… *A NEW PLAYE … TO BE PLAYED IN MAYE GAMES*: THE CONTEXTS FOR DRAMATIZATIONS OF ROBIN HOOD TALES AT EARLY MODERN MAY GAMES, WHITSUN ALES, AND ROBIN HOOD REVELS

Lorraine Kochanske Stock
University of Houston

FROM MAY GAMES TO ROBIN HOOD REVELS

The late medieval and early modern periods saw increased seasonal festivities celebrated during the late spring (May) through mid-summer (June). Although Ronald Hutton notes that these customs were "probably ageless," he admits that they also reflected pre-Christian, specifically Celtic, fertility rituals practiced at Beltane (May 1), which evolved into the European rite of "going a Maying," performed on May Day.[1] "Going a Maying" involved a panoply of practices: gathering verdure and flowers (especially hawthorn or "Mayflower" blooms) culled from nearby woodlands; felling and erecting a large tree to serve as a Maypole; and participating in such rites of spring as lovemaking.[2]

Equally noteworthy in late medieval England's festive calendar was the Christian holy day of Pentecost, scheduled seven Sundays from the moveable feast of Easter, thus falling variously between mid-May to mid-June. Dubbed "Whit Sunday," abbreviated to "Whitsun" in Britain's vernacular by the mid-eleventh century, the feast inaugurated seven days of "Whitsuntide," with prominent activities like craft guilds performing biblical plays scheduled for Whit Monday and Whit Tuesday.[3] For the week of Whitsuntide, agricultural workers were released from their labors, providing all members of the parish leisure to observe or participate in parochial-sponsored religious processions, lay and religious drama, secular games, Morris-dancing, money-making gambits (selling floral May garlands, food, and drink), and general revelry.[4] Popular among these activities were Whitsun ales, wherein patrons purchased seats at lavish communal feasts at which they consumed specially prepared foods, washed down with ale freshly brewed for the festival.[5] Sale of these repasts raised money to fund the parish's financial necessities. A Mock King, "Lord of Misrule," or "Summer Lord" presided over the Whitsun ales and the May games. Robin Hood eventually fulfilled this role, accompanied by his consort Maid Marian, Little John, and the Merry Men.[6] Thus, Robin Hood and Maid Marian assumed the roles of the earlier Beltane feast's fertility-inspiring May King and May Queen. Because of this ongoing projection of seasonal royalty upon Robin and Marian and the celebration of this

[1] Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 124; Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 182-83.
[2] Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 226-43.
[3] The Whit Monday holiday was supplanted by contemporary Britain's summer bank holiday.
[4] Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 52; Hutton, *Stations*, 237; Lesley Coote, *Storyworlds of Robin Hood: The Origins of a Medieval Outlaw* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), 56.
[5] Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, 113.
[6] Hutton, *Stations*, 270-74.

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association at these annual festivities, inevitably the May games and Whitsun ales became identified permanently as the "Robin Hood Revels." Additionally, given the mythic outlaw's reputation for stealing valuables and money from his victims, equally inevitably the Revels' fundraising function required a legendary figure like Robin Hood as their iconic patron.

SCHOLARLY THEORIES ABOUT THE ROBIN HOOD REVELS

As I document presently, scholars have embraced three explanations for this intrinsically symbiotic interrelationship between the greenwood outlaw and the May games. First, the "seasonal" approach constructs Robin as "May Lord of the May games," presiding over celebrations of vernal renewal and personifying the "Green Man."[7] Second, the Bakhtinian-inspired "carnival" theory constructs Robin as the embodiment of disorder and misrule; his games or revels formally express, in the safe space of ludic play, the participants' conscious subversion of authority.[8] Third, proponents of the "economic/parochial" theory posit that Robin Hood's attachment to the May games signified neither his seasonal "greenness" nor his embodiment of anti-authoritarian socio-political subversion. Rather, they argue, the games or "gatherings" by Robin Hood pragmatically employed the outlaw, famed for separating his victims from their money, as an effective fundraiser: to pay for necessary repairs to the church's fabric in rural parishes; to support religious guilds' activities; and to offer financial relief to the parish's poor.[9] In my review and evaluation of the three approaches to such ludic/dramatic activities at May games, I argue that while all are partially defensible interpretations of the documented evidence, none definitively accounts for the success of these festivities as celebrations of Robin Hood. Interpreting the same evidence, they arrive at varying conclusions, suggesting that one theory cannot supersede or exclude the others. Indeed, collectively they demonstrate that the ubiquity of the Robin Hood Revels attests to the primacy and preeminence of the English outlaw's place in late medieval and early modern popular culture.

Before assessing the three scholarly models, I address two relevant topics: the persistent association between Robin Hood and the Morris Dance, which was an entertainment mainstay at

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[7] Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, 27-34. See subsequent notes individually citing David Wiles, John Matthews, and Lorraine Kochanske Stock.

[8] Peter Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup of liberty': Robin Hood, the Carnivalesque, and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England," *Semiotica* 54 (1985): 113-145; Christine Richardson, "The Figure of Robin Hood within the Carnival Tradition," *Records of Early English Drama Newsletter* 22, no. 2 (1997): 18-25; Peter H. Greenfield, "The Carnivalesque in the Robin Hood Games and King Ales of Southern England," in *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 19-28.

[9] Paul Whitfield White, "Holy Robin Hood! Carnival, Parish Guilds, and the Outlaw Tradition," in *Tudor Drama Before Shakespeare, 1485-1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism, and Pedagogy*, ed. Lloyd Edward Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine van Elk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 67-89; Sally-Beth MacLean, "King Games and Robin Hood: Play and Profit at Kingston Upon Thames," *Opportunities for Research in Renaissance Drama* 29 (1986): 85-94; James D. Stokes, "Robin Hood and the Churchwardens in Yeovil," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 3 (1986): 1-25; John Marshall, "'Comyth in Robyn Hode': Paying and Playing the Outlaw at Croscombe," *Leeds Studies in English* 32 (2001): 345-68; John Marshall, "Gathering in the Name of the Outlaw: REED and Robin Hood," in *REED in Review: Essays in Celebration of the First Twenty-Five Years*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Sally-Beth MacLean (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 65-84; and Coote, *Storyworlds*, 57-58.

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these festivities and even was incorporated into one of the plays discussed below; and the locally produced Robin Hood-themed drama that was an intrinsic feature of parochial May games. To that end, I analyze two plays about Robin's contests with a potter and Friar Tuck that William Copland attached to his 1560 publication of the long ballad *A Mery Geste of Robyn Hoode,* recommending them for performance at May games. Both plays illustrate various aspects of the three theories. Preserved by virtue of Copland's fortuitous publication of them, they represent what once must have been a vast body of now-lost dramatic ephemera. Even such a small sample demonstrates how dramatizations of Robin Hood's adventures became a mainstay of late medieval and early modern popular culture.

THE IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN THE MORRIS DANCE AND "ROBIN HOOD"

One almost obligatory component of the May games and Whitsun ales was the Morris Dance. In this time period, in various venues of popular culture, especially folk and professional drama, the cultural nexus known as "Robin Hood" was virtually synonymous with and sometimes indistinguishable from performances of the terpsichorean art, the "Morris Dance."[10] This lively traditional English dance, characterized by extreme, jerky, frenzied movements, was executed by performers representing symbolic or legendary figures, including various musicians, a Fool, a Hobby-horse, a female character named "Maid Marian" played by a cross-dressed male, and a Friar. Distinctive costumes and props maximized the Morris's visual spectacle. Ribbons swaying from the dancers' arms, long "dagged" sleeves drooping from their shoulders, and "napkins" or scarves fluttering from their hands produced eye-catching movement. Percussive hand-held wooden sticks and bells attached to the dancers' legs created rhythmic sound and aural vivacity.[11] Associated with May games, Whitsun ales, and other pastimes signifying "Robin Hood," the Morris was a visually recognizable and nearly ubiquitous aspect of late medieval and early modern popular culture. The dance's traditional and mythic characters reflected aspects of the "seasonal" theory of the May games' popularity. Moreover, as discussed presently, a Morris likely concluded Copland's *Friar* play.

