"Forget history. Forget what you've seen before. Forget what you think you know": Re/Establishing Space for People of Color in Otto Bathurst's *Robin Hood*

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Medievalism can be defined as the ways in which the medieval has been represented in post-medieval eras, essentially comprising any post-medieval effort to re-imagine the Middle Ages for contemporary societies.[1] David Matthews argues that Robin Hood is an exemplary figure in this field, despite the "absence of canonical literary or historical texts."[2] The Robin Hood tradition, in fact, resists any formation of a hierarchical canon, which has led Stephen Knight to provide the model of a rhizomatic structure to approach the tradition, where "the coherent determinants of time, place, class and power, as well as their servants in terms of literary tradition, operate only in a casual, not causal, way."[3] The popularity of this cultural myth, and Robin Hood's screen presence, has contributed to this dynamic, rhizomatic character that is more firmly established in his post-medieval afterlife than in his medieval origins.

From the first feature film about the hero in 1908, Robin Hood has been the subject of a motion picture at least once a decade, and the subject of a television show every decade since the 1950s. The content and endurance of these medievalist narratives reveal more about contemporary society and experience than they do about medieval England, and they form part of the transtemporal framework of popular medievalism, where there is a co-existence of the past and present, for the discussion of contemporary anxieties.[4] Discussions about medievalism have in recent years considered racial tensions that are evident within the texts. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey's edited collection *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema* closely examines the social and political ideologies contained in medievalist films and exposes structural issues around racism in contemporary society through an engagement with the medieval.[5] Cord Whitaker and Helen Young have extended those discussions to examine the argument of historical accuracy and its ability to deny people of color access into an imagined medievalist past.[6]

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[1] See Tom Shippey, "Medievalisms and Why They Matter," in *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 45-54.
[2] David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History*, Medievalism VI (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 179.
[3] Stephen Knight, *Reading Robin Hood: Content, Form and Reception in the Outlaw Myth*, Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 237.
[4] See Stephanie Trigg, "Medievalism and Theories of Temporality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 196.
[5] Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, ed., *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[6] For further discussions on racist gatekeeping in medievalism, see Cord J. Whitaker, "Race-ing the Dragon: the Middle Ages, Race and Trippin' into the Future," *postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 3-11; Helen Young, "'It's the Middle Ages, Yo!': Race, Neo/medievalisms, and the World of Dragon Age," *This Year's Work in Medievalism* 27 (2012): 2-9; Helen Young, "Race in Online Fantasy Fandom: Whiteness on Westeros.org," *Continuum* 28, no. 5 (2014): 737-47; and Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*, Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature 30 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Sabina Rahman, "'Forget history. Forget what you've seen before. Forget what you think you know': Re/Establishing Space for People of Color in Otto Bathurst's *Robin Hood*." *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 2 (2019): 1-9.

Robin Hood has largely come away unscathed within these discussions, perhaps in part due to an under-examination of the area. The release, and subsequent popular criticism, of Otto Bathurst's *Robin Hood*[7] provides an opportunity to examine the way in which racial aspects of the Robin Hood legend have developed on screen. This article will discuss the representation of Yahya as one of the pivotal figures of agitation for social reform in Bathurst's film, tracing his ancestry from his on-screen avatars to note a significant change that is displayed in the power dynamics between Yahya and Robin. Through this examination, I will suggest that dismissing the film's commitment to diversity as "political correctness gone mad" not only fundamentally misunderstands what medievalism is and what it does, but also attempts to police black bodies in a made-up past.

In *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination*, Paul Sturtevant notes that the film and television industries have been the leading influencers of historical consciousness over the last century.[8] The accessibility of film, and the immediacy and intensity of reactions when watching a film, allow the viewer to "recover a context for people and incidents distant from them in space or time."[9] However, the articulation and rearticulation of this period in film and television means that the Middle Ages can be manipulated for particular purposes. Sturtevant observes that connections made between "fantasies and historical reality [have] worrying implications" which include some uncomfortable racial prejudices and tensions.[10] These racial tensions are fundamentally involved with discourses of medievalism. As Laurie Finke and Martin Shichman note, there is a distinctly racialized aspect to on-screen medievalism:

> The first thing everybody notices (or perhaps does not even need to notice) about films set in the Middle Ages, is that the characters are usually white. The fantasy of the Middle Ages has always been the exclusive province of European colonialism, representing the historical legitimization of white, Christian, European domination. A non-white character in such a landscape would surely seem "unrealistic" and need explaining.[11]

The ubiquitous whiteness from the medieval Robin Hood legend had been generally maintained in Robin Hood screen texts with an assumption that the legend was the product of a culturally isolated European past.[12] Robin Hood films and television programs have tended

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[7] *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst (Summit Entertainment and Lionsgate, 2018).

[8] Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism*, New Directions in Medieval Studies 1 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 85 and 75.

[9] Edward Benson, "Oh What a Lovely War! Joan of Arc on Screen," in *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, ed. Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 217.

[10] Paul B. Sturtevant, "'You Don't Learn It Deliberately, But You Just Know It From What You've Seen': British Understandings of the Medieval Past Gleaned From Disney's Fairy Tales," in *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past*, ed. Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 93.

[11] Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, "Inner-City Chivalry in Gil Junger's *Black Knight*: A South Central Yankee in King Leo's Court," in *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 107-21.

[12] The tenuousness of this assertion is a dynamic site for exploration, with recent research arguing against the misconception that the European Middle Ages and Early Modern history occurred in a cultural vacuum. See, for example, Nashid Al-Amin, *True Myth: Black Vikings of the Middle Ages* (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2014); Imtiaz H. Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008; London: Routledge, 2016); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

to reflect this assumption that medieval England was completely white, while making some effort towards a racially diverse cast. The inclusion of Joseph of Cordoba in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*,[13] Nasir the Saracen in *Robin of Sherwood*,[14] Azeem in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*,[15] and Djaq in *Robin Hood*[16] present people of color, but in each case, that person of color is notably foreign, displaced to England from elsewhere.

In order to examine Yahya in Bathurst's *Robin Hood*, it is important to briefly consider Azeem from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. As Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey note, "the Middle Ages has served as a preferred setting for exploring on the silver screen some of society's deepest concerns."[17] Azeem, a black Muslim, was laden with the social anxieties and racial tensions of being black and Muslim in the direct aftermath of the first Gulf War, converging blackness and Arab/Islamic representations. Lynn Shutters notes that Muslims and Arabs tend to be portrayed poorly in Western film, typecast as "lascivious sheiks, religious fanatics, and cold-blooded terrorists, Arabs on the silver screen are caricatures, not characters."[18] Jack Shaheen argues that the vilification of Arabs on screen reveals "cinema's systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people."[19] Interestingly, however, his study includes *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* is one of only a few exceptional films that represent Arab culture favorably.[20] Although Azeem's presence in medieval England fulfils a narrative function, his presence also sows what Finke and Shichtman call the temporal "seeds of the modern"[21] to allow a re-imagination of complex racial relationships in a non-antagonistic manner. Critics such as John Aberth, who dismissed the film as "an excuse to push a modern, politically correct agenda, which includes multiculturalism,"[22] perhaps misunderstand its aims and its value in exposing contemporary anxieties. These discussions are made clearer through a consideration of the parody film *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*.[23] Dave Chappelle's character Ahchoo, the analogue of Morgan Freeman's Azeem, is initially encountered by Cary Elwes' Robin Hood while he is being beaten by soldiers. Ahchoo, during this beating, remarks "I hope somebody is getting a video of this." This unexpectedly cognizant moment references the videotaped assault of Rodney King, an African-American taxi driver. The tape, filmed by a witness from his nearby balcony, showed King being viciously attacked by several police officers during his arrest on March 3,

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[13] "The Wanderer," *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, directed by Bernard Knowles, ITC, April 16 1956; and "The York Treasure," *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, directed by Terry Bishop, ITC, April 1, 1957.
[14] *Robin of Sherwood*, created by Richard Carpenter (HTV and Goldcrest Films, 1984-1986).
[15] *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, directed by Kevin Reynolds (Morgan Creek and Warner Bros., 1991).
[16] *Robin Hood*, created by created by Dominic Minghella and Foz Allan (Tiger Aspect Productions and British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006-2009).
[17] Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, "Introduction: Filming the "Other" Middle Ages," in *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.
[18] Lynn Shutters, "Vikings Through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer: Constructions of the Other in *The 13th Warrior*," in *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 77.
[19] Jack G. Shaheen*, Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 1.
[20] Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 500.
[21] Finke and Shichtman, "Inner-City Chivalry in Gil Junger's *Black Knight*," 109.
[22] John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 190.
[23] *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, directed by Mel Brooks (Brooksfilms and Gaumont, 1993).

