The Literary Evidence of the *Gest of Robin Hood* and the Origins of the Outlaw Tradition

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Revised version

Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex and vital. When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.

Oscar Wilde.

1992

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1. Introduction

In 1967, A.L. Lloyd remarked with almost audible impatience that "the quest for the historical Robin Hood still follows a meandering river of ink."[1] More recently, a reviewer of John Bellamy's *Robin Hood: an Historical Enquiry* (1985) felt that "one's immediate reaction" to a new monograph on the topic is "to say enough is enough."[2] Yet even after a good thirty years of modern scholarly research into the origins and early historical context of the outlaw tradition there still seems to be room - and need - for a reconsideration of some of the central issues.[3]

No medieval English chronicler saw fit to mention a contemporary historical outlaw called Robin Hood. The first chroniclers to make any notice of him are the Scotsmen Andrew of Wyntoun, Walter Bower and John Major.[4] Wyntoun, completing his *Original Chronicle c.* 1420, placed Robin in the reign of Edward I, but he offered nothing to substantiate that this was the *floruit* of the outlaw. Perhaps he knew a tale which, like the *Gest*, associated Robin with a king Edward, and so he decided that the first of the three Edwards was the more likely one to have been connected with the outlaw. Bower, writing in the 1440s, counted Robin and his men among the disinherited followers of Simon de Montfort, who was defeated and killed at the Battle of Evesham in 1266. Major in his *Historia Majoris Britanniae* (1521) represented Robin as a contemporary of Richard I, again without any supportive evidence. Nothing suggests that these writers had anything firmer than contemporary traditions to base their accounts on.

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[1] *Folk Song in England* (Frogmore, 1975 [[1]1967]), 129. A list of the abbreviations employed in the notes and the bibliography is prefixed to the latter, below p. 98.

[2] Review by H.R. Loyn in *The Historian* 49 (1986), 89-90. I quote p. 89. For Bellamy's book, see next note.

[3] The important contributions are R.H. Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood", *P&P* 14 (1958), 30-44; J.C. Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood", *P&P* 18 (1960), 89-110; M. Keen, "Robin Hood - Peasant or Gentleman?", *P&P* 19 (1961), 7-15; J.C. Holt, "Robin Hood: Some Comments", *P&P* 19 (1961), 16-8; T.H. Aston, "Robin Hood", *P&P* 20 (1961), 7-9; these are reprinted in R.H. Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights and Heretics* (Cambridge, 1976), 221-72; M. Keen, "Robin Hood: a Peasant Hero", *History Today* 8 (1958), 684-9; M. Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London, 1979 [[1]1961]); R.B. Dobson & J. Taylor, "The Medieval Origins of the Robin Hood Legend: a Reassessment", *Northern History* 7 (1972), 1-30; R.B. Dobson & J. Taylor, eds., *Rymes of Robin Hood: an Introduction to the English Outlaw* (London, 1976); J.R. Maddicott, "The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood", *EHR* 93 (1978), 276-99; J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London, 1982), reviewed by R.B. Dobson & J. Taylor, "`Robin Hood of Barnesdale: A Fellow thou has long sought'", *Northern History* 19 (1983), 210-20; D. Crook, "Some Further Evidence Concerning the Dating of the Origins of the Legend of Robin Hood", *EHR* 99 (1984), 530-4; J. Bellamy, *Robin Hood* (London & Sydney, 1985); P.R. Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: the Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood", *P&P* 108 (1985), 35-79.

[4] *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, ed. F.J. Amours (*STS* 50, 53-4, 56-7, 63) (Edinburgh & London, 1902-14; 5 vols.), V, 136-7; *Johannis de Fordun Scotichronicon Genuinum*, ed. T. Hearne (Oxford, 1722; 5 vols.), III, 774 (contains Bower's interpolations); J. Major, *A History of Greater Britain*, ed. & trans. A. Constable (*Publications of the Scottish History Society* 10) (Edinburgh, 1892), 156-7.

With such confusion in the earliest "historical" writings on the topic, and when none of the historical Robert or Robin Hoods known from records seem entirely satisfactory models for the traditional character, speculations about the origins of the tradition have not surprisingly taken many different directions. Robin has been regarded as a mythical, fictional or historical character. Those who have regarded him as a forest sprite or, in Thomas Wright's oft-quoted words, "one amongst the personages of the early mythology of the Teutonic people",[1] have, when they felt a need to offer arguments in support of their opinion, instanced his appearance in May games and the great number of localities in England named after him as indicative of his mythical origins. Although it has recently come to light that some kind of Robin Hood folk drama flourished at Exeter already in 1426/7[2], it still holds true, thanks to an allusion in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B-version, *c*. 1377)[3], that a literary tradition of sorts is in evidence earlier than is the case with the Robin Hood May game drama; and in any case the impersonation of Nelson, Wellington and Napoleon in early 19th century May games in England is eloquent testimony that a person's connection with these games is not necessarily an indication that he had mythical origins.[4] If the May game itself originated in pre-Christian fertility rite, and this is a moot point indeed, it by no means follows that medieval or more recent May Day revellers were conscious of the pagan origins of the festival. As for the hundreds of places and natural features in England named after the outlaw, the names are virtually all first recorded in the sixteenth century or later, and so they merely illustrate the popularity and growth of the tradition in early modern times, they have little or no bearing on its origins. In fact, the only known truly ancient Robin Hood place-name - discussed below - tends to support the view that a historical outlaw may have lain at the roots of the tradition.[5] Nor is there anything mythical about Robin Hood as he is portrayed in the earliest tales, which have come down to us from a period much earlier than the vast majority of Robin Hood place-names.

F.J. Child's view that "Robin Hood is absolutely a creation of the ballad muse"[6] might seem more plausible, but evidence brought forward by historians suggests that even if the tradition as

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[1]*Essays on Subjects Connected with the Literature, Popular Superstitions, and History of England in the Middle Ages* (London, 1846; 2 vols.), II, 211.

[2]D. Wiles, *The Early Plays of Robin Hood* (Cambridge, 1981), 43, 64; J. Wasson, ed., *Devon* (*REED*) (Toronto, etc., 1986), xiv, 89, 364, 443; J. Wasson, "The St. George and Robin Hood Plays in Devon", *Medieval English Theatre* 2 (1980), 66-9.

[3]See below p. 8.

[4]See W.E. Simeone, "The May Games and the Robin Hood Legend", *Journal of American Folklore* 64 (1951) (pp. 265-274), 274 n. 39.

[5]For a large but by no means exhaustive collection of Robin Hood place-names, see Dobson & Taylor (1976), 293-311; for the earliest such name, see below p. 64.

[6]F.J. Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, (New York, 1965 [[1]1882-98]), III, 42.

it is preserved in the earliest tales is largely fictional, the search for a historical Robin Hood may not be entirely futile. Of the forty odd extant Robin Hood ballads only three exist in MSS or prints of the medieval period: *Robin Hood and the Monk* (MS *c.* 1450), *Robin Hood and the Potter* (MS *c.* 1500) and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (prints of the early 16th century or later).[1] The latter is much the most promising source for the historian intent on tracking down the obscure historical person(s) who may lie at the root of the tradition. It has at least some remarkably specific topographical references and a few obscure topical allusions with which to wrestle. The other two items, less specific in these respects, have little to recommend them to the historian. There is therefore a justified consensus that attempts to pin-point the historical Robin Hood must take their starting point in the *Gest*.[2]

At first sight consensus might not seem to extend much further than this. Some historians, R.B. Dobson & J. Taylor and J.C. Holt, have argued that a historical Robin Hood is most likely to have lived in the 13th century.[3] On the other hand, a much publicized and elaborate hypothesis has it that the outlaw leader was a porter of the chamber at the court of Edward II in the 1320s.[4] This view, first put forward by Joseph Hunter in the 1850s, has recently been re-confirmed in Bellamy's book just referred to.[5]

The central task below will be to evaluate the more important of the arguments offered for placing Robin's *floruit* at this later date. This will be done in chapter four. Here the evidence for a 13th century Robin Hood will also be discussed, but more briefly since it seems much less controversial to me.

Although the *Gest* is first and foremost a literary work, those who champion the 14th century royal porter have very little to say on this aspect. I believe with those who opt for a 13th century origin of the tradition that a detailed literary analysis of the *Gest* must precede any attempt to use it as a historical source. The first two chapters therefore deal with matters literary. First, there is the question of the date of composition of the poem: is it near-contemporary with an early 14th century Robin Hood? Secondly, does it incorporate earlier ballads in recognizable form? These questions obviously bear on the confidence with which

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[1]The canon of Robin Hood ballads is in Child, III, 39-233. Two other ballads are apochryphal Robin Hood items, being very different in tone and setting: *The Birth of Robin Hood* (called *Willie and Earl Richard's Daughter* by Child) and *Rose the Red and White Lily* (B- and C-versions called *The Wedding of Robin Hood and Little John*) in Child, II, 412-24; also see *Jellon Grame* in Child, II, 306-7. The three medieval Robin Hood tales are in Child, III, 39-89, 94-101, 108-14, and in Dobson & Taylor (1976), 71-132.

[2]Holt (1982) discusses all the early tales, but it is clear from his study that most of the significant topical and topographical allusions are to be found in the *Gest*.

[3]See their works referred to above p. 3 n. 3, and see below pp. 89-91.

[4]See ch. 5 below.

[5]J. Hunter, *The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelsy of England, "Robin Hood." His period, real character, etc. investigated and perhaps ascertained* (London, 1852); for Bellamy, see above p. 3.

we can read the poem as a historical source, and therefore merit discussion in some detail. This is offered in chapter two.

Another important aspect is the literary history of the sub-plots and motifs of the *Gest*: where Robin can be shown to tread the path of older heroes of romance and other tales, he is hardly any longer on historical ground; it clearly matters how much of the time the *Gest* takes us into the realm of fiction. Although one very wise historian has paid some attention to this aspect of Robin Hood studies, the relatively well-known early parallels to, and possible sources of the *Gest*, have hardly ever been studied as carefully as they deserve. Perhaps the belief in hypothetical ballad sources has made such a study seem less called for than it really is. Chapter three will, it is hoped, go some way towards supplying this want.

The conclusion will briefly review the results reached and attempt to reconcile the evidence for a 13th century Robin Hood with that for one of the next century. Conclusions drawn from the literary analyses of the *Gest* should be an aid in this.

2. The Date of Composition and Putative Ballad Sources of the Gest

The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, a poem in eight "fyttes" and 456 quatrains, survives in six prints dating from the early l6th to the early l7th century.[1] There is general agreement that it embodies older narrative materials, but opinions differ as to their nature and number, the way in which they were incorporated in the poem and the author's own contribution to the tale. One critic is impressed by "the poem's remarkable unity and above all its narrative symmetry", another comments on its "disjointed lack of artistic unity".[2] Its author and precise date of composition are unknown. Since the *Gest* offers the only tolerably promising basis for pursuing the question of Robin Hood's historicity and as its date of composition and dependence on earlier tales clearly bear on its potential value as a historical source, we must come to grips with these issues.

What can be offered in the following on the date of composition amounts to little more than a census of scholarly opinion and a plea for caution. To give a qualified answer to this vexed question would require a very detailed linguistic analysis of the text with the inclusion of much comparative material. This would obviously exceed the limits of the present thesis. As it is usually assumed that the author's chief sources were now lost Robin Hood ballads, we shall take a brief look at some of the more central hypotheses formed on this question. As an essential preliminary to this, we must analyse the means by which the author sought to lend unity and coherence to the poem.

Synopsis of plot

As the contents of the poem may well bear on our dating of it, let us briefly rehearse the plot. In fytte I, Robin meets a poor knight, lends him £400 so that he can pay his debt to the abbot of St Mary's, York, and sends him away loaded with gifts, and with Little John as his "yeoman" or squire. In fytte II, the knight pays his debt to the abbot. Fytte III has Little John employed with the sheriff of Nottingham, who is subsequently lured into the outlaws' hands and only set free after swearing not to persecute them in the future. In fytte IV, Robin relieves a monk of £800, and when the knight from fyttes I and II returns to pay his debt to the outlaw, the latter maintains that he has already got twice the amount back, for the knight had offered the Virgin as guarantor, and the monk belonged to her abbey. In fytte V, the wily sheriff breaks his oath and arranges an archery contest in order to catch the outlaws. Robin wins, of course, and the outlaws manage to

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[1]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 71-2; J.C.T. Oates, "*The Little Gest of Robin Hood*: A Note on the Pynson and Lettersnijder Editions", *Studies in Bibliography* 16 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1963), 3-8.
[2]D.C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, N.C., 1968), 72; Maddicott, 93.

escape from the ambush laid for them and take refuge with the knight mentioned above, who is now for the first time given the name Sir Richard at the Lee. In fytte VI, the sheriff takes the knight prisoner, but is killed by Robin, who sets the captive free and flees to the greenwood with him. However, in fytte VII, Edward, "our comly kynge", comes to the North to apprehend them. Disguised as an abbot the king succeeds in meeting with the outlaws, the eventual outcome being their pardon. Robin goes to court with the king in fytte VIII, but soon grows weary of life there and returns to the greenwood to live as an outlaw for 22 years, until he is treacherously bled to death by the prioress of Kirklees, who "nye was of hys kynne" [451:4].[1]

Date of composition

Although the earliest extant editions of the *Gest* date from *c*. 1500, linguistic evidence suggested to Child a possible date as early as a century or more before this. He noted that the text retains many ME word forms, but concluded cautiously that:

> The Gest may have been compiled at a time when such forms had gone out of use, and these may be relics of the ballads from which this little epic was made up; or the whole poem may have been put together as early as 1400, or before. There are no firm grounds on which to base an opinion.[2]

This was in l888. In 1909, Clawson argued, chiefly from the frequency of the ME e-ending, that a date before 1400 is more likely than one after, but like Child, he failed to compare the linguistic evidence of the *Gest* with that of other texts of known date.[3] The language of the poem has never been carefully studied, and it remains to be seen whether modern linguistic scholarship will confirm these results. Pending this, most historians have repeated the opinions of Child and Clawson, often with an unwarranted emphasis on an early date. Thus according to Dobson & Taylor, the ME word forms "gave Child strong grounds for believing that `the whole poem may have been put together as early as 1400, or before'".[4] If this is a little biased, it is quite puzzling how John Bellamy, referring again to Child and Clawson, could get the impression that: "The cautious and generally agreed opinion of scholars is that the *Gest* was compiled no later than 1400".[5] On this basis he attempts to press the date as far back as the 1360s or -70s. In Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B-version, *c*. l377), Sloth makes a famous confession:

> I kan no*gh*t parfitly my Paternoster as *th*e preest it synge*th*,

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[1]Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from the *Gest* and other Robin Hood tales are from Dobson & Taylor (1976); edn. of *Gest*: 71-112. Numbers in [] refer to stanzas and verses.

[2]Child, III, 40.

[3]W.H. Clawson, *The Gest of Robin Hood* (*University of Toronto Studies, Philological [& Literature] Series, [Extra Volume]*) ([Toronto], 1909), 3-6.

[4]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 8.

[5]Bellamy (1985), 97. Maddicott, 276, makes a similar statement.

But I kan rymes of Robyn hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre.[1]

As rhymes of Robin Hood were evidently so widespread in the 1370s, so Bellamy argues, "it seems a reasonable surmise" that the *Gest* was written nearer to that decade than to 1400, "and probably several years before the celebrated lines in *Piers Plowman*".[2] The allusion proves the existence of Robin Hood poems, but not that the *Gest* was among them. It certainly requires good arguments to convince an informed reader that the poem, first printed around 1500, was among Sloth's "ydel tales at *th*e Ale" some l30 years before.[3] Yet nothing in the line of supportive evidence is offered.[4] Maddicott concludes that the *Gest* was composed in the 1330s;[5] just as in Bellamy the early date follows from the historical hypothesis being developed, but it is not bolstered by any linguistic or textual evidence.

Among the historians who have touched upon the question of dating, only Holt and Dobson & Taylor seem to me to have exercised due caution. Holt puts the writing of the poem "in the fifteenth century, perhaps even as early as 1400", but he seems to find a mid-15th century date more likely.[6] We would do well to remember that the last word in diachronic linguistics had not been said in Child's and Clawson's day; neither, for that matter, has it today. Both critics were convinced of the great age of the ballad genre, a fact which may have made them inclined to prefer the earliest rather than the latest possible date. They did not discuss the linguistic evidence in any detail. Richard Jordan has observed that while final "e" was lost in the "unbefangenen lebenden Sprache" during the 15th century, it was preserved to a greater or lesser extent in the poetry of the period.[7] Were Child and Clawson mindful of this when they decided on an early date? What date is suggested by the over-all phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical features of the text? Until such questions are answered, it seems rash to accept the early dates suggested by Maddicott and Bellamy, and we should certainly allow the possibility that the *Gest* was written not long before it was first printed.

A date in the period 1455-95 has been suggested by D. Parker, who finds that "the poem contains sentiments appropriate to the period of the Wars of the Roses".[8] Robin is emphatically a yeoman, friendly to members of that class as well as to good knights and squires. The outlaws

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[1]Passus V, ll. 394-5: *Piers Plowman*, ed. G. Kane & E.T. Donaldson (London, 1975), 331; the allusion is also found in the C-version (*c.* 1387), see *e.g. Piers Plowman*, ed. D. Pearsall (London, 1981), 129 & n. I have changed yogh to 'gh' and thorn to 'th' in the quote.

[2]Bellamy (1985), 97.

[3]*Piers Plowman*, Passus V, l. 403; Kane & Donaldson, 331. Thorn changed to 'th'.

[4]H.R. Loyn in his review of Bellamy (1985), 90, finds that: "A firmer analysis early on the case for compilation ca. 1370 would certainly have been helpful."

[5]Maddicott (1978), 298.

[6]Holt (1982), 15, 188; Dobson & Taylor (1972), 8, assume a 15th cent. date of composition.

[7]*Handbuch der mittelenglischen Grammatik: Lautlehre* (Heidelberg, 1968 [[1]1925]), 244.

[8]"Popular Protest in *A Gest of Robin Hood*", *Modern Language Quarterly* 32 (1971), 3-20. I quote p. 3.

live up to the chivalric ideals of courtesy, liberality and hospitality. Robin's devotion to the Virgin is exclusive to the point of heterodoxy, but with a single exception all higher clergy are depicted as greedy and cynical gluttons in league with corrupt men of law. The king is above all such machinations and therefore in rapport with the "gode yeman" and honest knights like the one Robin befriends. The later l5th century saw the rise of the yeomanry, a middle class of freeholders and artisans. The more discerning of these would have seen their interests to lie with the lower echelons of the knightly class. In an age when capitalist practices were replacing the traditional tenet that financial activity should be a means to a moral end, this rising class would turn to the old moral code to which the gentry now paid little more than lip service. Faced with the upheavals of the Wars of the Roses the middle classes saw the king as their one hope for the restoration of stability and prosperity. The Church and especially monastic foundations were criticized for employing dubious financial methods and, more generally, conventional religion was regarded as the religion of the powerful, hence there was a popular movement towards a cult of the Virgin. In this period St Mary's Abbey, York, whose abbot and cellarer play a most unflattering role in the *Gest*, was often accused of sharp practice in the acquisition of land. Moreover, the abbey was repeatedly attacked by outlaw gangs in the years 1433-72, though this was definitely for lucre rather than out of moral indignation.

The themes of the *Gest* would thus seem to match a date in the second half of the 15th century. Yet it must be said that these socio-economic and religious issues are more or less characteristic of all of the later Middle Ages. Robin's royalist attitude is not so helpful in dating the poem, for it is chiefly expressed in a sub-plot whose central event is a variation upon the perennial motif of the meeting of a disguised king and one of his subjects. This chestnut of popular literature necessarily involves a large measure of bonhommie between king and subject.[1] Collections of medieval lyrics offer ample evidence that zealous devotion to the Virgin was widespread throughout the later Middle Ages, not just in the later 15th century.[2] "Yeoman" and "yeomanry" are ambiguous terms. In its original signification, "yeoman" referred to a man in service ranking below the squire. The word is used in this sense when Robin sends John with the knight:

> `I shall the lende Litell John, my man,
> For he shalbe thy knave;
> In a yeman's stede he may the stande,
> If thou greate nede have.' [81].

When Robin himself leaves his outlaw life for a time, it is to do service at court. There is no suggestion at all that he and his men had any land before their outlawry, they are therefore not

[1]See below pp. 53ff.

[2]Thus *c.* 25 per cent of the 91 items in C. Brown's collection of *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford, 1965 [[1]1932]) are addressed wholly or in part to the Virgin.

yeomen in the modern sense of "freeholders". Robin is much more akin to the proud (and slightly foppish) hunter yeoman portrayed in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*;[1] only, the latter yeoman is in service, whereas Robin, except for his spell at court, is not. Since Chaucer could draw this character in the late 14th century, the *Gest*'s courteous and "prude" yeoman hero might well have been depicted in the same period.[2] Even if Robin is not a former yeoman freeholder, his order to his men to "do no husbonde harme [/] That tylleth with his ploughe" [13:3-4] may have been intended to appeal to such members of the readership (or perhaps audience). Yet as Holt has noted, franklins could be described as "yeomen" by the early 15th century.[3] So whatever we take "yeoman" to mean, a readership of yeomen does not necessarily imply a date in the period favoured by Parker.

Taken together, Parker's more general arguments about the ideology of the poem do suggest that it may well have been written during the Wars of the Roses, but they cannot prove that it was. The more specific evidence as to St Mary's Abbey is somewhat more persuasive. Widespread resentment at the economic dealings of the abbey at a time when it was repeatedly attacked by outlaws explains very well the appearance of the blackguardly abbot in a tale about England's most famous outlaw.

