

THE IMPERIALIST GAMES ETHIC IN LATE-VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN ROBIN HOOD NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

Towards the close of Escott Lynn's *When Lionheart Was King* (1908) Robin Hood prophesies that "the day is not far distant when Englishman and Norman shall live side by side in peace, and as brothers shall hold their own against the world."¹ To contemporary readers the message here would have been clear: once the English nation has united, it will be unstoppable.² Published as it was in the heyday of the British Empire, that statement in Lynn's novel would have had clear imperial undertones for readers.³

Imperialism does not feature much in any of the "big name" Robin Hood texts of the nineteenth century. In her commentary on the novels of Walter Scott, Thomas Love Peacock, Pierce Egan, G. P. R. James, and Thomas Miller, Stephanie Barcewski convincingly argues that in these novels, "the authors who treated the legend of Robin Hood ... instead of promoting imperialism, they more often attacked it by emphasising its high cost in terms of the attention paid to more pressing domestic problems."⁴ The novels about which Barcewski makes that statement were all written between 1819 and 1843. However, during the late nineteenth century, a number of Robin Hood children's books were published, and it is the following late-Victorian and Edwardian children's books which are analysed in this article: John B. Marsh's *Life and Adventures of Robin Hood* (1865); Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1883); Edward Gilliat's *Forest Outlaws, or St. Hugh and the King* (1887) and his second work *In Lincoln Green: A Story of Robin Hood* (1898); J. Walker McSpadden's *Robin Hood and his Merry Outlaws* (1898); Henrietta E. Marshall's *Stories of Robin Hood Told to the Children* (c.1906); Lynn's *When Lionheart Was King* (1908); Henry Gilbert's *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood* (1912); and Paul Creswick's *Robin Hood and his Adventures* (1917).

These books were published during the era of "new" imperialism. This era began during the 1870s, reached its high point with the Berlin Conference in 1884, when the "great powers" of Europe carved up the map of Africa and assigned territories to various European empires, and lasted until ca. 1914. It was a "new" style of imperialism because the period saw European empires establish direct rule over new colonies, especially in Africa during "the Scramble for Africa." Before this time, Europeans' colonization of other lands had occurred, especially in the British case, through the operation of privately-run joint-stock companies.

¹ Escott Lynn, *When Lionheart Was King: A Tale of Robin Hood and Merry Sherwood* (London: Blackie and Son, 1908), 48.

² The author would like to thank the reader and the editors for their helpful comments on this article.

³ A version of this chapter originally appeared in: 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).

⁴ Stephanie L. Barcewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 224.

It was, until the late twentieth century, assumed that imperialism had very little effect on British culture during the Victorian Edwardian period. As historian Bernard Porter maintains:

Every Victorian novel carries a reference or two to a colony, a colonial people, or emigration, or someone who has worked in the empire in some way ... This is scarcely surprising ... authors would have had to make a deliberate effort to exclude all imperial allusions.⁵

Other historians such as Lawrence James have made similar claims.⁶ This is an older, and what we might call a “traditional” view of imperialism and its relation to British culture which has been challenged by a number of cultural historians. John Mackenzie led the way in this respect; where the history of the British Empire was once “seen as fusty, hidebound, backward-looking,” and studied at the level of high politics, with Mackenzie’s *Propaganda and Empire* (1984),⁷ attention was turned to the examination of *how* imperialist ideology was diffused through British culture. Other scholars soon followed Mackenzie’s lead and, although each scholar has their own distinctive approach, they are broadly in agreement that imperial ideology was all-pervasive in British popular culture.⁸ There are now, therefore, two camps of imperial historians: “those who proclaim themselves or are labelled as exponents of a ‘new’ imperial history and those who, by default, must presumably be termed old imperial historians.”⁹ This essay takes the side of the “newer” challengers.

This article will also contribute to the field of children’s literature studies for the reason that, during the era of “new” imperialism, many children’s books, especially those in which the characters venture abroad, contained imperialist sentiments.¹⁰ Indeed, scholars of imperialism and children’s literature have focused often on children’s books which contain overt imperial references, such as M. Daphne Kutzer’s recent survey which examines the works of Rudyard Kipling and novels such as Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905). The imperialist credentials of the likes of Kipling and Hodgson Burnett, and the other authors which Kutzer examines, are now well-established. However, this article shows how late nineteenth-century Robin Hood children’s novels, which feature a medieval character who rarely ventures abroad and whose plots do not often feature non-English characters carried an implicitly imperialist ideology. The merry men’s conduct in virtually all of these novels conforms to what J. A. Mangan describes as the “games ethic” or “public school ethos.” Readers will have noticed that Pyle’s text is considered here as well. Although an American, Pyle’s nationality does not hinder a discussion of his work in this essay. Pyle attended an

⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

⁶ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Abacus, 1994), 331.

⁷ John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

⁸ The following works are a few selected examples out of many: John Mackenzie, “Empire and Metropolitan Cultures,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Andrew Porter, vol. III, *The Nineteenth-Century*, ed. A. Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 270–93; Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (London: Pearson, 2005); Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, ed., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁹ Stephen Howe, *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, ed. Stephen Howe (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1.

¹⁰ Clare Bradford, “The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children’s Books,” *Children’s Literature* 29 no. 1 (2001): 196-218.

American private school, which was the equivalent of a British public school. Elite American schools promoted an ideology similar to the British schools' games ethic and Pyle's book became popular in England, winning praise from even the likes of William Morris.¹¹

This article is structured into several parts: the first section delves deeper into the meanings of some of the key terms such as "imperialism" and "games ethic" used in this essay along with a short history of the emergence of this ideology in British public schools. This part of the discussion is important because it allows us to set late-Victorian Robin Hood books in their political and intellectual context. The essay then proceeds to a thematic analysis of the Robin Hood novels listed above. The themes under which the texts are analyzed are the constituent parts of the games ethic: the ideologies of athleticism and muscular Christianity, fair play, duty, and patriotism.