The Betley Hall painted glass panel (1550–1621), once installed in the home of the Tollet family and now owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum, provides a period-correct visual image of the dance's traditional characters: a Fool figure; six bell-clad and be-ribboned male dancers; the traditional piper and tabor-player; a Hobby-horse; and a Maypole whose banner proclaims "A Mery May," the traditional season of Robin Hood-themed games, plays, and revels. Contributing to and reflecting the emerging Robin Hood legend, the panel depicts a friar holding a floral garland/rosary. The Morris's friar is the avatar of Friar Tuck, who fights with Robin Hood in Copland's *Friar* play intended for performance at the May games, or the unnamed Curtal friar, who fights with Robin Hood in a later ballad. Beside the friar is a crowned, blonde-haired "Queen of the May," one hand holding a flower (the gathered goal of "going a

[10] Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "Canonicity and 'Robin Hood': the Morris Dance and the Meaning of 'lighter than Robin Hood' in the Prologue to Fletcher and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," in *Robin Hood and the Outlaw/ed Literary Canon*, ed. Lesley Coote and Alexander L. Kaufman (London: Routledge, 2019), 109-131.
[11] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "morris dance (n.), sense 1," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1007255677.

Maying"), the other, her veil. Often played by a cross-dressed male, she nevertheless is the likely avatar of Robin's consort Maid Marian in the May games.[12] Various editions of Robin Hood texts illustrate their content with images of the Morris.[13] This demonstrates the ongoing association between the dance and the multivalent, multimedia cultural nexus denoted by "Robin Hood," including literary ballads, folk plays, and parish guild members playing the roles of "Robin" and "Marian" at May games, Whitsun ales, and in staged drama like Copland's *Friar* play, whose "Lady free" represents both Robin's consort and the character from the Morris.

Thus, "Robin Hood, Little John, Friar Tuck, and Maid Marian, although not constituent parts of the original English [M]orris, became at length so blended with it, especially on the festival of May-day, that … they continued to be the most essential part of the pageantry."[14] In *Albion's England* (1612), William Warner chronicles the theatrics practiced at Robin Hood/May games and Whitsun ales: "At Paske [Easter] begun our Morris, ere Pentecost [Whitsun] our May, / When Robin Hood, Liell [Little] John, Friar Tuck, and Marian deftly play."[15] "Play" references public performances in dramas, such as *Robin Hood and the Friar*, discussed presently, by individuals impersonating the familiar greenwood principals plus figures imported from the Morris, the Friar and Maid Marian. As Barbara Lowe reports, a Marprelate tract similarly decries a boy in church responding not to the service, but to "either a Summer Lord with his Maygames, or Robin Hood with his Morris dance." Also listing them as equal aspects of the "merry" past, *The Practice of the Divell* (1577) lauds the time when "Robin Hood's plays [were] in every town, the Morrice and the Fool, the Maypole and the Drum."[16] These almost offhand references reinforce the interchangeability of these festive activities in popular opinion and the expectation of Morris-dancing alongside dramatic pageants whose greenwood cast overlapped with characters of the Morris.

… A new playe for to be played in Maye games, very plesaunte and full of pastyme: Popular Drama about Robin Hood

Before discussing Copland's plays, I should distinguish these public theatrical representations of the Robin Hood narrative at May games and Whitsun ales from performances of similar drama staged privately in manor houses. From fifteenth-century documentary evidence (a fragmentary working script of a "play" and a letter wherein John Paston complains of losing the servant who

[12] "Betley Window," V&A Museum Catalogue Number C.248-1976. Displayed in British Galleries, Room 58c, Case WE. See http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8054/window-unknown/. On this glass panel as a source of information about the Morris Dance see E. J. Nicol, "Some Notes on the History of the Betley Window," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 7, no. 2 (1953): 59-67; Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts, and Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 239n73.

[13] John Mathew Gutch used Israel van Meckenem's engraving titled "Ancient Morris Dance" as his frontispiece and appended his "Dissertation upon the Morris Dance and Maid Marian" (illustrated by engravings and the Tollet window) to his edition, *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode With Other Ancient & Modern Ballads and Songs Related to this Celebrated Yeoman*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1847), 1:frontispiece; 301-65.

[14] "Shakespeare and his Times: May-day," *The Atheneum* 3 (1818): 11.

[15] William Warner, *Albion's England [1612]* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1971), 121.

[16] Barbara Lowe, "Early Records of the Morris in England," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 8, no. 2 (1957): 68-69.

performed the roles of Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham), scholars infer that some sort of Robin Hood drama, possibly the fragment titled *Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham*, purportedly was staged for people in John Paston's orbit.[17] Lesley Coote notes, "The play may have been performed in the Pastons' own household, and/or that of a patron or kin, rather than in a public place."[18] In contrast, theatrical events at Robin Hood Revels were enacted outdoors and attracted the much larger public audience of both local parishioners and visitors from other towns.

A consensus of scholarly opinion posits that the plots for these plays were supplied by early printed Robin Hood texts, such as the ballads. As John Forrest notes, during the mid-sixteenth century, "the major themes of the Robin Hood tradition appeared in print in substantial literary pieces."[19] Whether the Robin Hood ballads were the "catalyst" for or the "result" of simultaneous urban and rural interest in May games and other "country games," putatively a symbiotic relationship conjoined them. Illustrating Forrest's point, early printers William Copland and Edward White respectively published ca. 1560 and 1594 separate editions of the long, episodic ballad, *A Mery Geste of Robyn Hoode*, each appending to the ballad text "… *a new playe for to be played in Maye games, very plesaunte and full of pastyme*" [*A New Play Intended for Performance at May Games, Very Pleasing and Entertaining*].[20] Not one "playe," but two short plays were printed sequentially after *Mery Geste* without a new title indicating the second play's start. Editors refer to the two untitled plays by their plots: *Robin Hood and the Friar* (hereafter *Friar*) and *Robin Hood and the Potter* (hereafter *Potter*).[21] Claiming these *Geste*-plus-play publications establish a model of "professional writers providing material for urban May games," Forrest claims the ballads provided the plots for the early plays performed at May games.[22] Alternatively, to construct this extant play portraying Robin Hood meeting his match in Friar Tuck, Forrest also notes that Copland may have "cobble[d] together a text from [various] folk plays … in his possession."[23] Coote agrees, "The plays surely must be Copland's work," reflecting "source material in circulation in the previous ten years, and maybe more."[24] Juxtaposing the process of *telling* the Robin Hood narrative (oral ballad) versus *showing* the story (performed play), John Marshall has challenged this presumptive paradigm of play-

[17] For the text of the original manuscript fragment and a reconstruction of it into scenes with designated speakers, see Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997).
[18] On the Pastons' play, see Ohlgren, *Early Poems*, 92-95; on other Robin Hood dramas privately staged by Prior William More of Worcester, see Coote, *Storyworlds*, 33-36, 35.
[19] John Forrest, *The History of Morris Dancing, 1458-1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 217-18.
[20] For the play's text in William Copland's publication of *A Merry Geste of Robyn Hoode* see Thomas H. Ohlgren and Lister M. Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Edition of the Texts, ca. 1425 to ca. 1600* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013). Subsequent quotations of Copland's edition of the *Geste* that include the two plays, and quotations from the other early Robin Hood ballads are from the Ohlgren and Matheson edition, cited parenthetically by page and line, unless otherwise noted. All translations from the Robin Hood texts are my own unless otherwise noted.
[21] Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 286; Ohlgren, *Early Poems*, 131.
[22] Forrest, *History*, 218.
[23] Forrest, *History*, 218; also see J. M. Steadman, "The Dramatization of the Robin Hood Ballads," *Modern Philology* 17, no. 1 (1919): 9-23. On texts of the plays see George Parfitt, "Early Robin Hood Plays: Two Fragments and a Bibliography," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 22 (1978): 5-12.
[24] Coote, *Storyworlds*, 54.

sourced-from-ballad, arguing that it is equally possible, if not more plausible, that the drama influenced the ballads rather than vice versa. Marshall suggests that at least there was a "promiscuous migration" between oral and literate cultures, represented here by the plays and published ballads respectively. [25] I discuss Copland's two seamlessly presented plays "to be played in Maye games" separately, starting with the second play.

