally chosen to be part of the county justice system but were being pushed aside. Sir Richard Lee's appearance in the *Gest* and subsequent befriending of Robin Hood suggests the turmoil brewing in the lower aristocratic and yeoman classes resulted in a need to reestablish order on the local level to ensure a more stable country as a whole. Sir Richard's involvement with the outlaw and the storyline's inclusion within the popular ballad points to the need to look outside the established law in order to return to justice and stability because of the corruption involved within law enforcement. In fact, as Walker and Virgoe point out, during Richard II and Henry IV's reign there were several times in which the crown had to concede power to private interests in order to reestablish order stemming from the largely unpopular and foreign appearing peace commission (Walker "Yorkshire" 283; Virgoe "Crown" 237). However, most of the time the crown was able to exude enough influence through its selection of legal representatives to maintain control. There are instances, though, of the crown selecting individuals based on their political potential instead of their aristocratic rank. For example, Richard II does not appoint Edmund, the Duke of York, and

Henry IV chooses to appoint a young baron, Peter, Lord Mauley, to the bench over other older, higher ranking individuals (Madox 231, 307). The point is that the legal system of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries began to evolve into political cronyism for its own sake instead of being a simplified vehicle for local justice and, thus, providing the impetus for the *Robin Hood* ballads' attacks on the legal system.

The sheriff also became a mediator for various legal transactions. Because so many transactions eventually required the witness of the sheriff, and because the sheriff was excused from many of the financial responsibilities of rents and other payments due the crown and lord, the peasantry would often slip the sheriff a little extra on a collected payment in the hopes that a future request, such as allowing livestock to graze in a particular area, would be granted or a more favorable ruling would occur. Over time, this slightly underhanded conduct became expected on the part of the sheriff, and so the peasants were eventually paying more without receiving anything extra in return. These extra collections, along with the aforementioned safeguards, plant the seeds for unchecked corruption. One example from *Robin Hood and the Potter* hints at the sheriff taking more than he needs simply because it is there. As Robin is introduced to the sheriff in the lawman's home, the sheriff's wife exclaims

“Lo, ser, what thes potter hayt gaffe yow and me,
 Feyffe pottys smalle and grete!”
 “He ys foll wellcom,” seyde the screffe,
 “Let os was, and to mete.” (*Potter* lines 161-164)

The key word is “gave (gaffe)” signifying the “buying” of the sheriff's favor; the other key aspect within this stanza is that the sheriff does not even try to refuse five big and small pots. One can assume having this many more pots will either increase the sheriff's personal worth, allow him to show that wealth off, and, more likely, to potentially sell or trade if his taxation goals are not reached in the coming year.

The medieval sheriff, after going through these extended evolutions, came to exist as a keeper of the peace on the local level while also being the king's enforcer, judiciary manipulator, tax collector, lawyer, arbitrator, and public utilities inspector. J.J. Jusserand notes in *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages* within the Rolls of Parliament of Henry IV that

[H]umbly pray the Commons of your realm, as well as spiritual as temporal, complaining that several sheriffs of your kingdom feign and procure presentments in their turns that divers roads, bridges, and causeways are defective from non-reparation, with purpose and intent to amerce abbots, priors, and seculars, sometimes up to ten pounds, sometimes more, sometimes less, and levy the said ameracements by their officers called out-riders, without delay or any reply of the parties, in places where the said roads, bridges, and causeys are sufficient enough, or perhaps are not in charge of the said amerced men. (40)

This item in the court record indicates the sheriff's job to ensure road maintenance through taxation and payment of workers to do the job. Here, that job was not being done correctly. Jusserand goes on to claim that the king would have substantial interest in maintaining these roads and bridges because impassable roads meant secluded areas that would become self-contained entities difficult for the king to control (41). What it also shows is the corruption that had seeped into the position of the sheriff because of the lack of oversight and the growing amount of work required of the sheriff on a daily basis.

Because the targeted bureaucrats and church officials in the *Robin Hood* ballads were essentially local, or county, individuals in positions of far reaching power, it's important to understand that Robin Hood was not targeting the king specifically for any wrongdoing, but instead concentrated on those who worked for the king. Richard Firth Green points out that there was a significant problem with corrupt officials, but many attempts to pin the source of the problem on the king, writers of the time typically saw him "not as a source of reforming legislation but simply as a just administrator of good old laws that have fallen into neglect" (419). Each sheriff, though, answered directly to the king, and generally one sheriff was

appointed per county. Robert Palmer notes that any attempt to thwart the sheriff from doing his duties could be considered an obstruction of royal power (33). Simon Walker, in his article “Order and Law,” notes that there was an increase in disorder and lawlessness during the end of Edward I’s reign, but the sovereign had the primary responsibility of “maintaining and enforcing justice” (92). The contradiction of monarchical expectation and reality of order at the end of the thirteenth century and early years of the fourteenth century forced the need for large scale reforms within the justice system that had evolved since the Norman invasion. Up to this period of time, the king was able to maintain order within the legal system through a very broad, top-down approach of permanent sitting judges at Westminster and irregular meetings of justices of the eyre throughout England. But this approach proved to be significantly lacking in the manpower and regularity necessary for the rise in litigation at this time. Walker points to a two month period towards the end of the thirteenth century that shows nearly 775 cases brought before the eyre justices in one county alone (93). Wendy Childs also shows “the estimate that the sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in thirteen months in 1333-4 received about 2,000 letters and writs requiring action” (273). This large amount of legal action was becoming the norm, and the established justices could not maintain the workload. As a result, a system of county courts meeting on a regular basis was established to handle the overload and eventually overtook the relevance of the eyre justices. Walker notes that “The county court, meeting usually every month and presided over by the sheriff, provided a local forum for royal justice” (92), and “it was the justices of the peace who eventually emerged in the late fourteenth century as the principal agents for the enforcement of the criminal law at [the] local level” (94). The sheriff now acted as a legal arbiter upholding the king’s law and, therefore, was even more deeply embedded in the machinations of authority that could significantly affect the lives of

many individuals too poor to fight the system. The king, however, would not necessarily remain “hands off” if it was in his best interest to become involved. Walker states that by the 1230’s, “Royal justice had begun the long process of dissociation from the person of the king, although many of the most important pleas continued to be heard ‘before the king’ (*coram rege*), a phrase that implied interest, if not the actual presence, of the king” (92-93). Incredible as it may sound, the king would literally hear the case and rule on it, essentially usurping the role of the justice. However, society accepted this aspect of the law since it was their duty to obey the king. It also hints at the tightly intertwined relationship between the sheriff and the king and the delivery of justice and how those relationships were perceived in the complaint literature of *Robin Hood*.

The relevance of the king’s personal involvement within the *Robin Hood* ballads becomes clearer in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* when the king is personally summoned *and* arrives in Nottingham. In the sixth fitt, the sheriff has Sir Richard Lee surrounded in the knight’s castle, but the knight will not give up until he has a fair hearing before the king:

“Wende furth, sirs, on your way,
And do no more to me
Tyll ye wyt oure kynges wille,
What he wyll say to the.” (*Gest* lines 1281-1284)

The charge the sheriff brings against Sir Richard is that he “kepest here the kynges enemys,/Agaynst the lawe and right” (*Gest* lines 1275-1276). The sheriff goes to London, and

Ther he telde him of that knight,
And eke of Robyn Hode,
And also of the bolde archars,
That were soo noble and gode.
“He wyll avowe that he hath done,
To mayntene the outlawes stronge;
He wyll be lorde, and set you at nought,
In all the northe londe.”
“I wyl be at Notyngham,” saide our kyng,
“Within this fourteenyght,
And take I wyll Robyn Hode,

And so I wyll that knight.” (*Gest* lines 1289-1300)

The interest the king must have with this dispute not only reflects the dangerous potential of a disorderly mob roaming free, but it also reflects the Church’s displeasure of losing the lands that Sir Richard owned once he paid off the debt to St. Mary’s. In a roundabout way, the king must have learned that the Church lost the knight’s land, even though it was trying to obtain it unscrupulously, and the sheriff had let the situation build up past his abilities to contain it. The conflict is then given an audience with the sheriff’s boss, the king, because “it was the people’s part to obey the king’s will and his laws. Disobedience of whatever kind, [...], was a kind of treason, the first step down the road towards general insurrection” (Walker 91). On the other side, however, “Actions and decisions that were against justice and universal right (*commun droit*) could not, therefore, be considered legal” (Walker 91). The king is being lead into a situation where his laws and law enforcers are being disregarded by a group of people that are against that justice and universal right that allow social harmony. This ending is caused by the sheriff, retained by the church/abbot, and presents a single, irresponsible side to the king while revealing a shortcoming of the sheriff. Walking into this situation, the king is correct to approach in disguise:

Full hastily our kynge was dyght,
So were his knyghtes five,
Everych of them in monkes wede,
And hasted them thyder blyve. (*Gest* lines 1481-4)

Unless the king moves to the heart of the issue, i.e. the outlaws’ involvement, the problem of Sir Richard’s winning the battle against the church of St. Mary’s cannot be resolved; the only way to the issue is to find the outlaws.

Although *Robin Hood and the Potter* and *Robin Hood and the Monk* do not share similar scenes of the king’s involvement, they do portray another aspect of the king’s law from the

Church's perspective of enforcement. For example, in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Robin is worshipping in church, a safe place for all who are there, but is discovered by a monk who informs the sheriff the outlaw is in the church:

“Rise up,” he said, “thou prowde schereff,
 Buske the and make the bowne;
 I have spyed the kynggis felon,
 For sothe he is in this town.
 “I have spyed the false felon,
 As he stondis at his masse;

Hit is long of the,” seide the munke,
 “And ever he fro us passe.” (lines 83-90)

The sheriff clearly appears to be acting as a hired agent of the king's law to enforce those laws within the walls of the church, but this clearly violates laws of sanctuary in which criminals could either take the vows of the church, indemnifying themselves against prosecution of their crimes, or seek refuge within the church for a period of time in which the law could not claim them while they were within the church. As Robin Hood is leaving the church, he sees the sheriff and his men waiting for him. Robin fights valiantly, killing twelve men, but he breaks his sword on the sheriff's head and finds himself weaponless. The text states that “Robyn in to her churche ran,/Thro out hem everilon” (*Monk* lines 119-120); the next page of the text is missing, so it's unclear what happens in those lines. However, looking at what follows tells one that Robin has been captured by the sheriff since his outlaw band is shown preparing to break him out of jail. Going back to lines 119-120, though, it appears as if Robin is going back into the church, as if he is seeking sanctuary of the clergy; however, he clearly is not granted it because he is next seen in the sheriff's prison. What the audience had to experience was “an unstoppable expansion of royal power into the sacred places of England [which] assisted the convergence of the power of the state with that of the Church” (Burrow 806). As a refuge for sinners, no matter

what the sin, the church had a responsibility to protect those who sought its comfort. The sheriff, in this instance, appears to disregard his duty in pursuit of the outlaw and thus placing his personal gain ahead of justice.

As more and more individuals engaged the courts beginning in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and thus the services of the sheriff, as noted in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* and the works of M. T. Clanchy (*Civil Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre, 1249*) and D. W. Sutherland (*The Eyre of Northamptonshire, 1329-1330*), the courts became overwhelmed to adequately move through the volume. The result was a more active role involving the Church, but one in which the sheriff still had authority in due to the king having ultimate control. Walker states that “A dense network of subordinate jurisdictions in both town and countryside supplemented the work of royal justice in combating disorder, regulating conduct and enforcing certain social norms. The most pervasive influence in this respect was exercised by the ecclesiastical courts” (95). Walker further explains that these ecclesiastical courts would generally rule on mortal sins (i.e. adultery), wills, and acts of perjury, to name a few. The inclusion of ecclesiastical courts served as a way to alleviate the growing strain on the legal system, especially those adjudicative proceedings run by the sheriffs, which could easily see one thousand cases a year in London, as was the case during Edward IV’s reign (Pugh 2).