IMPERIALISM AND THE GAMES ETHIC

The word "imperialism" is often used in today's press and by modern-day political activists as though it were synonymous with its sister terms "colonialism," "colonization," and "empire." While they have similar connotations, they describe different processes. While such labels will always be contentious, Stephen Howe has formulated the most convincing definitions of these words to date. Howe holds that "colonialism" denotes the ideology with which one nation justifies the colonization of other lands. An "empire" describes a state where one polity exerts political, economic, and cultural control over other regions. "Imperialism" is the word used to describe the actions and ideology through which one nation or group of nations justifies and maintains political and economic hegemony over less developed nations (a nation need not have an empire but its foreign policy may be considered imperialist).¹² We will not find colonialism or promotion of it in late-Victorian Robin Hood texts but we find imperialist ideology in it: the games ethic, which Robin and his men display in their conduct, was part of British imperialism. It was an *ideology* which validated imperial rule.

The games ethic first emerged in the mid-Victorian public schools and then filtered through into British popular culture at large by means of popular literature. Public schools had been established during the medieval period to educate the sons of the poor for the Church. The oldest public school is reputed to be King's School, Canterbury (est. 597). More institutions were established in the succeeding centuries such as Warwick School (est. 914), Eton (est. 1440), Harrow (est. 1572), and Charterhouse (est. 1611). Although they were centers of learning in the medieval and early modern periods, by the eighteenth century these schools had fallen into decline and they were doing little to advance Britain's cultural and scientific achievements. Public school boys had a reputation for cavorting with prostitutes and rioting than for being studious. We have only to read Parson Adams' comments on public schools in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) to acquire a sense of the depths to which the reputation of the public schools had fallen in Fielding's era: "Public Schools are the Nurseries

¹¹ William Morris, cited in Stephen Basdeo, "'That Robin Hood should bring us John Ball': William Morris's References to the Outlaw in *A Dream of John Ball* (1888)," *Journal of William Morris Studies* 23, no. 2 (2019), 53.

¹² Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 76 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15-16.

of all Vice and Immorality. All the Wicked Fellows whom I remember at the University were bred at them.”¹³

However, public schools’ reputations soon improved. Their rise to respectable status had much to do with the reforms at one particular public school: Rugby School, after Dr. Thomas Arnold was appointed as its headmaster in 1828. His aim was to mold the boys into scholars as well as Christian gentleman so he set about reforming the school. One of Arnold’s innovations was to encourage the boys to play sport, although physical education was not, during his tenure, a formal part of the curriculum. It was the combination of religious instruction, scholarly learning, and exercise which, according to Arnold, created a gentleman: “in the true scale of excellence ... moral perfection is most highly valued, then comes excellence of understanding, and, last of all, strength and activity of body. But at school this is just reversed.”¹⁴ Muscular Christianity had arrived.¹⁵ Devotion to God along with an emphasis upon physical fitness was one of the key elements of public school ethos. Soon other schoolmasters followed Arnold’s lead. The British government was taking notice: many other public schools needed reform and a Royal Commission, headed by George Villiers, Earl of Clarendon, was convened in 1864 to investigate how to reform all of Britain’s public schools along “Arnoldian” line. The result of this commission was the passage of the Public Schools Act (1868).¹⁶ The schools became free of government control, making them essentially private schools; the curriculum was updated to serve the needs of modern, industrial, imperial society, while the classics were side-lined; and of course the importance of sports was emphasized. The schools subsequently became attractive places for the upper middle, gentry, and aristocratic classes to send their sons to be educated. (Arnold’s role as a great reformer of public schools has been questioned and it was G. E. L. Cotton, headmaster of Marlborough School, who did more to spread the idea of “Arnoldian” schooling).¹⁷

Outside of the public schools, further developments in the expansion of the British Empire led to the schools becoming training grounds for the imperial officer class, especially as the government after the 1850s initiated direct rule over several territories which had previously been governed by private trading companies. In the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion in 1857, the government passed the India Act (1858), which initiated direct political control of the subcontinent.¹⁸ Between 1884 and 1914, several European powers including Britain also took direct political control of virtually the whole of Africa—a process known as “the Scramble for Africa.” Men imbued with an imperial ethos were needed to run this empire,

¹³ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Claude Rawson (London: Everyman, 1998), 213.

¹⁴ Thomas Arnold, *Sermons*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1878), 104.

¹⁵ Nick J. Watson, Stuart Weir, and Stephen Friend, “The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005), 1.

¹⁶ “An Act to Provide for Public Elementary Education in England and Wales,” Education in England: The History of Our Schools, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/1868-public-schools-act.html>.

¹⁷ See the following: Pierre de Coubertin, “Physical Exercises in the Modern World: A Lecture Given at the Sorbonne, November 1892,” in *Pierre de Coubertin, 1863-1937: Olympism. Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Muller (Lausanne: International Olympics Association, 2000), 287-97; Fabrice Neddham, “Constructing Masculinities Under Thomas Arnold of Rugby (1828-1842): Gender, Educational Policy and School Life in an Early-Victorian Public School,” *Gender and Education* 16, no. 3 (2004): 303-26; and William H. Freeman, *Physical Education, Exercise and Sport Science in a Changing Society*, 8th ed. (Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2015), 173.

¹⁸ K. T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886*, The New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 194.

and so the public school system began to develop “distinctly militaristic features” in order to produce leaders to lead the rank-and-file of the British armies, who were fit, due to their sporting prowess, and could serve in what were often inhospitable environments overseas.