The textual evidence of the early editions tends to support a late date. Dobson & Taylor find that collation of the two earliest editions to survive in a useful state

> reveals numerous slight verbal but relatively few substantive textual variations, a fact which suggests that a fairly standardized version of the work was presumably circulating in manuscript form at the end of the fifteenth century.[4]

Such moderate variation seems most intelligible if the period of transmission had not been very long. The l5th century certainly fulfilled the conditions for vigorous transmission of Robin Hood tales. From this period we have the ballads *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter*, a short folk-play probably based on a lost version of the ballad *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, numerous allusions in contemporary literature, several citations of a Robin Hood proverb, a legal maxim, three Robin Hood place-names, records of Robin Hood May games at eight localities in England; and north of the Border two chroniclers included brief passages on the outlaw in their works; by 1492 there were Robin Hood summer games at Edinburgh, and at Aberdeen, as early as 1438, we find a ship called "ly Robert hude".[5] The

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[1]Ll. 101-17: A.W. Pollard *et. al.*, eds., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1932 [[1]1898]), 2.

[2]Robin is described as "prude" in *Gest* st. 2. On the various connotations of "yeoman", Chaucer's yeoman and Robin Hood, see Coss, 74 n. 145; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 33-6; Hilton (1976), 228-9, 247, 249-50, 263-5; Holt (1982), 116-28.

[3]*Ibid.*, 117-8.

[4]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 8.

[5]Edns. of early ballads: see p. 5 n. 1 above; recent edns. of play: Dobson & Taylor (1976), 203-7; G. Parfitt, ed., "Early Robin Hood Plays", *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 22 (1978), 5-12; Wiles, 34-5, 71; its ballad

number of 16th century editions of the *Gest* leaves no doubt that the poem was then very popular, and in the light of the ubiquitousness of its central character in the preceding century, it seems unlikely that the poem could have existed for a long time without being subject to the distortions and omissions that go with vigorous transmission, be it oral or in MSS.

There is thus evidence to suggest a date of composition not very long before the poem was first printed. Yet until linguistic analysis throws more light upon the question, it seems inadvisable to put forward such a date in an assertive tone.[1] However, the textual evidence does indicate that a 14th century date is too early; whether we instead opt for one early or late in the 15th century, the poem cannot have been put together much less than five generations after the halcyon days of Robin Hood, porter of the chamber in the reign of Edward II. One obvious corollary is that underlying historical events may have been distorted out of recognition during the transmission and rehandling of the material that went into the making of the *Gest*. On the other hand it is also possible that the poem is a fairly transparent attempt to string together a number of old ballads which were nearly contemporary with the events they ostensibly described. Which of these possibilities is the more likely we must now attempt to determine.

The effort at unity I: plot continuity

The *Gest*'s introductory scene (sts. 1-16) serves, as Hunter notes, to inform the reader as to Robin's "character and habits" and "the principles on which his operations were conducted", but far from dealing with "bygone affairs" as Hunter also implies,[2] it alludes to future events, and in this it anticipates an important characteristic of the rest of the text: throughout there are frequent explicit or implicit references to earlier or later events. This trait together with the appearance of parallel (or deliberately contrasting) scenes and sustained verbal parallelism makes it clear that the contribution of the so-called compiler must be very substantial indeed. That is why I would prefer to call him the author. We shall now examine these three chief means of establishing unity.

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source: see p. 59 n. 4 below; literary allusions: Dobson & Taylor (1976), 1-5, and above p. 8, below pp. 57-59; also P.H. Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper* (*EETS* 275, 280) (1976, 1980) (= vol. I, pts. 1 & 2; vol. II as yet unpubl.), I, pt. 1, 189; proverb: Dobson & Taylor (1976), 289, 291; legal maxim: *ibid.*, 3, and W.C. Bolland, *A Manual of Year Book Studies* (Cambridge, 1925), 107; place-names: Dobson & Taylor (1976), 301, 310, and below p. 64; May games: Lancashire (1984), Nos. 586, 662, 667, 683, 761, 1317, 1442, 1481, 1490, 1659-60, 1662, and sources referred to there; Wiles, *passim*; J.M. Wasson, ed, *Devon* (*REED*), xvi-xvii, xxiv, 89, 108, 364, 383, 443, 444; chronicle passages: see above p. 3 and below p. 65; ship: A.J. Mill, *Mediaeval Plays in Scotland* (St Andrews, 1927), 23 n. 1; Summergames in Scotland: *ibid.*, 219

[1]The Swedish critic and art historian C.G. Estlander in his dissertation *Folksångerna om Robin Hood* (Helsingfors, 1859), 64, and R. Fricke, *Die Robin-Hood-Balladen* (Braunschweig, 1883), 65, suggest that the *Gest* was cast in its present mould shortly before it was printed. Hunter, 41, also assumes a 15th cent. date.

[2]Hunter, 11.

At the beginning of the *Gest* we find Robin Hood, a "gode yeman" and the most courteous of outlaws, in Barnsdale with William Scarlok, Much the Miller's Son and Little John. The latter wants to dine, but Robin says that first a knight, squire or "bolde baron" must be found to partake of, and pay (exorbitantly) for the meal. We are told that Robin hears three masses every day; he is especially devoted to the Virgin, and for fear of mortal sin he never attacks a travelling company if there is a woman in it. John then wants to know "what life that we shall lede" and:

`Where we shall take, where we shall leve,
Where we shall abide behynde,
Where we shal robbe, where we shal reve,
Where we shal bete and bynde.' [12].

In response Robin states the outlaws' *modum spoliandi* (sts. 13-5). Husbandmen, yeomen, *good* squires and knights are protected, but:

`These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde;
The hye sherif of Notyingham,
Hym holde ye in your mynde.' [15].

This introduction provides a rough index to the matters and characters of the poem. We hear the names of the three most prominent members of Robin's band as well as that of his chief haunt.[1] The outlaws' courtesy, mentioned briefly here, is stressed throughout the text,[2] and we are occasionally reminded that he is indeed a yeoman.[3] His friendliness to peasants tallies well with his remark early in fytte IV that if the guest his men bring home "be a pore man [/] Of my good he shall have some" [210:3-4]; the last stanza of the poem tells us that "he was a good outlawe, [/] And dyde pore men moch god." [456:3-4]. As mentioned briefly above, Robin's devotion to the Virgin helps the knight get a handsome loan, just as it provides the pretext for fleecing a "fat heded monke" [91:3].[4] The outlaw's warning against the sheriff and the mention of a friendly knight are obviously significant in view of what follows. On the other hand, we note that there are no bishops or archbishops in the sequel: instead we have the monastic villains of St Mary's. The appearance of the knight and the unfortunate monk is further foreshadowed by Robin's unwillingness to dine without someone to foot the bill, for they are both introduced as dinner guests. As will later appear, meals are indeed important on many occasions, both when they are served and when they ought to have been.[5]

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[1]The topography and place-names of the *Gest* are discussed below pp. 64-71.

[2]See *e.g.* sts. 2, 24(-5), 29(-30), (34), (75), (177), (183), 226, (232), (264), 295, 312, 323, 383, 385, (432), 444, (449). Sts. in parentheses instance courteous behaviour rather than comment on it.

[3]Sts. 1, (3), (20), 26, 37, (80-1), 129, (139), (212), 222, (229), (255), (268-9), 406. Sts. in parentheses refer implicitly to Robin's being a yeoman or refer to his men.

[4]See synopsis of plot, above pp. 7-8.

[5]See below pp. 20-21

Little John is sent with the knight as his "yeoman" or "knave" in the last stanza of fytte I (st. 81) and is with him as far as st. 85, but then disappears, and when fytte II ends, he still has not been brought back to the outlaws' quarters. Robin is occassionally mentioned in the second fytte,[1] but apart from Little John's brief appearance none of the outlaws plays any role in it. The knight is certainly its protagonist.

After an interval of about a year's duration in which the knight accumulates the money to pay Robin back, he sets out for the outlaws' camp, but stops on the way: "For love of Robyn Hode" [139:4], to save a yeoman who is in danger of being killed at a wrestling contest, because the local mob is irked at the championship's going to this outsider. When fytte II ends, the knight is therefore left in limbo:

> Thus longe taried this gentyll knyght,
> Tyll that play was done;
> So longe abode Robyn fastinge,
> Thre houres after the none. [143].

Without the benefit of what he is told in fytte V, the reader would be as uncertain as Robin is whether the good and honest knight would return to pay his debt. Without fytte III he would not know if Little John was ever to rejoin the other outlaws.

Although reasonably self-contained, fytte III has some allusions to past and future events which only make sense in the larger context of the *Gest*. Little John is offered employment with the sheriff as a result of his prodigious marksmanship during an archery contest where this unhappy upholder of the law is among the onlookers. John accepts the offer, but observes, in st. 151, that he is still employed with the "curteys knight", so the sheriff must first ask the latter's permission to take over his servant, which is granted in st. 152. At the end of the fytte, when the sheriff has fallen into the outlaws' hands, he purchases his freedom by swearing not to plot any evil against them (sts. 201-4). After this, one would expect a sequel in which the sheriff breaks his oath. This is what occurs in fyttes V and VI.

The first stanza of fytte IV informs us that the sheriff is "fayne" to be back in Nottingham and that the outlaws are in the "wode", thus smoothing out the transition from the tale about the sheriff to the following story of the monks. Robin is worried because the knight has not turned up to pay his debt. However, his men instead bring home "the hye selerer" [233:4] of St Mary's Abbey, who, after being relieved of £800, is sent off with greetings to the abbot and prior of his house (sts. 233, 247, 260). The attentive reader of the *Gest* will have noted that all three monastics have appeared earlier, for in fytte II, while the knight is on his way to St Mary's, the scene changes to the abbey, where the abbot and high cellarer gloat over the prospect of foreclosing on the lands of the knight, who they consider either dead or destitute, whereas the prior shows himself a more lenient mortgagee and a better Christian (sts. 86-95). Our bad

[1] See sts. 82, 127, (128-9) 139, 143.

impression of the abbot here is fully borne out by the knight's subsequent interview with him (sts. 102-24).[1] During the scene in which the cellarer is robbed, the outlaws maintain, despite their victim's protests, that the Virgin in her capacity as guarantor for the knight's loan has sent this representative of her abbey to settle the matter on her behalf.[2] As to the actual confiscation we are told that:

Lytell Johan spred his mantell downe,
As he had done before,
And he tolde out of the monkes male
Eyght hondred pounde and more. [247].

The previous occasion referred to here is the ransacking of the "knyghtes cofer" [42:3]. One final feature in this scene deserves notice. Before the cellarer gives a characteristically untruthful answer to Robin's question as to where he is headed for, the narrator steps in to tell us the truth:

The monke was goynge to London ward,
There to holde grete mote,
The knyght that rode so hye on hors,
To brynge hym under fote. [253].

Something is evidently brewing against the knight, although he has long since settled his debt to the abbot. We are not told the nature of these machinations, but we shall find another allusion to them shortly.

When the monk has just managed to escape from the outlaws before having one of his other pack horses searched for valuables (sts. 255-60), the narrator intrudes to effect a swift change in the course of the narrative:

Now lete we that monke be styll,
And speke we of that knyght:
Yet he came to holde his day,
Whyle that it was lyght. [261].

After courteous greetings Robin asks his new guest: "What nede dryveth the to grene wode?" [265:3], thus implying that money matters have been satisfactorily settled by the cellarer's "payment" and that the knight must therefore have come about some other business. Rather incongruously Robin then wants to know why the knight has been so long in coming; the latter answers that "the abbot and the hye iustyce [/] Wolde have had my londe." [266:3-4], but he also explains that he was delayed because he stopped to help the "pore yeman" [268:4]. Robin's reaction to the latter explanation is very favourable: "What man that helpeth a good yeman, [/] His frende than wyll I be." [269:3-4]. It is acceptable that the knight should offer two reasons for a slight delay, but Robin's questions are not easily reconciled with one another; the first one implies that he is in earnest when viewing the cellarer as Our Lady's proxy, but the second shows that he is not. At the expense of consistency this scene has been emphatically

[1]See below pp. 49-50
[2]See below p. 24.

connected with much of what has gone before. Robin's first question makes sense only if we know that the cellarer has already - in a sense - paid back the loan. The knight's first answer to Robin's second question must refer to the obscure plot against him which we just dicussed. That a high justice is implicated should not come as a surprise to the careful reader of the *Gest*, for early in fytte II we were told that:

The hye iustyce and many mo
Had take in to they honde
Holy all the knyghtes det,
To put that knyght to wronge. [94].

The high justice and a sheriff of an unnamed bailiwick are "holde with the abbot" [107:1], *i.e.* retained by him to help the abbey take over the knight's lands. It seems, then, that the conspirators were unwilling to admit defeat when the knight had paid his debt and so continued to plot against him. The knight's second excuse for being late reminds us of the interlude at the wrestling contest at the end of fytte II,[1] and Robin's positive reaction underscores his status as a yeoman and his loyalty to his peers.

The knight tenders Robin the £400 he borrowed, together with 20 marks for the outlaw's "curteysy" [270:4], but Robin will not take it: "For Our Lady, by her high selerer, [/] Hath sent to me my pay", and it were a shame if he "toke it i twyse" [271:3-4, 272:1]. The outlaw has a sound laugh while telling "his tale" [273:1], *i.e.* how he got the money from the cellarer; he then notices that the knight has brought a large number of bows and sheaves of arrows with him. They are gifts for the outlaws and have been described in some detail towards the end of fytte II in a passage relating how the knight sets out for Robin's quarters in a style befitting his station (sts. 131-2). On receiving this splendid gift, Robin gives the knight £400, for as he puts it: "The monke over tolde it me" [276:4], or as John told Robin while robbing the cellarer of his £800, "Our Lady hath doubled your cast." [248:4]. Together with the money the knight gets this homely piece of advice: "make thy selfe no more so bare, [/] By the counsell of me" [279:3-4], which reminds us that he was destitute when he first entered Barnsdale in fytte I. The narrator fittingly rounds off the story of the knight's debt (fyttes I, II and IV) with a pious flourish:

Thus than holpe hym good Robyn,
The knyght all of his care:
God, that syt in heven hye,
Graunte us well to fare. [280].

The part of fytte IV dealing with the monk (sts. 213-60) contains several implicit and explicit references to the action of fyttes I and II, and even if it may have been partly based on older tales, it cannot have existed independently of the narrative of these fyttes in anything close to its present form. The parts of the fytte dealing with the knight (sts. 206-7, 261-80) are

[1]See above p. 14, and below pp. 47-47.

intimately connected with what we have already been told about his plight.

The sheriff is the protagonist stranger of fyttes V and VI (sts. 281-353). Fytte V begins with a stanza that connects it with the story of the knight:

> Now hath the knight his leve i take,
> And wente hym on his way;
> Robyn Hode and his mery men
> Dwelled styll full many a day. [281].

The knight certainly also plays an important role in what follows, but the immediate sequel (sts. 282-308) is more intimately connected with the story about Little John and the sheriff in fytte III. The sheriff arranges an archery contest for "all the best archers of the north" [283:1]. The prize is a silver arrow with head and feathers of gold. Robin at once decides to participate in order to "wete the shryves fayth, [/] Trewe and yf he be" [287:3-4]. The arrow of course goes to Robin, but perhaps just as inevitably:

> They cryed out on Robyn Hode
> And grete hornes gan they blowe:
> `Wo worth the, treason!,' sayd Robyn,
> `Full evyl thou art to knowe. [296].

Robin curses the sheriff for his treachery and wishes he had him once again in his power, for then he would have to leave a better pledge than his "trewe lewte" [298:4]. This, of course, refers to the promise of good behaviour extracted from the sheriff in fytte III.[1] Our heroes manage to escape from the trap laid for them, but Little John is hurt in the knee by an arrow, and begs Robin to kill him so that he will not be caught alive by the sheriff. Although there is no explicit allusion to John's luring the sheriff into Robin's grasp (in fytte III), it must strike the reader that the perpetrator of this prank has still more reason than any of his comrades to fear the sheriff's vengeance. But it will of course never do to kill a trusted comrade-in-arms, so instead Much carries John on his back (sts. 306-8). Before long the outlaws come to a "fayre castell" [309:1]:

> And there dwelled that gentyll knyght,
> Syr Rychard at the Lee,
> That Robyn had lent his good,
> Under the grene wode tree. [310].

The knight thanks Robin for his "grete kyndenesse" [312:3] in the greenwood, referring of course to the money lending business of fyttes I and IV. Fytte V ends with the outlaws seated around the dinner table within the sheltering walls of the knight's castle (st. 316).

In fytte VI, the sheriff besieges the knight's castle, but agrees to go to London to hear the king's will with regard to the knight and the outlaws. The king lets him know that he will be at Nottingham to apprehend the miscreants: "Within this fourteenyght" [325:2]. Meanwhile, Little

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[1]See above p. 14.

John is "hole of the arowe [/] That shot was in his kne" [328:1-2], so the outlaws leave the knight's castle for the greenwood. The king's brief appearance at this point in the tale anticipates his advent at the opening of fytte VII. However, before the monarch arrives, the sheriff catches the knight, whose wife goes to the outlaws for help. The appearance of this lady also in a way connects the present fytte with fytte II, for there we have briefly heard her greet her husband, when he came home after paying his debt at St Mary's (sts. 126-7). On hearing that the sheriff has caught the knight, Robin rushes off to Nottingham in a frenzy of anger, shoots the sheriff, chops off his head, and exclaims:

> `Lye thou there, thou proude sherife,
> Evyll mote thou cheve:
> There myght no man to the truste
> The whyles thou were a lyve.' [349].

Far from ill-motivated, as has sometimes been thought,[1] Robin's violent anger is entirely understandable - or at least it must have been so to a sympathetic, medieval readership - in view of the sheriff's failure to keep his oath to leave the outlaws in peace.[2] The knight is set free and takes refuge with the outlaws in the forest (sts. 351-2), pending the pardon which Robin expects from "Edwarde, our comly kynge" [353:4].

Fyttes V and VI very often hark back to previous events involving the knight and the sheriff, and fytte VI anticipates the coming of the king in the sequel. We must conclude that as it stands, this story of Robin and the sheriff is to a large extent the work of the author of the *Gest*. Even if he may have used older material for this sub-plot, he certainly took great pains to make it tally with the rest of the poem.

In fytte VII, the king comes to Nottingham to track down Robin and the knight just as he said he would in fytte VI. The knight, still with the outlaws, is occasionally mentioned until he is finally pardoned by the king;[3] his appearance serves as a further link between this fytte and the preceeding narrative. On being pardoned, Robin is invited by the king to come with him to court; this offer is accepted, but not without qualifications:

> `But me lyke well your servyse,
> I wyll come agayne full soone,
> And shote at the donne dere,
> As I am wont to done.' [417].

This stanza beautifully foreshadows the outlaw's later *Sehnsucht* for forest life. It makes the reader suspect that Robin may well return to the greenwood, which indeed he does towards the

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[1]Fricke, 19-20.

[2]This is also noted in Clawson, 94-5, and J. de Lange, *The Relation and Development of English and Icelandic Outlaw-Traditions* (*Nederlandsche Bijdragen op het Gebied van Germaansche Philologie en Linguistiek* 6) (Haarlem, 1935), 53-6.

[3]Sts. 354-6, 360-1, 363-4, 410, 431-2.

end of the last fytte.[1] Yet there is a slight jar: would anybody, even the sturdiest and most independent of outlaws, have the nerve to make such a proviso after receiving royal pardon for a series of crimes for which a less fortunate man might well have been quartered and drawn? This makes heavy demands on our credulity, but then such an anticipation of future events undoubtedly contributes to narrative unity. When Robin wearies of court life, he goes before the king and tells him:

`I made a chapell in Bernysdale,
That semely is to se,
It is of Mary Magdaleyne,
And thereto wolde I be. [440].

He is sleepless and has lost appetite, because he "longeth sore to Bernysdale", and wants to go there: "Barefote and wolwarde" on a penitential trip [442:1,3]. Once there, he slays a deer and blows his bugle, and his seven score of outlaws come running to welcome him back (sts. 445-9). We are here reminded that Barnsdale is Robin's stamping ground, just as we were told it was in fyttes I and IV, and again the outlaw's devotion to the Virgin is underscored, just as it was in those parts of the tale. The *Gest,* like fytte IV,[2] ends on a pious note:

Cryst have mercy on his soule,
That dyed on the rode!
For he was a good outlawe,
And dyde pore men moch god. [456].

This reading of the *Gest* has, to quote Hart, shown "stanzas widely separated in the poem to be closely connected in meaning"; it has borne out his observation "that the story was grasped as a whole, that things late in the narrative were foreseen, and things early in the narrative worked out to their conclusions".[3] The chief thread binding the poem together is the story of the knight, his debt and his friendship with Robin Hood. We have seen that the strands of the narrative involving the monks of St Mary's, the sheriff and the king are all more or less closely tied up with this central theme. The knight's role is quite negligible in fyttes III and VIII, yet in the first of these the author duly remembers that arrangements must be made with the knight before Little John can begin to "serve" the sheriff; in the last fytte he has the decency to let the king pardon the knight and restore his lands to him. There is thus not a single fytte in which the knight is not at least mentioned; the only other characters about whom this can be said are Robin Hood and Little John. That the knight plays such a central role may, as we shall see, have important implications for an attempt to elucidate the historical background of the poem.[4] For the moment, let us conclude from this analysis of self-reference and plot continuity that the

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[1]See the synopsis of plot, above pp. 7-8

[2]St. 280 quoted above p. 16.

[3]W.M. Hart, *Ballad and Epic* (*Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 11) (Boston, [Massachusetts], 1907), 92.

[4]See the discussion of Bellamy's hypothesis regarding the knight, below pp. 84-89.

author or "compiler" did not simply put old tales together, tacking one onto the other. Whatever the author borrowed from older tales must have been woven together with a substantial amount of material of his own making. The *Gest* cannot simply be regarded as a piece of literary patch-work.