Those acts of perjury, however, appear in the earlier visited scene from the second fitt of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* in which Sir Richard has to repay the church of St. Mary’s. Sir Richard owes this particular church £400, which had to be paid within twelve months, that he borrowed “Upon all his londe fre” (*Gest* line 346). As the fitt progresses, the audience learns this is the final day of the twelve month period and the abbot, the chief steward, a justice, and the high sheriff were in attendance in order to oversee their hoped for gain of the knight’s property:

The abbot and the hy selerer
 Sterte for the full bolde,
 The justice of Englonde
 The abbot there dyde holde.
 The hye justice and many mo
 Had take in to theyr honde
 Holy all the knyghtes det,
 To put that knight to wronge. (*Gest* lines 369-376)

One of the chief complaints of the time with ecclesiastical courts was that they were “more oppressive [...] in their exactions than all the lay courts” (Walker 95). The ballad compiler illustrates this perception by the vivid depiction of the excitement and desire to humiliate the knight solely for the purpose of gaining his land. The Sir Richard understands this situation as he walks into it and calls direct attention to it when he arrives. It is a curious passage that begins with the abbot asking Sir Richard if he has the money to pay the debt. Sir Richard replies that he has “Not one peny, sayd the knight,/“By God that maked me” (*Gest* lines 413-4); the abbot feigns displeasure and asks why the knight showed up with nothing. “For God,” than sayd the knight,/ “To pray of a lenger daye” (*Gest* lines 419-20); he is using the Church’s own purpose, that of spiritual salvation through prayer and devotion to God, in order to highlight the hypocrisy of the high church officials. Praying for a longer day may sound like a stretch of making this point, but the justice steps in by denying a lengthening of the contract. Sir Richard “begs” the justice and the sheriff to

[...] be my frende,
 And fende me of my fone!”
 “I am holde with the abbot,” sayd the justice,
 “Both with cloth and fee.”
 “Now, good syr sheryf, be my frende!”
 “Nay, for God,” sayd he. (*Gest* lines 423-428)

Neither of these representatives of the king’s law will allow for any leniency towards the knight.

The knight goes on:

“Now, good syr abbot, be my frende,
 For thy curteysé,
 And holde my londes in thy honde
 Tyll I have made the gree!
 And I wyll be thy true servaunte,
 And trewely serve the,
 Tyl ye have foure hondred ponde
 Of money good and free.” (*Gest* lines 429-436)

Within this mock beggary, the knight addresses the “gentle” nature expected within the aristocracy, regardless of the pillar of the estates model of which one was a part. He also is creating another contract of servitude until the debt can be paid; in both cases, the abbot takes great offence and shows no consideration for anything but greed:

The abbot sware a full grete othe,
 “By God that dyed on a tree,
 Get the londe where thou may,
 For thou getest none of me.” (*Gest* lines 437-440)

Although the final day of the contract has arrived, it is not over. The ballad compiler wants the audience to fully understand how the Church’s influence in the legal system is being corrupted from the king’s intent all while the sheriff and justice continue to look on in support of the corruption. Sir Richard seems to sum up the sentiment when he says “it is good to assay a frende/Or that a man have need” (*Gest* lines 447-8).

Interestingly, the justice tries to think through the possibilities of continued strife between Sir Richard and the abbot if the Church will not either extend the contract’s payment time or forgive the debt. The abbot has accused Sir Richard of being a “false knyght” (*Gest* line 451), a claim upon the knight’s character, so the justice figures that a payment to the knight will help alleviate pursuing the character attack claim in the courts and end any animosity Sir Richard might harbor in the future. The justice says

“What wyll ye gyve more,” sayd the justice,
 “And the knyght shall make a releyse?”

And ells dare I safly swere
Ye holde never your londe in pees.” (*Gest* lines 465-8)

For the abbot, this price is “an hondred pounde” (*Gest* line 469), but the justice believes it should be twice that amount. However, Sir Richard will have none of it and reveals what his goal has been since he walked in the church:

“Though ye wolde gyve a thousand more,
Yet were ye never the nere;
Shall there never be myn heyre
Abbot, justice, ne frere.”
He stert hym to a borde anone,
Tyll a table rounde,
And there shoke oute of a bagge
Even four hundred pound.
“Have here thi golde, sir abbot,” saide the knight,
“Which that thou lentest me;
Had thou ben curtes at my comynge,
Rewarded shuldest thou have be.” (*Gest* lines 473-484)

Sir Richard has paid the debt, cleared his name from the “false knight” charge by maintaining his composure and showing how the abbot was the discourteous one, and reveals how the Church’s greed has effected a loss of the knight’s land in apparent perpetuity.

Since the abbot has been dealt with, justice should be addressed. Sir Richard has thoroughly embarrassed the abbot, and the abbot, like most who have been made a fool in public, seeks some type of satisfaction; he turns to the justice, who is there to supposedly act in the interest of the church. The abbot says

“Take me my golde agayne,” saide the abbot,
“Sir justice, that I toke the.”
“Not a peni,” said the justice,
“Bi God that dyed on tree.” (*Gest* lines 489-492)

Thomas Ohlgren, the editor of the *Gest* used here, notes that the word “take” in line 489 means “give” which then forces the word “toke” of line 490 to mean “gave,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* supports. The result is the abbot revealing the second instance, in the presence of Sir

Richard, that the justice is being paid off to benefit the church. The justice already told the knight that he “holde[s] with the abbot [...]/Both with cloth and fee” (*Gest* lines 425-6). Ohlgren notes that

“The phrase *cloth and fee* echoes the Latin formula *cum robis et foedis*, used to designate payment of legal services with both money and gifts of clothing. The abbot had retained the chief justice in order to help him bankrupt the knight. [T]he the practice of giving and receiving robes for such purposes was considered a conspiracy in the legal code of King Edward I, 1305-06; in another statute of

King Edward III, dated 1346, justices were required to swear that they would accept robes and fees only from the king.” (*Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* 156)

The abbot of St. Mary’s clearly violates the king’s established law; Richard Kaeuper states that “in the first half of the fourteenth century the practice by which lords retained the king’s justices was more prevalent than it had been earlier or would be again” (180). The justice clearly will not give the money back the abbot has paid him showing that even personal gain trumps others’ gain; the sheriff, oddly enough, remains in complacent silence throughout this exchange. The satire, or complaint, against the sheriff and Church becomes more evident by understanding that the local enforcer of the law and the “chief moral authority in society: the Church” were doing little to maintain the order necessary for society to interact successfully and apparently worked together to prohibit a fluid hierarchical system (Coss 59). The point made reflects the prevailing understanding that the court system, especially the ecclesiastical courts, were often unfair and ruthless in taking advantage of those who appeared before them. Walker explains that “At a more general level, law offered the promise of binding authority in a world that often lacked it” (99). Although this statement is true as it relates to the king’s ideal, it fails to realize that the *Robin Hood* compilers and the audiences for the ballads were actively and/or passively undercutting that ideal with the estates satire. One assumes the corruptibility of the sheriff in this

example by understanding the sheriff's "overlooking" pots being sold too cheaply and given away in *Robin Hood and the Potter*:

“Lo, ser, what thes potter hayt gaffe you and me,
Feyffe pottys smalle and grete!”
“He ys foll wellcom,” seyde the screffe,
“Let os was, and to mete.” (lines 161-4)

After giving the sheriff's wife five pots for free, the sheriff fully welcomes the disguised outlaw into his home. This might not seem like a point worth discussing, but the compiler wants the audience to understand the sheriff's role in not enforcing the law as it relates to prices of goods. There is an inherent value of goods, and to usurp that value through either raising or lowering the price would mean the seller is usurping God. The sheriff had a duty to uphold those values, but he clearly does not, even in his own household.

Lastly, because sheriffs had to cover so much area, they would often have a staff to help with the work load, thereby extending the arm of the king's power through even more local officials. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the sheriff is able to employ “many [of] the moder's son” (line 97) to capture Robin, and in *Robin Hood and the Potter* has many “archares that weren prowre” (line 182) and several other references to the sheriff's men. Also, sheriffs could receive amercements, fines levied against individuals, from court decisions as part of their salary (Palmer 36). Knowing that the potential for making money out of every court decision was possible might have led some sheriffs to take advantage of the situation. If county problems were dealt with without causing attention, the king might not care what went on in the counties as long as taxes continued to fill the coffers.

The glimpse at the corruption of the sheriff one sees in the second fitt of the *Gest* does not appear to be so until closer examination. By paying attention to the sheriff's response to Sir Richard's request, one can observe on a more concrete level why the *Gest* is part of the estates

tradition in terms of its complaint against at least one of the pillars of the model. In stanza 106, Sir Richard implores the sheriff to support him in his request to be extended more time to collect the money owed to the Church from a loan. After being denied by the abbot and the justice, the sheriff claims that his hands are tied in the matter. His response is short, “Nay, for God” (*Gest* line 428), but reflects his unwillingness to do his job if it means deciding between the more socially powerful abbot over the struggling knight. As discussed earlier, the sheriff had a responsibility to arbitrate agreements and resolve problems between all classes, not just those of political expediency. The first appearance of the sheriff in the *Gest* is immediately depicted negatively, with no development leading to the portrayal, due to the audience’s understanding of the sheriff’s corrupt character.

These feelings of suspected corruption are not without merit. In 1341, the aforementioned John de Oxenford was indicted in a trailbaston commission for numerous transgressions: taking livestock and corn for the king’s use without payment to the suppliers, taking corn intended for the king’s use for personal consumption, and taking wheat, malt, and oats earmarked for English troops fighting the Scots in Perth and selling the goods for his own profit (Those English troops, by the way, lost). Maddicott notes a chancery clerk was sent to investigate further but came back to London claiming Oxenford’s account of the Perth incident, which he claimed the goods were lost in the Humber River during transport, was acceptable and dropped the charge. Oxenford was also accused of releasing prisoners illegally for money, stealing livestock from owners and forcing the owners to buy them back, holding livestock to prevent the owners from ploughing their land and subsequently having to sell it, and numerous other charges of bribery and extortion (289-91). These charges are numerous and not indicative of every sheriff in the scope of their variety, but they are reminders of the ease at which

corruption could occur and escalate for a sustained period of time. These instances are also useful in showing how the *Robin Hood* audiences would expect the sheriff to behave and not have it explained before being exposed to it in the ballads.

Other examples of the sheriff's corruption exist as a build up for what is to come in the final three fitts of the *Gest*. In the third fitt, the sheriff hires Little John to work for him. Historically, the sheriff would have men working for him in order to help with the collection of dues, general patrolling of the king's property, and for a defensive force if called upon by the crown. The sheriff clearly notes Little John's skill with the bow and wants that talent working for him. The fruits of the sheriff's corruption, though, are made evident by Little John's and the cook's desire to leave his service and steal whatever valuables they could carry (textual evidence). They take numerous silver vessels, cups, utensils, and £300 and promptly went to Robin Hood with the goods. The cook joins the outlaws because the pay is better. Later, the sheriff is captured by the outlaws while hunting in the forest. In order to leave, he agrees to forgive any former wrongs levied against Robin. But, in the fifth fitt, the sheriff breaks his deal and attempts to capture Robin at a shooting competition. Robin purposefully goes to it in order to "wete the shryves fayth, / Trewe and yf he be" (*Gest* lines 1147-8). Of course, the temptation to capture the outlaw in the hopes of advancing his social stature overrides any promise previously made to abstain from harming Robin. The outlaws escape to Sir Richard's castle, but continue to be harassed by the sheriff.

At this point in the sixth fitt of the *Gest*, a turning point begins. The audience would evidently be enjoying the cunning and adventures of Robin and his men, but would undoubtedly not perceive what underlies the eventual outcome of the sheriff. The sheriff and his men lay siege to Sir Richard's castle, and the sheriff attacks the character of the good knight. The knight

appeals to the sheriff to seek the counsel of the king, his immediate superior, in this matter, since the knight does not deny Robin is at the castle but does not agree that the outlaw has done any wrong. The sheriff misrepresents the deeds of Robin, telling the king that if left unchecked the outlaw “wyll be lorde, and set you at nought, / In all the northe londe” (*Gest* lines 1295-6). The king advises the sheriff to abandon the siege, but to prepare for the king’s coming so that he can personally deal with the outlaws. Robin and his men then leave the castle, track the sheriff down, and kill him and his men in the street. The violence of the act is particularly brutal, but seems to suggest the pent up anger of being lied to and oppressed by the one person who had the power to exact some semblance of equality and protection to those who needed it. Robin shoots the sheriff once, which was enough to kill the man, but ensures his demise by cutting off his head. He then says:

Lye thou there, thou proude sherife,
 Evyll mote thou cheve:
 There myght no man to the truste
 The whyles thou were a lyve. (*Gest* lines 1393-1396)

Eventually, Robin Hood was pardoned by the king, but the compiler goes through the shooting match story to expose just one of the tricks the sheriff tried to capture the outlaw and illustrate to the audience how local law enforcement could not be trusted, and Robin and the public knew the sheriff could not fulfill that obligation.

