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# Robin Hood:

## How the legend evolved and what the Eastern Counties had to do with it

### Chris Wood

Robin Hood has had many faces, many adventures, and many explanations. He is the archetypal Noble Outlaw – noble as in honourable and, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of noble birth. And the Eastern Counties have played an active part in the legend's inspiration, transmission and, perhaps, its enactment.

Some people have looked for a real, historical man as the origin of the legend. Others have made Robin a figurehead of political campaigns, whether radical socialist, conservative, or green. Some have seen a mythic origin and found a Pagan, magical inspiration in the tales. And most people have been happy to enjoy the slapstick humour, swashbuckling derring-do, and feel-good heroics.

There are many books available that try to trace the 'original' Robin Hood. They dig through the layers of accretions trying to find a core historical story that is not there. In the process they discard the far more interesting and inspiring layers that have built up the legend that is known and enjoyed worldwide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This paper is an archaeology of the development of the Robin Hood myth from its various medieval origins to the modern day. I make no apologies for the emphasis on popular culture in this paper: Robin Hood is a popular phenomenon.

### Film and TV

Before looking at the origins of the legend, it is worth setting the scene by sampling modern portrayals. In the last hundred years, Robin Hood has been portrayed in wildly differing ways in film and on TV, although always with certain things in common. Some of the productions stand out, such as the 1922 silent *Robin Hood*, with Douglas Fairbanks, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* from 1938, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, and the two from 1991, *Robin Hood: Prince of*

*Thieves*, with Kevin Costner, and *Robin Hood*, starring Patrick Bergin and Uma Thurman, the latter of which was completely overshadowed by the former, so much so that, although it appears on TV occasionally, it has no British DVD release. Mel Brooks' 1993 spoof, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, actually fits the irreverent spirit of the legend very well.

On TV, the first production was *Robin Hood* in 1953, starring Patrick Troughton, but the best known (and loved) versions are surely *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955-9), starring Richard Greene (a role he reprised in the 1960 Hammer film, *Sword of Sherwood Forest*) and *Robin of Sherwood* (1984-86), starring both Michael Praed and Jason Connery in the lead role, wherein the name, Robin Hood, becomes a title adopted by the man who becomes Herne's Son (more of which later).

The venerable British science-fiction series, *Doctor Who* is based on similar principles, with an exiled noble (a Time Lord), who steals (a time/space ship, the TARDIS) and helps the oppressed. In season 8 (2014), there is even a brilliantly conceived story (*Robot of Sherwood*) where the Doctor meets Robin Hood and the parallels between the two, and the inspirational importance of story and of the female companions of these Trickster characters (see later), are drawn out.

## Robin Hood in Space

Popular culture has taken the Robin Hood story to many strange places. American outlaws have been eulogised (Jesse James) in the style of Robin Hood – and the genre is not dead (viz. folk songs about 1990s ecowarrior Swampy or indeed 'The Hero of Canton' in *Firefly*, see below). Clint Eastwood was *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) and his subsequent film *Pale Rider* (1985) puts an interesting twist on the tale. The bad guy is called 'LaHood' and hires a 'sheriff', and a 'Preacher' (Eastwood) rides in from the wastelands to bring justice to the underdogs. Robin Hood has also inspired films as far away (culturally) as Japan.

Back at home, the spirit of Robin Hood can be seen in many other literary creations, arguably best developed, with a twist, in the *Cadfael* novels of Ellis Peters. Here the righter of wrongs, living on the edge of his community, slipping into the forest at the drop of a hat, is a monk, but a monk with a very worldly history and capable of defending himself. The Noble Outlaw usually has a priestly or at least religious companion, such as Friar Tuck, but sometimes the two figures are merged, as with the Preacher in *Pale Rider*.

