YEOMAN JUSTICE: THE ROBIN HOOD BALLADS AND THE APPROPRIATION OF ARISTOCRATIC AND CLERICAL JUSTICE

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By

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YEOMAN JUSTICE: THE ROBIN HOOD BALLADS AND THE APPROPRIATION OF ARISTOCRATIC AND CLERICAL JUSTICE

Presented by Megan Elizabeth Woosley

A candidate for the degree of

Ph.D in English Literature

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Stephen and Candace Woosley, whose love and support allowed me to fulfill my wildest dreams, something every parent hopes his or her child will one day accomplish. I thank them for reading to me as a child, which fed my imagination; exposing me to history and museums, which grounded me in fact; and indulging my hunger for various trips to see ruins, hear lectures, study manuscripts, examine artifacts, and visit magical landscapes, which allowed me to become the scholar I am today.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Craig Goodman. Without his patience, support, and understanding none of this could have been accomplished. I thank him for running to the library for me when I was too busy to pick up a book, for cooking dinner when I was consumed with an idea, and for tolerating my absence when I was writing, reading, or was swept away to late medieval England.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the formation of yeoman identity through the lens of justice in four late medieval English ballads: *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, *A Gest of Robyn Hode,* and *Robin Hood and the Guy of Guisborne*. I argue the Robin Hood texts critique common medieval conceptions of justice by creating new ones through the appropriation of recognizable literary vocabularies related to the first and second estates. Instead of presenting a fully developed portrait of identity, the Robin Hood corpus displays ambivalence, which is further evidence that identity for the yeoman, and its operating system of justice, is still being worked out in the text itself. The yeoman is celebrated due to his ability to manipulate and appropriate cultural practices in order to gain wealth and social prestige. This parallels a broad historical trend of middle strata economic and social mobility in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

INTRODUCTION

Each Robin Hood production, both literary and cinematic, speaks more clearly to the historical period in which it was produced than it attempts to interpret the figure of Robin Hood himself. Robin is a character upon which we superimpose our desires. As Robin Hood scholars often say, "each generation gets their own Robin Hood," and this is largely true in reference to film adaptations. The legend we are most likely familiar with, that of a dispossessed gentleman fighting against the evil usurper King John, has little in common with its roots in medieval literature. In the six-hundred year history of his popularity, Robin Hood has been featured in literature and film as a knight, a crusading warrior, a rebellious peasant, and a yeoman trickster. These fluid representations of Robin are not unique to film adaptations; they also apply to his literary history, and specifically in reference to his appearance beyond the Early Modern period, the literary period in which he is first gentrified. The Early Modern gentrification of Robin is a stretch from his medieval roots as a yeoman. However, this social elevation engages the rising social importance of the yeoman in the latter part of the Middle Ages and transforms the medieval potential for social advancement through the appropriation of aristocratic identity into a literary reality, something the medieval ballads merely fantasize about. Nonetheless, it is neither the intent of this dissertation to look at each successive generational portrayal of Robin Hood, nor to chart how the

legend changed from the medieval period to the modern.[1] I draw attention to this phenomenon for one reason: to point out the Robin Hood legend's ability to morph and reflect social preoccupations and anxieties, whether of class, justice, war, or nationalism.[2] The medieval legends engage the socio-economic concerns of the period, when burgeoning middle strata tried to make sense of its new found importance in a social classification system that afforded it neither social space nor identity in the three estates system. The ballads bear witness to this phenomenon recognizing the anxiety of the aristocracy over cultural appropriation, the weakened aristocracy, and the localization of government.

I wish to complicate the assumption that the Robin Hood literature morphs into something new each generation. Instead, I suggest the thematic continuity of Robin Hood literature spanning the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, which shares similar socio-economic concerns that are evident in the depiction of justice. This dissertation argues that the Robin Hood ballads document an emergent yeoman socio-economic identity by appropriating and manipulating well-established literary and socially-classed concepts of justice. The yeomen in the Robin Hood ballads look outward to aristocratic,

[1] For an overview of the legend, which breaks the character of Robin into several different

[2] As evidence of such shifts, I draw attention to the first blockbuster Robin Hood film starring Douglas Fairbanks (1922), three years after the start of World War I. The backdrop of the Crusades, and the usurpation of Richard's crown by King John serve as political commentary on the rising American nationalism and military engagements with foreign countries. Furthermore, Ridley Scott's newest depiction of Robin Hood (2010) returns him to the status of yeoman fighting against power hungry and greedy barons during the backdrop of the First Barons' War. This served as socio-political commentary on American politics. During the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, some protestors took on the figure of Robin Hood as a figure of resistance to corporate greed.

bourgeois, and religious forms of justice that appear in literature in order to justify the recognition of themselves as socio-economically separate, and in some cases, similar to other recognized estates, and therefore legitimized. From there, the texts determines the yeoman value system by privileging distributive and retributive justice for the yeoman and project the socio-economic tension of the late Middle Ages while simultaneously writing a literary narrative of the yeoman identity.

Social Strata

Robin's place in the medieval social strata is what both fascinates and compels me to study the medieval ballads in which he is featured. Several scholars have debated the social setting of the audience of the medieval ballads. Although audience is problematic when it comes to the early ballads, as we have no clear idea for whom they were written, many critics have tried to tie the audience to a variety of social stations. Maurice Keen and Rodney Hilton once argued the Robin Hood texts were obsessed with "agrarian" concerns and tied the Robin Hood ballads to "peasant discontent,"[3] but these tales are not likely to be concerned with peasant matters since there is a lack of tenurial issues critiqued in the text. Like other critics, I argue the political, economic, and

[3] Maurice Keen writes that the Robin Hood ballads are situated in a fourteenth century social context and posits that they are a form of peasant discontent (but his argument differs from Hilton, who sees it as an expression of the Revolt of 1381) in that it is in the abuse of power against the peasants. In this argument he frames the audience for Robin Hood as rural peasants because of the ballad form. He admits in his newer introduction that he was mistaken and that the ballads have more in common with metrical romances and the form says nothing about the audience. Like Holt, he argues that the audience is yeomen, specifically the one that shares space with the aristocrat. See the entire debate between J.C. Holt, R.H. Hilton, and Maurice Keen in R. H. Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights, and Heretics: Studies in Medieval English History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

religious issues raised in the early ballads are clues for the yeomen audience.[4] I study the Robin Hood corpus in relation to the yeoman, arguing that the ballads are reflections of the yeoman's desire to legitimize social identity. J.C. Holt has argued quite thoroughly the ballads are addressed to the yeoman retainer,[5] but while much of Holt's work is precise, I reject his idea that the ballads narrowly address the concerns of the household yeoman. While his argument rightfully determines the popularity and dissemination of the ballads by the yeoman retainer throughout England, it is limited in respect to understanding audience. Unlike Holt who argues that the early audience was composed of aristocratic retainers, I suggest a multitude of definitions of yeomen as being relevant in the ballads: the household retainer, the rural landowner, the forester, the wealthy rural artisan, and the yeoman bachelor. I do not limit my definition of yeoman to one nuanced meaning. Instead, I show that the term is resistant to such reduction, as the linguistic history presented below suggests.

By the late Middle Ages, there were arguably stable ideal definitions for the identities of all three estates in England. Wimbledon's sermon "*Redde Rationem*

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[4] Most Robin Hood scholars accept the general yeomen audience, although some critics, most notably Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007) have argued an urban merchant audience.

[5] In *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), J.C. Holt places the origin of the ballads in the thirteenth century. He argues these ballads were adapted in the fourteenth to reflect social changes due to bastard feudalism. He sees the original audience as being yeomen and the issues that they address as yeomen concerns. However, it is clear he is using the term "yeomen" strictly defined as being "household servants," and that the early spread of these tales were through those retainers and hired minstrels. He also places the audience in the North of England and argues that the Robin Hood ballads borrowed only through familiarity from the other outlaw ballads and gained popularity because of the precise locations mentioned that were important to the audience in the north (118).

Villicationis Tue,"[6] perhaps one of the most familiar examples of how the three estates worked in concert, imagined neither philosophical space nor vocational definition for the identities of those whom Sylvia Thrupp has branded the "middle strata."[7] The term "middle strata" relies on the hierarchical ranking system within the estates. However, the "middle strata" is a term that designates those that fell outside of that classification system, specifically the lesser gentry and merchants. Furthermore, as there was a hierarchy within the knight and clerical estates, there was also one in the third. Wealthy merchants were economically superior to and distinct from common laborers and artisans during the period. There were a wide variety of people who fell into the classification of the commoners in the three estates system: merchants, artisans, and free and bound laborers. In my dissertation, the 'middle strata' refers to those that were socio-economically distinct and in a liminal position between the lower peasantry and the lower aristocracy: a medieval version of the anachronistic term "middle class." By birth they were considered of the third estate, but through their freeborn status and economic success, they resembled the lower gentry more than common laborers, and

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[6] Thomas Wimbledon, "*Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue:" A Middle-English Sermon of the Fourteenth Century,* ed. Ione Kemp Knight (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 61-66. In this late fourteenth-century sermon text, Wimbledon assigns work to the three estates based on the parable of the vineyard.

[7] See Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval England.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan UP, 1948), 9. The term "middle strata," originally coined to categorize the urban bourgeoisie, is not particularly useful to discuss rural entities such as franklin and yeomen; however, no term exists to discuss the entire phenomenon of the rise of the early middle class in both rural and urban settings. Although this chapter and the dissertation as a whole focuses on the identity of rural yeomen, the term will be used to describe the phenomenon of both groups as urban and rural patriciate, who are not of aristocratic birth, and who most resemble the category of the lower gentry. Since scholarship has heavily focused on this phenomenon in urban centers, my use of this term and reference to the bourgeoisie is helpful to establish similar incidents in a rural setting.

this is why they are considered as occupying such transitional space; the middle strata, through conspicuous consumption and cultural appropriation sought to carve out their own space in a categorical system that placed them all in the third estate. The middle strata includes rural non-noble landowners whose wealth and status were similar to that of the urban bourgeois. The literature consumed by and portraying the middle strata documents an intent to carve out a cultural space separate from the peasantry and validated through appropriation and adaptation of ideals from a variety of different literatures attached to established social groups. More specifically, however, my interest in this phenomenon of cultural definition is limited to one strand of the rural middle strata: the yeoman, a term that is featured prominently and used to categorically define Robin Hood and his men in the ballads.

In sermons we find both historical mention of the Robin Hood ballads and clues to their perceived reception. One of the two fifteenth-century sermons that feature complaints against those who enjoy the ballads,[8] delivered in 1433 by John Stafford, Bishop and Chancellor of England,[9] simultaneously criticizes the danger of the Robin Hood ballads and curiously realigns the three estates into three divisions unfamiliar to medieval representation: one estate made of clergy and nobility, one made of knights and merchants, and one made of the laborers. On one hand, the sermon chronicles the departure from fourteenth-century representations of estates sermons or estates satire,

[8] Alan J. Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry in Late Medieval England* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 145.

[9] This sermon survives in three manuscripts. John Stafford delivered this sermon to King Henry VI. See Fletcher, *Preaching,* 145-47, and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 50.

which commonly categorize laborers and merchants in the same class, and represents shifts in social alignments[10] that had been happening over the course of two hundred years. The merchants began to resemble the knights both in dress, manners, and habit. On the other, the sermon documents complaints about the Robin Hood ballads as a force of social unrest. Alan Fletcher argues the Robin Hood ballads present a challenge to the peace of society. He quotes Stafford's sermon that states the people

> take more hede to these wanton prophettis, as Thomas of Arsildowne and Robyn Hode, and soche sympyll maters, but þe ȝeve not so fast credens, to the prophettis of God. . . and to all the twelve prophetis of God.[11]

Stafford sees Robin Hood as turning the people away from the church to embrace outlaw heroics. Although Thomas Ohlgren sees this as a direct condemnation of Thomas of Erceldoune's "false prophecies than to Robin Hood's outlawry,"[12] I contend that the turning from the creed and prophets of God refer to the open resistance to the Biblically sanctioned social system, which used biblical texts, such as the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 20, to classify social status. This rejection is one of social philosophy rather than of religious practice. Although Stafford blames his attack on the lack of belief in God's prophets and prophecies, his complaint about Robin Hood, in the context of the

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[10] In *Robin Hood*, Ohlgren uses this evidence of the increased importance of merchants to situate *Robin Hood and the Potter* into a sermon exemplum structure, and later argues for mercantile affiliation in the same ballad (50; 68-91).

[11] Fletcher, *Preaching,* 162.

[12] Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 51.

reformulated social estates, which re-envisions merchants and knights on equal footing as well as clerics and aristocrats and leaves the third estate intact, buts up against the world of Robin Hood, which imagines yeoman social space distinct from laborers and instead draws upon clerical, mercantile, and aristocratic cultures. This coupled with the pairing of Erceldoune, a figure that prophesied Scottish independence, suggests something in the line of rebellion and social unrest. The social identification of Robin is as a yeoman, a rural counterpart that had as much power and wealth as the merchant, the strata now classified by Stafford with knights, once classified as nobility. This movement forecasts the potential for the realignment and threat the Robin Hood ballads represent to social stability.

The Yeoman

Yeomen can be viewed as occupying an indeterminate social position within the rural middle strata. In light of important scholarly work in the field of medieval economic history, such concepts of the rise of the capitalism and resulting social differentiation in the city have been challenged by prominent medieval scholars such as M.M. Postan and Rodney Hilton.[13] These challenges have been ignored by various literary critics who often pit the rural economy against the urban, and therefore make assumptions about idealized nature and simplicity of rural landscapes.[14] The rise of the

[13] See M.M. Postan, *Medieval Economy and Society* (Hammonsworth: Peguin, 1973) and R.H. Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985) and *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[14] See Lee W. Patterson, `No Man His Reson Herde,' in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530,* ed., Lee W. Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 327-29. According to Lee Patterson in his influential essay on the Miller's political consciousness in *The Canterbury*

cash-based economy was due in part to the abundance of money from rural wage labor which allowed peasants to buy more commodities and in turn supported and helped make merchants wealthier. Merchant guilds were some of the most powerful groups in fourteenth and fifteenth-century England and in some cases they competed with local governmental authorities for power. Not only did urban merchants and guildsmen enjoy more power and wealth, but their rural counterparts, franklin and yeomen, did also. In fact, the rural middle strata competed with the wealth of the rich burgers in the city,[15] so it is not astonishing the Robin Hood ballads feature one of the most prominent members of the rural middle strata, the yeoman, and define his economic and social importance in a rural setting. My study challenges classical Marxist interpretations of the idyllic feudal rural community, and thus chronicles the socio-economic changes that *arose* (and were not a product of resistance to urban economic change) in the rural landscape. My dissertation seeks to elucidate the consciousness of the non-noble rural patriciate and their struggle to define a socio-economic identity, hence serving as a counter-history to the multitude of studies that record these same conflicts in urban settings and in urban literature. Before we begin this counter-history, we must first understand the term 'yeoman' in the late Middle Ages because by doing so we can

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Tales, the impetus for economic change rose in agrarian communities. This shift happened in the country before the fourteenth century: aristocrats' war-ransoming accounted for a large part of a cash-based economy in addition to the rise of rural wage labor.

[15] Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1989), 23.

begin to understand the similarities and differences between the rural and urban middle strata.

While there are several book-length historical studies of the yeoman during the Early Modern period and beyond, specifically of their prominence in military conflicts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is a scarcity of such studies in the late medieval period. In fact, the definition of yeoman during the late Middle Ages is ambiguous at best. We initially think of one of two concepts of the yeoman when the word is mentioned. First, we think of the "Yeoman of the Guard," employed as the King's Men. Second, we recall the almost mythical green forester, bow and hunting horn in hand, which Chaucer immortalized in the *General Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales*. However, neither of these associations proves useful to understand the significance of the yeoman.

Yeomen are freemen, and some were wealthy landowners resembling the lower landed gentry. Other yeomen were employed as "youngmen," in aristocratic households being part of a knight's service, like the yeoman who accompanies the knight and squire in the *Canterbury Tales*. Many aristocratic household boys were promoted to range the forest and king's land, which is why yeomanry is often associated with forestry. According to Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, editors of the *TEAMS* edition of the Robin Hood ballads, there are two separate variations of the word. The first, that of household rank, derived from the term "young man, one that had completed his training or apprenticeship but was not yet a master in his field. More specifically, 'yeoman' was a rank in a noble household—between esquire and groom, a distinct

position in the hierarchy."[16] Second, it refers to social status: as the economic shift in the fourteenth and fifteenth century took hold, social mobility was more likely, and "yeoman" had begun to be applied to a person between a gentleman and a husbandman—"substantial and prosperous farmers."[17] Also, it was applied to craftsmen and rural artisans that were prosperous but not of noble blood. Yeomanry, "implied freeborn blood and free tenure."[18] As evidence of such a shift, both uses of the word—as rank in a noble household and "of the middling sort" were used simultaneously in the ballads.

There were a large population of people that were classed yeomen, and the term had no consistency except that it referred to those men who had notable status and prosperity in the rural community. J.C. Holt points out that the terms "yeoman," "franklin," and "gentleman" were interchangeable in the fifteenth century in both legal and social documents of the period.[19] He mentions that despite that the original meaning of the word as a household rank *valetti*, one that was in no way "menial" but "liveried," well cared for and valued; the term took on new meaning because of the status brought with it:[20]

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[16] Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, eds. *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo,MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 34.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 118.

[20] Ibid., 119.

It may well be that the term spread outwards to describe a broad social rank in the countryside partly because government officials viewed local society in terms of the hierarchy within which they themselves lived and worked—hence *valetti* and yeomen came to constitute the next social rank below knights and squires just as they did at court and in noble and knightly households—and partly because it brought a certain social cachet. It may well be that freeholders, appreciating the social differentiation taking place higher up the social scale in the emergence of a clearly defined body of esquires and less formal array of gentlemen, preferred the terms which described the next rank in the household hierarchy to the totally neutral 'franklin.' A yeoman had standing. [21]

Taken as a whole, it is clear that there is no stable identity, or definition of what constitutes the yeoman. However, as mentioned above, the term did begin to have social weight towards the latter half of the Middle Ages. It is clear that the term 'yeoman' begins to change as time goes on surfacing in the Early Modern period and beyond as a title of some notable social and military import: it was an honor to be a Yeoman of the Guard or one of the yeoman military units that consisted of men of socio-economic substance to fight in various military conflicts.

My argument embraces this historical and linguistic instability. The varied characteristic inconsistencies in the corpus of the medieval Robin Hood ballads suggest a moment of attempted definition. There are different Robin Hoods in the early ballads.

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[21] Ibid., 119-120.

Some scholars have dubbed him "chameleon," "the fount of restorative justice," "a cold blooded killer," "courteous," "sometimes more common; sometimes . . . high-minded; sometimes . . . a trickster," and "also . . . stubborn, individualistic, and devoted to religion."[22] It may seem as if Robin Hood defies characterization to a certain extent, but such an admission ignores his consistency in one category listed above: justice. Many characterizations of Robin Hood listed above can fit under that heading. Robin Hood may act inconsistently when viewed through personal actions, but when examined through the lens of justice, his actions are much more patterned in response to what he perceives as injustice. The violence, courtesy, trickery, religiousness, and wavering individual versus communal actions that seem varied in the text serve to establish a conceptual definition of *yeoman justice.*

Justice

While critics have discussed justice in Robin Hood, specifically as a *modus operandi* and as one element of a yeoman value-system, none have studied it as it works to define social identity and values. My study does this following three categories of literary and historical understanding of medieval social class: aristocratic, clerical, and middle strata. Aristocratic and clerical justice appear in various popular literary medieval genres: romance, *chanson de geste*, *fabliaux*, hagiography, chronicles, estates satire, anti-clerical, and biblical literature. These concepts are also found in non-literary forms of historical writing: military history, chivalric treatises, legal records, laws, and

[22] A.J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 12.

ecclesiastical writing. The third category, middle strata justice, concerns the non-literary conventions of behavior, found in conduct manuals and sumptuary law, which are closely associated with literary conventions in a host of genres for the aristocracy. I examine the yeoman appropriation of these fully-formed concepts of justice found in literature, each associated with different social classes, in order to locate where the yeoman remakes, reworks, or rejects them to create their own value system of identity through justice.

Justice is generally defined as the "quality of being just or righteous; the principle of just dealing,"[23] but now as in the Middle Ages it had a multitude of nuanced meanings that conflated moral with legal concepts. In the *Middle English Dictionary*, it simultaneously meant "fair," and in accordance with "divine law," as well as someone who executed that law from a legal standpoint. Further, it could mean "vengeance," or "retribution," as well as "equity" and "treatment befitting one's station."[24] In this dissertation, justice is not always defined as morally right action, for violence is wielded by outlaws, men external to legal authority in order to punish those they deem corrupt. The Robin Hood ballads complicate and critique the concept of justice by drawing attention to its subjective nature and by appropriating the literary genres of those groups that create and inscribe its meaning. Although the definition of justice can be found in secular and sacred legal content (laws, legal examination, sacred texts), it finds its way into literature in genres (trial by ordeal, troth-plight, military combat, and

[23] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (online), s.v. "justice."

[24] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "justice."

tournament) suggesting its wide dissemination and importance to the culture. The historical practice of justice finds itself expressed in literary content, especially those forms that feature the actions of the clerical and aristocratic estates that were in charge, in theory, of modeling behavior and of administering justice. Furthermore, I discuss justice beyond legal practice and punishment and examine it in the context of fourteenth-century modes of shifting social consciousness.

Distributive justice is a concept that sought to give what was "right" and "just" to one group. Although it is clearly located in conservative estates doctrine as what each estate should rightfully do and receive, such a belief system reflected an idyllic portrait of society instead of reality. In late medieval England, the concept of distributive justice is best explained in the context of the Rising of 1381, when laborers demanded the abolition of the manorial system that exploited them and kept them bound to land, and when commoners (along with merchants and other notable medieval people) rebelled against wage freezes and the Poll Tax that sought to limit the amount of payment they could negotiate for their labor, which had risen in price after the Black Death. This rising consciousness is similar to yeomen's desire to have what they consider just for themselves. The ballads illustrate this by the many games the yeomen play in Robin Hood that manipulate aristocratic and clerical expressions of justice for cash. Most readers describe this as theft in the ballads, but I show that these economic gains are not theft, but rather operate upon the same recognizable judicial principles of those groups in power. In Robin Hood, justice is defined by the values of yeomen, who expose,

critique, and gain by appropriating the language and genres of those that were legally sanctioned to administer justice.

Our modern idea of Robin Hood's justice is markedly different. We often think of him as "stealing from the rich and giving to the poor." This is not so in the medieval ballads. There is only one such case in medieval literature, and Robin Hood gives money to a knight who has been wronged by an abbot, who left the knight poor. It is important to remember, however, the knight in this ballad is far from the poverty-stricken figure to whom Robin Hood gives in the modern tradition. This knight had land, which makes him far from poor. A clearer medieval portrait of Robin Hood is one who steals from the corrupt and keeps the money for himself and his men. In the same case noted before, Robin gives money to someone who needs it, but he expects to be paid back with interest, and even becomes furious when the knight is late to do so. This challenges our modern idea of the egalitarian Robin Hood, but even more importantly, this idea has eclipsed his actions as a medieval champion of yeomen.

Robin is just, however, and he and his men fight for justice. He only robs the corrupt, specifically those that violate their oaths to protect the people, exemplified in the various lies and money hoarding portrayed in the ballads. His attacks are on local corrupt officials responsible for administration of justice, and never on the king because he was a representative of God.[25] The early ballads portray attacks on authority, but

[25] For more on this argument, see Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London: Routledge, 1961), 155-157. He argues that the King was outside the social system and to attack him or his reign would be to attack God.

only in the vein of centralized local authority. This reflects an anxiety of late medieval England where local religious and administrative powers are working to become centralized powers, often in collusion with each other.[26] Robin and his men respect the King, even bow down to him, so his challenge to authority has nothing to do with challenging royal authority in the medieval period or addressing the wrongs of the royal administration.

The Texts

The earliest manuscript containing the Robin Hood ballads is 1450, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, but it is clear the Robin Hood ballads had been in circulation for some time far before the extant record suggests. The first reference to Robin Hood appears in William Langland's *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, an allegorical dream poem from the late fourteenth century. We can surmise that the Robin Hood tradition had been in place for some time to warrant a mocking of a tradition: the literary reference features the figure of Sloth who is reprimanded because he cannot remember his *Pater Noster* but he can recite the rhymes of Robin Hood. This reference speaks to the popularity of the Robin Hood legend by 1377, and also situates Robin Hood as an early figure of resistance to institutional authority.

The earliest poem, *Robin Hood and the Monk,* survives in one manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.5.48 that dates to the mid-fifteenth century and

[26] See Christine Chism, "Thinking Globally and Acting Locally in the Fifteenth-century Robin Hood Ballads," in *The Letter of the Law: Law and Literature in Late Medieval Culture,* eds. Candace Barrington and Emily Steiner (Cornell University Press, 2002) for her discussion of this centralization and Robin's attack on the collusion between local and religious administrators.

contains a variety of poetry including religious and secular texts.[27] The two other early sources are *Robin Hood and the Guy of Guisborne,* 1650, found in one manuscript, British Library Add MSS 27879,[28] also known as the Percy Folio, which contains ballads, romances, and poetry. *Robin Hood and the Potter*, 1510, found in one manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS Ee.4.35, has a "household miscellany, containing a mixture of basic catechesis, etiquette, proverbs, cautionary tales, popular literature, and mercantile matters"[29] including "*The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*," a conduct book I use as a context to discuss the Robin Hood ballads in chapter three. *Robin Hood and the Guy of Guisborne* is problematic because Francis Child dated it much earlier than 1650, and this early date was maintained by scholars for a number of years making *Guisborne* the earliest Robin Hood ballad. Many believe it is much older than its source because it features content that is contained in the 1475 play fragment and contains linguistic forms that are archaic, which is why I have included it in my study.[30] *A Gest of Robyn Hode* survives in print in 1510 but it was possibly composed in 1450. Some have even argued for a 1400 composition date; however, is more likely from later in the tradition because it is a compilation of several ballads together which suggests the ballads from which it sprung were in circulation as early as the thirteenth century. It survives in

[27] Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 28-30.

[28] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 169.

[29] Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 68-70.

[30] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 169-171.

numerous medieval to Early Modern printed sources,[31] the most complete and noteworthy are the Lettersnijder edition printed in Antwerp (1510) and Wynkyn de Worde's edition, which scholars disagree over its sequence before or after the Lettersnijder edition.[32] These two editions, along with an edition by Richard Pynson (1530) and fragments from the Douce collection at Bodleian Library comprise the four early print sources for the *Gest*. Two other editions, William Copeland's 1560 edition and another dated to the late sixteenth century Edward White (1590) are the known as the late editions.[33] However, the earliest record of performance we have, a payment for Robin Hood players, is 1426.[34] The four ballads mentioned above were set to music, sung and recited by a performer, and performed in households and in public by minstrels. The ballads and short plays were possibly linked to the Robin Hood festivals in the spring, although it is not clear whether the ballads gave rise to the festivals or the reverse. The festivals were community fundraising events where short Robin Hood plays or skits were performed by members of the community for a donation despite the objection to these ballads by churchmen like Stafford.[35] The donation helped fund local churches or other community services such as road building. We have records of their

[31] These editions "ranged in date from c. 1495 to 1610." Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 20.

[32] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 80.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 81-83.

[35] Both Alexandra F. Johnston, "The Robin Hood of the Records," in *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries,* ed. Lois Potter (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), and Paul Whitefield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008) 53-54, have written about the performance of the Robin Hood tradition. See White for a more in depth coverage of their use as community fundraising for the church.

production in 1426-27 in Exeter, but no entire medieval plays survive at all. All we have are the ballads and a play fragment from 1475.[36] Furthermore, scholars debate which came first: the ballads or the plays, but most likely the ballads rose first and inspired their inclusion in spring festivals, which dramatized the ballads into short plays.[37] Even though these surviving ballads are late medieval and in some cases Early Modern, we know the Robin Hood tradition is at least more than a century older, as that must have been a well-established tradition to have warranted mention in Langland.

My choice to discuss the four ballads over several centuries sometimes as a unit rather than picking one century in which to locate them or discuss them one by one is a decision that warrants discussion. The ballad I will primarily focus upon is *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (1510). However, included in my study are *Robin Hood and the Monk* (1450), *Robin Hood and the Potter* (1510), and *Robin Hood and the Guy of Guisborne* (1650). The manuscripts and print sources I include have dates that span over two hundred years, from mid-fifteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. However, my coverage will extend back further than the fifteenth century. Most of my work with the ballads places their historical and socio-economic concerns in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. Nevertheless, these same socio-economic concerns persist well into the sixteenth century, and the rise of the yeoman during these centuries suggests a broad historical trend not limited solely to one century. The history of the corpus

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[36] Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 8-10.

[37] J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood,* argues the yeoman minstrel spread the tradition through aristocratic households first.

involves oral tradition and a performative culture for which there are no records of original sources, but the lack of historical specificity, that is, reference to datable events, in the ballads make the ballads well–suited to broad historical examination. Most of my work will feature the four oldest ballads, whose dates straddle both the medieval and the Early Modern Period. Because of the fragmentary nature of some of the ballads, specifically *The Monk*, and the artificial compilation of others, like the *Gest*, I decided to focus on thematic concerns of the medieval texts themselves. So instead of examining one moment in a text and examining its possible socio-cultural context, I looked for that theme in other ballads in hopes of examining a trend that connected to a historical trend. This allowed me to discuss yeoman identity more fully by examining more than one text simultaneously.

Methods

Although my main focus is on *A Gest of Robyn Hode,* like many other Robin Hood critics, I propose to read the oldest ballads as a literary unit rather than as separate entities from different traditions. The reason for this is that the longest ballad, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, is a composite of several different ballads patched together to make a longer epic. It clearly it draws upon several different ballads in order to present a continuous narrative from older sources that did not survive. For one, we know it is a composite because as some scholars have noted the transition between the episode with the knight, Sir Richard of the Lee, and the episode with John and the Sheriff is

forced, clumsy, and abrupt;[38] and two, it appears as if there are five different stories contained within the *Gest* that do not reference each other at all.[39] In addition, the earliest 1475 play fragment that features Robin Hood wearing the face and clothes of a knight, is strikingly similar to the same action Robin performs by beheading the Guy of Guisborne and wearing his head and cloak as disguise.[40] Later ballads, as well, such as *Robin Hood and the Butcher,* repeats scenes from *Robin Hood and the Potter*.[41] *The Monk*, *The Potter,* the *Gest* and *Guisborne* share features with each other: justice, disguise and trickery, anti-clerical violence, truth-telling competitions, archery competitions, respect for the king, hatred of the Sheriff, robbery of the corrupt, and collusion between local and religious authorities. These topical similarities suggest their relationship to the larger Robin Hood tradition from which they originated.[42] Their status as the earliest Robin Hood ballads get one as close to a medieval Robin Hood tradition as possible, and therefore, provide the clearest clues to the interactions between text and social context. I focus on the oldest four ballads as a unit because what one ballad can suggest alone can only be further illustrated and analyzed in detail by looking at how all respond to and present the same issue.

[38] J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood*, 17.

[39] Pollard, *Imagining*, 4.

[40] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 169.

[41] Pollard, *Imagining*, 8.

[42] Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 16.

I claim the Robin Hood ballads and early plays as pieces of literature despite the fact ballad and fragmentary forms present a challenge. The ballad used in the Robin Hood ballads is often rejected as literary because of its status as popular culture and its attachment with informal presentation. I acknowledge that the ballad form is not as poetic as the literature of Chaucer and Gower, but I argue it is capable as functioning the same way as canonically accepted literature. That is, it is capable of responding to literary tropes and texts that carry socio-political and socio-economic messages. Like other cultural materialists, I examine the responses of marginalized groups to hegemonic power structures and believe that the Robin Hood texts as popular culture are themselves historical documents. This kind of work has been popularized by analyzing Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, and Lydgate, canonized poets, whose subject matter has been linked with emergent urban mercantile ideology and subversive political and clerical resistance in urban settings. My approach is to examine similar gestures in rural settings and analyze rural emergent ideologies by looking at the historically marginalized texts of popular culture. My approach is to recover the ballad for literary consideration, much like Maura Nolan has looked at John Lydgate's mummers plays, another folk tradition, to discuss his building of a public culture; that is, a form addressed to a specific imagined audience that makes use of accepted literary traditions.[43] I view the ballad as appropriating traditions in order to demand social authority and to express a yeoman culture. Likewise, the social concerns of the Early

[43] Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and The Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

Modern period and the fourteenth century also find their ways into popular culture of their respective periods, and the link between the Early Modern period and the fourteenth century has yet to be made through examination of the appropriation of literary forms in Robin Hood ballads.

I approach the Robin Hood ballads through a wide swath of time instead of only looking at one specific point in historical time. Recent trends in fifteenth-century criticism prove useful in thinking about the Robin Hood materials appropriation and engagement with social context. James Simpson provides an important critical model when he argued the continuance of popular literary forms and modes of cultural critique through the spectrum of several centuries. He included the fifteenth-century Hoccleve and Lydgate in his study connecting these writers to Chaucer, Langland, and Gower, and explained that critics often defame the fifteenth as a century that produced nothing but great imitators. He argued literary critics since the Renaissance saw a break between fourteenth century and the Early Modern Period.[44] His book recovers the fifteenth century as an extension of the fourteenth, and he connects the fourteenth century to the Early Modern period by looking at appropriation of genres and forms in order to analyze cultural reformations and revolutions. The Robin Hood tradition appropriates popular aristocratic and clerical literary conventions of justice and cultural practices spanning the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and adapts them to the changing social and economic conditions of the yeoman that start to become readily apparent in literature of the fourteenth century and continue through to the sixteenth.

[44] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution (*Oxford, Oxford UP, 2004).

Chaucer is considered to be one of the innovators in the literature that features appropriation of aristocratic and clerical culture. His Wife, Merchant, Franklin, Clerk, and Man of Law all rework available forms of literary genres to claim authority and exhibit cultural knowledge.[45] Like Simpson, I use the Robin Hood ballads to discuss the continuance of the trend of appropriation found in texts of the fourteenth century. I examine aristocratic and clerical ideals in critically marginalized texts in order to contextualize late medieval modes of class contention and expose yeoman identity building that is not mere reproduction but a deliberate reworking of social identity. This phenomenon has been documented in studies focusing on urban and canonized literature, specifically in terms of emergent merchant ideology, but has not yet been connected to yeomen. I show that marginalized literature uses similar means of appropriation, critique, and identity building as the literature of Geoffrey Chaucer, thus recuperating the ballads for serious literary consideration.

Social class and ideology are expressed by genre, a concept Fredric Jameson proposes in *The Political Unconscious* as "ideology of form."[46] While discussing the genre of romance as functioning as a mode, Jameson argues that when other texts appropriate forms, the act of their appearance can illustrate both the ideology of the original and a deviation or message about their appropriation:

[45] Likewise, sixteenth-century writers often get examined to discuss social and economic mobility through the appropriation of aristocratic forms. Shakespearean plays, most notably *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, address middle class cultural appropriation while romances like *Cymbeline* examine with changing notions of nobility and *gentillesse*.

[46] Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious*: *Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981).