The effort at unity II: verbal parallels and repetition of incident

Another feature which lends unity to the tale is the appearance of parallel incidents and situations. Let us briefly touch upon the two most important instances. There are no less than four archery contests: that which leads to Little John's employment with the sheriff (in fytte III), the one arranged by the latter in order to catch the outlaws (in fytte V), an impromptu exhibition of marksmanship during the outlaws' entertainment of the king (in fytte VII) and Robin and the king's shooting at marks while riding to Nottingham (in fytte VIII). As an archery contest also occurs in the early ballad *Robin Hood and the Potter* (MS. *c*. 1500),[1] it is possible that the author of the *Gest* found one or more of these scenes in his sources, but as we shall later see, two of the passages on archery are almost identical, so the author either wrote both himself or borrowed a passage from an older tale and used it twice. What is clear is that the author wanted his text to contain such parallel scenes.[2]

The narrator is a gourmet as well as a gourmand. There are several dinner scenes, often elaborately described and always with true gusto. All the protagonist strangers - the knight, the sheriff, the high cellarer and the king - are "invited" to dine with Robin. When the knight comes to the abbey to settle his debt, the conspirators are having dinner, and when the outlaws take refuge in the knight's castle, the host has hardly shut the gates behind them before dinner is ready. Little John starts a fight with the sheriff's servants, because they refuse to serve him any food until their master is back from hunting (sts. 155-71). Finally, when the outlaws and the knight stop at Nottingham to celebrate their pardon together with the king: "They ete and dranke, and made them glad, [/] And sange with notes hye" [431:1-2]. As David Fowler has noted,[3] these scenes serve as the occasion for a test of character or a revelation of identity. The knight unravels his sad story and shows his good manners during dinner; the sheriff loses appetite when he discovers that thanks to Little John's services his costly plate has been transported to the outlaws' quarters; regaling himself among his cronies, the abbot treats the knight with exquisite rudeness, failing to return his formal greeting and letting him kneel so long

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[1] *Potter* sts. 42-54; edn. of ballad, see above p. 5 n. 1.

[2] On the function of archery in the *Gest* and the early ballads, see D.A. Hoffman, "`With the shot y wyll / Alle thy lustes to full-fyl'[:] Archery as Symbol in the Early Ballads of Robin Hood", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86 (1985), 494-505.

[3] Fowler, 75.

that:

> Up then stode that gentyll knyght,
> To the abbot sayd he,
> To suffre a knyght to knele so longe,
> Thou canst no curteysye. [115].

It is during a feast that the outlaws and the knight discover that the "abbot" they are entertaining is actually the king in disguise.

The dinner scenes often serve to reveal the characters' courtesy and good manners (or lack of both). This is quite natural since, as Nicholls notes, the communal dinner in the hall or refectory formed the hub of the wheel in the social life of the house; it was a prime occasion for showing courtesy, a quality so necessary in every member of a large household if it was to function smoothly.[1] The so-called courtesy books, which became widely disseminated in the two last centuries of the Middle Ages, often take the form of manuals for would-be servants in noble houses. One of the most well-known specimens thus opens with the telling phrase *Stans puer ad mensam* (MS *c*. 1460).[2] If the *Gest* here reflects contemporary social mores, its emphasis on courtesy may of course still have been inspired by earlier sources, but if so, they are not so likely to have been ballads, for detailed descriptions of dining and courteous behaviour are not among the chief preoccupations of ballad narrators. Indeed a ballad typically develops its plot in fewer stanzas than the *Gest* lavishes on one of its dinner interview scenes.

The author very likely included several archery and dining scenes because they would be popular with his audience. Dining, of course, was never out of fashion and archery was extremely important in war, for hunting and as a pastime throughout the later Middle Ages. The repetition of such titillating or exciting stock situations affords the reader the pleasure of recognition, while variations in detail and the degree of elaboration ward off tedium.

In his accounts of the outlaws' entertainment of the knight and the monk the author reinforced the parallelism of situation by means of verbal and structural symmetry. We must take a close look at these two passages, for although they have been analyzed in detail by several critics,[3] some questions remain unanswered and one knotty point seems to have been entirely misunderstood. A few quotes will serve to illustrate the deliberate verbal parallelism. When Robin sends his men out to fetch home a dinner guest - who turns out to be the knight - he gives Little John this instruction:

> `Take thy gode bowe in thy honde,' sayde Robyn,
> `Late Much wende with the,
> And so shal Willyam Scarloke
> And no man abyde with me [17].

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[1]J. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Dover, New Hampshire, 1985): see *e.g.* 14, 18.
[2]F.J. Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book*, *EETS, OS* 32 (New York, 1969 [[1]1868]), 26-33.
[3]For instance Clawson, 9-24; Fowler, 77-9; Fricke, 9-15; Hart, 93-6.

This is repeated almost verbatim at the beginning of the scene involving the monk(s):

Take thy bowe in thy hande,' sayde Robyn,
Late Much wende with the,
And so shal Wyllyam Scarlok,
And no man abyde with me. [208].

Equally close correspondence is found between several other pairs of stanzas.[1] Some sts. of the first scene are repeated in the second with slight but significant changes.[2] For instance compare st. 26:

`Who is thy maister?' sayde the knyght.
Johnn sayde, `Robyn Hode'.
`He is a gode yoman,' sayde the knyght,
`Of hym I have herde moche gode'

with st. 221:

`Who is your mayster?' sayd the monke
Lytell Johan sayd, `RobynHode' [*sic*],
`He is a stronge thefe,' said the monke,
`Of hym herd I never good.'

Some stanzas are parallel (or contrasting) as to function and contents rather than as to wording.[3] Robin asks the knight how much money he has:

`Tel me truth,' than saide Robyn,
`So God have parte of the:'
`I have no more but ten shelynges,' sayde the knyght,
`So God have parte of me.' [39].

And the monk:

`What is in your cofers?' sayd Robyn,
`Trewe than tell thou me.'
`Syr,' he sayd, `twenty marke,
Al so mote I the.' [243].

By such "narrative symmetry", as Fowler calls it,[4] the author manages to bring out very clearly the essential similarity of the scenes and the differences of bearing and character of the two guests as well as the outlaws' friendliness to the knight and their hostility to the monk. Clawson shows that these two parallel scenes, stripped of all stanzas referring to the knight's debt to the abbot, can be read as brief but substantially complete ballads. The first of these would have told how a knight was brought to Robin Hood as his dinner guest; when asked how much money he carried with him, the knight stated only a small amount, he was searched, found truthful and probably rewarded with a large sum. In the second ballad a monk was forced to dine with Robin, made an untruthful declaration of the amount of cash he had and was robbed

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[1]Sts. 18/209, 20/212, 29:1/225:1, 34:1-2/232:1-2, 40/244.

[2]Sts. 21/213, 26/221, 32:1-2/231:1-2, 41-3/246-8, 44:1-2/251:1-2.

[3]Sts. 19/210, 22-3/216, 24-6/219-21, 30-1/226, 39/243.

[4] Fowler, ch. 3, "Rymes of Robyn Hood" (65-93) *passim*; also see 9, 10, 12, 16, 122, 146, 211-3, 245, 267, 275-7, 299, 321, 325.

of £800.[1] Clawson believes that two such ballads actually formed the bases of fyttes I and IV, although he later re-decides with regard to one of them.[2] It is hardly possible to disprove this hypothesis, but we can suggest a simpler one.

Clawson discusses two passages in the French romance of *Eustace the Monk* (MS of late 13th cent.)[3] which are analogous to those in the *Gest*. As he rightly observes, these incidents are separated by some 900 lines of intervening narrative and there are no clear verbal or structural parallels between them. Yet I do not understand why this should give us "every indication that they are derived from two separate traditional tales or ballads, one of Eustace and a truthful merchant, the other of Eustace and a lying monk". Neither is it obvious to me why "the existence in the Eustace tradition of two such independent stories" should make it "the most plausible assumption" that the parallel passages in the *Gest* were based on two Robin Hood ballads which in their outline resembled the two putative ballads or tales about Eustace.[4] That a romance incident occurs as an isolated episode is not *a priori* proof that it is derived from an earlier tale. There is no evidence that tales or ballads about Eustace existed before the extant romance was written, neither have parallels to the two incidents been found in any English sources antedating this French romance;[5] and in any case it is hard to see why the existence of such tales should have made the author of the *Gest* less likely to have been the first one to attribute such adventures to Robin Hood than one or two earlier balladeers whose products have left no trace. Whereas Clawson, attempting to account for the composition of the *Gest*, derives its two parallel passages from two hypothetical Robin Hood ballads, which he in turn derives from two tales about Eustace, which he again thinks underlay the corresponding passages in the romance of *Eustace*, Leo Jordan, in an attempt to account for the composition of *Eustace*, assumes that parallels between it and the extant early Robin Hood tales are due to independent borrowing from lost 13th century Robin Hood ballads.[6] Much confusion results from disregarding chronology.

Clawson is well aware that the parallels and contrasts between the two scenes of the *Gest* were made quite deliberately, and he agrees with Fricke that they show "in wie engem Zusammenhang die beiderseitigen Erzählungen in ihrer jetzigen Gestalt erfunden sind".[7] In other words, even if these passages may have been based on Robin Hood ballads, someone - either

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[1]See Clawson, 14-7, and in conjunction with this 9-13.
[2]Clawson, 16; and see below p. 24.
[3]Clawson, 15-7; see below pp. 41-44 for further discussion of this romance.
[4]Clawson, 16; De Lange, 50-1, takes a view similar to Clawson's.
[5]L. Jordan, "Quellen und Komposition von Eustache le Moine", *ASnSL* 113 (1904), 66-100, found no such tales about Eustace. Clawson shows no awareness of this article.
[6]Jordan, see especially 97, 98, 100.
[7]Clawson, 14, quoting Fricke, 12.

the author of the *Gest* or someone before him - changed one or both to establish close verbal correspondence. Hart found that *c*. 50 per cent of the stanzas in English and Scottish ballads (including Robin Hood ballads) contain dialogue, whereas the corresponding figure for the *Gest* is *c*. 66 per cent.[1] Seventeen out of the 24 stanzas of the knight episode (= *c*. 71 per cent) and 12 out of the 19 dealing with the monk (= *c*. 63 per cent) contain dialogue. This suggests that the two passages were cast in their present mould by the author of the *Gest*. The probability that this was so becomes a near certainty when we remember that those passages in the account of Robin's "entertainment" of the monk which have no parallel in the earlier scene are nonetheless thematically related to it. Throughout his talk with the monk, Robin maintains that his guest has been sent by Our Lady to pay the knight's debt. In his efforts to bring the nonplussed high cellarer round to this point of view, the outlaw explains the conditions of the loan given to the knight.[2] The two scenes are thus at a fundamental level connected by the loan, and the verbal parallels are probably intended to underscore the connection between them. Clawson is unable to point to anything in the parallel passages which must of necessity have been derived from any of the two hypothetical ballads. It is therefore entirely possible that the author's sources were not ballads at all. Much the simplest assumption is that the suggestion for these two scenes came from some version of the romance of *Eustace the Monk*. We shall take a closer look at this tale in the next chapter.[3]

It is difficult to understand Clawson's eagerness to prove that the passage involving the monk was derived from a Robin Hood ballad in which a single monk was robbed, for it later turns out that fytte IV was based on a ballad in which *two* monks were relieved of their money, and the ballad of the single monk is now only a possible source of inspiration which together with "a natural desire in the compiler for a symmetrical contrast" between fyttes I and IV, led him to excise one of the monks from the ballad on which fytte IV would have been based.[4] That the latter fytte is based on a ballad of Robin Hood and two monks was first suggested by Richard Fricke.[5] There is something to say for this hypothesis, although not all of the evidence adduced in favour of it will bear scrutiny. Most critics have found the text inconsistent in several points with regard to the number of monks entertained by Robin as his dinner guests. Clawson considers these contradictory statements too numerous and too serious to be explained as the result of the author's or copyists' carelessness. Let us look at the evidence.

On the outlook for possible dinner guests, John, Scarlock and Much the Miller's Son become

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[1]Hart, 101, 314-5.
[2]See sts. 232-42, 248-52, and also Little John's remarks in 206-7, 214.
[3]See below pp. 41-44.
[4]Clawson, 23, and see 24.
[5]Fricke, 13-4.

"ware of two blacke monkes, [/] Eche on a good palferay" [213:3-4]. In st. 214:4, John feels convinced: "That these monkes have brought our pay". Yet in st. 216:1 we are told that: "The monke [*sic*] hath two and fifty men". This is certainly a mistake, but I would suggest that from now on the narrative runs more smoothly than is generally thought. Stanza 217 refers to the newcomers by the pronoun "them", thus clearly implying two monks. John tells his comrades to bend their bows, adding that: "The formost monke, his lyfe and his deth [/] Is closed in my honde" [218:3-4]. Assuming that there really ought to be only one monk, Clawson regards this latter remark as the author's attempt to solve the contradiction "by the explanation that one monk was much more prominent than the other".[1] The obvious and unstrained reading is that there are two monks, one of whom rides ahead of the other. If this reading is adopted, the next stanza makes better sense than Clawson thinks:

`Abyde, chorle monke,' sayd Lytell Johan,
`No ferther that thou gone;
Yf thou doost, by dere worthy God,
Thy deth is in my honde. [219].

The single person addressed here must be the "foremost" monk. According to Clawson, only one monk is mentioned from now on, the other one has disappeared quite unaccountably. In fact, John goes on speaking to a single monk - he must be the "foremost" one - cursing him for having kept the outlaws' "master" fasting by coming so late (st. 220). On learning who the outlaw chief is, the monk blurts out: "He is a strong thefe" [221:3].[2] John tells him he will be sorry for this answer (st. 222). And then, "twang" goes the bowstring:

Much was redy with a bolte,
Redly and anone,
He set the monke to fore the brest,
To the grounde that he can gone. [223].

The "foremost" monk is killed then, and accordingly only the other monk remains. For some reason this murder seems to have gone undetected by most critics. Probably the auxiliary in the last line of the stanza has been taken for a modal verb, and so the whole stanza has been understood to mean that Much only threatens the monk.[3] However, in this case "can" is not pres. sg. of the modal verb "cunnen", but a variant form of "gan", pret. sg. of the nearly meaningless ME auxiliary "ginnen".[4] Apart from the stanza just quoted, there are four other instances in the *Gest* of "can" as a form of "ginnen". One example will suffice. As to the archery contest at the beginning of fytte III we are told that:

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[1]Clawson, 21.
[2]This st. is quoted *in toto* above p. 22.
[3]Thus *e.g.* Holt (1982), 86: "[in fyttes I, II and IV] indeed not a single arrow is let fly; the threat is sufficient to put the monks' retinue to flight."
[4]For this form of "ginnen", see R. Jordan, 167, 288.

Thre tymes Litell Johnn shet aboute,
And alwey he slet the wande,
The proude sherif of Notingham
By the markes can stande. [146].[1]

Here we are certainly not concerned with the sheriff's *ability* to stand by the marks: it is abundantly clear from the sequel that he is actually present. In the other cases it is equally certain that a modal sense is out of the question. If it is accepted that "can" in st. 223 has the value of "gan", it follows that the monk to whom John had spoken is killed. This would certainly be the result if one was hit in the chest by an arrow shot by someone within speaking distance. No wonder then that the monk "went to ground".

The story of the monks continues thus:

Of two and fyfty wyght yonge yemen
There abode not one,
Saf a lytell page and a grome,
To lede the somers with Lytel Johan.

They brought the monke to the lodge dore,
Whether he were loth or lefe,
For to speke with Robyn Hode,
Maugre in theyr tethe. [224-5].

It would have made for greater clarity if the surviving monk had been referred to as "the other monk" or similar, but whether there is really such a "remarkable inconsistency" in the last of these two stanzas as Clawson thinks is more debatable. He takes for granted that "theyr" in the last line refers only to "the monke" of the first line; but the last line implies the presence of two monks and is thus not in keeping with the rest of the stanza.[2] Those unwilling to be brought before Robin could be the monk *and* the page and groom of the preceding stanza. Another slightly more likely possibility is that "Maugre in theyr tethe" refers not to the victims, but to John, Scarlock and Much. At the opening of the fytte, Robin will not let dinner be served (st. 206), for he is worried because Our Lady has not sent him his pay, *i.e.* the knight's debt has not been paid. Little John feels hurt on behalf of the good knight - his recent master - and somewhat crossly tells Robin not to worry, for "Yet is nat the sonne at rest" and "I dare say, and savely swere, [/] The knight is true and truste.'" [st. 207:2-4]. John is therefore angry when he and his two comrades leave Robin to go look for a dinner guest: "Forth then stert Lytel Johan, [/] Half in tray and tene" [st. 211:1-2]. In such bad mood and further incensed at the monks' attitude, the

[1]Also see sts. 184:2, 316:4, 344:4; Child's b-variant has "gan" instead of "can" in 146:4, 316:4 and 344:4 (Child, III, 79, 80); the d-variant has "can" for "gan" in 291:1, 296:2 and 447:2 (*ibid.*, 81); the f-variant has "gan" for "can" in 146:4, 223:4, 316:4 and 344:4 (*ibid.*, 82, 83, 84) and "can" for "gan" in 214:2, 263:2 , 291:1, 319:1, 389:2, 392:2, 397:2, 422:4, 428:1 and 447:2 (*ibid.*, 83, 84, 85); the g-variant has "gan" for "can" in 29:2, 316:4 and 344:4 (*ibid.*, 85, 87, 88) and "can" for "gan" in 263:2, 392:2, 397:2, 422:4, 428:1 and 447:2 (*ibid.*, 87, 88, 89).
[2]Clawson, 19-20.

outlaws might be inclined to give the remaining monk as short shrift as the "foremost" one received, yet, even if somewhat reluctantly, "Maugre in theyr tethe", they instead follow Robin's orders and bring the monk to him. Thus "theyr" in the last and "They" in the first line of st. 225 would have the same referent. Yet both of these tentative readings seem a little strained. As will be shown in the next chapter, the author may well have been influenced by a similar scene in one of his sources in which the victims are in the plural.[1]

The outlaws thus meet two monks, kill one of them because of his low opinion of Robin Hood and bring the surviving monk to their leader. The only remaining inconsistency is that st. 216 mentions only one monk when both are still alive.

It is by no means impossible that the author's source featured two monks. Only a single stanza is devoted to the murder of the "foremost" monk; if this incident had been primarily intended to appeal to the antimonastic sentiments of the readership, the author would presumably have treated it in greater detail. It is therefore likely to have been deviced to adjust material derived from a source featuring two monks to a sequel in which only one monk was to appear as well as to the earlier scene with a single knight. However, the author was more careful in making this change than would appear from Clawson's analysis. The unknown poet did not create quite as much confusion in his text as has generally been thought. On the other hand he may well be blamed for complicity in the murder of one of the two monks, but if his motive was a desire to adjust the present scene to its context, this must certainly be considered an extenuating circumstance.

In addition to plot continuity and anaphoric as well as cataphoric allusions the author has lent unity to his tale by means of parallel or deliberately contrasting situations, in two cases reinforced by clear verbal parallels. Fowler seems right in concluding that "the stitching that binds the various episodes together is more significant than the assumed vestigial remains of earlier Robin Hood ballads."[2]

Some previous analyses of the Gest

A little "archaeology" has often been thought necessary to unearth the component ballads of the *Gest*, but sometimes, as in Hunter, the text is crudely cut up into pieces of varying length. He sees the *Gest* as a kind of life of Robin Hood "or rather a small collection of the ballads strung together, so as to give a continuity to the story"; to these ballads the author or compiler added a "few stanzas here and there", but there is "no difficulty in discovering where each original ballad begins and where it ends".[3] So Hunter divides the text into six or seven ballads

[1]See below p. 43.
[2]Fowler, 79.
[3]Hunter, 6, 11.

and even gives them titles, thus lending a spurious appearance of certainty to his analysis. Such a simple model is obviously not in keeping with the results of the analysis of the text made above. To illustrate how ill-considered Hunter's literary analysis is, it will suffice to note that in the second half of his first hypothetical ballad, "Robin Hood and the Knight" (fytte I from st. l7 onwards and all of II), the outlaws are almost entirely absent and the "ballad" breaks off when the knight is busy saving the unfortunate wrestler; clearly a most unsatisfactory ending.

F.J. Child's account of the composition of the *Gest* in his introduction to the poem is more well-considered than Hunter's analysis, but it is still not very detailed. He characterizes the poem as "a three-ply web of the adventures of Robin Hood with a knight, with the sheriff of Nottingham, and with the king". The first "ply" corresponds to fyttes I, II and IV; the second to fyttes III, V and VI; the third to VII and VIII. This tripartition of the text has been generally accepted, in part perhaps because it spares the critic the inconvenience of having to deal with Little John's quite independent adventure with the sheriff in the midst of the discussion of the story of the knight's loan. However, it should be emphasized that the phrase "three-ply web" is not simply intended as a description of the text as we have it, but also as a characterization of its method of composition. The three "plies" or divisions correspond to three hypothetical ballads which Child calls "Robin Hood, the Knight and the Monk", "Robin Hood, Little John and the Sheriff" and "Robin Hood and the King". In addition to these, a handful of stanzas at the end of the poem are derived from a ballad on "Robin Hood's Death".[1]

The first division of the text would work excellently as an independent tale. When, at the end of fytte IV, the knight leaves the outlaws after having offered to pay his debt, matters have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and as noted above, the fytte ends with a prayer for the well-being of the narrator and his audience, a characteristic ending in romances as well as early ballads.[2] The only detail which would be slightly out of place if this division was an independent tale is Robin's warning against the sheriff of Nottingham in the introduction, for the brief mention of an anonymous sheriff's being in league with the abbot in fytte II is hardly enough to justify such notoriety.[3]

However, the other two divisions are less independent and coherent. They are of course kept together by having Robin as their protagonist and by frequent recurrence to the theme of the

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[1]Child, III, 39-56; see especially 42, 50.

[2]St. 280 (see above p. 16); such sts. in ballads in MSS of *c.* 1650 or earlier, see Child, I, 254 (st. 10), 273 (st. 45), II, 248 (st. 34), III, 30 (st. 170), 101 (st. 90), 113 (st. 83), 151 (A, st. 7), 287 (st. 66), 298 (st. 70), 310 (st. 68), 314 (st. 64), 333 (st. 32), 446 (st. [15]), V, 57 (st. 66), 80 (st. 57), 83 (st. 56); for such sts. in romances, see *e. g.* D.B. Sands, ed., *Middle English Verse Romances* (New York, 1966), 54 (ll. 1535-42), 129 (ll. 2994-3001), 153 (ll. 810-2), 181 (l. 902), 200 (l. 580), 232 (ll. 1042-4), 278 (ll. 1130-1), 346-7 (ll. 838-58), 371 (ll. 659-60).