Robin Hood has even boldly gone where no archer has gone before. Leaving aside the name of the captain in *Enterprise*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* did a (rather daft) Robin Hood episode (*Qpid*, 1991). But Robin Hood in space has been done much better in other series – perhaps because *Star Trek* is all about the 'good' federation, and so is hardly Noble Outlaw territory! (Although *Voyager* and Rodenberry-inspired *Andromeda* are interesting from this perspective.)

Obvious examples include *Blake's Seven* (1978-81), explicitly, and more recent offerings *Farscape* (1999-2004) and Joss Whedon's *Firefly* (2002). This last was about a band of (mostly) honourable outlaws pitched against the oppressive Alliance

(as much perhaps Josey Wales in space as Robin Hood in space), and itself was outlawed from the schedules (cancelled) only to return with a fairly successful cinema film, *Serenity* (2005). It even did one episode based properly on the Noble Outlaw genre (*Jaynestown*), which also demonstrated how legends can develop independently of actual events.

Robin Hood has always fitted the fantasy genre well. Even the 15<sup>th</sup> century ballads did this. They embody contemporary values and relationships, but are set in another time, two or three centuries earlier, and place, a primeval Greenwood, the same yet different from the real Royal Forests, the more believable the further from Sherwood or Barnsdale the stories are told. This becomes even more the case by the later plays and novels, such that by the time of *Ivanhoe* (1818) it was practically set in stone.

## The Noble Outlaw

What then are the characteristics of the Noble Outlaw stories, as we see them *today*, of which Robin Hood is the archetype? Not all of the manifestations of the Robin Hood legend and the historical parallels mentioned below satisfy all of these criteria, but a pattern is there.

- 1 An honourable outsider, wrongfully outlawed
- 2 Takes to the woods (or other liminal, scary, wilderness place)...
- 3 Has a band of followers,
- 4 From some of whom he faces and loses a challenge before they join...
- 5 And which includes a religious, priestly or shamanic companion.
- 6 He fights for justice
- 7 Against a fractured, corrupt or simply non-existent government (a 'wounded kingship')...
- 8 Whilst remaining loyal to the 'true king' (*i.e.* justice, divine harmony)...
- 9 In whose name he substitutes his own, just social order,
- 10 With the backing of the archetypal feminine,
- 11 But with an inevitable or pre-ordained death.

## Origins and development

Q: Who was the dispossessed Saxon noble, who returned to reclaim his lands from the bad Norman King, disguised himself as a potter to enter the enemy camp, was betrayed by churchmen, escaped to the forest, near Barnsdale, and was eventually reconciled with the King?

A: Hereward (c. 1070) – and the forest was what is now Rockingham Forest, Northamptonshire, and the Barnsdale is in nearby Rutland (although that is cheating a little, as it was not called that until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, being Bernerdeshulle in 1202 (Cox, 1994)). Interestingly, there was also a real Robin Hood imprisoned for activities in Rockingham Forest in 1354...(For more detail on Hereward, see Head (1995) and Rex (2005).)

There are many parallels to Robin Hood in history, legend and mythology. Romances written about historical characters, such as Hereward (c. 1070; right), Eustace the Monk (c. 1170-1217), Fulke Fitzwarren (late 12<sup>th</sup> century - 1256), William Wallace (c. 1270-1305) and Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), predate the written Robin Hood stories and doubtless influenced them. The Bruce even had a claim to the earldom of Huntingdon (Bradbury, 2010).



The East Anglian tale of Tom Hickathrift should also perhaps be considered. A large but dissolute young man, perhaps in the Little John mould, Tom was employed to take a cart-load of beer from King's Lynn to Wisbech, a long journey avoiding the fen and the evil giant who dwelt there. Being a lazy lad, he decided to take the fen road regardless and was challenged by the giant. Taking the cart's axle rod as a staff and a wheel as a shield, Tom bested his foe and returned the land and the giant's ill-gotten gains to the community. A parallel version of the story has Tom battling an oppressive landlord, just before the Norman conquest. There may well have been local circumstances that generated the story, but there is an unquestionable similarity to the story of Hereward (who was exiled before the conquest for being a troublesome young man, but on his return became a hero of the resistance). Elements of the Robin Hood tales may have accreted to Tom Hickathrift's legend as well.