What underlies and drives all of these various roles of the sheriff, then, is the desire for order. The idea of order extends from natural order to infiltrate social order. The omnipotent God creates the natural order of all things through which the king or monarch derives power. Social order extends from the monarch to various classes. “The maintenance of order, in all its senses, was the prerequisite of harmony: the state of man living in peace with man, but also of man living in peace with God” (Horrox 475). This top down order remains established over time

and expected. Green states that the corruption and changes within order results from “the systemic problems of an institution no longer able to adapt to changing social conditions” (418). In the case of estate satire, that order becomes disrupted by the yeoman class here. Law enforcement or the military is established to maintain order as deemed necessary society, and thus, nature and God. When land needs to exchange owners or a crime is committed or taxes need to be collected, someone has to “officiate.” Medieval sheriffs were well qualified to do these tasks because the sheriff was chosen from within the local community. The advantage to having a locally appointed sheriff was in his ability to know the people, the land, and presumably how to interact effectively with the people and hold their respect. Even today, communities elect sheriffs from among themselves to act as “go-betweens” for injured parties in the more rural areas. However, the shrieval position becomes entangled with corruption, either legitimately or perceived, and must right itself within the public’s mind if order is to ever be established. The kings of both pre- and post-Conquest England fail in maintaining social order because they fail to sustain their own laws. Although created with good intentions and positive results, the sheriff and what he represented could not survive as he had in the midst of the estates upheaval of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

4 CH. 3: HOW ROBIN HOOD FILLS THE ROLE OF THE SHERIFF

The *Robin Hood* ballads present the outlaw as an idealized sheriff through the guise of complaint literature. In an effort to promote this construction, Robin Hood is portrayed as morally superior to his enemies. A common thread in outlaw tales was to elevate the outlaw through his deeds, thus justifying his actions on morally higher grounds showing that morality was not solely in the hands of the aristocracy; the outlaw must have these “qualities of courtesy and generosity, otherwise the hero would be too threatening and would become a villain”

(Hanawalt 170). The usage of the term “villain” carries a heavy charge of all that is not gentle or courteous; to be called a villain or to act vilely meant that one acted like the most rustic, unpleasant churl imaginable. Crouch gives an example of a thirteenth-century bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, being called a villain (19). So when the audience of the *Gest* hears the abbot of St. Mary speaking “vylaynesly” (line 450) to Sir Richard, they understood this to be a satiric complaint against an evil begetting abbot opposed to the “gentyll” (line 453) knight that has historical precedence. Wearing the livery of Robin Hood and carrying the full payment of his debts paid from Robin’s accounts, the knight becomes an extension and exemplar of Robin’s courtesy in this instance just as any emissary of the sheriff would be an extension of that sheriff.

The ballad compilers go to some length presenting Robin Hood’s morality. What Robin Hood valued most was honesty and would test that in individuals he encountered. A tradition Robin Hood began was not to eat unless he had the company of a stranger, in particular aristocratic strangers, which Little John, Will, and Much provided. After Robin feeds his captured guest, he would ask them how much money they carried. A lie caused the outlaw to take whatever money the person had; if the guest told the truth, Robin Hood gave him additional monetary or mercantile supplements from his coffers. In the *Gest*, Robin questions Sir Richard, who rightly responds to only be carrying ten shillings; thrilled with the honesty of the knight and wishing to reward a behavior he keeps, Robin gives the knight the money he needs for his debt and six yards of scarlet and green cloth for clothing, a horse, boots, and spurs. Conversely, when the monk is Robin’s “guest” in the *Gest*, he claims to only have twenty marks, when in fact he has eight hundred pounds; the monk is lectured on being true to his faith and sent off without any of his original money. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the sheriff is sent back home after the meal without his horse or weapons simply because he is corrupt and cannot be trusted with anything.

This proclivity towards courtly entertainment certainly mimics the scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in which Arthur waits for entertainment before eating during the Christmas celebration and gets that desire with the Green Knight's challenge. Notice the text in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

But Arthur refused to eat till the rest were served.
 He was in merry mood, like a mischievous boy.
 [...]
 But that day he was driven by a different resolve;
 He had nobly decided never to eat at feasts
 Such as these, until someone had told him
 A strange story or splendid adventure. (lines 85-6; 90-93)

And the text in three places of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*:

“It is fer dayes, God sende us a gest,/That we were at oure dynere!” (lines 63-4)
 “But we brynge them to dyner,/Our mayster dare we not se.” (lines 867-8)
 “For thou has made our mayster wroth,/He is fastyng so longe.” (lines 879-80)

Both Arthur and Robin are seeking guests to dine with them in order to be entertained, show off their wealth, and help if need be. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the line “Let os was, and to mete” shows a proclivity toward more refined behaviors that are more readily observed in court, not middle class homes (line 164). In *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, Norbert Elias states that the rising middle class begins to actively engage in courtly manners during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (62), curiously at the same time both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Robin Hood* ballads were highly popular. The Romantic similarity between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the *Gest of Robyn Hode* illustrates the relatively close proximity of the settings of both stories, but it also shows the desire to connect to the aristocracy while illuminating those estate failings. One of the morals at the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reflects the danger associated with pride. Gawain, the model of chivalry, comes back to Arthur's court a broken man because he let his love of self and all of the trappings

of court life with Arthur overshadow his role as a knight and as a moral model. The lie Gawain tells the Green Knight about his gains from being pursued lead to his downfall but evokes a desire to change. Gawain states

“This band belongs with the wound I bear on my neck:
Sign of the harm I’ve done, and the hurt I’ve duly received
For covetousness and cowardice, for succumbing to deceit.
It is a token of untruth and I am trapped in it
And must wear it everywhere while my life lasts.
No one can hide, without disaster, a harmful deed.” (lines 2506-2511)

Robin, too, values honesty above all other attributes which directly relates to being a “gode yeman” (*Gest* line 3; *Potter* line 13) and fuels the aforementioned dinner test, but the end of the *Gest* seems similar enough to the passage just quoted from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to warrant a comparison. The outlaw spends fifteen months in the king’s court, loses his money “to gete hym grete renowne” (line 1736), and realizes “Yf I dwele lenger with the kyng,/Sorowe wyll me sloo” (lines 1751-2); he re-enters the forest, kills a deer and blows his horn to see if his men will return,

And gadred them togyder,
In a lytell throwe;
Seven score of wyght yonge men
Came redy on a rowe.
And fayre dyde of theyr hodes,
And set them on theyr kne:
“Welcome,” they sayd, “our mayster,
Under this grene wode tre.” (lines 1789-1796)

Clearly, the language is not the same high style of Romance as in *Sir Gawain*, but both Sir Gawain and Robin Hood return to their rightful places in modes of servility and humility having been corrupted by a different court than their own. They are both accepted without hesitation, and the various audiences for both genres learn about the immoral influences of foreign or outside authority. Helen Cooper, in “Romance after 1400,” states that “both the figure of Robin

and the literature associated with him owe their existence to their carnivalesque resistance to institutional control” instead of promoting an aristocratic ideal since “Romances [...] endorsed the dominant culture at both the personal and political level (695). However, some Romances, it seems, should be studied further to understand the deeper connections between popularity, social movements, and contemporaneity with other non-Romances since that is not the aim here. It is important to remember, though, that Robin Hood is ultimately trying to replace the corrupt sheriff by reestablishing the order necessary for society to thrive; in order for that to happen, morals must be reestablished.

A strong devotion to St. Mary also elevated Robin Hood’s moral status above his enemies like the sheriff because it appears to be a purer devotion. Though Robin does pray to Mary in the fourth fitt of the *Gest* to ensure his money returns to him, his position was not to use religion and its social power to enforce materialistic gains as his enemies did. The outlaw’s excuse “I drede Our Lady be wroth with me” showed that he was aware of his possible sins as reasoning for a late payment he had loaned to a knight (*Gest* line 823). By fearing Mary’s anger, Robin consciously gauged his actions in order to procure the salvation of his soul, and not the material pleasures of the world. In *Robin and the Monk*, the opening stanzas depict a downcast Robin:

“Ye, on thyng greves me,” seid Robyn,
 “And does my hert mych woo:
 That I may not no solem day
 To mas nor matins goo.
 Hit is a fourtnet and more,” seid he,
 “Syn I my Savyour see.” (lines 21-6)

It is not until the outlaw is in St. Mary’s church that he feels better since he is actively praying and tending to his soul; it is also in the same church moments later when the sheriff arrests him, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. The sheriff, though, is rejecting law and the moral

underpinnings of it in order to make the arrest. It is important to note the moral superiority of Robin Hood compared to the sheriff because distinct difference must exist in order to “sell” the idea that local government officials were part of a larger sentiment to keep the lower classes beneath them while, more importantly, asserting Robin’s claim to the sheriff’s role as it should have been performed by undergirding it with higher moral standards.

As has been shown, the sheriff clearly was needed for collecting the king’s taxes and administering local courts, but there is a specific need for community protection from abuses of the law in whatever form they embody. Barbara Hanawalt, in her article “Ballads and Bandits,” makes some very good historical assertions pertaining to Medieval outlawry and pivots nicely to a more specific address of Robin Hood. She is not trying to assert that the outlaw was real, but she does claim the basis of the outlaw’s specific ballad details are reality. Hanawalt combs through coroners and court rolls of the fourteenth century in order to come to her conclusions. Rightly so, she states “[Robin Hood] was a hero who could defy the law, right wrongs done by corrupt officials, fleece the church, and be rewarded by the king for his actions” (154). At a time when the estates structure was crumbling and those power structures were becoming more oppressive as a result, it’s easy to see why Robin Hood could capture the audience’s attention. Hanawalt’s purpose, though, seems to be directed at whether this appreciation is legitimate or engineered by the clever balladeers, as she notes that “ordinary bandits were regarded with mixed feelings” (155). These mixed views on outlaws seem to undercut what the Robin Hood of the ballads was trying to accomplish through active social change, but they do show the truth rooted within the early ballads as it plants those seeds of change and moves the figure of Robin Hood to the idealized role of the sheriff.

Hanawalt references the practice of English armies recruiting outlaws during times of war, particularly the Hundred Years' War and various battles with Scotland, simply to strengthen the king's numbers. After the conflicts, these outlaws, who could be killed on sight due to their status as living outside the bounds of the law ("wearing" the wolf's head), were simply released to the woods. Within this commonly accepted practice, the outlaws had to be tough criminals who were proven in fights and combat and could be trusted to instill fear in the enemy and opposing forces while bolstering the confidence of the standing army through their toughness. Of course within the civilian population, one would imagine that the desired qualities on the battle field would be something to be feared apart from it. Some estimates note that up to twelve percent of a standing army were composed of outlaws during the fourteenth century (Hewitt 174). With potentially hundreds of outlaws roaming the countryside after their military service was completed, it becomes clearer why communities would have a significant level of fear associated with outlaws. The *Robin Hood* ballads can supply some of the reaction these communities had, in particular the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Towards the end of the *Gest*, in the eighth fitt, Robin Hood is riding through Nottingham with the king. As he is doing so, the townspeople hide and run away in fear thinking the king is either actively recruiting outlaws or the outlaws have just been released from service and that they can expect some sort of trouble with the riff-raff in town. It's not until the king *and* Robin Hood are identified that the townspeople come out to welcome them. The text states

All the people of Notyngham
 They stode and beheld;
 They sawe nothyng but mantels of grene
 That covered all the felde.
 Than every man to other gan say,
 "I drede our kynge be slone:
 Come Robyn Hode to the towne, iwys
 On lyve he lefte never one."

