

# Robin Hood and the Crusades: When and Why Did the Longbowman of the People Mount Up Like a Lord?

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In the mid 1950s some thirty million people in Britain and the United States would each week watch an episode of the British-made *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. It starred Richard Greene as the officer-type hero, returned from the crusades and forced, through the vileness of the Norman lords under bad Prince John, to take to the forests to defend English freedom.<sup>1</sup> As a nobleman and a returning crusader, Robin rode into the opening scene, and he is remembered as a cavalryman: the theme song, still widely known, goes “Robin Hood, Robin Hood, riding through the glen, Robin Hood, Robin Hood, with his band of men.”<sup>2</sup> But what does this imply? Is it just Robin on a horse leading his faithful infantry? Or are all the band mounted, like fox-hunters, or lost cowboys? Or are the two lines alternatives: perhaps Robin might *either* ride through the glen on his own *or* might just be there on foot with his band of men? And why, in any case, is it a glen — a word connected with Scotland, not English Nottingham? This paper will discuss issues like these in light of the long-lasting Robin Hood tradition. But the most interesting question is simply where this idea of Robin on horseback came from, and where and why the crusades became involved.

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1 For a description of the series and its reception, see Richards, “Robin Hood on Film and Television,” 67.

2 Whereas people firmly, even aggressively, recall this as the opening song, it was in fact performed as the end credits rolled; television, and film, had not yet developed the identifying and marketing device of the pre-title song, though there was over the opening titles in the series a completely forgotten, and very feeble, sung quatrain that summarized the action of the following episode, as in a Canto of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*.

## A Pedestrian Outlaw

The earliest Robin Hood ballads are remarkably unlike the modern standard image of the hero.<sup>3</sup> He is a yeoman, not a lord, and his social relations with his band are lateral, not hierarchical. He is not hiding away in the forest until his king returns: he is, like a real outlaw, there all the time and always against the king, or at least against the king's officers. He has a very small (and thus historically accurate) band, not the politically challenging regiment of men that he develops under the influence of Scottish ideas of resistant outlawry.<sup>4</sup> He lives in a late medieval present, not in the time of good King Richard or bad Prince John — the latter's usurping villainy made, in a sixteenth-century renovation, Robin's resistance in fact hierarchy-supporting and conservative. He has no relations with a Lady Marian: his only gendered emotion is his worship of St. Mary (apart from his male friendships, of course). Most striking of all, he does not rob the rich to give to the poor: he takes from the rich and corrupt to give to himself and his friends, not yet deploying the *de haut en bas* patronization of charity.

This image of a reasonably credible late medieval outlaw is emphasized by the fact that he is always on foot. Not only was that a basic marker of class: it was also functional. It is impossible to draw and shoot a longbow from the saddle, and that seriously threatening weapon, which can pierce armour and fell a war-horse, is central to the earliest identity of the ballad outlaw, and to the social challenge inherent in his representation. It seems entirely proper in that context that the proverbial statement, recognized in law as an example of a well-known truth, is that "Robin Hood in Barnsdale stood," as distinct from television Robin riding onto our screens.

There would appear to be a contradiction to the notion of Robin Hood the pedestrian in a woodcut at the start of the earliest version of *The Gest of Robin Hood*, printed in Antwerp in about 1500 (*Fig. 1*). It shows a bow-carrying man on a large horse, much like a knight's charger. Apparently, no commentator has thought this odd. But my argument here, that Robin has only in later centuries come to ride, and to crusade, requires engagement with this illustration. First, there is textual inauthenticity. This woodcut is actually re-used from Pynson's slightly earlier version of Caxton's *Canterbury Tales*, where it represents the Yeoman.<sup>5</sup> That kind of print-shop economy was common,

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3 This paragraph summarizes material found in Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*, esp. chap. 1 "Many Men Speak of Robin Hood": Versions of the Hero," 1-10.

4 On this point, see Knight, "Rabbie Hood."

5 I am grateful to Thomas H. Ohlgren for sharing with me his new research on the details, dates, and publishers of these texts ahead of its publication in *Robin Hood: The Early Poems*, 103-107.



Figure 1. Is this Robin Hood? Mounted man carrying bow, from *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode*, published in Antwerp in c.1500. This text drew on Pynson's now fragmentary *Gest* of c.1495, which presumably also used this illustration, which had been used by Pynson for the Knight's Yeoman in his print of *The Canterbury Tales*, 1492.

through to the nineteenth century, but calls into question the authenticity of an equestrian Robin so early. Whether Chaucer refers to Robin Hood in the yeoman, as he surely does in the devil in "The Friar's Tale," both mounted, is another matter, not relevant here though intriguing enough and, I think, answerable in the positive, but both would be no more than the shadow of an equestrian Robin Hood, quite absent from the ballads.

But it is still true that, even if borrowed, this very early text offers us a mounted Robin. Or does it? How sure are we that this illustration is, in fact, Robin? Would Robin Hood really wear spurs, as this figure does? A knight would, and the only mounted person in

the *Gest* who rides alone carrying a bow is in fact the knight: after Robin has helped him regain his lands, he comes back to the forest riding on “his good palfray” with bows and arrows as “A pore present” for Robin.<sup>6</sup> I suggest this may well be a representation of the return of the knight. Apart from perhaps justifying a cut of somebody riding with a bow, the story of the knight in the *Gest* is unusual in several ways. It starts the story, and seems to link with certain early resemblances, unique to this text, both in its period and since, between Robin and King Arthur. Robin waits for a guest before having dinner, and gives formal commands to his men as he never does elsewhere, not even when he later becomes an earl and, later again, a horseman and even a crusader. I suggest that just as much of Caxton’s business was to present chivalric material to a largely urban audience in what Arthur B. Ferguson called “The Indian Summer of English Chivalry,”<sup>7</sup> so the gentry opening to the *Gest*, focused on the knight and Robin’s rescue of his endangered status, is audience-targeted, and this manoeuvre is for good sales-oriented reasons focused in this initial (and only) illustration. It is quite possible that the woodcut, like the opening stanzas, is meant to elevate the plodding outlaw story to a level more in keeping with the genteel, even chivalric, tone of books at the time.