Several people from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, called Robin/Robert Hood/Hude/Hode/Hod, or with the surname Robinhood, have been identified as possible originals, but none fit the bill sufficiently. It is probable that, if there was an original man, he contributed little more than the name and an act for which he was outlawed. Others contributed more. The name was already being used as a *nickname* for felons in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Baldwin (2011) makes a good case for some of the elements of the key ballad, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, being taken from the careers of Roger Godberd and Walter Devyas. These two took to a life of crime to cope with the burden of the fines imposed upon them for being part of the fruitless continuation, in the late 1260s, of Simon de Montford's struggle against Henry III. However, Baldwin also states that the first instance of a criminal's name being changed to 'Robehod' occurred in 1261.

Other outlaw tales, such as *Gamelyn* (14<sup>th</sup> century, but set in the 13<sup>th</sup>) and *Adam Bell* (16<sup>th</sup> century), as well as a number from Scandinavia, follow similar lines to and indeed shared motifs with Robin Hood. (One of Bell's companions, William of Cloudesly, even shoots an apple from his son's head. Whilst the origins of William Tell are beyond the scope of this paper, this does show how stories move around.) Friar tuck and Little John probably came, in part at least, from other outlaw tales. There is also the early 14<sup>th</sup>-century, Anglo-Norman-French *Song of Trailbaston*, with a Greenwood of justice, with archery and outlaws called 'hoods'.

The realities of the outlaw life and the ruthlessness of men in that position, whether by necessity or otherwise, did not stop some outlaws being looked on sympathetically

by the peasantry, as they were seen to be opposed to dishonest royal officials (Baldwin, 2011).

The ballads of an outlawed yeoman or forester by the name of Robin Hood are set between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tales were clearly current in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1377) mentions them. But they were not committed to writing, as far as we know, until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the earliest extant versions are from about 1500. This goes some way to explaining the historical anachronisms in the earliest printed versions (17<sup>th</sup> century).

The locations of the ballads are interesting. The earliest manuscripts are written in northern dialects (Yorkshire and North Midlands), save for *Robin Hood and the Potter*, which is probably in Norfolk dialect and indeed owned by a bailiff to, and relative by marriage of, the Norfolk Paston family (Ohlgren, 2007). Could Hereward even have been the origin of the potter disguise tale, at least as far as Robin Hood is concerned?

The ballads have Robin active in Yorkshire, with real placenames around Barnesdale (e.g. the Sayles, Kirklees, Doncaster and Wentbridge), and in Nottingham and Sherwood Forest. There are a few other, fragmentary early written sources (15<sup>th</sup> century), giving us “Robyn hod in scherewod stod” (Lincoln, c. 1400-1425), “Robin Hood in Barnsdale stood” (mid-15<sup>th</sup> century) and “Robyn Hode Inne Greenwode stode” (Wiltshire, 1432). ‘Sherwood’ simply means ‘Shire Wood’ (Ekwall, 1960), so *could* have had more general application. There is also every reason to suppose that local versions would use local placenames.

There is another early source for Robin Hood, which actually comes from different geographical areas: East Anglia, the South of England, the West Country and Scotland, but *not* Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire or Wales (Bradbury, 2010). This source is the plethora of popular Robin Hood plays and games from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries that were part of widespread Spring, May or Whitsun festivities – the time when summer activities were beginning.

It is the Paston family of Norfolk that we have to thank for the preservation of the sole surviving medieval text of a Robin Hood play, and the first text including Friar Tuck (Dobson & Taylor, 1997). The play, *Robin Hood and the Sheriff*, covers similar territory to *Guy of Gisborne* and was written down in about 1475, but there is evidence from one of Sir John Paston's letters that the play was performed for the Paston family as early as 1469 or 70, only the second recorded instance of a Robin Hood play, the first being in Exeter in 1427 (Marshall, 2000).