> So generic affiliations, and the systematic deviation from them, provide clues, which lead us back to the concrete historical situation of the individual text itself, and allow us to read its structure as ideology, as a socially symbolic act, as a proto-political response to a historical dilemma.[47]

This view informs my body of work. I view literature as being capable of expressing emergent class ideology, and I propose several genres as expressions of power structures attached to established hegemonies. One apparent example uses romance as an expression of aristocratic identity. My dissertation identifies places in the ballads where established and accepted genres contingent on discourses of justice are appropriated, hybridized, parodied, and manipulated in order to express emergent yeoman identity.

This project draws upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital that presents a different system of hierarchy to the economic. That is, the prescribed meaning of the capital of taste is contingent upon the "cultural code "of the "cultural nobility": " A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded."[48] I use Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to describe yeoman appropriation of taste from the nobility in order to use it against them and to manipulate it for economic gain. This understanding

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[47] See Fredric Jameson "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre" in *New Literary History* 7.1 (1975), 157.

[48] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Trans., Richard Nice (Harvard UP, 1987), 4.

of taste, most notably featured in my discussion of table manners in the third chapter, can easily be extended to genre. The yeoman appropriation of these codes sends signals that they are part of this cultural code and therefore exert their cultural nobility, but my discussion of cultural capital is not limited to exerting knowledge. I use cultural capital to discuss how the Robin Hood texts manipulate the codes upon which give power to certain groups. This is expressed in the texts as economic and social capital. Although Bourdieu's systems of economic and cultural are separate, they work in concert with each other.[49] Therefore, we can see how gaining cultural capital can potentially lead to economic and social capital, which is the case in the Robin Hood ballads. I argue the Robin Hood ballads appropriate judicial literary genres that operate as signs of cultural knowledge in order to feature the yeomen turning cultural capital into economic capital while presenting the possibility of social capital. Hence, such an act illustrates an emergent social identity.

Last, my approach seeks to recover Robin Hood from Robin Hood criticism. In the same way critics of the fifteenth century, namely James Simpson, recuperate fifteenth-century literature from critics who focus on marginalizing their socio-cultural importance, I intend to recuperate the Robin Hood ballads from its critical past. Much of the Robin Hood criticism has focused on the search for uncovering the "real" Robin Hood, and furthermore, the ballad rarely receives serious treatment in terms of its political and social context.

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[49] Bourdieu, Ibid., 286-288.

There have been some authors that have done careful and critical work with context, namely Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren amongst others, but the body of Robin Hood criticism in the past often falls within the search for historical figures or within the explanation of Robin Hood's longevity in popular culture up until the twentieth century. There are a plethora of film and biographical criticisms.[50] Unfortunately, the Robin Hood ballads often are ignored for serious literary consideration because of these types of approaches. John Bellamy, writing in 1985,[51] amongst other scholars, has argued the Robin Hood ballads are historical documents of a real Robin Hood. This type of scholarship persists even today: David Baldwin's 2011 book[52] and John Paul Davis' 2009 book[53] attest to this trend. While this type of scholarship is interesting and labor-intensive, it is shortsighted to divorce the Robin Hood tradition from its social and literary context. There have also been excellent studies of the Robin Hood tradition by the historians Maurice Keen, J.C. Holt, and Rodney Hilton, which provide careful clues to context, but approach the text from a purely historical approach. My project treats the Robin Hood ballads as part of a literary tradition in order to illustrate socio-economic concerns of the rural middle strata.

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[50] Mike Dixon-Kennedy, *The Robin Hood Handbook*: *The Outlaw in History, Myth, Legend*, (History Press, 2006) purports to answer all questions about Robin Hood, but overlooks the medieval ballads and draws instead from the children's books that were rewritten from the tradition. Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, is informed by the ballads and film, and takes four mythic representations throughout time and views them in terms of their socio-political settings.

[51] *Robin Hood: A Historical Inquiry* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

[52] *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked* (Gloustershire: Amberely, 2011).

[53] *Robin Hood: The Unknown Templar* (Peter Owen Ltd., 2011).

Furthermore, to see Robin Hood solely as a historical figure removes this literature from engaging with broad socio-historical trends that span the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. The Robin Hood corpus responds to and engages with socio-economic change that helped create yeoman identity. Even though I have set out to treat the Robin Hood materials in a historical manner, I wish to divorce myself from the biographical and historically-specific tradition. There have been plenty of books written with the intent of finding a "real" Robin Hood or placing the Robin Hood ballads during a certain century, but it is not my intent in this project to comment upon or enter this conversation. I do not think it necessary to prove there was a real Robin Hood in order to treat the literature in a historical manner.

To say Robin Hood was a real person that inspired these tales does not remove that historical engagement, but it does force one to look at "one" historical moment rather than look at broader socio-economic trends that span several centuries and that can be more productive to literary and historical scholarship. Robin Hood is more of a Piers Plowman/Jack Straw figure: a literary character that embodied resistance, motivated and represented change, a name that distressed laborers took to respond to broad historical trends. The Robin Hood figure works similarly. He is a literary character that participates in addressing the topic of justice, and as a result of this broad historical preoccupation, people throughout several centuries adopted his name to respond to social and economic injustice.

Chapter One interrogates the justice of religious poverty, as defined by Christian law in Acts and Matthew, two books connected to the setting of the ballad at

Whitsuntide, as a precept for clerical chastity in *Robin Hood and the Monk*. I argue that the actions of Robin and his yeomen parallel those of the disciples in reference to willful poverty in the book of Acts, which chronicles the building of the early Christian church. I contend that Robin and his men act more in accordance with the spiritually chaste and religiously driven apostles and Christ himself in Matthew than the Monk. In this way, the text simultaneously critiques religious orders and writes a narrative of yeoman religious habits. The yeomen physically punish the Monk for his violation of poverty and thirst for greed while exhibiting the Christian concept of poverty themselves.

The yeomen communal identity, covered in Chapter Two, manipulates the concept of aristocratic brotherhood by restructuring hierarchical notions of fealty, maintenance, and vassalage. In theory, aristocratic brotherhood is organized by sublimating individual will to that of a lord in service of the judicial concept of the common profit. Ideally, it functioned as a reciprocal relationship, but as the Robin Hood texts suggest, it can exclude the profit of all due to collusion and greed. The Robin Hood texts create an alternative structure of aristocratic brotherhood based on the attempted erasure of hierarchical systems, one that balances individual desires with a newly formed concept of a *yeoman profit*. The actions of the yeoman fellows are checked and punished when they act in service of self instead of the yeoman communal identity. This literary expression of emergent socio-economic identity can be linked historically to guild fellowship and the changing definition of 'yeoman' during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.

Chapter Three turns to the yeoman manipulation of existing codes of conduct to gain cultural capital, expressed in the ballads as gaining economic capital. I examine the ballads' inclusion of the language and subject matter of conduct manuals, both in sumptuary laws and romance, arguing that Robin and his men manipulate the concepts that distinguish social class (those of bodily behavior) for cash and social prestige, thus mirroring the wider bourgeois appropriation of the literature of conduct. Although the appropriation of aristocratic conduct by the urban middle strata is well known, this chapter suggests that conduct books were consumed by rural groups such as yeomen.

Chapter Four examines the subject of tournament not as used in aristocratic romance, but as an expression of sacred justice found in both clerical and military discourses. I argue that the ballads purposefully manipulate the concept of trial by combat for gain and expose the corruption of its use for governing power. This chapter explores the rising importance of the yeoman archer and the longbow in military history, and argues the archery competition in the ballads creates a yeoman literary counterpart to the tournament. As the tournaments in judicial practice and military history suggest, the victor is sanctioned by God and is thus inherently good and just. The yeoman archery competition, likewise, uses this ideological construction to gain distributive justice for the yeoman.

Taken together, the literary appropriations presented in four chapters suggest a deliberate yeoman reformulation of existent judicial ideologies. The Robin Hood texts expose and dismiss the hegemonic languages of judicial practices. These principles are then manipulated for economic gain for the yeoman, which suggest their subjective

nature and corrupt use in judicial practice. The reformulated permutations of yeoman justice are neither stable nor unilateral. This lack of stability suggests an identity in formation and is a hallmark of emergent class identity. My analysis challenges the emergent middle strata identity in an urban mercantile setting and the idyllic feudal portrait of rural existence. Instead, my dissertation complicates our understanding of stratification in the rural economy and society by documenting yeomen who sought to legitimize their own social identity through appropriation of literary genres of justice.

CHAPTER ONE: THE JUSTICE OF RELIGIOUS POVERTY

Much has been made about the religious nature of the character of Robin Hood in *Robin Hood and the Monk,*[54] yet there has been little investigation in light of the textual culture surrounding the celebration of the religious feast day of Whitsun, also known as Pentecost. Whitsun and Whitsun-ales were extremely popular religious feast days and summer festivals that brought communities together simultaneously in worship in church and in celebration of communal unity. Several critics have argued that the physical performances of the Robin Hood games coincide with the celebration of early summer festivals in communities, namely Whitsun.[55] Challenging those that have read Robin Hood as carnivalesque, Paul Whitfield White has argued that the tradition of communal fundraising for churches was not solely a part of "festive misrule" but rather a practice condoned by the church during Whitsun and regulated by churchwardens and religious guilds.[56] While these studies are helpful to understand how the religious holiday of Whitsun is tied to the Robin Hood tradition, there is a gap between the Robin

[54] See Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 50-67, for a discussion of the similarities of *Robin Hood and The Monk* to sermon exempla. He argues *Robin Hood and the Monk* was contained in a manuscript that held mostly religious material that would have been culled for religious edification in the form of sermon exempla by the manuscript's owner, Gilbert Plinkington. See Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion,* 43-65, which argues the early ballads portray him as a holy Catholic, which church officials likely saw along with his reputation for redistribution of wealth as a figure ripe for church fundraising.

[55] In *"The Robin Hood of the Records*," Johnston argues that these summer festivals vary from Lord of Summer Rule to Whitsun-Ales, citing evidence of May Day festivals that employed inversion to late religious sponsored festivals (29-36). Conversely, in *Robin Hood*, Ohlgren agrees the attitude toward clerics in the ballad is part of the festive misrule of Whitsun, which was condoned by the church, "but argues it may be more likely that the violence against the Monk is personal and related to the geography of St. Mary's Abbey in Nottingham, which had a history of greed (57-59).

[56] White, *Drama and Religion*, 43; 57.

Hood scholarship on historical practice of the religious tradition of the Robin Hood games at Whitsun and the religious tradition of Whitsun, the tradition that includes sermons and liturgy that were delivered during the feast. This chapter intends to bridge the two bodies of criticism. Specifically, I investigate how *Robin Hood and the Monk* illustrates sermon ideals revolving around the tradition of Pentecost are put into festival practice in towns around England. While many scholars are troubled by the violent aspects of the ballad and have written these off as part of carnival and inversion summer festivals, I see them in the Biblical and sermon tradition of Whitsun. I contend that the religious holiday can be characterized by social justice, a theme in which the larger corpus of Robin Hood ballads are invested. Robin and his men act as protectors of the faith by appropriating the culture of the poverty of spirit, suffering hardship in exchange for a relationship with Christ, while punishing clerics that violate the concept of material poverty. These lessons are addressed in Acts, the Gospel of Matthew, and the sermon tradition surrounding Whitsun. I argue *Robin Hood and the Monk* must be considered in the context of contemporary sermons and the festival of Whitsun, both of which celebrate poverty and community.

Whitsun is a celebration of the Holy Spirit, and the sermons surrounding this religious holiday reminds Christians about Christ's metaphorical and literal poverty, and the role of poverty plays for those who wish to be closer to Christ by participating in community through charity, meekness, and brotherhood. These lessons, which Christ taught in the Gospels build upon the idea of communal welfare, which was celebrated during Whitsun. Robin and his men navigate several elements of Whitsun by celebrating

the religious holiday of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by building of Christian community through recreating the Mass that featured the story of the disciples in Acts, and by playing defenders to protect of the faith. In protecting the faith, Robin and his men recall the religious quest from romance, which taught spiritual poverty as a path to Christ. Their actions also draw on the larger lay religious celebration of Whitsuntide, which generated money for the community and church, thus they practice poverty of spirit and the charity of Christ. I suggest *Robin Hood and the Monk* is neither a promotion of orthodox instruction found in Whitsun sermons on poverty nor a tolerance of misrule but rather a revision of clerical Whitsun teaching to promote the role of lay yeomen in spiritual practice of poverty, enlisting festivity in the service of community and poverty.

Poverty in the late Middle Ages was one way for religious adherents to imitate Christ. The most obvious example of this is the order of mendicant friars that took vows of voluntary poverty and lived off of begging and the charity of others in order to focus on spirituality. Although friars were one of the groups at the heart of late medieval anti-fraternal writings and anti-clerical criticism, the concept of poverty was still one that established a tie to Christ. In a recent study on poverty in late medieval England, Kate Crassons has argued that the claims of poverty were "capacious," and could take the form of "spiritual rewards" of those like the mendicant orders,[57] who took on voluntary material poverty, as well as the response of the community, who are reminded of their

[57] Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2010), 6.

own "charitable obligation to alleviate Christ's own suffering of the poor and showing mercy to those in need."[58] I wish to add to this scholarly discussion on poverty and religious identity in late medieval England by showing that the yeomen in *Robin Hood and the Monk* use the concept of poverty and communal response to simultaneously define their own spirituality and respond to religious and social injustice. In this chapter I combine two definitions of poverty: one, spiritual poverty, and two, material poverty. The latter type of poverty is the voluntary type that includes willfully giving one's goods away in order to live through the charity of others, thus making one subject to others, and therefore, closer to God's grace through suffering. The former is poverty in spirit, outlined by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven,"[59] and recounted by Paul in 2 Corinthians: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."[60] This kind of poverty is about choosing suffering rather than just being without money. Both definitions assume suffering and hardship, but in medieval Christian theology, the latter is about tolerating oppression, suffering injustice, and willfully experiencing vulnerability in order to *imitate the suffering, oppression, and injustice Christ chose* in order for humans to become rich with everlasting life. I will draw from both of these definitions, as the ballad uses both

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[58] Crassons, *The Claims,* 9.

[59] Matthew 5:3 All quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, Standard Revised Version, College Ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965).

[60] 2 Corinthians 8:9.

interchangeably at times; however, many of my readings will invoke solely the concept of poverty of spirit, which is not presented as the lack of physical wealth.

In the *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the religious frame is constantly invoked as a reminder of the spirituality of the yeomen. The ballad takes place during Whitsun, also known as the Feast of Pentecost, a religious day celebrated in England, fifty days after Easter. In Judeo-Christian tradition, it is a celebration of two different events, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. According to Jewish tradition, it is a celebration of when Moses received the Torah from God during the harvest festival now celebrated as Shavuot.[61] The Mosaic laws contained in the Torah and the nature of the Ten Commandments that Moses received during Pentecost make justice one of the preoccupations of this holiday. Separately but equally important, in Christian tradition, the feast commemorates the Twelve Apostles receiving the Holy Spirit and later baptism in Acts 2: 1-6, which is the story of the disciples who built the early church by spreading the teachings of Christ. Although these two events are defining moments from two different religions, they are united by their celebration on the same day, by their Abrahamic genealogy, and their shared traditions and law, and, more specifically, by their intent to uphold that law and practice of each respective church. According to exegetical tradition, their relation to one another is the typological: the appearance of God to Moses on Mt. Sinai prefigures the Holy Spirit's appearance in Acts after Christ's crucifixion. The giving of the laws on Mt. Sinai prefigures the teaching of Christ in the

[61] Charles Souvay, "Pentecost (Jewish Feast)," In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

Gospels and their dissemination by the disciples in Acts. Both are central tenets of the faith. Although later on this chapter will analyze the ballads' engagement with the finer details of Whitsun's tradition of spiritual poverty in the ballads in reference to clerical discourse, we first turn to a place in literature where the celebration of Whitsun features the lay co-optation of the concept of poverty of spirit, thus identifying the appropriation of clerical discourse on spiritual poverty as part of a secular identity.

The Secular Religious Quest

Religious feasts, and specifically the feast of Pentecost, are a common backdrop in medieval romance in which knights blur the line between secular identity and religious duty.[62] The humility and hardship the knights must endure to reach the Grail are a form of poverty of spirit, and those successful in the tests of character reach their destination. The feast of the Pentecost occurs at the start of Malory's quest of the Holy Grail. The Grail appears during the feast of Pentecost behind an arras and magically feeds all of the attendant knights, which is a metaphor of Christ's charity and ability to spiritually feed those that hunger in poverty for him. After this miracle, several knights depart for the quest of the Holy Grail. The adventures that follow test the knights on their moral compass to see who is fit to find the Grail. This initiates the purity tests of knights who are able to find Christ's cup, which is an instance of the suffering required of Christians to find the grace of God. Many knights fail due to greedy appetite, the

[62] The Feast of the Pentecost is the starting point for many Round Table adventures, as well as the setting for *Yvain*. See Chretien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances,* Trans. William Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 1991). The two other prominent Christian feasts in medieval romance are Easter and the Ascension.

opposite of poverty of spirit. One example is Lancelot's sexual desire for Guinevere, which represents his physical intemperance as a metaphor for his spiritual intemperance. Especially in the Arthurian tradition, knights are tested for religious chastity, for example, in the Sangreal episodes of the Malory and de Troyes cycles. Pentecost is a fitting day for upholding the principles of the Church, including the distribution of sacraments to Christians. The religious quests in Arthurian literature show that the Pentecost is sacred to the Knights of the Round Table in romance.

The Pentecost is the occasion that the knight reaffirms his pledge to his fellow knights, known as a Pentecostal Oath, which marries the secular duty of knights to a Christian poverty of spirit. As Malory recounts:

> Then the King established all the knights, and gave them riches and lands; and charged them never to do outrage nor murder, and always to flee treason, and to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore. . . Also, that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no love, nor for no worldly goods. So unto this were all the knights sworn of the Table Round, both old and young. And every year so were they sworn at the high feast of Pentecost.[63]

Although not overtly religious and rather connected to the valor of the knight, the Pentecostal Oath indirectly highlights the poverty of spirit required of Christianity. It

[63] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript,* ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 57.

requires avoiding intemperance as outlined by murder no matter how tempting, fleeing from treason no matter what is at stake to gain, practicing mercy at the cost of anger, and loyalty to a higher power which voluntarily dissolves the self in service of a higher ideal. The last words of the oath require knights to take no battles for worldly goods, suggesting that spiritual goods are the only goods worthy to fight for. The lack of worldly goods, of course, is connected to voluntary material poverty. The rest of the oath promotes poverty of spirit, which asks one to devote one's will to a higher ideal. Avoiding murder, a defining instance of the practice of knighthood, is outlined here suggesting that spiritual poverty and the values of knighthood have much in common. On the other hand, the fact that the knights in Malory's romance murder many, can be explained by the contemporary theory of just war, where certain types of actions that bring destruction are qualified in order to protect the church. Robin and his men persecute those that violate treason, cruelty, lack of mercy, and battles in a wrongful quarrel of law in the ballads, but simultaneously yeomen use violence and murder to penalize those in clerical positions, who violate both definitions of poverty. This draws attention to the similarities between the yeoman band of outlaws and knights through the concept of just violence, but it does not account for the majority of the biblical and religious parallels in the text that will be covered later in this chapter.

The religious quest Robin departs upon alone in *Robin Hood and the*

Monk, armed with only the "might of mylde Marye"[64] keeps true to the solitary mission of religious quests in romance where the warrior practices poverty of spirit through his vulnerability to attack. He has put his faith in a religious symbol, stripped bare and willing to suffer physically in service of a higher power. In Malory's romance, Galahad refuses the company of his squire on his quest protected by a religious sign, the shield of white with red cross, which is a symbol of a religious affiliation to St. George adopted by early Christian Crusaders. This symbol has been made famous by other religious orders such as the Knights Templar, and is widely identified as the symbol for the "warrior of Christ" in medieval history.[65] Robin's use of the "might of mild Mary" as protection works similarly to St. George's action of arming himself with the sign of the cross, and to Galahad's use of a shield with the cross of St. George. These are a type of lorica, "armor," or a prayer used for protection. Although a thoroughly secular man, Robin Hood is specifically portrayed as a religious type, like King Arthur's knights in the Sangreal or a saint. This chapter's argument that poverty in the clerical tradition was appropriated by yeoman identity should be understood in the context of the romance tradition since the secular order of Arthurian knights were inspired by religious precepts

[64] All quotations from the ballads come from Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). All subsequent line citations from this text will be noted parenthetically.

[65] Peter Coss, "Knighthood, Heraldry, and Social Exclusion in Edwardian England," in *Heraldry, Pageantry, and Social Display in Medieval England,* eds., Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 52. Coss discusses the red cross upon a white background is the symbol of the Knights Templar as opposed to the Knights Hospitallers, who use the white cross on a dark background. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (London: J.M. Dent, 1900), 126-134. In this collection of hagiography, the cross is named after St, George, a knight, who protected himself with the sign of the cross, slew a dragon, and saved a princess from being offered as a sacrifice by lot, but not before he converted an entire town to Christianity. According to the *Golden Legend,* with his help, the crusaders who wore his sigil were able to lay siege to Jerusalem.

of poverty established through the holiday of Whitsun much like Robin Hood and his men.

Like the knights, whose role it was to protect the church, Robin participates in a spiritual quest of protecting the church against those that would destroy it. This is remade for yeomen into an attack on local corrupt religious officials through the use of violent justice. The violence that Robin inflicts upon the Sheriff, the Monk, and their men is justified because these officials are depicted as a threat trying to destroy the sanctity of the church. Robin Hood and his men thus follow the Pentecostal Oath which states that fighting for spiritual goods is the only worthy battle. In this way, Robin appropriates the violence of the knight in order to restore justice and order. The Monk colludes with the sheriff and ignores the right of sanctuary. The Monk is described as a greedy man, whom Robin has robbed before, but inside the church, the Monk ignores his oath to protect his parishioners and instead acts on personal vengeance. While kneeling in the Church, Robin is attacked by the Monk, and in a skirmish that attracts the Sheriff and his men, twelve deaths and various injuries occur:

> Ther as the schereff and his men stode thychkust,
>
> Thedurwarde wolde he.
>
> Thryes thorow at them he ran then,
>
> For soothe as I yow sey,
>
> And woundyt mony a moder son,
>
> And twelve he slew that day.
>
> His sworde upon the schireff hed

Sertanly he brake in too. (105-12)

The scene calls to mind the violence in the romance texts. The *Alliterative Morte* and *The Chanson de Roland* depict battles between Christians and Saracens that are far more gruesome but concern the same theme: upholding religion through violence and extermination of morally corrupt individuals while on a Christian quest. The violence in the romance is excessive: bodies are split in two, blood pours from injured heads, and knights die in great number. In one small skirmish in the *Monk*, Robin Hood kills twelve men and strikes the Sheriff's head so hard his sword is broken in two. Robin Hood makes the religious quest of battling infidels more personal, but it is this adaptation that appropriates from chivalric treatises the personal and civic duty of a knight. Robin's attacks on the local clergy and government officials justify the violence he inflicts in the same way that romances justify the violence to protect the church. Instead, Robin and his yeomen protect the church on both a local and literal level. In the Robin Hood text, those that were supposed to protect the church are responsible for its corruption and try to keep Robin from practicing his faith. He responds by eliminating the threat through violence, and restores order, so he may continue to fulfill his personal religious duty. The religious duty that the yeoman adopts as his own draws upon religious law established in correlation with the Biblical Feast of Pentecost.

The Religious Practices of Yeomen

Robin Hood and the Monk immediately alludes to the religious holiday both by name and more broadly by the use of words with religious connotations: "Whitsun" (9), and the multiple references to Christ's death "Be Hym that dyed on tre" (14), "Savyour"

(26), and the Virgin Mary "mylde Mary" (28). The twelve disciples are alluded to when Much, fearing the safety of his friend's life suggests Robin take twelve men with him (31), a tie to the Christian context of Whitsun's celebration of twelve disciples. These direct and indirect references all identify the tale as a religious quest that will ultimately test character.

The twelve plus one numbering recalls Jesus and his twelve disciples and paints Robin as a protector of the church, who is willing, like the imprisoned disciples in Acts, to practice his faith by defending it. In fact, Pentecost is remade into a Christian feast in Acts, in a pivotal moment when Jesus explains to his Twelve Disciples their mission before The Ascension, and tells them how to lead and promote the church by commanding them to spread the Gospel: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sama'ria and to the end of the earth."[66] The disciples acted as true practitioners of the faith, spreading practices to the "end[s] of the earth." Likewise, the Acts of the Apostles contains the story of the early church that was the main focus of Mass during the period between Easter and Pentecost. Furthermore, Robin mentions "Mass" and "Matins" (24) and the attack upon him happens during Mass drawing attention to what Robin missed in church that day. Although Stephen Knight mentions that Matins is a mistake because of the time of day, the text most definitely is referring to Matin at Lauds, which is later in the day.[67] As liturgical historian Susan Boynton explains:

[66] Acts 1:8.

> The Mass in the Roman rite included a reading from the Pauline Epistles (or other biblical books) and one from the Gospels. The yearly cycle of these readings was essentially in place by the eight century. On certain occasions the first reading at Mass was from the Old Testament or the Acts of the Apostles rather than from the Epistles.[68]

Boynton mentions at Matins the scriptural lessons "from Easter until the Sunday after Pentecost the readings were taken from Acts of the Apostles, the canonical Epistles, and Revelation."[69] The focus on the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Twelve Disciples and their role in spreading the faith by teaching Christianity allow us to see Robin as a Christ-like figure and his men, the twelve Much suggests he take with him into town, as Apostle-like.

Although Robin is unlike Christ-like in many ways, he models Christian behavior in his journey into town into certain imprisonment for the salvation of his soul, a loose parody of Christ's own journey into certain death for the salvation of all. This act itself reminds one of the suffering, or poverty of Christ in order for humans to receive spiritual riches, quoted above in this chapter from 2 Corinthians 8:9, one of the Pauline Epistles, a book featured in readings during Whitsuntide. The setting of Pentecost in concert with the corrupt clergy he encounters suggests that Robin is simultaneously

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[67] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 50.

[68] Susan Boynton "The Bible and Liturgy," *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages*: *Production, Reception, Performance in Western Christianity*. eds., Susan Boynton and Diane Reilly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 22.

[69] Ibid., 23.

playing the role of a disciple, as originally described in Acts, one who suffers poverty in spirit for their faith and for Christ. When the Holy Ghost descends upon the disciples in Acts on the feast of Pentecost, they begin to speak in tongues of different languages. This suggests that they can understand possible converts near and far, as if the tower of Babel had never fallen. However, it is in this baptism of the Holy Spirit by fire as described in Acts, and subsequent physical baptism of water that the connection is most clear.

The word "baptism" itself it etymologically linked to the concept of cleansing, and, as I will demonstrate below, the baptism of the Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ's suffering and poverty for our salvation. In the *Middle English Dictionary*, "baptisen" means "ceremonial purification" or "to cleanse."[70] This is noteworthy since when Robin enters the church, the word "save" is invoked:

> Whan Robyn came to Notyngham,
>
> Sertenly withouten layn,
>
> He prayed to God and myld Mary
>
> To bring hym out save again.
>
> He gos in to Seynt Mary chirch,
>
> And knelyed down before the Rode.[71]

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[70] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "baptisen."

[71] ll. 67-72

Although the editors of the text have glossed the definition as "safe," in light of the account of the history of Pentecost, "save" is appropriate as well. It is quite possible the word was selected for its multivalent nature. Of course, Robin has been warned by John to avoid town because of possible capture; however, the secondary sense of "save," from "saven" is "to bring about salvation, deliver the soul from sin," "absolution," which is directly related to concept of the baptismal "washing clean," one of the sacraments of Catholicism required for the faithful.[72] Robin could have been on his way to cleanse himself of sin, so his quest would have been one for absolution.

In one of the central celebrations of Whitsun in English tradition, catechumens dress in white, which is said to have been where the name "whit" comes from, but white is also widely connected with absolution as evidenced by both John Mirk's sermon on the Eve of Whitsun. Additionally, the tradition of granting plenary indulgences to those that recite a prayer on the Feast of Pentecost evoke the sacrifice Christ made for the absolution of humankind. The recitation of "Veni, Creator Spiritus" or "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" on Whitsun qualifies one for plenary indulgence after confession and communion.[73] Alternately, if said on Whitsun alone, the indulgence is for three-hundred days.[74] This hymn, also called the "golden sequence," is sometimes attributed to Pope Innocent III in the twelfth century and sometimes to Robert II in the eleventh century

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[72] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "saven."

[74] *A Catholic's Vade Mecum: A Select Manual of Prayers for Daily Use* (London: Burns and Lambert, 1851), 363.

and is performed during Whitsun and the week following.[75] While there is no direct reference to the recitation of this prayer in the poem, it is broadly relevant to Robin's insistence on going to Mass on Whitsun. Furthermore, there is a long history of confession and washing oneself clean on this holiday, as evidenced by John Mirk's sermon:

> On Saturday nexte coming, os ȝe knowen
> well, wil be Whyston Even, þe wyche day ȝe schul alle faston and comyn to chyrch to sene and heren þe service þat schal be sayde in Holy Chyrch þat day. ȝe schall alle make ȝow redy and clene in sowle þat ȝe may be redy þat day to reseyue þe Holy Goste þat þe Fadir of heuen sendeth among mankynde.
> Wherefore I charge ȝow, if þer be any man or woman þat is fallyn
> In any grievous synne, þat ȝe comyn to me and clense ȝow þerof or Sonday comme, and I will be redy to help in alle þat lythe in me with Gode wylle.[76]

The sermon continues by communicating the importance of a clean soul and citing the smell of sin in the nose of God. The idea of absolution, confession, indulgences, and baptism on Whitsun illustrates the importance of the feast day for medieval Christians. Robin Hood stood to gain much by attending Mass that day, whether he was seeking to

[75] *The Catholic Encyclopedia.* Eds. Charles Herbermann, Edward Pace, Conde Pallen et. al. 15 (New York: Encyclopedia Press Inc., 1913), 342.

[76] John Mirk's *Festial, De vigilia Pentecostes sermo, f. 74 ll. 2-11.* in *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, Early English Text Society, Vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 144.

be cleansed or "saved" or whether he was just participating in the observance of the feast. The fact that he is challenged and willingly puts himself in harm's way in order to participate aligns him with both the disciples who were imprisoned for practicing their faith in Acts and Christ himself, who was crucified through his own poverty of spirit for the riches of humans. This possible martyrdom he is willing to endure situates *Robin Hood and the Monk* in the context of Christ's suffering, or poverty of spirit.

In Acts, the book that is featured during Whitsun and after, the disciples are responsible not only for spreading Christ's message about how to live, but also for enforcing punishment (even death) on those who broke rules of poverty established by the group. This is especially true in cases of the violation of financial distribution and equity, which parallels the activity of Robin and his men in relation to his punishment of clerics and of his own men. Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and wife in Acts who try to hold money intended for the benefit of believers for private gain, are punished by immediate death for lying to God: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? [. . . .] You have not lied to men but to God. When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died."[77] The message of the story is further iterated when Ananias' wife, Sapphira, repeates the fate of her husband by repeating his lie about money in order to keep it for herself. As a result, like her husband before her, she met the fate of immediate death. This resembles Robin's band's justification for stealing after the truth-telling game in the ballads. According to this logic, those that would lie in order to selfishly promote one

[77] Acts 5:3; 5.

over a group should be punished. This parallel can be helpful to contextualize Much and John's violent punishment of the Monk and his page for his violation of material poverty and spiritual poverty. Both characters are violently killed, and this fact has bothered readers of the ballad and has caused some to theorize about the carnivalesque or festive misrule involved in Whitsun-ale celebrations.[78] However, festive misrule has been a popular explanation of the mixture of the sacred and profane, it does not take into account Whitsun's relationship to the response to the lack of Christian charity.

The Monk of St. Mary's Abbey is guilty of violating the law of sanctuary amongst other laws of God, but it seems his physical punishment is warranted by his greed, situating the Monk's violent punishment in the tradition of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts, the book that contains Pentecost and that would have been read in church services during that time. As a member of the regular clergy, this monk has forgotten his vow of poverty, prominently established by the disciples during the building of the early church in Acts 2: 44, which discusses the three-thousand that were baptized after the Holy Spirit arrives: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had any need."[79] These were the first Christians that were led by the disciples. These disciples,

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[78] In *Robin Hood*, Ohlgren argues that the violent murder of the monk and his page are in the tradition of festive misrule, but this does not explain the whole story of the violent treatment of the monk and page, which are most likely connected to their Cluniac roots, and personal vengeance of the author to a specific priory (58-9). In *Drama and Religion,* White has argued that while the mixture of the sacred and profane celebrated during late summer festivals and violence is connected to purity in the legends of the Our Lady tradition (59-60).

[79] Acts 2: 44-45.

first numbered twelve, who then took upon many, shared their goods with the group, as monks do in practice. The story of Ananias illustrates the case of one man and his wife, who chose to join this group of faithful but who were not committed to living according to the principles of poverty, both spiritual and literal. Their punishment was death for their greed. This Monk, who violates sanctuary and his orders in order for a presumable favor from the Sheriff intends to live the same way, communally and publicly as a messenger of Christ, but privately greedy and wrathful for those that punish him.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is an important story in Acts, which in early Christianity is important in the tradition of Whitsuntide, which provides a context for the violent response the yeomen have toward the Monk and the Page. While Robin and his men are literally poor, in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, they evoke other definitions of charity, poverty, and meekness that were required of Christian followers, especially the clergy. They are participants in thievery elsewhere in the ballads, but it is only a claim made by the corrupt Monk in the *Monk*, which is never substantiated or witnessed in the ballad itself. Elsewhere in the Robin Hood corpus, when the yeomen steal, they do not hoard this wealth to themselves, but distribute it among the yeomen group. On the other hand, they require that men of the cloth act in imitation of Christ's poverty, both literally and metaphorically. Thus, the celebration of Whitsun links the celebration of justice as established in the Old Testament with the poverty of spirit invoked in the New Testament.

The Covenant of Justice

The justice is celebrated during the Pentecost through The Mosaic Covenant, or what modern day Christians call the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, the belief that man's relationship with God is negotiated by man's relationship to Jesus, his new law expressed through Christ's teachings in the Gospels and his blood taken at the Last Supper. This theme is predominant in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, which invokes the teachings of the New Covenant and its emphasis on charity and poverty. The duty of Christians is formed in both the Decalogue revealed by the father (The Ten Commandments which formed the basis of Mosaic law) delivered on Mount Sinai, and the Sermon on the Mount revealed by the son, the longest and most complete record of Christ's teaching in the New Testament. Both events are revelations, and are united by the Holy Spirit, revealed in Acts, thus completing the Trinity. The ballad is set during Pentecost, which associated with the Christian law established in the Old Testament. the connection to new law delivered by Christ is a natural progression. The connection between old and new law is both established in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Christ's acknowledgement he has fulfilled this prophecy in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will
> make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house
> of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
> when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of
> Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband,
> says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house

> of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.[80]

The forgiveness and the remission of sin is a prophecy of Christ himself, who teaches and responds to the Old Covenant laws in the Sermon on the Mount. Christ's words refer directly to the Old Covenant found in the Old Testament, which Christ fulfills the prophecy instead of rejecting it: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but fulfill them."[81] These are especially important in how we are to interpret the Sermon, considering Christ directly addresses the Decalogue and Mosaic Law given during the Pentecost and instead offers more inward, self-aware instructions than the Old Testament that deals with punishment for breaking Mosaic Law:

> You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment," But I say to you every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.[82]

[80] Jeremiah 31: 31-34.

[81] Matthew 5: 17.

[82] Matthew 5: 21.