Interestingly — class will out — this gentrifying opening does not last. The knight’s story is resolved and the *Gest* continues with more familiar conflicts between Robin, Little John, and the Sheriff. The story of the knight is used to start the *Gest* on a socially elevated and, as far as Robin’s actions are concerned, upwardly mobile basis, easing the yeoman radical into the book-buying market. But though the knight is definitely a horseman, he is not a returning crusader: in fact, he suggests that his ruin is so complete he may have to go on crusade:

“Hasteley I wol me buske,” sayde the knight,  
 “Over the salte see,  
 And se where Criste was quykke and dede,  
 On the mount of Calveré.”

(223-26)

Later, when the king arrives, it is not from crusade, which is hardly surprising as this is a King Edward (number not specified), not the king who is later involved with Robin, Richard I, the Lionheart.

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6 *A Gest of Robin Hood in Robyn Hode and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Knight and Ohlgren, ll. 1049 and 1100. Hereafter, line references are provided parenthetically in the text above.

7 Ferguson, *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry*.

It is not just crusading that is of no interest in the early Robin Hood context: the mounted knight himself made no impact on the tradition. Though the *Gest* was mined for broadside ballads in the print-hungry seventeenth century, producing “The King’s Disguise and Friendship with Robin Hood” and “Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow,” and was also the source for part of “Robin Hood and the Sheriffe” in the Forresters manuscript of about 1670,<sup>8</sup> the story of Robin rescuing the knight is completely disregarded by poetic and theatrical versions of the story until the nineteenth century, such as Tennyson’s late verse play *The Foresters*, where the *Gest* was used as a medievalizing source, and, compatible with Robin’s now widespread gentrification, horse-riding came, at a slow and uncertain pace, into the tradition and its meaning.

This is not to obscure the fact that there are other equestrian moments in the *Gest* — but they focus on characters who are not outlaws. Like the knight, the sheriff rides while Little John (briefly his servant) goes on foot; the monks ride luxuriously “Eche on a good palferay” (852), but the outlaws do not steal their horses, only their money. The knight’s wife expresses her class position by riding, but walking remains the default mode of outlaw transportation: Robin “walked into the forest” (1313). The king and his men ride to Nottingham and the forest but then walk into it, followed by their horses, now proletarianized from cavalry mounts to pack-horses. The one moment when Robin is mounted occurs when he and the king finish their manly games and they “rode” together to Nottingham. Equally interestingly, the ballad that is cut out of this part of the *Gest*, “The King’s Disguise and Friendship with Robin Hood,” does not accept this moment of equine appropriation and merely says they have “gone” together to the town.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in general and as a class-based political rule, it’s two legs good, four legs bad in the yeoman ballads. A couple of horses do appear among the outlaws, but they both seem inauthentic. In the *Gest*, Robin was able, from some mysterious source, to equip the knight with horse and accoutrements, and in “Robin Hood and the Potter,” he is able to provide a fine lady’s horse for the Sheriff’s wife. Just as the knight himself seems a gentrified detour at the start of the *Gest*, so the courtly language between Robin and

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8 Forresters MS, London, British Library, MS Add. 71158. For “Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow,” see Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 541-48. “The King’s Disguise and Friendship with Robin Hood” is printed in Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 3:220-22. “Robin Hood and the Sheriffe” is found only in a late seventeenth-century manuscript discovered in 1993; Knight, ed., *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript*, ix. The text is printed in Knight, ed., *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript*, 23-33.

9 Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 222, stanza 33, line 1.

the wife suggests a momentary loop from a romance. The horses, as in the woodcut, seem a sign of generic contamination.

But what about the ballad of “Robin Hood and Sir Guy of Gisborne,” where Robin’s opponent appears disguised as a forester, and heavily disguised at that, as he is wearing a horse skin, including the head. Commentators have been excited at the possible sighting of an appealingly extreme version of folklore here, and the enthusiasm has been extended into Robin’s own possible homoerotic nature.<sup>10</sup> But perhaps, as with Pynson’s mounted apparent outlaw, there is another explanation. Part of Guy’s status as a serious enemy is that he too does not ride at all — he just dresses like a horse: he is not so much a horseman as a horse-man. A walking yeoman inauthentically doing gentry bounty-hunting business lies behind this strange appearance, I suggest, not just, or perhaps not at all, the magic or gender matters that have so far been preferred. Robin, of course, hijacks and reverses this equine social posturing when, having killed Guy, he frees Little John while himself dressed in the horse-skin. And to distance the horse element of this ballad further, just as it was not unfair to point to the actual inauthenticity of Pynson’s woodcut, it is legitimate to note that “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne,” being not recorded until the Percy manuscript of the 1640s<sup>11</sup> and bearing in its first stanza a quite suspicious resemblance to the first stanza of “Robin Hood and the Monk,” is a text whose medieval authenticity must be doubtful.