The spring festivities also included a French pastoral Robin (of completely separate origins), who brought his Marian with him across the Channel. He merged with the English outlaw to create a more complex Robin: Summer King and Lord of Misrule. The latter was doubtless coloured by stories of the trickster sprite Robin Goodfellow, but was a feel-good figure, allowing a little licentiousness within the bounds of social structures. As an opiate, Robin could not ultimately win, hence the matches between him and other combatants, which he always loses.

There were also dances involving Maid Marian and a comic friar. He struck a chord with rival outlaw tales of a ‘Frere Tuck’ and the two characters merged to become part

of the Robin Hood universe. Tuck was not however a solid part of the stories until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the novel *Ivanhoe*. Marian, however, became a firm part of the literary legend in the 16<sup>th</sup> century due to the Reformation. Robin could no longer be seen to be devoted to the Virgin Mary, so he came to have his Maid Marian instead. But out on the village green, the Robin Hood games began to give way to Morris dancing as the 16<sup>th</sup> century progressed, and Marian made the transition to being the man-woman in the Morris (Hutton, 1996).

Archery is prominent in the stories as it was a key part of the games, indeed perhaps the most important part from the point of view of the feudal overlords, as it encouraged a skill useful in warfare. Other aspects of the festivities were more suspicious. Bishop Hugh Latimer complained, in 1549, that people preferred the Robin Hood games and fairs to coming to church, even though Robin Hood was “a traitor and a thief”.

## Historical Echoes

A number of historical figures who came after the popularisation of Robin Hood seem to fit the pattern of the stories. Notable here is the story of Robert Kett (Bindoff, 1949; Cornwall, 1977; Hoare, 1999; Land, 1977; Sotherton, 1987; Wood, 2007; Woods, 1615). In 1549, the year Bishop Latimer was fulminating against the Robin Hood plays, Kett led a march on Norwich (then England’s second city), which became a major rebellion, calling for justice. The rebels camped outside the city on Mousehold Heath and in Thorpe Woods, developing an alternative commonwealth, but were eventually defeated in a pitched battle by the Earl of Warwick, and Kett himself was executed as a traitor.



This call for justice at a time of fractured governance (the King was sickly boy, Edward VI, and the Duke of Norfolk was in the Tower), coming from the woods and wastes outside the city, was instrumental in the development of the first national poor law, as it sparked the levy of a poor rate, the architect of which, John Aldrich, was asked to model the national scheme at the suggestion of Archbishop Matthew Parker, who had preached in Kett’s camp (Reynolds, 2005).

Interestingly, the spark for the ‘Commotion in Norfolk’ seems to have been the summer fair on Wymondham, a likely occasion for a Robin Hood play. Bradbury (2010) is certain there was one, although he does not give his source. The fair was, however, focussed on the commemoration of the Translation of St. Thomas à Beckett on 7<sup>th</sup> July and featured a procession and a play, called the ‘Windham Game’, based on the life of the martyred archbishop in the erstwhile (following Henry VIII’s suppression of religious guilds in 1545) chapel of the Gild of St. Thomas in the town (Garrard, 2003; Holstun, 2008). The Beckett cult was also a focus for ideas of rebellion against oppressive authority and unjust government, as has been noted by Wood (2007).

Whether or not there was a Robin Hood play involved in the sparking of Kett's Rebellion, it certainly echoes the themes and motifs of the legend.

## Theatre and Novels

London-based Plays took off in the Elizabethan era and (along with the printed versions of the ballads) became the new focus for the development of the legend when the Puritans suppressed the games in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Theatre survived as it made money for the new middle class...

In 1600, Anthony Munday moved the story on by making Robin the dispossessed Earl of Huntingdon, rebelling against unjust authority (which was easier to get past the censors), with Marian as the love interest and Prince John as the arch-villain (inspired by the work of early 'historian' John Maior). In Munday's time, the Earl of Huntingdon was Henry Hastings (of Bruce descent), who had been seen by Protestants as a possible successor to Queen Elizabeth (Bradbury, 2010).