Full hastily they began to fle,
 Both yemen and knaves,
 And olde wyves that might evyll goo,
 They hypped on theyr staves.
 The kynge loughe full fast,
 And commanded theym agayne;
 When they se our comly kynge,
 I wys they were full fayne. (lines 1705-1720)

The people of Nottingham think they are witnessing the outlaws coming to pillage, and not seeing the king because he is in Robin's livery, they were scrambling to get away. Clearly, they understood from either personal experience or actual events that outlaw bands released from the king's service could pose a community threat. There could be other reasons the fear exists, but that aspect is not appropriate for this work. Regardless, the reaction of the townspeople in the ballad seems to reflect the historical accounts to which Hanawalt refers, so there could be no active application of the king's law when a need for troops occurred. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the outlaws Little John and Much receive a pardon from the king for their service to him, and that pardon seems to be extended to Robin Hood simply by his association with the other

two and mimics the rationale behind why outlaws recruited and used in battles by the king were freed:

“Robyn Hode is ever bond to hym,
 Bothe in street and stalle;
 Speke no more of this mater,” seid oure kyng,
 “But John has begyled us alle.” (lines 351-354)

The king is stating that because of the deeds Little John and Much accomplished on behalf of their master, Robin Hood, the outlaw leader is forever in debt to them; the king is also waving off any other notions of tracking the outlaws down for their crimes as if their service, especially

such devoted service (“He is trew to his maister” (line 347)), might be useful in the future, i.e., future battles, as well as reflecting the devotion to the king’s bidding required for the shrieval position. There are few other options to even consider as to why the king would allow the other non-pardoned outlaws to continue existing freely.

Hanawalt continues by assessing the associations within the outlaw group. Through her research within the criminal records, she notes that many outlaws were not at the bottom of the social ladder but included numerous individuals within the newly forming middle class, based on the value of their moveable goods (chattels). So when the audience encounters the potter in *Robin Hood and the Potter* and sees him staying and joining the outlaws, they would not be asked by the balladeer to reach beyond what they already knew to be true, i.e. that a traveling salesman could have substantive inventory and means and wish to stay within an outlaw band. The potter may also be thinking, as Carpenter points out in *Lordship and Polity: a study of Warwickshire landed society, 1401-1499*, that “the real avenues to the acquisition of land and to social advancement lay through the professions” (137). The best way to do that would be to develop a thriving and in-demand business without the hassles of an aristocracy bending the law against the up-and-coming middle class. Certainly, the potter makes a year’s salary (£10) from the two months’ worth of pots he carried and had the townspeople wanting more. Comparatively speaking, this potter is only two pounds below the £12 Campbell shows as what the lesser landed gentry would earn in annual income (202). The only way this result was achievable was through Robin Hood acting in a pragmatic fashion to depict the sheriff as a fraud, sell the pots at a competitive price, and create demand for a product to help someone else. It can also indicate either a predilection for trouble or a desire to want the change for which Robin Hood is striving. Either way, Robin Hood is forcing the entrenched authorities to accept what is in the best interest

of the potter when unjust barriers are removed. Robin Hood seeks to provide the best solution for those involved, especially those who would otherwise be oppressed.

Of course, one should also remember that of the few named associates of Robin Hood's band, Much the Miller fits squarely within the middle class due to his occupation as it puts him on a level with the potter. One can see another example of this type of characterization in another work of the period, too. In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the second pilgrim to engage the other pilgrims in tale telling is the Miller. Jill Mann, in *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, notes that Chaucer's Miller has a consistent reputation for dishonesty (160), is strong, a good wrestler, and a jangler, or one who idly talks (gossips). The Miller's red hair, she continues, is symbolic of deceit and treachery (162). Most of these are not flattering traits, but they are also not traits associated with the aristocracy. In fact, Ohlgren notes that "Wrestling was not, by the fourteenth century, considered an aristocratic sport" (157), so both Chaucer's and the *Robin Hood* ballads' inclusion of wrestling in combination of certain professions correspond to the middle class. Although Chaucer's Miller is not an outlaw, his description and associations show that Robin Hood's Much the Miller and the potter from *Robin Hood and the Potter* are socially peers and have consistent characterizations within the time period's literature to be accepted as presented in the outlaw ballads as socially mobile and are not inhibited from this mobility by Robin Hood.

Hanawalt discusses the rationale for why Robin Hood is the leader of his band. She states "The crucial element for the outlaw band was an outstanding leader—a Robin Hood. He commanded respect because he was the strongest or the best shot or was a natural leader or had the highest social status in the group" (160). It becomes incredibly difficult to determine Robin's strength or shooting ability as the reason he is the leader since he can be beaten in shooting

activities and is beaten in nearly every fight in which he engages. For example, in the seventh fitt of *The Gest of Robyn Hode*, Robin Hood, upon discovering he had just inadvertently captured the king, sets up a shooting match in which the prize is the loser's arrows/shooting gear and the loser will receive a blow to the head. After winning several rounds, Robin misses the shooting sticks, and the king is the one who has to deliver the blow. However, being in the company of the outlaws, he is scared to strike Robin:

“It falleth not for myn ordre,” sayd our kynge,
 “Robyn, by thy leve,
 For to smyte no good yeman,
 For doute I sholde hym greve.” (*Gest* lines 1621-1624)

It is not so much being surrounded by criminals that frightens the king, but the fear of what those criminals will do upon seeing their leader beaten. The king has seen the loyalty they have for the outlaw leader simply by how they respond to Robin's call. In any event, Robin shows that he can be beaten and is not too proud to accept his “punishment” for failing in the contest. He alleviates the king's fear by stating “Smyte on boldely,” sayd Robyn, “I give the large leve” (*Gest* lines 1625-6). The king then wins the complete respect of the outlaw:

Anone our kynge, with that worde,
 He folde up his sleve,
 And sych a buffet he gave Robyn,
 To grounde he yede full nere:
 “I make myn avowe to God,” sayde Robyn,
 “Thou arte a stalworthe frere. (*Gest* lines 1627-1632)

The king moves from an outsider to a respected brother simply because he beat Robin Hood in a shooting match. To an even greater extent, the audience sees the outlaw leader as one being accepted by the king, or chosen, as a leader. Clearly, strength and ability must be present, but humility and morality should coexist with the former two characteristics in order to be the king's choice as a sheriff replacement in the *Gest*. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the potter encounters

Robin on a road who tries to exact a toll. The potter will have none of this, refuses the outlaw's "request", grabs a staff, and readies for a fight:

Roben howt with a swerd bent,
 A bokeler en hes honede;
 The potter to Roben he went,
 And seyde, "Felow, let mey hors go." (*Potter* lines 57-60)
 [...]
 The potter, with an acward stroke,
 Smot the bokeler owt of hes honde.
 And ar Roben meyt get het agen
 Hes bokeler at hes fette,
 The potter yn the neke hem toke,
 To the gronde sone he yede. (*Potter* lines 67-72)

Clearly beaten with the outlaw band watching, Robin accepts his defeat and offers the potter food and drink because he "seys god yemenrey" (line 90). In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Little John beats Robin Hood in a shooting match and won "five shillings to hose and shone" (*Monk* line 50), the outlaw breaks his sword over the head of the sheriff in an ambush which leaves him "weppynlesse" (*Monk* line 115) and to his capture. These examples from the three ballads suggest the outlaw leader is strong, but he is hardly a dominant fighter. These scenes, though, point to Robin Hood as one who could maintain order within the local community, which a sheriff should be ensuring.

The latter two reasons Hanawalt discusses, that of being a natural leader and having high social standing, have to be the prevailing reasons Robin Hood remains in command. If one goes back to *Robin Hood and the Monk* with the scene of Robin losing to Little John in the opening fitt, one would see Little John

waxed wroth therwith,
 And pulled out his bright bronde.
 "Were thou not my maister," seid Litull John,
 "Thou shuldis by hit ful sore;
 Get the man wher thou wille,
 For thou getis me no more." (*Monk* lines 57-62)

If it had been anyone other than Robin Hood, Little John would have killed him. Calling Robin his master (line 59) underscores the idea that the outlaw leader commands a level of respect that appears to be inherent to his person. After Robin Hood is captured in the *Monk*, Little John cools off from the previously mentioned fight and continues to refer to Robin as his master in lines 130 and 199. However, as the story progresses and the outlaws break Robin out of prison, Robin attempts to make Little John the leader in order to keep him from leaving again:

“Nay, be my trouth,” seid Robyn,
 “So shall hit never be;
 I make the maister,” seid Robyn,
 “Of alle my men and me.” (*Monk* lines 311-314)

A certain humility exists within Robin Hood that allows him to accept his faults and losses while remaining honorable and strong; it is this quality that Little John does not have that causes him to realize he can never lead the outlaws like Robin can lead them. Little John responds to the offer:

“Nay, by my trouth,” seid Litull John,
 “So shall it never be;
 But lat me be a felow,” seid Litull John,
 “No noder kepe I be.” (*Monk* lines 315-318)

Little John’s comments reflect the respect he has for his “master” while telling Robin that his role within the outlaw leader’s group is as a “felow” (*Monk* line 317), or simply a member, and not a leader.

In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, one sees similar examples of Hanawalt’s claim of the inherent leadership qualities of Robin Hood that overshadow his faults. After the potter beats Robin in the fight from the first fitt, Robin’s men see that he is about to be killed and rush to help him: “Let us helpe owre master,” seyde Lytell John, “Yonder potter,” seyde he, “els well hem slo” (*Potter* lines 75-76). They do not attack the potter, though, and end up joking with Robin

about losing the bet that he could beat the potter; the potter calls into question Robin's treatment of yeomen:

“Het ys fol leytell cortesey,” seyde the potter,
 “As I hafe harde weyse men saye,
 Yeffe a pore yeman com drywyng over the way,
 To het hem of hes gorney.” (*Potter* lines 85-89)

which causes Robin to offer him a deal for his pots, which he needs to trick the sheriff, and safe passage and rest in his forest. It appears that once the courtesy is questioned, Robin Hood bends over backwards to show courtesy to the potter, as seen at the end of the ballad with the year's payment for the pots that were worth two month's salary, as was noted earlier. Typically, once a leader is beaten, the winner or another challenger has the right to step in the leader's place. If there was a need to reiterate Robin's place in the hierarchy, Little John calls him “master” shortly after Robin's conversation with the potter (*Potter* line 107).

Perhaps the best example of Robin's inherent leadership quality is shown more clearly near the end of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. In the seventh fitt when Robin recognizes the king, the king asks for mercy from the outlaw leader and receives it. The king bestows this honor of mercy not because he is afraid but because the outlaws have been just and courteous towards the king. By all legal rights, the king should have killed Robin for the murder of the sheriff, but the respect of an upright man being unjustly punished by the king's sheriff has removed the blight on Robin's record and restored justice. When the eighth fitt begins, the king asks to wear Robin's colors, Lincoln green, as a sign of his commitment and servitude to Robin, as would anyone who wears another's livery:

Theyr bowes bente, and forth they went,
 Shotynge all in fere,
 Towarde the towne of Notyngham,
 Outlawes as they were. (*Gest* lines 1689-1692)

The ballad tells the audience that the king is riding as an outlaw, or at the very least as a member of Robin's band. The king offers Robin a place at his court, too, which the outlaw accepts; he only stays fifteen months, but the time spent there without repercussions from his outlawry by the supreme authority in the land demonstrates Robin's inherent quality of a man respected. The respect the king gives the outlaw is what Walker notes as an aspect of knowing when, how, and who to use to effectively exert the order that was so lacking in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries:

the king could not hope, in reality to maintain the good order his subjects demanded of him without the considerable resources of time, learning and manpower [...] Accommodating the demands and preferences of the local potentates who held sway [...] might mitigate the force of royal authority, but it also served to impart a crucial responsiveness to the legal remedies the crown provided. Dilatory and uncertain though it could be in the delivery of justice, the king's law was developed, by this necessary co-operation, into a powerful instrument for the implementation of a broader conception of social order. (112)

The king, in other words, could issue all the laws and edicts he desired, but if there was no one to be trustworthy enough to carry out those orders in a just and fair manner at the local level, then the king is simply wasting his energy. There is, therefore, a need for order on the local level that the community could agree with and support, and Robin Hood fills this desire and need.