In the succeeding passages Christ references the laws given during Pentecost in Exodus stressing elements of forgiveness, understanding, meekness, and spiritual poverty. The connection between the Old Testament laws given to Moses during the Pentecost and the teachings of Christ in the Gospels, specifically in Matthew are made clear in both the passage in Jeremiah and in Christ's own reference to the prophecy, and his reference to Old Testament laws in the Sermon. The comparison of Old Law next to New refigures what it is to be a Christian, but more specifically guides how one should live and practice piety.

The tradition of Christian Pentecost, while privileging the celebration of the Holy Spirit, connects the Old Testament laws and the celebration of justice to the new laws of Christ, and the role the disciples play to build the new church. In a sermon delivered on Pentecost, Augustine intertwines all three events, the Old Covenant, the new teachings of Christ, and the Holy Spirit:

> They received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And it's not without reason that we celebrate this day as a great, and indeed a very plain and evident "sacrament." But would your holinesses please notice how the old and the new scriptures harmonize with each other; in those grace is promised, in these it is given; sketched out there, completed here.
>
> . . . .
>
> We must try to understand why the Holy Spirit is called his [God's] finger.

> It's because the apostles received a division of gifts through the Holy Spirit; and the division of the hand is apparent in the fingers; with them one count and distributes. So why do the Jews celebrate Pentecost?[83]

Augustine argues this law written in the hearts of men is of fertile ground, as opposed to the hard stone of the tablets of the Old Covenant that the Jews received on Pentecost. The first Covenant was broken, but the second will prosper because of its fertile ground.[84] Secondly, the laws of Christ offer more in the way of forgiveness, as exemplified by Augustine's example later of the story in John, which an adulteress is forgiven of her sin by Christ when he utters the famous lines, "If any among you is without sin, let him to be the first to cast the stone at her."[85] This connects Christ's teachings found in the Gospels and Pentecost to a specific intent to highlight the poverty, meekness, and love of brotherhood Christ established in his Sermon on the Mount and in the Gospels.

In a thirteenth-century French sermon widely cited by medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas uses the Pentecost to discuss brotherhood and charity and identifies the Holy Spirit is a reminder of Christ's lessons in the Gospels:

> God reveals His secrets to His friends. And this is the second step of the creation which is from the Holy Spirit: that they [who are re-created] may know God in wisdom. "But I have called you friends, for all that I have

[83] Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, *Sermons* (230-272B), trans. John Rotelle, Volume III, section 7 (Augustinan Heritage, 1993), 300; 303.

[84] Ibid., 303.

[85] John 8:3.

> heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). Hence, recognition of truth is also from the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:26). Now, however much a man may be taught exteriorly, it will profit him nothing unless the grace of the Holy Spirit is interiorly present. As the Gospel says, "The anointing will teach you concerning all things." And He not only teaches the truth, but will even call it back to mind. [It is as if our Lord were saying:] "I myself am able to teach you, but you do not by this fact believe or want to fulfill what I teach. But He who brings it about that you believe and that you fulfill what you hear, *He* will call things back to mind." The Holy Spirit does this because he inclines the heart to give assent and to carry out what it hears.[86]

The appearance of the Holy Spirit during Whitsun/Pentecost acts as a baptism that reinvigorates the disciples and also remakes men, urging them to remember the lessons of Christ. Christ and the Holy Spirit are inextricable entities, and the appearance of the Holy Spirit that baptizes the disciples during the Feast of Pentecost serves also as a reminder of Christ's own baptism, which precedes his ministry in the Gospels. There he speaks of poverty, brotherhood, charity, and meekness, all qualities required of

[86] Thomas Aquinas. "Aquinas's Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost: A Rare Glimpse of Thomas the Preaching Friar," trans. Peter Kwasniewski and Jeremy Holmes, in *Faith & Reason* 30:1-2 (2005), 99-139.

Christians to imitate in order to be closer to Christ. Naturally, the sermons on Pentecost, like the one represented here by Thomas Aquinas speak of these qualities.

> Whoever does not love his brother, regardless of whatever sort of good work he may do, is dead. Charity is the life of the soul, for just as a body lives through its soul, so the soul lives through God, and God dwells in us through charity. "He who abides in charity abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn. 4:16).[87]

The poverty of spirit exhibited in the act of loving one's brother, even if he is an enemy reminds one of the charity of Christ, who gave succor to the poor. In this passage, the lack of charity and brotherly love represent spiritual death, when one chooses greed over sacrifice, or privileges self and goods over poverty and spirituality.

The connections to the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Christ in reference to poverty in the Gospels were well known in contemporary England. In John Mirk's *Festial,* the sermon on the Pentecost addresses the appearance of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, but also links the teachings of Christ as new laws for Christians. The Holy Spirit brings grace and allows men to experience poverty of spirit and meekness recalling specific lessons of Christ, represented by the Holy Ghost:

> For he þat hath [wytte to get goode he holdyn a wyse man, but he þat hath] wysdam to forsake goode and bene pore for Goddys sake he is holdyn a fole. Nerþeles, be a man nere so ryche, at þe laste he schal be pore. For noght he bringyth into þis worlde and noght he schal bere oute

[87] Ibid.

> with hym. But þe Holy Gost he bryngyth with hym boþe wytte of wyse prechying and wysdam of gode levyng. For the þat levyth wel he techeth wel, for a god ensaumpul is a gode doctrine. Þis grace os þis day was ȝeven to Crystes disciples, for þei taght wel and lyved wel, so þat be here gode techyng and gode ensaupul of lyving þe faythe of the Holy Chyrche is sprade alle aboute þe worlde.[88]

According to this sermon, the disciples were taught both knowledge and wisdom by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Here, Jesus's actions remind us of Christian poverty of spirit and those that practice good living live "poor for Goddys sake." This sermon reminds its listeners that they will leave with nothing but their reputation after death and that goods that were acquired in life cannot be taken in the afterlife. Furthermore, the poverty of spirit, beyond material poverty, is alluded to here when the sermon asserts that those who exhibit "gode living," willingly suffering for God's sake, will be rewarded in the same way Christ, who willingly took on poverty rewarded man with grace. The Holy Ghost that descended upon Pentecost also helps man with grace and conditions him to respond to the poor in charity for God's sake:

> So þe Holy Gost makyth hye hertys and proude, be þe grace þat he ȝeveth, to be lowe and meke; and hem þat lyggeth colde in envye he maketh hem warme in love and scharite; and hertus þat ben harde [i]n gendering of gode and holdying he makyth þem nesse and liberal to dele

[88] Mirk, *Festial,* 147.

> þe pore for Goddys sakw and to do many werkys of scharite; and nesche in fleshly lustus he makud harde with doing of penawnce and streytenesse of lyving. Ƿus is þe Holy Goste besy in alle ways to makyn salue to alle maner synne and to helyn þesowle of alle maner sores.[89]

The Holy Ghost invokes the justice of Christ, whose teachings expressed in the Gospels stressed poverty of spirit, which conditions man to absolve self, specifically the carnality of lusts of an animalistic nature that make up worldly wealth, for a relationship with Christ that will bring grace and salvation. This is coupled with the response Christians give to those that suffer poverty for God's sake.

Robin exhibits poverty of spirit in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, acting vulnerably when he walks into the church on Whitsun. He exhibits piety and suffering following the messages of Pentecost sermons. More directly, Robin adheres to the first and second Beatitudes, while the monk exhibits none of this behavior. Robin is prostrate before God, echoing both the poverty and the meek of Beatitudes one and two: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.[90] Modern readers automatically associate poverty and meekness as being poor in wealth and mild in composure. However, these definitions constrain the understanding of the verses. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

> The word *poor* seems to represent an Aramaic *'ányâ* (Hebrew *'anî*), bent down, afflicted, miserable, poor; while *meek* is rather a synonym from

[89] Ibid., 149.

[90] Matthew 5: 3-4.

> the same root, *'ánwan* (Hebrew *'ánaw*), bending oneself down, humble, meek, gentle. Some scholars would attach to the former word also the sense of humility; others think of "beggars before God" humbly acknowledging their need of Divine help. But the opposition of "rich" (Luke 6:24) points especially to the common and obvious meaning, which, however**, ought not to be confined to economical need and distress**, but may comprehend the whole of the painful condition of the poor: **their low estate, their social dependence, their defenseless exposure to injustice from the rich and the mighty.**[91]

This reading and conflation of humility and meekness with poverty is a part of medieval English tradition. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "povre" means "humble, meek [often with allusion to the first Beatitude (Mat.5.3)]; **~** in (of) spirit**;** ~ man; also as noun: the ~ in gost (spirit)," but also means "wretched and unfortunate"[92] "Poverte" also means "hardship," "poverty of spirit; humility."[93] This reading of poverty, employed throughout this chapter, is not reduced to sole lack of material wealth.[94]

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[91] John Peter Van Kasteren, "The Eight Beatitudes." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol.II (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), 11 Apr. 2013 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02371a.htm> (emphasis in bold is mine).

[92] *Middle English Dictionary,* s.v. "povre."

[93] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *"poverte."*

[94] Kasteran, in "The Eight Beautitudes," continues: "Besides the Lord's blessing, the promise of the heavenly kingdom is not bestowed on the actual external condition of such poverty. The blessed ones are the poor "in spirit", who by their free will are ready to bear for God's sake this painful and humble condition, even though at present they be actually rich and happy; while on the other hand, the really poor man may fall short of this poverty "in spirit"."

Although Robin and his men are not materially poor, Robin Hood bends himself down literally and bears himself humbly before God and the entire parish, exemplifying poverty of spirit: "he gos in to Seynt Mary chirch, / And knelyd down before the Rode; / All that ever were the church within / Beheld wel Robyn Hode." (71-74). Robin becomes bare before the entire congregation, in supplication of Christ's help. Earlier in the ballad, he refuses a large company, preferring to appear before God despite the imminent danger to his body that will come if he proceeds into town alone as a wanted outlaw: "'Of all my mery men,' seid Robyn, / 'Be my faith I wil non have, / But Litull John shall beyre my bow, / Til that me list to drawe.'" (35-38). He makes himself vulnerable here preferring to protect his own body though the "might of mylde Marye" (28) trusting his safety to the care of a higher power meekly showing his need for "divine help." Although John refuses to bear Robin's weapons and a squabble ensues between the men, Robin sets off by himself as he mourns on his way: "Then Robyn goes to Notyngham, / Hym selfe mornyng allone," (63-64). This grief, according to the *Middle English Dictionary,* and the preferred gloss of Knight and Ohlgren,[95] suggests Robin is contrite, like a model Christian, but it also means "love-longing, or yearning,"[96] the intense need to share in the celebration of the Pentecost. These actions are the behaviors of a model Christian in the book of Matthew, where Jesus describes he has

[95] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 39.

[96] *Middle English Dictionary,* s.v. "morning"

come to fulfill the prophecies and does not work against the old law and prophets, which are enumerated in Mosaic Law.

Robin suffers hardship, another part of the definition of "poverty" for his charity in the *Monk*, and as a result of religious intercession he is released from wrongful imprisonment. Like the disciples in Acts, Robin appears to worship despite the danger of doing so, and is imprisoned as a result. Peter and John minister and heal a cripple, one the poorest in the Bible. Because of this charity, they are arrested by the Sad'duccees in Acts 4. Their charity in response to a poor beggar, is performed in public, and when Peter speaks to defend the faith because of his actions, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and is released, presumably through the volition of God. Likewise, Robin acts in response to a cleric's violation of charity, and when he goes to the church to pray, he is imprisoned. He rushes back into the church for the right of sanctuary, but despite his right to be protected by the church, he is imprisoned by the Sheriff. When the yeomen learn of his imprisonment, they echo their faith that his belief will keep him free from harm:

> He has servyd Oure Lady many a day,
>
> And yet wil, securely;
>
> Thefor I trust in hir specialy
>
> No wyckud deth shal he dye. (133-136)

The power of speech by the Holy Spirit freed both disciples from imprisonment, and the might of Mary frees Robin through John's intercession: "And I shal be the munkis gyde, / With the might of Mylde Mary, / And I mete hym," seid Litul John / "We will go but we

too" (139-42). Here John takes care of the monk and frees Robin from wrongful imprisonment by the power of religious intercession.

More specifically, however, it is the contrast between good behavior and bad that forms the justice of the ballad. The monk is painted as a false representative of God while Robin and John are represented as following Christ's teachings on poverty. This suggests that the yeomen practice an unadulterated form of devotion and persecute those that violate the covenants of God.

While Robin Hood seems to be acting in accordance to Christian poverty of spirit, the Monk rejects these ideals. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states "But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well."[97] A sworn member of the regular clergy, the monk violates this by retaliating against Robin for a grievance he has instead of practicing humility. Although the first part of this quotation is commonly used to declare Christian pacifism in the face of violence, more broadly it instructs not to retaliate against those that harm you and to surrender yourself to be a passive entity. The Monk was attacked by Robin Hood and took money from him, which refers to the second part of the quotation above. If someone takes something from you, you should not retaliate but rather give him more, which is connected to the verse two lines below "give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you"[98]

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[97] Matthew 5: 39-40.

[98] Matthew 5: 42.

This is similar to the charity Christ requires of Christians mentioned in Mirk's and St. Thomas Aquinas' sermons on Pentecost. This passage reiterates the importance of both material poverty and spiritual poverty. The Monk, who should be living a life a voluntary poverty in imitation of Christ violates those orders by carrying a large sum of money, which he fails to distribute to those that ask of him.

The Monk's lack of charity is connected to his greed and lack of willful poverty. Thomas Ohlgren compares the Monk's wide hood described in the text to Chaucer's Monk who wore a "wide hood" suggesting his dress was expensive:

> The monk's ostentation is hinted at by 'his wyde hode,'
> while elsewhere he is described as 'gret hede' (line 75),
> no doubt referring to his costly hooded cowl. He closely
> resembles Chaucer's Monk who is also an outrider and
> wears expensive clothing, including a wide cope (VII 1949).[99]

Ohlgren adds that the sum Robin Hood has presumably stolen from him is significantly large, one hundred pounds, and is of "questionable origin."[100] This is comparable to the other sums that were stolen of clerics in other Robin Hood ballads, specifically, that in *A Gest of Robin Hode*, where the Abbot is shown clearly in collusion with the Sheriff in a profit-sharing scheme.[101] Little John and Much claim to have lost twenty marks (168), and this sum juxtaposed with the hundred pounds the Monk claims to have lost

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[99] Ohlgren, *Robin Hood.,* 59.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Christine Chism, "Thinking Globally," 14-16.

suggests severe corruption and greed within St. Mary's Abbey. The Monk's lack of the charity and his hoarding of wealth with the desire to protect it with retaliation suggest the Monk is breaking the doctrine of Christian poverty required by his vows. The Monk's literal wealth is a metaphor for his greediness and represents his unwillingness to be meek before God. He lacks the poverty in spirit, which may be related to the fact he disrupts the Mass preventing the Holy Spirit from entering his own body. Thus the text reflects the subject of both John Mirk's sermon on Pentecost, and St. Thomas' lesson on the Holy Ghost.

These comparisons between the Sermon on the Mount and the behavior of the Monk in contrast to the yeomen are relevant because the Sermon provided a blueprint for Christians, and specifically for the clergy. For example, St. Augustine proclaimed that the Sermon was a good model for Christians:

> If any one will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life: and this we do not rashly venture to promise, but gather it from the very words of the Lord Himself. For the sermon itself is brought to a close in such a way, that it is clear there are in it all the precepts which go to mould the life.[102]

[102] St. Augustine, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew*, trans. William Findlay, ed. Phillip Schaff (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 3.

Christ's ministry, the most complete of which is captured in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, outlines the laws of Christ in addition to the old laws established by God on Mt. Sinai on Pentecost. Together these are the precepts of Christian living, and together generate the core of what it is to be a just Christian. Much of what Christ teaches in Matthew is characterized by humility, temperance, and love of brotherhood, all concepts inherit in poverty of spirit and charity. Augustine saw this as a model for Christian life, but even more specifically, medieval writers saw this as a model for the clergy, thus making the Monk's violation of it even more egregious.

The Monk's anger is symptomatic of his lack of humility and spiritual poverty. Attacks in churches, especially during mass, were directly addressed in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, and the Monk further illustrates his lack of poverty of spirit by succumbing to intemperance inside the church to fulfill his revenge over his lost material wealth. Robin was kneeling at mass when the monk brought the Sheriff to attack him: "He goes in to Seynt Mary chirch, / And knelyed down before the Rode; / Alle that ever were the church within / Beheld wel Robyn Hode" (71-74). Recognized by all in the church, Robin Hood was neither harming anyone, nor disturbing the mass itself. Furthermore, the Monk clearly states he initiated the attack: "I layde furst hande hym apon, / Ye may thonke me therefore" (173-74). Not only does he admit responsibility for the attack, he wants recognition for it as well. This suggests greed and pride, which along with his intent for the attack, wrath, have the monk guilty of three of the seven deadly sins

addressed in penitential handbooks. Violence during mass is directly addressed in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*:

> And after, whan men brekeþ or brenneþ
> holi churche or holy places, as chirche-hawes
> or house of religioun, or whan men draweþ out bi
> strengþe any wyȝt þat fleþ to chirche to be socoured
> and saued þerby.
> And after, whan men maken
> conteke in holi chirche, wherby þat blod is sched.[103]

These violent actions, including using strength to draw out a man who has fled to church to be saved and succored, all happen in the *Monk*, and are related to the greater sins, such as greed, wrath, and pride of which the monk is guilty.

The Communal Welfare

The harvest festival of Shavuot, the name of the celebration of Pentecost by the Jewish people, is commanded to be upheld by God in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and continues to be celebrated by Christians providing a link between the summer festivals of Robin Hood and Pentecost. Pentecost is usually celebrated in May and set fifty days or seven Sundays after the movable feast of Easter, thereby making it possible that it coincides with early May festivals with which the Robin Hood's tradition was associated.

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[103] *The Book of Vices and Virtues.* EETS. ed. Nelson Francis. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) V. Sacrilege 36-37.

Depending on the date of Easter, which can be anywhere from the end of March to April, Pentecost could have fallen between early to late May. According to the Julian calendar, Easter was March 22nd making Pentecost May 10th in 1478.[104] In fact, the English custom was to celebrate two festival seasons per year, one during the winter solstice, and the other during the summer solstice, May to the end of June,[105] so early summer festivals coincided with the celebration of Whitsuntide, which was intimately intertwined with Robin Hood. However, the fertility of the May festival was not part of the Whitsun tradition.[106]

In addition to the close dates with May festivals, the religious feast of Whitsun was associated with Whitsun-Ales, a community celebration during Whitsuntide that was similar to the May Festivals that included Morris Dancing. This celebration was criticized heavily by early church reformers, who found the communal dancing, playing, and church money raising akin to pagan traditions as evident from this complaint from 1585:

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[104] Ron Mallen. Astronomical Society of South Australia, 2001. http://www.assa.org.au/edm#Method Although presently we use the Gregorian calendar, before October of 1582 the Julian Calendar was widely used by most Europeans. Because of the difference in the way leap years were calculated when the change was made, the Julian Calendar was 10 days behind the Gregorian Calendar in 1582. However, England didn't make the change until September 1752, thus making them several days behind the rest of the Roman Catholic world. Although May would have been May no matter what calendar one used, it is interesting to consider the near ten day discrepancy that would have made the feast of Pentecost fall very near to May first in 1478. The algorithm and explanation for the discrepancy between England and the Julian/Gregorian calendar can be read here.

[105] Johnston, "The Robin Hood of the Records," 30.

[106] Knight, *Robin Hood: Mythic Biography*, 12.

> Whereas a heathenish and ungodly custom had bene used before in many partes of this lande about this season of year [Whitsun] to have Church Ales, May games, morish dances, and other vaine pastimes upon the Sabath Dayes, and other days appointed for common prayer, which they have pretended to be for the relief of theire Churches, but indeed hath bene only a meanes to feed the mindes of the people and specially of the youth with vaine sight which is a strange perswasion among Christians, that they cannot by any other means of contribution repaire theire churches but must first do sacrifice to the Devil with Drunkenness and Dancing and other ungodly wantoness.[107]

Although the criticism above makes Whitsun-Ales sound like a Devil's Sabbath, the intent was to raise money for the church itself, which would be used to help the community. This is a communal celebration, where every person comes together to help in response to poverty.

Whitsun-Ales and the religious feast of Whitsun are a long-standing tradition for the church; however, Robin Hood's association with them is not. The first record that appears for Robin Hood and Whitsun is in 1426-27 in Exeter, the first ballad *Robin Hood and the Monk* appears in 1450, and the first play fragment is dated to 1475, thus making it impossible for us to determine a lineage with any sort of confidence. The records of the games production in Exeter, which includes a receipt for players that "played a game

[107] John Morris. *The History of Morris Dancing: 1458-1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4.

of Robin Hood," is clear, but no entire medieval plays survive. All we have are the ballads and the play fragment fifty some years later that bears a rough similarity to the seventeenth-century *Robin Hood and the Guy of Guisborne,* the play *Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham.*[108] Stephen Knight argues that the Whitsun play-games would have been performed during the play-game festivals during Whitsun,[109] but we cannot determine if the ballads inspired the games during Whitsun, or if the games inspired the ballads. Most scholars agree that the ballads were first, and if that is the case, the rise of Robin Hood's association with Whitsuntide could be derived from the appearance of poverty and charity in both traditions. In any case, the Robin Hood festivals during Whitsun directly tie the Robin Hood tradition to communal charity, a connection only implicitly in the ballads.

As Paul Whitfield White has argued, the Robin Hood tradition is intimately connected to communal fundraising, specifically for the church. In fact, religious guilds, some named the "Youngmen" (the linguistic forbearer of the word yeomen) put on festivals during Whitsun:

> Parish religious guilds quickly recognized the popular appeal of Robin Hood as a means of collecting funds, particularly for expensive one-time projects. Thus when the Holy Rood and St. Christopher Guilds of Bodmin,

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[108] Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography,* 8-10.

[109] See Francis Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, volume 3 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 90; David Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood,* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 43. The only one to challenge the ballad first view is George Swan "Robin Hood's 'Irish Knife," *University of Mississippi Studies in English*, 11-12 (1993-95): 65-66.

> Cornwall, needed money to build the "Berry Tower" above the chantry chapel of the Holy Rood, which they used for worship and meeting, "Robyn hoode and his felowys' organized a 'gaderying' n the parish on two occasion in 1505/6, the first of which produced 9s.[110]

Although the communal fundraising for the church seems to be a positive element of Robin Hood practice, the attack on Whitsun-Ales above is commonplace for the period, as many church reformers found the customs of fundraising for the church by the community through games and pastimes, specifically those sponsored by religious guilds, to be reminiscent of Catholicism. In those cases, the tradition persisted, but the guilds changed their name to something less "papist."[111]

The Robin Hood Games raised money for community projects and were sponsored by the church as a part of charity to the community, mirroring actions in the ballads themselves. Hoggling and Hocking, both practices encouraged by churchwardens played on mock theft and payment for song and performance were used by religious guilds in the sixteenth century to raise money for communal needs, mirroring the theft Robin Hood commits in the ballads to support his own yeomen community, or the money he gives to ease the poverty of a humble knight in the *Gest*.[112]

The emphasis on Whitsun ties the *Monk* to the Robin Hood games. Both the central tenants of Christianity and the practice of communal goods through Christian

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[110] White, *Drama and Religion,* 53-54.

[111] White, *Drama and Religion,* 52. White investigates the practices of hoggling and hocking.

[112] Ibid., 49-52.

charity are alluded to in Whitsun. These two facts set the tone for the religious justice Robin will seek in the ballad, as most quests are adventures to right a wrong. Robin not only tries to participate in the central tenets of his religion by attending mass on a feast day, he also upholds his faith by punishing those that seek to interfere with it and those that violate the Christian concept of poverty. Paul Whitfield White has argued that the inclusion of the Robin Hood figure into the Whitsun tradition could have sprung from the "holy Robin" tradition in the ballads. He gives evidence that Robin participates as a true Christian.[113]

Although Paul Whitfield White's analysis of the holy Robin tradition acknowledges the values that Robin and his men exhibit as model Catholics that possibly made texts like *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *A Gest of Robyn Hood* popular tales for the church to capitalize on, his reading overlooks the tradition of Whitsun as a religious holiday that illustrates appropriate responses to poverty through charity. As I have shown, this tradition is established in both continental and English sermons, from classical Church Fathers to contemporary medieval parish priests. *Robin Hood and the Monk* continues conventional clerical teaching, and allusion to Whitsuntide highlights the ballad's emphasis on Christian poverty and charity. The ballad can be seen as an animated Whitsun sermon that joins the festivity of Whitsun to the festivals of communal response to the practical problems of poverty.

Conclusion

[113] White, *Drama and Religion*, 59-62.

The story of the formation of the early church in the *Acts of the Apostles* and Jesus' delivery of the New Covenant in the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew* may seem at first glance unusual places to situate *Robin Hood and the Monk*, but the setting of the ballad during the religious feast of Pentecost beg the reader to do so. *Acts* focuses directly upon the efforts of the twelve apostles to build the church after Christ's crucifixion, ascension, and resurrection. It illustrates an emergent religious group that becomes the Church of Rome by first following Jewish customs and by gradually making distinctions between themselves and their former religious affiliation. The book chronicles the spread of their belief system from Jerusalem, where they create a group of self-sufficient Jewish religious adherents to Rome, and where they integrate Gentiles into the church. Likewise, the Robin Hood ballads seek to define yeoman identity, and in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, to define yeoman religious practice. In is this exposition we can see the similarities of the yeomen characters to biblical figures and can recognize the parallel to the yeomen journey to make themselves distinct from other social groups, by establishing their moral authority apart from church and state.

Robin Hood and the Monk not only establishes a yeomen holy Catholic tradition as argued by White, it also depicts yeomen as defenders of the faith by their modeling of material and spiritual responses. By acting like Christ and his disciples in the ballads, Robin Hood's yeomen become more holy than the clergy itself and participant in establishing a lay religious identity. This identity highlights their investment in community, for by punishing the Monk they rewrite the narrative of the early disciples

defending the faith in front of the Sad'duccees and also rewrite romance narratives that feature knights protecting the faith from deterioration.

Through the celebration of Whitsun the ballad demonstrates an engagement with widespread medieval discourses on poverty previously overlooked in Robin Hood scholarship. While Robin Hood does not steal from the rich and give to the poor, he displays poverty of spirit, which is more central to Christian teaching on humility, temperance, and suffering than material poverty itself. However, lack of material poverty does play a role in highlighting spiritual decay in certain characters in the ballads, specifically the Monk in *Robin Hood and the Monk.* Examining the sermon tradition in conjunction with the holiday of Pentecost uncovers the rich tradition of poverty in the Whitsun Mass, the sermon tradition, and the festivals associated with the celebration of Pentecost providing a new understanding of the ballad.

CHAPTER TWO: THE JUSTICE OF YEOMAN FELLOWSHIP

Unlike the narratives of *fin amor* from the romance tradition but like the narratives of war in chivalric romance, the relationships in the Robin Hood ballads center on homosociality. The ballads draw attention to male bonds by the repetition of words that describe them, such as "friend," "fellow," "master," that appear numerous times throughout the medieval Robin Hood texts, most notably in trials of character that end with reward or punishment. These bonds appear to be drawing on a multitude of models available to men in the late Middle Ages in order to establish acceptable and unacceptable forms of homosocial bonds for yeomen.

The yeoman brotherhood in the Robin Hood ballads operates in a self-serving manner, and while individual desires are punished in favor of the communal benefit of yeomen, the yeoman system of brotherly bonds negotiates a complex system of shifting ideals in both urban and rural culture, where yeomen are working out their social identity. As Paul Strohm has shown in the *Canterbury Tales*, love is expressed in feudal terms, and so the text uses the language of feudal terms. Likewise, the Robin Hood ballads use the language and concepts of vassalage and aristocratic brotherhood.[114] The bond within the yeoman group is founded upon concepts of aristocratic brotherhood, as defined by the feudal practices of vassalage. I argue that the fellowship of Robin and his

[114] In *Social Chaucer* (Harvard University Press, 1989), Paul Strohm has shown that the language of love, derives its force from the concept of feudal service based on homage (vassalage), and is closely connected to what Maurice Keen has dubbed the chivalric "brotherhood of arms" (aristocratic brotherhood). Strohm notes that the concept of brotherhood and of marriage in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* made through various oaths and pledges of truth serves to critique false bonds made for individual profit in the fourteenth century (88-109).

men is modeled after concepts of aristocratic brotherhood (such as maintenance), and operates both in contrast to and in concert with ideal forms of aristocratic brotherhood. Aristocratic brotherhood privileges sublimation of self to a lord (vassalage) and the ideals of honor over individual will (chivalry), and sometimes unjustly protects networks over truths (maintenance-at-law). I show the vacillating relationship between lord and vassal in *Robin Hood and The Monk*, *Robin Hood and the Potter,* and *A Gest of Robin Hode* is a symptom of the anxiety over the violation of common profit. A representation of equals that band together to survive in a world on the social crossroads, the yeoman fellowship attempts to establish yeoman identity by administering justice penalizing those those that violate oaths of friendship and community, and rewarding those that uphold communal bonds approved by yeomen.

One kind of bond in the *Gest* is to the "friend." "Friend" is different from "vassal" in that a friend is not bound by oath as devised in legal treatises, nor is it like a "brother" who is bound by social class or group identification, as defined in guild literature. Sir Richard looks for a friend to protect him from his enemies, and to help him in a time of trouble, but instead finds those that act in self-interest. The highest frequency of the word "friend" appears in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* when the knight Sir Richard of the Lee calls upon numerous persons inside St. Mary's Abbey to support him thereby highlighting the *unfriendly* behavior of others: the aristocracy, the men of law, and clergy. These groups in the Robin Hood ballads fail to provide for the general welfare of the community and choose instead to increase their coffers by unjust alliances. Sir Richard repeats the phrase "be my frende," three separate times in twelve short lines

first to the Justice, then to the Sheriff, and last to the Abbot, all representatives sworn under oath to protect true justice, and in the case of the Abbot, the poor:

> “Now, good syr justice, 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 frend!”
>
> “Nay, for God,” sayd he.
>
> “Now, good syr abbot, be my frende,
>
> For thy curteyse,
>
> 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 pounde
>
> Of money good and free.” (422-36)

Sir Richard asks to be defended from his foes to the Sheriff and Justice, those that were employed to uphold justice. He also asks the Abbot to protect him, and even pledges to serve him until he has the payment for him. Sir Richard asks these men to do their jobs, and in the case of the Abbot, he makes an oral promise to serve in exchange for protection. This promise is basically a pledge of vassalage, like the various pledges men made to those in power for protection. The Abbot rejects him because he stands to gain

more benefit from taking his land. This scene highlights abandonment of common profit in favor of individual gain that replaces the idealistic oath of allegiance in the ballads.

Sir Richard finds both financial and platonic friends in Robin Hood and his yeomen. Their friendship illustrates the increased power of the yeoman both financially and socially, as Robin and his men fulfill the roles of vassalage and maintenance for Sir Richard and alter the model of aristocratic brotherhood to include yeomen, which reflects their increased socio-economic power. In order to understand how this works, the next section defines the relationship between maintenance and vassalage, and shows how these concepts are adapted by the Robin Hood ballads.

Two Medieval Localities and the Practice of Maintenance

In the literature of romance and in retinue-based manorial relationships found in legal treatises, a lord directs his men by his will, and the vassal is required to take orders from his lord. The vassal loses his equality in this social alliance to serve the good of the lord. In the traditional interpretation of the maintenance of vassals, a lord and vassal have a bond that promotes communal safety and welfare, and as long as the lord operates in service of good, his retainer should, in theory, support his will. In the ballads we see three forms of social organization: the first is ideal and operates like the selfless lord-retainer relationship, which is represented by the nostalgic Greenwood; the second is corrupt and promotes the individual over all, which is represented outside of the Greenwood; and the third, the fellowship, which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, on the crossroads of both, which balances the two worlds of rigid

individualism and selfless deference. When the two worlds of idealism and corruption collide, the bonds between men are strained. In these moments, the yeoman who chooses individual gain over yeoman community is punished. Such punishments are testaments to the attempt of the medieval Robin Hood corpus to *define* and *create* what is to be a yeoman by drawing on acceptable and unacceptable bonds in late medieval society. The transgressions of Robin and his men suggest that their social identity is not stable and is instead vulnerable to the same corruptions of the townspersons that are scrutinized in the ballads. As a result, the resolution of fellowship represents an ideal form, one that is never really narrated or achieved perfectly in the text.

The town is presented as corrupt in contrast to the idealism of the Greenwood. In town, the organization in theory is an extension of the lord vassal relationship, for the king is the ultimate lord and his men, the town officials—religious and judicial--report back to him and should serve the king's greater good of the king's subjects following the shift to the participatory government. As Christine Chism has shown, the centralization of law was maintained by local officials acting on behalf of the king. Locally appointed officials, most notably "citizens, gentry, and nobility" were assigned to "staff the system."[115] They were bound by oaths of service to the king for the good of the people, but violated such oaths of service in favor of profit. The system when it worked properly (if it ever did) relied on a concept called "maintenance." "Maintenance" is defined in a variety of medieval texts referenced in the *Middle English Dictionary* as "support, backing, financial provision, and upkeep" and is generally associated with "the keeping

[115] Christine Chism, "Thinking Globally," 14-15.

of a number of retainers or other supporters."[116] In fact, although the term "maintenance" has been associated with "livery and maintenance" in legal scholarship, and therefore with bastard feudalism after the dissolution of the manorial system, the other forms of maintenance, specifically that of positive support, are rarely the subject of discussion. "Maintenance," although strictly defined is the relationship between a lord and his retinue, was a concept that bound servant to master, peasant to vassal, and vassal to lord in the manorial system as articulated in legal documents; however, it is also one that permeated throughout medieval society, and was not entirely bound to manors. Husbands and wives, fathers and sons, lawyers and barons, and even the structure of the church operated similarly.[117] Although it is easy to forget maintenance, in theory, operated to the benefit of all in medieval society, the majority of its appearances in late medieval documents speak to the negative practices that are associated with legal maintenance, especially those of maintenance-at-law. These texts allude to such practices as "abetting a wrong-doer," "wrongful or officious interference in others' law suits, especially by a lord or his followers trading on his political influence" or "money, bribery," an erosion of the support that originally bound men together in the practice of maintenance.[118]

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[116] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "maintenaunce."

[117] Kathleen E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed, and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2009), 4. Kennedy argues: "as the *Middle English Dictionary* reminds us: for the English from the late fourteenth century onward, maintenance meant supportive behavior, whether for the good or for the bad. After all, maintenance—strictly speaking, being provided for or providing the wherewithal to live—was the business of just about everyone.

Two types of maintenance appear in the Robin Hood ballads: helpful (such as support and upkeep), and self-serving (such as maintenance-at-law). The self-serving forms appear in the lack of support Sir Richard has from his fellow knights and in the scenes between the Sheriff of Nottingham, the Abbot of St. Mary's, and the Justice of the Shire. The king's men act in the interests of the individual, and the political alliances are at odds with the mutual welfare of maintenance, for each alliance in town is portrayed as corrupt, violating the good of community. The helpful type of maintenance, specifically the type that Robin and his men practice, did not just consist of economic relationships. Instead, it was a bond of kinship or mutual affection, which was the basis upon which medieval society operated.[119] These two juxtaposed forms deliberately establish the practices of good yeomanry in the ballads and serve as the measuring stick for the justice Robin Hood and his men administer through punishment to those that violate their oaths in favor of greed.