But even though it may well be a piece of sixteenth-century medievalism, like *Chevy Chase* or *The Battle of Otterburn*, not to mention the generically much closer *Adam Bell*, *Clym o’ the Clough* and *William of Cloudesley*, and though it at least admits the appearance of a horse, the Gisborne story in its action keeps its feet firmly on the ground. At the end even the Sheriff simply runs away, which is remarkable as he has to get all the way from Yorkshire to Nottingham: no wonder John catches him with an arrow through the head.

The notion of the pedestrian outlaw lasts a good while. Martin Parker, in his long, printed ballad of 1632, *The True Tale of Robin Hood*, makes the hero an earl readily enough but never puts him on horseback (*Fig. 2*). His enemies, an abbot and the bishop of Ely, ride with massive bodies of men, but the outlaws stand and deliver from their longbows.<sup>12</sup>

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10 On Robin, Guy, and folklore, see Kane, “Horseplay,” 106 n. 13. Kane discusses Guy as “an imperfect version of the traditional wildman image.” Kane also discusses the homoerotic potential of the encounter; Kane, “Horseplay,” 107-10.

11 London, British Library, MS Add. 27879, “Collection of English Metrical Romances and Ballads.”

12 Martin Parker, *A True Tale of Robin Hood*, in Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 602-25.



Figure 2. Seventeenth-century Robin Hood with spurs, from Martin Parker's ballad-epic *A True Tale of Robin Hood*, 1632.

Anthony Munday, the originator of the gentrified narrative, is himself very shy about riding. Little John does tell Robin that “your horses” will be waiting at an inn,<sup>13</sup> but when they leave, he is merely loading a pack-pony (513-14). There is no hint of equestrian behaviour as Robin approaches or is in the forest. But King Richard is appropriately, royally, different: fresh from the “heathen warres,” he gallops in with “twelve and twenty score of horses” (2708, 2657).

13 Anthony Munday, *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, in Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 303-401, line 294.

With very few exceptions, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ballads tell stories, in single-sheet “broadside” and collected “garland” form, about an unmounted Robin. In the common “Robin Hood meets his match” ballad-type, the hero strolls through the forest and fights on foot whomever he meets. When he is accompanied on his trouble-seeking forest trips, he, John, and Will ramble about taking the air and their chances together. A striking version of this pedestrianism is “Robin Hood and the Prince of Aragon.” It has some romance features — a maiden on a horse brings the king news of an ogre-like enemy, there is a tournament, and a hero is needed to save a lady. But although the king offers the outlaws lances, and “the trumpets began to sound a charge,”<sup>14</sup> the heroic three just march into battle and, of course, to victory.

In “Robin Hood and the Valiant Knight,” the king commands “a trusty and worthy knight”<sup>15</sup> to arrest Robin, but Sir William leads only bowmen against Robin’s men in a bitter infantry battle; in “Robin Hood’s Chase,” it would seem, from the territory covered by the king and his quarry Robin (the length of England from London to Newcastle via Sherwood), that they must be mounted, but the matter is left silent: the only verbs of motion used are “go” and “come,” and not a horse is mentioned. In the same way “Robin Hood and Queen Katherine” does not state how the outlaws get from Sherwood to London. And though the Queen’s page/messenger who invites them south might seem to be a rider as the Queen tells him to “post,” in fact he goes on foot: “Sometimes he went, sometimes hee ran.”<sup>16</sup>

In the ballads, even lord Robin does not ride. The one fully gentrified version, “Robin Hood and Maid Marian,” a print-shop confection of the late seventeenth century,<sup>17</sup> has Robin as an earl and Marian as his beloved: it deploys the upmarket fiction of the girl seeking her beloved in male costume, followed by misrecognition, a fight — she does well — then recognition and embracing. But this detritus of gentry romance does not include any sign of a horse, let alone a crusade. The earl and his beloved settle down as forest outlaws for life, and the ballad has basically still a yeoman structure, however elaborated.

14 “Robin Hood and the Prince of Aragon,” in Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 3:147-50, stanza 39, line 1, and stanza 38, line 4.

15 Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 3:225-26, stanza 4, line 1.

16 Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 3:197-200, stanza 6, line 1. This is from a Wood broadside ballad, dated perhaps as early as 1640; see Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 563. The parallel sequence is torn out of the contemporary Percy folio version, and there is no page’s journey in the 1663 Garland version; but the Forresters manuscript of about 1670, which has a fuller and much clearer account of all the action, follows the Wood version quoted. Thus, this can be taken as authoritative.

17 “Robin Hood and Maid Marian,” in Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 493-98.

But Robin can seem to change his habits. The familiar seventeenth-century broadside woodcut of Robin and his friends in Civil War outfits (*Fig. 3*) will occasionally have spurs added. Yet when the texts, rarely, make him ride, there seem clear signs of exoticism. In “Robin Hood and the Bishop,” the sheriff thinks Robin is mounted, because he has him under arrest on a horse, but in fact he has in custody an old woman whom Robin had previously helped and who has changed clothes to save him. This deuterorobin carnivalizes the situation when she invites the sheriff to prove her gender identity by saying “Lift up my leg and see” — awkwardly, even inauthentically, while still on the horse.<sup>18</sup> The one ballad where Robin is on horseback is “Robin Hood’s Birth, Breeding,



Figure 3. Seventeenth-century Robin Hood without spurs, from the broadside ballad “The Noble Fisherman,” c.1650.

18 “Robin Hood and the Bishop,” in Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 549–55, line 72.