On the other side of this scene, Robin has been away from his men for fifteen months. After tiring of court life and spending over a hundred pounds over this time period, the outlaw desired to be back in the greenwood. Curiously, the band accepts him back and as their leader, no questions asked:

Robyn slewe a full grete harte,
His horne than gan he blow,
That all the outlawes of that forest
That horne coud they knowe,
And gadred them togyder,
In a lytell throwe;
Seven score of wyght yonge men

Came redy on a rowe.
 And fayre dyde of theyr hodes,
 And set them on theyr kne:
 “Welcome,” they sayd, “our mayster,
 Under this grene wode tre.” (*Gest* lines 1785-1796)

Robin offers a meal as a symbol of hope for acceptance; he receives that and his old position as leader, or master, as he is consistently referred. The trappings of court life may have clouded the outlaw’s judgment for a time, but it could not take away his inherent leadership quality. As the one individual within the local community that could return a wayward and broken system back to order, Robin Hood’s leadership, i.e. as a sheriff/local authority, is exemplified by his killing of “a full grete harte” (*Gest* line 1785). A sheriff is required to maintain the king’s deer, as noted earlier, and here Robin Hood takes control of that aspect of the position and uses the meat to provide a very high quality and often unattainable source of protein for his community which in turn made them healthier and more productive. The figurative response of the outlaws mirrors their literal response: they return from being scattered and orderless, and “on theyr kne” they welcome their master back (*Gest* line 1794).

Hanawalt explains that “Outlaws may have escaped the conventional relationships of man to lord by seeking refuge in the greenwood, but their social thinking made it natural for them to model their organization along the lines of feudal government” (161). I agree that some outlaw groups did this, but I do not see how Robin’s band did, based largely on examples of the outlaw leader losing fights. In typical feudal systems, one individual has complete control at all times and keeps that control due to a firm grip on any would-be usurpers. Robin Hood was trying to enact a positive change within society by modeling the behavior of a gentleman, as noted in the audience address in the opening line of the *Gest* of “Lythe and listin, gentilmen,” on the local level, and fighting for structural changes within the estates system while attempting to

model proper shrieval post behavior; he certainly was not a proponent of a powerful lord ruling men who had no hope of moving up the ranks, as the emerging middle class evidenced. There would be no advantage to supporting the system the Normans brought which appears to have corrupted many systems in the first place. One illustration from the *Gest of Robyn Hode* shows how loosely the control with the outlaw band appeared. Robin Hood orders Little John to bring back a length of cloth for the knight, Sir Richard Lee, but Little John returns with many times more than what was requested. He even leaves the outlaws in disgust over his unfair treatment of not receiving that much cloth but decides to return and is accepted with no consequences. Robin does not respond negatively to Little John's decision; all can come and go freely. Again, this approach to "administration" leads to a more orderly society in which Robin exists because men are free to peacefully pursue their best interests, engaging in those horizontal contracts, which leads to a stable society. He models the behavior expected of both a leader and a member; when others leave that society, including Robin Hood, they experience the lack of necessary order and come back to what works.

Since Robin Hood was trying to create a more perfect society by fighting against the corrupt aspects of established structures, he sought to maintain and build upon those elements that worked. Although I disagree with Hanawalt's assertions about the feudal system, she rightly notes that identity within the outlaw group is important and that liveries should be upheld. Granting of liveries showed to whom one belonged and the wealth and power of the one granting those colors. For Robin Hood, Lincoln green was the primary color of choice; crimson also appears as a secondary color. For example, when the king reveals himself to Robin in the *Gest*, he asks to wear the green hood of the outlaw band. Green is the traditional color of the foresters of the period due to its ability to blend in to the forest surroundings. For a forester, this

camouflage maintains an unseen presence in the forest to watch over the vert and venison required by the position. For the outlaw, the color made hiding from the law much easier. The king, too, in *The Gest of Robyn Hode* wears the outlaw's livery after the shooting match; as the pair, along with the other outlaws, rides through town, the townspeople are fearful enough of Robin's capability to kill that they fear for the life of the now unrecognizable king. Once the king reveals himself, though, their fears subside. The king's acceptance of the livery, though, does help prove the respect he has for the outlaw and is willing to submit to his authority.

Liveries "performed the dual work of affirming identity and signaling difference. They also asserted the power of the lord, since the possession of servants was an index of status" Rubin 400). However, once back at the king's palace, the outlaw livery is discarded for the king's livery. Rubin claims that this type of behavior falsely claims one identity in a "fraudulent self-fashioning" (401), much like when Richard II wore John of Gaunt's collar to symbolize the "good love heartfully felt between them" (Goodman 144). Robin Hood is now subjecting his service to the king; this reversal of authority seems to be directly related to the location of the one in authority. Neither the king nor the outlaw will usurp the other's authority in his domain. There is an inherent relationship, then, in the position and the place. Although these exchanges of respect and livery have been discussed repeatedly in various contexts here, it is imperative to understand their relationships on several smaller, local levels in order to understand why they are imposed on the Medieval audiences and how those audiences would process the information.

The audiences would see the livery not as a sign of ownership, but as a sign of belonging more along the lines of Strohm's horizontal agreements instead of vertical since these associations are not static but, instead, incredibly fluid. They are, however, indicative of authority whether or not it is genuine.

Does this relationship of subservience to authority follow, though, Robin's treatment of the sheriff or is it not based on the person but the intent of the person? It has never been the contention of this argument to prove Robin Hood is out to destroy the position of the sheriff but to correct the error of that position's ways. Simon Walker, in "Order and Law," states

"Recourse to the law played such a central part in the conduct of relations at every level of society for several reasons. Some were practical, for many routine administrative problems were addressed through the agency of the law [...] At a more general level, law offered the promise of binding authority in a world that often lacked it. Appeal to the fixed and predictable norms of due process was especially attractive within a society in which private authority, whether exercised legitimately by a franchise holder or illegitimately by those who took advantage of their local influence to flout the king's peace, frequently appeared a more significant force than the occasional intervention of a distant royal official." (99)

Walker is referring to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in which governmental corruption seems to be seeping in many areas of life while society is in the process of rejecting those intrusions and reforming itself out of the crumbling estates model. What society was searching for was honest leadership, not anarchy. Scott Waugh, in "From Court to Nation," notes that in 1341, after extensive review of local officials, it became clear that "corruption and malfeasance were rife within the ranks of local officials [...] The result was a potentially volatile tension between expectations of what royal government should do and how authority was actually exercised" (35). One can see the disconnect due to the growth of the legal system as a way of trying to establish control and stability, but what underlies that disconnect is the distinction between law and fact. Paul Hyams, in "The Legal Revolution and the Discourse of Dispute," states that prior to the thirteenth century, there was no distinction between law and fact; they were considered the same thing by juries and legal administrators. However, as legal arguments advanced, the shared notion of what is both right and legal diminished to the point of various groups or classes manipulating the language to press for a particular outcome. Hyams

notes, interestingly, that all who heard the aristocratic tales of King Arthur or the lowly ballads of Renart the Fox were privy to the same types of justice exacted within those stories and took that commonality to court (52). But as the disconnect grew, “it seriously affected the general cultural balance of Western Europe, helping greatly to distance law and lawyers from ordinary people and the general culture” (Hyams 54), leading to misappropriation of true justice.

Robin Hood and the Potter sheds some light on this point of the intent of the shrieval position and the failings of what the sheriff has become. When Robin decides to go to Nottingham to trick the sheriff, he ends up eating and spending the night in the sheriff’s house. While there, he respects the household in that he does not destroy the place, is not disrespectful to the wife or sheriff, and he uses the bows and arrows of the sheriff during their shooting match. Although the weapons are not strictly livery, they are the property of the sheriff and used out of deference to him. Sheriffs are responsible for maintaining a militia, so using the lawman’s equipment can be seen as simply falling in line with the rationale behind the authority. It is a fine line, to be sure, but it is what moves the audience to the outlaw’s side. The outlaw submits to the authority of the sheriff while he remains under his roof. Some may argue Robin Hood is trying to impress the sheriff’s wife through his kindness, but he is also offering a sharp, contrasting alternative, much like having political candidates debate side by side. After the disguised outlaw gives the sheriff’s wife free pots, she offers the outlaw a meal:

Foll corteysley shce gan hem call,
 “Com deyne with the screfe and me.”
 “God amarsey,” seyde Roben,
 “Yowre bedyng schall be doyn.” (*Potter* lines 151-154)

The exchange shows the level of courtesy and attention that the sheriff seems to lack since during the meal the sheriff is more interested in the betting and loud banter of his men than with his guest and wife. Upon leaving the house the next morning, Robin

toke leffe of the screffys wyffe,
 And thankyd her of all thyng:
 “Dam, for mey loffe and ye well thys were,
 Y gaffe yow here a golde ryng.” (*Potter* lines 238-241)

His gift of a gold ring for the wife’s effort of housing him while the sheriff is busy plotting his capture of Robin Hood illustrates the courtesy of the outlaw and the desire to offer the alternative. It would seem difficult for an audience to reject someone who respects women, is courteous, and has no intention of persecuting someone over a legally delineated argument. His later gifts of a “white palfrey” (*Potter* line 286) and a defeated husband are “for the loffe of [the sheriff’s] weyffe” (*Potter* line 288), or more broadly, the respect of the common person. At the end of this ballad, Robin has successfully inverted the behavior of the sheriff in front of the town and the sheriff’s wife; everyone sees the failure of the sheriff as he is forced to walk the horse back to his wife while understanding who is responsible for this act. There was no need to kill the sheriff or subject him to further torment, it is enough that the sheriff is now seen submitting to the better authority and accepting the role.

Another point of disagreement with Hanawalt is when she claims that an actual burglary and attack on a woman at home for the food and blankets she had shown “a delightful case of role reversal in which the foresters save the unfortunate widow from the putative Robin Hood” (165). In Hanawalt’s example taken from the *Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield* (the same area in which Robin Hood exists), she notes the role reversal occurs when foresters come to the rescue of the woman, thereby elevating the established law authority over the outlaw, whom she associates with Robin Hood. The fictional Robin Hood, though, is acting like the forester or the sheriff by coming to the woman’s rescue, not aiding the outlaws. Robin Hood makes it very clear that “he never do company harme / That any woman was in” (*Gest* lines 39-40). If one is only looking at Robin Hood as an outlaw, the actual law appears to be doing the right thing in the

Wakefield instance. But the underlying corrective of Robin's approach prohibits his outlaws from even doing this crime in the first place. The ballads never show any legal authority apart from the king working to advance peace and justice for anyone in whom some type of political gain could not be wrought. So although some similarities to real outlaws helps to shine light on the ballad accounts of Robin Hood, other examples can mislead by equating real and fictitious worlds. As a comparison, no one will argue Chaucer is creating reality with *The Canterbury Tales*, but he is certainly satirizing it just as the *Robin Hood* compilers are employing satiric elements to evoke social change.

A corresponding point to the previously stated one can be seen in fear versus public support. Hanawalt notes some interesting court facts that bear repeating:

The jurors' response to robbers and burglars confirms the general fear and distaste felt for people engaging in these criminal activities. While normally only 23 percent of the indicted were convicted, 31 percent of robbers and burglars were. The jurors could tolerate homicide (12 percent convictions) because it was more often the result of direct fights between people who knew each other well and were defending their honor. But robbery and burglary were committed by strangers to the community, in stealth and often at night, and in criminal associations. Thus, the crimes in which bandits engaged were among the most feared and hated. (167)

Community, then, yearns for collective safety, and random (non-murder) violations on one person are a violation on the whole population. However, the ballads do not point to public outcry against Robin Hood and his band of outlaws. A public that convicts more robbers and burglars than murderers on a nearly 3 to 1 ratio would not then adamantly support the dissemination of similar individuals for their entertainment (Hanawalt "Crime and Conflict" 58). As members of the community and having to be somewhat intelligent and observant, the balladeers would be aware of the public sentiment against the actual robbers and burglars; the courts, though, would take advantage of the lower classes' lack of education and force

punishment through misunderstanding, even taking away the older, established role of the sheriff as one who could bring about peaceful resolutions between aggrieved parties without the need of courts by relying, instead, on common sense. Since most of these court proceedings were run by the local sheriff, the balladeer saw the opportunity to actually reverse the role of the outlaw by satirizing the corruption of the sheriff. It helps to go back to the example previously given about Sir Richard Lee's attempt to repay the loan to the abbot of St. Mary's. There, the knight is met with an unjust treatment and a violation of the time needed to repay the loan, which is overseen by the sheriff. Once the hypocrisy is brought to light by the knight producing the necessary money, the sheriff, the abbot, and the entire law enforcement and adjudication structures are shown to be foolish, classist, and corrupt; Robin Hood puts an end to that corruption for a time by giving Sir Richard the money he needs for the debt, robbing the church of their ill-gotten gains, and killing the corrupt sheriff which leads to himself filling the role of sheriff through the king's acceptance.