While the public school system trained healthy boys from the middle classes, working-class boys—the future rank-and-file of the imperial army—at this period were generally unhealthy, living in cramped overcrowded conditions and malnourished. This became especially apparent at the beginning of the Boer War (1899-1902), which highlighted what seemed to the establishment to be a case of “national deficiency” as one third of working-class volunteers were turned away from enlisting for being too unhealthy.¹⁹ Additionally, the growing rivalry from other emerging great powers such as the USA and a newly-unified Germany made the British authorities anxious that the United Kingdom would lose its preeminent international standing. It was this anxiety over Britain’s declining international supremacy which contributed to the emergence of militarism in the public schools. While the public schools were mainly attended by the wealthy sons of the middle and upper classes, in theory the ideals of the public school ethos were values to which all classes could subscribe. Robert Baden Powell (1857-1941), the founder of the Scout movement, for example, deliberately avoided using the word “class” in his works.²⁰ The public school ethos, then, which stressed the values of athleticism, fair play, and devotion to duty, sought to prepare boys of all classes for a life of imperial service.²¹ The end result of this ethos was intended to produce, as intimated by Baden-Powell, boys trained to do their duty to God while carrying out service for others.²²

While it was the wealthier classes’ children who were exposed to the imperialist public school ethos in the schools, the games ethic filtered through into popular culture at large. For example, body builders such as Eugene Sandow competed topless on stage, displaying what was considered to be the perfect male physique. Boys’ magazines covered the annual games held at public schools in the hope that reports of these “tests of prowess” would induce young male readers of all classes to “take pattern and example by the discipline and skill evinced by their brethren.”²³ In tandem with the advent of “new” imperialism was the emergence of a large body of children’s literature that promoted imperial values. While violent penny dreadfuls had flourished between ca. 1840 and ca. 1880, by the late nineteenth century there was an attempt to reclaim the realm of children’s books from figures such as Dick Turpin (1705–39) and Jack Sheppard (1702-24), who had dominated it in penny dreadfuls.²⁴ It was only supposedly “respectable” hardback books that would provide juvenile readers with “wholesome adventures,” even if in practice these books could be just as violent as some of the penny dreadfuls, which moralists such as Charlotte Yonge complained about. Books with an imperial message, such as those by G. A. Henty, therefore, promoted respectable reading for children at a time when middle-class moralists assumed that it was badly needed. And in this corpus of

¹⁹ G. R. Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, The New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36-7.

²⁰ Robert Baden-Powell, “The Scouter,” *US Scouting Service*, September 1919, accessed August 12, 2016. <http://usscouts.org>.

²¹ Searle, *A New England?*, 65.

²² Robert Baden-Powell, *Scoutmastership: A Handbook for Scoutmasters on the Theory of Scout Training* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1920), 141-42.

²³ *The Boy’s Own Volume of Fact, Fiction, History, and Adventure* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1865), 447.

²⁴ Charlotte M. Yonge, *What Books to Lend and What to Give* (London: n.p., n.d.), 5-6.

books were the Robin Hood titles which are the subject of this discussion and which, as this essay shows, imparted imperial values to their predominantly youthful readers.

With the exception of Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, which retailed at a hefty 15s in the United Kingdom,²⁵ many of these books were relatively cheap at a time when the average annual wage for a skilled laborer was approximately £38 per annum.²⁶ Escott Lynn's *When Lionheart was King* retailed at 3s 6d.²⁷ Henry Gilbert's *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood* sold for 7s 6d.²⁸ McSpadden's Robin Hood retailed at 12s 6d,²⁹ and Newbolt's *The Book of the Happy Warrior* sold for 7s.³⁰ None of these books was out of the reach of those from the middle classes, and maybe even more affluent members of the labor aristocracy. As we have seen, however, there was much poverty in the late-Victorian era. The designer and socialist activist, William Morris, remarked that a "precarious" wage was about 18s per week.³¹ There were many parents who would not have been able to buy these Robin Hood books for their children—a purchase of a new 12s book such as Gilbert's would have been hard to justify if the main breadwinner was earning only 18s per week. For those members of the working classes who could not afford to buy the books outright, many of these books were given away as prizes. Most of the books consulted for this article bear an *ex libris* label in the front which indicates they were presented as rewards to schoolboys and schoolgirls for high achievement or good attendance. In addition, many of them were given as Sunday school prizes. Even where parents could not afford to buy some of these Robin Hood books outright, therefore, there were plenty of opportunities for children to own these texts *gratis*.

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY AND ATHLETICISM

The games ethic dictated that the cultivation of physical prowess, combined with Christian piety, would in theory enable young boys to spread the gospel when they served the empire in often inhospitable environments. Even though they were not set out in the colonies, in Robin Hood texts, we can see a shift from a domestic muscular Christianity to an outward-looking imperial Christian ethos. There were precursors to this emphasis upon imperial Christianity in Robin Hood penny bloods. J. H. Stocqueler's *Maid Marian* (1849) sees the first signs of evangelical Christian sentiment creeping into the Robin Hood tradition. A significant portion of the novel is set in the Holy Land, detailing the adventures of Richard the Lionheart on his crusade and Tuck's attempted conversion of two Muslim characters and a Jewish lady are praised in the novel.³² Earlier texts such as Joseph Ritson's *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads* (1795) had presented Robin as a very pious man indeed,

²⁵ "Advertisements," *The Athenaeum*, December 15, 1883, 796.

²⁶ Robert C. Allen, "Real Incomes in the English Speaking World, 1879-1913," in *Labour Market Evolution: The Economic History of Market Integration, Wage Flexibility and the Employment Relation*, ed. G. Grantham and M. MacKinnon (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 120.

²⁷ "Books Received," *The Academy*, December 21, 1907, 277.

²⁸ "Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood," *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, December 8, 1912, 5.

²⁹ "Advertisements," *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, December 12, 1921, 14.

³⁰ "The Christmas Season's Yield of Books," *The Manchester Guardian*, November 26, 1917, 6.

³¹ William Morris, "The Hopes of Civilization," in *William Morris: News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wheeler, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2004), 325.