Valour, and Marriage.” Here he is, very rarely for the ballads, somewhat gentrified: at the start, he and his mother ride off to Uncle Gamwell’s mansion. Then Robin and Little John, himself elevated as “page,” go hunting in Sherwood — though only with longbows — and meet Clorinda, a rough-hewn fairy mistress. That sign that we have wandered from the outlaw story into a gentrified literary *compote* is confirmed when suddenly they are all on horses: “Before we had ridden five Staffordshire miles.”<sup>19</sup> The reversal seems itself marked in the text as Robin, John, and Clorinda are held up by some non-mounted yeomen. But our heroes fight and win, apparently on foot, and then, if not as outlaws at least not as gentry, they go to the distinctly plebeian pleasures of Titbury fair.

I think we can write off this poem’s two mounted moments, like Clorinda herself, as an uncharacteristic sport, and we can sum up the early material as realizing an outlaw who walks and does not ride as a central meaning of Robin Hood that, strikingly, carries over into most of Robin’s gentrified appearances, and is only contradicted under special circumstances.

### Modern Mounted Robin

The present is different. Both horse and crusade have become a recurrent feature in film and television. In 1922 Douglas Fairbanks first appears in full knightly splendour and goes on crusade as second-in-command. Before riding through the dubious glen in 1954, Richard Greene was in the Holy Land. Sean Connery (*Robin and Marion*, 1976) and Kevin Costner (*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, 1991) both start as mounted crusaders. The old ballad tradition is not entirely forgotten. Though Errol Flynn as Hood in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) leaps a horse into his first shot, he never leaves on crusade: the film was generally faithful to the early structures, with the Washington University scholar F. Morgan Padelford as an adviser. Part of the irony of *Robin Hood Men in Tights* (1993) is that the only riders are Marion and her very large maid — to the horse’s regret. More politically unequestrian yet is the 1980s television series “Robin of Sherwood”: the opening sequence powerfully realizes just how hard it is for a man on foot to escape a mounted cop, part of the class-conscious and resistance-oriented element of this version from the height of anti-Thatcherism just before the British Miners’ strike. But in general, for modern cultural consumers, Robin on horseback and

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19 “Robin Hood’s Birth, Breeding, Valour, and Marriage,” in Knight and Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 527-40, line 161.

returning from crusade has become normal, which is probably why the Pynson woodcut has not seemed strange to modern people.

What happened to change home-loving, earthbound Robin into an international equestrian? At first thought, it would seem likely that the ideas of Robin riding and crusading had their origins in the substantial development of Robin Hood in the nineteenth century, that home of gentry fiction and imperialism.<sup>20</sup> It is true that through Scott, Peacock, and several more minor talents, the outlaw hero was reconceived in romantic and nationalist terms: he was linked to the Saxon race — or more exactly the anti-Norman-French race; he felt as fulfilled among deep nature as any romantic poet; he was distinctly and newly masculine, in both the arrow-splitting phallic competition that Scott invented and the “between men” pattern Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed from this period<sup>21</sup> — the new presence of a handsome villain serves the hero both as rival for Marion and as a potential homoerotic partner. Peacock’s crucial contribution was to combine for the first time the image of the lordly hero with the energy of the yeoman outlaw, locating this condensation firmly in the time of Richard and John. But while it might seem a simple step to make unfairly outlawed Lord Robin a rider and a crusader, and as such an emblem of international adventure, even empire, this development is elusive.

Thomas Love Peacock’s *Maid Marian* (1822) begins with Earl Robin and his men galloping up on “foaming steeds” to the church where he is to marry Marian.<sup>22</sup> This is reminiscent of the image of Richard I charging into the narrative in Munday’s play, but curiously it is Robin’s last appearance on a horse in the novella: in the fight at the bridge in chapter 6 it is not clear that the outlaws are mounted, and it even seems improbable, as Robin fires a longbow arrow in front of the Sheriff’s horse. Robin, Marian, and her father later walk from Hampshire to Northumberland, the length of England, disguised as pilgrims.<sup>23</sup> And there is no enthusiasm for crusade: Peacock as narrator comments that when Richard goes, it is “to the great delight of many zealous adventurers who eagerly flocked under his banner, in the hope of enriching themselves with Saracen spoil, which they called fighting the battles of God.”<sup>24</sup> Such a critique of imperialism — painfully valid to the present — comes, intriguingly, from a man who for financial reasons took a lifetime job in the East India Company, at the core of empire. But for Peacock nobility did

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20 The following paragraph summarizes arguments offered in Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, chap. 3 “Robin Hood Esquire,” 94-149.

21 Sedgwick, *Between Men*.

22 Peacock, *Maid Marian*, 123.

23 Peacock, *Maid Marian*, 188.

24 Peacock, *Maid Marian*, 123.

not connote exploitation of the peasants. In *Maid Marian* Lord Robin's fall from aristocratic grace is caused by his passion for hunting in the royal forests: a liberal and inherently pro-peasant dissent to proprietorial enclosure of forests and waste lies behind this. Peacock wrote elsewhere a moving account of "The Last Day of Windsor Forest" as after 1813 the great public forest was enclosed by the royal family — a day when he claims to have met an old forester called Scarlet who was looking for his friend Robin Hood.<sup>25</sup>

Peacock stressed in a prefatory note to *Maid Marian* that "This little work, with the exception of the last three chapters, was written in the autumn of 1818." He finished it by early 1822 — setting himself up in the East India Company had intervened. His point was to avoid being thought an imitator of Scott, who had given Robin Hood a substantial role in *Ivanhoe*, published for Christmas 1819. Only timing could have raised such an idea: the stories differ greatly. Scott's outlaw is no lord but a tough yeoman and superb archer who, in newly invented action, helps the Saxons and the incognito King fight the brutal French lords and then — in a shift back to the old material — comes the forest encounter where Richard is revealed, a scene carried over to a new king from the *Gest* and still beloved of Robin Hood films.