Important identity elements of Robin Hood's development into the societal ideal of the sheriff need to be clarified, then, in light of the previous information and the three ballads. Starting with the last fitt of the *Gest*, the audience hears of Robin accepting the king's sovereignty in the previous seventh fitt, and the king and his knights wearing Robin's colors showed that he accepted Robin's identity as the sheriff. For a time, the king and Robin shared an identity, "outlawes as they were," in the same livery (line 1692), further reflecting the idea that Robin and the king were in agreement on the outlaw's ascension to sheriff and the merging of lines between the king's desire and the reality of Robin's execution of the law. Decidedly colonial, the act of the two seemingly disparate individuals, who represented the rising English middle class and the Norman descended king, wearing the same livery symbolized the unity of

the event. Two individuals at odds with each other's actions coming together showed that a common ground and mutual recognition for stability was desired but ultimately could not last because their identities were too different. One then perceives how the greenwood defined Robin Hood in a way that could not be replaced by the niceties and corruption of court. Court made the outlaw soft and less dangerous with the bow, while directing him to ignore the issues of his shire. Robin laments to Little John that

Somtyme [he] was an archere good,
A styffe and eke a stronge;
[He] was compted the best archere
That was in mery Englonde. (*Gest* lines 1745-8)

He knew that the greenwood was the only place that made him happy and made him whole. It was his identity as the moral and just shrieval ideal, and so he went back to it, mentally noting that the higher one moves within the legal and administrative systems, the easier it is for corruption to seep in while undermining any positive effects of the middle class succeeding.

In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Robin is fighting the sheriff because he will not allow the outlaw to worship freely or even claim sanctuary from his supposed crimes. Although it has already been discussed that the sheriff is ostensibly trying to do his job by arresting a known outlaw, he does it with a disregard for long standing laws of sanctuary. Long since corrupted by lack of oversight, the sheriff arrests Robin and holds him for trial. The sheriff's corruption, or failings at his job are readily seen, though, until Little John offers a hint at what might be waiting the sheriff from the king as reward for Robin's capture: a higher position.

Whan the scheref saw the kyngus seell,
He did of his hode anon:
"Wher is the munke that bare the letturs?"
He seid to Litull John.
"He is so fayn of hym," seid Litul John,
"For sothe as I yow say,
He has made hym abot of Westmynster,

A lorde of that abbay.” (*Monk* lines 255-62)

Of course, Little John is lying, but the sheriff can only see how *he* will benefit while overlooking any impropriety he may have done in reaching this point. Later, after Robin has escaped, the king resigns himself to the fact that his sheriff has failed him, and Robin returns to the greenwood as leader of the outlaws. Since the sheriff is dead at this point, the vacancy has to be filled by the only one who can rightfully observe the faith of others, the protection that comes with that faith, and a lack of desire to pursue individuals because there might be a promotion involved.

In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the outlaw has already been observed usurping the sheriff’s role when he takes the lawman’s weapons and horse and sends him home in disgrace. As has been stated earlier, the sheriff’s actions that led to that point did not warrant death or anything more than public humiliation, so Robin Hood is clearly behaving in a way that the community desires for peace, stability, and freedom. Not only has he undermined the sheriff’s authority and replaced it with his own, Robin has openly advocated a freer market for those who desire the competition and freedom that type of market system can bring. The townspeople are amazed at the prices Robin sells the pots for, and try to buy as many as they could before the sheriff intervenes:

The pottys that were worthe pens feyffe,
 He solde tham for pens thre;
 Preveley seyde man and weyffe,
 “Ywnder potter schall never the.”
 Thos Roben solde foll fast, (*Potter* lines 137-41)

Harkening back to the point on common sense, Robin understands that a market driven by supply and demand, without it being monopolized, would benefit the newly formed middle class

by offering fewer restrictions and cheaper options for goods and services. This act, though it leads to others the audience would perhaps find more entertaining, helps lay the groundwork for the law to do what is right even though it might not be legal thereby aiding in the corrective movement of righting a corrupt system.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the sheriff was an appointed official from the area in which he served. Seeing that the sheriff had many responsibilities, he would therefore have associates to help him with those duties. It should come as no surprise, then, when the *Robin Hood* ballads note that Robin Hood commanded 143 men who whole-heartedly supported their master. However, the shrieval appointment was not a permanent one, and anything from ill-health, kingly displeasure, or death, to name a few, could cause one to lose that position. Usually, the king would promote an under-sheriff if that man was fit enough to command that position. Although Robin Hood never lost his status as leader of the outlaw band, it was a position that was subject to change. Several instances point to displeasure by Little John at some of the commands or accusations given by the leader, notably in the *Gest* and *Monk*. Little John was perhaps most capable of replacing Robin Hood because he was his equal in shooting, unafraid to take chances, and was the leader's right hand man, all qualities Hanawalt notes as being necessary for leadership. In the *Monk*, Little John is annoyed that Robin Hood does not agree with the amount of money Little John thinks he owes him. "Litul Jon waxed wroth therwith, / And pulled out his bright bronde" (lines 57-8); only because Robin is his master, and the respect that the outlaw has for his leader, he is able to live. But this is a petty argument because Little John quickly comes to the rescue of Robin once the outlaw leader is imprisoned. Through these acts, he had every right to become the leader, but he declines:

"I make the maister," seid Robyn,
"Of alle my men and me."

“Nay, be my trowth,” seid Litull John,
 “So shalle hit never be;
 But lat me be a felow,” seid Litull John,
 “No noder kepe I be.” (*Monk* lines 313-18)

In the *Gest*, Little John was obviously impatient at Robin Hood’s desire to eat with a captured traveler, and not before one could be found. Little John remarked, “It is fer dayes; God sende us a gest, / That we were at oure dynere” (lines 63-4). Later, when Robin, Little John, Will, and Much were waiting for Sir Richard to return with the money owed to the outlaw, Robin ordered the three men to find a traveler to dine with them that evening. The text reads that “Forth then stert Lytel Johan, / Half in tray and tene” (lines 841-2), i.e. in anger and annoyance. There had to be some equality felt between the two outlaws, or at least that was how Little John viewed the relationship, for there to be this level of resentment. In a later contest with the disguised king, Robin set forth rules that whoever missed the target would be struck and have to give his gear to his master. Several instances portrayed Little John and Will Scarlock missing and receiving blows from Robin which indicated his position as their master. Finally, Robin Hood missed and was immediately made aware of the error by Gilbert Whitehand’s comment, “‘Mayster’, he sayed, ‘your takyll is lost, / Stande forth and take your pay’” (*Gest* lines 1615-6). Robin claimed the monk, the king in disguise, as his master and waited to receive his blow. There was a very pregnant pause in the text as if the men were waiting to see if Robin Hood would in fact administer his own rules against himself. If he was not considered an equal by his three closest followers even though he counted on their service, they would not likely have expected him to be struck. He was struck, and the men saw that he was not above the rules and would take the punishment just like everyone else should when they were justifiably wrong.

Robin Hood’s leadership identity was not the same as an aristocratic role. An aristocrat would demand that his authority be respected and that his position would not be in jeopardy by

those who served under him. Robin's position always seemed tenuous in that those who served him were under no obligation to do so. The obvious example of this stay-as-long-as-you-like policy occurs when Robin's men left him at the king's court. Here, Robin's interest lay in more personal gain and the seeking of acknowledgment from people in a higher social class:

In every place where Robyn came
 Ever more he layde downe,
 Both for knyghtes and for squyres,
 To gete hym grete renowne. (*Gest* lines 1733-6)

He was spending more than he had in order to be more than he was to those who were his social superiors. He was no longer the dangerous outlaw who was known for his exploits in the greenwood, but rather a tame yeoman at court falling into the trappings of that environment. His identity was gone, taken by the court and the loss of his men. When Robin returned to the greenwood, he returned humbly, killing a deer to share with those who would welcome him back. All of his men returned

And fayre dyde of theyre hodes,
 And set them on theyr kne:
 'Welcome,' they sayd, 'our mayster,
 Under this grene wode tre.' (*Gest* lines 1793-6)

Noting the change in Robin back to his former self, the idealized sheriff, his men remained faithful until his death. No pomp and circumstance demanded his return to outlaw leader because his identity was as a servant who served justly and was served justly.

Robin Hood, then, fills the role of the sheriff as one who is morally upright, not beyond reproach, a proven leader, a skilled arbiter, and one who knows what is equally right across all classes and can administer that justice without hesitation. The sheriffs in place in the shires of the *Robin Hood* ballads fail in their duties because they are presented as opposites of Robin

Hood's idealized role; in fact, they are not capable of maintaining the order they are required to maintain. As Green has already been noted as saying, these ballads and characterizations exist because the true, real life situations "fail to get to grips with the systemic problems of an institution no longer able to adapt to changing social conditions" (418). Ironically, instead of seeking new reforms for age old problems, Robin Hood looks to the past as a model for how the main figure of localized peace, stability, and hope for a better future can bring about a new, improved social order.

5 CH. 4: CONCLUSION

The *Robin Hood* ballads focus on restoring a rightful order within Medieval English society of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of course, "rightful order" is a broad term, but the idea is one that society has become something anathema to its natural state and thus experiences inner turmoil as it seeks to correct the chaos. Admittedly, the *Robin Hood* ballads do not fix the many problems present during this time period, but they do address the issues that they can attempt to change, namely injustice and oppression at the local level. Within the local level, larger scale social change could conceivably occur resulting in nationwide change. Local changes centered upon corruption within the Church and shrieval offices through oppressive tax collection, resource allocation, and aristocratic favoritism. The estates satire and complaint literature model, therefore, offered Medieval writers the best opportunity in which to guide these local changes.

The *Robin Hood* ballads compilers use the complaint literature genre as a vehicle to address injustices and the failure of authoritative offices offer suitable corrections. Jill Mann, in *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, and Ruth Mohl, in *The Three Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, have defined the parameters of estates model satire, with most of the

application occurring in Chaucer studies. These scholars have noted that Medieval estates satire work to highlight the discrepancies between the social classes, focusing on the injustices placed on the middle and lower classes by the aristocracy. Mohl lists the specifics more than Mann, and notes that estates literature should address the estates themselves through a clear delineation of social classes, show the failure of the estates, designate the estates as ordained by God which leads to the justification of their existence, and it should offer some sort of a solution to the failures. As has been shown, the *Robin Hood* ballads fulfill these elements at various levels while maintaining the aspect of entertainment. Whether it be with Church corruption or secular corruption, Robin Hood attacks the shortcomings of the aristocratic estate model because that model did not fit the society it imposed itself on any longer. Because it did not, there had to be a problem with either the model or how society was trying to orient itself hierarchically from the top down.

This order was understood as a natural social hierarchy in Medieval society. C. S. Lewis, in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, discusses the idea of “hierarchy” and why it is incredibly important to the success or failure of order in the universe. He states

According to this [hierarchical] conception degrees of value are objectively present in the universe. Everything except God has some natural superior; everything except unformed matter has some natural inferior. The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors. When it fails in either part of this twofold task we have disease or monstrosity in the scheme of things until the peccant being is either destroyed or corrected. One or the other it will certainly be; for by stepping out of its place in the system (whether it steps up like a rebellious angel or down like an uxorious husband) it has made the very nature of things its enemy. It cannot succeed. (73-4)

Lewis is taking some of his concept of a pre-modern hierarchical order from Aristotle who said that “to rule and be ruled are things according to Nature” (74), so when the rulers and the ruled become inverted or out of order, Nature itself is in a state of flux or dis-ease and will remain in

that state as long as the inversion continues. One sees this constantly in the *Robin Hood* ballads, particularly in the figure of the sheriff. He is never presented as adept in his job; it is always rather curious that he cannot find nor recognize the most wanted and celebrated individual in his shire. But the sheriff of the ballads is a bumbling fool in a position higher than Nature allows and, thus, the problems become inherent. The corruption slips in to his position, it infects the Church (and vice versa), and soon the people the sheriff has been entrusted to protect and distribute justice equally to can only look to his own desires at everyone's expense. It makes sense, then, that the sheriff's death and ridicule within the ballads are supported and cheered by the audiences; those audiences understand that the hierarchical order is trying to correct itself.

