

Reviews

HELEN PHILLIPS, ed., *Robin Hood Medieval and Post-Medieval*. Dublin, Ireland and Portland, Oregon: Four Courts Press, 2005. Pp. 197. ISBN: 1-8518-931-8. £55/€50/\$65.

As Helen Phillips notes in her lucid and comprehensive introduction to this important volume of essays, there has been a major upsurge in scholarly interest in Robin Hood studies in the past decade. She attributes this renewed interest to the interdisciplinarity of the subject, the current academic concern with popular culture, national identity and the nature of medievalism, and the general interest in law and violence, class and politics, attitudes to wilderness, and gender identity. All these aspects feature in one way or another in this collection, and there is not one of these essays that does not contain some fresh insight or new angle to enrich our understanding of the Robin Hood phenomenon. Douglas Gray, whose pioneering essay 'The Robin Hood poems' in 1984 was a major contribution to the field, provides a magisterial overview of developments since that date in 'Everybody's Robin Hood,' nuancing and in some cases revising his earlier judgments.

Derek Pearsall, Thomas Ohlgren, and Ray Percy provide new and thought-provoking interpretations of the ballads *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter* and the seminal collection *The Gest of Robin Hood*. Richard Firth Green persuasively argues for the influence of the little known Middle English poem *The Hermit and the Outlaw* on the story of Robin Hood's death. Timothy S. Jones intriguingly locates the story of Tristan in the tradition of tales of noble outlaws.

David Hepworth provides the first comprehensive account of Robin Hood's grave. It is a masterly piece of analysis and lends unexpected support to the tradition of a Wakefield origin for Robin. Liz Oakley-Brown examines the two Anthony Munday plays, which conferred noble status on Robin, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (1598). In a subtle and carefully argued piece, she suggests that Munday was doing more than to historicize and gentryfy Robin, as others have claimed, but that he was deliberately setting up a variety of dual identities and an instability of setting that perhaps reflected his alternative career as a government double agent in the authorities' campaign against Catholic dissidence. In an exemplary and highly satisfying piece of analysis, Stephen Knight identifies the English sources used by Ben Jonson in transforming a pastoral masque into his unfinished Robin Hood play, *The Sad Shepherd*. They turn out to be Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, Munday's *Huntington* plays, *The Gest of Robin Hood*, and William Warner's *Albions England*. He also speculates that it may not

have been unfinished because Jonson died but because he found that the hybrid of the classical pastoral and gentleman outlaw themes was just not working.

Linda Troost interestingly excavates *The Noble Peasant* (1784), a comic opera by the radical playwright Thomas Holcroft with music by William Shield. It involved a complicated plot set during the ninth century Danish invasions of Saxon England and featured the ballad outlaw heroes Adam Bell, Clym o' the Clough, and William of Cloudesley. She shows that Holcroft used the period setting and the outlaws to give voice to his radical anti-authoritarian sentiments. Helen Phillips demonstrates how in *Shirley* Charlotte Bronte used elements of the Robin Hood story and in particular his murder by the Prioress of Kirklees to express three key political issues in the novel: feminism, political violence, and industrialization. Lois Potter rediscovers *Sherwood*, a forgotten play by an unjustly neglected poet Alfred Noyes, which combines the historical/political setting of Munday's plays with the fairyland elements in Tennyson's *The Foresters* and gives them a Christian subtext concerning death and rebirth. Michael R. Evans examines Robin Hood place names to see if they lend support to Robin as a mythological rather than an historical figure. He concludes, contrary to Sir Sidney Lee who argued that an originally mythological figure was historicized by latter ballad writers, that the place names came after the ballads and as a whole are too late to confirm either mythological or historical origin. This fine scholarly collection is essential reading for anyone interested in the phenomenon of Robin Hood.

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