1991. The incident triggered the Los Angeles riots in April and May 1992.[24] Azeem and Achoo, rather than fulfilling a political correctness quota, reflect contemporary racial anxieties. The characters exemplify Arthur Lindley's assertion that medievalist material of this nature can be "lifted out of historical sequence to serve as […] 'a distant mirror of the present,' an analogue or distancing device that enables us to see ourselves from a position of estrangement."[25]

Bathurst's *Robin Hood* is an extension of this sort of self-aware tradition, for the director explicitly states that "wherever possible, the point of this Robin Hood was finally to make relevant the clichés of a story that have been blindly reinforced by a near hundred-year cinematic tradition."[26] The rearticulation of existing features in the cinematic Robin Hood corpus for contemporary audiences also necessarily connects the film with contemporary racial anxieties, which become evident from the opening monologue:

> So, I would tell you what year it was, but I can't actually remember. I could bore you with the history but you wouldn't listen. What I can tell you is that this is a story about a thief. But it doesn't begin with the thief you know. He stole from the rich and gave to the poor. It became a bedtime story. But listen, forget history. Forget what you've seen before, forget what you think you know. This is no bedtime story. If stealing a few coins is all he did, all he was, Robin of Loxley, would never have become Robin Hood.

As mentioned above, historical veracity and on-screen medievalism are the source of some racial tension. Historical veracity in medievalism is often promoted for its pedagogical value,[27] and is usually combined with "a belief in a recoverable truth about the past."[28] However, the pastness that is represented in medievalism lends itself to the exclusion of others based on race, class or gender.[29] Bathurst's directive to "forget history," therefore, explicitly positions his film against that exclusionary model of medievalism which uses the argument of historical veracity to deny people of color access to these imagined medieval spaces.

The effect of this is tangible. Although Yahya's presence in the narrative still necessitates some explanation, his presence in medieval England does not. His presence in the town and his interactions with other people do not mark him as different. There are no hints of the "painted man" comments that Azeem from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* was subjected to. He is entirely normalized in the town, no one giving him a second glance because, crucially, there are other people of color in this film. Even during the battle scenes in the Crusades, a person of color is in Robin's company, his allegiances made clear by his uniform and British accent, and not his skin color. By rejecting history, and engaging in the practice of color-blind

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[24] See Rebecca Rissman, *Rodney King and the L.A. Riots* (Minneapolis: ABDO Publishing Company, 2014).
[25] Arthur Lindley, "Once, Present, and Future Kings: *Kingdom of Heaven* and the Multitemporality of Medieval Film" in *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 20.
[26] Otto Bathurst, as quoted by Kevin Maher, "No Tights Allowed: Meet the 21st-Century Robin Hoodie," *The Times*, November 17, 2018, 4–5.
[27] See Benson, "Oh What a Lovely War! Joan of Arc on Screen," 217-37; and Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Reel Joan of Arc: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of the Historical Film," *The Public Historian* 25, no. 3 (2003): 61-77.
[28] Bettina Bildhauer, *Filming the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 227.
[29] See Lynn Ramey, "In Praise of Troubadourism: Creating Community in Occupied France 1942-43," in *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema*, ed. Tison Pugh and Lynn Ramey, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 139-54.

casting,[30] Bathurst's film contributes to a larger conversation. Mary Beltrán suggests that representations of people of color in film and television, both as individuals and as groups, form an important contribution to the social imaginary about race by challenging essentialist notions about race.[31] The representation of dynamic and fluid racial identities on screen challenges the notion of the fixedness of race and racial identities. Yahya's presence, therefore, engages with these changing discourses of black visibility through and within a landscape that is not entirely white.

George Lipsitz suggests that diversity of representation can mediate established historical identities by representing past identities but "changing [their] meanings in the present."[32] Yahya's character becomes particularly noteworthy in this context. Although Kris Swank characterizes Yahya as the "junior partner" to Robin's "white savior" due to his losing his hand, and suggests that it "[rendered] him effectively castrated and impotent," [33] Yahya's ability to maintain power in his relationship with Robin indicates that this is not the case. Despite appearing to fulfil a similar sidekick function to that of Azeem, he is not indebted to Robin. His presence in England is not due to any obligation, but rather due to his own political agenda. He has a cause, and he recruits Robin, saying "this war, all wars, and everything happening here is as old as time. Rich men getting richer. Men of power taking more power from the blood of innocents. Yours. Mine. And my son's. And I want to stop it. But I cannot do it alone." The Robin Hood tradition is characterized by a loss of faith in the intentions or abilities of people in positions of authority, but Bathurst's Robin admits that he only played the part of The Hood to win Marian back, not to aid the oppressed. When Robin was fighting in the Crusades, he says all he ever "thought about was coming back here and being with [Marian]. Sitting in our manor, eating and drinking and not doing very much." Robin of Locksley only became Robin Hood because of Yahya. Where Azeem walked behind Robin in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, saying "it seems safer to appear to be your slave rather than your equal," Yahya, who uses the same nickname for Robin that Azeem had, says "follow me, English." He walks in front and Robin follows. In Bathurst's film, far from being the white savior, Robin Hood becomes Yahya's lost hand.

Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl state that part of the allure of Robin Hood lies with the possibility, slight though it may be, that he was a real man.[34] However, it is in the mythic qualities of the Robin Hood tradition, the ability to create a past in which a reimagination of contemporary anxieties can be played out in a medievalist setting, that the true value lies. As Stephen Knight notes, these texts offer "views on what narratives and forms of representation have been popular at any given time; the patterns to be found in them all feed out of their

[30] Where casting decisions are made without consideration of the actor's ethnicity or skin color.
[31] Mary Beltrán, "Latina/os On TV!: A Proud (and Ongoing) Struggle Over Representation and Authorship," in *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Popular Culture*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama (New York: Routledge, 2016), 23-33.
[32] George Lipsitz, "The Historical Study of Popular Culture," in *A Companion to Popular Culture*, ed. Gary Burns, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies 38 (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 25.
[33] Kris Swank, "Back in Black in Sherwood: Revisiting the Black Outlaw in Robin Hood Adaptations," *Academia.edu*, February 2, 2020, accessed May 31, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/42321658/Back_in_Black_in_Sherwood_Revisiting_the_Black_Outlaw_in_Robin_Hood_Adaptations_2020/, 17.
[34] Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 65.

contexts and do not remain sequestered inside their textual confines only."[35] In these creative medievalism spaces, accuracy and authenticity are not crucial factors. As Bettina Bildhauer notes, what matters to audiences is that the world 'feels' right.[36] If, as Finke and Shichman suggest, the Middle Ages has become synonymous with fantasy,[37] the fantasy of Robin Hood embracing a racially diverse cast certainly feels right.

[35] Knight, *Reading Robin Hood*, 230.
[36] Bettina Bildhauer "Medievalism and Cinema," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, Cambridge Companions to Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 49.
[37] Finke and Shichtman, "Inner-City Chivalry in Gil Junger's *Black Knight,*" 109.

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REEL FURY: WHITE FRAGILITY AND THE BACKLASH AGAINST BATHURST'S *ROBIN HOOD*

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No remaking of the Robin Hood legend has garnered as much loathing as Otto Bathhurst's 2018 *Robin Hood.* While the majority of professional reviewers found elements to praise in the film,[1] reviewers on Amazon, IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes unleashed their fury under the aegis of anonymity.[2] Lamenting that they were robbed themselves, many reviewers claim to have walked out of the theater, and the reviews reveal a level of visceral disgust with the movie. On Amazon, "Sara B." advises: "Next time you go to the bathroom, look down into the bowl before you flush. Congratulations, you just created something more worthwhile than this film."[3] Another Amazon reviewer describes the film as "a porta-john on a construction site."[4] Multiple viewers make scatological comparisons or describe the film as "nauseating."[5] On IMDB, a user calling themselves "Dr. Graham Barkely, OBE"[6] writes: "There's plenty more that makes it farcical that I could go into but I've just had lunch and I'd really like to keep it down if I could. So to sum up, my youngest son stepped in some fresh dog mess the other day. We had to throw his shoe away. Reminded me of this film."[7]

The majority of the reviewers tried to "throw the shoe away," giving the film the 1-star rating necessary to write the review, and then revoking the rating and invoking negative stars in the comments, despite the extra time and energy needed to do so. The film seems to take on the qualities of the abject, what must be literally thrown away. As Julia Kristeva describes the abject in *The Powers of Horror:*

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without

[1] For example, Owen Gleiberman calls the film "a diverting live-wire lark—one that, for my money, gets closer to the spirit of what Robin Hood is about than the logy 1991 Kevin Costner version or the dismal 2010 Russell Crowe version" ("Film Review: 'Robin Hood," *Variety*, Nov. 20, 2018). Geoffrey Macnab acknowledges its faults, but concludes that "[t]his is such an energetic affair that it hardly seems to matter when its aim is less than true" (Robin Hood Review," *The Independent*, Nov. 20, 2018).
[2] All reviewers will be referenced by the screen names used to leave their public reviews; links to the review (often left as a comment) and to the page are included.
[3] Sara B., "Deserves ZERO stars," April 26, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018).
[4] Amazon Customer, "So horribly pathetic I cant explain," March 8, 2019. Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018).
[5] Kindle Customer, A bad Guy Ritchie impression featuring a woke Eggsy and AntiFa as heroes," February 6, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018); Diana, "Like a train wreck….so horrible but had to keep watching…," July 17, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018); Anonymous me, "Poorly written Anarcho-Communist Propaganda," May 26, 2020, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018).
[6] Obviously, no such person exists or has been knighted, but the pseudonym attempts to authorize the reviewer.
[7] Dr_ Graham_Barkley_OBE "My son stepped in some dog mess," Nov. 29, 2018, IMDB.com review of *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst.

Lauryn Mayer, "Reel Fury: White Fragility and the Backlash Against Bathurst's *Robin Hood*." *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 3 (2019): 10-22.

> makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.[8]

As Kristeva notes, the abject is not simply a site of disgust, but one that provokes a threat to life. We can see the echoes of the abject in what would otherwise look like ridiculous hyperbole in some of the reviews: from Amazon, "This is so horrible, I can't even describe the horror."[9] On IMDB, a review by sebstallard is titled "Don't Wreck Your Life!"[10]

What kind of threat to self does this film pose, to evoke such abject reviews? The majority of criticism centers on the film being too political or politically correct (to the reviewers) – an objection that begs the question, of course, as to which ideologies have been naturalized and are therefore *not* considered political. Robin DiAngelo's remarks on whiteness also apply to the naturalization of political ideologies (and the two are, of course, linked): "Whiteness rests on a foundational premise: the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as a deviation from that norm. Whiteness is not acknowledged by white people, and the white reference point is assumed to be universal and imposed on everyone."[11] Much of the vitriol aimed at the film stems from the fact that it critiques these naturalized ideologies, a critique that (like discussions of race) provokes highly defensive behavior from those invested in these systems of domination. Interestingly, many of the reviews offer curatives to this abject deviation from whiteness: much of the advice given after these online rants is to watch either the Errol Flynn film *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) or the Kevin Costner vehicle *Robin Hood*: *Prince of Thieves* (1991).

This advice is frankly puzzling, for the 2018 film has more in common with the films of 1938 and 1991 than these reviewers realize. Tropes associated with the tradition can be extrapolated to contemporary political flashpoints. For example, reviewers do not appear to object to redistribution of wealth; if such objections arose, potential viewers of the 2018 phenomenon would not have been directed towards the Errol Flynn film or the later Kevin Coster movie instead. Nor do viewers appear to take issue with the 2018 film's introduction of Marian as an early or prototypical Robin Hood, serving within the narrative as an inspiration for Egerton's character: Marian (played by Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) fights early and speaks aggressively in *Prince of Thieves*.

Reviews of the 2018 *Robin Hood* film may participate in a variation of a composition fallacy. Under this kind of faulty thinking, audiences conflate an attack on practices within an institution with an overt attack on the institution itself. For example, audiences perceive the film's depiction of corruption within the Church as an attack on the institution itself, or on Christianity more broadly. In the same manner, the portrayal of Muslims as victims of crusader abuses must somehow mean that all Christians are evil. Many of these reactionary interpretations (which absolve audiences of their own guilt) are on display in contemporary American race relations.

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[8] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 12.
[9] Amazon Customer, "So horribly pathetic I cant explain," March 8, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018).
[10] sebstallard, "Don't wreck your life!!!," Aug. 4, 2019, IMDB.com review of *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst.
[11] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 25.

I thus wish to tease out two interconnected threads that constitute, for an audience such as the reviewers mentioned earlier, sufficient threats to motivate these feelings of disgust and horror in the 2018 *Robin Hood* film: the destruction of a reel racial hierarchy, and the threat to white supremacy posed by the movie's call for the overthrow of neoliberalism[12] by collective revolution.[13]

Errol Flynn's *Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) has long been interpreted by critics and audiences as a critique of contemporary Nazi Germany.[14] Despite this history, however, the film now could be easily perceived by some viewers, particularly those with racist and xenophobic views, as satisfying modern white supremacy's whitewashing of history. The 1938 film's opening narrative describes the crusades as "fighting the infidels." Despite being set in 1191, one hundred twenty-five years after the Norman Conquest, the film makes a sharp division of the population of England between the decadent, predatory Norman invaders and the downtrodden but valiant Saxons, who are called the "true English."[15] Such framing makes the film prime material to be read as an anti-immigration allegory, much like the vile novel *The Camp of the Saints* (1973). The film also, of course, presents an all-white Middle Ages.[16]

Kevin Costner's *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), on the other hand, casts Morgan Freeman, a Black American actor, as Azeem; the film is the first big-screen remaking of the legend in which there is a Black co-star, or sidekick.[17] Azeem's presence is a nod towards diversity, but for the most part, an empty gesture. Freeman's presence does nothing more than underscore long-term coded racial hierarchies in film[18] while alleviating white guilt and playing on essentialist anti-

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[12] For an excellent discussion of the mutually reinforcing relationship between neoliberalism (a political approach that favors free-market capitalism, privatization and reduced spending on social welfare programs) and forms of oppression such as racism and sexism, see Anne Sisson Runyon, *Global Gender Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[13] JanPattersonRN in her review calls out white assumptions of moral superiority: "Do you really think being white and raised in something nominally [but not in practice] Christian gives you protection from greed and power lust?" ("An old story writ new for our times," Jul. 6, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018)). Melvin predicts white fragility when he notes: "If you're white and racist you'll absolutely hate this movie" ("Best Robinhood ever!!!!," Dec. 18, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018), directed by Otto Bathurst).

[14] Stephen Knight makes this point during his discussion of the Flynn vehicle in *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, though Knight notes that though "an antifascist Robin is an appealing idea; yet some of the scenes most suggestive of Nazism, such as the scene in which Norman soldiers smash up shops" are also in the 1922 film, concluding that "antifascist interpretation may have more to do with the political context then and now than with any conscious plan on the part of the filmmakers" ("Robin Hood of Hollywood," in *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003], 150-210 at 158).

[15] The Flynn film here echoes the nationalist sentiments popular in the nineteenth-century and brought fully into the popular Robin Hood tradition in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819).

[16] Michael Curtiz and William Keighley, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1938).

[17] The BBC series *Robin Hood* (2006-2009) did see a Black actor, David Harewood, play Friar Tuck in its final season.

[18] A quick image search of biracial buddy movie posters provides a neat synecdoche of this hierarchy: when both actors are shown, the Black actor's face/body is almost invariably placed either behind or below that of the white actor.

Muslim sentiment,[19] to which Azeem is shown to be the sole exception. The film's establishment of Azeem's exceptionalism begins from the introductory shots, as the story opens in Jerusalem, focuses on a minaret, and zooms in on a muezzin reciting the adhan. The camera then immediately cuts to a dark and noisome dungeon where stereotypically stocky, scimitar wielding "Arabs" are administering amputations as punishment for thefts of bread, a montage meant to associate Islam with barbarity. Against this sinister backdrop, Robin of Locksley (although innocent of theft) offers himself up for amputation to save Peter, a weaker crusader, highlighting crusader virtue as opposed to Muslim ruthlessness. After a show of verbal valor ("This is English courage!"),[20] Locksley turns the tables on his captors, and as he escapes attempts to rescue fellow crusaders. Although Azeem, a Muslim, helped save Locksley by warning him of attackers behind him, Locksley initially does not agree to save him despite two separate please: Azeem first asks for freedom, because "I am under a sentence of death."[21] His second plea is direct begging, playing on human compassion: "For pity's sake." Only when Azeem appeals to Locksley's sense of self-preservation does Robin listen: "Set me free; I will show you a way out. If you do not, we are all dead men."[22] Azeem, for Locksley, is only valuable as an instrument; appeals to common humanity fall on deaf ears.

After helping Locksley escape, Azeem then insists on traveling with Locksley to England, in service to Locksley for saving his life, telling Locksley "I will stay with you until I have saved yours, that is my vow."[23] Initially, Locksley high-mindedly refuses this service, even going to far as to try to ambush Azeem and ship him back East. When Locksley verbally releases Azeem from the debt, Azeem reminds him that "only Allah can do that," and declines his freedom.[24] In doing so, the film naturalizes Azeem's wish to serve Locksley as one of free will, rather than overtly addressing an imbalanced power dynamic inherent in the concept of the life debt. With the specter of exploitation thus laid to rest by Azeem's own words, and the audience's guilt assuaged, Azeem can assume his place in the narrow racial narrative confines that have entrapped Black actors since *The Birth of a Nation* (1915): the loyal recipient of white paternalism; the "magical Negro"; or the brutish criminal. Ed Guerrero reminds us that *Birth of a Nation* demonstrated "how deadly serious the new medium [film], barely twenty years old, had become as a tool to create and shape public opinion and racial perceptions."[25] In these limited and thus inherently racist constructions, cinematic Black agency can only be portrayed as a threat to be contained. "Positive" black roles, in contrast, demonstrate what Patricia Turner denounces as the moviemaking community's "pernicious preference for docile, apolitical, nonthreatening black characters."[26] For audiences in the first decades of the twenty-first century, Morgan Freeman's casting history has already mostly

[19] As discussed later, the only depiction of Muslims (other than Azeem) plays on the Orientalist stereotype of the "menacing Saracen." For a further discussion of this phenomenon in the Robin Hood corpus, see Kris Swank, "Black in Sherwood."
[20] Kevin Reynolds, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1991).
[21] Reynolds, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.
[22] Reynolds, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.
[23] Reynolds, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.
[24] Reynolds, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.
[25] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 15.
[26] Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 218.

coded into this latter nonthreatening category through his interchangeable characters in well-known films, including *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), and *Bruce Almighty* (2003).[27]

I assert that Freeman's filmography has already primed the twenty-first century audience to understand that 1991's *Prince of Thieves* will not be a threat to white supremacy; indeed, it might even play into a nostalgia for Black characters who are forced to explicitly address their own outsider minority status. When Locksley questions why Azeem is "walking at the back of [him]" Azeem responds "In your country, am I not the infidel? It seems safer to appear as your slave, rather than your equal."[28] The film sets up an unequal "buddy" relationship, and as Guerrero notes:

> It seems that with the biracial buddy formula Hollywood put the black filmic presence in the protective custody, so to speak, of a white lead or co-star and therefore in continuity with white sensibilities and expectations of what black, essentially, should be.[29]

Locksley responds by essentializing Azeem's point about perspective: "For an infidel, you have uncommon clarity of thinking."[30] From this point on, literally and metaphorically, Azeem walks behind Robin: he helps Robin train the younger fighters, fights for Robin, and indulges in some caustic comments about supposed English superiority, but his role is one that is "legible" to a white audience: either the wisecracking Black sidekick or the wiser, older Black helper. Locksley is the dominant figure throughout the film, from organizing the fighting men to designing the various traps and stratagems that help them steal from the Sheriff of Nottingham. Locksley does chide the rest of the outlaws of Sherwood for their reluctance to include Azeem in their comradery: when they refuse to share alcoholic drinks with Azeem, the exclusion is pitched in racial overtones. The one-off gesture is a token attempt at inclusion, meant to highlight Locksley's obligations to Azeem as a protector and Azeem's dependence upon Locksley as champion. This is a common move that Turner sees in other films supposedly addressing racism that "exaggerate the role whites have played in fighting racial hostility."[31]

Moreover, the film is quick to point out Azeem's weaknesses and re-inscribe them racially and religiously. From early in their time in England Locksley sees Azeem's devotions and prayers as hindering Locksley's heroism, for example during Locksley's attempt to rescue a poaching urchin from the Sheriff of Nottingham's thugs (including Guy of Gisborne). The camera shift from Locksley, desperately using any weapon at hand against six other men and their hunting dogs, to Azeem placidly continuing his prayers. After Locksley chases the men off, he accuses Azeem of neglecting his vows, and Azeem calmly replies that "I fulfill my vows when I choose to" as Locksley bitterly replies, "Which does not include prayer time, meal time, or any time I'm outnumbered six to one." Though the scene ends comedically, when Azeem dismisses Robin's

[27] While Freeman has played a variety of roles, the ones that have garnered the most acclaim are those in which he plays a character that is "legible" to white audiences.
[28] Reynolds, *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*.
[29] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness,* 128.
[30] Reynolds, *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*.
[31] Turner, *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies,* 168.

objections by pointing out, "You whine like a mule. You are still alive,"[32] the moment sets up Azeem as violating his role as helper—and thus, as a Black man, he becomes dangerous and requires punishment. Later, when Azeem thinks he hears ghosts in Sherwood Forest as the pair enter looking for the outlaw band, Locksley quickly points to wind chimes that he, as a native, must surely expect: "You're scared easily, my painted Moor."[33] Two parts of this response need to be stressed: first, the phrase "painted Moor" rather than "Azeem" is a dog whistle for the audience to view Azeem's fear as a racial failing.[34] Second, Locksley's use of the possessive adjective, in a moment when the two are alone, plays overtly into Azeem's statement that he wishes to be perceived as Locksley's slave. This "doubling" of Azeem, simultaneously subordinated to Locksley in the racial hierarchy while purportedly "free" from literal enslavement, is designed to placate a white audience unwilling to address the brutal reality of systemic racism. For them, the end of literal slavery means that Black individuals have equal freedom with white ones—and that racism is an individual character flaw rather than a continually reproduced structure of domination. As DiAngelo notes:

> Racism—like sexism and other forms of oppression—occurs when a racial group's prejudice is backed by legal authority and institutional control. This authority and control transforms individual prejudices into a far-reaching system that not longer depends on the good intentions of individual actors; it becomes the default of the society and is reproduced automatically.[35]

This blindness to systemic racism is a form of aggression and persecution of its own. Ijeoma Oluo discusses precisely this topic when talking about racism and police brutality: "In this individualist nation we like to believe that systemic racism doesn't exist. We like to believe that if there are racist cops, they are individual bad eggs acting on their own. And with this belief we are forced to prove that each individual encounter with the police is definitely racist or it is tossed out completely as mere coincidence."[36]

By contrast to the films that reviewers recommend as a curative to the 2018 film, Bathurst's reworking of the legend presents an astounding lack of agency given to Robin of Loxley.[37] The film opens, indeed, with a stealthy and clever thief who is robbing the rich to give to the poor: but the thief is Marian stealing a horse *from* Robin. When Robin catches her, she turns his arrogant attempts at seduction into a denunciation of the idle aristocracy. Robin releases Marian, and gives her the horse, but only on condition that she give him her name. This is a disturbing scene to watch, since he pins Marian to the wall, all the while giving her a harasser's smirk;[38] the threat of rape is evident, as is Robin's economic privilege.

Robin's presence seems to corrupt Marian: after their meeting, the film provides a montage of their lovemaking in the manor, a space that is physically and symbolically higher and further

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[32] Reynolds, *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves.*
[33] Reynolds, *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves.*
[34] Locksley also refers to Azeem as a "painted old hound," while trying to learn the name of the woman for whose love Azeem was sentenced to death.
[35] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 21.
[36] Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race* (New York: Seal Press, 2018), 89.
[37] Otto Bathurst, *Robin Hood* (Santa Monica: Lionsgate Pictures, 2018).
[38] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.

away from the town and the mines. Marian seems to have forgotten her commitment to her people; far from the daring thief of her first appearance, the film only shows her and Robin embracing in soft focus as the voiceover tells us that "seasons passed, and their romance blossomed. They were young, in love and *that was all that mattered*" (emphasis mine).[39] Their idyll ends abruptly when Robin is drafted to fight in the crusades, a startling departure from the voluntary service he provides in *Prince of Thieves* and Ridley Scott's 2010 *Robin Hood*, the two blockbuster films most recently preceding the 2018 movie. Indeed, military service seems to be key to making Robin something more than a smirking harasser: the film jumps forward in time, and the audience next see Robin and his squad of crusaders[40] fighting a losing battle against the technologically-superior and strategically more brilliant Muslims. When one of the crusaders is captured and hung up as bait for the rest, the film does a savage takedown of the classic "daring rescue" trope of action movies. Robin insists trying for the rescue, and not only fails, but is responsible for the deaths of dozens of the crusaders as they follow him into a trap. The Muslim squad is led by a masked man the audience later learns is Yahya, a warrior of incredible speed, strength, and dexterity. Yahya defeats Robin by throttling him; as Robin loses consciousness, he is saved by another crusader cutting Yahya's hand off amidst the bombardment of the city by the crusaders' late-arriving backup forces. The defeated Muslims are put into chains, and abused in a fashion visually reminiscent of tortures at Abu Ghraib.[41] Robin rebels against the execution of Yahya's son, but cannot stop it;[42] instead, he is shot himself, threatened with execution (saved only by his class privilege), and dumped on a hospital ship back to England. While his compassion for the Muslim captives puts him on the moral high ground, he lacks the power to enact justice and save the captives.[43]

The first shot of the hospital ship focuses on the recumbent and unconscious Robin, who is dreaming of Marian, before panning down through a grate to see Yahya sitting upright in the bilge, alert and waiting.[44] Notably, although the shot is meant to be reminiscent of the horrific slave ships of the Middle Passage, here it is Yahya who has the power and agency, as he has chosen —without Robin's knowledge—to board the ship and shadow Robin home. This shot of Robin unconscious and Yahya in control of his circumstances echoes the earlier scene where Robin was throttled into unconsciousness by Yahya, and trains the viewer to read Robin as passive in comparison to Yahya.

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[39] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.

[40] While the crusader's costumes summon up images of SWAT teams and urban combat attire, the film is careful to frame this as a medieval crusade. The "draft notice" handed to Robin uses the medieval technique of rubrication to highlight "The Third Crusade" in vivid red; Robin's memory sequence on the hospital ship pulls out all the tropes associated with the crusade: medieval armor and white banners with the red cross on them.

[41] As Robin walks through the crusader encampment, the camera follows his eyes as crusaders force their chained Muslim prisoners to kneed ("On your knees, you pig"), assault them, and force their heads onto a block in a fashion that seems to deliberately not only the disturbing images released from Abu Ghraib, but also the opening scene of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) discussed above.

[42] He does manage to free Yahya and others, which allows Yahya to follow him back to England.

[43] We'll see this same combination of morality and helplessness later in the film, where the community as a whole is being beaten in an attempt to discover the identity of The Hood; Robin gives himself up to the Sheriff's thugs, but while this temporarily staves off that particular round of violence, it does nothing to change the system of violence and exploitation regularly unleashed upon the community.

[44] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.

Robin returns to England to find his home a ghastly looted ruin, the town turned into a Victorian industrial dystopia, and Marian embracing another man. This last sight causes him to double over, retching and weeping, and it is in this moment of Robin's abjection that Yahya bursts on the scene with dazzling energy.[45] The scene is worth remembering in full to show the startling contrast between the helpless and the determined Yahya. Robin looks up to see Yahya standing over him. He attempts to escape, but Yahya literally bars his way with one hand and stops his self-pitying plaint of "You should have killed me; this must be hell" [46] by angrily lashing back: "You want to know what hell is? I lost my hand in this war. My people were in chains. My land was pillaged. And my son was murdered."[47] He then reveals that he has chosen Robin as his instrument to help fight a new war, one which frames them as equals in a struggle against the predatory rich who have embroiled both their nations in war for fiscal gain. Yahya concludes his recruitment speech with an imperative: "Follow me, English,"[48] in a striking verbal echo of Azeem's nickname for Locksley, and possibly deliberate physical reversal of Azeem's walking behind Locksley in *Prince of Thieves*.