[3]See st. 107:3-4 and above pp. 13-13.

knight's debt and gratitude to, and friendship with him; the sheriff's soliciting the king's help against Robin and the knight in the second division requires a sequel like the last division, where the monarch appears in person to track down the outlaw and his friend. Yet, whereas the first section is more of a piece, the other two consist, as Holt notes, of "miscellaneous material"; they are essentially episodic.[1] When Child's tripartition of the text will be adopted in the chapter that follows it is therefore merely as a matter of convenience; I do not believe that the *Gest* was put together from the three rather long ballads Child envisaged.

Clawson in his analysis of the *Gest* availed himself of the materials for the study of the poem collected by Child and also took over his tripartition of the text, but his analysis is far more detailed than those offered by Child or any other previous critics. His work is much too lengthy and complex to be discussed in full detail within the limits of the present thesis. Yet we must acquaint ourselves with its general features and discuss its theoretical foundations.

Clawson sees the *Gest* as based on some fifteen sources: ten or eleven Robin Hood ballads, two ballads not belonging to the cycle, a miracle of the Virgin and an exemplum. All the non-Robin Hood sources went into the making of the first division; nearly 38 per cent of the stanzas here are attributed to the "compiler"; a mere 28.5 per cent are considered to have been derived from Robin Hood ballads. In the second division, the "compiler" contributed at least *c*. 21 per cent of the stanzas; the remaining *c*. 79 per cent came from Robin Hood ballads. The corresponding figures for the last division are *c*. 25 and *c*. 75 per cent.[2] Although Clawson does not comment on this, the relatively low amount of Robin Hood material in the quite self-contained first division seems to support the assumption that this may have existed as an independent tale.

The stanzas added by the "compiler", amounting to a good 30 per cent of the whole text, have an introductory or transitional function or refer to past or future events, thus adding unity to the narrative. A good deal of this material relates to the knight. Clawson's results are here very well in keeping with what we have found. He correctly notes that the author "was not a mere mechanical fitter-together of separate ballads, but an original poet", who wove the ballads at his disposal "into a unified narrative which bears throughout the stamp of his individuality". Yet this awareness of the importance of the author's contribution to the tale at the same time furnishes an important point of criticism against Clawson's suggestions as to the ballad sources, for when the author is responsible for so much connective and unifying matter, why should he not have made substantial and perhaps original contributions to the various actions of the

[1]Holt (1982), 24.

[2]These figures are based on the table in Clawson's conclusion, 125-7. In the body of the work the possibility that more sts. may be attributable to the "compiler" is frequently considered, see pp. 41, 52, 53, 86, 118, 119, 122, 123. I have disregarded this, taking his conclusion to express his final opinion. The figures for the "compiler's" contribution are therefore minimum figures.

poem? If there "is probably not a stanza in the *Gest* which has not at least been revised by his hand, and many passages [...] are to be assigned entirely to him",[1] how can we hope to discern the contours of the original ballads with any certainty? None of them has survived and hardly any of the later ballads are similar enough to be their direct descendants. Clawson himself disposes of the only attempt yet made - by Brandl - to isolate component tales on dialect criteria.[2] Under these circumstances the argument has to rest on internal evidence and theoretical assumptions about ballad origins and chronology. Clawson's conclusions from the former and his premises with regard to the latter are by no means insusceptible to criticism.

The four most important basic assumptions are: 1) Inconsistencies in the text indicate an attempt to splice pre-existing ballads together.[3] 2) If stylistically incongruent with the rest of the tale, a given passage represents an underlying ballad source.[4] 3) Portions of the text that can be shown to narrate a short action with a single climax represent component ballads[5]. 4) The existence of parallel incidents in earlier outlaw tales or later (!) Robin Hood ballads lends supportive evidence that a given portion of the text represents a now lost ballad source.[6] None of these assumptions can be confidently made. With regard to the first point: when there appears to be an inconsistency, the reader may have misunderstood the text; he should make a substantial effort to make sense of the text as it is. It does not seem that Clawson has done so with regard to the monk(s) in fytte IV.[7] If the text remains inconsistent, it may be due to copyists' or printers' carelessness or their misguided attempt to make sense of a passage which was in the first place unclear as distinct from inconsistent. If the inconsistency is indeed due to the author, it may be simply an inadvertent slip, or the author may have failed to keep track of the complexities of his plot. Finally, if the inconsistency has arisen from the attempt to fuse two or more sources together, the latter may have been Robin Hood ballads, other ballads, tales about the outlaw belonging to other genres, or non-Robin Hood tales belonging to other genres. There is clearly a multitude of possibilities to be taken into account; yet Clawson tends to consider only the explanation he prefers. Concerning the second point it must be noted that what I have termed stylistic incongruence is a rather more subjective matter than logical inconsistency; if, as is sometimes the case, stylistic "peculiarities" which suggest that some parts of the text were based on older ballads are also in evidence in others which are

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[1]Clawson, 48; Clawson's italics.
[2]Clawson, 7-8; and see the work referred to there.
[3]See Clawson, 19-23, 42-6, 89-90, 93-4.
[4]See Clawson, *e.g.*, 63-4, 117.
[5]Clawson, 14-5, 68, 70-1, 114, 117.
[6]Clawson, 15-6, 45-6, 65-8, 69, 75, 88-9, 112-3.
[7]See above pp. 24-27.

attributable to the author, we clearly cannot base a certain case on them[1]. And whether or not *e.g.* abrupt transitions are due to the author, they most likely reflect his artistic choice, since he made such a substantial effort at narrative unity. As regards the third point, it cannot have escaped any medievalist's notice that many if not most works of narrative literature of the age, especially romances and the very few medieval ballads we possess, are derivative and episodic. If we were to assume that every episode in every tale about a given hero were derived from a pre-existing short tale about the same character, it would lead to a downright absurd and quite gratuitous proliferation of hypothetical "ballads" or proto-romances. Apart from the rather metaphysical assumptions which we shall see underlie Clawson's study, the possible existence of Robin Hood ballads that formed a link between earlier non-Robin Hood literature and the *Gest* must to a large extent rest on the specious argument that the appearance of a sub-plot or motif in an early romance or other source somehow makes it more likely that someone writing before the author of the *Gest* turned this bit of narrative into a Robin Hood ballad. This appears to me to be rather dubious on first principles. Obviously our knowledge of an earlier parallel to a part of the *Gest* renders it superfluous to assume a hypothetical intermediary source, unless internal evidence or references in other medieval literature forces us to do so. One wonders whether Clawson knew about Ockham's razor.

It would be vain to hope for an analysis of the *Gest* that could settle once and for all the questions of the author's contribution to the poem and the number and nature of his sources. J.C. Holt states the case so well:

> critics have differed, and will continue to differ, about the extent of the unifying contribution of the author of the *Gest* or about the number of distinct component elements which went into its making. There is room for argument, if only because none of the components survive other than in the *Gest*.[2]

For this reason Clawson's conclusions must remain hypothetical, while for the same reason they also remain incapable of being definitively disproved. If it is thus rather futile to pursue the shadowy contours of these hypothetical ballad sources, it is certainly worthwhile to examine the theoretical basis of Clawson's analysis. Since his study is by far the most detailed and comprehensive attempt to account for the composition and sources of the *Gest* it has quite naturally come to exert a great influence on studies of the medieval Robin Hood tradition, so it is the more regrettable that its premises have apparently never been discussed. Of the historians who have written on the topic only Holt again seems to show awareness of the tendency inherent in Clawson's study:

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[1]Clawson, 59, notes that an abrupt shift from one point in time to another shows that the author of the *Gest* who effected this shift was well in touch with the abrupt style of the ballad. On other occasions such abruptness is taken as an indication that the *Gest* preserves passages from older ballads: see *e.g.* 63-4.
[2]Holt (1982), 25. Holt's *italics*.

> Clawson may have been a little too ready to multiply the number of separate components which must have underlain the *Gest* and to assume that those components already took the form of ballads.[1]

Before he has yet begun his analysis, Clawson states that:

> indeed it is hard to conceive that a poem relating a succession of distinct and slightly interwoven outlaw adventures in ballad metre and style can have been composed in any other way than by the combination and re-working of separate ballads of that outlaw.[2]

In fact his study shows the *Gest* to be a rather more complex composition than this passage suggests; this shines through in the conclusion, where it is observed that the text

> is not a mere mechanical stringing together of ballads, but a complete rehandling and fusion of ballads, and medieval tales as well, into a unified narrative.[3]

It is the "rehandling" and "fusion" of the material that makes it so difficult - probably impossible - to say precisely what the sources were like. Most of the older tales containing analogues to the *Gest* are romances. The whole poem, like its third, fifth and sixth fyttes, opens with a call for the audience's attention, a trait more common in romances than in early ballads and more typical of early than of later ballad poetry:

> Lythe and listin, gentilmen,
> That be of frebore blode;
> I shall you tel of a gode yeman,
> His name was Robyn Hode. [1].[4]

Narrative symmetry, such as we find it in the scenes of the knight's and the monk's visits to the outlaws' camp, is also, as Fowler notes, a feature which the *Gest* and other examples of "minstrel" poetry share with medieval romances.[5] It is entirely possible, and indeed very likely, that the Robin Hood tales on which the author drew were metrically as diverse as romances and stylistically more akin to romances than to ballads; rather than being the "simple ballads" envisaged by Hart and Clawson, they would have had complex plots as well as the "lyth and listen" intros, the narratorial "tags" adding emotional comment and lyrical detail, and the "Now leave we, now speak we of" type of transitions found so regularly in metrical romances and early minstrel "ballads". Such a suggestion gains strength from the known chronology of the genres. Whereas the romance is unquestionably a medieval genre, we possess only a handful of medieval "ballads" - or more properly, quatrain poems meant for

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[1] *Ibid.*, 191 n. 11. Holt's *italics*.

[2] Clawson, 6-7.

[3] *Ibid.*, 128.

[4] Also see sts. 144, 282, 317. Direct address to the audience is found in many later Robin Hood ballads, see Child, III, pp. 109 (st. 2), 118, 134 (st. 3), 145, 156, 159, 165, 168, 171, 173, 189, 191, 194, 195, 198, 206, 209 (sts. 1-2), 215, 227 (sts. 1-2) (references are to first sts., unless otherwise stated), but it is rare in ballads outside the tradition. Of the twelve romances in Sands only *Sir Orfeo* (pp. 185-200), *The Squire of Low Degree* (249-278) and *Floris and Blancheflour* (279-309) are without such direct address to the audience; the version of the latter poem used by Sands lacks the introduction.

[5] Fowler, 72-3.

recitation - and they are all preserved in MSS or prints of *c*. 1450 or later. The treatment of a biblical and therefore very "un-balladlike" theme in *Judas*, surviving in an MS of *c*. 1250, in a manner close to ballad style, hardly justifies belief in the exsistence of a corpus of secular ballad poetry at this early date[1]. Yet clearly the assumption that the *Gest* was composed early in the 15th cent. (or in the latter half of the fourteenth, as Clawson thinks) from a dozen of ballads presupposes the belief in the proliferation of this genre at a quite early date, from which there is in fact no evidence of the existence of ballads, but plenty of romances surviving in MSS. Although no Robin Hood romances survive, it is worth noting that the very first snippet of a poem about the outlaw to survive, in a Lincoln Cathedral MS of the first quarter of the 15th century, was clearly not part of a ballad, but of a poem in four-stress line rhyming couplets:

> Roby*n* hod in scherewod stod hodud *and* hathud hosut *and* schod ffour / And thuynti arowus he bar In hit ho*n*d*us*[2]

When Clawson was nonetheless convinced of the great age of the ballad, he was in line with contemporary opinion; more particularly, he was obviously much influenced by the general theory of the development of popular literature propounded by W.M. Hart in *Ballad and Epic* (1907), and he also took over the latter's concept of the "simple ballad". Clawson finds that the *Gest* employs "the material, the metre, and to some extent the style of the single ballad", while in scope and complexity it evinces "a decided approach to the method and style of the epic."[3] The "simple ballads" from which the poem was supposedly made up would have been characterized by brevity, abrupt transitions between scenes, a non-complex plot and a narrative focus on the action rather than on descriptive detail and background.[4] Clawson finds that if his analysis be accepted

> then the theory that popular epics like the *Iliad*, the *Beowulf*, and the *Roland* are a development by means of accretion and artistic rehandling from popular ballads, receives important confirmation from the *Gest of Robin Hood*.[5]

This is only too well in keeping with Hart's highly speculative and extremely unlikely theory of narrative evolution. To this critic the aboriginal narrative nucleus is the "simple ballad" which by processes of accretion and agglomeration developed into more complex poems like the Robin Hood ballads, border ballads, the *Gest* and, finally (!) epics such as those mentioned

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[1]See Fowler, 6-7, 20, 42-3, 68.

[2]G.E. Morris, "A Ryme of Robyn Hod", *Modern Language Review* 43 (1948), 507-8; Morris's italics. This fragment has been discovered a second time by a Nottinghamshire enthusiast, see the notice "'Further Proof' of Robin Hood", in *Daily Telegraph* for January 2 1981.

[3]Clawson, 1.

[4]Clawson, specifically refers to Hart's concept of the "simple ballad" on pp. 59, 63-4. Also see *e.g.* 68-9, 72, 80, 83, 88.

[5]Clawson, 129. Clawson's italics.

by Clawson.[1] Dobson & Taylor rightly note that Hart's discussion of the *Gest* "seems extremely misguided" and, as Müller comments, his "higher chronology" that makes the epic a development of the ballad "steht in absolutem Widerspruch zu dem, was wir von der Geschichte der epischen Gattungen wissen."[2] According to Hart the "simple ballad" represents "the narrative poem in its briefest, least developed state", its narrator "moves abruptly from incident to incident [...] without explanation, or any sort of transition whatever"; being concerned with "just the simple, single action of his ballad [...] told without preliminaries."[3] Only one of the 72 ballads analyzed in order to establish these characteristics[4] is found in a 15th century MS; one is recorded *c*. 1575, while the rest are of the 17th to 19th centuries[5] To use this material to represent something anterior to the epic is, to be frank, sheer topsy-turvydom. The assumption that the putative "ballad" sources of the *Gest* shared these traits is quite preposterous; the more so since the earliest ballads - mainly Robin Hood items - have more complex plots developed at a leisurely pace and with much descriptive and lyrical detail.

Some conclusions

The *Gest*, it has been suggested, is probably not quite as old as is often thought. The detailed linguistic analysis that could clarify the matter has yet to be made. In the meantime, it must be concluded that a later date of composition seems more likely on the strength of the textual evidence. If an analysis of the "ideology" of the poem does not lead to certain conclusions, then neither does it argue against a 15th century date. If the *Gest* does thus not gain credibility as a historical source by being nearly contemporary with the events it supposedly treats of, its trustworthiness cannot on the other hand be salvaged by appealing to its fidelity to earlier sources. Inasmuch as the latter were Robin Hood tales, they are lost to us and our knowledge of the chronology of the narrative genres suggests that they are more likely to have been romances than ballads; some or all of the older tales the author borrowed from may not have been written in ballad quatrains. Hence very likely his meddling with his sources - to take the point of view of the disappointed historian rather than that of the grateful general reader - may have been very extensive indeed. In this situation it is best only to have faith in the authenticity of the *Gest*'s account where it can be corroborated by external evidence. One can,

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[1]See for instance Hart, 307-11.

[2]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 9 n. 1; W.G. Müller, *Die englisch-schottische Volksballade* (Bern & Munich, 1983), 30; for the concept of "higher chronology", see Hart 2-4.

[3]Hart, 4, 40, 288.

[4]Hart, 8-60, 314.

[5]15th cent. ballad: Child No. 22; 16th cent.: No. 178; 17th cent.: Nos. 7, 9, 10, 26, 48, 63, 73-74, 80-81, 83, 107-110, 155, 173, 272; 18th cent.: Nos. 4, 6, 11-14, 20, 34, 37-39, 42-43, 51, 53, 58, 62, 64-68, 76-77, 79, 82, 86, 90-91, 93-94, 96, 98, 181, 203, 210, 218; 19th cent.: Nos. 15, 17, 25, 40-41, 49, 57, 70, 72, 78, 87, 113, 201, 221, 270.

however, turn to the surviving non-ballad analogues to establish how much of the *Gest* is almost certainly derivative and hence cannot pass as the authentic doings of a real-life Robin Hood.

3. Analogues to the Gest *in Medieval Literature*

Hunter was too optimistic when he assumed that the *Gest* is a relatively straightforward attempt to string a number of ballads together. The poem cannot be neatly divided into a few component ballads. The so-called compiler must have made a large original contribution to the tale. This means that we cannot, like Hunter, regard the *Gest* as a safe index to the earliest Robin Hood tradition; nor, therefore, is it as likely as he thought to be an undistorted account of the career of a hypothetical historical outlaw. Just as serious as this mistaken belief in the "compiler's" fidelity to his sources is Hunter's failure to examine any of the surviving older tales containing parallels to the incidents and motifs of the *Gest*. Neither have any of his later followers, Walker, Harris and Bellamy, done much to make up for this omission.[1] This deficiency must be remedied in the present chapter. We shall attempt to determine which incidents and features in the *Gest* are derived from older literature and must therefore be largely fictional. The basic assumption will be that those of Robin and his men's actions which had already been attributed to several older heroes are obviously unlikely to be authentic.

The sources to be examined are the exemplum and miracle mentioned briefly above,[2] some examples of the type of story known as "king and subject tales" and a handful of early outlaw romances. Well-known as these parallels are, they must be discussed at some length, for although Holt has an excellent chapter on this topic,[3] several parallels have not been analyzed in detail since Clawson's *Gest of Robin Hood* (1909),[4] and while he was much interested in literary source relationships, he was not at all concerned with their implications for the potential authenticity of the *Gest*'s account of Robin Hood.

In the last section of this chapter, I shall briefly revert to the question of the Robin Hood tales the author may have drawn on. A couple of passages in the poem itself in conjunction with a few allusions in late medieval literature suggest that the author chose only to touch upon some of the then known Robin Hood matter in the briefest and most casual way. That the author almost completely ignored some of the Robin Hood tales he must have known should warn us that he may have wrought such substantial changes on the received tradition that its possible historical contents have been transmuted out of recognition, a fact which, together with the

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[1]For brief discussions of these parallels in their works, see Hunter, 33; J.W. Walker, "Robin Hood Identified", *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 36 (1944), 15-6; J.W. Walker, *The True History of Robin Hood* (Wakefield, 1952), xv-xvi; P.V. Harris, *The Truth about Robin Hood* (Mansfield, 1978 [[1]1951]), 13, 16 n. 2, 18 n. 2, 19 n. 1, 32, 47-50, 100; Bellamy (1985), 6, 24, 63-4, 66, 80, 133.

[2]See above p. 29.

[3]Holt (1982), 62-81, ch. 4: "The Original Robin Hood".

[4]See above p. 8 n. 3.

presence of much material derived directly or indirectly from literary sources external to the Robin Hood tradition, may well make it a rather quixotic task to pursue the historical Robin Hood on the basis of the *Gest*.

Earlier outlaw tales

The most important medieval analogues to the *Gest* are without doubt the four outlaw romances of *Wistasse le Moine* (in the sequel = *Eustace*), *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* (= *FFW*), *The Tale of Gamelyn* (= *Gamelyn*) and the *Gesta Herewardi*.[1] These tales resemble the *Gest* in specific incidents as well as in several traits in the characters and careers of their heroes. Some general features of these narratives must be discussed briefly before studying detailed parallels.

The French *Eustace* romance survives in a single MS. tentatively dated to 1284.[2] There is no direct evidence that it was known in England, but it is extremely likely that it was. The historical Eustace, a disaffected vassal of the count of Bolougne, served as a sea-captain under King John in 1205-12, but then swung over to the enemy and served the French king in a similar capacity. He was killed by the English at the Battle of Sandwich in 1217.[3] His life and doings have left a considerable mark upon English records and chronicles and seem to have stirred the imagination of Englishmen at an early date, for by the reign of Edward I, Walter of Hemingford could describe him as "quidam tyrannus ex Hispania [*sic*] cognomine Monachus" and he was soon famous as a "pyrata fortissimus" and an adept in "nigromaunce".[4] Such notoriety makes it extremely likely that the rumbustiously humorous French romance was soon extant in England.

The AN prose romance of *FFW*, which is a close paraphrase of a non-extant AN verse romance of the late 13th century, survives in a single MS (*c*. 1325-40).[5] A copy of the AN prose romance and an incomplete copy of an ME alliterative version were still extant in the 1540s when John Leland summarized the tale.[6] The story was then evidently well-known and popular. The first third of *FFW* tells the history of the Fitz-Warins, a baronial family of the

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[1] *Li Romans de Wistasse le Moine* (*University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures* 126) (Chapel Hill, 1972), ed. D.J. Conlon. *Fouke Le Fitz Waryn* (*Anglo-Norman Texts*) (Oxford, 1975), ed. E.J. Hathaway, P.T. Ricketts, C.A. Robson & A.D. Wilshere. Edn. of *Gamelyn* in Sands, 154-81. Edn. of *Gesta Herewardi* in *Lestoire des Engles solum la Translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, ed. & trans. T.D. Hardy & C.T. Martin (*Rolls Series* 91, pts. 1 & 2) (London, 1888-9), pt. 1, 339-404.

[2] Conlon, 11.

[3] See Conlon, 14-9; also see Keen (1979), 53-63; H.L. Cannon, "The Battle of Sandwich and Eustace the Monk", *EHR* 27 (1912), 649-70.

[4] Conlon, 113, 117, 119. Almost all 57 items in Conlon's list of record and chronicle materials relating to Eustace (pp. 108-22) are English.

[5] Hathaway *et al.*, xxi, xxxvii.

[6] Leland's summary is printed in F. Michel, ed., *Histoire de Foulques Fitz-Warin* (Paris, 1840), 101-12; also see Hathaway *et al.*, xxi-xxiii, xxi n. 13, xxv, xxvi, xxxvii, and their notes to the text, 62-104 *passim*.