Lewis continues by noting that "By ruling or obeying natural equals [leads to] Tyranny" and "By failing to obey a natural superior or to rule a natural inferior [leads to] Rebellion" (76). Both of these outcomes are present within the *Robin Hood* ballads in the form of the sheriff, the monk, the St. Mary's abbots and bishops, and to some extent the king. Tyranny comes into play with the sheriff trying to rule his yeoman equals; since the law comes from the king, the outlaws seem to only honor what the king says. This is clearly seen in the *Gest* when Robin Hood and his men finally recognize the king, and they "kneled downe in that place" (line 1640). Kneeling is the sign of subservience to a recognized superior. The outlaws never do this to the sheriff. The king is the clear, natural, superior to the outlaws and inherently has the respect that comes with it. The outlaws, as a result of an inferior in the position of authority, end up rebelling. Rebellion is the natural end point of failing to rule the natural inferior, which is what Robin Hood recognizes within the sheriff and the Church officials. So while no one has been able to pinpoint what has led to Robin Hood's outlawry, it seems plausible that it is merely his reaction to tyranny by way of rebellion.

Moving these ideas back to the estates model, then, allows one to see how order within the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was reorienting itself to correct long standing social disorder. The rebellion, whether it is the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 or the expanding popularity of an outlaw and his 143 men, is natural and is exploited by the writers of time period to help push the changes necessary to bring back stability. Lewis's points center on the fact that there must be order and there must be rules to ensure that order. He states "The heavenly frolic arises from an orchestra which is in tune; the rules of courtesy make perfect ease and freedom possible between those who obey them" and that "there is no good game without rules" (*Preface* 81). The king the *Monk* leaves the pardoned outlaws Little John and Much alone not because they are dangerous, but because they are correct in their rebellious pursuit of order. Even in the *Gest*, the king notes that life is easier and more pleasant when the rules are followed:

"So God me helpe," sayd our kinge,
 "Thy game is nought to lere;
 I sholde not get a shote of the,
 Though I shote all this yere." (lines 1701-4)

The shooting match is the topical application of the king's comments, but his observance of what has transpired in his quest to find Robin Hood and accept him within his company underlies his statement. What follows is a merry shooting match as the king and the outlaws wind through town back to London; these rules of right order and ideally pursued and wrought justice make life easier once they are known and applied. Ironically, Robin Hood forgets this while in the king's court because he is not the aristocratic equal, even though he spends money like he is. He says

"Alas!" then sayd good Robyn,
 "Alas and well a woo!
 Yf I dwele lenger with the kynge,
 Sorowe wyll me sloo." (*Gest* lines 1749-52)

Regardless of why the king might want Robin to stay at court, Robin cannot stay simply because it goes against the rules of hierarchy. Once he leaves, he is accepted with his men and in his position as leader; he returns to his natural place in the hierarchical order with his men, his community, and his social class. This idea of establishing rightful order must come within the estates model, as Mann and Mohl define, in order to function within the context of its literature and audience.

The elements of the struggle for identity, those social norms and community relationships that form individuals under an oppressive authority, become apparent by looking closely at the outlaw tales of Hereward the Wake, Fouke Fitz Waryn, and Robin Hood. Outlaw tales carried similarities throughout the period of their production, regardless of the hero portrayed. Common elements often included a greenwood lifestyle, extreme generosity, and clever disguises. The common thread running through these tales over hundreds of years has allowed authors and compilers to adapt popular figures into vehicles for change. My contention here has been that the main reason for the dissemination of outlaw tales throughout the Middle English period rests on the expectation of identity which culminates in the Robin Hood character expressing the identity of the emerging middle class and the identity of an idealized sheriff, who had the ability to help this class development to occur. Many arguments exist concerning the historical veracity of the outlaw figures and intended audience, but those discussions, though important, do not capture the primary significance of the texts.

Authority tends to dominate individual and community/local identity, and this domination can occur in myriad ways from direct physical harm to subtle taxation slowly increased over time to upwardly mobile individuals. Also, resistance to authority tends to

promulgate itself away from the direct source of that authority. The three outlaws addressed in chapter one present a movement of control from the Conquest to the late fourteenth century. Hereward's tale took place in the Peterborough area, not far from the initial resistance to William. Once Hereward's outlawry was resolved, the issues of authoritative resistance moved to the contested borderlands of the Welsh March. Here Fouke Fitz Waryn rebelled against John. The distance had grown since Hereward's time, but the distance was not so great as to prevent the king from eventually overseeing the operations against Fouke as William had done against Hereward. With Robin Hood, the Barnesdale and Nottingham areas were greatly removed from the king's seat of power and were thus harder to control. Although they were more commonplace by the time of sixteenth-century printing of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, sheriffs were, as depicted in the tale's fourteenth-century setting, firmly in place to extend the king's arm of control. The king only became involved at the end of the *Gest* and the *Monk*, but his role was not antagonistic. This brief portrayal of the king reflected how his power was being inversely exercised by local authorities which caused a hatred of the king's law directed to the individual enforcing the laws. So, as the power structure descended to the counties, the outlaws' targets became more localized. Though I have argued that these outlaws were not fighting on a national scale--i.e., to evoke some national change--their localized struggles were against a national oppressor. For each outlaw, the oppressor sought to destroy the identities of established individuals in order to impose a new identity that fit the framework of the authoritative system which needed the estates model to survive to ensure power and authority would not diminish within the aristocracy.

Over time, as numerous books about the Norman Conquest explain, the invaders were assimilated into the colonized society. Yet, the Norman imposition was not without its lasting

marks. The Normans and the Anglo-Saxons merged into one race, but the structures placed by the Normans would always be Norman. Since outlaw literature does not appear until the Conquest, there must be a correlation between the two developments. Hereward, Fouke, and Robin Hood were but a few of the outlaws about whom stories were told. One major event leading to a new genre of literature should not be passed over lightly. The English colonial society reacted by creating outlaw heroes. Though many parts of their stories were fictionalized, the historical details that mingled with the fictional elements created an identity that inspired hope and comfort. As Maurice Keen states in *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, “the memory of the common people is the longest on earth” (56). Long after William and decades after English replaces Norman French as the national language, outlaws such as Robin Hood provided a stepping stone to the vagaries of illicit behavior and the determined efforts to accomplish a change. Essentially, each outlaw attacked an identity in order to preserve his own identity or the identity the author wished to portray. The various identities, though, do not become nationally significant until Robin Hood forces the nation to rethink its social hierarchies.

The greenwood or forest represents a main uniting entity for Robin Hood, his outlaws, and those who supported them. In the greenwood, the outlaws were no longer confined to the institutions of government. Taxes were not paid, laws were not abided, and church was administered as conveniently as possible, although belief in God did not abate. The greenwood existence was the idealized form of society that provided sustenance in the forms of food, clothing, warmth, and shelter to those living around it; unlike how the aristocratic Romances portrayed it, the greenwood was not a feared place for the middle and lower classes. The greenwood became the place where the outlaw could escape in order to organize resistance, rest and recover from battle, and live, mostly, unbound by law. Of course, forest laws were in place

and were extremely oppressive, but in the outlaw tales they simply could not be enforced. Harsh laws of the forest begun by William continued to be perpetuated by successive monarchs. Raymond Grant points out that all venison and vert in royal forests were protected and could only be used for the benefit of the king (6). Killing these animals and using the vegetation resulted in severe punishments such as being blinded. In the outlaw tales, these laws were never enforced, nor did it seem that they could be, and thus the outlaws lived regally off the land and were not afraid to share the bounty with their guests. Robin Hood especially exhibited the goodness of the land of Barnesdale and Nottingham. Also, as adept as the power structure was at controlling established elements of community, the forest was particularly unfriendly to the law enforcers.

Other outlaws' identity, such as Fouke and Hereward, was not as bound to the greenwood as was Robin's, or at least the compilers chose not to highlight the forest as much. Fouke and Hereward can be traced with reasonable certainty to specific homes. Robin Hood's historical identity has never been confirmed and, therefore, cannot be placed at a particular home. The reader never finds Robin fighting to regain his unjustly confiscated home. But because Hereward and Fouke have their identity bound to their ancestral home, they use the forest only as a strategic transition point. Robin Hood embodies the greenwood so thoroughly that not even the extravagances of court could satisfy him. The compilers of Robin Hood must have known this and used it to their advantage. The advantage was that Robin could become the hero for every person who was oppressed by the tyrannies of local power structures. Robin Hood's greenwood was his home and had its own laws which were viewed as being more just than the government's laws because they were based on honesty and piety with no expectation of receiving some political pay-off in the future. These elements of honesty and piety reigned in Robin's forest

which was in stark contrast to his sworn enemies. Robin Hood fought, gave, and ruled in his forest. His approach to life mimicked his life. The greenwood was the antithesis of these structures and was part of daily life so it would easily be regarded as counter to the rule.

Historically speaking, outlaw stories provide a unique glimpse into the Medieval world. Most accounts surviving from the Middle Ages are from court documents which help paint a broad spectrum of national and local activities. But these documents leave little to the mind set of those affected by government. The vagueness that occurs in outlawry in terms of factual contiguity and authorship are overshadowed by the amount of specific thought and reaction to current events. Though admittedly biased, outlaw tales present the other side of the government documents. Robin Hood discusses the abuses of local municipalities. Other outlaws existed, but the handful that survive in literary form exist because they were identified with for specific reasons. It did not matter who wrote them or necessarily who the stories were about. What mattered was that the outlaws provided an outlet for the repressed individual to express hope for change. Robin Hood and his men were not the only ones affected by misapplied laws in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they were the only ones targeted as the abusers of the law. The surrounding people and audiences are interesting to note in that they are supportive of the outlaws. As mentioned earlier, the ballad form developed in England evolved into a specific format; many of those elements are evident in *Robin Hood and the Potter*. Ballads were thought to have originated in France and were usually associated with music and dance. Francis Child, the preminent ballad scholar in the nineteenth century, defines a ballad as a “song that tells a story, or...a story told in song” (xi). Child goes on to state that a ballad can also be a “short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterized by complete impersonality so far as the author or singer is concerned” (xi).

Taken from the courtly format of three stanzas and a refrain, they evolved to suit the desires of the popular audience and minstrels into a form without strict refrains and incorporating an easily remembered rhyme scheme. This courtly association ended when sixteenth-century printers began printing cheap broadsides of these tales, like *Robin Hood*, that minstrels would perform and sell in the streets. Many of these broadsides used the term “ballad” in the title and noted some familiar tune to which they could be sung. Fowler also notes the “structural symmetry” of the ballads by noting that in order to help memorization, a “repetition of motifs and descriptive detail” became the established norm along with regularized plots (9). In many ballads, the action that begins the tale will end it in a very similar way. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the tale begins with the potter and Robin interacting and ends with a similar scene.

Fowler also points to the use of filler lines used to strengthen weaknesses in the structural stanza quatrain (10). These are lines that are essentially useless in terms of advancing the storyline and they do not always occur, but they allow the minstrel to maintain an ABAB rhyme scheme, or at least have alternating lines rhyme. For example, the second stanza reads as follows:

Herkens, god yemen,
Comley, cortessey, and god,
On of the best that yever bare bou’,
Hes name was Roben Hode. (*Potter* lines 5-9)

Note that the second line does not advance the story any more than giving a more favorable description of the yeoman audience; but as far as the rhyming is concerned, it allows for the last line to rhyme with it. Another filler line occurs in stanza fourteen and represents a common variation :

The potter to hes cart he went,
He was not to seke;
A god to-handle staffe therowt he hent,

Beffore Roben he leppyd. (*Potter* lines 53-6)

The second line, “He was not to seke,” means that he did not have to search for a weapon. Even though the rhyme is not as clear in the second and fourth line as it is in the first and third in this example, the filler line completes the quatrain. Stanza thirty-one contains an excellent example of an early filler line that would become a mainstay to be repeated in similar form throughout many *Robin Hood* ballads. It reads:

When Roben cam to Notynggam,
 The soyt yef y scholde saye,
 He set op hes hors anon,
 And gaffe hem hotys and haye. (*Potter* lines 121-4)

The second line basically translates “if I were to tell the truth.” Telling the truth or letting the audience know that the truth was being spoken gained prominence as a filler line because it could be easily worked into any wording to complete the quatrain without taking away from the action as well as establishing a believable veracity to the minstrel’s tale. An emerging social class of non-aristocrats sought a literature that they could relate to, was in English and not Norman French, and did not center on courtly life. The *Robin Hood* ballads met these standards. Being a largely illiterate, but skilled, social class, the yeomanry relied on oral stories for entertainment. For the mid-fourteenth century minstrel, this was a blessing because the minstrels needed a paying audience, which the yeomen provided, but they had to adjust their style to fit the desires of the popular audience. By shortening romances, altering rhyme schemes, and incorporating several different sources, readings could easily transform into short recitations. The compiler employs an easily remembered ABAB rhyme pattern, uses filler lines to maintain the quatrains, and makes sure the sheriff is thoroughly made to look foolish. Clearly, the social dynamics of the mid-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries helped to develop a new form of English literature through the *Robin Hood* ballads with which they could address those dynamics

effectively to the class of individuals who most craved the necessary changes.