On the other hand, the Greenwood is portrayed as an ideal place outside of any "real" late medieval locality. It is nostalgic, a throw back to a perceived past that was mistakenly thought to be a simpler time, and a place of fantasy, a projection of existence without the complexity of conflict. In this setting, Robin and his men live off of the natural economy, consuming the king's deer, fowl, and fish, and items of status.

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[118] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "maintenaunce"

[119] Kennedy, *Maintenance*, 4. The helpful type of maintenance is illustrated in aristocratic romance between a king and his retainers such as the protection, upkeep, and gifts that are exchanged between two persons, which is violated by King Arthur in Marie de France's *Lanval*. See Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glynn Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1999).

White bread, fine wines, livery, and weapons seem to materialize out of thin air. We never see Robin Hood or his men going into town to purchase or barter for livelihood. The only financial transactions occur on the crossroads, suggesting that these items are an extension of the outlaw's natural economy. This fantasy world operates in contrast to the corruption of the medieval city. But such idyllic places never existed. As mentioned earlier, the classical understanding of the cash economy rising in town is a misunderstanding of the medieval economy. According to medieval historians, the cash economy had been present in the rural economy well before the fourteenth-century.[120] Thus, the rise of rural wage labor helped define yeomen as powerful members of the socially stratified rural cash economy. However, the depiction of the Greenwood as a rural place that operated without money is a deviation from the practices documented by historians, so it is important to identify why the Greenwood is idealized in the ballads as a place that seems to operate so seamlessly and without any sort of labor or exchange.

The Greenwood's ideal setting is part of an attempt to legitimize yeoman identity as naturally chivalric and therefore honorable through the concept of vassalage. The relationships there operate like a lord vassal relationship, which draws upon the fictionalized and romanticized nostalgia from manorial settings where knights owned land, practiced chivalry, and had a wide network of social relationships that in theory

[120] See M.M. Postan, *Medieval Economy and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975) and Rodney Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985). Both authors have challenged the classical Marxist view of the rise of the cash economy in the city, and Hilton argues that since the twelfth century the agrarian community was thoroughly monetized, and even highly stratified. For a thorough, but concise discussion of this conversation, see Lee Patterson: '"No Man His Reason Herde," 113-55.

operated without corruption.[121] "Vassalage" is a political agreement made between a lord and retainer, but the agreement also had military and social meaning.[122] The ceremony is characterized by homage, an oath of fealty, and a kiss of contract. The most complete description of this ceremony appears in Flanders in 1127:

> Then joining his hands together, he placed them in the hands of the count, and they bound themselves together by a kiss. . . and pledged fidelity 'I promise on my faith to be faithful from now on to count William and to observe my homage completely, in good faith and without deceit, against all men,' and this he swore on the relics of the saints.[123]

Although the above ceremony concerns members of the aristocracy, the oath of fealty, complete surrender, and ritualized swearing upon an instrument or relic was not just limited to lords and their knights. In fact, such ceremonies were required of all members of a feudal estate. The ceremony appears in the *Statutes of the Realm* in 1275 and in varied ceremonies for villein and freemen:

> When a Freeman shall do fealty to his Lord, he shall hold his Right Hand upon a book, and shall say thus "Hear you my Lord R. that I, P. shall be to

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[121] Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philedelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 165-205. Green argues the Greenwood operates under folk-law and is nostalgic in its presentation (193-96).

[122] Joseph Strayer, *Feudalism* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1965), 13. Where Gansholf stressed the military duties of feudalism, Joseph Strayer paints a much more nuanced portrait of it including the politico-military duties of a vassal or *fideles* to his lord that extended and became codified as socio-economic as well.

[123] Galbert of Bruges, *De Multro Karoli comitis Flandriarum.* ed. H. Pirenne (Paris, 1891), 89, rpt. in Joseph Strayer, *Feudalism*, 122.

> you both faithful and true, and shall owe my Fidelity unto you, for the Land that I hold of you, and lawfully shall do such Customs and Services, as my Duty is to you, at the times assigned. So help me God and all his Saints.[124]

A vassal places his hands in his lord's hands in homage and declares his intent to protect the lord, and this hand holding symbolizes "self-surrender of one person to another. The placing of the hands of the vassal between those of the lord symbolized the placing of the vassal's person at the lord's disposition."[125] A vassal then makes an oath of fealty, which states the vassal's intent to serve the lord with good intention, followed by a kiss to seal the contract.[126] This ceremony, full of pomp and spectacle, recalls the ceremony of knighthood, which also features a full surrender of the body to a higher cause of protecting the realm. However, the *Statutes of the Realm* also include oath ceremonies for freemen and villein. Both ceremonies operate upon principles of honor and service. The relationships in the Greenwood also bear a striking resemblance to the duties of a vassal.

The oath of vassalage is significant in our discussion of Robin Hood, as oaths, trouthe-plights, and other verbal forms of allegiance and pledging figure prominently into the text. In fact, characters are tested upon their oaths, words, and through the

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[124] *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain, From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts*1 (London: Record Commission, 1810-1828), 227-28.

[125] F. L. Ganshof, *Feudalism,* 3rd ed. trans. Philip Grierson (London: Longmans, 1964), 74.

[126] Ibid., 78.

truth-telling games Robin plays with characters he meets upon the road. It is based upon this examination that Robin judges character and either penalizes or rewards action. These oaths, while not formal pledges of fealty, remind the reader that ritualized oaths and pledges of good behavior are an important part of establishing male bonds.

The ceremony of the oath of fealty is removed from the great hall to the Greenwood under the "trestle tree," which the *Middle English Dictionary* defines as "a construction consisting of a crossbeam or beams attached to the trunk of a tree to provide a concealed seat for a hunter," an apt yeoman replacement for the great hall and symbol of Robin's sylvan abode.[127] Instead of a vassal having his hands enveloped by his lord, Robin Hood's potential fellows utter oaths, pass tests with words, and pledge allegiance to Robin Hood or to other yeomen in the band. These oaths invoke the formal practice of vassalage, which was encouraged, according to historian Strayer, in order to "establish a private and personal bond between himself [king, lord] and his officials."[128]

The bonds between the king and his officials are weak in town in comparison to oaths and bonds made between men are strong in the Greenwood. In *Robin Hood and the Potter,* the potter Robin meets and tries to exact toll from is called "felow" (40) by Robin, and "yemen" (61) by the narrator, an awkward but telling choice of terms since he is a craftsman, not a yeoman but also of the middle strata. They fight together over a

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[127] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "trestle."

[128] Strayer, *Feudalism*, 37.

toll until the potter identifies himself as a follower of good yeomanry (and by doing so names himself a yeoman), which immediately causes Robin to stop his attack and pledge brotherhood and a financial enterprise to the potter: "'He ys fol leytell cortesey,' seyde the potter, / 'As I hafe harde weyse men saye, / Yeffe a pore yeman com drywyng over the way, / To let hem of hes gorney" (85-88). Robin stops his attack and in the next twenty lines speaks the phrase, "by my trouth" twice: "'Be mey trowet, thow seys soyt,' / 'Thow seys god yemenrey; / And thow dreyffe for the yevery day, / Thouw schalt never be let for me'" (89-92). It is as if these words identify the potter as a member of the yeomanry. They operate as code words or as a pledge of good faith to the yeomen, which allows Robin to identify a friend he can enter a fellowship with: "'Y well prey the, god potter, / A felischipe well thou haffe? (93-4), that ends with another pledging of trouth: "'Y grant thereto' seyde the potter, / Thow schalt feyde me a felow gode; bot thow can sell mey pottys well, / Come ayen as thow yede.' / 'Nay, be mey trowt,' seyde Roben" (98-101). While not as ritualized as the oaths made in vassalage and maintenance, this exchange features the trouthe-plight, a well-identified oath of contract in folk-law,[129] the value-system of yeoman, and the term "fellowship," which identifies mutual financial benefit to these self-identified yeomen through a verbal contract, a place, and ritual. The oaths made between these men replace the formal oath of vassalage and instead bound men based on a similar set of ideas, specifically those beneficial to yeoman, and in turn put them into mutual benefit of each other.

[129] Firth-Green, *Crisis of Truth*, 41-70.

The Yeoman Vassal in the Greenwood

The ballads feature a social structure in the Greenwood with Robin as a lord and John as his vassal that attempts to idealize the Greenwood as a place of lasting pledges of service between a lord and his vassal. At first, this seems a curious departure from the equality of the fellowship that I will present later, but it serves as a counterpart to what the ballads see as the lack of lasting oaths of maintenance between men in towns. At the beginning of *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, John calls Robin, "Maister" (19; 41;), and when questioned by the Knight about the person whom John calls master, John replies, "Robyn Hode" (102). John looks to his lord for guidance, as does a vassal:

> Tell us wheder that we shal go,
> And what life that we shall lede.
> Where we shall take, where we shall leve,
> Where we shall abide behyden;
> Where we shall robbe, where we shal reve,
> Where we shall bete and bynde. (43-48)

Here John looks for leadership. It is clear he looks to his master for directions on every account of his life just as the accounts of the oath of vassalage in legal treatises outline. John looks for guidance on what sort of life he should lead, a selfless act that casts him in the role of a vassal. He also looks to Robin to determine what sort of quests they will undertake, including specific sanctions on what to take and leave, who to beat and bind, and where they should go. This complete surrender to a lord's rule is characteristic of vassalage as conventionally depicted in legal treatises.

As both historians Strayer and Ganshoff elaborate, the most important duty of a vassal to the lord was military protection, as the origin of feudalism was to provide service in war according to early legal treatises. A vassal was required to protect the physical body of the lord and, depending on the situation, was expected to supply his body in battle or supply soldiers for the lord in times of war.[130] The role of the lord in relationship to the vassal was similar to the protection that was required of the vassal to the lord. Knights were expected to protect their lord's interests, especially when it came to defending their land against invaders. A fourteenth-century chivalric treatise by Geoffroi de Charney describes this as an honor and a counter-part to contracts of feudal vassalage:

> I shall therefore speak first of those who seek out and participate in the wars in their own locality without going into distant regions . . . to defend the honor and inheritance of their rightful lord who maintains them, for the faith and loyalty which they owe to their lord cannot be better demonstrated than by serving him and assisting him loyally in such urgent need as that of war which is so grave as to put person, land and resources at risk.[131]

[130] Ganshoff, *Feudalism*, 87; In *Feudalism,* Strayer also mentions the military origins of feudalism, but also acknowledges that if feudalism was only to give men for war, it would have failed significantly as vassals retained fiefs and "began to strive to reduce the amount of military service they owed" (29). On a large scale, mercenaries would have been hired, but rather than focus on the real practice of feudalism, which of course, did not function ideally, I seek to examine such nostalgia in the ballads to establish the nature of vassalage in the Greenwood.

[131] Geoffroi de Charney. *The Book of Chivalry,* eds., Richard Kaeuper, and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 49.

Charney sees the pursuit of arms in war as one of the most honorable. Violence in the service of justice to your lord is the duty of the knight according to *Book of Chivalry*. A lord has a bond to his men, and that bond is upheld in every part of life. This is not only apparent in the description of the ceremony of vassalage and in the duties of a knight in chivalric treatises, but also in the literature of knights, romance, which according to Maurice Keen both inspired and reflected the practice of "real" knighthood.[132] In *The Song of Roland*, vassalage is understood in terms of warfare. A vassal should never flee a battle, even when it seems his own death is imminent: "The Franks say: 'A curse on him who flees. / No one of us will fail you for fear of death" (1048-49). Deserting one's lord on the battlefield was considered cowardly, and a vassal was expected to suffer for his lord:

> Oliver said: 'Lord companion, I think
> We may have a battle with the Saracens.'
> Roland replies: 'And may God grant it to us.
> It is our duty to be here for our king;
> For his lord a vassal must suffer hardships
> Endure great heat and great cold
> And he must lose both hair and hide.
> Now let each man take care to strike great blows,

[132] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 2-3

So that no one can sing a shameful song about us.[133]

The suffering on the battlefield puts the lord above the physical comforts of the vassal. The vassal must fight and be brave and understand that the will of his lord is more important than his own body.

In the ballads John protects the reputation of Robin connecting him with the code of war found in vassalage in romances and chivalric treatises. Little John is concerned with Robin Hood's reputation and martial success, following the traditional oath of a vassal defending the honor of his lord. When the Monk in the *Gest* says of Robin Hood "He is a stronge thefe. . . Of hym herd I never good" (883-84), Little John charges the Monk with lying and threatens him physically: "'Thou lysest,' than sayd Lytell Johan, / 'And that shall rewe thee'" (885-86). The threat of violence in service of higher ideals recalls both vassalage and chivalry, where the knight was required to use his own body to protect the land and his lord in battle. In addition, the value of the vassal's body to the lord is observable in Little John's protective actions in the *Gest*. When he is shot in the knee, unable to move, he would rather die than hinder his lord:

"Mayster,' then sayd Lytell Johan,
'If ever thou lovest me,
And for that ylke Lordes love
That dyed upon a tre,
And for the medes of my servyce,

[133] *Chanson de Roland*. trans. Burgess, Glynn. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 1006-14.

That I have served the,

Lete never the proude sheryf

Alyve now fynde me.

but take out thy bronde swerde,

And smythe all of my hede,

And gyve me woundes depe and wyde,

No lyfe on me be lefte." (1209-20)

The repetition of the word "service" especially next to "love" makes the reader aware that Little John verbally renews his oath of fealty and his bonds to Robin because love and service are concepts deployed in oaths of fealty through the kiss and the sacrifice of life for another in romance. A vassal dies in battle for his lord, and he is not afraid of death. Here, John is wounded and rather than jeopardizing Robin's success in battle, John asks Robin to kill him. Death is the ultimate sacrifice for a warrior, hearkening back to the philosophy of lords and vassals being tightly connected. This connection is so striking that the King comments "His men are more at his byddinge / then my men be at myn" further drawing a parallel between the ideal bonds of the Greenwood and the self-serving non-yeoman bonds that permeate the text (1563-64). The own King's men seem to not be as truly devoted to him as Robin Hood's.

The bond between a vassal and a lord is not only about the vassal suffering for the love of the lord, but rather it is a reciprocal bond of love. In *Le Morte Arthur*, King Arthur's suffering as a lord is stressed. He cries when the captives of Lucius are reported to him, he avenges Sir Kay's death, and praises his lords:

I must honour above all on earth those

Who when I was away waged my battles.

I shall love them while I live, with Our Lord's help,

And allot them the spacious lands they like best.

Those who suffered wounds for my sake by these soft waters.

Shall gain from this game if I am granted life.[134]

King Arthur's emotional response speaks to the genuine care and love he has for his men. The love that he speaks of is transmitted when he avenged the deaths of his vassals, and when he sheds tears for the loss of life during his battles. Even more moving, however, is his selfless act of giving to his men. He does not hoard wealth for his own sake. Rather, he distributes it out of love and for the good of all.

Likewise, Robin displays love for his men. Most importantly, he sees his men as more than disposable entities for his own protection; the men that are connected to him are his close comrades, and he would rather act loyally to them than desert them. When Little John asks Robin Hood to kill him after John has been wounded, Robin Hood replies: "I wolde not that, sayd Robyn, / 'Johan, that thou were slawe, / For all the golde in mery Englonde, / Thought it lay now on a rawe" (1221-24). Robin puts the welfare of his men over his self, identifying him as an ideal feudal lord, who treasures his men above money. Robin says he would reject money if it were before him to preserve the life of John. In addition, Robin carries Little John on his back when it could have brought

[134] *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 1595-1600.

more harm to his self than good. In these ways, Robin chooses the safety of his men over himself, showing a bond of love.

The lord also granted clothes and weapons to the vassal yearly, even if the vassal had been given a fief, a practice known as livery and maintenance. According to thirteenth-century philosopher Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln, whose text *Rules* was a conduct book for household management, it was mandatory for maintained men to display his band: "Order your knights and your gentlemen who wear your livery that they ought to wear that same livery every day, and especially at your table in your presence to uphold your honour."[135] Robin, likewise, keeps his men in good clothes to display his band of men: "And everych of them a good mantell / Of scarlet and of ray" (917-18). He also gives liveries to the knight Sir Richard when he joins them in the Greenwood. Liveries are an important part of maintenance in medieval practice. These clothes identify one's patron, represent his value-system, and warn others of the protection received from powerful lords. Robin Hood's gift of clothes—here scarlet instead of the stereotypical green we associate with him—identifies these men as a working unit rather than unaffiliated bandits roaming the countryside.

The lord-retainer relationship is loosely maintained in the Greenwood in order to establish these yeomen as chivalric and capable of following oaths of service and love to other yeomen, but it is not a flawless system. This relationship falls apart at notable times: when one man seeks profit or fame above another thus violating the code to act

[135] *Walter of Henley's Husbandry: Together with an Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules.* ed. E Lamond (London, 1890), 85.

in the best interest of the group. At times, Robin Hood feels his men to be his inferiors, and wishes them to serve as a vassal would traditionally serve his lord. In other cases, Robin Hood treats his men as his social equals. Similarly, Much and John act as traditional vassals when it promotes the good of the Greenwood and like equals when one person violates the law of community. Sometimes Robin's men submit to his authority, as they do after the "buffeting" game in the forest in the *Gest*, and sometimes they resist central leadership in favor of fellowship, as in the case when John beats Robin in *Robin Hood and the Monk*. As long as the good of yeomen is promoted, the band relies on these principles. It is only when self-interest threatens to destroy the community of yeomen that punishment is introduced.

Common Profit and Just Punishment

There are moments in the Robin Hood texts that illustrate what happens when the bonds of community disintegrate and individual actions are promoted above the good of the community. When these actions are presented, the character in the Greenwood is punished, either by money, shame, or failure, and a new peace, a fellowship, is established promoting the accepted goals of the social group rather than the individual. This is the third type of social organization that operates on the crossroads of both self-promotion of the town and the idyllic selfless deference represented by the Greenwood. The text introduces the organization of fellowship when characters fail to promote the good of the yeomen group in favor of individual interests.

Moments of individual profit are always punished in the text. When Robin ventures out on his own, for example, the reader is urged to understand that

community is important, and no man can act for selfish purposes alone. In *Robin Hood and the Monk* this happens in a moment when gambling is used to settle a disagreement over who is to serve whom. Robin Hood wishes to go to Mass, and when Moche suggests that he "Take twelve of thi wyght yemen, / Well Weppynd, be thi side" (31-2), Robin Hood refuses all of their help except Little John's. However, he doesn't want Little John to come just as his man, but to serve him as a page: "Of all my mery men,' seid Robyn, / 'Be my feith I wil non have, / But Littul John shall beyre my bow, / Til that me list to draw" (35-38). Robin wants him to carry his bow until he needs to use it. Because John does not want to carry his bow, this is a moment of resistance to the traditional practice of vassalage because vassals were to carry the weapons of their men, and hold the stirrups while they mounted a horse. However, there is no reason John should carry Robin's gear other than to boost Robin's ego; the yeomen only play inferior when there is some reason for them to do so.

According to the ballads, Robin's need to have a man serve him is for entirely selfish purposes, status and power and illustrates the same temptation of cupidity with which the townspersons struggle, a bond void of feeling that the ballads punish through economic loss and physical violence. However, John rejects his role as a sometimes servant for Robin's profit, and directly refuses such an arrangement: "Thou shall beyre thin own,' seid Litull Jon, / 'Maister, and I wyl beyre myne, / And we well shete a peny,' seid Litull Jon," (39-41). John suggests that he has equal rank, where he will bear his own bow and Robin will bear his. Furthermore, the game of shooting a penny requires skill, and John proposes this to put them both on equal ground again. To further drive

the point about bonds for individual profit the ballad introduces a second selfish action by Robin. Robin proposes a gambling game to assert his dominance[136] over Little John: "I wil not shete a peny,' seyd Robyn Hode, / 'In feith, Litull John, with the, / But ever for on as thou shetis,' seide Robyn, / 'In feith I holde the three" (43-46). Robin bets John three pennies to John's one, and Robin loses five shillings to John. Robin asserts his physical dominance through skill, but also his financial dominance, illustrating two of the ways that yeomen perform justice in the ballads. When John claims that he has won that money, Robin gets angry, loses his composure, and hits John. John draws his sword and tells Robin: "'Were thou not my maiseter,' seid Litull John, / 'Thou shuldis by hit ful sore; 'Get the a man wher thou wille, / For thou getis me no more'" (59-62). John realizes that Robin has treated him unfairly here. Here the reader catches a glimpse of what happens to the bond between these men when the entire agreement fails to support anyone. Robin ventures into town without his men, and he is captured and imprisoned. Robin asserts dominance for his own individual ego, in contrast to when Robin acts like a lord and his men like vassals for the benefit of the entire yeoman community. When Robin dominates without mutual benefit, he is punished thus showing the text's desire to establish yeoman social norms of community.

The promotion of the individual over the community is penalized in Robin Hood, which becomes clear only when John and Much come to rescue the imprisoned Robin.

[136] In "Little John and *Robin Hood and the Monk*" *Robin Hood: Medieval And Post Medieval,* ed. Phillips, Helen (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), Derek Pearsall sees Robin's betting as "a shockingly arrogant way of asserting his superiority" (45).

They re-establish the terms of their bond, and use the language of oaths under the trestle tree:

‘I have done the a gode turne,’ seid Litull John,
‘For sothe as I the say;
I have brought the under the grene-wode lyne;
Fare wel, and have gode day.’
‘Nay, be my trouth,’ seid Robyn,
‘so shal hit never be;
I make the maister,’ seid Robyn,
‘Of all my men and me.’
‘Nay, be my trouth,’ seid Litull John,
‘So shalle hit never be’
But lat me be a felow,’ seid Litul John,
‘No noder kepe I be.’ (307-318)

The words “master” and “fellow” renegotiate the terms of their relationship. Robin gives up his perceived authority over John, and John voices his intent to exist as an equal. The repetition of “trouth” twice under the “grene-wode lyne” or trestle tree has reestablishes their oaths to each other. When Robin gives up complete authority, acknowledging he cares more about Little John than his own individual rank and status, he understands that selflessness characterizes any good social agreement. Peace is restored when John reminds Robin that he is not his servant, rather he is a man with whom he is united for the common goals of a group. Derek Pearsall argues the

fellowship John proposes is "a community that he cannot have, neither from Robin nor from the society that found itself an admiring and enthusiastic audience of the Robin Hood ballads and play in the late fifteenth century."[137] However untenable the wish is, the fellowship John proposes works to establish yeoman identity. Each man expects to serve for the good of the yeoman group. While this may have been a wishful thought, in text it communicates the desires of the yeoman group, who see themselves able to redefine their allegiance to one another rather than working against one another for individual profit. This is very similar to the idealistic nature of the aristocratic texts in defining aristocratic identity. Knighthood never worked as smoothly as it was defined in romance or the chivalric treatises, but the fantasy helped shape and develop the morals and actions that drove the social class.[138]

This tension between individual and common profit is further developed in *Robin Hood and the Potter* by highlighting the selfish desire for individual monetary gain. When Little John mentions that the Potter approaching the Greenwood has beat him several times, and he has been unable to exact a toll from him, he bets that no man can beat the Potter either. This is a way for him to keep the equal status of the group. However, Robin Hood, unable to pass up a chance for money and status in martial prowess, takes him up on the bet: "Here ys forty shilling,' seyde Roben, / 'More, and thow dar say, / That Y schall make that prowde potter, / A wed to me schall he ley" (29-32). Not only does Robin Hood take John's bet, he also challenges his men to give him

[137] Ibid., 48.

[138] Keen, *Chivalry*, 2-4.

more by betting against him. Robin tries gain status by venturing on a task without his fellows again, and he will not be successful in his quest because this is an act of promoting one individual over the group of fellows. The potter takes out a sword, and Robin takes out a buckler and a sword, but the potter knocks Robin Hood in the neck, making him fall to the ground. All the while, the fellows laugh and watch under a tree: "Thereof low Robyn hes men / There they stod onder a tre" (63-4), watching Robin get attacked by the Potter until it becomes clear that Robin is in trouble: "Let us helpe owre master,' seyde Lytell John, / 'Yonder potter,' seyde he, ' els well hem slo" (75-6). John fears for the life of Robin, and the men rush in to help. Before Little John offers his help, however, he makes sure Robin admits defeat and acknowledges that they are equal: "Schall Y haffe yowre forty shillings,' seyde Lytl John, / 'Or ye, master, schall haffe myne?' / 'Yeff they were a hundred,' seyde Roben, / 'Y feythe, they ben all theyne" (81-4). Little John gives Robin a choice to admit defeat or to continue his insistence that he is superior in strength to him. Robin chooses to admit defeat and again we see the text sometimes punishes characters that strive to be superior to another member. Robin is punished for questing by himself, without his men, by the penalty of physical defeat. He but he is also punished for wagering or trying to make money and gain status, and his punishment is to lose money and to be physically attacked by the Potter. This punishment contains both the knightly way of being punished, physical violence, along with a monetary penalty for his egotism, which is absent from romance texts as a marker of punishment. However, considering the amount of monetary punishment the

yeomen inflict upon other guilty groups, it is no surprise this punishment is used by yeomen as well.

Robin and his men follow the rules of traditional vassalage as long as they promote community. In all of the action discussed above, the men value the lives of other members of their community. They all agree to value their well-being, including that of the moral philosophy that underlies it. When Robin outlines who they should beat and bind, his men agree that they should not antagonize good yeomen and farmers, for this would be destroying the values of the Greenwood, a community made up of yeomen: "But loke ye do not husbonde harme, / That tilleth with his ploughe, / 'No more ye shall no gode yeman / That walketh by grene wode shawe," (51-54). No individual promotion is tolerated in the text, and the members of the Greenwood act in accordance with the lord vassal relationship as long as it benefits the yeoman community over the individual.

This valuing of the yeoman community is closely attached to medieval concepts of political philosophy, which promoted the *bonum common communitatis* over the *bonum common hominis*, in other words, privileging the general welfare of the people over individual welfare. In the political philosophy of *Mirrors for Princes*, the common profit was used to instruct Kings to act in the benefit of the entire populace. Hoccleve writes that largesse, here personified as gold, is prevented from its true message unless it is sent for the "commun profit, / The which to lette is evere thy delyt."[139] This message of giving to the benefit of the community (giving is delight) over the profit of

[139] Hoccleve, The *Regiment of Princes*, 4,108-9.

the individual is strengthened by his explication of the wrong messages of gold. All three authorial powerhouses of fourteenth-century England address the honor of common profit over individual impulse .[140] The concept appears in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Langland's *Piers Plowman,* in the Rat Parliament where the rats and more than a thousand mice "comen to a counseil for the common profit"[141] while the cat shows up when he likes. Gower refers to the role of the work of clerics as follows:

> For trowthe mot stonde ate laste.
>
> Bot yet thei argumenten faste
>
> Upon the Pope and his astat,
>
> Wherof thei falle in gret debat;
>
> This clerk seith yee, that other nay,
>
> And thus thei dryve forth the day,
>
> and ech of hem himself amendeth
>
> Of worldes good, bot non entendeth
>
> To that which comun profit were.[142]

In the last example, the clergy are chastised for not tending to the good of the common profit from the top down. The Pope, like the King, must provide an example, but those

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[140] Although below I mention Gower and Langland, Chaucer also employs the concept of common profit in *The Clerk's Tale* with his use of Walter's individual desire to remain a bachelor while his realm wishes him to marry. The sublimation of the self to the greater good of the realm is necessary in this tale, as it was in medieval political tracts on kingship.

[141] Langland, B-text, 146.

[142] Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* 369-77.

that fall in rank underneath him must all work in concert for the good of the commons, avoiding conflicting "yays" and "nays" that benefit one over the other.

The extension of the concept of common profit from kings to clergy is especially significant in the Robin Hood ballads because it links obligation not only to one occupation but to all. This illustrates how the concept of "common" profit was extended from the responsibilities of a king to his people to the clergy's role in acting in the best interests of their people. The concept is prevalent in sermons on the three estates, as each estate is required to act, work, and provide for a different element of the community.[143] The idea of mutuality was reproduced in places such as Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, and in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.*

In fact, common profit is not only emphasized in manuals for rulers and religious institutions, it also permeates guild culture stressing an anxiety over profit. For example, in the *Little Red Book of Bristol,* a collection of official documents and records for fourteenth and fifteenth-century Bristol that contains guild ordinances, the phrase "common profit" is invoked multiple times to establish the use of money for the common profit of the people and the good of the craft: "take no maner seruant to covenant by yhere without he pays in the begynnyng of the covenant viijd. To the vse of the common profite and iiijd. To the contribucione of the seid Crafte."[144] However, as

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[143] In Wimbledon's fourteenth-century sermon,"*Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue,"* for example, the laboring estate is to provide food for society, the clergy is to teach and to lead all to salvation, and the knights are to defend (61-66).

[144] *Little Red Book of Bristol*, ed., Francis Bridges Bickley, vol. II. (Bristol: W. Crofton Hemmons, 1900), 156.

scholars point out, the repetition of the phrase was not only a reminder of the guilds' establishment for the good of the realm, but also, attacks on other guilds (and even members of the same guild), who were violating rules for their own benefit.[145] This tension between the good of the realm and the singular profit of one group or individual or another was addressed by a statute in 1437:

> No such Masters, Wardens, nor People make nor use no Ordinance which shall be to the Disherison or Diminution of the [King's Franchises] or of other, nor against the common Profit of the People, nor none other Ordinance of Charge, if it be not first discussed and approved for good and reasonable by the Justices of Peace, or the Chief Governors.[146]

The same statute was repeated in 1503 by Henry VII and specifically addresses "singler pfit & to the comen hurte & damage of the people" thus taking a stance on the problem of the guilds profiting by their own ordinances.[147]

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[145] In *An Anatomy of Trade in Medieval Writing: Value, and Consent and Community* (Cornell University Press, 2006), Lianna Farber argues that in documents and charters of the London guilds the line between craft profit and common profit is contested, and shows that conflicts between guilds sometimes became violent (161-67). Similarly, in *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law, and Ethics in the English Marketplace*, *1200-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), James Davis argues "The evoking of "common profit" was a characteristic rhetoric in guild ordinances, in order to demonstrate a respect for law and uphold the reputation of the guild and its members . . . . However, this rhetoric could also serve as a useful justification for quashing the output and sale of non-members. It was just as likely that guilds attempted to keep prices up, prevented competition from outside the guild structure and thus reduced choice for consumers" (172-73). Both authors acknowledge the tension between individual profit and common profit.

[146] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol II, 15 Henry. VI. c. 6, 299.

[147] Ibid., 19 Henry VII c. 7, 652.

Curiously, however, one such kind of guild member is targeted from within the guild by their superiors in the guild, a fact that seems not only to elucidate the inner struggle of profit within the guild, but also contextualize common yeoman social identity. These members are known as bachelors or collectively as the "yeoman brotherhood." The Clothworkers' Guild and Merchant Tailors, for example, identifies "a body of freeman" or junior members of the guild that "in some of the larger companies. . . became so much an independent class, that they sought to have their own separate administrative officers," and had established their own clientele and hoped to form a "charitable principle into a sub-municipal autocracy, and to spurn, when its support was no longer needed, the ladder by which they had climbed to power."[148] In the more formal attacks upon the yeoman brotherhood, specifically in a guildhall ordinance in 1415 against the Yeoman Tailors, the junior members of the Tailors were attacked for living together as brothers outside of the houses of the masters of the craft, committing violence upon the common people, and attacking a master of the craft. This ordinance required that the yeomen not use liveries or form a brotherhood amongst themselves:

> Have often assembled together in great numbers, and made divers assemblies and conventicles in divers places within said city and without, and have beaten, wounded, and ill-treated many lieges of our lord the king, and especially now lately one Thomas Tropewell, one of the masters of the foresaid trade, severely, form malice and design aforethought; and

[148] W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Livery Companies of the City of London: Their Origin, Character, Development, and Social and Political Importance* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1892), 20-21.

> have made many rescues against the servants and officers of the said city while arresting malefactors and disturbers of the peace of our lord the kind; and have committed, and daily endeavour to commit, very many other evils and enormities to the injury of the peace of our lord the kind and the manifest disturbance of his people[149]

Although the attacks upon the yeoman brotherhood seem to be somewhat valid, one might question the motivation of the Tailors' Guild to paint their successful inferiors as immoral. If the opinion of W. Carew Hazlitt bears any weight, the ordinance was intended to limit the power of the lower ranks of yeomen from competitive trading with the guild since they were the apprentices of that guild who had become independent and demanded their own freedom in production and trading.[150] Such an action seems to resemble the situation of rural yeomen, who sought to appropriate profit for themselves through accepted forms of brotherhood from those in power. This discord caused by the valuation of individual profit has members of the guild brotherhood turning on one another, thus violating the oaths they take to maintain the guild itself. It is this sort of violation of oaths that Robin Hood's band of men punish in the ballads.

The language of brotherhood is not solely aristocratic, as it was appropriated by guild culture to describe relationships within the highly stratified system. Thus, the actions of Robin Hood and his band of men seem to be a reflection of a larger

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[149] *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist.* ed., Charles Matthew Clode (London: Harrison and Sons, 1875), 515.

[150] Hazlitt, *The Livery Companies,* 20-21.

movement within middle strata society. In the commentary cited above by Hazlitt, the yeoman brotherhood sought to break away and become its own group and were in economic competition with the guild who formerly housed them. This is similar to Robin Hood and his men in the ballads. The yeomen's actions in establishing themselves as a separate social identity as yeomen potentially threatened other middle strata groups, like the Sheriff, who commonly in the ballads characterize the yeomen as heathens. Such action is present in guild culture as demonstrated above. The yeoman bachelors threatened the guild, who in turn sought to demonize them as wild and rambunctious. The yeoman brotherhood, perhaps, acted against the guild to demand their own freedom to practice their craft outside the constraints of the guild, an act the guild found to be in direct violation of its principles.

In the ballads, common profit is recast as yeoman profit: yeomen act as a unit in benefit of their own community while punishing those outside of their community that violate yeoman communal bonds. The erosion of bonds in the ballads is best viewed through the clergy's and townspersons' love of goods. They value money, food, and commerce over the bonds of brotherhood, but these issues of love of self over brother are not just located in town but also in the countryside. The yeomen of the ballads struggle with moments of selfish desire, and are appropriately punished in favor of serving the yeoman common profit.

Yeoman Profit and Fellowship

After times of struggle for selfish profit between the yeomen, the word "fellowship" establishes peace and reasserts the common goals of the yeoman social

group. A fellowship is a "body of fellows or equals," but it also can be an "organized society of persons united by office, occupation or common rules of living."[151] Instead of a social agreement that benefits the lord in power, a fellowship is a body of men that are united in a similar cause. Each man works together for a common goal, but also retains his own will as long as the actions of the individual promote the welfare of the group. The word "fellowship" is found in a multitude of late medieval documents including guild ordinances, rules of religious orders, craft fraternities, rules of collegiate bodies, and orders of knighthood.[152] This widespread use of the word suggests it was an important element of social relationships, and may provide one reason for the popularity of the Robin Hood ballads for a number of groups. All could see the benefit of a fellowship bound by mutuality rather than submission. The word establishes a shared value-system of a group of united men or women. And while craft and merchant guilds, aristocratic and religious fraternities as well as collegiate bodies clearly had a hierarchical system of benefit and decision-making that does not seem to be the case in the Robin Hood ballads.[153] In contrast to the group noted above, while Robin is clearly the elected leader of the outlaw group of yeomen, he gives up power and financial benefit for the profit of all.