From the beginning of the relationship, Yahya is dominant, a startling departure from the norm in film, especially since this pattern continues throughout the movie. As Guerrero notes, commenting on Black representation in the wake of *Birth of a Nation*:

> in almost every instance, the representation of black people on the commercial screen has amounted to one grand multifaceted illusion. For blacks have been subordinated, marginalized, positioned, and devalued in every possible manner to glorify and relentlessly hold in place the white-dominated symbolic order and racial hierarchy of American society.[49]

When IMDB reviewers make comments dismissing the film as "liberal propaganda about social justice and other garbage" concluding "this was probably filmed by Obama,"[50] and another reviewer on Amazon frames a rant about how the film has stolen from white history and culture in whataboutism,[51] it is not hard to see that behind the fury is a sense of what Michael Kimmel terms "aggrieved entitlement," a zero-sum mentality where any gain by a non-dominant group must mean a corresponding loss inflicted on the dominant group.[52]

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[45] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.
[46] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.
[47] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.
[48] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.
[49] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness,* 4 and 5.
[50] aypostnet, "Left the theater after 5 minutes and a good meal," Nov. 29, 2018, IMDB.com review of *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst.
[51] Dracula, "Horrible," Mar. 23, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018, directed by Otto Bathurst. The review's whataboutism is worth examining at length: "Another garbage re-do of a classic. Guess what. White people do exist, and we do have a history, and we do have tales that originated from our own cultures. It doesnt meant we're the only ones - but stop trying to put an idealistic philanthropic agenda into every piece of entertainment that exists. Learn some real history. Only 2% of whites have slave owners in their heritage. Look up the barbary piracy wars - the arabs enslaved MILLIONS of black north Africans and whites until the US invented a navy and worked with the British to end the piracy. Love your fellow man and stop trying to rewrite tales. Bring black people into the stories, thats fine, but stop pushing a globaist agenda by destroying these tales."
[52] Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men* (New York: Nation Books, 2017), 24.

Yahya's competence is thus seen as an attack on Robin, and through Robin, whiteness. Yahya is the one who comes up with the plan to steal from the Sheriff of Nottingham: "Nottingham is the bank and the beating heart of the crusades, and I want to put a knife through it,"[53] a move that would literally defund the crusades. He forges Robin's new identity as a duality, designed to be in total service to their new cause: "By night you'll be hitting the sheriff's couriers, toll takers, tax collectors…by day, you'll be playing Lord Loxley, drinking and dining with some of the most obnoxious people on earth." Note here that this forging of Robin's new identity means that Yahya now has complete military control over every hour of Robin's life, a point which the film makes clear: when Robin complains about a task, saying "It's my day off," Yayha snaps back, "You have no days off, English."[54] Yahya bars Robin from seeing Marian again, swats a bottle of spirits from Robin's hand when he attempts to drown his sorrows in alcohol, and physically shakes Robin to make his point about sticking to the plan. To demonstrate to Robin, and the audience, that Robin is indeed not yet at Yayha's level of strength and speed, Yahya bests Robin, armed only with a staff and missing a hand. The training montage includes a grueling session where Yahya looms over Robin while barking out orders. The two are not training together: Yahya acts like a stereotypical Marine drill sergeant, breaking down Robin to turn him into a fighting instrument. In a striking visual reversal of slave/master images during these training sessions, it is Robin—not the Black man—who is weighted down with chains and dragging them along the ground. The camera focuses and the montage pauses on several moments when the audience sees a switch in the plantation trope of white leisure and Black labor. The racial implications are clear: while Robin sweats with exertion, the camera pans to Yahya sitting down and eating.

Although reviews from *Empire*, *Variety*, *The New York Times*, and others downplay Yahya's position as one of "sidekick,"[55] the movie drives home the message time and time again that Robin is simply a body performing Yahya's will. Beyond the overt dialog when Yahya recruits and trains Robin, Yahya's competence is highlighted through his competence in unexpected circumstances. For example, at one point in the film Yahya allows himself to be captured to save Robin and Marian and frees himself using found tools and his own fighting ability. After a defiant speech to the Sheriff of Nottingham sees him imprisoned, Yahya is brought food in a crockery pot. Using his head, he smashes the pot and hides one of the shards in his teeth. When a guard approaches to beat him, Yahya swings his head around, wounds the guard in the head with the

[53] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.

[54] This double identity instantly invokes the playboy/crime fighter characters of Batman and Zorro, with one important distinction: whereas the two are exemplars of self-forged identities, Robin literally has no voice in creating his own role.

[55] It's interesting to note how the professional reviews insist, in the face of the arc of the entire film, on classing Yahya as a secondary character. Two examples will show the pattern. Gleiberman spends one sentence of his review on Foxx's character, and classifies Yahya's and Robin's relationship as "a mutually beneficial bond" (Gleiberman, "Film Review: 'Robin Hood'"). Dan Jollin writes that "Foxx is criminally wasted in a sidekick role that requires little more of him than the aforementioned exposition and a bit of training-montage shouting" ("Robin Hood Review," *Empire Online*, Nov. 19, 2018); Jollin also finds it ludicrous that longtime Moorish commander would know anything about English politics: "And a Moor who's somehow familiar with the inner workings of the English political and economic system despite just arriving in the country only adds to the preposterousness of it all."

shard, and then throttles him with his own chain. By contrast, Robin's own two attempts at leadership end poorly, and he requires rescue by Yahya.[56]

Even Robin's words are not his own: "Too slow!" yells Yahya as Robin fails in his training; "Too slow!" Robin then taunts the first toll guard who tries to attack him. Robin mirror's Yahya's phrasing in complex situations as well: Yahya declares that "We pull the tail and see who bites" when outlining his strategy to infiltrate the inner circles of Nottingham power. During an exchange between Robin and Yahya, Robin declares he wants to "go big" and attack the treasury directly; his justification, when Yayha observes the difficulty of the task, is to parrot Yahya's own words: "We pull the tail and see who bites."[57]

Yahya is the will and Robin is the instrument, well-summarized in one of Yahya's training instructions: "You must make your hand a quiver."[58] This phenomenon is what infuriates viewers who are much more comfortable with Black bodies acting as the instruments of white will. This also illuminates what would otherwise be a puzzling paradox: despite Yahya's evident leadership,[59] the same adjective, "useless," is echoed over and over again in reviews. Moreover, the criticisms of the character (Yahya, but usually called Little John) are closely linked to the actor: "Jamie fox's [sic] character is useless" is a commonly replicated phrase,[60] while other reviews use Yahya, as played by Foxx, representative of their criticism of the film, saying "Characters, specially Jamie Foxx made no sense to me."[61] Even well-written and thoughtful reviews miss the point the film is making: Foxx "achieves the impossible at making a crucial character such as Little John out of place and serving little point to the story."[62] Yahya is far from "useless" in the film. But in a culture of systemic racism that demands certain roles and behaviors from people of color, and will react with fear and rage if those demands are challenged, he is useless because he does

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[56] Robin's plan to hit the treasury stumbles when he realizes that the entire cart carrying the treasure is going to be lowered into the vault itself, making escape next to impossible. He then is discovered hiding under the cart by a guard, and is seriously wounded trying to escape from an increasing number of attackers. He is only saved when Yahya manages to drive a cart under the battlements Robin in running on, allowing him to jump and be carried away, a scene once again showing his passivity. We see this again when Robin's revealing of himself to save the townspeople only offers them a temporary respite, and he must be rescued from certain death by Yahya, who has disguised himself as one of Nottingham's thugs.

[57] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*. Notably, the entire interchange here reads like a child wanting and begging to ride a bicycle without training wheels.

[58] Bathurst, *Robin Hood*.

[59] As one reviewer complained, "The Moor (Jamie Fox [sic] was the better fighter, planner and most benevolent character in the movie and Robinhood [sic] seemed to be the second banana. The Moor had to teach Robin of Locksley [sic] how to fight and tell him what to do in almost every situation, might as well titled the movie after him." (Super Shopper, review of *Robin Hood*). Note the emphasis on Foxx's "otherness" here. Another gave the film one star because "the good guy is not a hero and is lead [sic] by his second head." (Dad's Review, review of *Robin Hood*). In this reviewer's view, "good guys" implies whiteness. Patricia Turner notes the ways "Disney studios ensured that generations of American children would shudder with apprehension when darkness appeared and utter sighs of relief at lightness." (*Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*, 107)

[60] mahmoudelkotb-512-910350, "An utter disastet," Biv, 29, 2018, IMDB.com review of *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst. The wording is identical in both reviews, and echoed in too many others to list.

[61] Honest Reviewer, "Very Disappointing!," Feb. 26, 2019, Amazon.com comment / review of *Robin Hood* (2018), *Robin Hood* (2018), directed by Otto Bathurst.