By the nineteenth century, the novel had arrived, and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1818) brought developments in the legend to a new plateau. Robin Hood was now firmly Saxon, against the oppressive Normans, yet also a dispossessed noble, living in the time of Kings Richard and John (previously it had been an unspecified Edward or Henry). Anachronism is standard in Robin Hood! Robin now robbed from the rich to give to the poor, whereas formerly the emphasis had been on robbing from the undeserving and helping the underdog. Guy of Gisborne was also now given a starring rôle, instead of his (fatal) bit part in the ballad, *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

## Politics and Pantomime

During the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, there were interesting political developments to the legend, in that Robin Hood was used by the Victorians to both justify *and* question the Empire (Barczewski, 2000), and that the fight for fairness and against injustice was transmuted into a socialist fight, clearly seen in the Robin Hood that T.H White inserted into his *The Once and Future King*. At the same time, the slapstick entertainment, that has always been part of Robin Hood, found a new home in pantomime, which of course allowed satirical portrayals to creep under censorious eyes.

Moving forward to the 1990s, we have the example of ecowarrior 'Swampy' (Daniel Hooper), whose conflict with the relevant authorities was seen by the press (and folk musicians in turn) as being like Robin Hood and the Sheriff, when he and many others took to the trees and tunnels to block unpopular road schemes.

## Mythical Myths

A further significant development, beginning in the Victorian age, was that people started looking for a mythical origin to Robin Hood. This was the era of the romantic

ideas of a Universal Neolithic Great Goddess and of Medieval and early modern witches being the debased remnants of pre-Christian religion.

A major event was the 1931 publication of Margaret Murray's *The God of the Witches*. The Great Mother Goddess was here overshadowed by the Horned God, supposedly worshipped since the Paleolithic, at least, on very flimsy evidence. Horned figures from around the world, whether gods or not, whether well attested or not (e.g. Cernunnos or Herne), were swept up into the melting pot and dumped into the figure of the 'Devil' who supposedly presided over witch covens (Hutton, 1993; 1996; 1999). One of these figures was Robin Hood.

Of the others, Herne has become significant in the Robin Hood universe (see below). Our earliest source for him is Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Harte, 1996) – a huntsman who stalks around an oak tree “with great ragged horns” – but is it the man who has the horns or the tree? This takes place in Windsor Great Park, with its important heronry. 'Herne' means heron! (N.B. the apparently one-legged heron is linked to the Wounded King (see later) and to the Divine Smith, who creates and destroys...)

Murray's book, whilst its arguments have been refuted, is important in that it *inspired* many elements in the Modern Pagan Witchcraft movement, became a small but important part of the popular perception of Robin Hood, and in particular inspired Richard Carpenter's 1980s TV series, *Robin of Sherwood* (1982-5).

The series retold the Robin Hood story with a popular Paganism surviving in the forest (with remarkably modern trappings and a penchant for music consisting of a 'folky' version of the theme tune to Richard Carpenter's previous children's hit, *Catweazle*). It had the Horned God in the form of Herne the Hunter, mediated by a mysterious shaman. It also reintroduced the Moor, not seen in the RH stories since the heyday of the Tudor Spring Games.

(It is also worth noting that the bow is a symbol and tool of polarity. Creative polarity is the foundation of magic. In modern Pagan Witchcraft this is most obvious in the forms of masculine/feminine or gender polarity, particularly in Wicca, and light/dark polarity, particularly in Traditional Witchcraft. In *Robin of Sherwood*, Herne says to Robin: “The powers of Light and Dark are strong in you.”)

## The Timeless Tale

The Wildwood or Greenwood is a modern dreamtime, an otherworld existing in a mythical past. One way of seeing the past is that it is still around us now. Different historical periods can thus be mixed and even modern thought-forms included. It can be anachronistic, but it has to be believable.