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[151] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "fellowship."; *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "felaushipe."

[152] Ibid., *MED* quotations.

[153] Knight argues that Robin Hood's "social interactions with his band are lateral, not hierarchical." See Stephen Knight, "Robin Hood and the Crusades: When and Why Did the Longbowman of the People Mount Up Like a Lord? *Florilegium* (2006), 202.

Robin establishes one such truth of the yeoman fellowship by listing who could be trusted and who should be punished. He and his men are fearful of the characters of town, suggesting he rejects the self-serving bonds represented there, and he clearly establishes upon whom to exact punishment and whom to reward. Robin's game playing serves to test and feel out the intruders he meets. Robin Hood tells his men to be careful of the men they encounter, and to never assault those who are good:

'Therof no force,' than sayde Robyn,
'We shall do well inowe;
But loke ye do not husbonde harme,
That tilleth with his ploughe.
'No more ye shall no gode yeman
That walketh by grene wode shawe,
Ne no knyght ne no squyer
That wol be a gode felawe.
'These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde;
They hye sherif of Notyingham,
Hym hode ye in your mynde.' (53-60)

Robin automatically identifies the farmer, just one of the occupations of yeomen, as a representative of good, suggesting his rural livelihood is means enough to keep him from the attacks of Robin's men. He also says that yeomen, knights, and squires should also be avoided; however, there is a caveat. Robin stresses "gode yeman" and knights

and squires that would be a "gode felawe," (56) which suggests Robin sees a breakdown in the essentialist portrait of the knight as being characterized by purity. He only seeks those knights and squires that would be *good fellows*, ones that will enter the community of yeoman fellowship and ones that will promise to service and uphold yeoman values.

He qualifies his statement with the phrase of "good" fellows, for he is not interested in becoming aristocracy but rather in admitting the aristocracy into his own group of yeoman fellows. He seeks to make bonds with them. In contrast, Robin identifies bishops, archbishops, and the Sheriff of Nottingham, as members of the town, and as characters worthy of attack. Robin lumps religious and government officials together in one group. Robin is suspicious of everyone except farmers that plow and representatives of rural life unsullied by the complex network of self-serving bonds in towns.

He also sees only the knights that identify with his fellowship as being exempt from attack, implying there is a difference in the ways in which knights and squires operate outside the Greenwood. Roy Pearcy sees this as a paradigm pitting the old system against the new: "The division between a virtuous old order of inherited land and a vicious new commercialism is articulated early in the *Gest* . . . Protected are the husbandmen who plough (the peasantry) and good yeomen, knights and squires (the landed aristocracy and their entourage)." [154] The *Gest* itself addresses this shift from the

[154] Roy Pearcy, "The Literary Robin Hood" *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post Medieval*. ed. Helen Phillips (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 65.

landed aristocracy who are idealized as upholding ideal bonds and those that have gained the title of knighthood through compulsion, a practice that knighted wealthier men based on salary and entertained the concept the possibility of the deterioration of chivalrous behavior. When Robin meets Sir Richard for the first time, he is astonished at the state of his threadbare clothes: "'Tell me one worde,' sayde Robyn, / 'And counsel shal it be: / I trowe thou warte made a knight of force, / or ellys of yemanry" (177-180). The "distraint of arms" discussed here was a practice that required those that "held £20 *per annum* to receive knighthoods or pay compensation."[155] This practice started as early as the thirteenth century and would have made lesser landowners knights, but would have also stressed them financially by requiring them to supply men at arms. The second practice mentioned in this quotation required those that made less than a pound to "provide yeomen such as archers for royal forces."[156] This distinction between the behavior of the old and new aristocracy is solidified in the lines following his mention of the *distraint* of arms: "'Or ellys thou hast bene a sori husband, / And lyved in stroke and stryfe, / And okerer or ellis a lechoure,' sayde Robyn, / 'Wyth wronge has led thy lyfe,'" (181-84). It is the new forms that Robin is anxious about; he draws a line between good and bad**,** signifying those that have newly acquired titles are those who may not be trustworthy or live in accordance with chivalry as the old order was idealized to do.

[155] Child qtd. in Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 152.

[156] Powicke qtd. In Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 152.

Robin's suspicion of the aristocracy reflects either the degeneration of the chivalry of knights and the weakened aristocracy, or alternatively, his own anxiety. When he meets Sir Richard, for example, his first reaction is distrust:

"Tel me truth," than saide Robyn
"So God have parte of the,"
"I have no more but ten shelynges," sayde the knyght,
"So God have part of me,"
"If thou has no more," sayde Robyn,
"I woll nat one peny,
And yf thou have nede of any more,
More shall I lend the." (153-160)

The invocation of God by both Robin and Sir Richard ritualizes the language of truth. Robin Hood begins by demanding the truth protected by the oath that invokes God, and this tests Sir Richard, who replies in a similar manner. Lords and knights no longer occupy their former status as figures of honesty, charity, and allegiance. In fact, Sir Richard comes to represent the failure of the traditional lord vassal relationship outside the Greenwood.

The bonds fail Sir Richard, and expose the self-serving purposes of networks in the aristocracy even though, as his status suggests, he is a knight and should have lords that provided for him through the system of maintenance. Lords were required to come to the aid of their vassals in times of crises, especially when their vassals were in judicial

trouble or were the victim of unfair treatment.[157] In fact, Sir Richard lacks this sort of network of protection. Because his son accidentally killed a man in a tournament, he is required to pay the death fees associated with that accident. Sir Richard's lord should have interceded to save him from financial ruin.[158] This fact is stressed in Richard and Robin's conversation about the lack of friendship he experiences:

"Hast thou any frende," sayde Robyn,
"Thy borrowe that wolde be?"
"I have none," than sayde the knyght,
"But God that dyed on tree."
"Do away thy japis," than sayde Robyn,
'Thereof wol I right none;
Wenest thoug I woulde have God to borowe,
Peter, Poule, or Johan?
"Nay, by Hym that me made,
And shape both sonne and mone,"
"Fynde me a better borowe," sayde Robyn,

[157] According to Lull in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry,* "When any noble prince or high baron has in his court or company wicked, false, traitorous knights that never cease to urge him toward evil deeds—toward bribery, betrayal and extortion with regard to his true subjects—the good prince ought, by the strength of his courage and on account of his great love for chivalry, to overcome and vanquish such men so that he will not allow chivalry to be subverted" (31).

[158] See Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England: 1100-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 51. The financial penalty exacted of Sir Richard's family seems to be uncommon. According to Barker, English tournament historian, as long as an inquest proved the knight in question accidentally killed another knight in competition, a pardon was issued. The financial constraint of Sir Richard is a product of buying a royal pardon, and not of a financial penalty of foul play in the tournament itself. However, the abandonment of his friends in a time of crisis remains a violation of chivalry.

"Or money getest thou none,"

"I have none other," sayde the knyght,

"The sothe for to say,

But yf yt be Our dere Lady;

She fayled me never or thys day." (245-60)

Robin's astonishment at Richard's lack of security causes Robin to question Richard about his friends several times. In fact, this passage represents the second and third time Robin questions Richard about the complete lack of assistance he has. Sir Richard maintains that he has no friends since he has lost his money, as he tells Robin he has been abandoned by other lords when he lost his riches:

Syr, never one wol me knowe:

While I was ryche ynowe at home

Great boste than wolde they blowe.

And now they renne away fro me,

As bestis on a rowe;

They take no more hede of me

Than they had me never sawe. (234-40)

The abandonment of Sir Richard implies that his friends have run away from him when he lost his money, which illuminates the self-serving form of profit that exists outside of Greenwood. When Sir Richard does not have money, he is of no use to his friends and lords. The assistance the yeomen lend this landless knight represents the increased economic power of the yeoman in the later Middle Ages. The Greenwood comes to

represent the restoration of the lord to his vassal; this is precisely the relationship that Sir Richard lacks.

The restored lord vassal relationship is not a pure one; since it negotiates both worlds of exchange and feudalism. Not only does Robin loan Richard the money he needs to repay the Abbot to retain his lands, Robin also takes on the other responsibilities of lordship to his vassal. As mentioned in the passages on vassalage, a lord is responsible for providing his vassal with liveries. John notices Richard's haggard appearance:

> "Master," than sayde Lityll John,
> "His clothinge is full thynne;
> Ye must gyve the knight a lyverray,
> To lappe his body therin.
> "For ye have scarlet and grene, mayster,
> And many a riche aray;
> There is no marchaunt I mery Englond
> So rych, I dare well say." (277-84)

Richard's clothing is poor, thin and worn, indicating his lack of lordship. Alternately, Robin and his yeomen are represented in language of luxury: "rich" is used twice, while green and scarlet, warm colors, contrast the dull bare clothes of Sir Richard. The yeomen are painted as protectors. Without clothing and protection, Sir Richard is in jeopardy of ruin. Since Richard proved his honesty by passing Robin's test, Richard proves he is a chivalric knight, worthy of Robin's lordship. Robin gives Richard liveries,

but also outfits him with boots, and a horse, identifying the importance of selflessness in the act of vassalage. Although this is a community activity, the only person that gives Sir Richard gifts is Robin, except for little John who gives him spurs. When Little John measures with the bow, he adds three feet to each measurement. Muche comments that John is a devilish draper (291), and Scarlet remarks "By Bod Almyght, / Johan may gyve him gode mesure, / For it costeth hym but lyght" (294-96). This implies that the gift comes from Robin's pocket, and that Robin expects that there will be a return of his friendship. He lends Sir Richard these things: "Whan shal mi day be,' said the knight. / 'Sir, and your wyll be?' / 'Tis day twelve moneth,' saide Robyn, / 'Under this grene-wode tre" (313-16). Robin expects that Richard will return little John, just as he expects the repayment of his money. We see Robin participating in the economy, but he is adapting the lord vassal structure to benefit all members of the Greenwood. Roy Pearcy sees the world of commerce being referenced here, but "only for the purpose of revealing that the greenwood company is in some manner alienated from its value system by an innate sense of aristocratic *franchise.*"[159] The participation in the economy adapts the language and action of the lord vassal relationship. It is a communal activity, and when Sir Richard comes to repay Robin Hood, instead of accepting the four hundred pounds he lent to Richard to make a profit, Robin Hood acknowledges the payment of the Abbot in his stead. In fact, Robin gives Sir Richard another four hundred pounds, half of what he has taken from the Abbot. In this way, the distribution of money is connected to the yeoman fellowship Robin has established with the knight.

[159] Pearcy, "The Literary Robin," 65.

While Robin and his men aid a knight, the interactions between the yeomen and the knight suggest that the knight has become part of the yeoman fellowship, thus the knight's actions benefit yeoman profit. After the loan to Sir Richard, not only does Robin Hood financially protect this knight, but the knight helps yeomen in the name of Robin Hood. At the wrestling match, the knight stops to protect a yeoman in jeopardy of death:

> There was a yoman in that place,
>
> And best worthy was he,
>
> And for he was ferre and frembde bested,
>
> Slayne he shulde have be.
>
> The knight had ruthe of this yoman,
>
> In place where he stode;
>
> He sayde that yoman shulde have no harme,
>
> For the love of Robyn Hode. (449-556)

The knight protects the rightful winner of the wrestling match, and names him the winner. In addition, he gives him "five marke for his wyne" (565), which is a huge monetary sum that is in addition to the status prizes offered to the winner. The knight reports his protective actions to Robin Hood, who in return names him a "friend:" "What man that helpeth a good yeman, / His frende than wyll I be" (1075-76). Later, Robin utters a trouth-plight twice, and welcomes the knight under his trestle tree: "Thou gentyll knight so fre, / And welcome be thou, gentyll knight, / Under my trystell-tree" (1094-96). This exchange, sealed in oaths under the trestle tree, establishes a

relationship that gives profit and protection to the yeomen. After this exchange, the knight continues the friendship by giving sanctuary to the yeomen in *fit five* that keeps the Sheriff's men from arresting them. During this protection, the knight discloses his love for Robin:

"And there dwelled that gyntyll knight,
Syr Richard at the Lee,
That Robyn had lent his good,
Under the grene wode tree.
In he toke good Robyn,
And all his company:
"Welcome be thou, Robyn Hode,
Welcome arte thou to me,
"And moche I thanke the of thy confort,
And of thy curteysye,
And of they grete kyndenesse,
Under the grene wode tre.
"I love no man in all this worlde
So much as I do the;
For all the proud sheryf of Notyngham
Ryght here shalt thou be." (1237-52)

Twice the trystell tree is mentioned, the place of oaths and pledges of truth for the yeomen, but even more importantly, the word "love" is explicitly used to describe the

relationship between Robin and Sir Richard suggesting the fellowship between Robin and Sir Richard is based on both mutuality and feelings of respect. The arrangement between the yeomen and the knight does not just benefit Sir Richard or Robin Hood's band of men; it benefits and rewards good yeomen with goods and cash and establishes a social bond between men, who are working for the same cause in the ritual language of oaths, which refigures the language and ritual of aristocratic vassalage for the common profit to the yeoman profit.

Sir Richard reproduces the truth test the yeomen give in order to decipher trustworthiness, which suggests he becomes part of the yeoman fellowship by reproducing yeoman ideology. Although the reader knows Sir Richard has the money the Abbot desires to exchange for his land held in collateral by the church, Sir Richard reproduces the philosophy of the yeoman truth test. This truth test quizzes passersby of how much money they are carrying in the form of an oral promise. If they tell the truth, the yeomen reward them. If they lie, they are punished by robbery. Sir Richard becomes a part of Robin's yeoman brotherhood by preserving the sanctity of truth in oral oaths. That is, the preliminary truth test the yeomen administer identifies moral character through speech. One who passes is defined as one that would be a "good fellow" with whom potential bonds could be forged: "'God, that was of a mayden borne, / Leve us well to spede! / For it is good to assay a frende / Or that a man have need'" (445-48). "God, that was of a maiden born, grant us well to succeed! For it is good to try out a friend before that man have need" warrants a pause and full examination since it is by

this principle Robin and his men gather yeomen fellows, punish those that violate oaths, and rob those with false speech.

This bond of yeoman profit is not solely located in the *Gest;* it is also a feature of *Robin Hood and the Potter,* where the pledge of trust is conflated with the language of payment. The lines that begin the test of the Potter echo the language of pledged trust in oath: "A wed schall make hem leye" (28). Knight and Ohlgren mention the emendation here by Child arguing the sense is to "leave a pledge or to lay a pledge" thus connecting money to oral oaths.[160] Although the Potter initially refuses both: "'Wed well y non leffe,' syede the potter, / 'nor pavag well Y non pay;'" (49-50), the fellowship that is eventually forged between the yeomen band and the Potter leaves the Potter significantly richer: "'Thow schalt hafe ten ponde,' seyde Roben, / 'Of money feyre and fre; / And yever whan thow comest to grene wod, / Wellcome, potter, to me'" (316-19). The ten pounds that Robin gives him for his fellowship would have been near a year's wages for the potter.[161] However, this fellowship leaves Robin and his men richer as well. The yeomen have lured the Sheriff into the forest by the Potter's disguise and by proving his worth through winning the archery contest, and when the Sheriff arrives, he is robbed of all of his gear and his horse. Robin Hood makes a profit from this transaction, and he also shares that profit with the Potter, a member of his fellowship who he professes "speaks good yeomanry." This fellowship allows a successful attack on

[160] Ibid., 73.

[161] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 79.

the yeomen's enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham, one of the main offenders of broken oaths in the corpus.

In the *Gest*, the Sheriff makes an oath under the trestle tree to be faithful to yeoman profit, but later violates this vow highlighting that the text penalizes the violation of oaths made to yeomen. The Sheriff promises to help yeomen wherever he goes, and pledges "for saynte charitè, / And I woll be thy best frende'/ That ever yet had ye" (802-4). Readers witness the invocation of a religious figure in oath taking by the Sheriff's promise to St. Charity, one of the martyred daughters of St. Wisdom. This invocation makes this oath sacred and recalls not only an earthly but spiritual promise by the Sheriff. The Sheriff deliberately uses the word "friend" which suggests devotion more familiar than a common allegiance. In case the Sheriff is not clear about the stipulations he agrees to, Robin highlights the role of the oath in yeoman profit:

> "Thou shalt swere me an othe," sayde Robyn,
> "On my bright bronde:
> Shalt thou never awayte me scathe,
> By water ne by lande.
> "And if thou gynde any of my men,
> By nyght or day,
> Upon thyn othe thou shalt swere
> To helpe them that thou may."
> Now hathe the sheriff sworne his othe,
> And home he began to gone; (805-14)

However, the Sheriff violates his oath at an archery competition, and he lures Robin and his men into a trap that injures Little John. Robin reminds the Sheriff of his oath: "But had I in grene wode, / Under my trystell-tree, / Thou sholdest leve me a better wedde / Than thy trewe lewtè" (1189-92). Robin uses "wedde," a word most commonly found in language used in marriage ceremonies for pledging, binding, or committing oneself to another, and "trewe lewtè" for sworn trust. Although "wedde" seems to be a curious word choice, it does draw attention to the legally binding terms of oath taking, which anticipates poetic justice of the Sheriff's gruesome physical penalty. After the Sheriff kidnaps Sir Richard, Robin exacts justice with the same bright sword upon which the Sheriff swore his oath:

> He smote of the sheriffs hede
>
> With his bright bronde.
>
> Lye thou there, thou proude sherife,
>
> Evyll mote thou cheve!
>
> There might no man to the truste
>
> The whyles thou were a were a lyve. (1391-396)

This action of beheading with the instrument of the oath illustrates the justice the Robin Hood ballads attempt to establish. It is justice that serves the yeoman, but also punishes those who ignore oaths taken using the language of friendship, those that are orally and legally binding, and those that are sanctified by religious invocation. All are possibilities the Sheriff is punished; however, the most likely is that the Sheriff favors his own self over the benefit of yeoman profit, to which he pledged loyalty.

The Sheriff, one of the townspeople, and clerks and religious figures have strayed so far from their bonds that they serve no one else but their own individual profit. This social choice depicted as a degenerated form of accepted bonds that lacks of community and promotes self-serving actions that have altered the way maintenance works.

False Community, False Speech, and Maintenance-at-Law

In contrast with the Greenwood, the town is a locus of trade where the artisans and merchants make money for their own profit. The city is represented as evil and full of corrupt individuals that do not honor the rightful bonds of their religious office, vocational service, and the law. The religious and government officials there form relationships that benefit the individual instead of the common profit. The inhabitants of the city work against the philosophy of the three estates, which imagines each estate working for the benefit of the body politic by acting as opportunists. The town life is described in contrast to the traditional lord vassal relationship that is characterized by the good of the whole community for the protection of every member of the social agreement. Christine Chism argues that the forged community of the officials of town operates for profit: "These ballads reveal that, at the same time late-medieval officials such as sheriff, justice, and king are assuming a veil of long-standing legal tradition to persuade collaboration, they are innovating underhandedly to enforce obedience and reap a profit."[162] Here, knights are dispossessed and abandoned, the townspeople take advantage of cheap wares, religious figures lie to hoard their accumulated wealth, and

[162] Chism, "Thinking Globally," 16.

monks ignore sanctuary. In town, the false sense of communal love serves to benefit the individual.

The greed of individual profit is most often represented through verbal falsehood. The religious officials work with the officials of the government, often overstepping job boundaries, and their verbal deception is symptomatic of the lack of communal bonds. The monk stopped by Little John, Much, and Scarlet was on his way "to London-ward, / There to hold grete mote" (1009-10). The "mote" he refers to is probably "A meeting; an assembly, especially for legal purposes or for settling accounts, a judicial council."[163] According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, it is associated with the Courts of the Hundreds, a common law division of the Shire into sections comprising of one hundred households, where courts and cases were held and heard monthly overseen by a royally appointed sheriff.[164] Knight and Ohlgren read these lines as the Cellarer attempting to lodge a case against the Sir Richard who was victorious in a previous scene: "The knight that rode so hye on hors, / To brynge hym under fote" (1011-12), which would be in the jurisdiction of the Hundreds. However, the Cellarer claims he is going to the manors in order to reckon with the reeves: "to maners in this londe, / too reken with our reves, / that have done moch wronge" (1014-16). This legal proceeding is a different kind, and one that would be in the jurisdiction of the clerical manor, not a mote, but rather an inquisition against the reeves of the manor. The

[163] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "mote."

[164] Ibid.

Cellerar claims that the reeves of the monastic manors are not being trustworthy in their reckoning of due accounts, and that most likely means not properly distributing money to the church, and instead distributing those goods to themselves. His verbal falsehood promotes individual profit, something Robin's truth tests seek to discover. This is the same crime the Abbot, Cellerar, and Justice conspire to commit against Sir Richard. However, he claims legitimate legal proceedings of established held land, when in reality he goes to call on maintained men in order to bypass honest legal proceedings against Sir Richard.

The *Gest* paints an anti-clerical portrait of St. Mary's, showing it as wealthy and thus suggesting the clergy's lack of support for the common profit. The Monk carries more than eight hundred pounds in his coffers, a very large sum. In fact, in *fitt two*, when it appears that Sir Richard will not return in time to pay back the Abbot, the cellar master remarks "by God that bought me dere, / And we shall have to spende in this place / Foure hondred ponde by yere" (366-68). This comment shows that the money that is acquired by the Abbot of St. Mary's is not being distributed according to just practice, which in turn suggests the oaths of the monks' brotherhood and the church have been broken. The hoarding of wealth is illuminated at a great feast in the Abbey, where he dines "for all his ryall fare," like a king (486). The money that the cellar master speaks of is obviously not being spent on the poor, on keeping the church in good health, or on travel expenses of the Benedictine monks. Instead, it is being spent on food for the Abbot, which supports a desire for individual over the common profit.

The bonds between Robin and his men contrast sharply with the selfish desires of those at St. Mary's Abbey, who participate in maintenance-at-law, a practice and extension of the lord-retainer relationship described above. Maintenance was the practice of supporting men for mutual benefit and the backbone of medieval society, but maintenance-at-law required legal protection from those you were beholden to despite the authenticity of a legal claim. There was open criticism of the system of maintenance in the late Middle Ages. In fact, both Langland through the character of Lady Meed, and Chaucer in *The Tale of Melibee* criticize these practices, which were open to widespread corruption.

In the *Gest*, the Justice is working for the Abbot, and he illustrates the conflicts of interest that maintenance-at-law, a false form of bonds, could pose. The Justice, a royally appointed position, would have been maintained by the King, who appointed him to hear cases and perform legal duties, but who in this passage has been maintained by the Abbot to do work for the abbey. The justice refuses to defend Sir Richard and proclaims he is "holde with the abbot. . . .Both with cloth and fee" (425-26), which suggests that the greedy Abbot and the High Cellarmaster are conspirators together. Here we see a direct view of the disintegrated bonds of maintenance. According to Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren "The justice, or professional lawyer, is the agent of a powerful lord—the abbot in this case. . . and the phrase cloth and fee . . . designate payment of legal services with both money and gifts of clothing."[165] Justices, according to Knight and Ohlgren, were allowed to "accept robes and fees only from the

[165] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 155-56.

king."[166] Although money has not corrupted the lord vassal relationship, as money and gifts were always a part of vassalage, I argue greed and self promotion has illustrated the corruption of maintenance, most notably, the Justice has ignored his oath to the King on two accounts: not to take liveries, and to practice just course of the law. He should protect Sir Richard, and the knight directly asks him to protect him from his foe, which he ignores in favor of payment from the Abbot to help him with the illegal sale of Sir Richard's feudal estate. According to Maurice Keen, the author would have known that dual lordship was illegal: "The maker of the *Gest* knew that a man who had become the retainer of one lord could not take the fee of another and so be retained by him; so Little John had to get the leave of Sir Richard in order to enter the sheriff's service in the guise of Reynold Grenelefe."[167] This same theme appears more than once in the *Gest,* suggesting these bonds have been compromised by the promise of profit in town.

On the other hand, while we see a clear picture of maintenance-at-law at work, the concept of maintenance, or the support of men for common good, is violated. The religious officials and the officials of the law, both vassals of the king, have dishonored their bond to their king for their own interests, a direct violation of law that is presented by Edward I:

> No Officer of the King by themselves, nor by other, shall maintain Pleas, Suits, or Matters hanging in the King's Courts, for Lands, Tenements, or

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[166] Ibid., 156.

[167] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend,* 135.

> other Things, for to have part or profit thereof by Covenant made between them; and he that doth, shall be punished at the King's Pleasure. And that no Sheriff, nor other the King's Officer, take any Reward to do his Office, but shall be paid of that which they take of the King; and he that so doth, shall yield twice as much, and shall be punished at the King's Pleasure.
>
> . . . .
>
> And that none of the King's Clerks, nor of any Justicer, from henceforth shall receive the Presentment of any Church, for the which any Plea or Debate is in the King's Court without special Licence of the King; and that the King forbiddeth, upon pain to lose [the Church, and] his Service. And that no Clerk of any Justicer, or Sheriff [take part] in any Quarrels of Matters depending in the King's Court, nor shall work any Fraud, whereby common Right may be delayed or disturbed; and if any so do, he shall be punished by the pain aforesaid, or more grievously, if the Trespass do so require. It is provided also, that if any Serjeant, Pleader, or other, do any manner of Deceit or Collusion in the King's Court, or consent [unto it] in deceit of the Court, [or] to bequile the Court, or the Party, and thereof be attainted, he shall be imprisoned for a Year and a Day. [168]

Each offense committed in the scene in St. Mary's is addressed in this law. The land hearing is out of jurisdiction for a church, and furthermore, the Sheriff stands to make

[168] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol 1, 3 Edward I c. 28, 33-4.

money twice, first by being in hold with the Abbot, and secondly for doing his job. Every offense is listed above for each member of the King's men. The justice stands to make money by handling the transaction of Richard's land to the Abbot. The Abbot stands to benefit from the late payment by Richard. The offenses are so many that the punishment of the King alluded to in the passage, the imprisonment of a year and day, the loss of the church, and the vague punishment mentioned at the pleasure of the king, seems quite harsh for the multiple infractions of these three characters in comparison with the justice Robin Hood and his men enforce, which is monetary payment.

Furthermore, the men that are maintained by the Church do not view their bonds to their employers as valid. The men that accompany the Benedictine monks on their journey to London abandon their posts when it becomes clear they will lose their lives: "Fyfty and two whan that we met, / but many of them be gone" (911-12). Fifty two men run when three men (Much, Scarlock, and John) approach them. Three men armed with bows and arrows do not seem to be much of a threat to fifty men who are presumably armed as well. In fact, the men that run are named as yeomen, a further suggestion that practitioners of good yeomanry will refuse to attack their own. The only community that exists in town is the community that unites two people that stand to benefit from some sort of profit. Loyalties are crossed, lord's rules are discarded, and retainers flee when their necks are in jeopardy.

Conclusion

The Robin Hood ballads promote the values of yeomen by rejecting vassalage in favor of privileging the oath. While Robin and his men act nostalgic for the traditional

relationship that features a vassal as wholly deferent to a lord, Robin's men reject full surrender to the power of a lord when that full surrender exists only to serve a superficial purpose. For example, when John refuses to carry Robin's bow, he shows that yeomen manipulate feudal relations only to benefit the yeoman brotherhood. Robin and his men also reject the self-serving bonds represented by towns. The traditional ties of vassalage also do not appeal to the yeoman, nor does the corrupted form represented in town, for the bonds that are formed in feudal ties have no place for the yeoman. Instead, community is an important element of social organization. The vacillating decisions of Robin Hood and his men in respect to vassalage highlight the anxiety of the yeoman, who understands that towns are not purely evil, but the lack of solid bonds made between lord and vassal there cause Robin and his men to retreat to the forest.

The inhabitants of the Greenwood are at times nostalgic and yearn for a structure that sees the yeomen as members of a defined community. The merry men's vacillation between sometimes adherence to traditional vassalage and sometimes curiosity about individual profit portray a world where yeomen are negotiating where they fit in. In fact, Stephen Knight has argued "both the argument with John and the unsuccessful fighting indicate that Robin in the early ballads is represented as being in some way vulnerable, even fallible. Although he remains leader, this is not by birth or right; it is more like a consensual position" (18), and the "tensions" of the community in the Greenwood are those "of a cooperative group, not those of a hierarchical structure and a single dominant hero" (18). The Greenwood attempts to try to solve the problems

of the yeoman by trial and error. The fellowship, or unity of many men for a similar cause, retains their individual voices for the good of the community, and represents a group that is not completely sure where they stand in the world of old values and bonds of hierarchy that seem to only benefit a select few. The fellowship is an emergent ideology, not characterized by any sort of codified rules, but is one that permeated a multitude of social groups during the period. The word “fellowship” is introduced in moments where the values of town reach the nostalgic form of vassalage sometimes practiced in the Greenwood. A fellowship tries to marry the two worlds by valuing the individual voice of the vassal and his traditional bond to his lord.

CHAPTER THREE: THE JUSTICE OF THE BODY

Whereas it is argued medieval conduct books sought to reproduce elite experiences for the newly emergent urban bourgeois,[169] this has not yet been connected to rural yeomen culture or seen as particularly relevant to the Robin Hood ballads. The medieval Robin Hood ballads' are invested in themes of bourgeois cultural appropriation through the ballads co-optation of aristocratic cultural conventions and romantic literary tropes. Robin's men, all yeomen and part of the rural middle strata, occupy an intermediary social status similar to the merchant class that became increasingly mobile due to the abundance of surplus after the seigneurial crisis, a movement widely recognized by medievalists.[170] Perhaps the most obvious example of the appropriation of aristocratic ideals by Robin and his men in the ballads are the numerous scenes at the dinner table. This focus on the dinner table corresponds to the emphasis on table manners and preparation of the table in conduct books, which rose in popularity from the thirteenth-century onward in England.[171] Despite the fact that

[169] Several critics have acknowledged ways in which the bourgeois appropriated the lessons of conduct books for social mobility. See Claire Sponsler, "Conduct Books and Good Governance," in *Drama and Resistance*: *Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 50-74; and Sponsler, "Eating Lessons: Lydgate's 'Dietary' and Consumer Conduct," in *Medieval Conduct,* eds. Kathleen Ashley and Robert Clark (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-22; and Mark A. Amos, "'For Manners Make Men': Bourdieu, de Certeau and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the *Book of Courtesy,*" in *Medieval Conduct*, 23-48; and Felicity Riddy, "Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text," *Speculum* (1996): 66-86.

[170] Patterson, ed., *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain,* 113-55. See my introduction for a full explanation of this argument.

[171] Roberta Krueger, "Introduction: Teach Your Children Well," in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, ed. Mark D. Johnson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 1.

feasts, manners, and the dinner table are prominent in Robin Hood ballads, they have received little critical attention.

This chapter will argue the *Gest* engages with the vocabulary of conduct books, the under-examined alimentary codes of the sumptuary laws, and chivalric romance, presenting courteous behavior as a means of social mobility for yeomen. Although the rise of the urban middle strata has received a lot of scholarly attention, their rural counterparts, such as yeomen, who competed with the wealth of their rich urban counterparts, have received less notice. Robin and his men are not aristocratic but rather yeomen, a wealthy class of countrymen, sometimes landowners and sometimes wealthy farmers. Robin's social status as a yeoman marks him as the rural counterpart to the urban bourgeois, who competed with the lower aristocracy in terms of wealth.[172] The *Gest* shows Robin competing with knight and merchants both through money and for claim to proper conduct.

This chapter will argue the mid-fifteenth-century *A Gest of Robyn Hode* appropriates the tradition of the aristocratic feast from romance to promote the power of the yeoman. In romances, the table, the food upon it, and the manners that accompany the table are a place for the display of potential wealth, economic exchange, and social mobility. Merging the literary trope of aristocratic feasting from romance with the lessons of conduct manuals, the yeomen of the *Gest* appropriate the cultural capital of manners just as the urban bourgeois appropriated the conduct of the elite in

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[172] Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living,* 23.

the same period. Whereas critics have tended to see the *Gest's* engagement with aristocratic paradigms as parodic, I argue it is purposefully manipulative of these paradigms intending to document rather than parody a moment in history when the role of yeomen was shifting.

Drawing from such contemporary manuals as *Urbanitatis*, *Stans Puer Ad Mensam,* and *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, and from late medieval sumptuary laws, this chapter will show that the *Gest* displays both the social and economic possibilities such codes offered for yeomen and the anxiety surrounding these very opportunities for advancement. The *Gest* remains ambivalent about social and economic mobility through the appropriation of manners and aristocratic culture, both displaying the distinct possibility of such mobility through manipulation and aristocratic and bourgeois anxiety over the breakdown of social hierarchy. The Robin Hood ballads illustrate a complex ideology of courteous conduct, which connects worthy character to courtly conduct, and suggests the potential for breaking down rigid class hierarchies. I argue the *Gest* shares with conduct books an anxiety about socio-economic mobility. While conduct books demonstrate an anxiety about class contamination, this contamination is realized in the *Gest*. That is, the *Gest* promotes and suggests the possibility of mobility while simultaneously representing anxiety about class contamination, which is a mirroring of the same contradictory messages of the English conduct books. It is not that yeomen are anxious about their own potential social mobility, rather like others who have risen through the social ranks, the newly successful tend to limit the potential of those below

them. Therefore, the anxiety represented in both texts is anxiety about the complete disruption of hierarchy.

Cultural Capital Pays Off

In the world of Robin Hood, symbolic capital is consistently converted to monetary gain. Those that are discourteous are corrupt and eventually lose money. The reverse is also true: in situations where one stands to gain economic capital, Robin and his men act in accordance with lessons of good conduct, and are granted trust and eventually money because of their virtuous appearance, something the conduct books model by showing that courteous presentation of the body is a virtue. However, Robin and his men do not embody courteous ideals, rather due to the connection between manners and virtue in the conduct books, they ape courteous behavior for economic gain through the appropriation of the paradigm of virtue modeled in the conduct books.

In the *Gest,* Robin makes money by exploiting an established paradigm that manners are a sign of trustworthiness. In conduct books and romances those that are noble are mannerly, and those that are noble are inherently moral. The fact that trust is established between characters through conduct acknowledges the conflation of manners with outdated ideas of *gentilesse*.[173] Robin uses precisely this outmoded belief system to his advantage as he appropriates courtesy for gain. For example, in *fitts 1, 3,*

[173] Robin and his men capitalize on courteous behavior in order to impersonate the nobility and to gain economic capital by way of establishing trust. They use the cultural capital of manners in order to appear noble and, therefore, trustworthy. By aping mannerly behavior, Robin and his men use cultural capital to gain economic capital. Little John and Robin are often described as acting courteously in order to dupe unsuspecting characters, and several characters mimic specific conduct lessons in the ballads in order to gain acceptance only to monopolize financial opportunities.

4, and *7,* Robin and Little John act courteous to entice King Edward, Benedictine monks, the Sheriff, and Sir Richard of the Lee to the table, only to administer a game that brings Robin cash. As a result, Robin not only gains trust of others that bring them to Robin's feasting table but gains money through the aping of nobility and purity.