ROBIN HOOD AND THE POTTER

Significantly, *pace* Forrest, Steadman, and Coote, of the two plays that Copland attached to his 1560 edition of *Geste*, only the second brief drama seemingly adapts a pre-existing ballad. *Potter* repurposes the opening episode of the early poem *Robin Hood and The Potter* (ca. 1468), wherein Robin attempts to collect from the yeoman artisan a payment for passage through the greenwood. The play eliminates the ballad's remaining complex plot involving Robin impersonating the potter but underselling his wares in Nottingham, gifting pots to the Sheriff of Nottingham's wife, dining with the shrieval couple, surpassing the sheriff at archery, luring him into the greenwood on the pretext of sighting Robin Hood, and sending the humiliated sheriff home with lavish gifts from the outlaw to his wife, who mocks her husband upon his return.[26]

Per his rubric, the simplified dramatic piece about the potter Copland prints is ideally suited for outdoor staging at the May games. Compared to the earlier putative source, it features a much-reduced cast (Robin, Little John, the potter, and his servant Jack). It eliminates the ballad's multiple changes of scene: from greenwood to Nottingham marketplace; to the sheriff's house; to an archery field; to the greenwood; then to the sheriff's house—all of which would be too difficult and complicated to stage at a May game or Whitsun ale. Rather, set entirely in Robin's woodland-habitat, the play easily adapts to an outdoor site at the fair. Joining the "isnot among vs al one" [is not a single one among all of us] who are too intimidated to "dare medle with that potter man to ma*n*" [dare interfere with that potter one-on-one] (lines 15-16), Little John predicts that even Robin won't "medle" [interfere] with the potter (line 21). The altercation over payment of the outlaw's demanded road tax provides dramatic conflict and opportunities for comic display of machismo by the local community's players undertaking the roles of potter, Little John, and Robin. Accepting the challenge and thrice calling Jack's master a "cuckolde" [husband whose wife commits adultery] (lines 35, 43, 47), an insult that is not included in the early ballad text, Robin takes pots from Jack and smashes them, another difference from the ballad. The same outdoor setting could easily accommodate Robin's action, which might inspire cheering and jeering among the spectators, if not the participation of some in the audience, who were watching their friends and neighbors portraying the roles, especially the role of the

[25] John Marshall, "Show or Tell": Priority and Interplay in the Early Robin Hood Play/Games and Poems," in *Telling Tales and Crafting Books: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. Ohlgren*, Alexander L. Kaufman, Shaun F. D. Hughes, and Dorsey Armstrong (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016), 189. Marshall invokes the ideas of Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 5.
[26] *Robin Hood and the Potter,* in Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 23-38. For how Robin's one-upmanship of the sheriff upends late medieval class and gender norms, see Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "The Preparation and Consumption of Food as Signifiers of Class and Gender Identity in Selected Premodern Texts and Examples of the Robin Hood Cinematic Canon," in *Food and Feast in Premodern Outlaw Tales*, ed. Melissa Ridley Elmes and Kristin Bovaird-Abbo (New York: Routledge, 2021), 96-100.

purportedly cuckolded potter. Indeed, the showdown with the potter allows the parishioner who plays "Robin Hood" in the May game to proclaim, "I am Robyn hode chiefe gouernoure / Under the grene woode tree" [I am Robin Hood, head authority under the greenwood tree.] (lines 61-62). As discussed presently, the actor assuming the role of "Robin Hood" temporarily was literally the "chiefe gouernoure" [head authority] of the parish, responsible for orchestrating that year's entire Robin Hood Revel, which raised funds to underwrite church repair and poor relief. This aspect of *Potter* supports the "economic/parochial" theory discussed presently.

Potter concludes with a brawl, wherein Little John rescues Robin by promising to "rappe him on the snoute / And put hym to flyghte" (ll. 80-81), [punch him (the potter) on the nose and force him to flee] which again could be enacted by parishioners playing Robin and the potter, with exaggerated slapstick and the potter's hasty exit from the open playing space to some other location at the fair. *Potter*'s simplified plot and abbreviated dialogue allow, even encourage, improvisation by the cast of locals, who might insert references to other parishioners in the audience, topical insider local jokes, and genial mayhem for the entertainment of spectators, thus fulfilling the title's promise of a play "very plesaunte and full of pastyme" [very pleasing and full of entertainment]. Such mock-violence also supports the Bakhtinian-inspired "carnival" theory, whereby Robin embodies disorder and misrule. In the safe space of ludic play, *Potter* thus channels the participants' desire to subvert authority.

Twenty-first-century participatory medievalism celebrating Robin Hood, such as Texas's springtime Sherwood Forest Faire (SFF), recreates an approximate experience of premodern Robin Hood-themed May games. Modeling itself on the original vernal Robin Hood Revels, SFF takes place in central Texas's still-*pleasaunte* spring months (March and April), before the heat of late spring and summer makes fair attendance physically uncomfortable. Like its model, SFF includes abbreviated, family-friendly dramatic adaptations of such medieval ballads as *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne.* These encourage sometimes-rowdy audience participation, providing both "pastyme" [entertainment] for its engaged spectators and a controlled outlet for venting repressed frustration with life's challenges, reflecting the "carnival" theory of the May games' functions.[27]

ROBIN HOOD AND THE FRIAR

Just as the *Potter* play invited audience participation, Marshall contends that in the opening line of the *Friar* play, where Robin proclaims, "NOw stand ye forth my mery men (all" (line 1) [Now, step right up, all of you, my Merry Men], that "it is highly probable that Robin addresses, and thereby includes, the audience, who may now be wearing his livery badge," in his repeated exhortation of "mery men all" [all you Merry Men] (line 14).[28] Moreover, if the earlier, longer ballad *Robin Hood and the Potter* arguably inspired Copland's *Potter*, the source for Copland's other play suitable for May games—about Robin's combat with the feisty, oversexed Friar Tuck—is less certain. The seventeenth-century backstory ballad *Robin Hood and the Curtal*

[27] Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "Sherwood Forest Faire: Evoking Medieval May Games, Robin Hood Revels, and Twentieth-Century 'Pleasure Faires' in Contemporary Texas," in *The United States of Medievalism*, ed. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 264-83.
[28] Marshall, "Show or Tell," 190.

Friar features Robin meeting his match in a well-armed, unnamed, physically powerful friar from Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire. Engaging in risky aquatic horseplay, both men by turns dump each other in a body of "wild water" (lines 51, 57, 63) while carrying one another on their backs to cross it. There ensues a six-hour physical altercation involving bows, arrows, swords, and bucklers. Signaling his need for help by blowing his horn, Robin summons fifty yeoman Merry Men for backup. Retaliating for this ambush, Tuck whistles for fifty ferocious mastiffs to come to *his* aid. Intimidated by the hounds, Robin cancels the fight—offering the friar "freindshipp" [friendship], membership in his band, and garments, perhaps referencing the issuance of Robin's livery to Tuck. [29]

The ballad postdates Copland's 1560 *Friar*, whose plot replicates, albeit more concisely, Robin's physical contest and the aquatic rough house with "Fryer Tucke." However, Copland's May game *Friar* also differs significantly from the *Curtal Friar* ballad. The play's Robin reports an altercation with a quarterstaff-equipped friar (having no affiliation with Fountains Abbey, but here identified as Tuck), who accosted him on the highway, beat him, and stole his purse (lines 1-13). Little John offers to force the friar to return with him for the outlaws' rough justice (lines 17-19). As in the ballad, while carrying Robin across a body of water, Tuck throws him in to "sinke or (swym" [sink or swim] (line 79). Later, even more dangerously, a fight ensues between Robin and his men and the friar and his accomplices named "cut and bause" (line 103) who are either humans or dogs. Having met his match, Robin proposes a truce: in return for joining Robin's outlaw band, Tuck will receive the inducement of "golde and fee," [gold and payment] and "a Lady free" [a loose woman], whom the friar labels "a trul of trust" [reliably uninhibited trollop] who will "serue a frier at his lust" [fulfill a friar's lustful desire] (lines 108-09, 114). Characterizing himself as "a prycker a prauncer a terer of shefes / A wagger of ballockes when other men slepes" (lines 115-16)[30] [a hard rider (of a horse or woman), a prancing stallion, a rumpler of sheets / a waver of his testicles, when other men sleep (instead of having sex)], the sexually profligate churchman boasts that he and "my lady" [my female sex-partner] will "daunce þ*e* myre for veri (pure ioye" [dance in the mud/mire for pure pleasure] (line 118).[31] The play concludes with them dancing.