³² J. H. Stocqueler, *Maid Marian, the Forest Queen, Being a Companion to "Robin Hood"* (London: G. Pierce, n.d.), 146.

despite the fact that he often robbed clergymen.³³ Being that one of the aims of the public school ethos was to fashion Christian gentlemen, it was easy for late-Victorian authors to transpose earlier ideas about Robin's piety on to the new public school ethos. The Robin Hood of late-Victorian children's books is always a pious man. In Gilbert's *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood*, when Robin gathers his band together, he is insistent that they should hear mass daily.³⁴

In addition, in late-Victorian Robin Hood books there is an emphasis upon Robin and his men's physique that is absent from earlier popular works such as Egan's *Robin Hood* and Stocqueler's *Maid Marian*. In J. E. Muddock's *Maid Marian and Robin Hood* (1892), Robin is described in the following manner:

Robin Hood was a striking personage, for his figure was suggestive of muscles of steel, while his sunburnt face told of resolute will, and no man with such fearless, brilliant eyes could be a coward.³⁵

That statement is, of course, informed by Victorian ideas of physiognomy. It is not only Robin Hood's physique and physical prowess which sets him apart from other men, but his face as well. Here is a hardy, tough Englishman who is unafraid to face the elements. Similarly, in McSpadden's tale, in his youth Robin is "a comely, well-knit stripling, and as soon as his right arm received thew and sinew he learned how to draw a bow,"³⁶ while Robin is described by Creswick as "muscular."³⁷ Similarly, in Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, Robin is "stout of sinew."³⁸

In another novel, Robin is skilled in the use of the bow but is also an excellent wrestler, and the outlaws, when they are not robbing people, regularly "amuse themselves in athletic exercises."³⁹ Gilliat's *In Lincoln Green*, which is perhaps the most "public school" of all the works examined in this chapter—as it opens in a very "Victorianized" medieval public school which Robin's son Walter attends—tells the reader how Robin has "well-made arms and massive shoulders."⁴⁰ (Gilliat was the assistant headmaster of Harrow so it is unsurprising that aspects of the games ethic are apparent in his book). In McSpadden's tale, as Robin competes in the archery contest, "he felt his muscles tightening into bands of steel, tense and true."⁴¹ In his description of Will Scarlet, McSpadden says that he is "not a bad build for all his prettiness ... those calves are well-rounded and straight. The arms hang stoutly from the shoulders."⁴² Even Friar Tuck is more muscular than fat in Lynn's *When Lionheart was King*, bearing "arms almost as brawny as Little John's."⁴³

Cultivating physical prowess would enable boys—the future servants of the empire—to survive and endure in the often-inhospitable environments in the colonies. In G. A. Henty's

³³ Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads*, vol. 1 (London: T. Egerton, 1795), x.

³⁴ Henry Gilbert, *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood* (London: T. C. and A. C. Jack, 1912), 51.

³⁵ J. E. Muddock, *Maid Marian and Robin Hood* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1892), 8.

³⁶ McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, p. 12.

³⁷ Paul Creswick, *Robin Hood and his Adventures* (London: E. Nister, 1917), 25.

³⁸ Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown, in Nottinghamshire* (London: Brandywine, 1938), 2.

³⁹ *Tales of Robin Hood* (London: John F. Shaw, n.d.), 8.

⁴⁰ Edward Gilliat, *In Lincoln Green: A Story of Robin Hood* (London: Seeley and Co., 1897), 45.

⁴¹ McSpadden *Robin Hood*, 23.

⁴² McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, 80.

⁴³ Lynn, *When Lionheart Was King*, 33.

With Clive in India: or, The Beginning of an Empire (1888), for example, the hero of the novel, the young Charlie Maryatt, from an early age always participates in sports at home, and as a young adult is chosen for a mission that will test his physical prowess.⁴⁴ While many medieval and early modern Robin Hood texts celebrate the summer time and give very little consideration to how a body of outlaws living in the forest might survive in a harsh winter, some of these children's books do recognize the fact that life for an outlaw might at times be difficult. H. E. Marshall's work reveals a little about Robin's life would have been like in the winter months: "in winter the roads were so bad, and the weather so cold and wet, that most people stayed at home ... They lived in caves during the winter, and spent their time making stores of bows and arrows, and mending their boots and clothes."⁴⁵

Even plays that were published specifically to be acted out by children at home give tips on how to survive in harsh environments. W. R. Snow's "Robin Hood and his Merry Men" gives an idea of how the outlaws cook food and boil water while living out in the greenwood.⁴⁶ Living outdoors makes the outlaws even tougher: McSpadden tells how "the wind blew the ruddy colour into his cheeks."⁴⁷ They are men who love being outdoors; they are not domesticated but ever since their youths have "longed for adventure."⁴⁸ Much like an efficient military force, the outlaws in Henry Gilbert's *Robin Hood* additionally undergo very rigorous training drills on a daily basis to keep themselves sharp.⁴⁹

FAIR PLAY

A Victorian public schoolboy had to be physically fit but he also had to be a good sport who played by the rules. This ideal was reflected in late-Victorian Robin Hood books. There had of course been a nineteenth-century precedent for portraying the outlaws as acting according to the rules of fair play. In Scott's *Ivanhoe*, after a playful quarterstaff match between the Miller and Gurth Robin exclaims, "Fair play and Old England forever."⁵⁰ The late-Victorian ideal of fair play was easily superimposed onto Robin-Hood-meets-his-match scenarios by late-Victorian writers. According to John Finnemore, these situations in the old broadside ballads illustrated "the old English love of fair play and straight dealing."⁵¹ In Marshall's book, when Robin first meets Little John and they fight with quarterstaves, Robin is beaten, after which he says to Little John, "it was a fair fight and you have won the battle."⁵² In Escott Lynn's *When Lionheart Was King*, when Robin and his men hold up a traveler named Ralph, Robin orders that Ralph should fight Friar Tuck with quarterstaves, saying "You shall fight the Friar, and you shall have fair play."⁵³ A scene of fighting according to the rules of fair play is acted out in Charles Herbert's *Robin Hood* as, after having fought Little John, Robin exclaims: "you've

⁴⁴ G. A. Henty, "With Clive in India," in *British Empire Adventure Stories* (London: Carlton Books, 2005), 570.

⁴⁵ Marshall, *Stories of Robin Hood Told to the Children*, 11.

⁴⁶ W. R. Snow, "Robin Hood and His Merry Men," *Routledge's Every Boy's Annual* (London: Routledge, n.d.), 477.

⁴⁷ McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, 33.

⁴⁸ Anon., *Tales of Robin Hood*, 8.