Although chivalric treatises and mirrors for princes excluded the possibility of rising within the social ranks due to controlled behavior, conduct books operate on the idea that manners might be traded for money. Late medieval conduct literature depicts behavior as a potential source of economic mobility, an idea that appealed to bourgeois readers' desires to turn cultural capital into possible economic capital and eventual social capital. Claire Sponsler argues conduct books express "nurture not nature, fashion subjects and that, to a large extent, the individual is in charge of his or her own self-fashioning."[174] Conduct books construct the possibility that those outside of aristocratic ranks could fashion themselves and gain through the presentation of their bodies. Conduct books may have been originally intended to educate aristocratic youth, but the emergent merchant class may have used them to appropriate noble behavior, and, as a result, could have popularized and transformed the genre. Claire Sponsler and Mark Amos argue that manners culled from conduct manuals were appropriated by the urban elite as cultural capital.[175] For instance, the conduct poem *Of the Manners to Bring One*

[174] Sponsler, "Conduct Books and Good Governance," 53.

[175] See Sponsler, Ibid. 56; and Amos, "'For Manners Make Men,'" 37.

to Honour and Welfare, c. 1430, explicitly links conduct not only to the virtue of honor, but also to the promise of financial success and sustainability:

> Sone, y schal þee schewe, --now take hede, --
> And of suche maners þee declare
> Bi whiche þou schalt come to manhede,
> To wordli worschip, and to welfare."[176]

"Welfare" can mean both "good fortune, well being and success," as well as "rich, sumptuous, and over-abundant in food."[177] This kind of shift from behavior as determined by birth to behavior that can be learned and perfected grants the possibility of using cultural capital in order to acquire more money. In this respect the poem illustrates Bourdieu's view that although cultural capital and economic capital are completely separate fields of production, together they hold the possibility of mutual benefit, as economic capital paired with cultural capital can lead to social capital.[178] By behavior learned through the use of conduct books readers stood to acquire even more economic capital through the presence of cultural capital. Additionally, according to this logic, the readers can also obtain social capital through economic capital.

Although the Robin Hood ballads demonstrate fascination with the literature of conduct, the appropriation of cultural capital in the *Gest* is intimately linked with the appropriation of the literary tradition of medieval romance. Medieval romance has a

[176] *Of the Manners to Bring One to Honour and Welfare* in *The Babees Book,* ed. F.J. Furnivall, *Early English Texts Society* o.s. 32 (London: Oxford University Press, 1868), 1-4.

[177] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "welfare."

[178] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique*, 286-88.

symbiotic relationship with courtesy literature. The romances often feature knights struggling with proper behavior and following the code of chivalry, and some critics have suggested romances are themselves courtesy literature.[179] Despite their status as yeomen, Robin's men participate in a world that is characterized by themes of chivalric romance. Thomas Ohlgren has noted the transformation of the knightly quest to one of merchant adventure in the *Gest*, as Robin often puts himself in danger in town, in archery competitions, and in pursuit of financial enterprises, and has identified the imitation of knightly behavior by "giving liveries and fees to his retained men; by acting in a courteous manner; by refusing to eat until he is visited by an unknown guest; by showing respect to his social superiors in lowering his hood and kneeling; and by granting a boon to the wife of Sir Richard at the Lee, the impoverished knight."[180] Many chivalric tropes are appropriated for the yeoman in Robin Hood ballads in order to recast the yeoman in his own hybrid world. This hybrid world, which highlights the

[179] Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33-36. Kaeuper argues that chivalric literature is prescriptive to establish a more perfect order, and certain types of behaviors are rewarded while others are punished. These romances model polite behavior for a knight and function in a manner similar to courtesy literature.

[180] Thomas Ohlgren, "Merchant Adventure in *Robin Hood and the Potter,*" in *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post-Medieval*, Ed., Helen Phillips (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 71. Thomas Ohlgren's argument is informed by Michael Nerlich's *Ideology of Adventure*, which argues "adventure evolved over time from the French medieval court of Chretien de Troyes to the capitalist economies of western Europe in the eighteenth century," marking the knightly quest to the merchant adventure (Nerlich qtd. in Ohlgren "Merchaunt" 70-71). Thomas Ohlgren "The 'Marchaunt' of Sherwood: Mercantile Ideology in *A Gest of Robyn Hode,*" in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture*, ed., Thomas Hahn (Cambridge; D.S. Brewer, 2000), 176-78. Ohlgren employs Nerlich's idea that the assimilation of yeomen to knights and the resulting class struggle uses "the cultural and ideological weapons of the nobility (in part unconsciously) in the class struggle against that very nobility" (176).

romance tradition heavily, is a world that features the cobbling of identity for the yeoman based on fully formed and recognized identities.

Although aristocratic romance influenced the Robin Hood ballads, the world of Robin Hood does not simply reproduce romance tropes.[181] Instead, Robin Hood and his men transform chivalric ideals for yeomen. Robin does not seek to be a knight because he refuses King Edward's invitation to live as an aristocrat in the *Gest*; however, through his appropriation of chivalric ideals, he is offered a chance to exist in aristocratic space.

One example of this co-optation is the transformation of the aristocratic tournament into the multiple archery competitions found in the Robin Hood ballads. The appropriation of the aristocratic tournament for economic mobility works similarly to the appropriation of manners: they both manipulate chivalric ideology. In romance, winners in battles are judged by the strength of their body and by the control of their virtues. Knights who were pure of heart, inherently good, and noble emerge as winners in fights. Those knights who were most chivalric and fitting to their estate were thought to be graced by God or fate to overcome their opponent. The manipulation of this chivalric ethos becomes evident when characters assume the winners of the archery competition in the Robin Hood corpus are noble in character. The Sheriff employs Little

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[181] In "The 'Merchaunt' of Sherwood," Thomas Ohlgren argues "The poems thus reveal what Nerlich calls a 'change of consciousness' from the courtly-knightly ideology of adventure to mercantile self awareness and self-fashioning. . . .and the [aristocratic] ideals were 'conserved, imitated, and appropriated by the urban merchant and artisan class, who are the producers and consumers of the Robin Hood poems" (qtd. in "The Merchaunt" 176). This idea rests upon Richard Tardiff's arguments that the context of the Robin Hood ballads is "urban rather than rural," and seeing Nottingham as the center of the stories, Tardiff "extends the meaning of 'yeoman' to include journeymen tradesmen and located the audience of the ballads in the urban lower class [. . .] who came into conflict with the civil authorities but also with the master guilds into which they were refused admission"(176).

John immediately after he wins an archery contest. He has no other reason to employ John other than the combination of skill and the "trust" earned by winning a contest, a transference of courtly ideology to middle strata gaming, as I will demonstrate shortly. The belief system the sheriff represents is faulty, however. As we learn, allegiance cannot be paid for; allegiance is part of an older tradition of oath and loyalty, and skill and trustworthiness are false constructs of aristocratic ideology. John is a disruptive servant: he cripples the butler, steals three hundred pounds, and "his coke and his silver vessel," thus manipulating for financial gain the belief system that the best man chosen by God wins and therefore can be trusted (715). Therefore, John manipulates aristocratic ideals for monetary gain. In the case of both the archery competition and the appropriation of manners, Robin manipulates the system of meaning attached to being noble in order to acquire the money of other characters who believe those that act nobly and mannerly are trustworthy. Both tournament and manners were elements of aristocratic lifestyle and the romance tradition. The cash Robin collects from their appropriation is a metaphor for economic and social mobility of the yeoman in the period.

Food Contamination as Social Contamination

The conduct books and the romance tradition acknowledge an aristocratic and middle strata anxiety over the permeable boundary between elite space and common space, also exemplified by Robin and his men. Some conduct books contain an anxiety about food contamination and the adulteration of status items, and this fear is directly related to the concern over the contamination of elite social space through the

metaphor of connecting status items to elite social space. The disgust of shared fluids and the shame in response to observable bodily functions is present in medieval conduct books from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. An overwhelming number of conduct books that concern table manners share a concern over shared space.[182] This is present in most English conduct books from the late Middle Ages and seems to document a trend in both attention to personal hygiene and avoiding offense.[183]

The fear of contamination is exemplified through the repetition of the importance of hand washing, utensil cleaning, mouth wiping, and the suppression of the expulsion of bodily matter such as sneezing, coughing, flatulence, rhinorrhea, and excess spittle in *Stans Puer Ad Mensam* c. 1479. The absence of such offensive matter preserves the purity of status items: wine, linen, meat, soup, glasses, etc:

> Of breed with þi teeþ no soppis þou make;
>
> Lowde for to soupe is aȝen gentilness
>
> With mouþ enbrowide þi cuppe þou not take,
>
> In ale ne in wiyn with hond leue no fatnes;
>
> defoule not þe naprie bi no richelesnes.
>
> Be waar þat at þe mete þou bigynne no striif;

[182] Norbert Elias, *Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939), 60. Norbert Elias not only speaks of the close proximity in which medieval people lived, but also of the way that the medieval person ate, without fork and with the hands, sharing goblets, plates, spoons and sometimes even knives. He argues that medieval people were without shame and disgust when their bodies came into contact with another or even when bodily fluids were swapped between one another through eating. While part of Elias' assertion is clearly correct, part misses the mark. The conduct books focus heavily on avoiding the swapping of bodily fluids thus challenging his assertion that they were without shame.

[183] See Mark Johnston, ed., *Medieval Conduct Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009) for examples of different cultural traditions of conduct literature.

ꝑi teeþ also at þe table picke with no knyf.[184]

This passage asks diners not to use bread to soak up soup and to wipe their mouths before taking the shared cup in case the remnants of grease or crumbs should spoil the wine or food. In *Urbanitatis* c. 1460, diners are made aware that they should not wipe their noses or wipe grease on the tablecloth:

Also kepe þy hands fayre & welle
Fro gylynge of the towelle,
There-on þou shalt not þy nose wype
Noþur at þy mete þy toth þou pyke;
to depe in þy cuppe þou may not synke
Thowȝ þou haue good wylle to drynke,
Leste þy eyen water þere by,
Then ys hyt no curtesy.[185]

Both the tablecloth and the napkin, while present on both lower class and upper class tables, were items of status. In her investigation of archaeological evidence of late medieval cooking equipment, Francoise Piponnier argues that tablecloths were status items: peasants owned some sort of rustic tablecloth, but they did not use it daily. Tablecloths were reserved for special occasions. Only the most wealthy could afford to use a linen tablecloth daily. Even burghers would have had a linen tablecloth, but they

[184] *Stans Puer Ad Mensam* in *The Babees Book,* ed. F.J. Furnivall, *Early English Text Society*, o.s. 32 (London: Oxford University Press, 1868), 36-42.

[185] *Urbanitatis* in *The Babees Book,* ed. Furnivall, 51-58.

would have used a hemp one on a daily basis.[186] Even for the most luxurious tables, the linen was an item of conspicuous consumption, so sullying the linen represented the defilement of status items. Since the less wealthy would be accustomed to wiping their fingers on their cheap hemp tablecloths and those of lower status have bodies that are dubbed as "dirty," their presence at the table is represented by the text's anxiety of the costly linen being dirtied.

The sullying of status items is closely connected to the corruption of food items in the conduct books, which features the same anxiety about the adulteration of goods. *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* c. 1500 suggests diners keep their hand out of dishes, out of meat, and from mixing items that will spoil the expensive food for another diner:

> Put not thy fyngerys on the dysche;
>
> Nothyr in flesche, nothyr in fysche.
>
> Put not thy mete in-to the salte,
>
> In-to thy Seler that thy salte halte,
>
> But ley it fyre on þy trenchers
>
> The byfore, and þat is þyne honore.[187]

Honor is connected to cleanliness at the table. One should not put the meat into the salt cellar, but rather lay meat on a trencher (stale bread used as a plate) and apply the salt to the meat to make sure that the meat will not spoil the salt or leave juice behind in the

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[186] Francoise Piponnier, "From Hearth to Table: Late Medieval Cooking Equipment," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 344.

[187] *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* in *The Babees Book*, ed. F.J. Furnivall, 27-32.

cellar. Also, one should not put one's fingers into the common dish or tear meat with one's hands. The text explicitly identifies these actions as dishonorable, uncouth, and non-aristocratic. On the other hand, chewing thoroughly and taking the shared cup with an empty mouth is attached to those at the top of the social strata: "And whylle þi mete yn þi mouth is, / Drynk þow not; for-get not this. / Ete þi mete by smalle mosselles; / Fylle not thy mouth as done brothellis."[188] In this poem, cups were shared between two diners. Taking a drink with food in one's mouth presents the possibility that morsels of food would be left behind in the cup contaminating the wine for another drinker. In addition, the size of bites signifies control of appetite and restraint, which is associated with the aristocracy, as specified by the quote above. At the other end of the spectrum, those gluttons that fill their mouths full of food are compared to the lechers in the brothels. The brief mention of brothels suggests not only the connection of unmannerly behavior with immorality, but also this implies a coded message about class: those that lived and took their meals in brothels were from the lowest ranks.

Cleanliness at the table is a common theme in the genre of romance as well as a preoccupation of conduct books. Romances feature cleanliness as part of the ritual aristocratic feast. Hand washing is featured prominently in *Lanval.* As the two handmaidens of Lanval's fairy lover approach him, they carry a towel and a golden bowl that is used later to help him wash before he sups with his fairy lover. The entire scene highlights both decadent examples of conspicuous consumption and the language of

[188] Ibid., 35-38.

manners.[189] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been discussed in conjunction with conduct books,[190] but it is noteworthy to point out that many romances including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* draw attention to the cleanliness of hands and the body right before supper to stress the process of polite eating for the aristocratic: "Alle þis mirþe þay maden to þe mete tyme; / When þay had waschen worþyly þay wenten to sete."[191] Other romances, such as *Le Roman de la Rose* contain an entire section of table manners where the character La Vieille outlines what is proper practice.[192] In fact, this passage has inspired Chaucerian parody in the portrait of the Prioress in the *General Prologue,* whose ambiguously worded love *amor vincit omnia* could have grown from her fascination with courtly life. The Prioress wipes her lip, is careful not to submerge her fingers in her sauce, and makes sure there is no grease when she takes her cup.[193] The word "clene" follows "curteisie" (133; 132) underscores the concept of cleanliness and courtesy.

Conduct manuals promote a similar aristocratic ideology to that found in romance. Most conduct books mention hand washing as a part of polite eating

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[189] Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France,* 59-66; 173-184. The ladies that attend Lanval dress him in rich clothing, serve him with ornate gold dishes, and attend to him courteously: "Mut fu servi curteisement . E il a grant joie le prent" (183-84).

[190] See Jonathon Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985) for a discussion of hand washing in both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (127) and *Cleanness*.

[191] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* folio. 92v.

[192] *Roman de la Rose,* 13,408-13,432.

[193] Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," *Canterbury Tales,* 127-36.

practices, as *Urbanitatis* demonstrates: "To þe mete when þou art sette, / Fayre & honestly thow ete hyt; / Fyrste loke þat þy hands be clene."[194] This process is strikingly similar to the ritual aristocratic feast in romance. The attention to hand washing and cleanliness for the aristocracy highlights the stereotypical depiction of commoners and those of non-aristocratic lineage as having dirty bodies. The order in which one should eat is an expression of social order. *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, c. 1480, for example, instructs: "Let the more worthy þan thow / Wassh to-for þe, & that is þe prow."[195] The order is calculated by both social stratification and hierarchy. That is, those that have higher rank within the same estate should wash first and have the honor of choosing their meat first, and if more than one estate is at the table, there should be an order for washing and serving.

The *Gest* mentions the process of hand-washing twice, which links the Robin Hood ballads with the literature of courtesy and romance: "They washed togeder and wiped bothe, / And sette to theyr dynere" and a second time, "They made the monke to wasshe and wype, / And syt at his denere, / Robyn Hode and Lytell Johan/ They served him both in fere" (125-26; 921-24). In the second quotation, Robin serves the Benedictine monk "in fere," altogether (924). Since the monk is of the first estate, Robin and his men follow the pattern of deference (despite the Monk's previous discourteous behavior) set out in the conduct manuals by serving him first and letting him wash first.

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[194] *Urbanitatis,* 39-41.

[195] *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, 85-6.

It is notable that the monk is forced to wash his hands before dinner, because the monastic manuals of table etiquette influenced those written for a lay audience.[196] A monk following his order should have known to wash his hands, but this unmannerly behavior is symptomatic of his spiritual corruption, drawing on aristocratic ideology that manners (including hygiene) mark virtue or vice. This attention to sterilization at the table shows the *Gest* to be a text that shows hygiene as a sign of the courtly as outlined in conduct books. Both traditions present courtly manners in the same way suggesting the Robin Hood texts present these paradigms as available for manipulation and exploitation. In fact, the characters in Robin Hood manipulate and exploit the paradigms for financial gain, as I will discuss below. The conflicting voices of the conduct manuals both promise social reward for control of the body and communicate the fear of contamination, through the metaphor of corrupted food and status items, that the social space of the elite is being culturally contaminated.

Lurking behind the obvious reading of the physical contamination of food and status items is the idea that the items are devaluing in status; that is, food and status contamination eventually represents class contamination. Take, for example, the linking of "churl" to the price of meat in *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*:

> Put not thy mete in-to the salte,
>
> In-to thy Seler that thy salte halte,

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[196] See Roberta L. Krueger's "Introduction: Teach Your Children Well," in *Medieval Conduct Literature* for a brief discussion of manuals for Benedictine life, including St. Victor's *De Institutione Novitiorum,* which dictated "restraint in dress, speech, gesture, and behavior at the table" (xiv) and the close relationship between clerical manuals and popular conduct books.

But ley it fayre on þi trenchere

The byfore, and þat is þyne honore[197]

Treating salt as it is an item of status and avoiding spoiling the entire salt cellar with your piece of meat is attached to "honore" above suggesting that those do not participate in manners are without honor.

Pyke not þyne Eris ne they nostrellis;

If þou do, men wolle sey þou come of cherles

And whylle þi mete yn þy mouth is,

Drynk þow not; for-gete not this.

Ete þi mete by smalle mosselles;

Fylle not thy mouth as done brothellis

Pyke not þi tethe with thy knife;

In no company begynne þow stryfe

. . . .

Bulk not as a Beene were yn þi throte,

As a karle þat comys oute of a cote.

And thy mete be of grete pryce,

Be ware of hyt, or þy arte not wyse.[198]

The last line mentions that the meat is of great price, and the wine was also expensive. Christopher Dyer mentions that the most "expensive elements in the diet—wine, spices,

[197] *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke,* 27-30.

[198] *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke,* 31-40; 47-50.

game—were reserved for the lord's family and the gentry," and the above passages contains both wine and spice. Meat other than game, on the other hand, made up most of the aristocratic diet. Dyer mentions that both meat and fish, "were served in large quantities," and meat would have been eaten everyday by the aristocracy, except for fast days and "Fridays and Saturday" where fish was served for religious observance.[199] These are items of conspicuous consumption, and the passage above expressed fears these status items will be tainted with the fingers of churls "karle" (48) that lack "honore" (32). The attention to cost, sullied status items, shared space and shared fluids represents the anxiety of those with power and wealth who fear occupying the same spaces with the bodies of the formerly classified "commoners." These are the same aspiring members of the middle strata that ascend to eat, drink, and wear the same clothes of the nobility. Perhaps they occupy the same space at the table with them, and read conduct books to learn how to successfully share the same space without causing offense.

Robin Hood's actions reflect the gestures feared in the conduct books' obsession with food purity. He looks as if he belongs at the table, but he uses his manners to occupy space that is reserved for the moral nobility. Robin's interactions with Sir Richard at the table ultimately bring him wealth. As he loans Sir Richard four hundred pounds, his payment is doubled when he is repaid by the monks with eight hundred; the

[199] Dyer, *Standards of* Living, 65; 58.

connection between courtesy, dining, and financial exchange is contained within the monk's response to Robin:

'By Our Lady,' than sayd the monke,
'That were no curteysye,
To bydde a man to dyner,
And syth hym bête and bynde.'
'It is our olde maner,' sayd Robyn,
'To leve but lytell behynde.' (1023-28)

The monk links a lack of courtesy here at the dinner table with chicanery. Robin's actions are veiled in courtesy and result in the monk agreeing to come to the table. This subsequently reveals discourteousness and the manipulation of courtesy for capital: the monk loses eight hundred pounds. The monk recognizes the table a site of monetary exchange, and even remarks that his meal would have been cheaper in another town:

The monke toke the hors with spore,
No lenger wolde he abyde;
'Aske to drynke,' than sayd Robyn,
'Or that ye forther ryde.'
'Nay, for God,' Than sayd the monke,
'Me reweth I cam so nere;
For better chepte I might have dyned
In Blythe or in Dankestere.' (1029-36)

Robin's attention to hand-washing, his elaborate table, and deferential conduct in kneeling and removing his hood marked him as a courteous representative of yeomanry, and through these actions trust was established. As a result, the monks felt secure that his actions marked him as a virtuous host. This progression reflects the philosophy of conduct books. Robin uses his manners as cultural capital, but he does so with the intent to rob, masking his churlish intent with embodied good behavior thus making him like the corrupted status item in the conduct books, which is a metaphor for class contamination.

Robin's appropriation of manners for financial gain is a realization of the fearful, anxious aristocratic voice represented in conduct books. Robin literally steals through good manners, and where the conduct books portray food and status items being corrupted through manners, Robin's appropriation is construed as theft. When Sir Richard returns his loan, the idea that good manners bring financial award is made even more apparent: "'Have here foure hondred pounde,' than sayd the knight, / 'The which ye lent to me, / And here is also twenty marke / For your curteysy'" (1077-80). The knight links money to courtesy in these lines, thus making explicit the connection between conduct and financial award. Although Robin refuses the money Sir Richard returns to him because he has received Richard's debt through the monks of St. Mary's Abbey and does not wish to be greedy and get paid triple, Robin gains twenty marks and bows and finely feathered arrows:

> He purveyed him an hundred bowes,
>
> The strynges well ydyght,

An hundred shefe of arrows gode,

The hyds burnesed full bright;

And ever arowe an elle longe,

With pecock well idyght,

Inocked all with whyte silver;

It was a seemly sight.” (521-28)

The Knight connects courtesy with financial reward above suggesting that those that are courteous stand to gain fortune. He reinforces this idea by giving lavish gifts to Robin.

The four hundred pound loan is forgiven Sir Richard, as Robin had doubled his prospect through his interactions at the table with the monk, but Robin is still rewarded for the transaction at the table with Sir Richard through the silver tipped arrows with peacock feathers and bows. Before the monk’s arrival, Robin fully expected to be paid by Sir Richard and even expresses anxiety when Richard is waylaid at the wrestling match. If Robin had not been sent a guest from St. Mary’s, Richard would have repaid him in full with interest on his loan, as the text suggests in *fitt 4*: "‘Have here foure hondred pounde," than sayd the knyght, / The whiche ye lent to me, / And here is also twenty marke / For your curteysy’" (1077-80). In addition, the interaction with Sir Richard, and later with King Edward at the table, hints at the promise of social mobility. Being in company with the aristocracy suggests not only the literal financial reward Robin receives from the knight and the monk, but also the possibility in the *Gest* for social mobility because of courtesy.

The table in the *Gest* simulates the table in the conduct books with one important difference: where the conduct books promise honor, good fortune, and wealth, Robin's manners bring literal wealth in the form of cash goods, something the conduct books do not explicitly promise. Robin uses the lessons of conduct books for financial gain through interactions at the table, but others, like the bourgeois consumers of conduct books, can use the lessons for both social and economic mobility. Robin uses manners to lure others to the table: he sets his table as if it were an aristocratic feast in accordance with standards of both romance and the wealth described in conduct books, but instead of the social gain the conduct books implicitly promise, Robin's exchange makes money. Robin and his men act mannerly in order to gain the trust of their dinner guests in order to rob them. Although this is part of their game—to lure with manners unsuspecting victims to a feast in order to test them for a financial reward—Robin treats Sir Richard with respect in order to get him to the table, the site of exchange. However, this literary example of the exploitation of manners and conspicuous consumption for potential financial and social gain was a real anxiety of the period, as the alimentary codes of the sumptuary laws indicate.

Sumptuary Laws at the Dinner Table

The anxiety of cultural contamination is not only seen in conduct manuals through the contamination of the clean body, of food and of status items, but also in alimentary codes of the sumptuary laws, which have been under-examined. The conduct books are part of a larger phenomenon of cultural anxiety over food and presentation. In 1363, a law "which was designed to prevent members of the lower

orders from dressing above their customary standard. . . . stated that grooms, servants and the employees of urban craftsmen should eat meat or fish for only one meal of the day, that they should wear clothes made from woolens costing no more than 1s 1d. per yard , and that they should not wear any silks or luxurious textiles."[200] The language of the statute specifically targets those acting "against their Estate and Degree, to the great Destruction and Impoverishment of all the Land."[201] These men were provided in addition to their daily meat, once a day "other Victuals, as of Milk, Butter, and Cheese, and other such Vituals, according to their Estate."[202] Although this is just one example of the law, other sumptuary laws targeted the newly wealthy members of both rural and urban society who were not noble. This response clearly identifies the wealthy aristocracy to exclude those who were not noble (but who were acting noble in dress, diet, and manner) from the noble. It would be a gross simplification to think this was only an activity of the aristocracy. In the example cited above, dress and alimentary codes were also championed by the powerful urban elite and guildsmen in order to exclude those below them from obtaining the status they had, and, also, to fix the prices to make less available expensive items to the lower orders, which was a product of the rising power of the working class.[203] It is notable that the structures that were put into place by the aristocracy to exclude the third estate were also appropriated by wealthy

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[200] Ibid., 88.

[201] *Statutes of the Realm,* 380.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Dyer, *Standards of Living,* 88.

townsmen and gentry in order to exclude those below them. The burgeoning economy provided multiple chances for improving one's station, but laws were made to keep the class division apparent.

The alimentary restrictions of the sumptuary laws sought to divide social groups through the prohibition of conspicuous consumption, and the numerous food laws and feasting restrictions mark the late thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries' preoccupation with food regulation and consumption. This connection illustrates the close connection food had to social status, but also sets a historical precedent for viewing the table as a site of economic struggle. In the above cited example, the restriction of meat, a status item, to one meal a day masks the underlying argument that even the servant class could afford this status food more than once daily. Dyer comments on the growing bourgeois ability to emulate the aristocracy through food and commodities: "wealthy townsmen behaved like the aristocratic consumer in that, after spending a good proportion of their income on food for their households, their other main areas of expenditure were building and textiles."[204] Indeed, an abundance of laws sought to regulate food prices during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in an attempt to avoid inflation, and extremely intricate regulation is set out in the reign of Henry III over bread (specifically wastel, white bread), wine, and ale.[205] Serious penalties for violation were also outlined, such as the pillory. These laws were also resurrected in

[204] Ibid., 205.

[205] See Frances E Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England*, *Johns Hopkins University Studies*. Vol. XLIV (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1926) for the description of food regulation during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Also, See 1 *Statutes of the Realm* (1235-1377).

1361 by Edward III in response to inflation of meat prices, specifically poultry.[206] This is presumably in response to the rising demand of meat, and the resulting increase of cost of obtaining it, as the economy surged and provided a new community of laborers that could afford to purchase it. The response was to set the price and cap inflation, restricting the merchants from gaining too much wealth from its distribution.

In fact, Edward III sets out a strict dictate of a culinary cap in response to the complaints of excessiveness stated by Edward III as being set to keep his subjects from "mischief:"

> many mischiefs have happened to the People of the said Realm: for the great men, by these excesses, have been sore grieved, and the lesser People, who only endeavor to imitate the great ones in such sort of Meats, are much impoverished, whereby they are not able to aid themselves nor their liege Lord in time of need, as they ought.[207]

The law, applied to all, is interestingly addressed to protect those of lower estate that have been burdened to emulate their social superiors and to those of greater estate, who were presumably affected by the rising costs of meat (that was addressed in a different statute) due to the great demand. The law restricts courses of a feast to two, and quantity of meats to two types, and that the sauces be made frugally without waste:

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[206] Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation,* 14-15; 59.

[207] *Statutes of the Realm*, 278.

> At dinner, meal, or supper, or at any other time, with more than two courses, and each mess of two sorts of victuals at the utmost, be it of Flesh or Fish, with the common sorts of pottage, without sawce or any other sort of victuals: and if any man choose to have sawce for his mess, he well may, provided it be not made at great cost: and if flesh or fish be to be mixed therein, it shall be of two sorts only at the utmost, either fish or flesh, and shall stand instead of a mess; Except on the principal Feasts of the year. [On the feast days] every man may be served with three courses at the utmost, after the manner aforesaid.[208]

This law was not followed or enforced, as there were no penalties attached to its violation, but it was forwarded to every office of the law to send a message about frugality and fruitless opulence. King Edward passed this to further his own wealth, as he knew the people would have more money to support his pursuits if they had more money to lend to him.[209] However, that is not to say there may be some intent to regulate consumption, specifically aristocratic feasts that could compete with the regal ones. This could be evidence of the head of the state limiting the lower aristocracy, as similar sumptuary laws pertaining to food consumption were reproduced in 1363 for the working class. Sumptuary laws sought to limit conspicuous consumption, specifically through dress and food, the latter being a topic that has been less explored.

[208] *Statutes of the Realm*, 279.

[209] Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation,* 29.

Robin's table is set as if he were the subject of the targeted alimentary restrictions proclaimed in sumptuary laws, and his conspicuous consumption of foodstuffs strives for aristocratic status, reflecting both romance paradigms and the practices formulated by fourteenth-century laws. Robin actively manipulates the status of food along with mimicry of aristocratic conduct for financial gain. That is, he sets his table as an aristocrat would, holds his body as an aristocrat would, in the hope that his guests attach good conduct and status items with virtue. The food served marks his table as mimicking the aristocracy: "Anone before our kynge was set / The fatte venison, / The good whyte brede, the good rede wyne, / And therto the fine ale and browne" (1569-72). Robin mentions this to show the king, disguised as an abbot, ""what lyfe we lede, / Or thou hens wende" (1577-78). White bread, wastel, was the most expensive type of grain and, according to social historian Christopher Dyer, "the most admired" by the aristocracy and most persons ate bread consisting of a mix of beans, husks, barley, and coarse wheat.[210] Other status items that are found upon Robin's table are wine, ale, and venison. Wine was extremely expensive because most was imported from Gascony and, as Dyer explains, "most knights and parish clergy had to be content with good ale."[211] However, Robin serves the best wine: "'Fyll of the best wyne,' sayd Robin, / 'This monke shall drynke to me'" (935-36). The word "best" suggests he intends his guests to know it was procured from the best vitner, and is therefore a sign of his

[210] Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 57.

[211] Ibid., 62.

wealth. Venison is a trickier subject, because Robin clearly poaches from the King's land, but Dyer notes that it was found in fenced royal parks, and "venison's status led to its use as a gift, and its consumption at special occasion, and then only at the top table."[212] During the feasting scene with Sir Richard, Robin's table is set with an abundance of meat:

> And sette to theyr dynere;
>
> Brede and wyne they had right ynoughe,
>
> And noubles of the dere.
>
> Swannes and fessauntes they havd full gode,
>
> And foules of the ryvere;
>
> There fyled none so little a birde
>
> That ever was bred on bryre. (126-32)

Game and fish, specifically swans and pheasants, mentioned in the quote above, "appeared regularly on aristocratic tables," Dyer has shown, because these items "symbolized the "aristocratic style of life" that was rich in both protected land and the leisure to hunt it.[213] The response Sir Richard gives after he has eaten at Robin's table suggests this lavish presentation is even rare for the aristocracy: "Such a dinere had I nat / Of all these wekys three" (135-36). Although the ill-fated knight he impresses is down

[212] Ibid., 61.

[213] Ibid.

on his luck, his response suggests that when he was wealthy he had partaken in such a spread.

The items Robin steals symbolize the appropriation of aristocratic culture through co-optation of conspicuous consumption. Robin's theft of the deer from the King's royally protected forest represents Robin's appropriation of the leisure of the aristocracy. As he places the deer on his table, he absorbs the symbolic status of a man that has been granted access to the King's land, something only aristocrats could do through royal sanction. The *Statutes of the Realm*, for example, said:

> Moreover It is accorded and stablished, That no Forester, nor Keeper of Forest or Chase, nor any other Minister, shall make or gather Sustenance, nor other Gathering of Victuals, nor other Thing, by colour of their Office, against any Man's Will, within their Bailiwick nor without, but that which is due of old Right."[214]

There were strict laws in place for poaching, and even foresters were not allowed to take game off the land they were entrusted to patrol. This competition for elite status between the middle strata and their superiors is observable through the table in the text, as well as between characters like the yeomen and the Sheriff.

The Sheriff occupies the same liminal space as yeomen and merchants, and the competitive play of the middling strata occurs at the table. Sheriffs were local enforcers of law, and the Sheriff in the *Gest* is very wealthy. When Robin invites the Sheriff to dinner, his table is set with status items: "Sone he was to souper setter, / And served

[214] *Statutes of the Realm,* 321.

well with silver white, / And whan the sheriff saw his vessel,/ For sorowe he might nat ete" (761-64). The Sheriff reacts with surprise and disgust when he discovers that his own silver is being used on Robin's table: "They toke away the silver vessel, / And all that thei might get / Pecis, masars, ne sponis, / Wolde thei not forget" (697-700). We can identify class antagonism in this example, as both men are invested in occupying elite spaces, and the material transfer of the silver vessel and tableware from one indeterminate strata member to another illustrates competition with another for status. The struggle amongst those of the middling sort is not as obvious as the attempts to gain status through material aristocratic appropriation, but the relationship between members of the high and low strata is evident through the metaphor of the table and the literature that concerned it.

The yeoman's attempt to strive for economic status in the *Gest* is demonstrated through the metaphor of Robin's table. The items placed upon the table create the illusion of wealth, but the physical table is not aristocratic, as Robin mixes status goods acquired from his income with a trestle table. Robin's table is both bourgeois and aristocratic, as it is not a fixed table. According to Daniela Romagnoli, fixed tables were not common and only rose in bourgeois households when the privatization of space became bourgeois.[215] Even the aristocracy, all except the most wealthy, set the table in common areas with collapsible trestles and boards, and as the social scale moved

[215] Daniela Romagnoli, "'Mind Your Manners': Etiquette at the Table," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 328-38. Claire Sponsler also argues this same idea in "Eating Lessons." She notes the bourgeois privatization of eating (11).

downward, tables are less common with the poorest eating while upright in the kitchen. In fact, the only specifically allocated dining spaces were at the monastery, where an entire room was devoted to dining. In aristocratic and bourgeois homes and manors, a board would be assembled in a common area.[216] Robin's table is assembled from trestles: "Bordes were layde, and clothes were spredde, / Redely and anone; Robyn Hode and his mery men / To mete can they gone" (1261-64). The allocated eating space signifies wealth and status, but the collapsible table suggests a less elite status.

In practice the medieval table was a heterogeneous and fluid place, and the interactions at the table, if one followed the rules of conduct, promised mobility.[217] According to Johanna M. Van Winter, who bases her study of medieval food on historical records of feudal lords and town records as well as written material of the time period, servants often sat on one side while the ones with the most status on the other in order to facilitate serving.[218] The medieval table of a person of the most elite status could potentially contain members from all three estates.[219] Wealthy abbots, country parsons,

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[216] Romagnoli, "Mind Your Manners," 332-33.

[217] The table unites and divides and is both socially conservative and progressive. Felicity Riddy sees the "embourgeoisiement" of the servant in the conduct poem as the recognition that servants should be mannerly, as well, as they reflect upon their employers' households and that male conduct books teach the "manners of the class to which they aspire," Riddy, "Mother Knows Best," 13-21. In essence, if one could survive a meal with grace and not give offense to a higher ranked individual, there would be a chance that person would be invited back to the table, which would bring the potential for prestige and power through social interaction.