Anglo-Welsh border area, from the Conquest to the late 12th century. The remainder deals with the outlawry of Fulk Fitz-Warin III, who, because the king repeatedly failed to recognize the Fitz-Warins' claim to the castle of Whittington, went into open rebellion against King John, probably in the summer of 1200, and remained an outlaw until late 1203.[1] The tale is an odd mixture of history, local and family traditions, outlaw stories and fantastic romance motifs.

Unlike Eustace and Fulk, the eponymous hero of *Gamelyn* (written *c*. 1350) seems unknown to history. The poem deals with Gamelyn's long battle against his eldest brother, who, acting with a cruelty to his ward so typical of guardians in medieval romances, will not hand over to his youngest brother the share of the paternal lands bequeathed to him by their deceased father. In the course of this family conflict Gamelyn takes to the woods, while "the fals knight his brother" is made sheriff. Gamelyn needs the support of able-bodied men to win the struggle against his brother, and so very appropriately, he soon meets a band of forest outlaws and becomes their "crouned king" when their previous ruler speeds off home upon receiving his pardon. In romances, luck smiles upon the righteous. It is significant that the presence of such a large and well-organized band of outlaws in the greenwood requires no explanation beyond the general one that "Many good mannes child in care is y-brought". The basic features of Robin's band are exactly like those of Gamelyn's: in both cases the gang numbers "Seven score of yonge men", *i.e.* "yeomen", or as they are also called in both poems, "merry men".[2] Robin is never actually called King of Outlaws in the *Gest*, but just like Gamelyn and his predecessor he is the "maister" outlaw. He makes the laws and gives orders, he issues new liveries to his men twice a year, just as he expects the king will do to him and his men when they enter royal service (170:2-3, 420). Robin in a sense has the prerogative of pardon: in the greenwood the king is in Robin's power, and so asks his mercy, before himself pardoning the outlaws (412-4). The king also finds that the state of discipline prevailing among them compares favourably with that at his own court:

> 'Here is a wonder semely syght
> Me thynketh, by Goddes pyne,
> His men are more at his byddynge
> Then my men be at myn.' [391].

In effect if not in name, therefore, Robin is king of the greenwood. In all essentials the organization of his band parallels that of Gamelyn's. It will appear from a discussion of historical robber gangs below that the literary conception of outlaw bands may have had some

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[1]Hathaway *et al.*, ix-xv, xxvii-xxxii; Keen (1979), 39-52.

[2]Sands, 173 (ll. 624, 628), 175 (ll. 695, 697), 177 (l. 774). For Robin's band of seven score see *Gest* sts. 185:3, 229:3, 288:3, 342:2, 389:3, 416:4, 448:3; and see 205:3, 262:4, 281:3, 287:1, 316:3, 340:3, 382:3 for his "merry men". "Yeoman" is a shortened form of "youngerman" or "young man": *OED 2*, *s.v.* "yeoman".

influence on real robber gangs and vice versa.[1]

Famous as the leader of English resistance to the Norman invaders, Hereward the Saxon has had his career celebrated in several chronicles and other (quasi-)historical works. Although reliable contemporary evidence is scanty, his historicity is beyond doubt. The *Gesta Herewardi*, the most central and circumstantial account of his deeds, often borrows from Germanic heroic tradition in order to add flesh to the rather bare skeleton of historical facts. This prose account, written around the middle of the 12th century, in several points foreshadows *Eustace*, *FFW* and *Gamelyn* as well as some early Robin Hood ballads, most notably *Robin Hood and the Potter*.[2] It also has similarities with the *Gest*, but they are not close and specific. Its chief importance to this study is that it seems to have supplied a kind of template for later outlaw traditions.

As portrayed in their respective tales these four heroes all point forward to the Robin Hood of the *Gest*. They are all outlaws at the head of a band of loyal men; they all, at least during part of their outlawry, live in the forest; in their struggle against their enemies they rely not only on strength of arms, but also on ruses and trickery. With the partial exception of Eustace they do not plunder and attack indiscriminately, their victims being only their powerful and dishonest enemies (and their agents). Except for Eustace the heroes are pardoned by the king, and they and their men are received at court and/or rewarded with official positions. Finally, though this hardly needs saying, they are portrayed in a favourable light throughout.

Some of these common characteristics are also found in Icelandic outlaw traditions. On the basis of analyses of the sagas of *Gisli*, *Hordr*, *Grettir* and *An Bogsveigir* (An the Archer) De Lange has drawn up a list of six common traits, three of which recur in the tales we are concerned with: rather than being a solitary desperado, the hero is the leader of a band of outlaws, he is "cunning as well as strong", and he employs various disguises. The latter is a very frequent expedient in the Robin Hood ballads, although Robin himself does not disguise in the *Gest*. Traditions with these features, De Lange suggests, were current among the Norse at an early date and were brought with them to Iceland and England.[3] We are thus dealing with traits of very general currency that may have characterized many non-extant English outlaw tales. That their recurrence in the *Gest* is, however, due to its dependence on *Gesta Herewardi*, *Eustace*, *FFW* and *Gamelyn*, rather than on lost sources, will become clear in

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[1]See below pp. 78-79.

[2]Date of *Gesta Herewardi* cf. C. Kightly, *Folk Heroes of Britain* (London, 1984 [[1]1982]), 122. Good discussions of the Hereward tradition are found in Holt (1982), 62-3; Keen (1979), 9-38; Kightly, 119-47; De Lange, 3-32. For *Robin Hood and the Potter*'s dependence on this tale, see Child, III, 109; Clawson, 61-8; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 125; Holt (1982), 64, 73; Keen (1979), 18f, 23f, 116-8, 131; Kightly, 135f; De Lange, 25-6, 29, 43, 51, 65, 77f, 80-5.

[3]De Lange summarizes these conclusions, 124-31.

what follows.

Parallels to section 1 (fyttes I, II and IV)

Already in the opening scene, where Robin sets out the outlaws' rules of conduct[1], he shows himself true to the code established by his predecessors. We remember that husbandmen and yeomen of the forest were preserved species and that barons, knights and squires were lesser prey, while archbishops, bishops and the sheriff of Nottingham were big game. None of the other heroes gives such a detailed list of his quarry, but a few explicit statements more or less vaguely resemble those made by Robin. The narrator in *FFW* tells us on three occasions that:

> Fouke ne nul dé suens, de tot le tens qu'il fust exilee, unqe ne voleint damage fere a nully si noun al roy e a ces chevalers.[2]

Much closer to Robin's orders is this passage in *Gamelyn*:

> Whil Gamelyn was outlawed [/] had he no cors;
> There was no man that for him [/] ferde the wors
> But abbots and priours, [/] monk and chanoun;
> Of hem left he nothing [/] whan he might hem nom.[3]

Anticlericalism was rife in the later Middle Ages, and Robin's animosity towards higher clergy and monastics need not have been inspired by literary precedent. Yet that this attitude in both tales coincides with a fierce hatred of the sheriff seems significant. Furthermore, *Gamelyn* is here decidedly stronger in motivation than the *Gest*. Gamelyn's enemy, the sheriff, is his evil brother, and as will appear below[4], his animosity against abbots and their ilk is the outcome of his experience with coldhearted monastics who have sided with his brother. Robin's enmity to the sheriff and the monks of St Mary's is certainly justified by their actions in the course of the narrative, but his instructions regarding them at the very beginning of the story suggest that his dislike of them had already become axiomatic to the conception of his character. Hence these themes were probably fresher when treated in Gamelyn than in the *Gest*. *Gamelyn* may well have helped establish the conventional picture of the outlaw at war with lay and monastic authorities before the *Gest* was written.

Robin's statement of the outlaws' *modum spoliandi* comes as a reaction to Little John's wish to have dinner, which Robin will only grant when a guest has been found to pay for their fare. That John speaks on behalf of all Robin's men is quite characteristic. Throughout the *Gest* as in most of the ballads he is much the most prominent of Robin's seven score of yeomen. The tendency to focus on one member of the outlaw's band is also found in *FFW* and *Gamelyn*

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[1]See above pp. 12-13.
[2]Hathaway *et al.*, 27; also see there, 30, 43.
[3]Sands, 177 (ll. 779-782).
[4]See below p. 49.

where Johan de Rampaigne and Adam Spencer are given special prominence, but it is probably just as much a result of narrative exigencies as an indication of the *Gest*'s dependence on these older tales. Ballad and romance alike employ much dialogue as a means of plot development and for dramatic effect, and it is more easily handled if not too many speakers are involved.

Robin's refusal to dine until a stranger appears is, as Child noted, a "humorous imitation" of King Arthur, who in several tales enforces fasting on his court pending the occurence of some strange "aventure"[1]. As with the outlaws this habit often causes impatience at Arthur's court. Robin's emulation of the legendary king's zest for strange occurences is tongue-in-cheek and down-to-earth: willy-nilly, rich guests are remunerative, although the outlaw is also ready to feed a poor man for free, should one turn up. Yeomanry is much like chivalry, but there is a shade of difference.

The scenes of Robin's entertainment of the knight (in fytte I) and the high cellarer of St Mary's (in fytte IV) resemble the two passages in *Eustace* discussed briefly above.[2] In the first of these passages Eustace comes across a merchant and says to him: "Di moi combien tu as d'argent". The answer is: 60 pounds and 15 sous, the victim is searched and found truthful and is therefore allowed to leave unrobbed, being told that:

Se m'eüsses de riens menti,
N'enportasses denier de chi.
Mais tu trestout perdu eüsses
Que ja denier mais n'en reüsses.[3]

Later Eustace is lucky enough to lay hands on the abbot of Jumièges and asks him how much cash he carries. The abbot is not co-operative, but on being bullied, he claims to have only four marks. A quich search yields 30 marks or more, so Eustace hands him back four and pockets the rest. Again the moral is made explicit:

Si li abbés eüst dit voir,
Tout reüst eü son avoir.
Li abbés son avoir perdi
Pour tant seulement k'il menti.[4]

Robin and Eustace thus both encounter first an honest layman and then a dishonest monastic. Robin, like Eustace, asks both his visitors how much money they have. The knight admits to having only ten shillings; and:

`If thou hast no more,' sayde Robyn,
`I woll nat one peny;
And if thou have nede of any more,
More shall I lend the. [40].

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[1]Child, I, 257 n., 257-8, III, 51.
[2]See above pp. 23-24.
[3]Conlon, 64 (ll. 950-4); the whole incident with the merchant occupies 64 (l. 930) - 65 (l. 995).
[4]*Ibid.*, 86 (ll. 1774-7). The whole incident with the abbot occupies 85 (l. 1746) - 86 (l. 1777).

The high cellarer pretends to have only 20 marks:

`Yf there be no more,' sayd Robyn,
`I wyll not one peny;
Yf thou hast myster of ony more,
Syr, more I shall lende to the.

`And yf I fynde more,' sayd Robyn,
`I wys thou shalte it for gone;
For of thy spendynge sylver, monke,
Thereof wyll I ryght none. [244-5].

As in *Eustace* the rules of the game are made clear. It is quite likely that the author of the *Gest* - or an earlier writer who put together the part of the tale that now makes up section 1 - knew *Eustace* and let himself be inspired by these two passages, and that noting that they present, as it were, two faces of the same coin, he decided to underscore this with verbal and structural symmetry in the Robin Hood story.

If *Eustace* was a source of these two scenes, it was hardly the only one. Fulk and his men capture ten merchants, but they only rob them after learning that the cloth and skins they carry with them are meant for King John, Fulk's arch-enemy, and that the loss will turn upon the king, not the merchants themselves, should their ware be lost by no fault of their own, but by "peril de mer ou par force de gentz".[1] The scenes in *Eustace*, *FFW*, and the *Gest* share a few basic features: 1) they illustrate the heroes' principle of robbery. Eustace and Robin rob only the dishonest; Fulk makes sure that King John alone will be worse off. 2) Fulk and Robin enjoin their victims to speak the truth when interrogating them as to their cash funds[2], so also does Eustace, but only with the abbot of Jumièges. 3) All three send their victims off with taunting greetings to their enemies. Eustace gives a tenth of what he has stolen from the count of Bolougne to the merchant, asking him to give it to the count, Eustace's overlord and enemy. In medieval France soldiers owed a tenth of their booty to their lord.[3] Fulk sends the merchants off with his greetings and thanks to the king for the fine robes. In the *Gest*, the high cellarer is only too happy to get away with this taunt ringing in his ears:

`Grete well your abbot,' sayd Robyn,
`And your pryour, I you pray,
And byd hym send me such a monke
To dyner euery day.' [260].[4]

The *Gest* may have derived these features from either of the older tales, but the two complementary scenes are found only in *Eustace*. Yet several traits found in *FFW* but lacking

[1]Hathaway *et al.*, 26 (l. 27) - 27 (l. 27); I quote 27 (l. 16).
[2]*Gest* sts. 39:1-2, 243:1-2.
[3]Keen (1979), 58.
[4]Also see *Gest* sts. 251-2, where Robin tells the monk to "grete well thy lady hende", *i.e.* Our Lady, from whose abbey the monk comes.

in *Eustace* recur in the *Gest*. Unlike Eustace who himself goes out to capture his victims, Robin and Fulk send one or more band members to do the dirty work.[1] The knight and the high cellarer are served dinner with Robin, so also are the merchants with Fulk. This has no analogue in the corresponding scenes in *Eustace*, although a captured enemy is on another occasion served dinner and allowed to leave in peace.[2] The high cellarer episode corresponds with the merchants scene in *FFW* as to a few details not found in *Eustace*. In the *Gest* the monks have a guard of 52 men, the merchants in *FFW* are accompanied by 24 "serjauntz armees" who protect "le tresour le [*sic*] roy.[3] Fulk's brother John asks the merchants: "What people are you and from what land?" A "proud and fierce fore-speaker" - "Un vaunt-parlour orgulous e fer"[4] - rushes forward and retorts: What business is that of yours? After some further parley a guard jumps at John sword in hand, but is overcome by the outlaw. As the guard is too numerous for John to cope with, Fulk and his band join the fray to take the merchants prisoners. The situation in the *Gest* is somewhat similar: before leading the high cellarer to Robin, the outlaws exchange words with and shoot the "foremost" monk, who rides more "ryally" than any "bysshop in this londe" and holds Robin for "a stronge thefe" [216:2, 221:3].[5] In *Eustace*, on the other hand, we hear nothing of retinues or guards, and although the abbot of Jumièges also asks Eustace to mind his own business, a little bullying is there enough to put the outlaw on top of the situation. From our previous discussion of this scene in the *Gest* we remember the following knotty stanza:

> They brought the monke to the lodge dore,
> Whether he were loth or lefe,
> For to speke with Robyn Hode,
> Maugre in theyr tethe. [225].

As to the merchants in FFW we hear:

> Johan lur demanda en amour venyr parler ou son seignur en la foreste, ou si noun il vendreynt maugré lur.[6]

The author of the *Gest* may have been mentally preoccupied with the single monk who was to pay the knight's debt - hence on one occasion he speaks of only one monk when the other is yet alive - but the captives are in the plural: the surviving monk, a page and a groom; and if the author drew inspiration from this passage of *FFW* where there are several merchants, it is the more understandable that he slipped into the plural when actually referring to a single monk.

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[1]See *Gest* sts. 17 and 208 quoted above p. 22.
[2]Conlon, 75 (l. 1366) - 76 (l. 1395).
[3]*Gest* sts. 216:1 (quoted above p. 25), st. 224 (quoted above p. 26) and st. 228. Hathaway *et al.*, 26.
[4]*Ibid.*, 26 (l. 38) - 27 (l. 1).
[5]For another opulent monastic, see below p. 47.
[6]Hathaway *et al.*, 27 (ll. 2-4). For *Gest* st. 225, see above pp. 26-27.

Turning to the scene of the knight's first visit to the outlaws' quarters, we find yet more persuasive evidence that the author of the *Gest* was inspired by Fulk's robbery of the merchants. Little John notes that the guest's "clothinge is full thynne" and asks Robin to "gyve the knight a lyveray [/] To helpe his body therein" [70]. John is told to:

> Take hym thre yerdes of every colour,
> And loke well mete that it be.
> Lytell Johnn toke none other mesure
> But his bowe tree. [72].

Although it seems not to have been noted previously, there can be no doubt that this was suggested by Fulk's distributing the merchants' cloths and skins among his men (and the merchants?). Fulk

> fist mesurer le riche drap e riche pelure par sa launce, e si vesti tous ceux qe ou ly furent, petitz e grantz, de cel riche drap [...].[1]

The detailed similarities are that: 1) Cloth is distributed. 2) It is measured with a weapon. 3) In *FFW* "mesure avoit chescun assez large"; in the *Gest* John gives the knight "gode mesure". 4) The victims in *FFW* are *merchants*; John tells Robin:

> [...] ye have scarlet and grene, mayster,
> And many a riche aray;
> There is no *marchaunt* in mery Englond
> So ryche, I dare well say. [71. My italics].

This is strikingly hyperbolic and not quite in tune with Robin's confession on a later occasion that the outlaws "lyve by our kynges dere, [/] Other shyft have not we" [377]. The abundance of cloths and the description of Robin as wealthier than any merchant in the land must have been inspired by *FFW*. It is notable that Fulk's use of his lance as yardstick is more natural in its context than Little John's using his bow. Fulk has just conquered the merchants, led them into the forest and subjected them to a cursory interrogation, when he begins to hand out their ware. It is thus quite natural that he still carries his weapon. The knight, on the other hand, has had a lengthy interview with Robin during dinner, John has counted the guest's cash and brought him £400 from Robin's "tresoure", before the cloth measuring takes place. That John should now pick up his weapon to use it as a measuring rod is plainly more contrived than Fulk's doing so fresh from the fight. If the basic idea of two complementary scenes to illustrate the robber's principles of conduct was very probably derived from a version of *Eustace*, it seems clear that much of the incidental detail in the two scenes in the *Gest* was taken from the Fulk story.

One final feature in fytte I has a number of distinct parallels. When the knight offers the Virgin as surety for his loan and Robin accepts her, it is, as Child and Clawson saw, no doubt attributable to the influence of a well-known and widespread type of miracle. In some of these

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[1]Hathaway *et al.*, 27 (ll. 18-20).

tales the surety is God, St Nicholas or the cross on a church, but far the largest group of such miracles, in Latin (several MSS of the 13th century), French, Provencal, Spanish, Norse and ME, have the Virgin as guarantor.[1] Whether the author knew the tale in a Latin, French, AN or ME version, the ME tale found in the Vernon MS is early enough (*c*. 1400) and sufficiently close to the corresponding passage in the *Gest* to serve as a representative of the author's source.[2] In this version, Theodorus, a merchant of Constantinople, is run out of money and goes to a Jew, Abraham, who agrees to lend him some on the security of Our Lady. They go to a church and Theodorus swears before the image of the Virgin that he will pay back what he borrows. With the money he sails to Alexandria in order to trade. He is prosperous, but only remembers about the loan the night before the day of repayment. He puts the money in a chest and throws it into the sea with a prayer to Our Lady that she bring it safely to the Jew. This she does, but when Theodorus later returns to Constantinople, the villainous Jew pretends not to have received it. He is brought before the image, where Theodorus prays the Virgin to reveal the truth of the matter:

*Th*E [*sic*] ymage spac, as god hit wolde,
And seide: Jeuh, *th*ou hast *th*i golde,
And in *th*e botme of *th*yn ark
*th*er [*sic*] *th*ou hast leid eueri Mark.

No wonder "*Th*e Jewh wox aschomed *th*o"![3] Robin does not bring his client before an image, neither is any actual miracle performed in the repayment. Yet indications are not lacking that the author of the *Gest* may have taken his lead from a form of this tale similar to the Vernon MS version. Unlike the debtors in some other versions, Theodorus is not a spendthrift, but "Of herte fre" and "ful of lewte".[4] Similarly, the knight Robin befriends is neither "a sori husbande" who has "lyved in stroke and stryfe", nor an "okerer, or ellis a lechoure" [46]; when he has gotten into straits it is only because he has had to borrow money from the rich abbot in order to save his son, who has accidentally killed two men during a tournament. The knight's friends are faithless:

`Where be thy frendes?' sayde Robyn:
`Syr, never one wol me knowe;
While I was ryche ynowe at home
Great boste than wolde they blowe.

`And nowe they renne away fro me,
As bestis on a rowe;
They take no more hede of me

[1]Child, III, 51-2 & 52 n.; Clawson, 25-33, 37-40.

[2]C. Horstmann, ed., "Altenglische Marienlegenden aus Ms. Vernon", *ASnSL* 56 (1876), 221-36. The miracle, "hou a iew lente a cristenemon moneye and took vre lady to borow", is found on pp. 232-4.

[3]*Ibid.*, 234 (ll. 155-8, 159). I have changed thorn to "th".

[4]*Ibid.*, 232 (ll. 2-3). For a tale with a prodigal protagonist, see "De Judæo & Christiano" in B. Pez, ed., *Ven. Agnetis Blannbekin, [...] Vita et Revelationes [etc. etc.]* (Vienna, 1731), 377-82.

Thanne they had me never sawe.' [59-60].

