

READING *ROBIN HOOD'S GARLAND* IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1802, Dorothy Wordsworth recorded in her journal that it was “a sweet mild morning. Read ballads. Went to church.”¹ For Dorothy Wordsworth at least, ballads were a form of literature that had to be read, something which may seem strange to modern readers, for ballads are usually associated with the act of singing.²

Songs, poems, and ballads have a special place in the Robin Hood tradition. From the first reference to “rymes of Robyn Hode” in the B-text of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (c. 1377), through to poems such as *Robin Hood and the Monk* (c. 1465), *Robin Hood and the Potter* (c. 1468), and *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode* (c. 1495) and thence to early modern broadside ballads, much of Robin Hood’s history has been transmitted through verse. After the decline of the broadside trade in the eighteenth century, however, a reader in that period probably encountered a Robin Hood ballad through one of the many printed collections of Robin Hood songs which went by the name of *Robin Hood’s Garland*.

While the text of many of the garland collections of Robin Hood songs have been analysed before by numerous scholars, this study considers how some eighteenth-century publishers, instead of having their purchasers use these books for singing, envisaged them as material for communal and private reading in the polite middle-class home. The format of these books will therefore be discussed, and I will show how the compilers and editors of various editions published in the eighteenth century arranged the material in them in such a manner to emphasize the importance of reading etiquette.

READING AND THE STATUS OF BALLAD SINGING IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Let us first explore, however, whether there is evidence of people actually reading from, rather than singing, *Robin Hood’s Garland*, and what it meant to read a book in the eighteenth century. In Henry Brooke’s picaresque novel, *The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland* (1765–70), one of the apprentices named Harry asks a fellow boy: “Did you ever *read* the History of Robin Hood, Jack? – I did, Sir.”³ The author could either have been referring to an entry on Robin Hood from a contemporary *History of the Highwaymen* or an edition of *Robin Hood’s Garland*, although it is more likely to have been a garland due to the

¹ Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 32

² A version of this paper originally appeared in my doctoral thesis: Stephen Basdeo, “The Changing Faces of Robin Hood, c. 1700–c. 1900: Rethinking Gentrification in the Post-Medieval Tradition,” PhD. diss. University of Leeds, 2017.

³ Henry Brooke, *The Fool of Quality; or, The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland*, vol. 5 (Dublin: Printed for the Author by D. Chamberlain, 1770), 273. Emphasis added.

fact that criminal biographies of Robin Hood were rarely published as standalone works and more often than not as part of larger histories of highwaymen. More light is shed in Thomas Holcroft's *Adventures of Hugh Trevor* (1794–97), in which he tells the reader why he became an author:

I know not how it happened that I very early became in love with this divine art, but such was the fact. I could spell boldly at two years and a half old, and in less than six months more could read the collects, epistles, and gospels, without being stopped by one word in twenty. Soon afterward I attacked the Bible, and in a few months the tenth chapter of Nehemiah himself could not terrify me. My father bought me many tragical ditties; such as Chevy Chase, the Children in the Wood, Death and the Lady, and, which were infinitely the richest gems in my library, Robin Hood's Garland, and the History of Jack the Giant-killer.⁴

Later, an anonymous correspondent in *The Paisley Magazine* from 1823 declares how he “was deeply read in various poetical works of merit, such as ... ‘Robin Hood’s Garland.’”⁵ Augustin Thierry in *The History of the Conquest of England by the Normans* (1847) remarked that during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, “several complete collections [of ballads] were made for the use of town readers with the pretty little title of *Robin Hood’s Garland*.”⁶ Similarly, in the preface to his Robin Hood novel *Royston Gower; or, The Days of King John* (1838), the author Thomas Miller recalls reading the garlands in his youth.⁷ The same author made a further allusion to his youthful readings of the garlands in an article upon outlaws for *Cleave’s Penny Gazette* in 1839.⁸

One justifiable objection to the above might be to ask whether a small dataset of sources referencing the reading of *Robin Hood’s Garland* is really enough to convince us that the publishers of the garlands envisaged their books as material for reading and not singing. I should point out here that I do not make the argument that nobody *ever* sang from the garlands, and this article is more about how the publishers facilitated the reading of them. However, there appear to be—as far as I can ascertain—more references to reading the garlands than there were to singing them. In fact, the only reference to singing from the garlands which I have encountered comes from the pseudonymous Toby Veck’s *Ten Tables Telling Tales of “My Landlord” and “The Church”* (1846):

If the printer have room, the writer will conclude with a short political drama and a long song, which he learned in his youth, from a relative, a “fine old English gentleman” farmer, “one of the olden time” who was competent to sing from *Robin Hood’s Garland* “six hours at a stretch.”⁹

⁴ Thomas Holcroft, *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for Shepperson & Reynolds, 1794), 13.