[218] Johanna M. Van Winter, *Spices and Comfits* (Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2007), 324.

[219] This trend is also observable in the romance tradition. Banqueting and feasting, both common elements of chivalric romance, simultaneously unify and divide the differing social strata in historical practice and literary tradition. Feasting in romance signifies wealth. Only the most elite can provide the

powerful guildsmen, and servants all sat near one another. Between table-mates, plates, spoons, and even wine glasses were shared, and a complex set of rules dictated behavior in order to avoid offense to one's partner.[220] Of course there were strict divisions within the traditional three estates system. In every household, bourgeois and aristocratic, there was a hierarchy, and conduct books prescribed those with less status to act with deference and gratitude to those higher than their station, even within their own estate. A wealthy franklin would defer to a lord, and a powerful guildsmen would take preference over an artisan. *Urbanitatis* commands that the man with most status should eat first and have the best cut of meat:

> Ryȝth euen as þou doste hit ete.
>
> If þou sytte be a worthyor man
>
> Then þy self thow art on,
>
> Suffre hym fyrste to towche þe mete
>
> Ere þy self any þer-of gete;
>
> To þe beste morselle þou may not stryke
>
> Thowȝ þou neu*ur* so welle hit lyke.[221]

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materials for such a social celebration. Although manorial feasts and feast scenes in romance were somewhat socially exclusive, the table was shared by many different walks of life, as evidenced by both conduct manuals directions for those of lower social station and in sections that address the proper conduct of servants at the table. The table is a communal meeting-place where high and low are united both in material practice at manorial feasts and in the tradition of romance.

[220] Ibid., 323.

[221] *Urbanitatis,* 44-50.

This text asks that those of lower status not be greedy in taking choice cuts of meat for themselves as well as offering them up to be selected first by their superiors. Each stood to gain from following codes of behavior and deference. Not only are servants promised improvement in their position, but also those of the bourgeois are promised potential mobility within society. Nicola McDonald explains that both the feast of the romance and the historical feast were places of

> social (as well as political and economic) contestation: with their complex hierarchies of eating and food consumption (only those at the high table, for instance, enjoy the most expensive and elaborate dishes: they confirm social division while at the same time uniting all of the diners at least for the meal."[222]

The conduct books not only outlined complex social hierarchies, but also dictated strict control of the body in order to avoid offense.

The table in the *Gest* is heterogeneous as well, and represents the table portrayed in conduct books where messages of mobility are communicated through adherence to rules of class. Robin, as a wealthy yeoman, seeks to invite those of status to his table:

> Then bespake hym gode Robyn:

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[222] Nicola McDonald, "Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of *Richard Coeur de Lion*," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 131.

‘To dyne have I noo lust,

Till that I have som bolde baron,

Or som uncouth gest.

‘Here shall come a lord or sire

That may pay for the best,

Or some knight or squyer,

That dwelleth here bi west. (21-28)

He has no interest, however, in those that are poor, those that are yeomen, or knights and squires that would be good companions, as these people have nothing he is interested in financially, for he intends to rob and appropriate their wealth for his own gain. He wages his attack on the wealthy, those in power, and those that are corrupt:

These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes,

Ye shall them bête and bynde;

The hye sheriff of Notyingham,

Hym holde ye in your mind. (59-60)

. . .

Be he earle, or ani baron,

Abbot, or ani kyght,

Bringe hym to lodge to me;

His dyner shall be dight. (73-76).

The guests Robin seeks at his table are either church officials, who were extremely wealthy, or the aristocracy: earls, barons, and knights. The High Sheriff of Nottingham

(not to be confused with the local Sheriff of Nottingham) was an elite position within the government, and most likely was awarded to some person of status. There was much to be gained by having these people at the table, and the money Robin gains from robbing them is a metaphor for the actual potential for economic and social mobility through social exchange at the dinner table.

When first meeting a stranger of higher rank, Little John and Robin often follow standards of deference set out in conduct books, as outlined here by the fifteenth-century *Urbanitatis*:

> When þou comeste be-fore a lorde
> In halle, yn bowre, or at þe borde,
> Hoode or kappe þou of þo.
> Ere þou come hym alle vn-to,
> Twyse or þryse with-outen dowte
> To þat lorde þou moste lowte,
> With þy Ryȝth kne lette hit be do,
> Thy worship þou mayst saue so.
> hode of þy cappe & þy hood also
> Tylle þou be byden hit on to do;[223]

Urbanitatis outlines the process of kneeling and removing one's cap and hood when one comes in contact with of any person of social superiority. Courtesy is important even in contexts where every person is of the aristocracy. The respect of kneeling and removing

[223] *Urbanitatis,* 3-12.

a hood shows a person is well bred and noble. These same gestures are repeated in the *Gest*. When Little John first comes into contact with the dispossessed knight, Sir Richard of the Lee, dressed plainly "he rode in simple array, / A soriar man than he was one / Rode never in somer day" (90-92). Little John kneels before him despite the fact the knight's outward appearance does not promise any benefit to Little John: "Litell Johnn was full curteyes, / And sette hym on his kne: / 'Welcom be ye, gentyll knight, / Welcom ar ye to me'" (93-96). Robin kneels, as well, when Sir Richard enters the Greenwood: "Whan Robyn hym gan see, / Full curtesly dud of his hode / And sette hym on his knee" (114-16). Robin undoes his hood as a sign of respect for the knight.

The practice of good conduct helps one gain respect from others both in the poem and in the conduct books, but it also promises social reward. Within the three estates system, each estate was stratified, and the conduct books written to household servants, such as John Russell's *Book of Nurture,* c. 1460, as well as conduct books written from mothers to daughters, such as *How the Good Wife Touȝte Hir Douȝtir*, c. 1350, suggest potential household promotion through practice of thrift and manners.[224] This promotion is charted, in the case of John Russell, from cellarer to chamberlain, as each household description in his *Book of Nurture* is illustrated in detail. The narrator first meets a man in the forest with a bow, presumably a yeoman, who serves only his

[224] In "Mother Knows Best," Felicity Riddy argues *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* was addressed to bourgeois servants and the heads of households that trained them. The advice contained within presents a kind of female bourgeois ideology that differs from courtesy texts written to males, which assumed social mobility through manners. The texts written to females stress thriftiness and maintaining a good name since the audience to which they were written may not have had access to their mothers or a family history of such lessons (83).

self, and who is instructed through the course of the poem to occupy each position of the household. This movement, from no employment, to being a marshal or chamberlain to a pope, promotes the idea of social mobility through manners.

The Yeoman Social Vision

The *Gest* recognizes the social reward through the appropriation of manners, and while Robin rejects his place among the aristocracy, the offer to live in the King's palace parallels the realization that manners can make gentlemen in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. Robin's interaction with Sir Richard at the table secures his position to occupy aristocratic space. After Sir Richard has eaten at Robin's finely set table, the knight remarks "'If I come ageyne, Robyn, / here by thys contre, / As gode a dyner I shall the make / As that thou haest made to me'" (137-40). The invitation to Sir Richard's castle marks a social relationship forged through the successful deployment of cultural capital. Robin is invited to occupy exclusive space, and although Robin sees his reward as only financial, the promise of social prestige is acknowledged through this invitation.

The promise of social mobility through courteous conduct is fully realized in Robin's interactions with King Edward, but Robin's refusal of the King's invitation to inhabit elite social space hints at the text's resistance to the dissolution of a social hierarchy. This resistance is the *Gest's,* which marks the poems ambivalence about social mobility due to economic mobility. The poem acknowledges social mobility, but fears a complete breakdown of hierarchy, keeping the yeoman from becoming royal. After an invitation to a feast in which Robin invites the King, disguised as an abbot, to

see “what lyfe we lede” (1577), the meal and interactions there impress the King, but mostly, the King is impressed with Robin’s men’s deference in accordance with prescribed codes of conduct:

> Here is a wonder seemly sight;
>
> Me thynketh, by Goddes pyne,
>
> his men are more at his byddynge
>
> Then my men be at myn.
>
> ful hastly was theyr dyner idyght,
>
> And therto gan they gone
>
> They served our kynge with al theyr might,
>
> both Robyn and Lytell Johan. (1561-68)

In this passage, a close relationship is established between deference, service, and stratification. The King is impressed with Robin’s treatment of his men, and his men’s service to him, but it is stressed that Robin and Little John, who believe the King is an Abbot at this point in the ballad, serve the King. These complex set of relationships are set out in conduct books, specifically in those that address dinner service and deference. These manners entice the King to invite Robin to come live in the royal palace:

> ‘And come home, syr, to my courte,
>
> And there dwell with me.’
>
> ‘I make myn avowe to God,’ sayd Robyn,
>
> ‘And right so shall it be.
>
> ‘I wyll come to your courte,

Your servyse for to se,

And brynge with me of my men

Seven score and thre.' (1657-64)

Robin's consent to the invitation rests on whether or not he agrees with the "servyse" there (1665). After Robin accepts, the King and he dress alike, both in Lincoln green (1685). After this exchange, the King stages a feast and rewards status at the table when he returns Sir Richard's land to him:

They ete and dranke and made them glad,

And sange with notes hye;

Than bespake our comly kynge

To Syr Rycharde at the Lee.

He gave hym there his londe agayne,

A good man he bad hym be;

Robyn thanked our comly kynge,

And set hym on his kne. (1721-28)

The royal feast represents the ultimate exchange at the table, where both social and financial transactions are made. Sir Richard was dispossessed of his land earlier in the ballad, and land is marker of the aristocracy. Although Richard had lost wealth due to his son's tragic accident in a jousting competition, he also lost social status with the loss of land. Robin provided him financial assistance at the table, but the King restored the knight with social standing through his inheritance. The courtesy at the table is emphasized: the King commands Sir Richard to continue his courteous manners, and

Robin kneels in deference to the King, illustrating Robin still uses courteous conduct to his advantage. Robin rejects the invitation to live in the ultimate exclusive space, the King's castle, however.

It is arguable that the yeoman, although he strives to mimic the aristocracy through manners and financial exchange, cannot survive at the top of the social ladder. That is, he cannot occupy the same space as the head of state. When Robin enters the royal court, his funds are quickly exhausted: "Had Robyn dwelled in the kynges courte / but twelve monethes and thre, / That he had spent an hondred pounde, / And all his mennes fe" (1729-732). When Robin inhabits this exclusive space, the cultural capital he has transformed into economic capital dissipates. Since he used the cultural capital to climb the economic ladder, and has been offered a spot in the most coveted social space, he finds his financial capital completely consumed.

The promise of occupying elite social spaces is explored in the *Gest*, but Robin's refusal to occupy these spaces is perhaps the text's implicit argument that yeomen, although completely able to act and mimic the aristocracy, cannot appropriate the highest aristocratic rank. In the *Gest*, yeomen want to assert their yeomen-*ness* rather than to be aristocrats. They do not adhere to manners unless they seek to redistribute money to *yeomen* from the corrupt first and second estates. One of the occupations of the text is to create identity through appropriation, but it recasts that appropriation not as parody, but as a reworking of existing paradigms to create an identity for the middle strata. This gesture of the text also acknowledges the conduct book's conservative anxiety about shared space, and the realization that there are limitations to

appropriated behavior. While cultural capital can present financial and social opportunity, the *Gest* implies cultural capital cannot allow a complete disruption; the *Gest* instead implies that social hierarchy has some staying power, especially that hierarchy determined by royal space.

A Gest of Robyn Hode presents readers with a paradox in its coverage of yeoman appropriation of courteous conduct and aristocratic ideals. The contrasting voices echo the conflicting message within many conduct books, for while implicit messages of social mobility are contained within them, the anxious voice of cultural contamination speaks loudly through the literary metaphors of food and status contamination that are represented in the multiple alimentary codes of the sumptuary laws. The *Gest* is invested not only in the appropriation of the aristocratic genre of romance, through its extended lavish feast scenes, but one that monetizes the capital earned from the adoption of courteous behavior through the metaphor of theft at the table. The conduct manuals were our modern day food blogs, wine tasting classes, fashion magazines, and travel guides, as they allowed the bourgeois a chance to occupy and experience elite culture. This cultural capital could be transformed into economic capital and exchanged for social mobility. The transformation of the cultural capital into economic mobility in the *Gest* is the recognition of the text that the bourgeoisie could capitalize on the conscious control of the body, for the conduct manuals recognize the attention to deference and cleanliness signify virtue, and virtue signifies *gentilesse*. Exuding *gentilesse* allows Robin to establish trust with his intended wealthy dinner guests, but that trust is soon realized to be false and masked by his mannerly body as he robs and

converts to money the same cultural commodity with which he has lured his guests. The conduct book's obsession with sterile atmosphere expresses the anxiety of the aristocracy that their status items will be sullied, that the table will be less pristine when the younger, less experienced bourgeoisie attend to it. Robin's deliberate actions in masking his criminal, but economically fluid, and socially mobile body to seem courtly and virtuous is a realization of that fear. The *Gest* illustrates that fear through the metaphor of the table, as Robin is invited to join the aristocratic world by the head of the realm. Although Robin rejects his invitation in order to assert his own yeoman identity, such an action shows that social hierarchy cannot be completely dismantled by the fluidity of economic mobility. Furthermore, the cultural capital Robin and his men acquire suggest the *Gest* engages in the larger conversation of the potentially destabilizing force of yeoman appropriation of aristocratic culture.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE JUSTICE OF GOD

While gaming has been discussed as a theme that runs throughout most of the Robin Hood ballads and as a performative element for the spectators of the festivals,[225] there is little discussion of social justice in the ballads. When one thinks of Robin Hood, however, it is hard to imagine him without his bow or in an archery competition proving his skill. It is also difficult to imagine how Robin and his men would be able to administer justice without the archery contest or the other forms of competition that run throughout the ballads. Dean A. Hoffman has argued that archery is a way to introduce justice in the ballads.[226] I claim his argument about archery can be extended to gaming as a whole in the early Robin Hood ballads. Gaming, whether through the archery contest or the wrestling match, is the mechanism by which action and the resulting justice are set into motion. I read games in the early Robin Hood ballads as an expression of justice that defines class.

The texts' preoccupation with justice enacts the class values of the heroes of the ballads. Robin and his men's identification as yeomen, stuck somewhere between identifying with the nobility and the peasantry produces ideological vacillation, a fluctuation seen in the games that bring about judicial action. The games played in the

[225] Johnston, "The Robin Hood of the Records," 53-4.

[226] Dean Hoffman, "'Wyth the Shot Y Wyll / Alle thy Lustes to Full-fyl' Archery as Symbol in the Early Ballads of Robin Hood," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (1985), 494-505. See page 494 for his argument that archery is a symbol of justice.

Gest of Robyn Hood toy both with notions of chivalric ideology and with the competing ideology of the individual in the emerging mercantile economy. Robin and his men exploit both worlds. The ballads rely on antiquated ideas about the judgment of the divine presence of God that are associated with aristocratic tournaments in order to illustrate that yeomen exist in two worlds simultaneously. The ballads invoke the concept of divine adjudication in both the literary tradition of tournaments and the practice of trial by combat. The ballads invoke the concept of divine adjudication found in both tournament and trials of combat in order to capitalize upon the title of winner. There are two types of yeoman competition in these ballads that I will discuss: one that manipulates chivalric ideals about competition (the archery contest); and one that parodies chivalric tournament and exposes yeomen as concerned only with material wealth (the wrestling contest).

In this chapter I argue that these two forms of yeoman competition manipulate chivalric ideals for economic and social gain. I show that the medieval Robin Hood ballads draw on a complex history of divine justice from both trial by ordeal and trial by combat, which separately informs military practice, aristocratic sporting event, and the chivalric literary tradition. The ballad's depiction of justice illustrates the indeterminate social identity of yeomen. The archery competition reworks existing paradigms of judicial discourse, specifically the aristocratic and the divine, presenting a form of justice that reflects and constructs yeoman values. I analyze the ballads' engagement with the idea of divine justice found in trials of combat and ordeal, which informs the conventions of the romance genre. Through the appropriation of the doctrine of sacred

justice, yeomen refigure justice for themselves by reworking aristocratic tournament ideology.

The yeomen replace the current system with judicial practices that relied upon trial by combat and ordeal, which were widely practiced before the thirteenth century and were a common means of adjudication in chivalric romance.[227] Yeomen exploit this belief system for economic gain by manipulating the chivalric ideology that ties the winner of an ordeal or combat to being the rightful, just, and good person God selected to succeed. In turn, the winner uses this advantage to gain trust from other persons in order to appropriate cash goods. In the process, this manipulation highlights the failure of both the judicial systems (ordeal, combat, and trial) of the legal examination process. This brand of justice involves an equitable distribution of goods not to the poor, as modern film adaptations of Robin Hood would have us believe, but rather to yeomen themselves.

First I will discuss examples of how the body has been used as a vessel of truth in judicial practice, and then how chivalric romances and chivalric treatises present the divine as present in feats of strength and combat. I illustrate the manipulation of the chivalric ethos of trial by combat through the example of tournament, an idea borrowed from chivalric romance. Then I will argue the yeomen adapt this belief system in the archery competition, which mimics the courtly tournament. In the ballads, yeomen

[227] Trial by ordeal was discontinued by the order of the Pope in 1215 while trial by combat continued to be used. See Canon 19 of the Fourth Lateran Council. Henri Leclercq, "Fourth Lateran Council (1215)," *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 9 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) 18 Jul. 2013 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09018a.htm>.

manipulate the belief of God's hand in battle, in feats, and of skill in order to gain distributive economic justice for themselves.

Divine Justice

Robin and his men appropriate the belief system underlying such practices as the ordeal and trial by combat—that God is the ultimate administrator of Justice, and only He knows the truth and can judge effectively. The ballads suggest an anxiety about the administrators of this system of justice. This anxiety is exemplified by scenes of judicial collusion between local, religious, and royal administrators, who gain social prestige and cash goods for their close relationship. One such scene is the failure of justice in the knight episode in the *Gest* discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the ballads suggest the entire system based upon sacred justice is flawed and can be (and has been in the past) manipulated by those in power. Therefore, the ballads expose the faulty system of justice on earth, administered in God's name by the hands of men in both ecclesiastical and secular court systems, by showing that it fails and can be manipulated for gain.

The Robin Hood ballads draw on an ideology of divine justice exemplified by the ordeal. Adjudication in Trial by Ordeal before 1215 was a common means of divining the truth that was believed to manifest through the instrument of the body. God, the ultimate judge, was thought to have actively participated in such rituals. As Paul R. Hymans has argued, "final proof in early English law, as elsewhere, was generally left to

the judgment of God. Because God was by definition impeccable."[228] Trial by ordeal was originally used to adjudicate theft but later was used to judge "invisible crimes" such as adultery, sorcery, heresy, and treasonous thoughts, crimes for which evidence was not apparent. Two forms of examination were used, both forms using the body as the ultimate vessel of proof of truth: trial by water, and trial by fire. Trial by water took two forms, hot and cold. Hot water involved retrieving stones from a cauldron of boiling water. The hand would be bandaged afterward, and the wound would be examined three days later by a cleric who would decide if it had festered, which meant guilt; or it had healed clean, which meant innocence. Trial by cold water involved being submerged in a pit of blessed water; floating was a sign of guilt because the holy waters of God had rejected the participant. Sinking proved innocence because the water had accepted the body of the participant. Trial by fire featured holding a hot iron from a fire and walking a set number of feet. As with the trial by hot water, the area that came into contact was bandaged and examined for proof of innocence and guilt.[229]

The understanding of this process as divine is evident in the fact that instruments used to examine potential criminals were treated ceremoniously; they were prayed upon, blessed, and cleansed by clerics. As historian Hunt Janin explains, "immediately before the ordeal itself, the accused had to spend three days in prayer and fasting," and both hot and cold water trials included prayer and fasting, a mass, and

[228] Paul R. Hyams, "Trial by Ordeal: The Key to Proof in Early Common Law," in *On the Laws and Customs of England, Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorpe,* eds., Morris S. Arnold et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 90.

[229] Hunt Janin, *Medieval Justice: Cases and Laws in France, England, and Germany* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 13-16.

blessing of the instruments of examination, and even the Eucharist was given with orders to help manifest guilt or innocence.[230] This process led to the Pope's decree in the Fourth Lateran Council that the practice should stop:[231]

> No cleric may pronounce a sentence of death, or execute such a sentence, or be present at its execution. If anyone in consequence of this prohibition *(hujusmodi occasions statuti)* should presume to inflict damage on churches or injury on ecclesiastical persons, let him be restrained by ecclesiastical censure. Nor may any cleric write or dictate letters destined for the execution of such a sentence. Wherefore, in the chanceries of the princes let this matter be committed to laymen and not to clerics. Neither may a cleric act as judge in the case of the Rotarrii, archers, or other men of this kind devoted to the shedding of blood. No subdeacon, deacon, or priest shall practice that part of surgery involving burning and cutting. Neither shall anyone in judicial tests or ordeals by hot or cold water or hot iron bestow any blessing; the earlier prohibitions in regard to dueling remain in force.[232]

Several theologians directly criticized the use of instruments to provoke God to act--some writers called it tempting God--and most agreed that God's judgment was "secret

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[230] Janin, *Medieval Justice,* 16; 14-16. The priest blessed the water of the cauldron for the hot water ordeal, the iron during mass for the fire ordeal, and the pit of water for the cold water ordeal.

[231] Hyams, "Trial by Ordeal," 101.

[232] H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937).

and impenetrable," and not subject to man's demand to make God reveal himself.[233] They argued that it is egotistical to assume God to be at the beck and call of human desires, and to settle the small accounts of humans. Furthermore, the instruments while blessed were basically used to basically torture another person and shed blood.

Even after the practice of ordeal was abolished, bodies were still held as ultimate vessels of truth. External sacred judgment about inner character and worth through trial by combat and judicial duel persisted even though the clerics that officiated them were banned from doing so. The lack of clerical involvement disassociated the invitation of God to reveal his judgment from an organized ritual in ordeal, combat, and duel, but the philosophy behind this practice continued. Major cases involving honor were decided using combat. The body continued to be a vessel of truth marking those that were successful in trials as innocent or victorious and therefore clean and trustworthy.

Even long after the practice of ordeal ceased in the early thirteenth century, the body continued to represent truth in literature in trials by combat and ordeal. The romance tradition used the combat motif to settle matters of dispute between two parties that need intercession and are common in Malory's *Morte D'arthur*. Furthermore, ordeal and the bodily tests are represented long after they stopped being

[233]Jane Martindale, "Between Law and Politics," in *Law, Laity, and Solidarities*, eds., Pauline Stafford, Janet L. Ielson et al. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001), 129.

practiced. In the fifteenth-century *N-Town Trial of Mary and Joseph*, for example, an ordeal was used to test Mary's virginity.[234]

On the other hand, trial by combat, practiced until 1819, and judicial duels, practiced until 1492, and even trial by champion, practiced until the thirteenth century, operates by the same principles of divine justice and was continued and is well attested in the record.[235] Like trial by ordeal, trial by combat was used for invisible crimes such as treason. This practice was ritualized as well. The approver repeated his charge against the defendant three times in oath, and the defendant denied the claim in oath.[236] Furthermore, the instruments of battle were prayed over, as described by John Hill, an Armourer and Sergeant in the Office of Armoury under Henry IV and Henry V:

> It was also a part of the counsel's duty to engage three priests, each of whom was to sing a mass on the day of battle—one the Mass of the Trinity, one the Mass of the Holy Ghost, and one the Mass of our Lady, or of any saint or saints to whom the knight had sworn devotion. Throughout the night before the encounter a light was kept burning in the champion's room and his counsel watched him and observed how he slept. In the morning he went to church. His harness was laid out at the north end of the altar and covered with a cloth; the Gospel was read over

[234] Emma Lipton, "Performing the Law in the *N-Town Trial Play*," In *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England,* eds., Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002), 130.

[235] Janin, *Medieval Justice,* 19.

[236] John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1973), 131.

it, the three masses were sung, and at the end of the third a priest gave a blessing.[237]

The ritual before both the trial of ordeal and combat invokes at every step the spirit of God to inhabit and invite him to manifest His judgment. This process was not merely a barbaric trial of entertainment; rather it was practiced in a world where the natural and the supernatural were closely intertwined. In fact, in judicial duels, men asked for "supernatural aid from the saints," and thanked God for his help.[238]

The entire process was a way of making the invisible visible and of evoking a tangible response to something intangible. These types of ceremonies pervaded medieval Christian culture. Churches traded in and prominently displayed the physical remains of saints in order to benefit from the saints' invisible ability to be God's intercessors by performing physical miracles, such as cures and spiritual visions. A related example is the Eucharist: the sacramental bread becomes the body of Christ in Mass through the doctrine of transubstantiation. Likewise, in ordeal guilt manifested itself through the body as a material evidence of invisible crimes, such as witchcraft, heresy, adultery, and treason that left no other trace of physical evidence.

This concept of divine justice extended to historical tournament, where moral character is ostensibly manifest in physical prowess, and where God decides the winner

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[237] Luke Owen Pike, *A History of Crime In England Illustrating the Change of Laws In the Progress of Civilization*, Vol. II. (London: Smith Elder Co., 1876), 390-91.

[238] Hyams, "Trial by Ordeal," 115. Hyams mentions separate instances of men either invoking God to help him or thanking him for the strength that was needed to do so thus illustrating the process of God's help in ascertaining truth.

through giving him strength to beat his less worthy opponent. Tournaments in historical practice included the ritualized religious practice. Before the tournament itself, at dawn, according to Jean Renart, a mass of the Holy Spirit was given, and according to Gerbert de Montreuil, French poet, heralds would cry, "Knight, seek out the churches! God may grant that your sins will be obliterated if you hear a mass of the Holy Spirit. Get your shoes on! Now is the time for worship!"[239] Similarly, the war cries of the knights in the *melèe* invoke God himself: "*Dex aie*! (God our help)" for the English royal house; "*Dex aie li Mareschal*! (God for the Marshal)," the cry of William Marshal, or even those that called upon the saints, "Saint David!"[240] The invocation of religious figures for help in the outcome of a test echo the ritual of the trial by combat and ordeal.

In *Robin Hood and the Potter,* such ritualized and Anglicized language appears in times of the archery tournament. When Robin disguised as a potter shoots with the Sheriff of Nottingham he invokes God to help him prevail even though the tackle that has been given to him is flimsy: "So god me helpe,' sayde the prowde potter, / 'Thys ys bot right weke gere'" (199-200). The phrase 'so God me helpe' echoes the Latin '*Dex aie*,' or even more directly William Marshall's cry for God's. This phrase appears again in a second ballad, *A Gest of Robyn Hode,* when John, who has been employed by the Sheriff due to his skill at archery, plans to exploit the trust he has gained from the Sheriff to rob him:

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[239] David Crouch, *Tournament*, (London: Hambledon and Continuum, 2005), 71.

[240] Crouch, *Tournament,* 75.

God lende us well to spede!

But alwey thought Lytell John

To quyte hym wele his mede

Nowe so God me helpe, sayde Littell John

And by my true leutye. (610-14).

Although John speaks these lines directly after the archery competition and not during the competition itself, the repetition of this phrase so near the competition suggests a deliberate attempt to echo the calls uttered during trials of combat.

In contrast with the tournament records of historical practice, which lack specific descriptions of financial transactions connected to cries of divine intercession, the Robin Hood ballads exact justice in a more material way. God participates in the process of appropriating money from one group to another. Instead of using the body, the ballads feature a financial reward for those that are just and as a punishment for those that are unjust. The lines "to quyte hym wele his mede/ Nowe so God me helpe," in the passage above coupled with - "God grant us well to spede" suggest John views God as able to help him exact justice through the material wealth he will appropriate from the Sheriff for his yeomen. The "quyte" is both the payment he will exact and the revenge he will take upon the Sheriff. This echoes the divine justice that is employed in trials of combat and ordeal, including the tournament, but alters it with a financial component of justice, something that is particularly yeoman as defined by the ballads. Although historically monetary prizes were awarded to winners of tournaments, money is not stressed in

romance, and it is never figured as justice. This form of justice is uniquely tied to yeomen in the ballads, who see the money as rightfully and exclusively theirs.

The Body of Trust is the Skilled Body

Apart from the tradition of testing the body to see the truth through the intercession of God's judgment, chivalric treatises reflected idealized beliefs about knights, their purity, and their bodies. The link between the strength of the knights' body and truth, especially in martial engagements and tournaments, are elucidated in chivalric treatises. Knights who were pure of heart, inherently good, and noble emerged as winners in fights. Those knights who were most chivalric and fitting of their estate were thought of as graced to overcome their opponent. Therefore, winning testified to the inherently good and truthful nature of the individual. In the *Book of Chivalry*, a fourteenth- century chivalric treatise circulated in England, Geoffroi de Charney states the connection between purity of character of knights and winning tournaments:

> These are the ones who are physically strong and skillful (agile) and who conduct themselves properly and pleasantly, as is appropriate for young men, gentle courteous and well mannered toward others, who have no desire to engage in any evil undertaking, but are so eager to perform deeds of arms at jousts…if all goes well for them they will usually win their contest.[241]

This passage contains the language of morality in such words as "properly," "pleasantly," "gentle," "courteous," and most importantly the refusal of "any evil

[241] Charney, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, 86-87.

undertaking." Although God's agency is not specified, it is assumed in this passage based on the moral language and the long-standing tradition of the body representing purity and goodness through strength or the ability to withstand tests. Moral character and martial prowess are directly connected in chivalric manuals. Furthermore, winning proves one's valor, honor, and purity, and make a knight immortal, ideal and fit for a higher quest.

Tournaments are perhaps the best example of the interaction between aristocratic literature and practice noted by Maurice Keen.[242] The first recorded example of Arthur's court inspiring Round Table tournament is 1223 in Europe, but there are many examples in England by the end of the thirteenth century. The earliest example in England is the King's prohibition of the Round Table tournaments in 1232.[243] Although it is not clear how much these tournaments were distinguished from the grand tournaments of the *melèe*, it is clear that the Round Table tournaments featured single jousts with blunted weapons, feasts, and a courtly atmosphere.[244] In several examples from Austria, Germany, and France a challenger picked his matches by touching the shield of the knight he chose to challenge, which echoes Arthurian tournament in literature. In other examples, specific episodes from romance have inspired activities in real life tournaments, such as offering marriage to a lady for the winner, and according

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[242] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 2-3.

[243] Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages,* trans., Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 262.

[244] Ibid.; Crouch, *Tournament,* 116-17.

to Bumke, a "ritual challenge with a washbasin, and a gong modeled after the adventure of the well in the Arthurian romance *Iwien*"[245]

In both the French and English romance tradition, tournament and combat are clearly attached to sacred justice. The best man wins through the hand of God. We can see this employed in the trial battle scenes by Malory, the combat scenes in Marie de France's *Lais*, and in the slaying of the Giant of St. Michel in the *Alliterative Morte D'Arthur*. Although no aristocratic tournaments appear in the Robin Hood ballads, they are parodied in the wrestling match, which will be discussed later in detail. Yeomen participate in the *Gest's* wrestling match, and they begin to fight a yeoman outsider because of skill. This scene acknowledges the yeomen recognize the concept of skill and truth being connected and will attempt to manipulate the outcome of a competition in order to make financial gain. It takes the intercession of Sir Richard of the Lee, a knight, to restore order and name the rightful yeoman the winner: "He toke the yeman bi the hande, / And gave hym al the play" (563-64). The rightful winner fails to be named showing the corruption of such systems because of human greed. Sir Richard later clarifies to Robin why he was late to return his loan: "But take not a grefe, that I have be so longe; / I came by a wrastelynge, / And there I holpe a pore yeman, / With wronge was put behynde" (1069-72). "Behynde" when used with "putten" means to "relegate to an inferior position, hurt, disregard," all as a result of the other yeomen's wrongs to

[245] Bumke, *Courtly Culture,* 263.

him in competition.[246] The knight, Sir Richard, makes sure the rightful contestant wins thus showing the Robin Hood ballad's recognition of aristocratic literary paradigms. However, instead of God's intercession, a knight intervenes suggesting the competition, like other forms of trial by combat and ordeal, could have been thrown or might not reflect the truth of God.

While absent in the ballads, aristocratic tournament is reflected through the various archery tournaments in the *Gest*, which, like the yeomen who participate in them, rely on both imitation and manipulation of the paradigms of sacred justice. The longbow, the weapon of Robin and his men, became increasingly important to the king which shows Robin's elevated social importance and introduces his intent to create new forms of identity from existing judicial paradigms. Archery competitions were meant to imitate aristocratic tournament, and Robin and his men obtain cash by manipulating antiquated ideas of sacred justice. The yeomen in the *Gest* deliberately invoke the doctrine of sacred justice in order to gain trust and appropriate wealth. The yeoman's imitation of knightly behavior not only finds precedence in weapon choice but also in the tradition of aristocratic tournament.

The Rise of the Archer

In order to understand how the games in Robin Hood reflect the yeoman's confused social identification, we must first understand that tournaments were linked with aristocratic ideology. From there, we can better examine yeomen's actions in

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[246] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "behynde."

gaming in Robin Hood. While tournament sports only included those of aristocratic birth, archery and the archery competition, while not solely restricted to yeomen, directly helped to define him. Both laws and lack of finance kept those who were not of noble birth, such as yeomen, from participating in aristocratic tournaments. Stemming from the tradition of battles, tournaments were ways for the aristocracy to practice martial arts and provided entertainment during times of peace. Jousting and swordplay mimicked war and allowed knights to practice against competitors. Although the first tournaments in England were most likely unstructured challenges between knights,[247] codification of military spectacle occurs quite early. Richard I (1189-99) declared that there were only five legitimate places in England to tourney, and he restricted participants ranked lower than a "landless knight."[248] Even without external restriction, participants unable to afford armor and weapons were excluded from early tournaments, which according to tournament historians Barber and Barker "usually meant that the participants were knights and squires."[249] In the fifteenth century, elaborate rules for participation were formalized, including proving noble birth, and excluding those that were "perjurers, slanderers, cheats, cowards, adulterers, destroyers of churches, and bandits to those who cannot show that their ancestors

[247] Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournament: Joust, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2000), 25.

[248] Ibid.

[249] Ibid., 185.

tourneyed in the last fifty years and anyone tainted by trade."[250] These stricter laws excluded those who could now afford armor and wanted to emulate the knightly class in tournament.

These exclusions, such as those "tainted by trade," paint a harsh portrait of the *nouveau riche* that can be identified as a fear of the breakdown of the ideology of the three estates model due to the increasing importance of the middle strata. Because arms, armor, horses, attendants, and travel were costly, there is a certain amount of financial restriction involved in the participation in tournament. Not only was it expensive to have the right accessories to participate, but the repairs to shields, lances, and armor increased finances once one was at a tournament. However, as money became more plentiful to laborers, merchants, artisans, and farmers, some were able to resemble the lower aristocracy in dress, food choices, housing, furnishing, and lifestyle. This is one of the tensions of the later Middle Ages when class restrictive laws were becoming more visible, such as sumptuary laws and alimentary codes as discussed in the previous chapter, and in this case, laws that restricted merchants from participating in tournaments. This is evidence for a move toward those of non-noble birth trying to imitate the activities of aristocrats for prestige.