Only those who seek to attack the outlaws are painted in an unflattering manner. This shows the supportive, but generally incapable, feelings of a broad spectrum of the community portrayed by these outlaws. These incapacibilities lie in the supposition that those who wish to resist cannot due to financial or property constraints. Without means, there can be no end, and those with much to lose would be most likely not to participate in open resistance yet likely to support those who did resist. Robin Hood gains the protection of a knight abused by the church leaders, earns the trust of a potter and a cook and a housewife, vicariously secures the monarchical pardons for two of his men, and has the constant support of 143 fighting men. The community support existed but the means of resistance rested with the outlaws.

How the community surroundings of property and social norms define an individual is identity. Removing these elements and replacing them with new identifying factors such as language and authority cause identity loss and confusion; William's conquest helped usher in the estates model which forced confusion on the native English/Anglo-Saxons. The outlaw identity that developed in response revealed several important elements about its heroes and audience based upon this identity definition. First, there was a constant struggle between morality and immorality. Looking at morality in terms of faith and response to that faith, Robin Hood was far superior to his enemies. Robin Hood repeatedly sought the guidance of the Virgin Mary for his actions and used the actions of the corrupt church officials as guides for how not to act. Robin was consciously concerned how Mary reacted to his actions; he says, for example, "I drede Our Lady be wroth with me" for the money lent to Sir Richard (*Gest* line 939). Little John responded that he did not "have no need/...this monk it hath brought, I dare well swere,/ For he is of her abbay" (*Gest* lines 942-4). In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Robin feels down or depressed because

he has not been to church in two weeks which has done “[his] hert mych woo” (line 22). He goes to St. Mary’s church, “And knelyed down before the Rode; / Alle that ever were the church within / Beheld wel Robyn Hode” (*Monk* lines 72-4). In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, Robin calls for “Thorow the helpe of Howr Lady” (line 109) and receives the blessing that “God eyldet he” (line 243). In each of these cases in the ballads, Robin is shown putting his faith in God and the Virgin Mary to protect him and give him a sense of centeredness and moral fortitude to know what is right and wrong and how to respond when confronted with these choices. Others within the ballad see this devotion and honor it; the audience sees this devotion, too, and supports it simply by “allowing” the compiler to leave these parts in the various tales. His devotion was sincere; Robin Hood was apparently so moral that the Virgin Mary took a special interest in ensuring the well-being of the outlaw by seeing him through the tough encounters in which he would find himself.

The generosity outlaws bestowed on others, which stemmed from their morality, contrasted heavily with the portrayal of the authorities’ greed. Robin Hood gave generously what he had to those in need, regardless of social class. The best example, from the *Gest*, was his giving £400 to Sir Richard so that the knight could keep his lands and pay off the debt his son caused by killing another knight in a tournament. All of Robin’s men partook of his feasting, which was full of game of all kinds as well as wine and ale. Robin even clothed all of the king’s knights after their reconciliation, and at court he spent so lavishly on gifts for those around him that he eventually went bankrupt. In the same ballad, the outlaw leader freely gives food to his enemies the sheriff and the monk of St. Mary’s. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, generosity is shown to the sheriff’s wife by giving her free pots, a gold ring, and a white horse. He also gives the potter a year’s worth of money for two months’ worth of pots in order to alleviate any trouble

he may have caused the potter. The outlaw also offers the potter the opportunity to stay with the rest of the outlaws “yever whan thow comest to grene wod” (*Potter* line 318). In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Robin’s generosity is presented slightly differently than the other two ballads. Here, he offers his leadership position to Little John: “I make the maister, / Of alle my men and me” (lines 313-4). In this example, no money or cloth or food exchanges hands, but the power offered seems too good to pass up; after all, the ballads have consistently shown that those with power will do nearly anything to keep that power. Robin’s generosity is extending into the intangible arena with this offer, further solidifying his dominance of unselfishly giving. Perhaps it is within this intangible that generosity is best exemplified since it becomes more of a character trait inherent to the individual.

Outlaws had to outsmart their enemies because they lacked the abundant amount of manpower at the government’s disposal. Robin Hood’s exploits would not have been effective without well thought out plans. The government’s response seemed to be to throw more men into the situation to overwhelm by sheer force, a tactic which proved to be ineffective because it failed to account for the human desire to seek balance, not chaos. Outsmarting the authorities shows a more rational response that is better received by the public. Brute force only works to maintain the estates model. Robin Hood’s intelligence allowed him to draw his guests into a level of comfort at meals before questioning how much money they were carrying. Of course, the outlaws are typically described as “merry men,” and the twenty-first-century reader will attribute this to mean “happy”; this is a good reading because Robin is never shown to behave darkly or oppressively when he is with guests at a meal. Those times are supposed to be enjoyed, regardless of the outcome. The outlaw took this comforting angle to put the guests off-guard which enabled him to gain the upper hand. The guests would instinctively revert back to

what kind of character they truly were, as most people do when they feel comfortable. If honest, they would tell the truth; dishonesty led to their loss of money. Robin would never put himself into situations that he did not believe he could escape. Shooting matches held by the sheriff would always involve Robin's men for protection. Though they would not be able to withstand any long-term fighting, his men could provide enough of a diversion to allow for his escape. While at court, Robin cleverly lies to the king to grant him permission to leave. The outlaw played upon his and the king's devotion to God as an excuse to escape. There is one example, though, that shows Robin not thinking the results of his actions through. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, he decides to go to church alone to worship against the advice of both Little John and Much because they know he will be an easier target if recognized. Of course, a monk does recognize him and calls the sheriff which leads to a fight and the ultimate incarceration of Robin Hood. It's Little John, though, that the audience sees thinking through the plan to break the outlaw leader out of jail. One does not simply walk into a castle with only one other person, find the holding cells, and walk out with the prisoner. Little John and Much procure the king's seal to gain them access to the castle's cells and verbally trick the guard to give them the keys:

Little John called up the jailer,
 And bade hym rise anon;
 He seyde Robyn Hode had brokyn the prison,
 And out of hit was gon. (*Monk* lines 271-4)

After killing the jailer, Little John takes the keys and frees Robin Hood; the three outlaws then run to the woods under the cover of darkness. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, a disguised Robin Hood tricks the sheriff into coming to the forest to "capture" the outlaw. The sheriff ends up losing his horse and his weapons and has to walk back to town. The audience sees a man whose pride inhibited his rational thinking to the point of being corruptive. Robin Hood and his men, then, offer the alternative of what can be accomplished against the powerful elite if thought and

planning occur; the end result of each of these examples is an outlaw band with the community support in light of a defeated authoritative structure.

Another revealing point about Robin Hood and his outlaws was their determination to react rather than remain complacent and fall in line with the estates model. As the English kings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries required more and laws and regulations to maintain and/or re-establish order, more outraged citizens supported the deconstruction of the entrenched social hierarchy, old or new. One needs to understand the roots of this type of rebellion in the lengthy Medieval outlaw corpus in order to connect Keen's statement of common people's memory and what Robin Hood was doing and why the audiences supported those actions. It was the determination to fight that rallied support for Hereward, especially from the other rebels at Ely. Upon hearing of what Hereward did to the Normans at his home, the Ely inhabitants "directly sent to him and negotiated through messengers for him to join them with all his men, to take part together with them in the defense of the homeland and their fathers' liberties, assuring him that such a knight as he was would have the foremost position among them" (Ohlgren 641). The men of Ely recognized a brother-in-arms who was not ready to be conquered and governed by the Normans much like the twelfth-century compiler wished to extol on his contemporaries. Fouke Fitz Waryn's determination was similar in that he was fighting a king who confiscated his property, but the outlaw was also fueled by a more personal connection with King John. John was determined to avenge the childhood conflict with Fouke by confiscating his ancestral home, and Fouke was not going to allow an unjust king to give his property away. Fouke's determination to rebel inspired other barons in the area to respond to John's mismanagement of government. Eventually, Fouke's property was returned, and the barons successfully reduced John's power through Magna Carta. Fouke's determination also inspired his fourteenth-century

counterparts to rebel against similar governmental mismanagement under Edward II. For Robin Hood, his determination stemmed from his anger at the exploitative nature of Church and local governmental officials. In every county of England, sheriffs resided wielding significant royal power of the court and monetary collection. The Church also flexed its monetary arm toward the local residences which increased the wealth of the churches while their constituents struggled, all with the help and protection of the sheriff. Robin Hood was a part of a growing middle class threatening the established power structures and was not content to allow the misuse and abuse of officially sanctioned power in order to maintain the status quo. Change was on the horizon, and Robin Hood was determined not to let it falter and so gave hope to those who related to the outlaw's rebellion and desire to correct the wrongdoings of the shrieval office. The common people, those peasants and yeomen/middle class knew these various outlaw tales and understood the corruption that underscored the delivery of justice and social mobility.

Various audiences identified with these outlaws because of their morality, generosity, cleverness, and determination; otherwise, these character traits would not have been exemplified. Each of these traits was carried through to the succeeding outlaws showing authorial intent not only to excite fervor in the actions of the audience, but also to give the audience what it sought with these outlaws. These outlaws represented an identity that was being suppressed by power structures in a colonial and then postcolonial society. Though each outlaw did not represent every social class in medieval England, each class being repressed could identify with the outlaws as representative of a common struggle. Thus the outlaws were characteristically superior to their enemies because they were fighting against an imposed identity which was not desired. Robin Hood, though, is the culmination of the Medieval outlaw tradition, refining these elements into a broader, nationwide scope through local means of seeking and demanding true

justice that can only come when hierarchical orders are correctly established and functioning.

The *Robin Hood* ballads have been used here in an effort to provide a new analysis of Medieval outlaw literature by focusing on the middle class identity as being unjustly oppressed in the face of a misapplied estates model in England. In light of the social disruptions caused by the mid-fourteenth-century plagues in terms of urban migration, wage increase demands, and authoritative resistance to these movements in the form of legal reprimands (e.g. The Statute of Laborers), Robin Hood offered the emerging middle class an outlet through which complaints could be voiced in the effort to bolster support. All of the celebrated Medieval outlaws reacted to the imposed, restructured society in order to reveal a local response to a national trauma that manifested itself over several hundred years. The texts reveal antiauthoritarian sentiments expressed through repetitive narrative elements focused on the concerns of a displaced and disempowered audience. Specific instances are pointed to—such as the local redistribution of land, the unjust decisions of the government and Church, and the vagrancies of county leaders—in order to evoke a response within the audience. The historical nature of Robin Hood and other outlaws pointed to by other scholarship is important in that it provides a foundation for other studies in the area, but this scholarship lacks any substantive analyses of why and for what purpose the *Robin Hood* ballads were created. I have addressed this purpose by following several similar themes within the literature as it relates to identity within the estates model and how that model addresses the need for Robin Hood to fulfill the shrieval position. Generosity, morality, and justice pervade these outlaw tales in order to portray the superiority of Robin Hood over his enemies and allow him to maneuver and claim his and his audiences' emerging place in a dynamic environment. Even though these outlaws did not desire to overthrow the government, they could harass it enough to effect a change in its policy within their local communities. The

outlaw fight was not waged on the national level but within the communities that formed their identities. Many scholars have overlooked the importance of outlaw literature from the point of view of the middle class and the estates model and underlying, reactive intent of the roles the main characters portray. My analysis has begun to rectify the gap in the scholarship of medieval outlaw literature as an important reaction to social disruptions in fourteenth and fifteenth-century England and not simply as entertaining storylines recounting exploits, family history, or mythic heroes. Localized societal reaction to oppression was important enough to record during the Middle Ages and so should continue to be approached in the manner I have set forth here in order to fully appreciate the varied messages in Medieval outlaw literature.

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