[62] TheLittleSongbird, "The un-entertaining and un-thrilling story of Robin Hood," Nov. 24, 2018, IMDB.com review of *Robin Hood*, directed by Otto Bathurst.

not fit the passive Black helper / sidekick model to a white hero. Viewers cannot "use" John to re-inscribe racist hierarchies: thus, he is useless.

Unlike more conservative Robin Hoods that critique figures within a system while championing the system itself,[63] Bathhurst's Robin Hood (a white man driven by a Black man's ideology) demands the overthrow of a neoliberalism that pits races and religions against each other to distract them from its ravages. As Yahya explains to the naïve Robin: "This war, all wars, and everything happening here [the exploitation of the commoners], it's as old as time. Rich men getting richer. Men of power, taking more power from the blood of innocents. Yours, mine, and my son's."[64] By framing himself and Robin as equal victims of economic and political oppression, Yahya threatens what W.E.B. Dubois terms the "public and psychological wage" of whiteness. As Jonathan Metzl describes it, "'Whiteness' thereby provided 'compensation' for citizens otherwise exploited by the organization of capitalism—while at the same time preventing working-class white Southerners from forming a common cause with working-class black populations in their shared suffering at the bottom of the social ladder."[65] To think about a shared cause means to erase the distinction between white and Black, and in a structure of systemic racism, whites view the loss of their place at the top of the racial hierarchy as a threat to self, one which must be violently "thrown away." By systematically downgrading the film, the reviewers are trying to throw away the message they fear and despise.

[63] In *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, both Locksley and his father are loyal subjects of Richard the Lionhearted. The casting and costuming of the villains in *Prince of Thieves* deploys a Chaucerian tactic of displaying moral corruption through individual physical appearances (Chaucer's Summoner, for instances, bears the marks of moral infection on his pustulent visage). Thus the corrupt civic judicial system is indicated in the decayed teeth of Guy of Gisborne; the money-stuffed Church is reflected in the bloated face of the Bishop; literal moral blindness in Mortianna; the corruption of office in the black-clad and often slouched figure of the Sheriff of Nottingham.

[64] Many of the reviewers complain about the film as borrowing heavily from such films as *The Matrix*, *V for Vendetta*, and *The Hunger Games*. However, the point of these borrowings is precisely to show the omnipresent ravages of economic inequality and the pervasive threat of oppressive regimes.

[65] Jonathan Metlzl, *Dying of Whiteness* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 17.

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A Review of Robin Hood Scholarship Published in 2017-2018

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Robin Hood scholarship of 2017 and 2018 covered a wide range of topics and demonstrates the depth inherent in medieval studies, medievalism studies, and adaptation studies, as well as in examinations of publishing, reading, and performance practices from the medieval period to the twentieth century.

Re-Examining Robin's Violence

The first two articles discussed revisit two of the most well-known Robin Hood ballads. In their articles, Renée Ward and R. W. Hoyle present critical examinations of and challenge previous readings of *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* and *The Gest of Robyn Hode*, respectively, by teasing out ambiguous wording and exploring the use of those terms in other medieval literature. These authors also examine Robin's place within the social and economic structures through an analysis of Robin's violence and the beheadings committed by Robin.

In "'Thou shalt have the better cloathe': Reading Second Skins in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*,"[1] Ward focuses her analysis on Guy's "capull-hyde" and Robin's disfigurement and beheading of Guy. She utilizes several types of approaches to support her reading of the symbolic nature of the actions of both men in the larger scheme of medieval economic identities and related social positions. Both the horse-hide and the act of flaying represent a transgression of boundaries between species (human and horse) and social status and economic class (yeoman and knight). When Guy and Robin wear the horse skin it "render[s] their social identities within the estates system potentially fluid and problematic" (Ward 353). Ward argues that Robin's status as outlaw helps reaffirm the structure of society:

> The outlaw undoes the problematic meanings the bounty-hunter and his horsehide create, delivers appropriate justice and reinscribes the hegemony that actually excludes him. He exists temporarily within the monetary economy—just long enough to critique and reject it. In doing so, he reinforces feudal structures and, through his restoration of order, demonstrates the importance of outlawry to the maintenance of those structures. (364)

Ward claims Robin rejects the social climbing of Guy who attempts to move from yeoman to knight by claiming a "knight's fee." This examination helps explain the violence of Robin's action. The physical violence he enacts and their consequences are a representation of the metaphorical violence he enacts on society. Ward states the ballad

[1] Renée Ward, "'Thou shalt have the better cloathe': Reading Second Skins in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*," in *Flaying in the Pre-Modern World: Practice and Representation*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 349-65.

> then, resists as it explores the social change of the late medieval period, articulating the inherently contradictory nature of the social system through the "capull-hyde" and its multiple significations, as well as through the violence that Robin enacts upon Guy. These various meanings of "capull"—those connected to bestial and human identities, or to class and social identities within the estates system—ultimately inform the violence within the ballad. (364)

As mentioned above, Hoyle's essay does similar work in reexamining one of Robin's more violent moments, and his analysis of the *Gest* centers on Robin's beheading of the Sheriff.

Hoyle's essay[2] was published in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*[3] and revisits Robin's "physical valour" which "is an ever present theme" in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* (88). Hoyle also explores the ambiguous wording of the ballad and examines the specific historical moment. Hoyle argues "The figure that is described in the *Gest* is not a yeoman in an economic sense: he is surely a gentleman, an aristocrat, and so there is a real tension between what Robin Hood says he is and his actions (his deference, for instance, to the knight) and the lifestyle that he demonstrates" (89). Hoyle states:

> Robin Hood is not a yeoman in any orthodox sense, but a "good man" of the imagination. Neither he, nor anything like him, existed in reality, whether early fourteenth-century reality or late fifteenth-century reality, but he could exist in a land which was both Far Far Away but needed to have a proximate geographical location. (94)

This idea of Robin's ambiguous existence also supports Hoyle's stance regarding the structure of the ballad.

Hoyle, similar to Ward, challenges a traditional reading of the ballad, and he does this by examining the structure of the ballad to demonstrate the ballad is not scattered as generally suggested but rather does have a purposeful structure. Hoyle argues "it does not quite make sense, because it is entertainment, not history" and "the *Gest* is a single cycle" (75). By revisiting the violence and Robin's reputation (when the King and Robin ride into town and their presence frightens the townspeople) as well as the language and the structure of the text, Hoyle posits a purpose for and an intention behind the *Gest* and its idiosyncrasies: "And so the *Gest* is meant to be funny. It is a tall tale. We are meant to laugh at many impossible things, from the location of the forest through the lifestyle and physical prowess of the merry men, their impossible feats of archery, their fantasy castle under the greenwood tree" (106).

Through these similarities, we can see the importance of continuing to challenge seemingly set readings of the ballads and how fruitful that discussion can be. According to both Ward and Hoyle, though they are examining different ballads, they are focusing on similar moments, and Robin must be outside the social structure in order to critique it, give it form, and maintain it. Robin can only function in peak condition as an outlaw and parody of society.

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[2] R. W. Hoyle, "A Re-Reading of the Gest of Robyn Hode," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 61 (2017): 67-113.

[3] It was noted by Michael Jones that this essay was "[p]erhaps surprisingly" the only Robin-Hood-centered essay published in the journal between the years 2007 and 2016: Michael Jones, "*Nottingham Medieval Studies* at Sixty," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 61 (2017): 1-8, 6.

PERFORMANCE (OR LACK THEREOF)

Here our authors each explore the aspect of performance and the differences in adapting the literary tradition. Each author considers how performance and audience impacts the legend in different genres, its presentation, its purpose, and its evolution.

Like Hoyle, Kathryn Funderberg revisits the *Gest i*n her essay.[4] Funderberg examines the evolution of the forest law by using the Magna Carta and the Assize of the Forest as a framing for the *Gest* and how yeoman could have interacted with these laws. Funderburg posits that the *Gest* "allowed for greater comprehension of how someone of yeoman standing might have viewed forest law" and "the narrative grants unique insight into a comparatively poorly documented section of society" (15). She also posits a reasoning for the structure of the *Gest*; she continues with "the ballad composition of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* [was] a format more accessible to the lower classes, especially if performed" (15). This important idea leads us to our next theme of performance of Robin Hood and the adaptation of the ballads into new genres.

Fiona Allen reminds her reader that occurrences of Robin Hood are not in isolation from other traditions. In her essay "Rescuing *Galoshins*, a Scottish folk play,"[5] Allen explores the connections between medieval English and Scottish plays of the Northern British tradition (4). She uses the references she sees to Robin Hood to explain how the "structure of the morality play…serve[d] as a blueprint for the *Galoshins* play" (2) and the *Galoshin* play's eventual "slide from respectability" (4). Examining how "the entirety of the *Galoshin* is concerned with the *liminal*," Allen argues "a relatively primitive people…would have welcomed an entertainment which reassured them that light and warmth would eventually return" (3). The villains and heroes of these plays are "the Black Knight, the Turkish Knight, the Prince of Egypt" and "Saint George, Prince George, King George" (3), which Allen states "This would seem to link the Robin Hood plays quite firmly to the period of the Crusades, wherein (in the terminology of the time) the brave English Christian nobles fought the invading Muslim Saracens" (3). She also explores the connections to the May Games and cites a 1508 "Robin Hood event in Aberdeen" (4). These connections demonstrate, according to Allen, that the "play which had begun life as an important part of civic festivities would undergo many more changes before it became a semi-rural custom practised first by men, then by children, and, in the 21st Century, by groups of mummers, who are gleefully re-shaping it for performance purposes" (4).