This nationalist updating of the ballad Robin also contained his vigour: Scott, a Tory, was no admirer of yeoman resistance in reality, no doubt bearing in mind the events in Edinburgh in 1561 when a Robin Hood procession turned into a riot and released prisoners from the Tollbooth and put the magistrates in, and no doubt relating such Robin Hood resistance to radicalism of his own day from the French Revolution to the Luddite and Captain Swing activities of the period after 1815 as well as the highly publicized Peterloo Massacre of early 1819, when troops attacked a mass demonstration in Manchester and killed twelve people. So his Saxon Robin is not empowered as either gentleman or liberal: he can have a threatening demeanour and is illiterate and, when Isaac first appears early on, quite anti-Semitic (whether the novel is as well is a trickier question). At most, Locksley (he is hardly ever even called Robin) is a peasant, useful in war, but socially very limited. Yet Scott seems to have seen more in the Lord Robin story than he was willing to make overt. The novel contains a displaced lord, returned from crusade, mistreated by John and his lackeys, loyal to Richard, and restored when the king comes home — but he is called *Ivanhoe*. To release the power of the Lord Robin story, Scott has invented a hero who avoids aggrandizing possibly radical Robin, and though he is an early riding and crusading hero, he is definitely not Robin Hood.

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25 Peacock, "The Last Day of Windsor Forest," 151.

Even after Peacock's gentrification and energizing of the hero, very well-known in its light opera production by J. R. Planché (also from 1822), the image of Robin as a solid, even resistant, yeoman perseveres. The Chartist Thomas Miller used Robin in *Royston Gower* (1838) as a tough elderly Saxon soldier, supporter of those oppressed by the Norman yoke.<sup>26</sup> In *Forest Days*, G. P. R. James, an early master of historical romance, validates Simon de Montfort as the father of parliamentary democracy — a particularly improbable liberal notion of the Victorian period — and Robin Hood is similarly mythic, previsioning Zorro as both forest outlaw and mounted popular avenger.<sup>27</sup> In the final scene, he appears as “a yeoman on a white horse,” to kill a lordly villain the king has pardoned: as his arrow strikes from a distance, he cries “whom kings spare, commons send to judgement.”<sup>28</sup>

A clumsier multi-class Robin appears in Pierce Egan the Younger's *Robin Hood and Little John* (1840),<sup>29</sup> a very popular and very long novel in which the earl, brought up as a forester, faces dishonest lords and sensational adventures, enjoys romance and marriage with Marion, but hardly ever mounts a horse and certainly has no interest in the crusades. It is a distinctly bourgeois Victorian cultural product, with a lot of hunting, quite a lot of kissing, some ghosts, and many weird inventions — Robin defeats an enemy called Caspar Steinkopft.

Egan's all-purpose novel was successful enough to generate, in 1849, a sequel in Joachim Stocqueler's *Maid Marian: The Forest Queen*.<sup>30</sup> Although this is sub-sub-titled *Being a Companion to “Robin Hood,”* it is very different, being partly an invented story about a returning crusader Sir Wilfrid (Ivanhoe's first name), with other Scott-derived material, and partly a richly fantastic story about a Robin Hood who is not only a crusader but brings back with him a fat surly Arab and his beautiful belly-dancing daughter. In a plot that reads like a parody of the Costner film long before Mel Brooks, there is also a local witch, Minnie Eftskin, a crazed Norman would-be rapist, Hugo Malair, and quite a bit of history, both crusading and domestic. Stocqueler had spent twenty years in India (there is probably a Peacock connection somewhere in the archives) and then returned to London as an all-purpose writer and wit about town.

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26 Miller, *Royston Gower*, 3 vols.

27 James, *Forest Days*, 3 vols. (1843).

28 James, *Forest Days*, 3:303.

29 Egan, *Robin Hood and Little John, or The Merry Men of Sherwood Forest* (1840).

30 Stocqueler, *Maid Marian, or The Forest Queen* (1849).

Stocqueler's novel is both orientalist and imperialist, yet does not present Robin riding to crusade. When he returns, he is on foot, leading three horses, one for each of his two Arabs and one for his baggage. He briefly mounts a horse for the siege of Southwell Manor (Scott's siege of Torquilstone replayed, but closer to Nottingham), but in the two early chapters set in Palestine it is clear that Robin, however much admired by the king, is no more than a captain of archers, a longbow-bearing infantryman in the best yeoman tradition. In the same uncrusading way, when in 1846 Stocqueler co-wrote *Robin Hood and Richard Coeur de Lion*, a very entertaining pantomime — it opens with a parody of Macbeth as three writers, late with their script, conjure a tiny Robin from an inkwell — Richard has returned from Palestine, and the only Arab presence is Abd El Kadir, "The Old Man of the Mountains" who has returned with the king and is basically a friend.<sup>31</sup> Neither of Stocqueler's little-remembered works can be taken seriously as the source of the Fairbanks image of Robin.

Nor can Tennyson's account. Admirer as he was of knights and horses, as the *Idylls of the King* testifies, and certainly an enthusiast for empire, when around 1880 he turned to the Robin Hood story and wrote *The Foresters* for Henry Irving, there are no horses or crusades. No doubt the former would, as in theatre legend, have been risky on stage, but the absence of equine derring-do is no doubt one of the reasons Irving found it too dull to play. However, the music of Sir Arthur Sullivan and the flair of the American impresario Augustin Daly made it a great success in the United States from 1892 on,<sup>32</sup> a production clearly stimulated by the triumph in 1890 of Reginald de Koven's light opera *Robin Hood*. Here, too, Robin is noble, but never leaves home, and — between the hero's youth, the simplicity of the plot, the absence of the crusades, and the demands of the theatre — de Koven provides no horses.