So also in the miracle, where Theodorus cannot offer the Jew any human guarantor:

Theodorus seide: icham be hynde,
ffor me *th*er wol no Mon hym bynde;
he *th*at sum tyme was my fere
Me passe*th* bi wi*th* outen chere.[1]

As Clawson notes, these analogous passages and a few others with less striking similarities suggest that the author of the *Gest* drew on a version of the miracle identical or very similar to that in the Vernon MS,[2] but it should be noted that the complaint about false friends, the closest point of similarity between the two tales, was ever a favourite topos of medieval literature. Thus *e.g.* in *Sir Penny* (15th cent. MS), a poem on the might of money, the first-person speaker makes this observation:

And if I have pens bothe good and fyn,
Men wyl byddyn me to the wyn,
"That I have xal be thin,"
sekyrly [*sic*] they wil seyn so.
And quan I have non in myn purs,
Peny bet ne peny wers,
Of me thei holdyn but lytil fors,
"he [*sic*] was a man, let hym goo."[3]

If he took the idea of the knight's loan from a miracle like that in the Vernon MS, the author had to look elsewhere for a suitable manner of repayment. The banks of the Went running through Barnsdale might conceivably have served for the sea-shore on which the chest washes up in the miracle, but Robin is characterized as much by his one-upmanship as by his devotion to the Virgin and a *bona fide* miracle would have been out of style. Instead the poet turned to an exemplum preserved in Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones Vulgares* (early 13th cent).[4] In this tale a knight takes a poor squire prisoner in war and holds him to ransom; offering God as surety, the captive is allowed to go home to raise the ransom, but proves unable to return with it in time. Meanwhile, the knight comes across a monk whom he asks: "Cujus estis?" The reply is: "Non habeo dominum nisi Deum." The knight briefly explains that God has stood surety to a loan now payable, and as the debtor has not paid and the guarantor is too formidable to wrestle with, he confiscates the horse on which this servant of God rides. When the poor squire turns up to offer the money, the knight will not take it, for the surety has already settled the matter by

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[1]Horstmann, 233 (ll. 27-30). I have changed thorn to "th".

[2]Clawson, 37-40.

[3]T. Wright, ed., *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes* (*Camden Society* 17) (London, 1841), 361. See other poems in [T. Wright, ed.,] *Songs and Carols* (London, 1836), 6-7, 27-8; K. Sisam, ed., *Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose* (Oxford, 1925), 157.

[4]T.F. Crane, ed., *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry* (New York, 1971 [[1]1890]), 30-1, 165. For a German version of *c.* 1519, see J. Bolte, ed., *Johannes Pauli[:] Schimpf und Ernst* (Berlin, 1924), I, 43-4; II, 273. Child, III, 53-4, refers to several versions of this story.

go-between.

Some version of this tale clearly suggested the manner in which Robin retrieves his outlay in fytte IV.[1] Instead of knight, poor squire and ransom, we have Robin, poor knight and loan, but the gist of the story and a few details are obviously the same. In the exemplum, the squire offers God as surety, for as he tells his captor, "aliud tibi facere non possum." When, in the *Gest*, Robin peremptorily rejects God as "borowe" or surety, the knight has "none other" to offer "But yf yt be Our dere Lady" [65:1,3]. It was noted above that the monks of St Mary's are opulently mounted; in the exemplum the knight

> vidit quemdam monachum valde pinguem et rubicundum qui optimum palefridum equitabat et more secularium pompose incedebat.[2]

The creditor in the exemplum is not entirely in earnest when regarding his monastic victim as the spiritual guarantor's emissary; neither, as we have seen, is Robin.[3] Both debtors return to pay their debts, but are delayed for one reason or another. The chief innovation in the *Gest* is that the victim of robbery is one of those who were in the first instance responsible for the debtor's predicament. This is, as Clawson noted, "a master-stroke of narrative construction".[4]

Unlike the debtor in the exemplum, the knight manages to raise the money in time, but he is delayed by the previously discussed events at the wrestling contest.[5] As several critics have noted, there is a parallel to this in *Gamelyn*.[6] The hero here goes to a wrestling contest and hears a franklin sing "wayloway", because the champion has killed his "two stalworthe sones". On behalf of the bereaved father the hero, who would have participated anyway, enters the contest to avenge the deaths of the two athletes; the knight in the *Gest* rescues a champion wrestler in danger of his life. If there is thus a general similarity of situation, it must be admitted that wrestling was a very common sport and the author may have found such an incident in a now lost tale[7] or he may have invented it himself, because wrestling seemed a fitting pastime for the good yeoman saved by the knight. That the author, as Clawson argues, would have developed the incident in greater detail if it had been of his own invention is a moot point.[8] The knight's rescuing the yeoman serves simply to delay him and further endear him to Robin. This purpose is well fulfilled without elaboration. When inspiration from

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[1]Clawson, 34-7, 40-1, discusses this exemplum very well; the parallel was also noted by Child, III, 53-4.
[2]For the monks of St Mary's riding in style, see above p. 43.
[3]See above p. 16.
[4]Clawson, 42.
[5]See above p. 14.
[6]See for instance Clawson, 48; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 76; Holt (1982), 72; and below p. 49.
[7]There are of course passages on wrestling in other surviving tales, see *e.g.* the lines on *Havelok the Dane*'s bearing "At Lincolne, at the gamen" in Sands, p. 83 (ll. 979-90).
[8]Clawson, 47.

Gamelyn still seems a distinct possibility, it is due to the general similarities between the two tales as well as a further slight parallel between *Gamelyn* and fytte IV of the *Gest*. Gamelyn and Adam Spencer soundly beat some of the sheriff's men, and those who still know how take flight, but receive this taunting invitation:

"What," saide Adam, "so ever here I mass!
I have a draught of good win - drink er ye passe!"
"Nay, by God!" saide they, "thy drink is not good;
It wolde make mannes brain to lien in his hood."[1]

Robin sends the high cellarer away with a similar offer:

The monke toke the hors with spore,
No lenger wolde he abyde;
`Aske to drynke,' than sayd Robyn,
`Or that ye forther ryde.'

Nay, for God,' than sayd the monke,
`Me reweth I cam so nere; [258, 259:1-2].

So far in this chapter, fytte II has been altogether ignored, and perhaps it would be wisest not to discuss it here, for no close earlier analogue survives. Yet this strand of the tale was so manifestly not originally a Robin Hood tale that it is tempting to speculate about its original form. In the first four stanzas of the fytte (sts. 82-5), Little John is with the knight, but thereafter he simply disappears; the last 17 stanzas (sts. 126:3-143) are again well connected with the story of the outlaws, but we hear nothing whatever about them in sts. 86-126:2. If the latter portion of the text had only come down to us as a fragment, we would hardly have suspected that it was once part of a Robin Hood tale.

It is clear from fytte I that the knight travels alone, for Robin comments that it "were greate shame" for "A knight alone to ryde, [/] Withoute squyre, yoman, or page, [/] To walke by his syde" [80]. It is odd, therefore, that the knight in fytte II suddenly has a retinue, "his meyne" whom he orders: "Now put on your symple wedes [/] That ye brought fro the see." [97]. Thus meanly clad the knight arrives at the abbey, pretending to be penniless in order to learn if his creditors are charitable enough to deserve 20 marks "for courtesy" over and above the principal. Despite Dobson & Taylor[2] this allusion to an overseas journey does not stand alone. The author remembers that the knight has donned his poor travelling clothes; when the debt has been paid:

The knyght stert out of the dore,
Awaye was all his care,
And on he put his good clothynge,
The other he lefte there. [125].

Already in fytte I the knight has told Robin that if he loses his lands, he will go "Over the

[1]Sands, 172.
[2]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 76.

salte see" to "se where Criste was quyke and ded, [/] On the mount of Calvere" [56:4, 57:1-2]. Another allusion to this overseas voyage will be discussed shortly.

Clawson notes the similarity of one scene in the ballad of the *Heir of Linne* to the interlude at St Mary's Abbey.[1] The spendthrift hero of this ballad returns to his former estates, feigning poverty although he has recently found a fortune. He is treated contemptuously by the new owner of his lands who, however, jestingly offers him that he can buy back his lands for 20 pounds less than he sold it for. Much to the consternation of those present the hero accepts the bargain and immediately produces the money and is so reinstated in his former possession. The knight in the *Gest* and the heir of Linne both dupe the (would-be) holder of their lands by pretending to be poor, they are both treated uncourteously by all except one of those present: the prior of St Mary's pities the knight, and at Linne a "good fellow" offers the hero of the ballad a loan - and yet another if need be - so that he can have a drink. Certainly, such a tale "could well have suggested the corresponding scene in the Gest."[2] But the earliest version of the ballad is from *c*. 1650, and apart from fytte II itself no earlier analogue to this scene is known. The ballad parallels some of the fully developed matter but not that merely alluded to in fytte II: the heir does not come from overseas with a retinue. If an early version of the ballad underlay fytte II, it must either have differed substantially from those now known or the author of the *Gest* must have changed it considerably. *The Heir of Linne* has no trace of the monastic setting of fytte II. In view of the known chronology, the *Heir of Linne* is more likely to be dependent on the *Gest* than *vice versa*.

Even if we cannot say with any certainty at all what the original tale was like, P.R. Coss does not seem far wrong in observing that "the story-line of an earlier version where the knight earned his redemption through service overseas seems to come through loud and clear". This would have been "a local tale not dissimilar in its appeal from the tale of *Gamelyn*." Coss sees a clear similarity between the wrestling incident in this romance and that in the *Gest*, a view tentatively supported above.[3] It is possible to speculate further that the interlude at St Mary's may also owe something to *Gamelyn*. The cruel brother in the latter tale has bound the hero to a post in the hall and lets him starve. Although already set free by Adam Spencer, Gamelyn pretends still to be bound when his brother holds a "mangery" where the guests include "Abbotes and priours" and "other men of holy chirche":

> Tho Gamelyn gan speke dolfully with-alle
> To the grete lordes that saten in the halle:
> "Lordes," he saide, "for Christes passioun,

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[1]Clawson, 45-6. Child who prints the ballad, V, 11-20, does not note the similarity between it and the *Gest*.
[2]Clawson, 46.
[3]Coss, 35-79; I quote pp. 70-1. Also see above pp. 47-48.

Helpeth bringe Gamelyn out of prisoun."[1]

Two abbots and a prior, one after the other, declare they would sooner see him dead than set him free: "Thus they saide alle that were in the halle." Gamelyn exclaims: "Now I have aspied that freendes have I non";[2] he jumps out of his loosened bonds, and armed with great staves he and Adam lay it on the monastic guests. The differences between this scene and that of the knight's visit to the abbey are of course very much more obvious and numerous than the similarities. Yet in both cases the occasion is a banquet with high monastics, the hero feigns helplessness in order to test them and one by one their replies reveal their callous indifference and cruelty. In the light of the other points of similarity between the *Gest* and *Gamelyn* it is possible that the analogue, vague as it is, is not coincidental. Whether in this case the scene was already found in the original version of the tale whose vestiges can be discerned in fytte II or whether it is the work of the author of the *Gest* is hard to say, but as there are other more or less distant echoes of *Gamelyn* scattered in the *Gest* the latter possibility seems more likely.

One final feature of this fytte deserves to be briefly noted. After the villains at St Mary's have flatly refused to grant a new respite on the knight's loan, he exclaims:

`God, that was of a mayden borne,
Leve us well to spede.
For it is good to assay a frende
Or that a man have nede.' [112].

It seems to have gone unnoticed in previous discussions of the *Gest* that the last two verses, which admirably epitomize the rationale of the entire interlude at St Mary's, are a proverb of rather wide currency in the later Middle Ages and the Tudor period. The first citation with an approximate date is of *c*. 1390, and it is found in 17 works of the late 14th to mid-16th centuries, including the *Gest*.[3]

Parallels to section 2 (fyttes III, V and VI)

Fytte III, which tells how Little John is employed with the sheriff, picks a quarrel with his servants, robs him and lures him into Robin's grasp, consists of simple comic incidents developed at a brisk narrative pace; most of the motifs which occur have parallels in earlier outlaw romances, particularly in *Gesta Herewardi* and *FFW*. John enters the sheriff's service calling himself "Reynolde Grenelef" [149:3], an alias obviously appropriate for a forest outlaw; Fulk similarly assumes the name "Amys del Boys" while staying with the French king; and later, driven to the coast of "Barbarie" alone on board a ship in a fierce storm, he

[1]Sands, 168-9 (ll. 434-6, 475-8).
[2]Sands, 169 (ll. 486, 490).
[3]B.J. Whiting, ed., "A Collection of Proverbs in BM Additional MS. 37075", *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr.*, ed. by J.B. Bessinger, Jr. & R.P. Creed (New York, 1965), 274-89; see pp. 278, 284-5.

introduces himself to the local royalty as "Maryn le Perdu de Fraunce". Hereward, shipwrecked off the coast of Flanders, calls himself "Haraldus".[1] Little John's spree in the sheriff's house and his brawl with the butler and cook also have analogues in the tales about these two older outlaws. Hereward goes spying in William the Conqueror's quarters disguised as a potter and fights with the royal kitchen staff, while the king is hunting just like the sheriff in the *Gest*. Fulk's Johan de Rampaigne, a man of many talents, disguises as minstrel or "jogelour" and goes spying in the house of Morys le fitz Roger, an enemy of Fulk's. Again a brawl with the "rybaudz" of the house ensues[2]. However, if there is a general similarity of situation, there are also important differences between the three incidents. John de Rampaigne and Hereward don disguises for the more serious purpose of obtaining information about their enemies, whereas Little John does so simply to play the sheriff a trick; unlike the latter outlaw the former only take to fighting after serious provocation from the domestics. Little John finds the sheriff's cook too good a swordsman to be lightly overcome, he persuades him to join the outlaw band and they abscond with the sheriff's silverware and money. These features have no analogues in the two older tales, but it is notable that a certain "Utlamhe [or: "Utlac"], id est Exulis, cocus Herwardi" appears in the roll-call of gang members in the *Gesta Herewardi*; Hereward also engages in single combat with one Letoldus and defeats him, but shows him mercy on account of his martial prowess[3]. However, single combat with a merciful victor is a quite obvious incident and hardly needs to have been inspired by any single source, and as Leo Jordan has shown[4], cooks were quite popular in medieval literature: Rumolt of the Nibelungen and the cook who employs, feeds and clothes Havelok may be instanced; when he wrote this passage, the author of the *Gest* may have improvised or he may, as it were, have followed more than one recipe.

The sequel in which the sheriff is captured is masterly told. Once back with the outlaws, Little John suddenly hits on an idea: he runs out and finds the sheriff "Huntynge with houndes and horne" [182:2], ignorant of what has transpired at home; John tells his former master that he has espied a "ryght fayre harte" amidst a flock of seven score of deer [185:1]. The sheriff is gullible enough to swollow the bait:

> And whane they came before Robyn;
> `Lo, sir, here is the mayster herte!' [188:3-4].

The captive sheriff loses appetite for the dinner set before him when he discovers his own silverware, and as noted above, he must swear to leave the outlaws in peace in exchange for

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[1]Hathaway *et al.*, 41, 54; Hardy & Martin, 353-4.

[2]Hardy & Martin, 384-8. Robin also disguises as a potter in the ballad of *Robin Hood and the Potter* (for edn., see above p. 5 n. 1); Hathaway *et al.*, 32-3.

[3]Hardy & Martin, 373, 398-9, 402; also see Clawson, 67 & n. 3, 69 & nn. 3, 4.

[4]L. Jordan (1904), 93 & n. 1; and see Clawson, 69.

his freedom[1]. A very close analogue to the passage is found in *FFW*. Near Windsor Forest, Fulk and his men learn from local people and from the sound of bugles that King John is hunting there; Fulk buys the clothes and gear of a charcoal-burner he meets, dons it, and thus disguised, humbly greets the king. "Sir villain", says the king, "have you not seen a doe or stag pass by here?" "Yea, my lord, not long ago", says the charcoal-burner, he saw "a horned one, it had long horns"; somewhat similarly Little John tells the sheriff that the deer he claims to have seen have so long "tyndes" or antlers that he dared not shoot "Lest they wolde me slo." [186:1,4]. The disguised Fulk offers to go into the thicket to stir up the deer, and his men who have lain concealed there rush at and capture the king who is following Fulk. The king must swear to restore Fulk to his inheritance and grant him "amour e pèes pur tous jours", before he is set free. Eustace also disguises as charcoal-burner in order to play the Count of Bolougne a trick, but this scene lacks the features shared by *FFW* and the *Gest*.[2]

With this discussion of the analogues to fytte III, we have almost finished with the second division of the *Gest*, for there are no close and extensive earlier parallels to fyttes V and VI; a fact entirely in keeping with the conclusion reached above that much of the material in these fyttes was supplied by the author in order to connect various strands of the *Gest* with one another.[3] The archery contest in fytte V may well be as obvious an incident in an outlaw tale as Clawson thinks, but although similar scenes occur elsewhere in the *Gest* and in the ballad of *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesly* (first printed *c*. 1536), nothing of the kind exists in the older outlaw romances.[4] The once widely held view that, as far as England is concerned, the longbow was an invention of the era of the Hundred Years War is unfounded, but it is still true that the archer only became a figure of national importance in this period, when shooting in the longbow was even made an obligatory holiday exercise for men in order to keep them ready for war.[5] As all the outlaw romances except *Gamelyn* were written before this period it is not surprising that archery plays a relatively minor role in them.

Most of the few analogues to fyttes V and VI are found in *FFW*. Only one is at all significant. During the outlaws' escape from the sheriff's men after the archery contest, Little John is wounded and asks his friends to kill him rather than let the sheriff take him. While Fulk and his gang are pursued by the king and his men, Fulk's brother William is wounded and asks his

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[1]See above p. 14.

[2]Hathaway *et al.*, 48-50; Conlon, 65-7.

[3]See above p. 18.

[4]*Adam Bell* is in Child, III, 14-39; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 258-73; for archery in the *Gest*, see above p. 20; Clawson, 81; Hoffman, 494-505. For an early allusion to Adam Bell and his comrades, see below p. 57.

[5]See *e.g.* Keen (1979), 188, for the mistaken opinion that in the mid-13th cent. "[...] the longbow was not [yet] invented." What he says on the topic, *ibid.*, 138-9, is, however, much to the point. The traditional belief that the longbow was imported into England from Wales by Edward I hardly has any basis in fact, see J. Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer* (Woodbridge, 1985), *passim*, but especially pp. 64-5, 71-5

friends to cut off his head and take it with them so that the king will not be able to identify him; Fulk, of course, will hear nothing of this, but unlike Robin and his men the outlaws in *FFW* have to leave their comrade behind.[1]

Just as the outlaws rescue the knight from captivity in fytte VII so there are rescue scenes in *FFW* and *Gamelyn*, but there are no detailed similarities to suggest that the *Gest* is indebted to these scenes.[2]

Parallels to section 3 (fyttes VII and VIII)

The central incident in this section, the meeting of king Edward and Robin Hood, obviously draws on medieval king and subject tales. To medieval and early modern writers of popular fiction this theme of a disguised or, more commonly, incognito king's meeting with one of his subjects was almost as attractive as the doings of Robin Hood and his merry men. Such tales abound in the British and European popular literatures of the period;[3] the most well-known example no doubt being the Middle Scots tale of *Rauf Coilyear* (*c.* 1480), but the famous 12th century anecdote of King Alfred and the cakes makes it clear that the dramatic irony of the situation was appreciated in England already in the early 12th century.[4]

The first more fully developed tale on this theme is found in Giraldus Cambrensis' *Speculum Ecclesie* (1216),[5] where Henry II gets lost from his hunting party and takes shelter for the night in some Cistercian abbey; he is hospitably received by the monks who do not recognize him, but take him for a knight of the royal household; they dine -rather too sumptuously for a monastic house - whereafter the abbot asks and obtains the "knight's" promise to help him in a matter about which he is to see the king next day. Everybody at the abbey swills choice wine long into the night and the abbot teaches his guest to exchange the novel toasts "pril" and "wril" instead of the usual "wesheil" and "drincheil". Next day when the king is back in court, the abbot turns up to discuss his business with the king, who grants him all his requests. After a splendid dinner, the king raises his glass: "Abbas pater, dico tibi *pril*." Trembling with shame and fear the abbot begs the king's forgiveness; the latter swears "per oculos Dei" that as it was

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[1]Hathaway *et al.*, 51; for the scene in the *Gest*, see above p. 17. Child, III, 54, notes a similar incident in a Romaic song about the Klepht Giphtakis, who is wounded and asks his comrade to save him or cut off his head rather than let him be taken by "that dog of an Ali Pacha."

[2]Hathaway *et al.*, 56 (l. 8) - 57 (l. 18); *Gamelyn* in Sands, 177-80.

[3]See E. Walsh, "The King in Disguise", *Folklore* 85 (1974), 3-24; Child, V, 67-87; Clawson, 103-12; H.M. Smyser, "*The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* and Its Sources", *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14) (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1932), 135-50.

[4]S.J. Herrtage, ed., *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* (*EETS, ES* 39) (London, 1969 [[1]1882]). For an allusion to Rauf Coilyear, see below p. 59. W.H. Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1904), 41-2, 136, also see 97 n. 3, 256-61.

[5] "Henry II. and the Cistercian Abbot" in T. Wright and J.O. Halliwell, eds., *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* (London & Berlin, 1841), I, 147-9.

at the abbey yesterday so it shall be at court today, and everybody joins in a long, boisterous bout of prilling and wrilling.

Two tales on this pattern, *King Edward and the Shepherd* and *The King and the Hermit* (both in MS of *c*. 1450)[1], come closer to the *Gest* in atmosphere and in some details. In the first of these, Edward III meets a shepherd while hawking near Windsor, gets into talk with him, and introducing himself as the merchant "Ioly Robyn", is invited home to dinner. The shepherd's lack of courtesy occasions several amusing situations: he loves his hat so much that he never doffs it to greet any of the great lords he meets. Similarly in the *Gest*, the cellarer of St Mary's leaves his hood on, and so Little John finds him "a chorle [...] For curteysy can he none" [227]. The shepherd is extremely profficient with the sling, but claims that he only uses it for the legitimate purpose of fowling; the king, however, eventually succeeds in cajoling his host into supplementing the many courses of fowl on which they have feasted with some illicit side-dishes of "conyngys thre, [/] Alle baken well in a pasty" as well as hart and roe.[2] After passing the peculiar toasts "Passilodyon" and "Berafrynde" many times, and after much wine, the shepherd cannot help but show his guest his Holy of Holies: an underground store-room well-stuffed with venison and select wines.

