

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

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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.