A riding Robin seemed natural enough to Alfred Noyes in his poem "Sherwood," written by 1904. He imagines Robin as leading a pack of hunters crashing through the woods:

from aisles of oak and ash  
Rings the *Follow! Follow!* and the boughs begin to crash;  
The ferns begin to flutter and the flowers begin to fly;  
And through the crimson dawning the robber band goes by.<sup>33</sup>

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31 For an account of *Robin Hood and Richard Coeur de Lion*, see Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*, 192-94.

32 For a discussion of *The Foresters*, see Potter, "The Apotheosis of Maid Marian."

33 Noyes, "Sherwood," p. 7.

This dashing action, especially with the cry of “*Follow!*” is perhaps closer to upper-class fox-hunting than mounted robbery, but is also highly unusual in written representations of Robin Hood, gentleman though he usually is after Peacock. Though it might seem equally obvious to condense the two ideas of Richard’s crusade and Britain’s empire, only Stocqueler among nineteenth-century British writers seems to have glimpsed the point, and then only as an attention-getting start to his rambling inventions and borrowings.

### The Movie Crusader

Thus, it appears to be just film that invented in a substantial and widely imitated way the crusading horse-rider. There must remain some doubt exactly when this happened because no film scholar has yet discovered or reconstructed all the images and themes deployed in the extraordinary number of seven Robin Hood films made before 1914. It seems a fair assumption that horsemanship was involved, as such outdoors mobility is a natural for movies shot in natural light, but the plots which have been traced make no mention of the crusades and focus only on the triangular romance of Robin, Marion, and a villain.<sup>34</sup>

The Fairbanks picture of 1922, however, makes riding and crusading important from the start. The source of the crusading is less easy to identify than that of the horse-riding. The previous Fairbanks film was *The Three Musketeers*, which Edward Knoblock, author of *Kismet*, had written on the basis of the novel by Alexandre Dumas, père. Thus, it might seem likely that the new Robin Hood film, and its crusade orientation, might also be based on Dumas. But things are not so simple: in his autobiography Knoblock says he was in Europe while the film was developed and shot (though he is credited as a “literary advisor”)<sup>35</sup> and, more to the point, neither *Prince des Voleurs* (1872) nor *Robin Hood le Proscrit* (1873), both attributed to Dumas, make Robin a crusader.<sup>36</sup> Both are based heavily on Pierce Egan’s novel, and Robin stays at home. In the second, King Richard does briefly return at the end and — the only positive piece of evidence — the English translation of 1903 carries on its paper cover an illustration of a crusader (*Fig. 4*).

34 Kevin Harty’s research, collected in *The Reel Middle Ages*, has traced story elements in three of these films, summarized in Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, 153.

35 Knoblock, *Round the Room*, 298-300.

36 Dumas, père, *Prince des Voleurs*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lévy, 1872) and *Robin Hood le Proscrit*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lévy, 1873), translated by Alfred Allison (“and a group of able scholars”), *Prince of Thieves* (London, 1903) and *Robin Hood the Outlaw* (London, 1904). In fact the novels are not by Dumas — he died in 1870, and the Lévy editions merely say they are “publié” by Dumas. The author seems to have been his collaborator Marie de Fernand, who also wrote as “Victor Perceval” and had produced *Ivanhoe* under the name of Dumas; see Nicole Vouigny, Alexandre Dumas Site, [www.dumaspere.com./pages/dictionnaire/prince\\_voleurs.html](http://www.dumaspere.com./pages/dictionnaire/prince_voleurs.html) (accessed 13 February 2008).