The theme of re-shaping through performance is also discussed in Jennifer Reid's essay on Anthony Munday's Robin Hood Plays.[6] Reid explores the "performative turn" in Munday's plays and how they "recreate [the] legend afresh" (69) through his reexamination of the "relationship between commercial and folk drama," a strategy that "empower[s] a reading of the former which need not be tied up in ideas of decline or appropriation" (71). Reid argues Munday's plays are

[4] Kathryn Funderburg, "Barons and Yeomen, Venison and Vert: A Comparative Analysis of Magna Carta and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* in the Context of Forest Law," *The Expositor: A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Humanities* 9 (2017): 7-15.
[5] Fiona Allen, "Rescuing *Galoshins*, a Scottish Folk Play," *MEMORIAMEDIA Review* 2, no. 3 (2017): 1-4.
[6] Jennifer Reid, "The 'Heavie Writ of Outlawry': Community and the Transformation of Popular Culture from Early Modern Customary Drama to Anthony Munday's Robin Hood Plays," *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture* 10 (2017): 69-91.

innovative as the gentrification of Robin is "necessitated by the different mode of performance required by the commercial stage" (78) rather than "a poor attempt to appropriate popular culture for an elite audience and for commercial gain" (71). Viewing these changes in the context of commercial drama "enable[es] an examination of Munday's changes to the legend which focus on theatrical practice rather than on appropriation or deterioration" (72), and Reid argues how "we can also identify that his deliberate generic hybridity is, not a failure, but part of the play's overall experiment with form" (72).

The physicality of the early texts is not only important to the Robin Hood tradition, but it is also important to our understanding of how the texts themselves are adapted. This can be observed not only in Reid's argument about Munday's plays but also in Carolyn Coulson's study of her work with students in adapting a ballad for performance at both the Southeastern Medieval Association and the Longwood Medieval Conference. In the collection *The Ballad of the Lone Medievalist*, Carolyn Coulson explores her experience as teacher and director and documents her students' experiences in her essay "Perpetual Invention and Performance-Based Research: The Case of the Ballad of *Robin Hood and the Potter*."[7] Coulson explains how choices in blocking in preparation for the performance and physicality "worked directly with the text" (106). Coulson also analyzes how performing one of the more dialogue-heavy ballads with her non-medievalist students led to a deeper understanding of the language and the ballad itself. Coulson points out how as she worked individually with each student's pronunciation of each word "sound by sound" and discussed how they "venture[d] into a strange new territory for the students' learning experience" (102). She posits, "Our experiences clearly support [Stephen] Knight and [Thomas] Ohlgren's statement that 'the tone and impact of the ballad may well show more art than has sometimes been assumed…'" (107). This point is important to consider as Coulson concludes that "this project contributed to an empowerment of the students through an exceptionally rich, collaborative learning experience…. I separated creative process and student learning into two different 'filters,' but in many ways they are intricately woven together" (107). In these exercises, Coulson's argument resonates with Reid's argument and how Munday's plays create the legend afresh; for Coulson, her students, and her audience, the early poem is also freshly reimagined and better understood.

Stephen Basdeo also asks his readers to reimagine the performativity of the later ballads by considering how these poems in were intended to be shared in intimate spaces. In "Reading *Robin Hood's Garland* in the Eighteenth Century,"[8] Basdeo examines the qualities of eighteenth-century Robin Hood ballads which indicate that these garlands "should be viewed as products as reading material for the middle-class home" (5) and provides evidence of how the "publishers facilitated the reading of [ballads]" (2). Basdeo notes "The fact that they were marketed for readers, however, anticipates trends in antiquarian research from the middle of the century onwards, when Thomas Percy, Thomas Evans, and Joseph Ritson emphasized the 'poetical,' and hence literary

[7] Carolyn Coulson, "Perpetual Invention and Performance-Based Research: The Case of the Ballad of *Robin Hood and the Potter*," in *The Ballad of the Lone Medievalist*, ed. Kisha G. Tracy and John P. Sexton (Earth: The Milky Way, punctum books, 2018), 95-108.
[8] Stephen Basdeo, "Reading Robin Hood's Garland in the Eighteenth Century." *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 2 (2018): 1-16.

status, of the songs which they had collected in their anthologies" (13). Rather than being sung, these ballads are being embraced and treated as literature.

This performance of the Robin Hood legend continues through to the present day in a different context. In modern Nottingham, England, at the Robin Hood Festival, Sally Everett and Denny John Parakoottathil studied the relationship between tourism and folklorism, "where qualitative data were generated from 20 in-depth interviews with event participants plus periods of researcher participant observation" (30).[9] They posit how "the five-day Robin Hood Festival is unlike historic reenactments because there are no agreed and documented truths and historical fact" (31). This unique status of the festival "may offer an opportunity to interrogate concepts of escape, imaginative freedom and personality" (31). The authors observe how Robin Hood "provides a fascinating focus given the blurred distinction between fact and fiction, where stories contain both historical truth and assumptions which perhaps provides more opportunity for imaginative development and creative engagement than a purely fictitious fairy tale" (33). These participants seem to use Robin Hood as a way to escape and/or shape their identities anew, similarly to how the following two studies determined the Robin Hood legend was used.

The next two essays introduced here could have fallen into either rubric of performance or politics; importantly, they examine attempts to shape the identity of the audience through the performance of Robin Hood.

Katherine Echols's book, *King Arthur and Robin Hood on the Radio: Adaptations for American Listeners*,[10] presents the details of twentieth-century radio adaptations and "does not judge the fidelity of adaptations but rather considers the adapter's approach" (26). While Robin Hood's legend is created afresh, it is also subsumed into the King Arthur legend and the modern idea of medieval chivalry, portraying the "Sherwood outlaw as [a] civilized chivalric knight" (23). Like Stephen Knight, she sees the evolution of Robin Hood's character and circumstances as examples of medievalism, which reflects on current society and reinforces values: Robin has been changed to fit audience and the type of medium through which the legend is being presented (22). Echols posits, "Robin Hood and his Merry Men all probably made it to radio because they were familiar to listeners of all ages and were easily adaptable to a restrictive format" (35). According to Echols, most of these programs excised the violence of the medieval texts and cast Robin Hood in a chivalric light more in line with modern ideas of King Arthur's knights (31). Most of the adaptations are used in an attempt to instill certain values into the listening populace.

Much like American radio programs sought to shape American identity, the historical pageants Angela Bartie and her co-authors examine in their essay[11] were similarly used to shape a national or local collective English identity in the early twentieth century. The authors note "pageants in this period were particularly focused on the medieval—and especially the Anglo-Saxon—roots of the English nation and of the Christianity that was held to be a central aspect of

[9] Sally Everett and Denny John Parakoottathil, "Transformation, Meaning-Making and Identity Creation Through Folklore Tourism: The Case of the Robin Hood Festival." *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 13, no. 1 (2018): 30-45.
[10] Katherine Barnes Echols, *King Arthur and Robin Hood on the Radio: Adaptations for American Listeners* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017).
[11] Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alexander Hutton, and Paul Readman, "Historical Pageants and the Medieval Past in Twentieth-Century England," *The English Historical Review* 133, no. 563 (2018): 866-902.

it. Pageants celebrated the versions of continuous English nationhood" (872). Bartie and her co-authors argue "In keeping with the turn towards romance and legend, pageants also featured local folklore of medieval origin" (888). This essay only briefly mentions a couple of pageants featuring Robin Hood, such as a pageant in Nottingham in 1935 (888), but for those interested in pageantry and medievalism it would be a productive place to start. The second half of the twentieth century saw a shift in interest from pageant to film and television, and pageants had less of an impact on the shaping of collective identities (901-902). The explorations of radio and pageants both lead the authors to briefly examine serial television dramas popular later in the twentieth century.

ROBIN AND POLITICS

It is unsurprising that these adaptations are used to shape an identity in the audience as the legend itself became a politically charged vehicle of expression as demonstrated by the following authors.

In his article, "The Rebellious Robin Hood of the Middle Ages,"[12] Alexander L. Kaufman posits there is a strong connection between Robin Hood and rebellion which begins with Walter Bower's description: "Bower's historical context of this entry in his chronicle is one that places the outlaw for the first time within a rebellion" (75). Kaufman explores how Robin's rebellious nature was used and referenced in a variety of contexts and literature, and while his actions and characterization may not stay the same throughout, these texts do produce one complex claim. According to Kaufman:

> Yet the Robin Hoods of the medieval period do reflect a doubling-up of rebellious activity: of a rebellion placed on top of or alongside another form or representation of rebellion. This self-referentiality about the nature of rebellion in medieval English culture, history, and literature that is represented and contextualized in Robin Hood texts signifies a deceptively complex matrix: a rebellious character who resides within the historical and textual world of rebellious activity. (91)

We can see the interaction of this rebellious nature with specific example of England's politics in the discussion of the following authors.