The author of this tale has succeeded in giving the shepherd an excellent and quite realistic reason to go to court next day: throughout the tale the merry-making is punctuated by the shepherd's complaints that the king's purveyors have confiscated his poultry and sheep, as well as slept with his daughter, and all they have left is a tally for "iiii pounde [/] And odde twa schillyng." The shepherd now fears he will never see a penny, but Joly Robyn has connnections at court that really count for something, and if the shepherd will come there "To-morne at vndern speke with me: [/] *Th*ou shal be seruyd of *th*i moné". Much play is made with the shepherd seated at the place of honour during dinner at court, but although the king sends the prince to him to propose a toast of Passilodion, Joly Robyn's true identity never dawns on him. However, the king at last orders a squire to reveal the truth of the matter to the shepherd, who falls to his knees begging the king's forgiveness for his poaching. The ending is missing, but it is reassuring that the king harbours no grudge: "Hit shalle hym mene al to gode: I wolde not ellis, be *th*e rode".[3] No doubt, as in so many other versions of this story, the rustic hero would have been knighted or would have received some other kind of promotion.

Several traits point strongly to a late 14th century date. The author was conversant with the

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[1]W.H. French & C.B. Hale, eds., *Middle English Metrical Romances* (New York, 1964 [[1]1930]; 2 vols.), II, 947-85; W.C. Hazlitt, ed., *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England* (London, 1864), I, 11-34.
[2]Hale & French, II, 963 (ll. 395ff.).
[3]*Ibid.*, 953 (ll. 73-8), 954 (ll. 118-9), 984 (ll. 1064-5). I have changed thorn to "th".

names of some of the noblemen of Edward III's court.[1] When the merchant Joly Robyn tells the shepherd that "My fadur was a Walsshe kny*gh*t [/] Dame Isabell my modur hy*gh*t," and that he is the shepherd's fellow-townsman by birth[2], the author expected his audience to appreciate its significance better than the shepherd does. The shepherd's grievances are borne out by a letter to the king of *c*. 1333 complaining that royal servants and harbingers "take many goods by violence from their owners: bread, beer, eggs, poultry [...], for which scarcely any payment is made".[3] Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* (1411-2) contains this apostrophe:

> O worthi king! benygne Edward *th*e laste!
> Thow haddist ofte in herte a drede impressed,
> Whiche at *th*yn humble goost ful sore a-gaste;
> And to know if *th*ou cursed were or blessid,
> A-mong *th*e peple ofte hastow *th*e dressed
> In-to contre, in symple array allone,
> To here what men seide of *th*i persone.[4]

This leaves little doubt that some form of the story was then extant; and the suggestion that Edward disguised in an anxious wish to test his image among the populace is entirely consonant with *King Edward and the Shepherd*, even though he is there incognito rather than disguised: "Joly Robyn" asks the shepherd, "What wil men of your Kyng seyne? [/] Wel litull gode, i trowe!"[5]

In the fragmentary *King and Hermit*, the king is again called Edward, but it is not clear which of the three Edwards is meant. In essence the plot is similar to that of the story just discussed. A few features are obviously suggestive of the early Robin Hood tales: the scene is Sherwood Forest, the hermit does his poaching with the bow and the king introduces himself as Jack Fletcher. Whether this tale is much older than the surviving MS version is uncertain.

Robin's pardon and preferment by the king in the *Gest* have precedents in the tales about Hereward, Fulk and Gamelyn, but there are nonetheless reasonably clear indications of the influence of king and subject tales. Like the rustic subjects, Robin admits to his poaching, for he tells the "abbot", *i.e.* the disguised king: "We lyve by our kynges dere, [/] Other shyft have not we" [377:3-4]. The king does not disguise or go incognito to meet the heroes in any of the older outlaw tales; in all of them the hero first comes to the king, not vice versa. On the other hand, the *Gest* differs from the king and subject tales in that the king is recognized already while staying with his "hosts" and there is no exchange of peculiar toasts.

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[1] *Ibid.*, 970 (l. 629), 972 (ll. 677-8), 981 (l. 972), and see the notes to these lines.
[2] *Ibid.*, 952 (l. 43), 953-4 (ll. 97-8).
[3] *Ibid.*, 951, n. to l. 35; and Walsh, 11.
[4] F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Hoccleve's Works. III. The Regement of Princes* (*EETS, ES* 72) (London, 1897), 93 (ll. 2556-62).
[5] Hale & French, 952 (ll. 50-1).

Only two more points in fytte VIII must be noted. That Robin takes the king's £40, gives his men one half of it and hands the other back to the monarch is no doubt a variation upon the method of robbery earlier in the *Gest*, and in *Eustace* and *FFW*, where the vitcims' honesty is rewarded.[1] The cursory account in the last six stanzas of the poem of Robin's illness and death at the hands of the prioress of Kirklees is well in keeping with the ballad of *Robin Hood's Death* (MS *c*. 1650).[2] Fowler is inclined to think that the latter was based on the former,[3] but the brief sketch in the *Gest* reads rather like a summary of a story already familiar to author and audience alike. More details would have been called for, if the story was a novel one. The consensus view that the manner of Robin Hood's death had already been established before the *Gest* was composed therefore seems justified.[4]

Traces of lost Robin Hood tales in the Gest

As there are a fair number of analogues to the sub-plots and motifs of the *Gest* in early tales about other outlaws and in exempla and miracles, and as the earliest surviving Robin Hood ballads do not contain as close analogues to the *Gest*, it is quite unlikely that the author's sources consisted predominantly in Robin Hood tales. The amount of authorial intervention to achieve plot continuity and a measure of unity, as well as for example the summary of contemporary traditions about Robin Hood's death, suggest that the method of composition was not primarily wholesale inclusion of Robin Hood "ballads" or tales. This conclusion gains strength if we take a close look at two minor characters of the *Gest* and a handful of allusions to them in late medieval literature.

Little John's assuming the name of "Reynolde Grenelefe" when entering the sheriff's service (in fytte III) was probably inspired by Fulk's calling himself "Amys del Boys", an alias with an equally sylvan ring,[5] but Reynold was originally the name of another of Robin's men, a character entirely distinct from Little John. During the archery contest arranged by the sheriff in fytte V:

Thryes Robyn shot about,
And alway he slist the wand,
And so dyde good Gylberte
Wyth the whyte hande.

Lytell Johan and good Scatheloke
Were archers good and fre;
Lytell Much and good Reynolde,

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[1]See above pp. 41-44.
[2]Editions in Child, III, 102-7, Dobson & Taylor (1976), 133-9.
[3]Fowler, 79-80.
[4]See *e.g.* Holt (1982), 191-2 n. 12.
[5]See above p. 50.

The worste wolde they not be. [292-3].

In fytte VII Robin arranges an impromptu archery exhibition in the presence of the disguised king; the punishment for missing the mark is a box on the ear:

Twyse Robyn shot aboute,
And ever he cleved the wande,
And so dyde good Gylberte
With the good Whyte Hande.

Lytell Johan and good Scathelocke,
For nothynge wolde they spare;
When they fayled of the garlonde
Robyn smote them full sore. [401-2].

Incidentally, this is another example of Fowler's "narrative" symmetry, although the lack of any apparent artistic purpose makes it more fitting to speak of dexterous re-cycling. More importantly, these stanzas suggest that the author knew tales in which Reynold - whether or not he was surnamed Greenleaf - and Gilbert with the White Hand played a greater role than they do in the *Gest*. It is made clear that Little John and Reynold are distinct characters, and whereas John, Scathlock and Much appear already in the beginning of fytte I, Reynold is only mentioned in the above instance; Gilbert makes his only other appearance when, after Robin has missed the mark during the last of the two archery contests, he observes, probably not without glee, that Robin must now step forward to receive the buffet he has earned.[1] The author very likely let the two characters crop up in these brief passages, because they appeared in one or more of the sources he used and because he knew that his audience/readership expected them to be featured in a tale about the outlaw.

One early Robin Hood fan certainly regarded Reynold as one of the more important of Robin's seven score of "wyght yemen". He was the anonymous sheriff's clerk who arranged the list of those to be returned as members of Parliament for Wiltshire in 1432 so that this acrostic appears:

Adam, Belle, Clyme, Ocluw, Willyam, Cloudesle, Robyn, hode, Inne Grenewode, Stode,
Godeman, was, hee, lytel, Joon, Muchette, Millersson, Scathelok, Reynoldyn.[2]

According to Dobson & Taylor the poetaster responsible for this acrostic must almost certainly "have been familiar with a version of the outlaw saga similar or identical to that preserved in the famous *Lytell Gest*".[3] However, this allusion does not tell us how much the then current tales resembled the *Gest*, it only shows that the members of Robin's band important enough to have a name in the *Gest* were also considered central characters *c*. 1430. It is

[1]Scathlock, Much and John first appear in sts. 3 and 4; For Gilbert's remark to Robin: see st. 404.
[2]I quote from Holt (1982), 69; also see *ibid.*, 12, 147, and facsimile of the acrostic, 70. This allusion was first printed by Holt. For Adam Bell and his comrades, see above p. 52.
[3]Dobson & Taylor (1983), 211.

unlikely that the tales known to this clerk were similar to the *Gest* with regard to the role allotted to Reynold; all we are told of him in a single stanza of the latter poem is that he partakes of an archery contest. Surely, Reynold's claim to fame must have been something greater than this.

In an anonymous and untitled 15th century burlesque we are asked to believe that:

> Ther schalmod the scheldrake and schepe trumpyd;
> [The] hogge with his hornepype hyod hym belyve,
> And dansyd on the downghyll, whyle all thei dey lastyd,
> With Magot and Margory and Malyn hur sysstur.
> The prest into the place pryce for to wynne;
> Kene men of combur comen belyve,
> For to mote of mychewhat [*sic*] more then a lytull,
> How Reynall and Robyn-Hod runnon at the gleyve.[1]

The significance of "Glaive" or "gleyve" is here clearly that of a "lance set up as winning-post in a race, and given as a price to the succesful competitor; hence, a prize."[2] In 1380 Wycliff quoted the saying "Certis *th*ei rennen all, but oon of hem taki*th th*e gleyve [...]", explaining it thus:

> Men usen ofte *th*is gamen, *th*at two men [...] rennen a space for a priis, and he *th*at come*th* first to his ende shal have *th*e gamen *th*at is sett, whe*th*er it be spere or gloves [...].

And from sometime before 1555 comes this piece of advice: "caste your eies on the gleue ye runne at, or els ye wil loose the game."

It is possible that the author of this burlesque knew a tale in which the two outlaws engaged in such a race, or races may have been a common pastime in May games; the whimsicality of medieval burlesque precludes any certain conclusion. However, the author must have expected his audience to be conversant with the name of Reynold, and in singling out this character for mention he seems again to have regarded him as more than a mere name. So, it seems, did also the author of a nonsense song printed in Ravenscroft's *Deuteromelia* (1609); Reynold is here again distinct from Little John, but oddly enough he is called a miller's son, an epithet applied to Much in the acrostic just quoted and in the *Gest* and several ballads.[3] As Child noted, the song is "utterly unintelligible" and "may have been meant to have only enough sense to sing".[4]

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[1]Wright & Halliwell, 84; the first brackets are the editors', the last mine.

[2]*OED 2*, *s.v.* "Glaive" *sb.* 1. b. The three quotes which follow are from the same source.

[3]The song is best edited in J. Ritson, ed., *Robin Hood: a Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads [etc.]* (London, 1795; 2 vols.), II, 204-8; Child, III, 54, quotes the song *in toto*; for Much see *Gest* st. 4, *Robin Hood and the Monk* st. 8 (Dobson & Taylor (1976), 115); *Robin Hood and Allen A Dale* st. 6 (*ibid.*, 173); *Robin Hood and Queen Katherine* sts. 34, 37 (the C-version in Child, III, 202).

[4]Child, III, 54. For a reference in *Fabyan's Chronicle* to a criminal "whych had renued many of Robin Hodes pagentes, which named himself Grenelef" in 1502, see Dobson & Taylor (1976), 4 & n. 3; M.A. Nelson, *The Robin Hood Tradition in the English Renaissance* (*Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies* 14) (Salzburg, 1973), 28-31. This was no doubt inspired by fytte III of the *Gest*; so was certainly the mention of "How Greeneleafe robd the Shrieue of Notingham," in Anthony Munday's play *The*

Evidence of the existence of tales about Gilbert with the White Hand prior to the *Gest* is less plentiful, but still quite convincing. Our only authority here is Gavin Douglas, whose *Palice of Honour* (*c*. 1501) contains this stanza on popular heroes:

> I saw Raf Coil*y*ear with his thrawin brow,
> Craibit Iohne the Reif *and* auld Cowkewyis sow,
> And how the Wran come out of Ailssay,
> And Peirs plewma*n* that maid his workmen fow,
> Greit Gowmakmorne *and* Fyn Makcoull, *and* how
> Thay suld be Goddis in Ireland, as thay say.
> Thair saw I Maitland vpon auld beird gray,
> Robene Hude and Gilbert with the quhite hand,
> How Hay of Nauchtoun flew in Madin land.[1]

The mention of the two outlaws together with Piers Plowman and a host of Scots legendary characters affords yet another example of the popularity of the Robin Hood tradition in Scotland at an early date.[2] What Douglas knew about Gilbert we shall hardly ever know, but it is unlikely that his knowledge was based solely on the *Gest*. He could hardly have expected the name to strike a chord with the readers, if they only knew it from the three stanzas in the *Gest*. I thus cannot agree with Dobson & Taylor that the reference "makes it virtually certain that the Scottish poet was familiar with a version of the *Gest*".[3] This conclusion would be more attractive if we had reason to think that Robin Hood tales were a rare species in the 15th century, but the wealth of literary allusions suggests otherwise.[4]

Whatever these lost tales of Reynold and Gilbert were about, they were either overgrown with layers of new material during the development of the tradition or the author of the *Gest* chose to avail himself of them only in the most marginal way, because for one reason or another they were not to his purpose. That these once popular characters were not entirely forgotten lends us some hope that the *Gest* may preserve material considerably older than its date of composition. On the other hand, it is also clear that much that was once central to the tradition may have been touched upon only very sparingly by the author or even completely lost sight of before the time of writing.

Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon (*c*. 1598) (New York, 1970 [[1]1913]), sig. I2r; also see Dobson & Taylor (1976), 225 & n. 1.

[1]P.J. Bawcutt, ed., *The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas* (*STS, Fourth Series* 3) (Edinburgh & London, 1967), 109; also see xxii, 205-7. Italics as in Bawcutt, except yogh changed to *"y"* in the first line.

[2]For other examples, see above p. 11.

[3]See above p. 56. Dobson & Taylor (1976), 5.

[4]Holt (1982), 100, suggests that Guy of Gisborne, Robin's antagonist in a ballad extant in an MS of *c*. 1650 (text in Dobson & Taylor (1976), 140-5), may have been featured in late medieval tales independent of the Robin Hood tradition. For an allusion to "Gy of Gysburne" in William Dunbar's *Of Sir Thomas Norray* (*c*. 1503-8), see D. Laing, ed., *The Poems of William Dunbar* (London & Edinburgh, 1834), I, 126; and see *ibid*., II, 309.

Conclusions

Although the analysis offered here cannot claim to be final in any sense, it has, I hope, been sufficiently detailed and careful to allow reasonably certain conclusions as to the literary nature of the poem and its value as a source for the quest for the historical Robin Hood.

A date of composition in the first half of the 15th century seems a safer suggestion than the 14th century dates preferred by those who hold with a historical outlaw in the same century. Hence, although it no doubt contains older materials, the *Gest* cannot as a whole be considered near-contemporary with an early 14th century historical Robin Hood. Whatever original and possibly authentic materials the writer of the poem availed himself of, he must have made an active and substantial contribution to the whole. He certainly added much to what he may have found in older Robin Hood tales, and we cannot know how much he changed what he borrowed.

The general conception of Robin Hood's character and way of life clearly owes much to earlier outlaw heroes; this becomes evident already in the *Gest*'s opening scene. The most important analogues to the first section are found in *Eustace*, *FFW*, *Gamelyn*, the exemplum and the miracle of the Virgin. The second fytte has no close, earlier analogue, but there are clear traces of an older tale as well as slight analogues to *Gamelyn*. In the second section, fytte III alone has notable analogues. *FFW* features both the use of an alias and the decoying of an enemy into the outlaws' hands; the parallels to this in the *Gesta Herewardi* are less striking. There are no clear antecedents to the action of fyttes V and VI, but again *FFW* is closest. Medieval king and subject tales form an extensive class of general parallels to the central events of the last section.

It is important to note that although the *Gest* shares a good many features with the older outlaw tales, it is in every sense an original work. Incidents and brief narrative strands are borrowed, but they are fitted into their new context with considerable ingenuity and originality; fresh details are always added. The *Gest* is often stronger in motivation than the older tales; it differs also in that, apart from his stint at court, Robin is throughout a forest outlaw; all the other heroes at first lead lawful lives, but become outlawed in the course of a struggle to gain or regain their patrimonies; apart from Gamelyn, they all travel abroad and meet unco adventures such as Robin never saw. It is indeed one of the most striking paradoxes in these outlaw traditions that the tales about the indisputably historical heroes, Hereward, Eustace and Fulk, contain so much of the supernatural, whereas the stories about the heroes of more dubious authenticity, Gamelyn, Robin Hood, Adam Bell and his comrades, are generally much truer to life. Not surprisingly evidence of an actual robber's lending money with a divine surety has yet to be unearthed; and that Robin invariably hits the mark, except when a miss serves a narrative purpose, is a little hard to give credence, even allowing for the high state of archery in

medieval England. Yet this of course can easily be explained as results of poetic licence, and as Hunter noted, there "is not [...] anything attributed to him but what might belong to man."[1] In a sense, therefore, Robin is a more realistic character than his literary ancestry. As there is some realistic detail, especially the setting discussed in the next chapter,[2] it is perhaps understandable that Hunter in his analysis of the *Gest* let himself be persuaded so easily, despite the uncertain nature of the external evidence he presented, that "the whole system of the Robin Hood cycle rests upon a basis of fact and reality".[3]

That an event occurs as a stock motif in popular literature does not, of course, prevent it from actually taking place; indeed it may do so without inspiration from literature. Child notes for instance that when the Mississippi keel-boat men used to shoot a small object, *e.g.* an apple, from each other's head, simply for fun or to show that they bore no grudge after a quarrel had been settled, there is no reason to attribute it to the influence of the William Tell tradition.[4] Yet when a tale can be shown to reiterate several composite incidents found in older tales, one cannot believe that it is largely authentic unless one is prepared to go to the perilous lengths of Vivian who in Wilde's *Decay of Lying* maintains that "Literature always anticipates life."[5]

In the *Gest* hardly much more than the Barnsdale setting, the sheriff's archery competition and its consequences in fyttes V and VI, and some of the matter concerning St Mary's Abbey in fytte II is without close parallels in older literature. Yet even the best of historians have occasionally had too much confidence that this or that part of the *Gest* may have been based on actual fact. Unlike the historians who favour a 14th century historical Robin Hood, Holt does not forget to apply a litmus test to the various strands of the *Gest*: if there are analogues to a given incident, it is less likely to be authentic. Yet it is surprising that in this test fyttes I, II and IV "come through relatively unscathed". He finds that:

> The main theme of the story [of section one], the knight's debt by mortgage to the abbot and its repayment, the consequent loan from Robin and its repayment, is to all appearance original; there is certainly nothing similar in any of the obvious sources on which the legend called.

This, he finds, may well have been based on real events, but "it is very doubtful whether real life was so nicely pointed as the tale."[6] It is true that the abbot of St Mary's is not featured as the creditor in any of the earlier analogues, neither is there a literary precedent for the knight's raising a loan to pay back another loan. The "analogues to the tale" may be "incidental", but

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[1]Hunter, 4.
[2]See below pp. 64-71.
[3]Hunter, 4.
[4]Child, III, 20-1.
[5]This piece is printed in *Intentions by Oscar Wilde* (Portland, Maine, 1904), pp. 1-50; I quote pp. 31-2.
[6]Holt (1982), 74-5.

there are quite a few of them. The scenes of the knight's and monk's meetings with Robin seem ultimately indebted to *Eustace* and *FFW*; the divine surety was not a new idea; the monk's paying the knight's loan is parallelled in the exemplum; an incident in *Gamelyn* may have suggested the motive for the knight's delay on the day of repayment as well as some other details. No really close earlier analogue has been found to the knight's feigning poverty at the abbey, but the idea of introducing the abbot of St Mary's as villain may have been suggested by the appearance of the abbot of Jumièges as one of Eustaces victims. It has been shown[1] that this part of the *Gest* contains remnants of an older tale; if this was based on facts, the interlude at the abbey may preserve some authentic matter. On the other hand, it is very doubtful whether a real debtor in a similar predicament would actually put his creditors to the test in such a way; the scene serves eminently well as an illustration of a piece of proverbial wisdom; the ploy in every way seems a literary one.

If one extends the discussion of early analogues to include religious tales, as was done above, it becomes clear that the first section of the *Gest* contains little that is original; when Professor Holt, in my view, has exaggerated the originality of this tale, it is because he does not discuss the miracle and the exemplum, perhaps finding them less obvious sources than early outlaw tales. Yet miracles and exempla were indeed obvious sources for a medieval writer of popular literature. Miracles, of course, served purposes of religious instruction, but the pill was usually sugared with a lively and entertaining style; these tales share in many of the qualities of secular, popular literature. Even if there is no evidence that the exemplum discussed above was used by preachers in England, such stories are preserved in MS preachers' handbooks compiled with the express purpose of equipping preachers with a store of stories with which to illustrate moral and religious points.[2] True, there is no wholesale parallel to the plot of section 1, but the accumulation of "incidental" analogues is quite impressive; if this narrative strand was based on real events, it was certainly embellished by piecemeal borrowing of assorted literary chestnuts.

Fyttes V and VI are largely without parallels in earlier literature, fyttes VII and VIII belong to the class of king and subject tales, and there are a few indications of borrowing from extant tales. On the whole, fyttes V to VIII have fewer analogues in older literature than fyttes I to IV; this should not, of course, lead us to consider them potentially more authentic than the first four fyttes. We have found vestiges of, or at least allusions to lost Robin Hood tales in fyttes V and VII, other sources that would have afforded parallels to the *Gest* may have been lost without leaving any clear traces. Analogues to fyttes I, II and IV are more plentiful. Yet, as will soon appear, it is the description of the locale in this first section which more than anything else

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[1]See above pp. 48-50.