⁴⁹ Gilbert, *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood*, 48.

⁵⁰ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 127.

⁵¹ John Finnemore, *The Story of Robin Hood* (London: A. and C. Black, 1935), x.

⁵² Marshall, *Stories of Robin Hood*, 16.

⁵³ Lynn, *When Lionheart Was King*, 32.

proved yourself the best man. I own I'm beaten, and the fight's at an end."⁵⁴ Similarly in McSpadden's work, when Little John and Will Scarlet first meet and have a fight with quarterstaves, they laugh about the fight afterwards and make friends.⁵⁵ In Gilliatt's *In Lincoln Green*, Robin's son Walter, at the public school he attends, is taught to play "by all the fair rules of fighting."⁵⁶

The ideal of fair play was not restricted solely to the Robin-Hood-meets-his-match scenarios. It is seen in Creswick's novel when Robin fights Sir Guy of Gisborne:

Next instant Sir Guy of Gisborne went staggering backward with a deep groan, Robin's sword through his throat. "You did bring this upon yourself," muttered Robin, eyeing the body of the knight in vain regret. "Yet you did fall bravely, and in fair fight. You shall be buried honourably."⁵⁷

On a more somber note, in Muddock's *Maid Marian and Robin Hood*, a bout at quarterstaff between Robin and another character named Allan Weir ends with the death of the latter, at which Robin regretfully says "I killed that villain in fair fight; an' he be dead, it is no murder."⁵⁸

Most of these greenwood skirmishes between Robin's band and enemy forces had to be conducted according to the rules of fair play. This meant that real fighting was often portrayed as game in these texts. In Herbert's novel, when Robin asks Little John to join his band, he proposes: "there is plenty of fighting: a hard life, and fine sport. Wilt thou throw in thy lot with us, John Little?"⁵⁹ Even when the outlaws are faced with real danger—when they face the sheriff's forces—this is described as nothing more than a "sport."⁶⁰ The portrayal of fighting as a sport reflects how warfare was often presented by prominent imperialist ideologues during the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. Sir Henry Newbolt in his poem *Vitae Lampada* (1897), for example, equates the field of battle to a "pitch," and further exhorts young men to "play up! play up! and play the game!"⁶¹ Newbolt's poem is quoted on the war memorial at Charterhouse College, which lists the alumni who have fallen in various campaigns, where it is said that the deceased, "played up, played up, and played the game."⁶² Similarly, Baden Powell's *Sport in War* (1900), the very title of which confirms the idea of war as a sport, says, "What sort of sport did you have there?" is the question with which men have, as a rule, greeted one on return from the campaign in Rhodesia; and one could truthfully say, "We had excellent sport." For, in addition to the ordinary experiences included in that head, the work involved in the military operations was sufficiently sporting in itself to fill up a good measure of enjoyment.⁶³

In addition to the fact that war was presented as a game in order to entice young boys to enlist for a supposedly enjoyable life in the army, sport was connected to masculinity during the late-Victorian period. This in turn was linked to the idea of masculinity that was promoted in public schools, and thence reflected in contemporary children's literature: boys had to be ready to

⁵⁴ Charles Herbert, *Robin Hood* (London: John F. Shaw, n.d.), 18.

⁵⁵ McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, 37-41.

⁵⁶ Gilliatt, *In Lincoln Green*, 116.

⁵⁷ Creswick, *Robin Hood and his Adventures*, 271.

⁵⁸ Muddock, *Maid Marian and Robin Hood*, 16.

⁵⁹ Herbert, *Robin Hood*, 19.

⁶⁰ McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, 152.

⁶¹ Henry Newbolt, "Vitae Lampada (1897-98)," accessed June 21, 2016. <https://www.wwnorton.com>.

⁶² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2004), 262.

⁶³ Robert Baden-Powell, *Sport in War* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1900), 18.

fight, but because they were from a “civilized” nation, they also had to play by the rules in order to differentiate themselves from the indigenous peoples of the empire, who were largely viewed as “savages” with no honor. The sad truth is that war, in fact, was not a game in the Victorian era, no matter how “brave,” “gallant,” or “sporting” it was made out to be by imperialist writers.

PATRIOTISM AND ENGLISHNESS

When the 1st Nottinghamshire (Robin Hood) Rifle Volunteers (a unit of the British Army) was established in 1859, a poem in the style of the seventeenth-century Robin Hood ballads was published to commemorate the founding of the corps:

Bold Robin Hood ranged the forest all round,
 The forest all round ranged he;
 Now Robin and men are under the ground,
 And Robin’s successors are we
 [...]
 Now Robin Hood Rifles, not Robin’s bow-men,
 Protect the weak and the fair;
 Robin Hood bullets will “settle the hash”
 Of foes who dare to come here.⁶⁴

The poem ends by stating how the corps will “sing God bless the Queen.”⁶⁵ Later in the century, a short article in the magazine *Young England*—nestled between instalments of a biography of the imperial adventurer Edward Hawke—stated that “the archers of Old England,” among whom were “Robin Hood and his merrie men,” discharged their arrows in England’s service.⁶⁶ Perhaps this fusion of Robin Hood’s ideals and military service arose from the fact that in the late-Victorian period Robin was portrayed in literature as a man who was ever ready to do his duty and serve his king. There are some continuities with earlier texts here—in Robin Hood poems such as the *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode* the outlaw is loyal to the king.⁶⁷ Just like the ideal of fair play, Robin Hood’s loyalty to the monarch in earlier texts was easily adapted by late-Victorian writers and made to correspond to the principles of the games ethic. Henry Newbolt’s *Book of the Happy Warrior* (1917), which tells stories of various heroic figures from English history including Robin Hood, tells readers that manners and morals of the people featured in his book will be of great service to all those who are minded to do their duty:

You will not get the best out of these stories of great men unless you keep in mind, while you read, the rules and feelings that were in their minds while they fought [... the] main ideas that were in the minds of all these great fighters of the past were these: First, service, in peace and war.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ “Ballad for the Robin Hood Rifles,” *Nottinghamshire Guardian* October 27, 1859, 7.