⁵ “Confessions over a Bottle,” *The Paisley Magazine* March 1, 1823, 109.

⁶ Augustin Thierry, *The History of the Conquest of England by the Normans*. Translated by W. Hazlitt, vol. 2 (London, 1847), 228. Emphasis added.

⁷ Thomas Miller, *Royston Gower, or The Days of King John* (London: Nicholson, [n.d.]), 6.

⁸ Thomas Miller, “The Young Outlaw,” *Cleave’s Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement*, October 26, 1839, 2.

⁹ Toby Veck, *Ten Tables Telling Tales of “My landlord” and “The Church”* (London: Longman, 1846), 15.

We would be justified in taking the farmers' ability to sing for a straight six hours with more than a pinch of salt—a tall order for any singer, then or now. It is likely that the farmer in question already knew the tunes to some of the songs which, as we will see, were not always included in the garlands themselves. There is also the possibility that Veck, writing in the Victorian era, conflated the broadsides and the garlands. After all, the word “garland” in some nineteenth-century Robin Hood books was used to denote a corpus of ballads rather than referring to a specific book.¹⁰ Veck's pamphlet was intended to bolster support for the Anti-Corn Law League (the Corn Laws were tariffs placed upon the imports of grain by the British government in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars). It was “recent political events” which made him recall, and reprint in his pamphlet, the ballad of *Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford*, which he learned from the farmer, although Veck could not sing it himself. Of course, one might conclude that there are few surviving references to singing from *Robin Hood's Garland* because it was simply what people did and that mundane everyday leisure activities rarely got recorded in sources such as those listed above. However, once we understand eighteenth-century reading practices and analyze the various ways which successive garland publishers facilitated the reading of their books through their formatting of them, we can conclude that it was the eighteenth-century reader which publishers had in mind rather than the singer.

It is tempting to believe that reading practices in the eighteenth century were much the same as today, where people more often than not read privately. In Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), we find Sofa Western alone reading in her bedroom, before she is rudely interrupted by her aunt who immediately suspects Sophia of reading something “low.”¹¹ Proponents of the eighteenth-century “reading revolution” argue that increasing literacy rates and the wide availability of all kinds of secular printed works saw reading practices change from oral to silent reading. People did certainly read privately but there is evidence that families from all classes engaged in reading as a communal activity in their homes. Abigail Williams points to a number of examples from the eighteenth century which illustrate this, such as William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), which sees a man reading to his wife on a morning before going about his daily business.¹² Williams employs not only textual but also visual sources to support her point that reading was often a communal activity in the middle-class home, such as a portrait of the Roubel family from c. 1750, which shows the family seated around a table where the head of the household reads from a book while his family listen attentively.¹³ It was not only the head of the household who read books to his family. On February 28, 1756, for example, Thomas Turner's wife read aloud to him “that moving scene of the funeral of Miss *Clarissa Harlowe* to me.” Mrs. Turner then read aloud a portion of Samuel Richardson's novel the following afternoon after their visit to church.¹⁴

One of the reasons that middle-class families gathered together and listened to passages from a book being read out loud by a family member was because it was a *polite* activity, and one's ability to read aloud and entertain others was “an attribute of a cultivated and genteel

¹⁰ *Life and Ballads of Robin Hood and Robin Hood's Garland* (Halifax: Milner and Sowerby, 1859), 10.

¹¹ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. Ned Halley (London: CRW Publishing, 2007), 256.

¹² William Cowper, “The Task,” cited in Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 6.

¹³ Williams, *The Social Life of Books*, 7.

¹⁴ Thomas Turner, *The Diary of a Village Shopkeeper*, ed. David Vaisey (London: Folio Society, 1998), 42–3.