Recall that the friar and the May Queen/Maid Marian were originally characters in the Morris Dance. Knight and Ohlgren suggest that "This [line] likely calls for a morris dance involving all the players."[32] Dobson and Taylor more specifically claim "the lady free must be the Maid Marian of the May game morris dances, in which she almost invariably partners Friar Tuck." [33] Although he equivocates about naming the "Lady free" Maid Marian, Ohlgren

[29] *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar,* in Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 464, line 134.
[30] The friar uses equine metaphors with sexual double entendre.
[31] About the Wife of Bath, Chaucer's *General Prologue* narrator says: "Of remedies of loue she knew par chaunce, / For she koude of that art the olde daunce" [Indeed, she knew love remedies, / For she well was acquainted with the old dance of love.]. The association between love and dancing supports the suggestion of the Wife's extensive sexual experience; Larry D. Benson, ed., *General Prologue*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 31, lines 475-76.
[32] Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 294.
[33] R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, ed., *Rymes of Robin Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 214n1. The same identification between the "trul" and the Morris Maid Marian is made by Malcolm A. Nelson, *The Robin Hood Tradition in the English Renaissance* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur Universität Salzburg, 1973), 62.

nevertheless identifies Tuck and the "trul" [prostitute] with the friar and Marian figures of the Morris as depicted in the Betley window: "The placement of the lady and the friar in the lower tier and their poses—turned toward each other—suggests that the friar, who appears to be dancing, is the lady's consort. The window then seems to reflect the play's bawdy association between the two characters."[34]

Although it is impossible to ascertain how Copland's *Friar* was presented in its recommended dramatic venue of sixteenth-century May games, a contemporary theater troupe has attempted to stage it authentically. Affiliated with the University of Toronto's Centre for Medieval Studies, the *Poculi Ludique Societas* (*PLS*) has mounted *Friar* and toured with it.[35] Mary Blackstone suggests that "the friar's final bawdy speech, his active sexual vigor, [and] the implied dance" with the "Lady free," are "inspired by the May Day festivities for which the play was avowedly intended."[36]

Unlike the Pastons' *Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham*, which likely was performed indoors inside a manor, for *Friar*, "an outdoor venue is preferable ... churchyards, playing fields, marketplaces, or city streets." Ideally either the "local playing field, where competitors in physical and martial contests [already] would have been celebrating with less dramatic performances," or "the churchyard, where festive dancers were circling the maypole," would offer a readymade space for enacting the plot.[37] The trickiest aspect of stagecraft is providing the body of water in which Robin and Tuck practice one-upmanship. Blackstone, who staged and filmed the *PLS Friar* in the 1970s, cautions that performing beside a river or stream, thereby most closely replicating the play's text, would have proved complicated, even risky, in an actual May game milieu. With repeated immersion in water, costly costumes would deteriorate. Without a change of clothes, wet garments would be cumbersome and uncomfortable during the subsequent quarterstaff fight scene on land.[38] Performing the play on a river or stream bank also would restrict the available space for the audience. Instead, Blackstone posits various workarounds, ways to simulate water without anyone getting physically wet. One creative substitution was "imagined" water on "bare ground," with the actors using exaggerated facial expressions and mime to indicate the shock to the system caused by immersion in cold water. Another solution was "a piece of blue cloth tacked to the ground," whose still "water" would appear too safe. Yet another invented solution involved two cast members sitting at both ends of long side-by-side strips of blue cloth, moving the strips to suggest waves. Tuck and Robin would be positioned between the strips—Robin falling in and the friar getting out.[39] Knight and Ohlgren concur: *Friar* "may have been performed next to a river or stream," but "a body of water … is not necessary for the action to be effective, and since local actors often took their

[34] Ohlgren, *Early Poems*, 239n73; Coote also equivocates in *Storyworlds*, 54. John Marshall suggests that the "dramatic creation" of the friar in the play/games may have "in some places migrated to the Morris dance, rather than the other way around." See Marshall, "Show or Tell," 192.
[35] For the *PLS* performance text and an account of the troupe's staging choices, see Mary A. Blackstone, ed., *Robin Hood and the Friar* (Toronto: Poculi Ludiques Societas, 1981).
[36] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 4.
[37] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 5-6.
[38] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 6-7.
[39] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 7.

productions to neighboring towns, little, if any, scenery…would be expected."[40] Traveling well beyond "neighboring towns" to perform their version of *Friar* at folk and renaissance festivals and universities in Canada, the United States, Ireland, and England between 1979-81, *PLS* expediently employed this last method of the cloth strips to simulate the running stream, to great effect.[41]

Finally, the persistent and enduring association between the Morris Dance and the signification of what "Robin Hood" meant to late medieval and early modern English culture supports reading the dance performed by Tuck and the "Lady free" as a reflection of the Morris.[42] Blackstone asserts that "a Morris dance finale is most likely implied by the last line."[43] In Appendix B of the *PLS Friar*,[44] various types of Morris are offered as options, with the direction: "Since the play itself contains so much robust physical combat, including quarterstaff fighting, it is suggested that a vigorous and fairly aggressive type of stick dance be used."[45]

Discussing *Friar* and *Potter* in the context of Copland's modernization, clarification (of obscure language), repunctuation, and expansion of abbreviations from earlier editions of *Geste* by Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde, Ohlgren credits Copland with ensuring the "survival" of plays performed at the May games and Whitsun ales.[46] Arguably, these scanty extant textual remnants represent a possibly huge body of ephemeral, now-lost dramatizations of Robin Hood narratives enacted at the fifteenth-through-seventeenth-century May games or Whitsun ales. These medieval rural "Mayings," which fell variously between May Day vernal festivities and the feast of John the Baptist (June 24, when the popular "Midsummer Watch" was celebrated), developed into organized community-centered festivities subsumed under the rubric "May games" or so-called "Robin Hood Revels." Plays like Copland's *Potter*, *Friar*, and others like them were surely an important component of those festivities. Indeed, W. E. Simeone contends that the three centuries of association with the May games were "the most important episode in the history of the [Robin Hood] legend."[47] The remainder of this essay examines three scholarly models that justify why plays involving Robin Hood, such as those published by Copland, contributed to Robin Hood's persistent identification with the May games/Whitsun ales, rendering them effectively "*Robin Hood* Revels." They include the aforementioned "seasonal" argument, the Bakhtinian "carnival" account, and the "economic/parochial" model. These competing theories also attempt to establish the cultural significance of this identification between Robin Hood and the May games.

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[40] Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 282.
[41] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 55-56. Having watched the *PLS* staging in the 18-minute video that accompanies Blackstone's edition, I concur that the use of the blue cloths for the stream is highly effective.
[42] Stock, "Canonicity," 112-20.
[43] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 12; Stallybrass agrees that *Friar* "probably ends in a morris dance in which Maid Marion was usually played by a man or boy" ("'Drunk with the cup'," 122).
[44] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 44-48.
[45] Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 46.
[46] Ohlgren, *Early Poems*, 130-31, 131. On the plays' role in vernal festivities featuring Robin Hood, see Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 281-84.
[47] W. E. Simeone, "The May Games and the Robin Hood Legend," *Journal of American Folklore* 64 (1951): 274.

ROBIN HOOD AS "GREEN MAN": THE SEASONAL MODEL

Early proponents of the seasonal theory date as far back as the period when the Robin Hood Revels occurred. The spontaneous, personal, medieval activity of "going a-Maying" or "bringing in the May," as practiced by Emelye and Arcite in Chaucer's late fourteenth-century *Knight's Tale,* was the vestige of the Roman *Floralia*, a festival honoring Flora, the goddess of spring regrowth.[48] As John Stow reported about his contemporaries' response to the spring/summer season in his 1603 *A Survey of London*, "on May day in the morning, euery [every] man, except impediment, would walke into the sweete meadowes and greene woods, there to rejoyce their spirites with the beauty and sauour [savor] of sweete flowers, and with the harmony of birds, praysing God."[49] Stow adds that London May games incorporated "Maypoles, … diuerse warlike shewes [various warlike performances] with good Archers, Morice dauncers, … and stage playes."[50]

The sexual urges the season prompted—which Chaucer's *General Prologue*-narrator celebrates, specifically the "smale foweles" that "maken melodye" and "slepen al the nyght with open ye" because "so priketh hem Nature in hir corages"[51] [small birds make melody that sleep all night with open eyes, so Nature stirs them in their hearts]—also prompted Puritan Philip Stubbs, another contemporary of the May games, to complain about the season's effect on Christians, saying that if one hundred maidens went into the woods overnight on May Day, "scaresly the third part of them returned home againe undefiled."[52] Hutton treats the May games and attendant Robin Hood-related activities as an aspect of the spring/summer season of "Merry" England's "ritual year."[53] David Wiles identifies the greenwood outlaw with the fertility associations of the maypole, "an emblem of summer and the natural world," which lent itself to a game played by Robin as "Summer Lord," "May King," or "Lord of the greenwood." Summarizing this aspect of his interpretation of Robin Hood, Wiles claims:

> Dressed in green, Robin and his company personify spring vegetation. When Robin bestows on the Pinner of Wakefield two liveries, one green, the other brown, he symbolically divides the year into its two opposite halves. This seems to be the most ancient and most mysterious of Robin Hood's significations.[54]

John Matthews devotes an entire book to endorsing the node of associations between May games, Maypoles, the Morris, and Robin Hood, whom he dubs "Green Lord of the Wildwood."[55] My own scholarship traces identifications between Robin Hood and the medieval period's

[48] Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "The Two Mayings in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*: Convention and Invention," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85, no. 2 (1986).
[49] John Stow, *A Survey of London*, 2 vols., ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 1:98.
[50] Stow, *A Survey of London*, 1:98.
[51] Benson, *General Prologue*, 23, lines 9-11.
[52] Phillip Stubbes, *Phillip Stubbes's Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakespeare's Youth, A. D. 1583*, 2 vols., ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trübner, 1877-79), 1:149.
[53] Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, 29-35.
[54] David Wiles, *The Early Plays of Robin Hood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), 18, 56.
[55] John Matthews, *Robin Hood: Green Lord of the Wildwood* (Glastonbury: Gothic Image, 1993); see especially "The Games of Robin Hood," 81-102.

mythic figures, the Green Man and the Wild Man, all "Lords of the Wildwood."[56] In sum, this seasonal approach to the prevalence of the May games as *Robin Hood* Revels identifies the British outlaw and his springtime games with vernal fertility and the natural world of the greenwood. The evocations of the forest in "somer," "in a may morning," or "on Whitson" that provide the temporal backdrop and physical setting for most Robin Hood ballads corroborate this seasonal identification between the outlaws' activities and the natural world "vnd*ur* the grene wode tre" [under the greenwood tree].[57] In Copland's *Geste,* the metaphoric troping of Robin Hood as a mythic green stag—the "fayre harte … of grene" [noble green hart], the "maister harte" [chief stag of the herd] whose "tyndes be so sharpe" [antler tips are so sharp] on a rack of "syxty and well mo" [sixty and well more] antler points, and who commands a herd of "Seuen score dere"[seven scores (140) of deer]—reinforces this association between Robin and the green world.[58]

ROBIN HOOD AS THE "LORD OF MISRULE": THE BAKHTINIAN "CARNIVAL" THEORISTS

The mayhem perpetrated by the frequently violent outlaw Robin Hood, which both *Potter* and *Friar* reflect, also well qualified him to be the "Lord of Misrule" at May games and other seasonal revels. In scene VII of George Peele's 1593 history play *Edward I*, Llewellyn proclaims: "I'll be Master of Misrule, I'll be Robin Hood," making explicit identification between the role and the outlaw.[59] Furthermore, describing the figure and his followers as if they were Robin and his outlaws, the aforementioned Elizabethan polemicist Stubbs castigated both May Day revels and the "Lord of Misrule" in his 1583 *Anatomie of Abuses*. Stubbs complained that "wilde heads of the Parish" adopt the "Graund-Captain (of all mischeefe)" titled "my Lord of Mis-rule" as their "king."[60] Just as patrons bought liveries from Robin Hood at the May games and Whitsun ales (described presently), Misrule's "baudie" [bawdy] adherents wear "scarfs, ribons & laces" [scarves, ribbons, and laces], multiple "bels" [bells], and "rich handkercheifs" [rich handkerchiefs], donning "wanton" green and yellow-hued liveries in allegiance to him.[61] Accompanying them are "Hobby-horses, dragons, & other Antiques," while "baudie Pipers and thundering Drummers" strike up "the deuils daunce" [devil's dance], likely referring to the Morris, which also concludes Copland's *Friar.*[62] "Like deuils [devils] incarnate," this "heathen company" enters the church, distracting the congregants from attending to the minister's preaching. When these "terrestriall [earthly] furies" exit to the churchyard (where their "Sommer-haules [summer-halls], their bowers, arbors & banqueting houses [are] set up"), they

[56] Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "Lords of the Wildwood: The Wild Man, the Green Man, and Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood in Popular Culture: Violence, Transgression, and Justice*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 239-49.
[57] See the opening stanzas of *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 7, lines 1-12. The ballads consistently open with an evocation of nature during May or at Whitsun.
[58] Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 194-95, lines 729-44.
[59] *Edward I* in *The Works of George Peele*, 2 vols., ed. A. H. Bullen (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 1:140.
[60] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 2:147.
[61] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 2:147.
[62] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 2:147.

feast, banquet, and dance well into the night of the "Sabaoth" [Sabbath].[63] Supporting their "heathenrie, diuelrie, whordome, [heathenness, deviltry, whoredom], drunkenness, [and] pride," they sell the Lord of Misrule's "badges & cognizances [heraldic devices]," which patrons place upon their hats.[64] The audience members Robin addresses as "my mery men all" in *Friar* probably wore such badges indicating their honorary membership in Robin's band of misbehaving adherents. Misrule's followers' costumes, musical instruments, frenetic dancing style, and the Hobby-horse figure perfectly describe the classic Morris Dance, which was long associated with "Robin Hood." As I show presently, the practice of selling badges, tokens of allegiance to the "Lord," the rough justice extended to reluctant participants, and the erection of summer houses, bowers, and arbors precisely match features of the sixteenth-century rural May games and Whitsun ales "Robin Hood" regularly oversaw. Stubbs expects his audience—familiar with the outlaw's leadership of the May games, accompanied by the Morris dancers— to recognize immediately the revels' unruly leader as "Robin Hood" and the dance as the "Morris."

Building upon Robin Hood's role as the "Lord of Misrule," the Bakhtinian-inspired school of criticism on the role of Robin Hood in late medieval and early modern culture emphasizes the outlaw as a figure signifying anti-establishment transgression, violence, and especially his "carnivalesque" inversion of official social structures.[65] Citing the same maypole that identified Robin as "Lord of the greenwood" for subscribers to the seasonal theory, Wiles notes how the large trees used to fabricate maypoles "were by convention stolen from the lands of the wealthy."[66] Such "annual, half-illicit entry into the greenwood, with its ritualized trespass and theft," explains how the Robin Hood legend "adapted itself so easily to the May games."[67] Merging the seasonal with the carnival approach, Wiles concludes: "For in the figure of Robin Hood two elements are combined, the outlaw who ignores the requirements of society [that is, by inspiring the theft of timber for maypoles], and the green man, the incarnation of spring."[68]
In his exploration of the ways the Robin Hood Revels exemplified the "carnivalesque," Peter Stallybrass emphasizes the transgressive aspects of the May games and their incorporated greenwood and Morris characters. These are well exemplified in the aquatic horseplay, quarterstaff fights, and sexual innuendo in Copland's *Friar.* For Stallybrass, in his "interrogation of rule" through the May games' "*licensed* misrule," Robin himself is less greenwood-lord than Stubbs's "Lord of Mis-rule."[69] "Gender-inversion and transvestism" also contribute to the "carnivalesque" aspect of May games.[70] Devoted to Flora, a powerful goddess who upended the usual gender norms of the Greco-Roman pantheon, May was also "the month of Maid Marion,"

[63] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 2:147.
[64] Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 2:148.
[65] Critics espousing this viewpoint include David Wiles, Peter Stallybrass, Christine Richardson, and Peter H. Greenfield. Wiles' arguments inform both the "seasonal" and the "carnival" interpretations. Greenfield's arguments reflect the "carnival" theory, but also illustrate the economic/parochial theory.
[66] Wiles, *Early Plays*, 19.
[67] Wiles, *Early Plays*, 19.
[68] Wiles, *Early Plays*, 19.
[69] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 119, 115.
[70] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 122, 115.

the Morris's transgressive, gender-bending, cross-dressed figure.[71] Her namesake greenwood avatar, Robin's May Queen/Maid Marian, also cross-dressed for disguise and equaled the outlaw's combat skill in the only ballad featuring her, *Robin Hood and Maid Marian*.[72] Finally, Stallybrass notes, May was the month "when the regulations of village and urban life gave way to the liberties of the forest."[73] This last aspect of May, the freedom of the forest, not only inspired the sexual license that Stubbs railed against, and that Tuck in Copland's *Friar* exemplifies, but also recalls that this locale, perennially associated with Robin Hood, was "a gathering place for masterless men seeking a meager subsistence, for cottagers and squatters, … for outlaws and religious dissenters." [74] The forest also was a literal/metaphorical space wherein, according to Pierre Bourdieu: "1. *Heterodoxy is produced by orthodoxy*…. 2. *Heterodoxy is excluded by orthodoxy*…. 3. *Heterodoxy negotiates/ contests orthodoxy*." In Stallybrass's formula, Robin Hood and the May games always represent heterodoxy.[75]