⁶⁵ “Ballad for the Robin Hood Rifles,” 7.

⁶⁶ “The Archers of Old England,” *Young England: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys Throughout the English Speaking World* 19 (n.d.): 169.

⁶⁷ *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode*, Wynkyn de Worde edition, ca. 1506, in *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Edition of the Texts, ca. 1425 to ca. 1600*, ed. Thomas H. Ohlgren and Lister M. Matheson, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 428 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013), 89-147.

⁶⁸ Henry Newbolt, *The Book of the Happy Warrior* (London: Longman, 1917), vi.

The message could not be any more explicit: Robin Hood and the other medieval heroes endeavored at all times to “serve” the nation. Gilliat’s *In Lincoln Green* sees Robin’s son, Walter, participate in a school archery contest “for the honour of my house and country.”⁶⁹ At another point in Gilliat’s novel Robin emphasises his own commitment to “duty” by exclaiming “I am never tired when honour and duty call me.”⁷⁰ Similarly, in Marshall’s story, when the outlaws are made to recite their chivalrous oaths, they are loyal to the King first, and vow to protect the weak and needy second.⁷¹ Towards the end of Marshall’s tale, Robin proudly exclaims “God Bless the King ... God bless all those who love him. Cursed be all those who hate him and rebel against him.”⁷²

Serving the king and the nation is presented in late-Victorian Robin Hood novels as a means by which a boy might advance in the world. In an overtly imperial reference, the anonymous author of *The Story of Ivanhoe for Children* wrote that “in a modern novel,” Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, “would perhaps have gone to the gold mines of Australia, or sought his fortunes in America or South Africa.”⁷³ In Paul Creswick’s *Robin Hood and his Adventures*, young Robin is taken to his uncle Gamwell’s estate. Upon surveying his uncle’s vast land holdings, he enquires how he became so rich, and he is informed that he was given lands as a reward for serving in the king’s army. Robin then expresses a desire to serve in the army when he becomes an adult, with a hope that he too will be similarly rewarded with land and money.⁷⁴ This is a message that is seen repeated in the works of Henty as well; in *With Clive in India*, a young parish boy rises through the ranks of the British army and returns home rich. Thus, there is a message of social mobility here: service to the nation could be the making of a man: morally, physically, and financially.

There was a class dimension to these ideas of loyalty and duty in some of the other novels. Just like the heroes of the empire in real life, Robin Hood was a man born to the upper classes. He is *always* the Earl of Huntingdon in these books. The merry men’s band have a clear hierarchy. They lack the democratic political sentiments that are present in Ritson, Pierce Egan, and Thomas Miller’s earlier works.⁷⁵ Unusually for Robin Hood, in Escott Lynn’s *When Lionheart Was King*, Robin manifests a condescending attitude to some of the downtrodden Anglo-Saxon serfs because they have bent the knee to the Normans in order to procure more lenient terms of feudal service than those they enjoyed under the Anglo-Saxon nobility before the Conquest.⁷⁶ A similarly condescending, though slightly friendlier, attitude to “the lower orders” is found in Creswick’s book, as he writes that “it was scarce a proper thing for one of gentle blood [Robin Hood] to mix with commoners.”⁷⁷ Robin does not have to be elected as he is in Egan’s *Robin Hood* and the anonymous penny blood titled *Little John and Will Scarlet*

⁶⁹ Gilliat, *In Lincoln Green*, 45.

⁷⁰ Gilliat, *In Lincoln Green*, 180.

⁷¹ Marshall, *Stories of Robin Hood*, 8.

⁷² Marshall, *Stories of Robin Hood*, 101.

⁷³ *The Story of Ivanhoe for Children* (London: A. and C. Black, 1899), vii.

⁷⁴ Creswick, *Robin Hood and His Adventures*, 25.

⁷⁵ Stephen Basdeo, “Radical Medievalism: Pierce Egan the Younger’s Robin Hood, Wat Tyler, and Adam Bell,” in *Imagining the Victorians*, ed. Stephen Basdeo and Lauren Padgett, Leeds Working Papers in Victorian Studies, vol. 15 (Leeds: Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies, 2016), 52; and Stephen Basdeo, “The Chartist Robin Hood: Thomas Miller’s *Royston Gower; or, The Days of King John* (1838),” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 44, no. 2 (2019): 75.

⁷⁶ Lynn, *When Lionheart Was King*, 40-41.

⁷⁷ Creswick, *Robin Hood and his Adventures*, 28.

(1865). In late-Victorian works there is instead a clear sense that he is the natural leader of his predominantly “lower class” band of outlaws. In McSpadden’s tale, Robin is the leader of the outlaw band because he possesses “birth, breeding, and skill.”⁷⁸ When Robin does associate with outlaws of “lower breeding,” it is as their clear and undisputed leader, giving orders as an officer among the lower ranks, who in turn owe their “noble” commander loyalty.

There was, by modern standards, a more unpleasant aspect to the promotion of English patriotism: it entailed a belief in the supposed racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. In early nineteenth-century literature Robin Hood is usually depicted as an Anglo-Saxon but it was not a racist concept. There was no sense in Scott’s *Ivanhoe* that Robin Hood as a Saxon is *biologically* superior to the Normans. Scott made it clear that the nation would only be at its best when Anglo-Saxon and Norman identity is combined to create a new *English* national identity.⁷⁹ Pierce Egan’s novel also appropriates this idea but in his novel race stands for class, and the division between Saxon and Norman highlight the antagonism between the elites and the working classes. But just as writers adapted to the ideals of loyalty to the king and fair play to serve an imperial purpose, they likewise did with the idea that Robin Hood was of Anglo-Saxon heritage. As we move into the later nineteenth century, the situation is subtly different. In George Emmett’s *Robin Hood* Robin becomes the loyal servant of both the king and the nation. Emmett was born in London in 1834 and, it is thought, spent his younger days in the army, having fought at the Battle of Balaclava in 1854 and the Siege of Lucknow in 1857.⁸⁰ Emmett stated that, much like Scott, the research for his novel came from reading the various ballads of Robin Hood and he frames his novel as an antiquary’s research.⁸¹ Emmett, however, appropriated the theme of conflict between the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans in order to instill pride in Englishness and English heroes—a pride connected to contemporary ideas of race and the bravery and superiority of the Anglo-Saxons. The medieval Robin Hood texts were “rude in composition [but] suited our sturdy Saxon ancestors, [expressing] all that was manly and brave.”⁸² This belief is also apparent in some of the minor pieces which were published during the nineteenth century. Echoing Emmett’s words is *The Boy’s Own Magazine* which, in its commentary upon *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, urges its young readers to study the old Robin Hood ballads because it will introduce them to “strong, Saxon English.”⁸³