person.”¹⁵ The word “politeness,” which had its roots in seventeenth-century courtesy culture, meant much more to people in the eighteenth century than it does today. It was a social code through which the bourgeoisie—which at this time was growing in economic importance—might emulate the manners, conduct, and the allegedly “refined” cultural habits of the aristocracy and distance themselves from plebeian culture.¹⁶ Politeness was only ever an ideal, and anyone familiar with eighteenth-century popular literature will know that lewdness flourished. For example, John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–49) may have been seized by the authorities and shunned by respectable booksellers, but pirated copies were best-sellers. When it came to ballads, Robert Burns’s collection of *Merry Muses* (c. 1800), which collated a number of bawdy gems such as *Nine Inch Will Please a Lady* and *The Plenipotentiary*, illustrate that the appetite for home consumption of works which were less than polite was very much alive in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it was important that one was *seen* to be polite and virtuous. Politeness was about aspiration and self-improvement; to participate fully in polite society, one had to cultivate a respect and appreciation for polite art and literature. In an age when formal education and learning beyond basic schooling was the preserve of a primarily aristocratic elite, volumes of Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* and *Tatler*, literary review magazines, novels, and translations of classical poetical works, to name but a few, brought polite learning and culture to the middle classes.¹⁷

The statements above regarding the nature of politeness and its connection with literary works are not intended to mean that the middle classes never sang any songs in their own homes of course. Scholars have researched the home as a site of musical accomplishment and noted that families practiced singing, and songs were performed when friends and acquaintances visited. Yet we must recall that polite domestic culture was geared towards self-improvement and a differentiation of one’s self and family from “unrefined” plebeian culture. Ballad singing had a decidedly *impolite* stigma attached to it, even if people from all classes enjoyed listening to such songs, as Burns and his friends did on an evening. Although references to singing Robin Hood in the eighteenth century are sparse, a poem entitled “The Humours of May-Fair” manifests a sneering attitude towards the singing of ballads:

With hideous face and tuneless note,
The ballad-singer strains his throat;
Roars out the life of Betty Saunders,
With Turpin Dick and Molly Flanders.
Tells many woeful tragic stories,
Recorded of our British worthies.
Forgetting not Bold Robin Hood,
And hardy Scarlet of the Wood.¹⁸

¹⁵ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 156.

¹⁶ Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 875.

¹⁷ Williams, *The Social Life of Books*, 9.

¹⁸ “The Humours of May-Fair,” *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, 26, no. 181 (1760): 264-65.

This is not to say that Robin Hood himself is viewed with disdain in that poem, although he is keeping some rather dubious company among the fictional Moll Flanders and the highwayman, Dick Turpin (1705–39), both of whom were celebrated in contemporary ballads.¹⁹ Ballads were often denigrated in the press: one correspondent in *The Grub-Street Journal* commented upon “the scandalous practice of ballad-singing” and said that it was:

The bane of all good manners and morals ... a continual nursery for idlers, whores, and pick-pockets; a school for scandal, smut, and debauchery; where our youth of either sex (of that lower class especially) receive the first taint, which by degrees so contaminates the mind, that, with every slight temptation they become abandoned, lewd, and strangers to all shame.²⁰

Other writers echoed similar sentiments when they referred to “beggarly, ballad-singing carriages.”²¹ It is true that Joseph Addison praised the *text* of *The Two Children in the Woods* for its “simplicity” when he saw a broadside on the wall of an acquaintance’s home but in an urban context ballads were viewed as “the cheap goods of destitute beggars.”²² It is the developments in attitudes towards ballad singing, and of the middle classes’ enthusiasm for adopting polite culture, which explains why, in combination with the arrangement of the texts themselves, that garlands should be viewed as products as reading material for the middle-class home.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE TEXT IN ROBIN HOOD’S GARLAND

While to a modern eye the various editions of *Robin Hood’s Garland* may look rather cheap, their cost was suited more to the pockets of middle-class readers than those from poorer social groups. As printed anthologies of popular songs and ballads, garlands were more substantial items than the humble chapbook, which typically numbered eight, sixteen, or twenty-four pages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and usually cost around 1d or 1/2d which was the same price of a regular broadside.²³ In contrast, there is no edition of *Robin Hood’s Garland* which contains fewer than eighty pages.²⁴ Although the prices for the earliest editions of the garlands are not given, those from later in the eighteenth century were significantly more expensive than chapbooks, with the 1770 edition of *Robin Hood’s Garland*, for example, costing 3d.²⁵ A 1794 edition of *Robin Hood’s Garland* was more expensive at 4d.²⁶ An even

¹⁹ Noelle Gallagher, “Point of View and Narrative Form in Moll Flanders and the Eighteenth-Century Secret History,” *Lumen* 25 (2006): 153.

²⁰ *The Grub Street Journal*, February 27, 1735, cited in Paula McDowell, “‘The Manufacture and Lingua-facture of Ballad-Making’: Broadside Ballads in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 47, no. 2-3 (2006): 152.