According to Siobhan Keenan, religious heterodoxy—the "hidden [and] subversive Catholic agenda … of its leading performer(s)"—inspired a 1615 "carnivalesque" Robin Hood performance on the Sabbath in the parish church of Brandsby, Yorkshire.[76] She interprets the playing of the Sheriff by recusant Catholic George Pearson and of Robin Hood by Catholic sympathizer George Sherwin as "a covert vehicle" for the expression of "religious and social discontent."[77] The ultraviolent and sexually profligate Tuck in Copland's *Friar* embodies such religious heterodoxy. Summarizing the "carnivalesque" symbiosis between the transgressive outlaw and the May-revels' civilian participants, Christine Richardson emphasizes how the "intrinsically dramatic" May games were "imbued with that characteristically carnival aspect … which eliminates boundaries between performers and spectators, making the 'performance' a universalizing, participatory event, removing also the barriers between art and life, … seen as a game."[78] The porous boundary between the thespian "outlaws" and Robin's audience of "mery men all" (line 1) that encouraged interactivity between actors and spectators in Copland's *Friar* illustrates Richardson's argument. Overall, the carnivalesque critics emphasize Robin Hood's illicit activities and transgressive behavior in his role as "Lord of Misrule" in the May games.

ROBIN HOOD AS FUNDRAISER: THE ECONOMIC/PAROCHIAL THESIS

Countering the previous two competing scholarly assessments of the significance of various Robin Hood "games," "revels," and "sports" is the economic/parochial interpretation of the May games' function. Describing a case that provides a differing perspective on seemingly "carnivalesque" activities like Robin Hood's games, Peter Greenfield cites an incident occurring in 1498 when, in defiance of a judicial order prohibiting inhabitants of Walsall and neighboring

[71] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 126.
[72] *Robin Hood and Maid Marian*, in Knight and Ohlgren, ed., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 494-96.
[73] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 126.
[74] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 126.
[75] Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the cup'," 139.
[76] Siobhan Keenan, "Recusant Involvement in a Robin Hood Play at Brandsby Church, Yorkshire, 1615," *Notes and Queries* 47, no. 7 (2000): 477.
[77] Keenan, "Recusant Involvement," 477.
[78] Richardson, "Figure," 18.

towns from attending the fair, Roger Marchall attended a Trinity Sunday fair at Willenhall, Staffordshire, identifying himself as "Robin Hood" and leading one hundred armed followers. Impersonating the Abbot of Marham and bringing eighty more armed attendants, William Milner accompanied Marchall. The official complaint implied that these combined transgressive groups threatened "a riot," but the one hundred eighty followers claimed a different motive:

> "[they] haue comen to the seide fere with ther capitanus called the Abot of Marham or Robyn Hodys to the intent to gether money with ther disportes to the profight of the chirches of the seide lordeshipes."[79]
>
> [They have come to the aforesaid fair with their captain, called the Abbot of Marham or Robin Hood, intending to collect money through their shenanigans, for the profit of the churches of the aforesaid lordships.]

For Greenfield, the incident illustrates (*pace* the carnival theorists) that parish records prove "these games to be anything but spontaneous expressions of popular resistance to authority."[80] Instead, parochial records suggest that Robin Hood games functioned "as charitable fund-raisers, authorized and organized by local officials—usually the churchwardens—and usually culminating in a communal feast." [81] Despite the outlaw's reputation for violence and transgression in the ballads, the parochial guilds' employment of "Robin Hood" in sponsoring church fundraising and poor relief through "Robin Hood"-themed entertainments at May games and Whitsun ales reifies the *Geste*-poet's evaluation of the outlaw in the final lines of the ballad: "For he was a *good outlawe* / And dyd *poore* men muche good."[82] As discussed presently, the Yeovil churchwardens praised their annual Robin Hood-impersonator for his "goodly" and "godly" participation in parish fundraising.

May games provided opportunities to realize necessary parochial fundraising goals (to replace the roof of the local church or aid the poor) that could be expedited by associated figures famed for separating people from their money—Robin Hood and the characters of the Morris. Once Robin Hood and Maid Marian assumed the roles of May Lord and May Lady in the seasonal celebrations, the outlaw's reputation for robbery dovetailed with the games' and/or Morris's function as a fundraising source supporting rural churches. Until the entire REED project is completed, evidence remains limited and piece-meal. Nevertheless, Simeone reports that "Robin Hood was in fact if not in name, King of the May…. virtual monarch…. of the spring festival in the parish of St. Lawrence, Reading." [83] Churchwardens' accounts for Reading's 1503–04 "gaderyngs of Robyn Hod" [collections by Robin Hood] netted "ten bushels of malt for the brewing of the church ale"; in 1533, Robyn Hod "gader[ed] [collected] … money xlix." [84] Simeone surmises the "gaderyngs" [collections] included "a ceremony of selecting

[79] Greenfield, "Carnivalesque," 19.
[80] Greenfield, "Carnivalesque," 20.
[81] Greenfield, "Carnivalesque," 20.
[82] Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 228, lines 1812-13, my emphasis.
[83] Simeone, "May Games," 271.
[84] Simeone, "May Games," 271.

Robin Hood and his companions, his participation in games and contests, his performance in a Robin Hood play [such as *Potter* or *Friar*], perhaps … a turn in the Morris Dance with Maid Marian and Friar Tuck."[85]

Paul White also details how the staging of such folk plays and games at Whitsuntide included numerous parish revels featuring Robin Hood. These "became an integral part of religious practice of many parish guilds"[86] through "raising money to fund their own devotional observances" (expenses for votive candles for their patron saint, prayers or masses for their deceased members), while also "contributing to the general parish fund or to a significant item of expenditure such as a new rood loft or image."[87] Several towns in Cornwall exemplify such guild-sponsored "gaderyng[s]" [collections].[88] Contributing toward constructing a tower above the chantry chapel of the Holy Rood, where the Holy Rood and St. Christopher Guilds met and worshipped, "Robyn hoode and his felowys" twice organized a "gaderyng" in Cornwall's parish of Bodmin (1505/06).[89] Several guilds in Stratton employed a member who "playd Robyn hoode," who "gathered" over thirty-eight shillings, "a collection made either from door-to-door or at a church ale by the local churchwarden." The citizen playing "Robyn" was "accompanied by men posing as Little John, Friar Tuck, and fellow 'hoodsmen,' all dressed in the Kendal green that characterized the livery of the fabled outlaw's company."[90] White further speculates that "playd" possibly indicates a "dramatic production" (such as Copland's *Potter* or *Friar?*).[91]

Churchwardens' records for the parishes of Kingston Upon Thames, Yeovil, and Croscombe provide fulsome documentation about the purpose, range of activities, and outcomes of the late medieval and early modern May games featuring Robin Hood.[92] The generic "King game," begun in 1504 in Kingston Upon Thames, was devoted specifically to Robin Hood in 1507, the first year it also featured a Morris Dance; this confluence supplies yet another association between "Robin Hood" and the Morris. Periodic and extensive re-equipping of the Morris troupe created new costumes for the dancers, the Fool figure, and Maid Marian through the end of Kingston's extant records in 1538. As Michael Heaney notes, the Morris dancers were "apparently more associated with Robin Hood than with the Kinggame."[93] Clearly, public perception of what "Robin Hood" meant was closely linked with the Morris at the May games, further supporting the identification of the dance performed by Tuck and the "Lady free" in *Friar* as a Morris. Conveniently, both Robin Hood and the Morris dancers were associated with extorting/collecting money from their victims or audiences. Whereas Robin the "prince of thieves" filled his feathered cap with spectators' cash, the Fool, Clown, and Maid Marian figures

[85] Simeone, "May Games," 271.
[86] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 69.
[87] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 71.
[88] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 74.
[89] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 74.
[90] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 74, quoting from Rosalind Conklin Hays et al., *Dorset and Cornwall: Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 521.
[91] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 74.
[92] On Kingston on Thames see MacLean; on Yeovil, see Stokes; on Croscombe, see Marshall, "Comyth" and "Gathering." On the Morris Dance that often was included in these Robin Hood Revels, see Michael Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth: Early Plebeian Morris," *Folklore* 100, no. 1 (1989): 88-104.
[93] Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth," 93.

of the Morris held ladles that facilitated the collection of offerings from their appreciative audiences.