Darwinian principles of the “survival of the fittest” were applied to international geopolitics of the nineteenth century. Britain was the world’s pre-eminent superpower. To the Victorians it seemed obvious that Britain, and often specifically the English, enjoyed their status as a great power over other races due to the fact that they were racially and biologically superior to them. Social Darwinism had arrived. It was consequently used by some statesmen, writers, and journalists to justify further imperial expansion.⁸⁴ Charles Adderley remarked “the

⁷⁸ McSpadden, *Robin Hood*, 30.

⁷⁹ T. A. Shippey, “The Undeveloped Image: Anglo-Saxon in Popular Consciousness from Turner to Tolkien,” in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scrabb and Carole Weinberg, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 29 (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 218.

⁸⁰ Robert J. Kirkpatrick, *Pennies, Profits, and Poverty: A Biographical Dictionary of Wealth and Want in Bohemian Fleet Street* (London: CreateSpace, 2016), 420.

⁸¹ Emmett, *Robin Hood*, 2.

⁸² Emmett, *Robin Hood*, 2.

⁸³ “A Ballad of Robin Hood,” *The Boy’s Own Magazine*, January 1, 1855, 25.

⁸⁴ James Epstein, “Taking Class Notes on Empire,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 270-74.

Anglo-Saxon race [was] the best *breed* in the world.”⁸⁵ It was this belief that allowed Cecil Rhodes to think that to be born English was to have “drawn the greatest prize in the lottery of life.”⁸⁶ Thus the connection between Anglo-Saxon heritage and racial superiority in late Robin Hood serials was not merely a copying of the themes from Scott’s novel. Instead its appropriation later in the Victorian era was representative of wider cultural attitudes regarding the supposed superiority of the English “race.”

The majority of the novels discussed here had little to say about people of other “races.” Marshall’s *Stories of Robin Hood* speaks approvingly of Richard I’s crusading activities, saying “it would be a terrible sin to allow wicked heathen to live in the Holy Land.”⁸⁷ The idea that the Saracens were “wicked” and “evil,” of course, is a regurgitation of the contemporary trope from other nineteenth-century writers who examined the crusades.⁸⁸ Stocqueler’s 1849 novel contains some Orientalist and racist portrayals of people of other lands as savages. For example, Stocqueler endorses the idea that medieval English people were less advanced than those of his own day and he likens their medieval “darkness” to the “ignorance” of the modern “South African savage.”⁸⁹ However, in the majority of the novels discussed in this article there were no non-English characters. They are free from derogatory stereotypes of non-white characters simply by default. Robin Hood stories were therefore, with the exceptions above, concerned specifically with praising Englishness and Anglo-Saxon racial identity rather than overtly denigrating non-English people. Although it stands to reason that when these authors elevated one “race” of people above all others, implicitly it meant that there were “lesser” groups of people by whom Anglo-Saxon “greatness” could be measured against.

CONCLUSION

From a twenty-first century standpoint, it seems odd that authors might adapt Robin Hood, a figure who had been radical and anti-establishment in some previous incarnations, to serve the ethos of duty to the nation and, indirectly, the empire. But the appropriation of medieval heroes to this end was not only applied to Robin Hood. In Henty’s *A March on London* (1898), Wat Tyler and the peasants revolted, not simply because of the poll tax, but, very oddly, also for the right to fight for their country.⁹⁰ Beowulf was likewise portrayed as a great athlete in fictional retellings of the legend.⁹¹ Hereward the Wake, too, received the “imperial” treatment in a serialized story featured in *Young England*.⁹²

⁸⁵ Charles Adderley, cited in William H. Pritchard, *Talking Back to Emily Dickinson and Other Essays* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 100. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁶ Matthew Lewis, *The Life and Times of the Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes, 1853-1902*, vol. 2 (London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1910), 178.

⁸⁷ H. E. Marshall, *Stories of Robin Hood Told to the Children* (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, n.d.), 3.

⁸⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), 101.

⁸⁹ Stocqueler, *Maid Marian*, 171.

⁹⁰ G. A. Henty, “A March on London: Being a Story of Wat Tyler’s Insurrection (London, 1898),” *The Literature Network*, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://www.online-literature.com>.

⁹¹ H. A. Guerber, *Myths and Legends of the Middle Ages, Their Origin and Influence on Literature and Art* (London: G. Harrap, 1909), 5.

⁹² Fred Wishaw, “In Arms for Freedom: A Tale of the Days of Hereward,” in *Young England: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys throughout the English Speaking World*, vol. 19 (London: The Sunday School Union, n.d.), 24-351.

However, in the aftermath of World War One, many of the ideals of the Victorian age were reassessed. A “stiff-upper lip” mentality could hardly be maintained in the face of mass bodily dismemberment and mental scarring. The Victorian ideal of manliness that was relevant in 1914 had changed irrevocably by 1918 and neither was the reputation of the Victorian military hero sacred. Lytton Strachey’s assessment of General Gordon in *Eminent Victorians* (1918) was emblematic of the new and growing attitude of some writers towards the “heroes” of the past. Strachey described General Gordon, for instance, as “alien to the subtleties of civilised statesmanship ... unamenable to official control ... incapable of the skilful management of delicate situations.”⁹³ This was a far cry from Eva Hope’s earlier description of Gordon in 1888 as a Christian soldier and “a gallant and skilful leader.”⁹⁴ Thus, despite the repeated idealization of public school qualities in biographies and fiction, these ideas lost their currency after 1918.