²¹ *Bell’s Classical Arrangement of Fugitive Poetry*, vol. 2 (London: J. Bell, 1789), 73.

²² Tim Fulford, “Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers: Ballad Singers and Ballad Heroines in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 47, no. 2 (2006): 309.

²³ Leslie Shepherd, *The History of Street Literature* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 28.

²⁴ There are, of course, some copies in libraries and archives where several of the pages have not survived.

²⁵ *Robin Hood’s Garland* (Nottingham: Printed by S. Creswell in the New ‘Change, 1770), 1.

²⁶ *Robin Hood’s Garland* (Nottingham: Printed and Sold by G. Burbage, 1794), 1.

more expensive but undated eighteenth-century edition cost 6d.²⁷ These prices would have been quite expensive for those of the plebeian classes to afford.

When readers were paying more for a product, then it stands to reason that they expected something of better quality than a regular broadside or chapbook. During the eighteenth century, the publishers of cheap chapbooks rarely made an effort to match the illustrations on their broadsides or chapbooks with the subject matter at hand. This practice continued until the 1820s when even James Catnach, a famous publisher of street literature, started out his business using worn typefaces and crude woodcuts, and often recycled them from one publication to another.²⁸ It was only in the early Victorian period that woodcuts in cheap publications became more detailed and elaborate, and began to be connected closely to the narratives they accompanied.²⁹ But the eighteenth-century versions of *Robin Hood's Garland*s are different in this respect. One of the first editions of *Robin Hood's Garland* from 1670 contains images of a man with a bow and arrow, along with several other characters who appear to match the figures from the ballads.³⁰ The fact that the illustrations in these publications were tailored to the subject matter became a selling point: the subtitle of a 1760 edition is typical of the many, advertising that it is “adorn'd with twenty-seven neat and curious cuts, proper to the subject of each song.”³¹

I noted earlier how literary magazines and polite culture in general held the practice of ballad singing in contempt. Upon opening a copy of *Robin Hood's Garland*, a purchaser would have noticed that there were no melodies supplied. The absence of the tunes must give pause for thought here because where song books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were specifically marketed for home performance, they usually inserted tunes. We find melodies supplied, for example, in the various editions of John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* from 1651 until the last edition in 1728. However, the shift towards the reading of ballads in the eighteenth century is evident in the preface to Thomas D'Urfey's *Songs Compleat, Pleasant and Divertive* (1719), where he says to his “noble subscribers” that he hopes “will happily be received by you when read or perform'd in your merry and vacant hours.”³² Many of the songs which D'Urfey included in his collection included melodies but several did not. The phrase “read or perform'd” indicates that D'Urfey, at least, envisaged that purchasers would be using his books for either reading or singing at home. The fact that ballad singing, by the polite classes at least, was sneered at in the press as something “low” and borderline immoral, as well as the fact that *Robin Hood's Garland* contained no melodies, suggests that these publications did privilege the reading of the ballads, whether aloud or privately, rather than the singing of them.

²⁷ Shepherd, *The History of Street Literature*, 89.

²⁸ V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1775-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 160.

²⁹ Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 194.

³⁰ *Robin Hood's Garland; Containing his Merry Exploits, and the Several Fights which he, Little John, and Will Scarlet had, upon Several Occasions. Some of them Never before Printed. Entered According to Order* ([London]: Coles, Vere, Wright, 1670), i.

³¹ *Robin Hood's Garland: Being a Complete history of all the notable and merry exploits perform'd by him and his men on divers occasions. To which is added, a preface, giving a more full and particular account of his birth, &c. than any hitherto published. Adorn'd with twenty-seven neat and curious cuts, proper to the subject of each song* (Northampton: Dicey, 1760), i.

³² Thomas D'Urfey, ed., *Songs Compleat, Pleasant and Divertive, Set to Musick*, vol. 1 (London: W. Pearson, 1719), iv.

Some of the songs in the garlands do carry subtitles such as “to the tune of...” after which the printer/editor inserts the name of a well-known ballad immediately. In the 1790 edition of *The English Archer*, for example, the ballad of *Robin Hood and the Butcher* is subtitled as “to the Tune of Robin Hood and the Beggar.”³³ Undoubtedly some tunes may have been known by readers when they purchased the garlands. However, the identification of tunes to some of the other songs is vague; for example, the ballad of *Robin Hood and the Stranger* in one garland is subtitled simply as “to a new tune.”³⁴ The listing of a tune, however, is not uniformly to be the case with all garlands, and the fact that a tune is specified on some ballads does not automatically mean that these publications were not envisaged as reading material.³⁵ In *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood* no tunes are indicated at all, not even in the subtitles. Similarly, an undated version of *The History of the Life and Death of that Renowned Outlaw Robin Hood*—a reprint of Martin Parker’s *True Tale of Robin Hood* (1632)—does not indicate any tunes. In any case, even as early as Parker was writing, he addressed readers and not singers:

If any *reader* please to try,
As I direction shew,
The truth of this brave history,
He'll find it true I know:
And I shall think my labour well
Bestowed to purpose good.
When it shall be said, that I did tell
True tales of Robin Hood.³⁶

Even when new Robin Hood ballads were written in poetic miscellanies with a wider theme, they did not include tunes. This is the case in *The American Mock Bird* (1760), which contains a short Robin Hood ballad titled simply as *A New Song*, but strangely, for a song, does not include a melody.³⁷ Admittedly, if some of the tunes were already known by readers despite the absence of melodies in the printed garlands, then it is impossible to imagine that readers did not at the very least sing or hum some of them as they were reading along on occasion. In place of musical notation, garland publishers often than not inserted additional punctuation into the ballad texts which were not present on the broadsides. This may seem as though it is a subtle change but is worth taking a closer look. Below is an extract from a seventeenth-century broadside version of *Little John and the Four Beggars* alongside the text from a mid-eighteenth-century garland, and I have underlined and placed in bold added punctuation:

Broadside Version (17th century)

Sayes John if I must a begging go,
with a hey, etc.
I will have a Palmers weed,

Garland Version (18th century)

Sayes *John*, if I must a begging go,
I will have a Palmers weed,
With a staff and a Coat, and bags of all sorts

³³ *The English Archer*, 13.

³⁴ *The English Archer*, 38.

³⁵ Stephen Basdeo, “A Critical Edition of *Little John’s Answer to Robin Hood and the Duke of Lancaster* (1727),” *Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies*, 1 no. 1 (2017): 21.

³⁶ *The History of the Life and Death of that Renowned Out-Law Robin Hood* (Penrith: A. Bell [n.d.]), 23.

³⁷ *The American Mock Bird* (New York: J. Rivington, 1760), 64.

With a staff and a Coat and bags of all sorts the better then shall I speed.³⁹
 the better then shall I speed.³⁸

Interestingly, the garland version of *Little John and the Four Beggars*, cited above, omits the refrain of “with a hey.” This suggests that the publisher did not think it necessary to include either because they assumed readers would know the tune or were indeed publishing their book simply with readers in mind rather than singers. But to return to our point about punctuation: observe below both the broadside and garland text of *Robin Hood and the Jovial Tinker* placed alongside each other:

Broadside Version (17th century)

Where dost thou live quod Robin Hood,
 I pray thee now me tell,
 Sad news I hear there is abroad,
 I fear all is not well.
 What is that news the Tinker said,
 tell me without delay,
 I am a Tinker by my trade,
 and do live at Banburay .
 As for the news quoth Robin Hood,
 it is but as I hear
 Two tinkers they were set i'th stocks,
 for drinking ale and beer.
 If that be all the Tinker said,
 as I may say to you,
 Your news it is not worth a fart,
 since that they all be true.⁴⁰

Garland Version (18th century)

Where dost thou dwell, quoth Robin Hood,
 I pray thee now me tell,
 Sad news I hear there is abroad,
 I fear all is not well.
 What is that news, the Tinker said,
 tell me without delay;
 I am a Tinker by my trade,
 and do live at *Banburay*.
 As for the news, quoth *Robin Hood* ,
 it is but as I hear
 Two tinkers they were set in the stocks,
 for drinking ale and beer.
 If that be all, the Tinker said,
 as I may say to you,
 Your news it is not worth a fart,
 since that they all be true.⁴¹

Any modern reader who opens an eighteenth-century text will notice a striking difference in the practice of punctuating texts between that period and our own times. Punctuation, from the late seventeenth century onwards, facilitated the custom of reading aloud. Various writers from this time onwards attempted to set down rules for “marking” on the page where readers should pause to emphasise a particular point in the text. A comma was “a note of a short stay ... in reading, the voice must there be a very little stopt,” so ruled Henry Care in 1687.⁴² The idea of punctuation as a device for marking pauses in the oral delivery of a text continued to have currency in the eighteenth century when books on elocution sold well as “punctuation came

³⁸ *Little Iohn and the four beggers, a new merry song of Robin Hood and little John* (London: Printed for William Gilbertson [n.d.]). Oxford, Bodleian Library Bod693.