In Sally-Beth MacLean's account, the town's several days of games, entertainments, and feasting at Whitsuntide could attract thousands of patrons to the parish of All Saints Church in Kingston Upon Thames (2,000 patrons in 1509). Like those "cognizances" [heraldic badges] distributed by Stubbs's Lord of Misrule, the number of paper "liveries" or special badges sold to Kingston's participants attests to this.[94] Wearing Robin's livery advertised the patrons' generosity and their allegiance to the greenwood outlaw during the town's Whitsun fair, lasting from the Thursday in Whitsun week through the next week. Two kinds of liveries were created: great liveries, garments fashioned of painted cloth or paper, depicting the Lord's emblem, which Robin as Summer "Lord" wore and distributed to members of his select company; and small liveries, paper badges also bearing the outlaw-Lord's emblem, which spectators at the fair purchased to certify that the wearer was a recognized retainer of the Summer Lord.[95] Robin's exhortation to the audience as "my mery men all" in Copland's *Friar* could have solicited both loyal allegiance to his cause and generosity to the parish where the play was performed. Similarly, the townsmen of Kingston who played Robin Hood and the Merry Men personally sold the painted paper liveries to the audience, increasing receipts through the outlaws' cachet and Robin's personal salesmanship, a camaraderie achieved, once again, through the opening exhortation to "my mery men all" in *Friar,* or something similar. The scale of the fair can be estimated by the number of liveries produced, ranging from 600 in 1537 to 2000 in 1520.[96] If every inhabitant of Kingston attended the fair, 500 people are still uncounted, indicating that the festivity attracted crowds of both locals and outsiders.[97]

And no wonder—Kingston's costumes were luxurious. In 1509 the principal actors—including Robin Hood, Little John, Maid Marian, Friar Tuck, and twenty Merry Men (accounting for most of the combined casts of Copland's *Potter* and *Friar*)—received new costumes: Kendal green wool tunics for the company; a Kendal green *huke* [outer garment] for Marian; canvas-lined satin coats for Robin and Little John; new feathered hats for all.[98] Perhaps because the fair's notoriety had spread, in 1519 the churchwardens committed additional funds to provide even more lavish costumes, including satin coats for Robin and his entire company.[99] The six-man Morris troupe received new Kendal green coats and feathered hats, suggesting to fair-goers another visual association, even if a color-coded sartorial one, between "Robin Hood" and the Morris.[100] In 1522 funds were spent refurbishing the costumes of both Robin Hood and the Morris-dancers: Robin's hat now sported opulent and expensive ostrich feathers [20 pence] and new shoes for him and Little John [21 pence]; the Morris troupe received new fustian (heavy wool) coats for the dancers [16 shillings], a buckram (stiff linen) coat for the Fool [4 shillings],

[94] MacLean, "King Games," 86.
[95] Forrest, *History*, 146.
[96] MacLean, "King Games," 86.
[97] MacLean, "King Games," 87.
[98] MacLean, "King Games," 85; Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth," 90.
[99] Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth," 91.
[100] Blackstone's description of the costumes for the *PLS* production reflects those listed in the inventories of the original May games; see Appendix D in Blackstone, *Robin Hood and the Friar*, 60-61.

and "gold skynnes" [10 pence] to luxuriously trim the dancers' coats.[101] MacLean posits that the returns on Kingston parish's investment exceeded the monetary, including such benefits as: "reinforcement of parish and civic unity"; "release of social tensions"; enhancement of prestige generally for Kingston, particularly for its All Saints Church; expansion of Kingston's marketplace; and profits from Robin's "gathering" made available for church repair and poor relief.[102]

In addition to the extensive records for Kingston, about sixty years of records (1516-77) supply evidence about the "Robin Hood" games in Yeovil in Somerset, with occasional subsequent records. Reviewing churchwardens' accounts, James Stokes describes a consistent pattern of activities performed in time-honored parish custom by administrators engaged in mounting Yeovil's annual Whitsun ales.[103] By virtue of always being organized by a town member playing the part of "Robin Hood," these effectively were "Robin Hood" ales. Usually, the citizen playing Robin was chosen for the role by three influential Yeovil constituencies: the current Vicar, the current senior and junior churchwardens, and the "Ancients," comprising former churchwardens. This triumvirate elected each year's "Robin Hood," usually a former warden, and often, like the Robin of the medieval ballads, belonging to the yeoman, landowning, or established professional craftsmen classes—never the local gentry. Collectively the occupations represented by "Robin Hoods" of this sixty-year period under study included: blacksmith, mercer, shoemaker, innkeeper, saddler, tanner, constable, draper, several yeomen, and several landowners. Some "Robin Hoods" kept their role in the family; relatives of blacksmith John Dennis were involved with Robin Hood entertainments in Yeovil for seventy consecutive years, handing the responsibility down from father to son.

Whoever played "Robin Hood" had three major tasks: as the "Keeper of the Ale," he organized that year's Whitsun ale, involving a range of duties; he served as Yeovil's entertainment director; and he performed the role of parish fundraiser. As Whitsun ale organizer, he oversaw the whole fair's various events: planning a play (Copland's *Potter*, *Friar*, or the like) involving Robin Hood and his company; enlisting townspeople to enact the roles of Robin Hood's fellow outlaws; casting the specific characters (Little John, the Sheriff, or Marian) for the Robin Hood "play"; purchasing costumes and props (cloth for the outlaw company's tunics and jerkins, re-fletching Robin's arrows, refurbishing Little John's horn) for the townspeople playing these roles; and orchestrating a communal dinner that concluded the ale (buying tablecloths, ordering food and drink). As entertainment director, "Robin Hood' administrated all social events in the town for the year. For Ascension Day, he supervised the church bell ringers: paying for their service, repairing bells, buying the ringers' libations. After their performance, led by a drummer and carrying a staff, he escorted his outlaw company from the church in a festive, if noisy, progress throughout the borough and outer parish, soliciting and gathering charitable donations from parishioners, returning in triumph much later to the church hall for a parish dinner with music and dancing late into the night.

[101] Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth," 92.
[102] MacLean, "King Games," 89; Wiles, *Early Plays*, 11-13; Barbara Lowe, "Early Records of the Morris in England," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 8, no. 2 (1957): 64.
[103] Stokes, "Churchwardens in Yeovil."

At the Whitsun ale, in conjunction with the head churchwarden, "Robin Hood" directed and performed in his annual eponymous play (similar to *Potter* or *Friar*). In the outlaw's persona and aided by his band, he solicited/demanded money from the fair's patrons—whether on foot, on horseback, or (if they refused to donate money voluntarily) by dragging patrons forcibly from their homes and carrying them publicly through the streets for mock rough justice. As its official fundraiser, Yeovil's annual outlaw-impersonator collected and kept safe the monies accrued from the Ascension bell ringing and the Whitsun ale and, in his "Robin Hood" persona, publicly presented the profits to the entire parish in February at the accounting of the previous year's fundraising. Here the community thanked the mock-outlaw for his "gud prouysyon and dylygent labors" [good provision and diligent efforts] as he presented the profits to "god and holy church."[104]

The role of Yeovil's yearly Robin Hood re-enactor required a trustworthy person capable of organizing multiple social events (gathering, dinner, ale, music, play, ringing), who knew the traditional Robin Hood-themed entertainments, could lead a band of willing assistants, and could persuade fellow parishioners and visitors to proffer their money for the good of the town. Thus, Yeovil's "Robin Hood" was an important parishioner, usually a former churchwarden, working under the current head warden. As Stokes summarizes, "unified by the Robin Hood metaphor," Yeovil's Robin Hood entertainments were "a complex mimetic process," moving through various settings, "the church, parish house, streets, fields, and dwellings" for events including "progresses, dramatizations of mock confrontations, … music, dance, archery contests, a play, triumphal entries," thus engaging the parish in "a civic mimesis-*cum*-fund raiser."[105]