Of course, the British Empire did not fall in the immediate aftermath of 1918 but reached its greatest extent in the post-war period as a result of having acquired League of Nations Mandate Territories, and it could be said that enthusiasm for the empire increased further. The British Empire Exhibition at Wembley held in 1924 and 1925 was a fairly popular event. Empire Day was an annual celebration in many parts of the empire in the early part of the twentieth century, when people dressed as historical English figures, including Robin Hood. The Empire Marketing Board produced posters such as *Highways of Empire*, which exhorted consumers to “Buy Empire Goods from Home and Overseas.”⁹⁵ It should be no surprise, then, that in the post war period children’s books were still continuing to present their heroes “in the established mode.”⁹⁶ Robin Hood novels were no different in this respect and in many post-war books the outlaw was presented much as he was in the Victorian era: an English gentleman who plays by the rules, is loyal to the king, and whose highest objective is to serve others. In Sarah Hawkes Sterling’s *Robin Hood and his Merry Men* (1927), which remained popular with schoolchildren into the late 1940s,⁹⁷ there is a similar emphasis upon Robin’s “sturdy build” as he applies himself to the athletic exercises which his father commands him to practice.⁹⁸ The anonymously authored *Robin Hood and his Merrie Men* (ca. 1930) similarly tells of how Robin “grew up a manly, robust young fellow, who could run swiftly, ride with great skill, wing an arrow and fight with his fists or with staves.”⁹⁹ It was a frustration with this type of middle-class public school portrayal of medieval history and the legend of Robin Hood that inspired Geoffrey Trease to write the socialist children’s story *Bows Against the Barons* (1934).¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, General Gordon*, The Definitive Edition (London: Continuum Books, 2002), 255.

⁹⁴ Eva Hope, *The Life of General Gordon* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, n.d.), 80.

⁹⁵ Donald McGill, *Highways of Empire* (London: Empire Marketing Board, 1927); Kew, National Archives CO 956/537A.

⁹⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 218.

⁹⁷ See the following Mass Observation files: Mass Observation, Topic Collection-59_1413, 2 and Mass Observation, Marylebone, Library QQM15C, R.C.C. 8. 4. 42, Topic Collection-20_2595.

⁹⁸ Sarah Hawkes Sterling, *Robin Hood and his Merry Men* (London: J. Coker and Co. Ltd. 1927), 16-17.

⁹⁹ *Robin Hood and his Merrie Men* (London: Thames Publishing, n.d.), 15.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Evans, “‘A Song of Freedom’: Geoffrey Trease’s *Bows Against the Barons*,” in *Images of Robin Hood: Medieval to Modern*, ed. Lois Potter and Joshua Calhoun (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 193.

Even though critics have argued before that Robin is an anti-imperial figure in this period simply because the novels do, on occasion, criticize overseas expansion, this article has shown that such an explanation is too simplistic. Through the “deeds of daring”¹⁰¹ told in these tales, Robin Hood was reconfigured as a supporter of the British imperialism because he embodied the ideal qualities—those of the public school ethos—that young readers would need to cultivate in order to become good servants of the nation and empire. Although British Empire historians might not immediately assume that Robin Hood novels are relevant to their research interests, the foregoing discussion does speak to their field’s debates. Quite clearly the commentary on the novels given above lends further credence to the position of the “new” imperial historians who maintain that the British Empire’s effect on metropolitan culture was all-pervasive. The characteristics ascribed to a fictional figure as seemingly unproblematic and non-imperial as Robin Hood did, in the latter part of the Victorian era, absorb imperial ideology. It will require further investigation by other scholars to consider what this means in terms of recent debates surrounding the decolonization of the field of medievalism.¹⁰²

Regarding the decolonization of medieval studies and medievalism and its relation to this study, perhaps a few reflections and recommendations for future study are in order. Robin Hood Studies has, until now, been relatively lucky in the fact that few of its major texts contain overtly colonialist, or indeed racist, sentiments. Scholars such as Lionel Lackey, in fact, have rightly praised early nineteenth-century works such as Scott’s *Ivanhoe* for the author’s emphasis on religious toleration.¹⁰³ The legend of Robin Hood is, furthermore, generally viewed as one which revolves around a figure committed to the cause of liberty and social justice. To take Stephen Knight’s words, “the central values of the tradition of the good outlaw” are “liberty and equality.”¹⁰⁴ However, perhaps we Robin Hood scholars—*especially* those of us who study the post-medieval tradition—now need to reassess some of the literature which forms the basis of our study. Maybe Robin Hood studies needs to be “decolonized”? It may make Robin Hood scholars uncomfortable to learn, for example, that stories of the outlaw, when taught in schools in the British colonies, have been viewed by some poets as part of an oppressive imperialist superstructure; such sentiments can be gleaned from reading the Guyanese poet John Agard’s references to Robin Hood in “Checking Out Me History.” According to Agard, the childish Robin Hood tales that he grew up learning in his school were viewed no differently to stories of Victorian imperialists. This is not to suggest that scholars should eschew forevermore these clearly important Victorian and Edwardian texts, which perhaps shaped younger readers’ impressions of Robin Hood even more than the big name works, but rather that scholars should historicize their analyses of these Robin Hood novels and show awareness of the imperial sentiments which underpinned many of them during the era of “new” imperialism.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert, *Robin Hood*, vi.

¹⁰² There have been many such calls, especially since 2016, to decolonize certain parts of medieval studies and Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski have helpfully compiled a bibliography of relevant articles: Jonathan Hsy and Julia Orlemanski, “Race and Medieval Studies: A Partial Bibliography,” *postmedieval* 8 (2017), 500–31.

¹⁰³ Lionel Lackey, “Vainly Expected Messiahs: Christianity, Chivalry and Charity in *Ivanhoe*,” *Studies in Scottish Literature* 27 no. 1 (1992), 150–61.

¹⁰⁴ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, xix.

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