³⁹ *Robin Hood's garland. Being a compleat history of all the notable and merry exploits perform'd by him and his men on divers occasions* (London: Printed by M. Edwards at the Globe without Newgate, 1746), 101.

⁴⁰ *A New Song to drive away cold Winter, Between Robin Hood and the jovial Tinker. How Robin by a wile, the Tinker did cheat, But at the length as you shall hear, the Tinker did him beat, Whereby the same, they did then agree, They after liv'd in love and unity* (London: Printed for I. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passenger [n.d.]). Cambridge, Magdalen College, Pepys Library, Pepys Ballads 2.107.

⁴¹ *The English Archer; or, Robin Hood's Garland* (Lichfield: A. Morgan [n.d.]), 20.

⁴² Henry Care, *The Tutor to True English* (London, 1687), 59.

increasingly to be seen as a sort of notation.”⁴³ Punctuation meant that an eighteenth-century reader would know, when reading aloud, when to modulate one’s voice and change the tempo of their reading, as James Burrow observed in 1771.⁴⁴ In short, singing was indeed a polite activity but the singing of ballads was not: the garland publishers’ omissions of melodies and their simultaneous insertion of punctuation into their Robin Hood ballads is indicative of the fact that they were facilitating the reading of their Robin Hood ballads but not the singing of them.

If we consider how the ballads are arranged within the garlands themselves, it becomes even clearer that these were products designed for an affluent literary marketplace. Seventeenth-century versions of *Robin Hood’s Garland* contain no prefatory material, but this changed in the eighteenth century. The new innovation of the eighteenth-century editions is that almost all of them contain a preface to the reader, which takes the following form in most editions:

Courteous Reader,

It is to be observed, that various have been the reports of the birth and parentage of our famous out-law Robin Hood; yet, thro’ industrious care and diligent search, we found him to be the undoubted son of noble parentage; namely, the head ranger of the north of England: his mother was the daughter of the right honourable Earl of Warwick; his uncle squire Gamwell of Gamwell-Hall, as you shall find more at large in the following songs; some of which have been for many years omitted; but in this edition they have been carefully collected, and placed in their right order, for the satisfaction of all ingenious lovers of the bow, and lovers of the memory of Robin Hood.⁴⁵

The address of readers as “courteous” requires explanation. References to “courteous readers” pervade eighteenth-century literature. To take one example, in the conclusion of *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), Jonathan Swift declares that, “I am wonderfully well-acquainted with the present relish of courteous readers.”⁴⁶ Courtesy was a behaviour originally connected with early modern court life and guidelines for practicing courtesy were published in numerous conduct books during the period.⁴⁷ By the eighteenth century, courtly courtesy was subsumed into the social code of politeness, which was inclusive of people from both the upper and middling orders.⁴⁸ These conduct books were published with the aim of improving people’s manners and to help them navigate their way through polite society and practice the etiquette that was

⁴³ Williams, *The Social Life of Books*, 21.

⁴⁴ James Burrow, *De Usu et Ratione Interpungendi* (London, 1771), 8–9.

⁴⁵ *Robin Hood’s Garland Being a Compleat history of all his Merry Exploits and Valiant Fights, which he, Little John, and Will Scarlet, fought on divers occasions. Licensed and entered according to order* (London: Onley, 1704), 3.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102.

⁴⁷ “Courtesy book,” in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249.

⁴⁸ William Bowman Piper, *Common Courtesy in Eighteenth-century English Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 15-17.

expected of them.⁴⁹ Where books in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries addressed their courteous readers, it was done so to signify that the text in hand was to be read didactically; it was clear to readers from the outset that they were reading a serious literary work and not reading a mere jest book or “idle tale.”⁵⁰ Thus, the address to “courteous readers” in the garlands appears to be a deliberate attempt on the publishers’ part to court a sophisticated and fairly affluent purchaser and give them a piece of “improving” literature which they might read in their homes.