Once considered a lower class weapon, in the fourteenth century, the bow was associated with yeomen. In early England, the bow was not seen as a weapon of war as much as those of iron and steel, such as the battle-axe, sword, and mace. According to an entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* "archery although practiced as a sport is but little

[250] Ibid., 186.

used in war."[251] Furthermore, before and during the thirteenth century, the bow was considered a lower class weapon, associated with the peasantry, most likely because, as historian John Marshall Carter has argued, "the medieval warrior could never become proficient with the bow on horseback like his Islamic counterpart in the Crusades."[252] All of that changed, however, with the success of the longbow in the Hundred Year's War with France. Victories at Crecy, Poitiers, and Halidon Hill, Scotland in the 1330-40's catalyzed the longbow's elevation from the obscure weapon of plebian foot soldiers, hunters, and peasant raids to celebrated fame.[253] It was not until the fourteenth century that the social class of the wielder of the bow changed, however. There is not much evidence to suggest that the nobility used the bow before the fourteenth century.[254] As Maurice Keen explains, Edward I (1272-1307) ordered that every man must "have his own arms and be ready for service, but this is most likely in reference to foot soldiers and peasants who were expected to defend the nation in case of attack."[255] After the celebrated victories secured by the longbow, the English army started to use mounted archers, a reflection of the new importance on the weapon; however, these archers dismounted to shoot. It is unlikely lower class foot soldiers could afford to provide their

[251] Edmund Burke, *The History of Archery* (London: Heineman, 1958), 141.

[252] Hoffman, "Wyth the Shot," 495. Hoffman discusses the association of the longbow with the lower classes. For a discussion of using the bow while mounted, see John Marshall Carter, *Medieval Games: Sports and Recreations in Feudal Society* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 86.

[253] Kelly Devries, "Longbow Archery and the Earliest Robin Hood Legends," in *Robin Hood In Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression, and Justice*, ed., Thomas Hahn (Cambridge: St. D.S. Brewer, 2000), 53.

[254] Ibid., 52-53.

[255] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend,* 139.

own horses. The yeoman rode a horse (because he could afford one due to economic mobility), but he dismounted to shoot. His military position was in between the foot soldier and the knight. With the increased importance placed upon the bow and its user, a new archer arrives on the scene: the yeoman.

We see this liminal state of the yeoman in battle reflected in literature; both the bow and the sword make an appearance simultaneously in a ballad, for instance, when Robin uses a sword to behead characters in the ballads. In the *Guy of Gisbourne*, Robin alternates between using the bow in the archery contest with Guy to decapitating him with a sword. After removing Guy's head, he puts it on his bow end and disfigures his face with an "Irish kniffe" (168). Robin's choice of weapons indicates that he waffles in his ideological identification. The yeoman at this time was becoming a successful member of the rural economy, who could afford a sword due to his social position, but who also chooses to carry a crude knife associated with hunting and rural life. Although neither swords nor bows or knives were neither limited to aristocrats, swords that were good enough and strong enough to behead a person without breaking and with a clean cut were expensive and limited to those who could maintain them. The "longsword," also known as a two-handed sword, was most effective at slicing and cutting through bone, and this is the sword we associate with knights on the battlefield.[256] The only reference to a type of sword the yeomen carry appears in a *Robin Hood and the Monk:* "But Robyn toke out a too-hand sworde, / That hangit down be his kne" (103-4),

[256] David M. Cvet, "Study of the Destructive Capabilities of the European Longsword," *Journal of Western Martial Arts.* February (2002), np.

confirming this is indeed what Robin carried. Most crude swords, the ones used by those who could not afford fine craftsmanship, would have been used more for stabbing instead of slicing. Robin Hood's sword in the *Monk* actually fails him, and he curses the smith, indicating that he did not have the highest quality of sword: "His sworde upon the schireff hed / Sertanly he brake in too; / 'The smyth that the made,' seid Robyn, / 'I pray to God wyrke hym woo" (111-14)! This passage draws attention to the breaking sword motif in heroic literature,[257] and the emphasis on craftsmanship and expense refers to the tradition of using longswords in aristocratic battle and combat. Robin's choice to carry this type of sword instead of the easily wielded broadsword, which was lighter and easier to carry, mimics aristocratic habits. We frequently see Robin and his men use their bows in the ballads, but they also use swords to behead characters, although there is no indication of their financial ability to afford them.

Robin's placement of Guy's head on a pike mimics the practice of parading executed traitors' heads through town for public spectacle. Furthermore, it suggests Robin's belief that he is fulfilling the role of a knight in instituting justice since Guy is a bounty hunter hired to execute Robin. Conversely, this act should be seen in the context of the multiple beheadings and parading during the Revolt of 1381 when shocking and violent acts of justice were performed by the peasants and members of the middle strata. Robin chooses to deform Guy's face with a weapon whose primary use is hunting, which suggests he also sees his pursuit of Guy as personal vengeance, and thus

[257] In *Robin Hood,* Knight and Ohlgren, mention the recurring motif of the broken sword in epic and heroic literature, 152.

as outside of the realm of true justice. This complicates the outlaws' use of justified violence and draws attention to the illicit hunting of the yeomen that places them under the jurisdiction of the law themselves.[258] Robin plays an elaborate game with Guy, first stalking him in the forest, then competing in a friendly game of archery, and finally disclosing his true identity moments before they battle, which results in decapitation. Similarly, Robin mimics the hunt of Guy when he poaches the King's deer furtively and out of jurisdiction. Robin mutilates Guy's face for no other reason than pleasure, as if he were gutting an animal. Robin only needs Guy's horn and horsehair for subterfuge; the disfiguration finds no other narrative purpose. Knights do not disfigure dead bodies. These are clearly not the actions of a knight, but they strive to imitate a knight, through the means of weapon and mode of execution.

In acknowledgement of the importance of the yeoman archer in battle, Edward III encouraged yeomen to act like the nobility through tournaments. Much like medieval tournaments were organized to keep knights' skills sharp in battle in times of peace, Edward III (1327-1377) wanted to encourage sharp shooters .[259] He encouraged archery through the organization of archery contests on festival dates.[260] The prizes attached to archery contests further encouraged participation. However, according to medieval weapon historian, Kelly Devries, these archery contests were not for peasants:

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[258] In *Robin Hood,* Knight and Ohlgren argue the Irish knife's primary use is hunting (183).

[259] Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England: 1100-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 18.

[260] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval England*, 139.

"peasants rarely participated in archery contests—it seems that they did not have the skill or time for these types of leisure activities. These contests are much more imitative of upper-class jousts held in England frequently during the last two centuries of the Middle Ages."[261] Imitative of aristocratic jousts, but restrictive of peasant participation, the archery contests allowed the yeoman to both emulate the upper classes and rise above the lower through the cash prizes attached to archery competitions.

It is not surprising then that we find the archery competitions in the Robin Hood ballads attached to a particular brand of yeoman justice. Unlike knights, yeomen were not bound by a code of ethics or by tracts written on behavior. It is not even clear how they should act, live, or fit into the antiquated philosophical system of the three estates. The yeomen in Robin Hood begin to create their own identity through their form of justice by appropriating the discourse of the doctrine of sacred justice. This is observable in the trust that is rewarded to the winner of archery contests in both the *Gest* and *Robin Hood and the Potter.* This trust awarded the winner of archery competitions results in duplicity and ends with an appropriation of material wealth.

Although prizes were given in historical aristocratic tournaments, in literature, those prizes are less important than the title of winning itself. Knights were concerned with performing aristocratic ideology through prowess and spreading their name through fame. In the French literary tradition, prizes for winning are "unmentioned since the victory is prize enough."[262] When prizes are mentioned, the victor usually gave

[261] Devries, "Longbow Archery," 57.

them away or they refused to accept them at all.[263] Furthermore, the prizes in the romance tradition that are mentioned—horses, fish, and marriage—are of less exchange value than use value. In the *Book of Chivalry*, Geoffroi de Charney states the connection between purity of character of knights and winning tournaments:

> And when God by his grace grants that such people as are mentioned above [knights in battle] perform great exploits, fight well and distinguish themselves in several successful days of combat which they may have, such people should be valued and honored…[264]

Prizes take the backstage, because winning is proving one's valor, honor, and purity, which make a knight immortal, ideal and fitting of a higher quest to fulfill the order of chivalry.

Although the aristocratic tournament is not represented as a source of economic vitality in literature, in practice tournaments generated money for towns, craftsmen, and business owners and sometimes for the participants. Hundreds of men and women attended them, and in France sites were chosen between two small cities, one for each opposing side of the grand tournament, the *melèe*. In England, however, tournaments were on fields outside large cities, bringing all revenue to one spot.[265] The tourneyers

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[262] Mary Arlene Santina, *The Tournament in Literature*: *Literary Representations of the Medieval Tournament in Old French Works, 1150-1226* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 141.

[263] Santina, *The Tournament,* 142-47.

[264] Kaeuper and Kennedy, *Knight's Own Book,* 89.

[265] Crouch, *Tournament,* 52.

visited local inns, bought food from local vendors, and probably purchased goods from the market as well as utilizing the services of armorers, saddlers, farriers, and blacksmiths.[266] One can only imagine how much revenue large tournaments generated for artisans, craftsmen, merchants, and members of the middle strata. This is noteworthy since mocking of the tournament generates money for Robin Hood's yeomen, also members of the middle strata. They generate money by imitating the aristocratic tournament's underlying philosophy as well as by winning them.

In the *Gest of Robyn Hode,* the archery tournaments imitate the aristocratic tournament both in generating economic revenue and in manipulating the concept of divine justice. The Robin Hood texts integrate the economic elements of aristocratic practice that are absent from the romance tradition thus emphasizing distributive intent.

As a yeoman, John manipulates the Sheriff into employing him by using the prowess he has in archery to simulate the ideology of the truth of the skilled body. John not only wins the title of best archer, but he also gains the Sheriff's trust, which leads the Sheriff to be tricked. The Sheriff is tricked not because he is ignorant, but because he faithfully believes in antiquated ideals of chivalric tournament that the archery tournament imitates. The belief that those that win are trustworthy and good echoes the moral language of Charney's text quoted above: those who avoid evil will win their tournament. Being a yeoman, John manipulates these concepts for economic gain. The

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[266] Ibid.

text differentiates between the two by their reaction to their winning: John manipulates, and the Sheriff reproduces this ideology of tournament. There are not many textual cues for us to understand the difference to their reaction to game-playing, but perhaps the answer lies in the celebration of the ingenuity of the yeoman itself. After all, the Sheriff is employed the King, and he is closely aligned with enforcing laws and regulations of the crown.

Robin and his men create their own sense of justice for their own group, and interrogate and manipulate what on the surface seemed just to their own advantage. This is most clearly illustrated in the words used by the Sheriff when John competes. After John splits a peg with his arrow in two several times, the Sheriff proclaims that "this man is the best archere / that ever yet saw I me" (577-78). The Sheriff stresses the strength of his body by calling him a "wight yonge man," an adjective that means "strong," and "brave." The words "strong" and "brave" draw attention to the chivalric ideals of martial prowess, which is married in courtly tournament to moral purity of character. This acknowledgement of strength in competition cues the reader into becoming attuned to the trust the Sheriff will reward John for his skill alone. Furthermore, the Sheriff asks where Little John is from: "what is nowe thy name? / In what countre were thou borne, / And where is thy wonynge wane?" (590-92). The question of name, ancestral home, and of current address recalls the public ritual proclamation of name, heritage, and manorial estate of courtly tournament. The knights at tournament were announced to a trumpet and their coat of arms described in detail. Terrence Wise explains:

> This was known as blazoning. Thus the principal terms and order of description employed in blazon have been in existence since the early 13th century, by which date heralds were finding it necessary to describe a coat of arms in such a way that there could be no shadow of a doubt as to what and whose it was, and they are readily are understood throughout Western Europe.[267]

The formal reading of the coat of arms was attached to its appearance on shields or flags. Professional heralds were trained as announcers, but the audience would have been familiar with the more famous houses' coats of arms.

The Sheriff invokes two popular parts of tournament practice: skill with nobility of character and ritual of tournament. Even after John replies with a common name, the Sheriff assumes he is trustworthy to employ. Immediately, he pays John with a "good horse" and a servant. He has no other reason to employ John other than the combination of skill and the "trust" earned by winning a contest, reflecting the doctrine of sacred justice to middle strata tournament. Once John enters the Sheriff's home, he is a disruptive vassal: he cripples the butler, steals three hundred pounds, and runs off with the Sheriff's cook and the Sheriff's silver vase: "his coke and his silver vessell" (715). Furthermore, by manipulating the established trust gained from his military skill, John leads the Sheriff into Robin Hood's trap in the Greenwood, which ends with Robin Hood stealing all of his clothes and suggests the Sheriff's humiliation by having to run

[267] Terrence Wise, *Medieval Heraldry* (Oxford: Osprey, 2012), 14.

back home naked. John uses his skill to trick the Sheriff, gaining status, goods, and another man to join the Greenwood fellowship.

The manipulation is possible because of its overall attachment to justice. The body, in ordeal or tests of combat such as the tournament, makes the invisibility of truth visible. These ballads adapt tradition to define justice for yeoman. We see this working when the King and Robin Hood play plucke-buffet (another archery game) against each other in the forest, and the King wins, or during the wrestling competition when the most able and true bodied yeoman is set to win, but has to be reinstated by Sir Richard. However, the majority of the times, the idea is manipulated by the yeomen for gain, as when John wins employment and trust from his skill as an archer. We can only surmise why John has attacked the Sheriff, most likely because of his ongoing involvement with trying to capture Robin Hood as an outlaw; the attack is not presented as a violent or unmotivated act. Strangely, we are never told for which specific crimes the Sheriff pursues Robin Hood, only that he is an outlaw. His pursuit thus seems to be an unjustified attack on one group of people, which may represent the larger oppression felt by those without power. In the process, the weapons that have been used against those without power are reproduced, manipulated, and inverted to be used on those that are sanctioned to exact justice, such as the Sheriff and the religious figures in the text.

Yeoman justice in the Robin Hood ballads is figured as physical punishment and as financial penalty. John voices this justice by explicitly stating he intends to “To quyte hym wele his mede” (612), to give them what they deserve. “Quyte” and “Meed” are

two words with strong relationships to two prominent authors of the fourteenth century: Chaucer and Langland. To "quite" means to respond, repay, or to get revenge, and it is a principle of the socially coded tale telling game in the *Canterbury Tales*.[268] Each of these definitions suggests the yeoman is responding to what he deserves: distributive justice in the form of goods. This is expressed here through the concept of "meed," a word that echoes William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, where the allegorical figure of Lady Meed conflates the meanings of literal cash payment or rewards with the heavenly concept of "meed" as divine justice. The yeoman administers distributive economic justice to himself, as the Sheriff represents a corrupt sign of royal power as well as being a member of a group that competes with the middle strata.

The Sheriff occupies a similar liminal position as the yeomen during this time and his attack on the yeomen, coupled with his reproduction of aristocratic ideology illustrates the complex social workings of the ballads. Originally, reeves had power to officiate crime and keep record of manor payments and were usually appointed by the lord of the manor. However, shire reeves, from which the word Sheriff derives, were in control of an entire shire, and before the fourteenth-century were usually royally appointed knights. After the fourteenth century, knighthood was not required, perhaps indicating that those who had land and money of common birth had climbed to a position of power. Little John and the Sheriff occupy the same liminal social position, and their exchange illustrates the ambition of these middling classes. The Sheriff, as noted above, reproduces the aristocratic ideology of tournament by employing John

[268] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "qyte."

based on his skill as an archer. The skirmishes between the yeomen and the Sheriff represent the larger social interactions of the period. The middle strata like the aristocracy was highly stratified, and the same types of laws that were made to distinguish between aristocrat and middle strata were reproduced and used to limit those below the lower gentry. The sumptuary laws, which I discussed in chapter three, are a good example of this. In the *Gest*, the Sheriff's fine silverware, his personal attendants, and his personal pastime of hunting show he reproduced the lifestyle of the aristocracy and was invested in limiting Robin Hood and his yeomen's activities, which are similar to his own.

The connection discussed above in the *Gest* between the body and truth also appears in *Robin Hood and the Potter*. On a journey into town, Robin meets the Sheriff of Nottingham and has an archery competition with him. Robin Hood gains the Sheriff's trust by winning this competition, repeating the pattern of the body representing of invisible truth determined by a test. The Sheriff invites Robin Hood to dinner, and Robin Hood lures the Sheriff into the forest, where he is ambushed by Robin's fellowship of yeomen. In the beginning of the selected passage the Sheriff challenges Robin and comments upon the firmness of his appearance in conjunction with his physical strength: "Thou semyst a stalward and a stronge, / Asay schall thow be" (191-92). According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "stalward" combines loyalty and firmness of character with robust physical appearance, and the following "stronge" suggests pure physical strength. The doubleness of meaning of "stalward" next to "stronge" is culminated in the concept of the word "asay," which means to test or to be tried. This

passage draws simultaneously on conventions of tournament ideology and the judicial trial. Furthermore, the Sheriff of Nottingham makes clear the connection between the trial of martial prowess and good character by linking the words "good" and "God." This link recalls the situation in chivalric tournament, where the winner is considered pure as selected by God's hand. Robin Hood is rewarded a monetary prize and wins the trust of the Sheriff. During the discussion leading up to the archery contest, the word "good" is used by the Sheriff: "Now schall Y wet and thow be god / And polle het up to they nere," (197-98). The Sheriff must see Robin's skill in archery to believe it, as if skill represented the truth of his character. This notion is strengthened by Robin's reply when he sees the poorly constructed gear: " 'So god me help,' seyde the prowde potter, "Thys ys bot ryght weke gere" (198-200). Although Knight and Ohlgren do not choose to capitalize God here, Dobson and Taylor capitalize it (128). In any case, from the context of the sentence, it is likely that "god" refers to God because Robin is calling on God to help him rather than saying good gear should help him; it makes no sense to directly address his gear. Robin calls on the grace of God to help him win, a direct invocation of divine presence in tournament, when knights and spectators believed that God was the judge of character and skill and played a role in shaping the outcome of the tournament and battle. "Good" is also used in this same conversation to refer to an arrow: "A god bolt owthe he toke" (202), meaning "good" as perfect in construction and/or character. The author's wordplay suggests the chivalric notion that someone that is good at archery is also good in their bodily form, as decided by God, the same way that knights that are victorious are good in character as decreed by God.

Furthermore, Robin's victory in the archery contest against the Sheriff proves him as a worthy and trustworthy character echoing the terms of aristocratic tournament that favor the most moral knight as being the winner. After Robin "cleffed the preke on thre," and the men feel "gret schame" (209), the Sheriff professes "Potter, thow art a man. / Thow art worthey to bere a bowe" (212-13). "Worthy" not only in skill to carry such a weapon, as the Sheriff asserts, reflecting the dual meaning of "worthy" as honorable, respectable, and noble.[269] It is through this worth that the Sheriff puts full trust in Robin Hood, who is disguised as the potter in order to lead him to the most dangerous place in the county, Sherwood Forest. This moral language appears in chivalric treatises about tournament and permeates the literature of romance.

In both cases, the Sheriff puts his complete trust in the winner of the contest, manipulating the system of sacred justice tied to the ideology of chivalric tournament. This is superimposed on a social entity in transition: the yeoman is bound by no code of honor, and assembles his identity somewhere between the first and third estate. For no discernible reason other than the trust the Sherriff attaches to winning a tournament, the Sheriff takes a strange man into his house as a servant with no references and with no knowledge of his background or name, and follows a strange man into the forest when highway robberies occur quite frequently. In addition, this potter (Robin Hood) is not trustworthy from the beginning, as evidenced by his incompetence in the market place and his professed friendship with Robin Hood, the Sheriff's enemy. However, in both cases, the Sheriff puts full trust in the victor of the tournament, when he has no

[269] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "worthy."

solid reason to do so. His belief that the winner is trustworthy further supports that the yeoman archery contest invokes the ideals of chivalric tournament. However, the yeomen who participate are bound by no rules of behavior; they strive to win to elevate their economic position.

The penalty the Sheriff pays in *Robin Hood and the Potter* is the loss of his horses and gear, and this along with the pledged oath the Sheriff gives when he is captured in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* reflects the financial losses of tournament. This practice of profiteering in tournament, mentioned above, is absent in the literary tournament. In the *melèe* tournament, knights would often steal horses in addition to making ransoms on other knights. In fact, knight began to complain about the stealing of horses as evidenced by this complaint, made by Henry de Laon, French minstrel: "Tournaments were not originally held as a way of capturing horses, but so as to learn who was manly in his conduct."[270] According to David Crouch, tournament historian, there was much "profit to be had in ransomed destriers."[271] It is noteworthy that the games that Robin Hood and his men play often end with stolen horses. In the archery competition held between Robin and the Sheriff in *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the Sheriff, who trusts Robin Hood due to his skill alone, ends in the loss of his horse and gear: "Y thanke God that ye be here; / Thereffore schall ye leffe yowre hors with hos, / And all yowre hother gere" (277-79). The profit the yeomen make is introduced by Robin thanking God for what he has brought him. The lines that follow paint a portrait of a masculine knight

[270] Qtd in. Crouch, *Tournament*, 96.

[271] Ibid., 97.

atop a horse: “Hether ye cam on hors foll hey, / And hom schall ye ho on fote” (282-83). Riding high on a horse is a euphemism for pride, but it also indicates masculinity which echoes the words the Sheriff says to Robin disguised as a Potter when he wins the archery competition: “Potter, thow art a man” (212). The Sheriff, as a loser of both the initial competition with John and as someone who was duped by him is stripped of his masculinity by riding a palfrey and by the presumption of cuckolding: Robin Hood gives him a white palfrey to give to his wife. The gift to the Sheriff’s wife, the second one in the narrative, hints at perhaps more than friendship between them.

In another ballad, the Sheriff is captured and ransomed, as in contemporary tournament practice. As in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, when men were ransomed, they were held until someone paid their ransom, or if they had good reputations and were trusted, they could swear an oath to free themselves.[272] Compurgation, the swearing of oaths to release one from imprisonment or guilt, was a practice of medieval English law, but also one that happened in tournament. The Sheriff swears an oath to free himself and instead of payment, he promises to not pursue Robin Hood. This takes place after he has been captured and lured into the Greenwood by John, whom he trusts because of his interaction in the archery competition. This false oath allows the Sheriff to lure Robin and his men to his archery tournament, which results in the Sheriff’s death. The practice of ransom in historical tournament and its association with both goods and money, benefits the yeomen and results in what I term yeoman distributive justice. There is a

[272] Ibid., 96.

difference between how aristocrats were depicted in tournaments and how this works in the Robin Hood ballads. In historical practice, ransom generated money. In the ballads, ransom is practiced by enemies to yeomen, particularly those that compete with them and have wronged them in the past.

The Sheriff's archery tournament in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* uses a financial prize to trap yeomen. The Sheriff recognizes the yeoman economy and can manipulate tournament for judicial gain. In essence, the Sheriff inverts and uses the yeomen's trick against him. The *Gest* is closest to an aristocratic tournament in the Robin Hood corpus and introduces the financial elements of yeoman literary tournament. Following historical practice, this tournament is announced in advance, and it is by invitation: "That all the best archers of the north / Sholde come upon a day, / And shoteth allthere best / the game shall bere away" (1129-232).[273] The prize is selected to appeal to Robin Hood himself: "A right good arowe he shall have, / The shaft of sylver whyte, / The hede and the deders of rych rede golde, / In Englond is none lyke" (1137-40). In historical and literary tournament, animals were usually given as a prize or as David Crouch explains "expensively made and guilded representations of animals."[274] After having been tricked the first time by John in an archery competition, the Sheriff has learned to manipulate games against Robin and his yeomen. Sheriff intends to apprehend Robin Hood, using

[273] Ibid.,30-33.

[274] Ibid., 36.

the tournament to enforce his vision of justice. Robin Hood and his men get away, but eventually Robin Hood repays the Sheriff for his trick by beheading him.

As in aristocratic romance and in trial by ordeal and combat, in these two yeomen archery competitions, bodily skill brings about trust of character. The Sheriff is tricked in two separate ballads because he reproduces the ideology of chivalric tournament. Skill in archery promised profitable employment. J.C. Holt argues in *Robin Hood*, that those employed as archers by the king should be the "strongest archers . . . selected from lords' households throughout the realm."[275] He contends that Robin's and John's skill in archery is the reason why they are so well respected by the Sheriff and the King.[276] Indeed, good archers were indispensable to a king and a lord, and historically the yeoman archer was becoming an important figure who could survive on skill alone, as archers were paid quite well in the period.[277] However, the Sheriff not the King employs John here. There is a difference between employing an archer from a "lords' household" and employing a country yeoman. For one, a yeoman from a noble household would have come with respectable references, and John does not. John only names his master as "a curteys knight" (602). The Sheriff doesn't ask for this knight's name. As mentioned above, the reason the Sheriff employs and trusts John based on his skill alone illustrating his belief that skill makes one worthy to trust, an antiquated employment of the presence of divine justice in courtly tournament.

[275] J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 143.

[276] Ibid.,143.

[277] Ibid.,143.

Because the Sheriff reproduces the ideology of the aristocratic tournament, the yeomen acquire wealth in duplicitously because they manipulate the chivalric game to their advantage, just as the Sheriff does after he has been duped. The text represents archery as a potential source of both symbolic and literal capital, since skill in archery can elevate one's financial prospects. As knights were famed to increase their reputation by the skill of competition, the yeoman archer could potentially elevate his economic status by winning cash prizes and his social status by finding gainful employment. Overall, however, the Robin Hood texts create yeomen identity by manipulating idioms of divine justice, reworking them to focus on the distributive forms that reward yeomen and not the poor. This deliberate re-working of the discourse of divine justice both directly condemns current operating systems by showing their ability to be manipulated and privileges yeomen to be rewarded financially.

This distributive economic justice is in line with rising social consciousness. This is a similar action, where money is redistributed literally to yeomen as well as enumerating the desire to be recognized. However, this action differs in that it benefits yeomen themselves. This yeomen consciousness mirrors their increased military and socio-economic importance, as they wielded the longbow in battle. The longbow was responsible for several celebrated English victories over the French, so it is not surprising to see the Robin Hood ballads connecting justice with economic exchange through the practice of archery.

Parody of the Tournament: The Yeomen and the Prize

As we have established, yeomen manipulate the concepts of aristocratic tournament built upon principles of divine justice of the body defined in trials of ordeal and combat, but this is predicated on the manipulation of an audience that recognizes aristocratic ideology. In order to prove this yeoman manipulation, it is important to look at the other form of gaming in the ballads. One of the forms, wrestling, demonstrates parodic elements of aristocratic tournament by exaggerated prizes and violence for self-gain. Instead of functioning as an aristocratic tournament should, or even mimicking the aristocratic tournament like the archery tournament, the wrestling tournament is fixed and has competitors that want to manipulate the results. Because it is a competition of yeomen, there is no one to manipulate but yeomen, who as a group in the ballad are well aware of their exploitation of trust for gain. This strips the aristocratic tournament and by extension the archery of any shred of decency and honor. Instead, it reveals them to be money making machines, as they were in historical practice. However, instead of showing the profit of the aristocracy, it reveals the profit of yeomen though trickery and theft, as in the ballads.

Wrestling was bound by no code of honor, was not idealized, and was considered a lower class sport in which peasants engaged. Chaucer highlights this peasant pastime with the churlish Miller in *The Canterbury Tales*. Many peasant sports were violent and physical. Legal records indicate accidental deaths occurred, fights broke out, and people were injured. In Eyre rolls, legal documents, of thirteenth-century

Yorkshire, nine percent of crime cases involved wrestling.[278] This suggests that skirmishes and outbreaks were common to lower class sport. This is a far cry from the controlled atmosphere and elevated ideals of chivalric tournament. In the *Gest*, when yeomen participate in a game without rules, the wrestling match, and one that is removed from the imitative archery competition, it becomes clear that one important motivation is to win prizes to win prizes and wealth. In this way, the wrestling match is not any different from aristocratic tournament, but it is all but absent in the literature of romance, which portrays it as idealized and motivated by higher ideals. Instead, as I have shown above, through ransoming, horse-stealing, and prizes, competitors stood to gain much.

The wrestling match in the *Gest* parodies the idea of the chivalric tournament. Yeomen participated in competitions to win prizes and acquire goods associated with social status, as in the case the wrestling competition in the *Gest* thus communicating the desire to be recognized not only as a cultural identity, but also as an economically viable group. The prize that is featured, for one, is greatly exaggerated. In most wrestling matches a ram was offered as a prize.[279] In this text, an elaborate prize—"a bull, a saddled horse, a pair of gloves, a gold ring, and a cask of wine"--[280] is offered to the winner. These are items associated with a noble class. Ale was the preferred drink of most medieval people, and gloves suggest that one does not need to labor for a living.

[278] John Marshall Carter, *Medieval Games,* 103.

[279] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, 157.

[280] Ibid.

These are status items, so the fact that the yeomen do not wrestle for a ram suggests they wish to rise beyond their association with farming and labor; they wish to emulate the leisure class of the aristocracy. They vie for the title of winner to gain goods of conspicuous consumption, not to prove worth of character.

It is not a surprise the best warrior and most pure of heart does not win a contest rooted in rustic practice with prizes that emulate the nobility. The conflict of the competitive ideologies of tournament is best viewed in the game of wrestling. The most "worthy" should rightfully win according to the aristocratic ideology of tournament; however, the yeomen that participate in the wrestling match, motivated by the greed of self-interest, resort to violence to further their own individual gain. Sir Richard is waylaid on his way to pay Robin his loan. He comes upon "all the best yemen / of all the west countree" (539-40). The yeomen avariciously try to prevent the most worthy man from acquiring the prize, threatening the loss of his life: "there was a yoman in that place, / And best worthy was he, / And for he was ferre and frembde bested, / slayne he shulde have be" (549-52). The word "worthy" shows up again in the context of winner. Except here, he is the rightful winner. Again, the philosophy emerges that the most noble man should win. Moreover, he is not only worthy of the title, but also his skill in wrestling is superior, in keeping with the chivalric ideology that the one that is best in skill is also best in character: "ferre and frembde bested," which means that he had far and strange the advantage.[281] The first line describes his character, the second his skill. Likewise,

[281] *Middle English Dictionary* s.v. "ferre," and "frembde."

according to Knight and Ohlgren, these lines mean "set far (from home) and as a stranger."[282] "Bested" can also mean advantage and "ferre" and "frembde" could have dual meaning in this passage, referring to the skill being far the advantage and strange in unique technique. It is clear, however, that the participant that truly deserved to win is in danger.

These yeomen are not above killing the best man in order to take home the prize. It is only when a knight of the old way, who fought in the Crusades, Sir Richard, arrives that order is established. The yeoman contest uses lower class forms of competition with prizes of status. Furthermore, the notion of worth is played with, for the most worthy in title is not relevant when removed from an imitative aristocratic tournament. This kind of behavior is expected of peasants, in keeping with the historical skirmishes of the Yorkshire Eyre rolls, documenting crime in peasant games, but it is not apparent that this behavior is also a violent part of aristocratic tournament, which is not documented in literature and historical documents. It also illustrates yeomen are stuck in an identity crisis in their literary representation of gaming. When participating in the archery contest, yeomen imitate and manipulate chivalric ideology for their own sense of distributive justice, but when removed and placed in peasant forms, they act like stereotypical peasants in literature, without honor. However, it is apparent, Richard, the knight, still believes that good should win, further complicating the tension between chivalric ideology about gaming, and gaming for material wealth.

[282] Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood,* 157.

Conclusion

The Robin Hood ballads interrogate several aristocratic tournament motifs that appear frequently but are unexplained in aristocratic tournament. First, that the body can be a representation of God's truth, which is a reflection of a legal system that tried the body in painful ways in order to evoke God's response. This practice known as trial by ordeal and combat worked on the principle of invisible evidence being made visible on the body. This motif appears in battles between black knights and good knights, which end with the most fit and skilled member winning and that win being a representation of God's judgment and simultaneously of that character's truth and morality. Second, this system continued to be represented in aristocratic literature in an idealized and romanticized manner long after its practice had ceased in England stressing the honor and goodness of the contestant who won a physical trial. Third, the yeoman archery tournament adapts this ideology of divine judgment of the body based on the idea that bodily skill represents morality. However, where tournament validates aristocratic identity, the archery tournament authenticates yeoman identity and justice. This description of yeoman justice comments on class identity and mobility. The yeoman archery competition manipulates the ideology of divine justice in order to capitalize on the trust earned by winning a competition hearkening back to divine adjudication. The money that is stolen as a result of the trust that is granted a winner in the yeoman archery competition represent what is missing from literary depictions of aristocratic tournament, which involved ransom, and horse theft. Furthermore, historical tournaments were boons to the local economy generating all sorts of trade and activity

that benefited the towns and surrounding areas that held them, specifically stimulating local trade for middle strata persons. The wrestling match, along with the revenue generated through prizes, although not a form of yeoman competition, illustrates how important prizes and money were in the tournament. The fighting between the yeomen illustrates the non-idealistic nature of tournament, and shows the violence motivated by greed involved in aristocratic tournament that is absent from the literature.

The view that the tournament brings justice works in two ways in the Robin Hood ballads. One, it helps to access one's enemy and results in physical justice, often especially against the Sheriff. This bodily penalty highlights the gruesome and violent nature of tournament itself, which is often absent in romance literature. As stated by the *Gest*, Richard of the Lee's son accidentally killed someone in tournament and now was responsible for paying that family grievance. Sir Richard is indebted to another man because his son killed another in a jousting tournament: "In felde wolde just full fayre. / He slewe a knyght of Lancaster" (208-9). Our first introduction to Sir Richard in the ballad depicts the violent and often deadly circumstances surrounding what is otherwise depicted as a pleasant pastime. Losing a joust could have meant death, as many knights died in tournament. There is much to lose in participating in aristocratic tournament, but the loss comes from injury. According to the *Book of Chivalry* by Geoffroi de Charney "physical hardship, crushing and wounding, and sometimes the danger of death" were the risks involved in tournaments.[283] The archery competition allows trust to be granted to the winner, putting Robin Hood or John in contact with the Sheriff, often leading to

[283] Kauper and Kennedy, *A Knight's Own Book*, 87.

moments where the yeomen humiliate, physically fight, or exact payment from the Sheriff. Likewise, the Sheriff uses the tool of the archery competition to lure Robin and his men for his own judicial purposes. Although the Sheriff fails to bring the yeomen to justice, he entices them to come to him by using the temptation of the archery competition. Instead, the archery competition ends with Robin Hood killing the Sheriff. The wrestling match, although less organized, represents the violent nature of tournament, but the archery competition leads to more physical violence against the Sheriff.

Secondly, archery meant monetary compensation for the yeoman. Because the yeomen seek to establish themselves as a separate social group, their income is especially important to identify. Archery was profitable employment, and since yeomen were associated with archery, it is no surprise that the Robin Hood ballads feature yeomen profiting from archery. John is employed because of his skill, and Robin is invited inside the Sheriff's home because of his skill, and both lead to profitable encounters for these yeomen. First they win prizes, and secondly they gain employment and a social call that allows them to gain even more goods, reflecting the new importance of the archer in the period. The archery competition imitates the aristocratic tournament, in which money was made through theft and kidnapping, which both occur in the *Gest*. However, the theft of Robin and his men punishes the Sheriff, and it is not clear the yeomen are in the wrong.

Viewing the Robin Hood ballads through the lens of divine justice allows readers to understand the ingenuity of the yeoman, and to recognize the ballads' employment

of a long-standing tradition of locating the body of might as the body of right. My reading not only features the yeoman as the hero, but also exposes the gaps in the often-romanticized version of tournament that were circulated in the late Middle Ages. Instead, through imitation, manipulation, and parody, the yeomen both expose and subsist on aristocratic forms of justice.

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