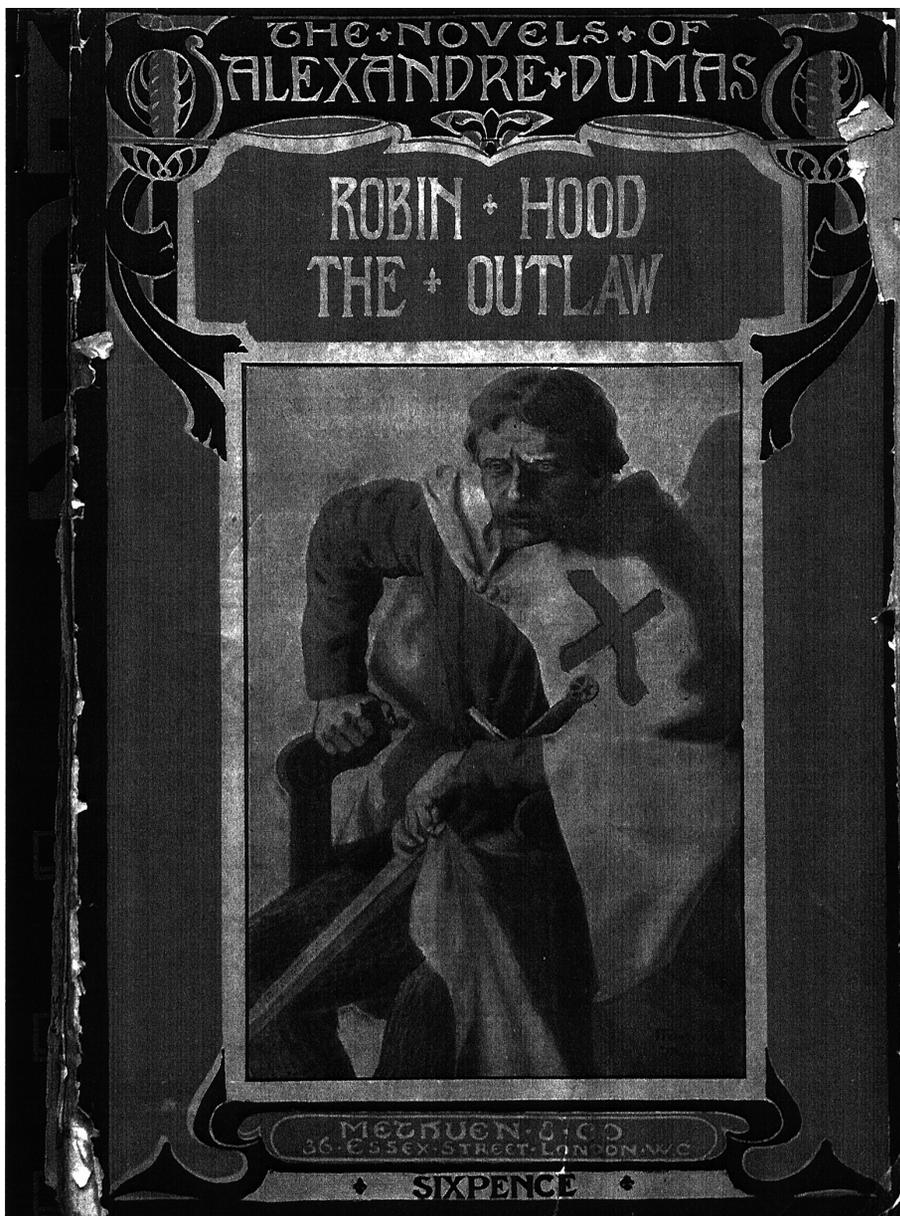


Figure 4. King Richard as Crusader, cover of first (1903) translation of *Robin Hood le Proscrit* (1873), allegedly by Alexandre Dumas, père.

The *Prince of Thieves* cover shows Robin with bow, arrows, and dashing moustache: the second novel shows an older man, with mail, longsword, and a bold red cross — presumably meant to be King Richard.

Conceivably, this was the inspiration for crusading Robin, and the inspiree was presumably Lotta Woods, the experienced writer (with a wonderful name for Robin Hood work) who researched the material and led the drive to persuade Fairbanks to do this film. He was reluctant, famously saying, “I don’t want to look like a heavy-footed Englishman tramping around in the woods.”<sup>37</sup> The script which Woods produced (and which Fairbanks allegedly reworked, under his *nom de plume* Elton Thomas) avoided that entirely by making Robin in the first half of the film a mounted crusader and, in the second half, a tricksterish acrobat. The urge to be anything but pedestrian may itself be the major reason for the enormously influential first Hollywood use of the mounted crusader image. Woods’ biography is obscure, but it seems clear that, as a well-read woman born in 1887, she would have been brought up in literary terms under the influence of Scott, and to elevate the outlaw image, presumably triggered by the cover of *Robin Hood the Outlaw*, and conceivably advised by Knoblock, Woods simply re-deployed Scott’s borrowed image of the displaced lord Ivanhoe, restoring him to the Robin Hood tradition.

There is one other possible source for the idea of a crusading Robin, an American light opera Woods is very likely to have seen. As a follow up to their very successful *Robin Hood* of 1890, Reginald de Koven and Harry Bache Smith produced in 1901 *Maid Marian*. This was performed widely across the United States in 1901 to 1903, and is not to be confused with the pseudonymous *Maid Marian*, the title under which their *Robin Hood* was played in London — presumably because there had been too many recent Robin Hoods in town.<sup>38</sup> The first act of the true *Maid Marian* is set at home, while Robin, as earl of Huntington, is on crusade with the king. The Sheriff and Guy, who yearns for Marian, cause trouble, and then Act 1 ends with the Crusaders’ March as Little John and others go off as reinforcements. Act 2 is set in Palestine, with the Sheriff and Guy again up to mischief; as spies, they arrange a defeat for the crusaders and Robin’s capture. In Act 3, they are back at home, still assailing Marian, but Robin finally escapes

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37 See Hancock and Fairbanks, *Douglas Fairbanks*, 191.

38 While the existence of this musical has been known for some time, it is only the energetic research of Lorraine Stock, who has identified several slightly different manuscript versions, which has made the de Koven/Bache Smith *Maid Marian* available. I am extremely grateful to her for her comments on the text and its reception and especially for providing me with a copy of the fullest version, held in Brandeis University Library Special Collections. Her first statement on the work is in “Recovering Reginald de Koven and Harry B. Smith’s 1901 Light Opera *Maid Marian*.”

and returns in time for a happy Christmas finale. It is hardly the plot of the much more serious and also much more lively Fairbanks film, but the setting of Act 2 and Robin's return to rescue Marian from Guy and resolve problems may have planted a seed more suggestive than the simple cover of the Dumas translation.

Whatever his source, the riding Robin who opened the Fairbanks film became central to the visual tradition. There is a splendid scene at the opening of *The Bandits of Sherwood Forest* (1946) when, after the deaths of Richard and John, national mischief re-emerges and the aging Robin calls together the men of Sherwood. They canter in cowboy mode down tracks, under trees, through streams, into a huge clearing, about a hundred of them, all on ponies straight from the Western movies. An action movie means a mounted movie in the early days of Hollywood.