Successive editions of *Robin Hood’s Garland* continued this practice of addressing courteous readers and sometimes inserted additional material. One edition from 1746 contains a lengthy prose account of Robin Hood’s life which was plagiarised from a criminal biography entitled *The Whole Life and Merry Exploits of Bold Robin Hood* (1736).⁵¹ Later editions also contain addresses to the reader which are similar to the one cited above. The 1760 edition contains a preface to the reader,⁵² as does the 1790 version.⁵³ One late eighteenth-century version entitled *The Famous English Archer, or, Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1796) declares in its preface that “the *reader* is here presented with a new and greatly improved edition of the celebrated adventures and exploits of Robin Hood, the famous English Archer, of whose history a knowledge may be obtained from the following concise narrative.”⁵⁴ The manner in which the 1796 garland was ‘greatly improved’ compared to those which came before is somewhat unclear: it offered readers no new ballad material so it must have been no more than a marketing gimmick. Similarly, *The English Archer; or Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (1790) reproduces the address to the Courteous Reader found in the 1704 edition.⁵⁵ Another edition of *The English Archer* printed in Lichfield c. 1790 enlarges the address to the courteous reader by inserting the following lines:

To read how Robin Hood and Little John,
Brave Scarlet, Stutly, valiant bold and free,
Each of them bravely, fairly play’d the Man,
While they did reign beneath the Greenwood Tree.
Bishops, Friars, likewise many more,
Parted with their Gold for to increase their Store,
But never would they rob or wrong the Poor.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Evelyn Arizpe, Morag Styles, and Shirley Brice Heath, *Reading Lessons from the Eighteenth Century Mothers, Children and Texts* (Lichfield: Pied Piper, 2006), 63.

⁵⁰ Philip Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of Some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 191.

⁵¹ *Robin Hood’s garland: being a compleat history of all the notable and merry exploits performed by him, and his men, on divers accounts and occasions. To which is added, The whole life of bold Robin Hood, Earl of Huntingdon* (London, 1746).

⁵² *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1760], 1.

⁵³ *Robin Hood’s garland: Being a Compleat history of all the notable and merry exploits perform’d by him and his men on divers occasions. To which is added, a preface, giving a more full and particular account of his birth, &c. than any hitherto published. A new and much-improved edition. Adorn’d with twenty-seven neat and curious cuts, proper to the subject of each song* (Wolverhampton: Smart, 1790), 1.

⁵⁴ *The Famous English Archer, or, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, Commonly Called Robin Hood* (Monaghan: Printed by John Brown, 1796), 3. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵ *The English Archer; or Robert Earl of Huntingdon, Vulgarly Called Robin Hood* (Glasgow: George Caldwell, 1782), 3.

⁵⁶ *The English Archer; or, Robin Hood’s Garland*, ii. Emphasis added.

After the section containing the preface to the reader, most of the garlands arrange the songs in exactly the same order, following a broadly “biographical” sequence. They begin with the ballad entitled *The Pedigree, Education, and Marriage of Robin Hood, and Clorinda*.⁵⁷ This is what might be termed an “origin story.” The ballad of *Robin Hood and Clorinda* is one of two biographical ballads to which the compilers of *Robin Hood’s Garland* would have had access—the other being *Robin Hood’s Progress to Nottingham* (c. 1700)—given the fact that the *Geste* was virtually forgotten until it was reprinted in Joseph Ritson’s *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads* (1795). *Robin Hood and Clorinda* describes, as its full title suggests, the birth and parentage of Robin Hood, and ends with Robin meeting Little John when he goes to live at his uncle Gamwell’s house. After this account of Robin’s birth, the compiler(s) insert several of the episodic ballads (i.e., those which do not offer extended narratives of Robin Hood’s life, but relate single events, such as meetings with strangers in the forests). Such ballads include *Robin Hood and the Jolly Pinder of Wakefield*.⁵⁸ Placed at the end of the various editions of *Robin Hood’s Garland* is either one of the two ballads detailing Robin Hood’s death, such as *Robin Hood and the Valiant Knight*,⁵⁹ or *Robin Hood’s Death and Burial*.⁶⁰

One particularly interesting version of *Robin Hood’s Garland* appeared during the 1760s, and is worthy of further discussion here because it is the first time that lengthy prose narratives of Robin Hood’s life provide links between the ballads. This book was *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood* (1769), which begins with an introduction to the legend of Robin Hood:

The accounts of this man’s genealogy are exceedingly various; and the stories of his robberies, amongst the country people of England, seem as fictitious, as those concerning the thefts of Mercury, amongst the heathens of Greece and Italy [...] There is sufficient tradition to induce us to think he really was a nobleman; particularly that contained in an old ballad, of which we shall give our readers a part, as containing a strong picture of the old English manners.⁶¹

This preface bears some resemblance to the narrative of Robin Hood that appeared in contemporary histories of the highwaymen. Here again readers are addressed, and the publishers of the garland evidently think that the “strong picture of the old English manners” is one of the attractions for polite readers. Published shortly after Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of*

⁵⁷ See the following editions as representative samples of the garlands’ consistency in the formatting and arranging of the songs throughout the eighteenth century: *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1704], 5-8; *Robin Hood’s garland: Being a Complete history of all the notable and merry exploits perform’d by him and his men on divers occasions. To which is added, a preface, giving a more full and particular account of his birth, &c. than any hitherto published. Adorn’d with twenty-seven neat and curious cuts, proper to the subject of each song* (London: C. Dicey, 1750), 1-5; *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1760], 1-5; *The English Archer*, 5-10.