This Greenwood dreamtime reflects modern society's subconscious yearnings for the wild (but sitting uneasily with the parallel fear of the woods). Here lives the Green Man of the modern collective consciousness and the Lord of the Wild or Horned God of the pagan cultural stream, be He 'The God' of Wicca, Pan, Herne, Cernunnos or Odin.



Robin Hood can be seen, today, as the spirit of the forest and of the wild, in its spring-summer aspect, paralleled in the autumn & winter by the horned hunter. He is Trickster and Culture Hero, stealing the spark of life from uncaring higher powers. He is the Green Man who calls mortals to His aid, to wear His mantle of green. Robin Hood is still able to inspire community-wide support for protest movements (e.g. the roads protests of the 1990s).

This 'Matter of the Greenwood' is the flip-side of the 'Matter of Britain' (Keen, 1987). In the Arthurian tales there are those who fulfil a rôle similar to Robin Hood. Perceval does to a certain extent, but Lancelot, late an addition as he is, perhaps fits the bill best. He is chosen by Guenevere when Arthur fails to live up to expectations. The legends tell the same story of the Grail healing the Wasteland, but from two different perspectives. The land, through the Queen, the human representative of Sovereignty, chooses another King, when the Wounded King cannot heal the Wasteland. A new champion or Culture Hero emerges from the land called waste, the badlands, the place of outlaws – the King of the Outlaws.

Indeed, Dobson & Taylor (1997) point out: “the early outlaw legend was at least in part a deliberate parody of the conventions of Arthurian romance.”

Wounded Kingship (bad government in whatever form) produces the Wasteland, yet from the Wasteland – the wild, lawless places (outside the city wall, such as the Mousehold encampment of Kett's Rebellion) – comes a new way, at once anarchic and ordered (the powers of Light and Dark in creative polarity). It is the sterility of the Wasteland against which the Trickster / Culture Hero rebels ... a Rebellion of the Heart (as Val Thomas put it), or, in Arthurian terms, of the well-spring of Sovereignty. Heady, dangerous stuff!

In Kett's camp, a new order was enacted. As Holstun (2008) articulates, the camp embodied a “monarcho-populist utopia”, an innovative new yet traditionalist system based on small producers, rejecting both the ascendant capitalism and the old-school gentlemen's oligarchy.

The Matter of Britain was familiar to the Tudor establishment, and it feared the 'Matter of Mousehold', reacting to it with what Holstun (2008) calls the “hysterical sublime”, a structural inability to understand the causes and issues at stake, and a reactionary, hysterical fulmination against what it could not understand without questioning its own existence, preceding decisive, pre-emptive violence. The archetypal Sheriff of Nottingham exemplifies this “hysterical sublime” perfectly. Of course, in as much as the audience for Robin Hood was the higher echelons of society, the gentlemen, the tales also served to salve their consciences: they would not stoop so low as the Sheriff of Nottingham, you see...

## **The Dark Side**

Of the criteria characterising Noble Outlaw stories outlined earlier, it is perhaps the challenge motifs (4 and 7) that have led to the greatest misunderstanding of the myths. The fight of a summer king against a corrupt authority sounds like the myth

of the summer and winter kings, fighting each other to succeed alternately as the year turns. Certainly rebellions often turn into the very things they originally opposed (in the words of The Who, we keep getting “fooled again”) and in the ballads, Robin is accepted into the King’s court.

The Trickster, whether Robin Hood, Raven, Loki or Pale Rider, has to rebel again, indeed against himself. Any literary Trickster has to have a dark nemesis: the Sheriff for Robin Hood, the Master for the Doctor, Moriarty for Sherlock Holmes...