But crusading was not quite so widespread, and certainly not so positive as honest American horsemanship. In 1922, Marian calls Robin back from crusade to help sort things out at home, and the Fairbanks film's view of crusading seems inherently negative, linked to and skeptical about the value of the American expedition to World War I, very costly in lives as it was. The implied position that there is much to do at home is remarkably close to Woodrow Wilson's isolationism of the period. Kevin Harty has gone further, seeing the Huntington of the first part of the film as "representing the pre-World War I American hero, who [. . .] returns from the continent with all the exuberance that we have come to associate with the Roaring Twenties."<sup>39</sup>

Once the link between Robin and the crusades is made, it is, as here, inevitably political. Something like the Fairbanks' film's objection to crusading can be read through Jennifer Roberson's novel *Lady of the Forest* (1992). Here Robin has returned from crusade in a traumatized state, and it is evident that Roberson is using the post-Vietnam mood as the basis for her weakening of Robin to permit a "strong woman" presentation of Marion.<sup>40</sup>

The degree to which Richard's crusading interests distracted him from good government is well-known to historians, who tend to exculpate King John from all charges except personal unpleasantness. The anti-Richard idea is sometimes used in a coded form to warn against adventurism — there are clear traces of this in Scott and at the end of the Flynn film and also in a novel like *Locksley* by "Nicholas Chase" (1983). The beginning of the fine film *Robin and Marion* (1976) brings its ageing crusaders (mounted, though no gentlemen) home with relief, showing in its opening sequence the Lionheart's brutality and apparently justified death.

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39 See Harty, "Robin Hood on Film," 91.

40 Roberson, *Lady of the Forest*.

More of a puzzle is the exact positioning of the most overtly crusade-linked Robin Hood film since Fairbanks, the Costner picture of 1991, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Kathleen Biddick has linked it in negative terms with the First Gulf War,<sup>41</sup> and it does seem that by having an American international action hero whose buddy is both Muslim and African-American, this film may be having its ideological cake and eating it, too. Yet at the same time Robin does withdraw from the Gulf and does offer a sense of tolerance (to all but the Celts, represented as barbarous savages without any apparent awareness of racism). The film certainly lacks the anti-militarism implicit in the cruel crusaders of the “A Poor Knight of Acre” episode of “Robin of Sherwood” or the militarist mania represented by Jurgen Prochnow in the other 1991 film *Robin Hood*. But the liberal position on crusading shared by these productions can be clearly identified in the Costner film, especially when viewed from the period of the Second Gulf War.

But crusading lord Robin still rides a horse, and so has to dismount to use his long-bow. There remains a structural inauthenticity or an ideological strain here, just as there is about that original illustration in the *Gest*. Such tensions can go further than a surface conflict. The mounted crusader of the 1950s television series, like the horseman in the Pynson woodcut, deserves closer inspection. First, going back to the song, where is this “glen” anyway? Somewhere in Scotland? There are no glens in Sherwood, nor in the other early site, the Yorkshire forest of Barnsdale. The term has a Disneyesque vagueness about it, closer to Glockamorra than Nottingham.

That perception of inauthenticity unfolds: there are acutely political reasons for the distant vagueness of setting in the 1954 television series. As has long been generally known, and now is becoming better recorded, this television series was, in fact, shaped and often written by American screenwriters, in part because American studios had a clear lead in the techniques of producing fictional television series but also because the producing team, British Sidney Cole and New Yorker Hannah Weinstein, knew some fine writers who would be glad of the work because they had been black-listed. (Weinstein was in London for similar political reasons). This series was created by American left-wing writers who knew very well what political crusades could entail and who knew the result of resistance to wrongful authority. Michael Eaton’s film *Fellow Traveller* (1991) delivered the tribute of an English radical — and one from Nottingham at that — to these yeoman outlaws of the typewriter, who included Ring Lardner Junior, Ian McClellan Hunter, Waldo Salt, Adrian Scott, and Robert Lees — with more to be revealed by Tom

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41 Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism*, 74-75, and more generally the section “The Return of Robin Hood, 1991,” 71-80.

Dewe Mathews when his research is published.<sup>42</sup> The apparent vagueness of setting is the reflex of political weight in the first televisual Robin.

Even though filmic Robin rides like a lord and can crusade like an imperialist, he has to some degree always borne the imprint of resistance — even non-crusading Errol Flynn has been taken as speaking an international challenge to fascism.<sup>43</sup> The dialectic force of the Robin Hood tradition seems undying. Though he became a gentleman, the story found it very hard to make him behave, or even ride, like a lord. And when the camera and California brought horses to the story, and a screenwriter of some brilliance condensed hero, period, and horse into the concept of Fairbanks the crusader, the myth retained its inner core of liberal resistance.

In 2006 on the BBC, and during the Second Gulf War, we have seen in Jonas Armstrong a new Robin Hood who is slight but enduring, ironic but resistant, noble in both birth and attitudes: he bears his experience on crusade like a cross. He is mounted but egalitarian: he first appears on his own horse, but later he and his men ride stolen ones — a compromise between the mounted gentleman and the opportunist yeoman, like much in the multiple tone, both heroic and ironic, of this series. Like his predecessors, Robin Hood of 2006 is testimony to the lasting vigour of the idea of resisting wrongful authority and a re-creation which, perhaps to the surprise of older viewers, met a real response: the BBC reports excellent viewing figures in the 8-12 year-old age bracket. A recessive, wily, eminently cool Robin, with designer stubble and an Estuary accent, speaks to and for the kids, and he is the latest indication of the remarkably old and remarkably persistent range of forms in which the idea of resistance exists, and must exist.

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42 Tom Dewe Mathews, who is working on a book on blacklisted writers, gave some new details in an article in *The Guardian*, 7 October 2006, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1888594,00.html> (accessed 13 February 2008).

43 See Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*, 230.

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