⁵⁸ *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1704], 12-15; *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1750], 8-9; *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1760], 12-14; *The English Archer*, 12-14.

⁵⁹ *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1704], 86-90; *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1750], 83-85; *Robin Hood’s Garland* [1760], 85; *The English Archer*, 78-80.

⁶⁰ *The English Archer*, 81-83.

⁶¹ *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood; The Terror of Forestallers and Engrossers, and the Protector of the Poor and Helpless: Interspersed with a Variety of Songs and Adorn’d with Several Curious Copper Plates* (London: Roberts, 1769), 1-2.

Ancient English Poetry (1765), the compiler of *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood* is evidently trying to draw upon the contemporary enthusiasm for native literary traditions—a desire to learn about native English culture was another marker of politeness, for any self-respecting member of polite society was committed to self-improvement through learning about history, philosophy, and the arts.

The editor of *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood* places *The Pedigree, Education, and Marriage of Robin Hood, with Clorinda, the Queen of Titbury Feast* following the introduction. After this comes *Renown'd Robin Hood*, which likewise links to the next ballad of *Robin Hood and the Tanner* through eleven pages of prose, much of which has been taken from Johnson's *History of the Highwaymen*. The reader is told the story of how Robin inherits his uncle Gamwell's estate, and the good works which he performed for the poor upon his accession to the estate. Successive episodic ballads in *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood* are likewise connected by lengthy prose narratives. Eight pages of prose connect *Robin Hood and the Butcher* with the ballad of *Little John and the Four Beggars*. The material is arranged in this manner throughout with *Little John and the Four Beggars* connected with *The Death of Robin Hood* by 15 pages of prose. The garland ends its account of Robin Hood's life with four pages of prose detailing the events of his death.⁶²

Although we cannot say with certainty how the garlands were used by consumers after they were purchased, it is evident that publishers envisaged them as reading material. At the end of the century, purchasers could buy a more substantial edition of Robin Hood's life and ballads. For example, there was *The History and Real Adventures of Robin Hood, and his Merry Companions: Written by Capt. C. Johnson* (1800). The inclusion of Johnson's text is an attempt to historicize Robin Hood and give context to the ballads themselves, notwithstanding Johnson's highly suspect scholarship. After all, he depicted Shakespeare's John Falstaff and Defoe's Colonel Jack as authentic historical figures. Johnson's narrative of Robin Hood was merely the stories of early modern ballads retold in prose.⁶³ With their readers' prefaces and the fact that some of them include lengthy biographies of Robin Hood, the garlands discussed here anticipated the publication of Ritson's text at the end of the century.

CONCLUSION

The texts of the garlands have previously been studied mainly with a view to finding variations in the lyrics of well-known Robin Hood ballads. This study has, however, considered them as a consumer commodity and discussed how publishers likely envisaged the garlands as books for readers and not singers. The garlands were moralist texts to be read by members of polite society; members of the plebeian classes may indeed have continued to sing ballads in public, but for purchasers anxious to 'improve' their manners and morals, the garlands were for reading. They could not, after all, be found singing "the vulgar doggerel of the streets." This reading may have been done privately, as doubtless happened on many occasions, but the garlands could also be read aloud by family members to each other, and the publishers of the garlands marketed their books in line with contemporary reading etiquette. In this way, the

⁶² *The Exploits of the Renowned Robin Hood*, 7, 20–32, 65–80, 86–90.

⁶³ Charles Johnson, *The Lives and Actions of the Most Noted Highwaymen, Street Robbers, Pirates, &c. &c.* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1839), 70.

garlands were part of an ongoing oral tradition, but they were not part of a song tradition as with the broadsides of the previous century. One might still sing the garlands if so inclined; the reading aloud of the ballads in the garlands was still a type of oral performance. The fact that they were marketed for readers, however, anticipates trends in antiquarian research from the middle of the century onwards, when Thomas Percy, Thomas Evans, and Joseph Ritson emphasized the “poetical,” and hence literary status, of the songs which they had collected in their anthologies.

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