In "A Critical Edition of *Little John's Answer to Robin Hood and the Duke of Lancaster* (1727)," [13] Stephen Basdeo presents and contextualizes the ballad *Little John's Answer*, an unexplored ballad located in the Special Collections Archive of the University of Leeds (15). Basdeo notes how "the narrative of the ballad refers to events which occurred between the King, Walpole, Lechmere, and Bolingbroke in 1727" (18). Basdeo analyzes political satire in this ballad as "popular participation in the political discourse of the day" (20), and he argues that these ballads due to their format were meant to "resist the trend towards gentrification" and to be "debated within social spaces such as the coffeehouse" (21).

However, each class seems to have their use for the outlaw; Bradley J. Irish examines an example from two centuries earlier of the opposite. In his chapter, "The Rejected Earl of Leicester,

[12] Alexander L. Kaufman, "The Rebellious Robin Hood of the Middle Ages," in *Rebellion*, ed. Robert C. Evans, Critical Insights (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2017): 73-95.
[13] Stephen Basdeo, "A Critical Edition of *Little John's Answer to Robin Hood and The Duke of Lancaster* (1727)," *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 1 (2017): 15-31.

the Rejected Sir Philip Sidney,"[14] Irish argues Robin Hood "became increasingly imagined not as a working-class hero, but as a displaced, disaffected, or exiled aristocrat" (111) as "in the second half of the sixteenth century, as Leicester and Sidney were rehearsing their grievances in the imaginative space of the wild, the Robin Hood of medieval lore was simultaneously adopting a form in which they might increasingly recognize themselves" (111-12). Irish notes:

> Leicester and Sidney may have especially admired one particular for-ester of the "wilde Countries": the infamous Robin Hood. As "chiefe gouernoure" of the wild, Robin Hood presided over an outlaw court of his merry men, a political subculture bound by the affective affinity of mutual alienation. He enjoyed a robust presence in the folklore of late medieval and early modern England—and we know he appealed to the Sidney family, who staged a Robin Hood performance during their spring festivities in 1574. (111)

Thus, Robin Hood becomes a way for even the aristocrat to make his discontent somewhat safely known.

In his essay "Robin Hood and the Forest Laws,"[15] Stephen Knight explores Robin's interaction with forest laws as he is moved into new genres "with post-medieval causes and contexts" such as enclosure (1). Knight examines the ballads collected by F. J. Child as well as Anthony Munday's plays, Ben Jonson's *The Sad Shepard*, popular prose and verse pamphlets, Thomas Love Peacock's *Maid Marian*, and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* in the contexts of enclosures, the eventual impact of Romanticism on Robin Hood and the forest laws, as well as the modern Robin in the television series of the twentieth century. Knight argues that it is only in the nineteenth century that breech of the forest laws is "the reason for Robin's outlaw status because the forest laws are taken as symbolic of general authoritarian oppression" (1). Knight posits:

> The way the figure of Robin Hood developed after 1800 seems to be a classic of dialectical medievalism: through forest celebration it yearns for the natural beauties of pre-urban, pre-capitalist times; but through the forest laws concept it also stands for an equally modern sense of personal freedom and escape from the unpleasant interventions of authority. (11-12)

Knight argues Robin "and his myth keep on evolving in the service of our considerations and consolations" (12). This idea can be clearly seen in the authors' discussions of adaptations of the Robin Hood tradition in the following section.

ADAPTATIONS FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The following essays explore adaptations of Robin Hood in the twentieth century, specifically the impact that the current events had upon a poetic adaptation as well as the representation of characters within film adaptations.

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[14] Bradley J. Irish, "The Rejected Earl of Leicester, the Rejected Sir Philip Sidney," in *Emotion in the Tudor Court: Literature, History, and Early Modern Feeling*, Rethinking the Early Modern (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 93-136.

[15] Stephen Knight, "Robin Hood and the Forest Laws." *The Bulletin of the International Association for Robin Hood Studies* 1 (2017): 1-12.

In his essay, "'Sherwood in the Twilight': Re-Working Robin Hood on the Eve of the Great War,"[16] Miguel Alarcão presents in full and examines the poem "Song of Sherwood" by Alfred Noyes. Alarcão argues that the poem is "an example of pre-war heritage poetry" (145) and notes "Noyes's poetic recall of the medieval outlaw in the post-Victorian twilight (including its Edwardian and early Georgian afterglows)" (149), which supports his contextualization of the poem through the lens of the eve of World War I.

The Robin Hood legend is well situated to media making statements about war. In "Child Soldiers in Medieval(esque) Cinema,"[17] Peter Burkholder and David Rosen analyze the use of children in warfare in medieval films which "are far more concerned with creating an aura of symbolic, emotional, and psychological authenticity than historical accuracy" (147). While most of the films presented in their examination describe children pressed into service, such as Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) and his *Robin Hood* (2010), which features "orphans [who] show limited agency by offering their military assistance, their role is ultimately ephemeral to the hurdles that the adult protagonists must overcome" (159). The orphans desire to participate in the battle on the beach is motivated by "Marion Loxley's surrogate motherhood" (163) and "the better living standards afforded them by Marion" (159).

Although female characters are added later to the Robin Hood literary tradition, adaptations provide a way to address their importance in the expanding Robin Hood legend. In her essay "'She Is My Eleanor': The Character of Isabella of Angoulême on Film—A Medieval Queen in Modern Media,"[18] Carey Fleiner examines two films, Richard Lester's *Robin and Marian* (1977) and Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010) and provides context for Isabella's characterizations, which "indicate her passion, her influence on politics, and the weakness and folly of the men around her" (95) in her approximate twenty minutes of screen time between the two films (92). Both films play with time, which allows for Isabella's appearance in the films and focus on "flashpoints [such as] the teenaged sex toy… [and then] an opinionated woman" (100). Fleiner posits that "Literary history of course can take liberties that scholarship cannot; moralizing biographies, historical fiction, and film fill in gaps in the sparse historical record, recreating the personalities of such powerful women by hanging contemporary attitudes, cultural mores, and experience on the skeleton of intriguing facts provided by the original sources" (101).

While these discussions of adaptations may not focus solely on the character of Robin as most of our discussion up to this point has, they demonstrate the versatility and depth of the Robin Hood legend and all of its characters.

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[16] Miguel Alarcão, "'Sherwood in the Twilight': Re-Working Robin Hood on the Eve of the Great War," *Gaudium Sciendi* 14 (2018): 141-52.

[17] Peter Burkholder and David Rosen, "Child Soldiers in Medieval(esque) Cinema," in *War, Myths, and Fairy Tales*, ed. Sara Buttsworth and Maartje M. Abbenhuis (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) 147-73.

[18] Carey Fleiner, "'She Is My Eleanor': The Character of Isabella of Angoulême on Film—A Medieval Queen in Modern Media," in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, ed. Janice North, Karl C. Alvestad, and Elena Woodacre, Queenship and Power (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 91-110.

SITUATING ROBIN

Robin Melrose and Stephen Basedo published works which situated the Robin Hood legend within the greater context of medieval literature and history.

In his book *Warriors and Wilderness in Medieval Britain: From Arthur and Beowulf to Sir Gawain and Robin Hood*,[19] Melrose demonstrates the connections between Beowulf, King Arthur, and Robin Hood. He provides a summarized history of the references to Robin Hood with excerpts and focuses on each figure's connection to not only the wilderness and the forest but to each other through the status of outlaw. Melrose argues:

> The Arthur of the Welsh tale *Culhwch* and *Olwen* belonged to the wilderness, and some have seen him as an outlaw like the Irish hero Fionn (or Finn) mac Cumhaill… However, Arthur never regained the outlaw status he may have had … and the role of the outlaw was taken by other figures…his later medieval descendant Robin Hood. (185)

The final two chapters of the book are on Robin Hood in the late Middle Ages, with Melrose naming him the "Wilderness Hero" and providing excerpts from the poems with explanations and connections.

In his chapter "Robin Hood: 'That Celebrated English Outlaw'"[20] from his 2018 book *The Lives & Exploits of the Most Noted Highwaymen, Rogues and Murderers*, Stephen Basedo also explores "some of the historical outlaws whom researchers have identified as being possible candidates for the 'real' Robin Hood" (2). After listing several common possibilities for the "actual" Robin Hood from court rolls, Basedo reminds us "that the name of Robin Hood was often used as an alias by criminals in the late medieval period, and it was used by a variety of people whose actions challenged state authority" (3) He then takes the readers through an accounting of the most pertinent Robin Hood adaptations and makes key points about the figure's relationship with the nation's audience. Basedo argues Sir Walter Scott's reasoning for writing *Ivanhoe* "was to create a shared sense of history around which all people could rally" (10). Later Basedo notes that "Robin Hood is perhaps the perfect hero to be 'Americanised'; he is the man who stands up for the common man against the strong and powerful, much like an American superhero" (14).

CONCLUSION

While most of the scholarship from 2017 and 2018 seemed to consider the interaction between the Robin Hood legend and politics, the approaches and texts used are quite diverse. As proven by many of our authors, revisiting and reexamining generally accepted claims often leads to a productive and enlightening discussion. Studying performance and adaptation continue to be a critical aspect of Robin Hood scholarship.

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[19] Robin Melrose, *Warriors and Wilderness in Medieval Britain: From Arthur and Beowulf to Sir Gawain and Robin Hood* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2017).

[20] Stephen Basedo, "Chapter 1: Robin Hood," in *The Lives & Exploits of the Most Noted Highwaymen, Rogues and Murderers* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword History, 2018), 1-14.

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