Similarly, John Marshall analyzes eighteen "gaderyngs" [collections] of money in the name of or by "Robin Hood," during the half-century spanning 1476-1526, in the parish of Croscombe (Somerset). As with documentation of Kingston Upon Thames and Yeovil, Croscombe's records situate "the Robin Hood revels in the wider context of parish finance and administration," allowing Marshall to draw certain conclusions about most of these gatherings.[106] First, on the "mutual alliance" between "Robin Hood" and parish-sponsored revels, Marshall notes that, "the growth of the Robin Hood myth and its broadening appeal during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was, in large part, due to its dissemination through parish games…. Parishes increased their revenue by associating church-ales with a popular hero."[107] The rewards were mutual and symbiotic: Robin Hood made the church-ales more popular; the revels contributed cachet to the growing Robin Hood legend. Second, "The obvious similarity between the celebratory character of church-ales and the ballad descriptions of Greenwood hospitality was clearly visible then as now."[108] Moreover, significantly, "the games flourish at a time when the middling or yeoman class, that represent the socially defining culture of Robin Hood, emerge as the source of parish government officers."[109] Possibly, "the inspiration for associating church-ales with Robin Hood rested with those who most closely

[104] Stokes, "Churchwardens in Yeovil," 5.
[105] Stokes, "Churchwardens in Yeovil," 8.
[106] Marshall, "Comyth," 346.
[107] Marshall, "Comyth," 358.
[108] Marshall, "Comyth," 359.
[109] Marshall, "Comyth," 359.

identified with him."[110] Indisputably, "the institutional principles upon which parish assemblies were founded" strikingly resemble "those underlying the Greenwood." Like the ballads' Barnsdale or Sherwood, Marshall argues, the parish "sought to practice the ideals of independence and self-government… [s]ustained by a system of shared values that emphasized the horizontal ties that bound its members, rather than the vertical line of hierarchy that divided them." [111] Politically, "the Greenwood mirrored the parish paradigm…. Robin is for the parishioner, then, not necessarily a conduit for repressed political feelings [per the carnival theory], but a hero of communalism and autonomy." In this paradigm, "the individual derives strength from the mutual support of fellowship."[112]

Finally, prior to the establishment of Protestantism, when some of the more raucous elements of the rural May/Robin Hood-games elicited the disapproval, even moral outrage, of polemicists like Stubbs, Robin Hood was a figure "mediating between the sacred and profane interests of holy day ceremonial" for, as Paul White notes, he is "the quintessential lord of misrule, the perfect spring festival symbol of liberty, adventure, and transgression." [113] Alternatively, as depicted in the ballads, his devotion to the Virgin Mary and his commitment to the Mass and other Catholic rituals "represent the higher values that the revels are designed to support through pious giving."[114] Paradoxically, if Robin Hood "gatherings" were fundraisers, they were also *fun*-raisers, inspiring Marshall's conclusion that the revels' "contribution to parochial finances and social cohesion, count for nothing without the sheer fun to be had from dressing up in Lincoln green and brandishing a bow and arrows with a few friends."[115]

ROBIN HOOD'S ROLE IN RURAL AND URBAN MAY GAMES

If the May games featuring Robin Hood supplemented the coffers of rural parishes, they also entertained inhabitants of urban areas like London, Oxford, Leicester, and Westminster. Urban May festivities included the raising of and dancing around a Maypole; the erection of bowers, castles, palaces, or other structures for feasting and dancing; processions honoring the Lord and Lady of May (often identified specifically as Robin Hood and Maid Marian) or featuring Robin Hood and his Merry Men; folk plays about Robin Hood and other mythic figures; archery displays and contests evoking episodes in Robin Hood ballads; and the obligatory Morris Dance.[116]

For example, in his *Diary* about events he witnessed in London during the second half of the sixteenth century, John Machyn reported for May 26, 1555 a "goodly May-gam" [entertaining May-game] at St. Martin's in the Field Church, including a "gyant"[giant], "hobehorsses" [Hobby-horses] and a "mores danse" [Morris Dance]; on Whit Monday (June 3), he described another "May-gam" [May game] at Westminster featuring more giants, "duwylles"

[110] Marshall, "Comyth," 359.
[111] Marshall, "Comyth," 359.
[112] Marshall, "Comyth," 360.
[113] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 83.
[114] White, "Holy Robin Hood," 83.
[115] Marshall, "Comyth," 360.
[116] Forrest, *History*, 127-39.

[devils], three separate "mores dansses" [Morris Dances], bagpipers, viol-playing, and many "dysgyssed" [costumed?] performers. He noted that "the lorde and lade of the May rode gorgyously" [lord and lady of the May rode gorgeously] to minstrels' accompaniment.[117] The three Morris teams must have been hired from various regions, at great expense to St. Martin's parish; the splendid costumes that so impressed Machyn also would have been costly. Machyn does not identify the May Lord and Lady as Robin and Marian at this May game, but the "dysgyssed" performers suggest the costumed Merry Men and Tuck, who often accompanied Robin at other Robin Hood Revels.

Machyn does specify the outlaw's participation in another London May game sponsored by the parish of St. John Zachery on June 23, 1559, a year before Copland's printing of *Geste-plus-Playe,* featuring a separate May Queen, a giant, a Morris Dance, as well as pageants depicting St. George and the Dragon, the Nine Worthies, and Robin Hood. Afterwards, Robin, Maid Marian, Little John, and Friar Tuck processed through the city giving speeches "rond a-bowt London" [all around London].[118] Heaney classifies this as "more than a procession: it was the proclamation of a May game," adding, "the whole spectacle [of this May game] was so successful that [it] was 'played' before [Queen] Elizabeth at Greenwich," as Machyn also reports.[119] Elizabeth I's father Henry VIII also participated in May Day rites in 1510, 1513, and 1515, the latter two occasions invoking Robin Hood explicitly.[120] Simeone goes so far as to proclaim about Robin's role in England's May games:

> [W]herever the May Games were celebrated through much of the fifteenth century, all of the sixteenth century when the outlaw reached the height of his popularity, and through most of the seventeenth century, … Robin Hood unequivocally dominated the whole festival. In fact the May Games became, during those centuries, a saint's day for the canonized outlaw.[121]

CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated throughout this review of the association between Robin Hood and the May games, Whitsun ales, and Robin Hood Revels, there was a symbiotic identification between these social events, the popular drama, the Morris Dance, and the nexus of cultural meaning attached to "Robin Hood." Copland appended two plays "very proper to be played in Maye games" [very suitable to be performed in May games] to the 1560 printing of *Mery Geste*, perhaps *the* definitive serial collection of Robin Hood's adventures, whose publication would have promulgated the legend of what Simeone dubs the "canonized outlaw" even more widely. Shrewdly, Copland saw another profitable reciprocal connection between the plays and *Geste*: parishes wishing to mount a Robin Hood Revel would desire the book's convenient ready-made

[117] J. G. Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, Camden Society, o.s., 42 (London: J. B. Nichols, 1848), 89.
[118] Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, 201.
[119] Heaney, "Kingston to Kenilworth," 99.
[120] Ohlgren, *Early Poems*, 127-28; John Marshall, "Revisiting and Revising Robin Hood in Sixteenth-Century London," in *Robin Hood in Outlaw/ed Spaces: Media, Performance, and Other New Directions*, ed. Lesley Coote and Valerie B. Johnson (London: Routledge, 2021), 115-23.
[121] Simeone, "May Games and Robin Hood," 270.

scripts, or they could mine *Geste*'s plethora of Robin Hood plots to create other plays; the book's two parts mutually promoted sales of more copies of Copland's *Mery Geste*. Independently, the "seasonal," the "carnival," and the "economic/parochial" theories account for certain discrete aspects of this cultural commixture of Robin Hood's roles as Green Man, Lord of Misrule, and parish fundraiser. However, to be sure, there are various inevitable overlaps between the theories, as Wiles and Greenfield exemplify, respectively merging seasonal with carnivalesque and Bakhtinian with economic explanations for behaviors at these May games. Even Simeone's paradoxical designation of Robin as "canonized outlaw" blends his functions of Nature deity (seasonal), sanctified violent lawbreaker/inverter of official social structures (carnival), and successful fundraiser for the religious/civic establishment (economic/parochial). All three critical discourses have merit. The springtime/greenwood imagery consistently used to frame the temporal and spatial milieu of the outlaw in the ballads attests to the medieval trope of "green" Robin Hood celebrated outdoors during May. His subversive and violent behavior in the ballads suggests the "carnival" construction of his outlaw identity as Lord of Misrule. Supporting the economic/parochial paradigm is the reliable verity—when in doubt, follow the money. But is there need for a single choice? Collectively these scholarly assessments demonstrate that the ubiquity of the fifteenth-through-seventeenth-century Robin Hood Revels confirms the primacy and preeminence of the outlaw's place in late medieval and Early modern English popular culture.

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