This combat is emphasised in the context of Robin Hood by John Matthews, in his book, *Robin Hood: Green Lord of the Wildwood* (1993), and is perfectly valid as a modern, mythological or Pagan reading. However, by assuming that this is the origin of the legend, coupled with Sir James Frazer’s sacrificial kingship (continued by Margaret Murray), Matthews is led to a very patriarchal perspective, with the two kings fighting for the ‘right’ to the maiden of spring, which is justifiably criticised in an afterword to the book by Chesca Potter: “The core of this mythology is rotten.” Having established that, there is no choice but to reinvent the mythology, which she attempts to do, invoking a new archetype of the Green Woman.

## The Real Ringleader

However, valid as this may be, the Greenwood mythos does not need it, as it already contains a powerful feminine force, especially today. In the ballads, Robin is dedicated to the Virgin Mary; later the feminine becomes apparently more subservient, although not to the extent of the Rape of the Flower Bride, as alluded to by Chesca Potter.

In a modern mythological reading alternative to that of Matthews, it is actually Sovereignty, the Lady of the Greenwood, Marian, who chooses the King of the Outlaws. In the ballad, *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, the Virgin Mary comes to Robin’s aid once invoked, bringing him renewed strength. Marian comes to embody the forest and chooses her hero. She can also be seen as the one who brings about his death.

The 1976 film, *Robin and Marian*, is probably the first to make the connection explicit. Here, Robin, on being reconciled with the King, goes off to the crusades and Marian enters a convent. Years later, Robin returns to Sherwood and finds things still corrupt, in the form of a world-weary Sheriff, but yet different. There is no place for him anymore; he is no longer of the Greenwood. Marian, now Abbess of Kirklees (the character in the ballads who kills Robin), recognises this and ends his and her sense of emptiness with poison.

So, in the modern myth, far from it being Marian who is fought over by unfeeling men, it is actually She who chooses Her champion. The key point is that it is the feminine principle which decides, which holds the right to rule – Marian and Guenevere choose; they are not forced. The champions are in any case both aspects of the same character, who changes as the year turns. The title of this section is taken from in the Doctor Who story, *Robot of Sherwood*, where it is the Doctor’s companion, Clara (representing the Marian character), who is taken to be “the real

ringleader” by a listening guard, whilst the Doctor and Robin are bickering in a dungeon.

The Summer King / Winter King dichotomy is one part of the wider mythology of twin brothers to be found possibly worldwide. It is this wider light/dark, good king / bad king *polarity* that manifests as the wounded kingship. In this context it is interesting that the archetypal split kingship in Robin Hood is the Richard:John dichotomy, in which Richard is seen as the good, true king, whereas in reality, Richard used the country’s resources for a far-off war and was absent most of the time, whereas, by the standards of the time, John was a better ruler.

The uncertainty as to who is the good and who is the bad king emphasises that it is the equilibrium (a dynamic equilibrium, certainly) between them that is important, not the victory of one over the other. Like Robert Kett, Robin the Greenwood challenger does not want to take over and become King himself (except of his patch), he wants to serve the just, whole, healed King. With the equilibrium restored, the inherent creative polarity can do its work once more, the Wasteland can be healed, and the land can flourish.

(For Pagans, none of this contradicts a seasonal rendition. Robin is the Lord of the summer-green woods. When autumn arrives, he becomes the Horned Hunter, Herne, one-legged watcher of the murky mere, the Fisher King, who is also the Wounded King (Matthews, 1997). His wound is separation from his Marian, who has become the Dark Lady of Winter (Abbess of Kirklees). But with her renewal in the spring, the hunter’s bow reflects the tensions of that season and Robin is reborn.)

## **Conclusion**

Disparate stories have come together and changed their meanings for different times and for different people. Every culture seems to develop its own Tricksters and Culture Heroes to suit its needs from the mythic and legendary material at its disposal. This may not have been the *origin* of Robin Hood, *contra* many commentators since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather one of the *results* of the stirring of the cauldron of stories by countless hands over the centuries, out of which each generation draws a broth to nourish its own existential needs. The stories have the power to help people cope with misfortune and hardship, and the power to inspire radical thinking and change.

**May the Rebellion of the Heart shine in all of us.**

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## **Note**

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