[2]See J. Coleman, *English Literature in History 1350-1400* (London, 1981), 172-84; and Crane, lxx-cii.

lends us some hope of finding a real outlaw somewhere underneath the dense growth of fiction.

4. The Historical Robin Hood

In his dissertation *Folksångerna om Robin Hood* ("The Folksongs about Robin Hood"), submitted and published in late 1859, the Swedish scholar C.G. Estlander gives an interesting account of a meeting that must have taken place in 1851:

> Seven or eight years ago, a great number of scholars assembled for an archaeological meeting in the vicinity of the town which once witnessed the merry exploits of Robin Hood and his robbers. Naturally, the chairman's seat was occupied by some man of high rank, on this occasion the Duke of Newcastle [probably Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham Clinton, 5th Duke of Newcastle[1]]. The chief occasion for the meeting was Robin Hood. An important discovery had been made, and the learned assembly was now to deliberate it. The proceedings had been arranged by the untiring Mr Gutch, who had published his often quoted work some years previously. However, the discovery was not his, it belonged to Mr Joseph Hunter, who during his searches among the old journals in the Exchequer archives had discovered from the rolled up household accounts of the Plantagenet family that a Robin Hood had been a royal servant, "porter of the chambre" [*sic*], to Edward II, and had received his three pence from the royal treasury for fifteen months. This unexpected discovery had brought the learned reporter [J.M. Gutch, editor of a collection of Robin Hood ballads] from his former conviction [that Robin Hood flourished at the time of the Battle of Evesham, 1265] to assuming this later date. For the fact is that of all rulers by the name of Edward, only the Second actually visited Sherwood, whence nothing could be more likely than that it is exactly he, the least chivalrous of them all, who is meant when the song refers to King Edward who went to Sherwood in the habit of a monk and, after a nice time together with the robber chief, led him to his court, where he, says the song in remarkable agreement with the royal household rolls, dwelled a mere fifteen months.[2]

Though vague and imprecise in some details, this account is of considerable interest; it tells us of an event in Robin Hood historiography which seems to have been overlooked by modern researchers. In his booklet on *The Great Hero of the Ancient Minstrelsy of England, "Robin Hood"*, published the year after the meeting, Hunter expresses his conclusions with some caution; thus its sub-title claims only that Robin's "*period, real character, etc.* [are] *investigated and perhaps ascertained*", yet considering the uncertain state of his evidence, he goes quite far in his conclusions; "untiring" as Mr Gutch may have been, Hunter's find was apparently the sole reason for the meeting, he must then, have had considerable confidence that

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[1]His dates are 1811-64. His father of the same name, the 4th Duke (born in 1785), died in 1851: *DNB*, *s.nn.* "Clinton, Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham".

[2]Estlander, 20-1 (and see *ibid.*, 23). I translate. Nothing suggests he himself attended the meeting. He refers to L. Étienne, "Litterature Populaire de la Grande-Bretagne: Les Ballades du Cycle de Robin Hood", *Revue des Deux Mondes, Seconde Série de la Nouvelle Période* 8 (Paris, 1854) (pp. 89-113), 92, and to p. 34 of a pamphlet entitled *Evans' Music and Supper Rooms*. Étienne has nothing about the "archaeological meeting", but the pamphlet may contain an account of it. Estlander submitted his dissertation on 1 October 1859; *British Library General Catalogue* (vol. 142, col. 910) lists a single copy of the pamphlet with the bracketed but not queried date "[1863]". I have not seen this. Gutch's collection is entitled *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode* (London, 1847; 2 vols.)

he had found the right man.

Estlander had not seen Hunter's "interesting and scholarly book", but wisely observed that it would have to offer "not only external coincidences, but internal proof drawn from the songs", if it was to be entirely convincing.[1] This chapter will discuss the porter's credentials as they are presented in Hunter's booklet and in Bellamy's recent monograph which reaffirms the most central of Hunter's results and explains the *Gest* as an instrument of political propaganda in the 1360s.

The topography of the Gest *and the two-cycle theory*

Most of Hunter's conclusions on the historical origins of the Robin Hood tradition are debatable, but his discoveries as to the related matter of the geographical background of the *Gest* are generally sound and of great importance. He demonstrated that already in 1306 Barnsdale was considered a peculiarly dangerous place. In that year the abbot of Scone and the bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow travelled south; they were guarded sometimes by eight archers, sometimes by twelve, in the sourthern part of their journey they had no guard, but on the route from Pontefract to Tickhill it comprised no less than twenty archers; the reason given for this extra cost in the expense accounts is simply: "*propter Barnsdale"*.[2] Whether or not an actual Robin Hood lurked there, the setting of the *Gest* was obviously well chosen. Only someone very well-acquainted with the area could have let Robin order his men, early in fyttes I and IV, to "walke up to the Saylis, [/] And so to Watlinge Strete" [18:1-2; cf. 209:1-2] to look out for dinner guests. As Hunter noted, there was indeed a place called the Sayles in Barnsdale, a small tenancy under the manor of Pontefract, valued at only one-tenth of a knight's fee.[3] The knight in the *Gest* stumbles upon the athlete in trouble, when "as he went at a brydge ther was a wraste-lyng," [135:1], in this, Hunter observed, "the name of *Wentbridge* appears to be enigmatically indicated".[4] Wentbridge is a village in Barnsdale deriving its name from the bridge over the Went. Hunter pointed out also that the oldest known Robin Hood place-name was the Robin Hood's Stone first mentioned in 1422, situated in Barnsdale near the Watling Street on which Robin's victims travel in the *Gest*.[5] It has been shown more recently that "Watling Street" was a local name for the stretch of the Old North Road running through Barnsdale and that the name of the Sayles still survives as Sayles Plantation; even "today its

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[1]Estlander, 21. I translate.
[2]Hunter, 14 n. 6; Holt (1982), 52, 193 n. 25.
[3]Hunter, 15.
[4]*Ibid.*, 20, and see 19; Hunter's italics.
[5]*Ibid.*, 60-2; also see Dobson & Taylor (1976), 23-4; 310.

potentialities as a place for concealed observation are obvious enough."[1] The latter was taken advantage of early, for as Maddicott has discovered, a robbery was committed at "le Saylles" in 1329 by two men of Doncaster and others.[2] Hunter might have supported his reading of the allusion to Wentbridge by pointing out that the town is mentioned quite un-enigmatically as "Went breg" in the early ballad of *Robin Hood and the Potter* (st. 61.) It has thus been proved, largely thanks to Hunter, that Barnsdale was a haunt of robbers and hence an extremely appropriate setting for the *Gest*. Yet he is too rash to conclude that this means that an actual Robin Hood plied his trade there.[3] On his own evidence the area was already considered dangerous some sixteen years before the supposed outlawry of his candidate for the historical Robin Hood, and the Doncaster crooks of 1329 hardly had anybody of this famous name among their ranks. Barnsdale's bad reputation need not have been due to a robber called Robin Hood, and it therefore does not so much strengthen the argument for an historical Robin Hood as suggest that if he did live, it was almost certainly there.

Hunter had little to say about the Nottingham and Sherwood setting which has become so inseparably connected with Robin Hood, and as for authenticity it has indeed little to say for it. Nottingham is where the sheriff comes from, little more; the realistic detail of the Barnsdale setting is entirely lacking. Robin was connected with both areas at an early date. The first evidence for Sherwood as his habitat, the line "Roby*n* hod in scherewod stod" in the Lincoln Cathedral fragment of 1400-25, is just as early as the brief passage in Wyntoun's chronicle (*c*. 1420) making "Bernysdaile" the scene of his activities.[4] This confusion or rivalry is reflected in the medieval tales: *Robin Hood and the Monk* is throughout a Nottinghamshire story; a variant of one of its incidents - Robin is attacked by the sheriff's men during mass - was known to the Scots chronicler Walter Bower[5], according to his account, written in the 1440s, the attacker was "a certain sheriff", no doubt our old acquaintance of Nottingham, but the scene was Barnsdale. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the mention of Wentbridge puts us at first in or near Barnsdale, but the sequel takes us to Nottingham. Fyttes I, II and IV of the *Gest* take place in Barnsdale and York, the rest mostly in Nottingham.

There are at least two possible explanations. A historical Robin Hood could have frequented both Sherwood and Barnsdale: the northernmost point of Sherwood lay less than 30 miles south of Barnsdale, a journey 20 miles further south would bring him to Nottingham. Historical criminals have been known to roam wider than this, a Leicester criminal to be dealt

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[1]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 23, and see 22.
[2]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 24 n. 3; Maddicott, 293 & n. 4.
[3]Hunter, 15.
[4]For Lincoln Cathedral MS, see above p. 33, and for Wyntoun, above p. 3.
[5]See above p. 3.

with later went to Yorkshire for loot.[1] However, Hunter suggested a better explanation of this evident geographical confusion. When the knight rides home in fytte II, Hunter thought this was somewhere between Barnsdale and York,[2] but the knight's castle where the outlaws take refuge after the archery contest at Nottingham in fytte V ought to be near Nottingham. The knight remains anonymous until in the latter episode he is suddenly given the name Sir Richard at the Lee (st. 310.) This suggested to Hunter that there had originally been a ballad of a Yorkshire knight and one about a Nottinghamshire knight.[3] He also observed that the Nottinghamshire tales of fyttes III and V - though not those of fyttes VII and VIII - were in all probability entirely fictitious,[4] which, he believed, was not the case with the Barnsdale strands of the *Gest*. Hunter may be right that there were originally two knights, but the author may also well have used a tale featuring either a Yorkshire or a Nottinghamshire knight as source for a part of the *Gest* and the appearance of the knight in other parts may be due solely to him. As fyttes I, II and IV are the narrative strand with the most authentic locale, the Yorkshire knight is in this case more likely to have been the original character, and the other one was then invented later. However this may be, the fact of geographical inconsistency in the structure of the poem is important; Hunter's analysis foreshadows the now widely held view that there were originally two distinct cycles of tales, one centering on Barnsdale, the other on Sherwood/Nottingham. Stories of separate outlaws living in these two areas may have become fused, in which case the hero of one or both of these traditions may have borne the name Robin Hood. The most plausible variant of this two-cycle hypothesis is that suggested by Dobson & Taylor; according to this view it was the sheriff who drew Nottingham and Sherwood into the Robin Hood tradition. There may have been lost tales unconnected with the Robin Hood tradition in which the sheriff was featured as an anti-hero.[5] Even if this hypothesis remains incapable of being proved, it certainly explains the known facts well. Apart from fytte VII, it is the sheriff's presence in Nottingham which makes the outlaws remove to its vicinity. Sherwood is never mentioned in the *Gest*, but one must assume that the outlaws are based there in the Nottinghamshire strands of the tale, for as Clawson has brought out very well, they have easy access to Nottingham.[6]

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[1]See below, pp. 80, 81; the Coterel and Folville gangs, the most notorious 14th century criminal fraternities, roamed over much of the Midlands and the North, see E.L.G. Stones, "The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville, Leicestershire, and Their Associates in Crime, 1326-1347", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series* 7 (1957), 117-36; J.G. Bellamy, "The Coterel Gang: an Anatomy of a Band of Fourteenth-century Criminals", *EHR* 79 (1964), 698-717. Also see Bellamy (1985), 105 n. 5.

[2]Hunter, 19.

[3]*Ibid.*, 25; Fricke, 19, makes the same suggestion; also see Child, III, 51 n.

[4]Hunter, 21, 27.

[5]See Dobson & Taylor (1976), 14-5; L.V.D. Owen, "Robin Hood", *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, vol. 11 (London, 1955), 733-4.

[6]See his analysis of fyttes I-VI, pp. 97-101.

That the author thus attempted to amalgamate two traditions with different geographical foci has several implications. If Robin Hood was an historical character, the sheriff need not have been so (and vice versa); a real-life model for either character need not have been contemporary with that for the other. Possible historical elements in either narrative strand need not be contemporary with those in the other. The detail of setting in the Barnsdale stories (fyttes I and IV) was probably found in one or more older sources, rather than supplied by the author of the *Gest*, for since in the work as the latter left it "a rational topography is out of the question"[1], he was obviously not much interested in topographical accuracy. Robin's meeting with the king takes place in the "grene wode" near Nottingham, but when the outlaw tires of court life, it is to Barnsdale he returns. It is somewhat disconcerting that this story of the meeting of Robin and the king, of vital importance for Hunter's identification of the outlaw, is thus liable to the charge of topographical inconsistency just like the rest of the *Gest*.

Hunter, who had written good works on Yorkshire local history,[2] might have located the mysterious "Verysdale" where the knight is said to live [126:4], but unfortunately he relied on the edition of the *Gest* in Ritson's *Robin Hood* (1795) in which the place is called "Uterysdale".[3] There is hardly any reason to admit, as Bellamy does, a slight possibility that Ritson had seen this version of the place-name in a no longer extant (fragment of a) black letter edition of the *Gest*.[4] It is simply one of the usually precise Ritson's rare blunders. Not only was Hunter - unlike Bellamy - unaware that the mistake had been corrected in the posthumous 1832 edition of Ritson's work, he was also - like Bellamy - ignorant of the fact that Ritson had already noted the error in the addenda and corrigenda in his first edition: "*for* Uterysdale *(as in the old copies) read* `Wierysdale,' *the name of a forest in Lancashire*."[5] The spelling of the name in those of the early editions which preserve the stanza that mentions it is "Verysdale", but strangely enough, Ritson chose to correct his error to what was his own interpretation of the name found in his source. Child, Dobson & Taylor, Maddicott and Holt, among others, have followed this interpretation; they may well be correct in identifying "Verysdale" with Wyresdale in Lancashire.[6]

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[1]Child, III, 51 n.

[2]For instance *Hallamshire* (London, 1819.) I have not seen this work.

[3]Ritson, I, 24 (l. 180.)

[4]Bellamy (1985) discusses this place-name pp. 75-80. There is still less justification for his speculation (p. 77) that Hunter turned Ritson's "Uterysdale" into "Utersdale" [sic] because the latter "seemed like an old Yorkshire place name, whereas Uterysdale did not." It is altogether more respectful to Hunter, and no doubt right, to assume that, unable to locate this non-existent place, he felt he might at least do the reader the service of modernizing the old "ys" genitive into "s".

[5]Ritson, II, [221.]

[6]Child, III, 50; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 75, 88 n. 2; Maddicott, 281; Holt (1982), 88, 100, 103, 105, 113 and illustrations Nos. 14 and 15.

Yet Bellamy thinks otherwise. He sees no reason why the knight should be a Lancashire man, and Wyresdale, he argues, never occurs as "Verysdale" in the records: "W" never becomes "V". He approves of Harris' argument that if the knight came from Lancashire, the journey to St Mary's, York, would never take him anywhere near Barnsdale.[1] These objections are not quite as weighty as they may seem on first sight. The knight's castle the outlaws stay in after the archery contest at Nottingham ought to be near that town. However subsequent to this, the king comes to the North:

All the passe of Lancasshyre
He went both ferre and nere,
Tyll he came to Plomton Parke,
He faylyd many of his dere [357.][2]

The king blames Robin for the dearth of deer in this Park, which appears to be in Lancashire or a place the king visited after that county. Why should the outlaw travel this far West to poach? It makes more sense if it had happened while he was staying with the knight. It is uncertain if the knight who is said to live in Verysdale in fytte II and the one of fyttes V-VIII were originally the same character, but the author identified them with one another; if Verysdale is therefore taken to be where Robin stays in fytte V, it should be near Plumpton Park and hence probably in Lancashire. Moreover, Holt points out that there is a hamlet called Lee in Wyresdale, hence perhaps the name Sir Richard at the Lee;[3] but Lee is of course a common place-name.

Records may never spell Wyresdale with initial "V", however, the *Gest* is not a record but a narrative poem. One of the alternative locations suggested by Bellamy is the valley of the river Erewash between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, which in the early 14th century was known as "Ire*w*ysdale", and if the *Gest* was transmitted orally or taken down from recitation, he suggests, this name "might easily be corrupted, as personal experiment will prove, into 'I*v*erysdale'", and the latter could have dropped the initial "i".[4] Certainly so; in a broadside version of the ballad of *The Gypsy Laddie*, the original line "They coost their glamourie [charm, spell] owre her" has been quite hilariously transmogrified into "They called their grandmother over".[5] With a mild case of such "grandmothering", Wyresdale could become "Verysdale" just as easily as could "Irewysdale", a severe one would make identification of the original place positively impossible. However as it is, with the exception of Wentbridge, all

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[1]Bellamy, 19, 34-5, 78; Harris (1978 [[1]1951]), 80.
[2]Holt (1982), 100, renders the first line "Through all the ways of Lancashire". This seems a happy choice (cf. *OED 2*, *s.v.* "pace", *sb.*[1], II. 4. b); another possible meaning seems to be "All the way to Lancashire".
[3]Holt (1982), 100.
[4]Bellamy, 79. My italics.
[5]Child, IV, 66 (st. 2), 70 (G-version st. 2.)

other place-names in the *Gest* appear in easily recognizable form, and "V" and "W" seem to have been commonly confused when it was written. In a legal case of the reign of Henry VI, it was argued on behalf of one party that he was under no obligation to pay a sum owed, since the bond stated the impossible sum of "wiginti [*sic*] libras"; it was urged by the other party that "W" was just a couple of "Vs" and two were as good as one. The ruling is unknown. In an earlier case a witness was at a loss to say whether his surname ought to be spelt Weller or Veller.[1] A 14th century Wycliffite who prefixed an intelligent introduction on the vagaries of vernacular spelling to his concordance to the Gospel in English did not distinguish between initial "V" and "W" in alphabetizing his keywords.[2]

If the knight passes through Barnsdale on his way from Lancashire to York, he certainly makes a substantial detour. Does he indeed come straight from home? This is nowhere stated, but it is perhaps the most natural assumption. Is he on his way to York when he meets the outlaws? When he has as yet no hope of being able to settle his debt, he tells them he will go on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land if he loses his estate, and when accepting the invitation to dinner, he states that "My purpos was to have dyned to day [/] At Blith or Dancastere" [27:3-4]; the latter two places are south of Barnsdale. Only after he has borrowed the money from Robin does he tell Little John (in fytte II): "To-morowe I must to Yorke toune [/] To Saynt Mary abbay." [84:3-4.] That the good and honest knight should not intend to keep his tryst at St Mary's despite his inability to pay is certainly out of character, but if he is on his way to the abbey when intercepted in Barnsdale, he is travelling north, which makes nonsense of his original intention of dining at Doncaster or Blythe. Fyttes I, II and IV seem marked by some topographical confusion, thus the knight tells Robin at Barnsdale that his creditor is "a ryche abbot here besyde [/] Of Seynt Mari Abbey" [54:3-4], whereas the actual distance from Barnsdale to York is some 35 miles as the crow flies. However, as the case stands it must be concluded that the knight is travelling south, and hence is not on his way to York, when intercepted by the outlaws. His itinerary is hardly a conclusive argument against identifying "Verysdale" with Wyresdale in Lancashire.

Bellamy searches for other possible locations; he prefers place-names beginning in "Ver" or similar. Place-names consistently spelt with initial "V" are, however, quite rare, he therefore speculates that the name in the *Gest* may have dropped an initial syllable or vowel, but he comes up with no certain choice. I would suggest that if one wants to search for an alternative to the Lancashire Wyresdale, one should begin by asking what would be a likely later form of

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[1]Bolland, 105-6.

[2]A. McIntosh, "Some Linguistic Reflections of a Wycliffite", *Franciplegius*, ed. J.B. Bessinger, Jr. & R.P. Creed (New York, 1965), 290-3. By means of examples the reader is instructed in how to use the concordance: "As, if *th*ee list fynde *th*is text: *Woman lo thi sone*; if *th*ou fynde it not in S in *th*is word *sone*, *th*ou shalt fynde it in V in *th*is word *womman*." P. 291 and see 293 n. 3. Italics as in McIntosh, except thorn changed to "th".

the medieval name "Verysdale"? It is now clear that ME initial "V" may become "W"; ME "er" generally developed into NE "ar", the genitive suffix "ys" may become "es" or "s". If it followed these common trends, "Verysdale" would become "Waresdale" or "Warsdale". One need not go far afield to find a parallel development. In the *Gest*, Robin's quarters appear as "Bernesdale" and "Bernysdale",[1] today the name is spelt "Barnsdale". Although the name now appears to be lost, there was in fact once a place known as "Waresdale" somewhere near Knaresborough. The MS Ministers' Accounts for the Honour of Knaresborough for 1 and 2 Henry VIII include an entry for "Waresdale & Swyendone".[2] Whatever the exact location of the place, it must have been tolerably close to the Plumpton, formerly in Knaresborough Forest, which Hunter and Dobson & Taylor identify with the *Gest*'s "Plomton Parke".[3] Against locating the knight's home and the scene of Robin's poaching in Knaresborough Forest it must be said that the most natural reading of the stanza on the king's discovery of the dearth of deer in "Plomton Parke" is that this happened in Lancashire; an alternative possibility is that the king came to Plumpton *after* having been in Lancashire, but unfortunately none of the three Edwards seems to have gone to Plumpton in the Forest of Knaresborough after staying in Lancashire. On the other hand, the narrator tells us that at Plumpton "our kynge was wont to se [/] Herdes many one" [358:1-2], which argues against the Lancashire locality since, as will soon appear, no King Edward was at all "wont" to visit it. The passage clearly implies that the king had often been at "Plomton"; if the king was Edward II, Plumpton in the royal forest of Knaresborough seems the most likely suggestion, for he was often at Knaresborough.[4] The two suggested locations of Plumpton Park thus give rise to problems in each their way. If Plumpton in Lancashire seems the most natural choice, it is still possible that "Verysdale" means Waresdale in the West Riding rather than Wyresdale in Lancashire. One need not insist on the proximity of "Verysdale" to "Plomton Parke" because it makes better sense, for whether one puts the knight's home South or North of Barnsdale, whether it is assumed he travelled South or North, his itinerary reveals topographical inconsistency in the tale. The derivation of "Waresdale" from "Verysdale" is corroborated by the analogous case of Barnsdale and it presents no linguistic problem. Whether Wyresdale is linguistically as likely a derivation remains to be demonstrated.

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[1]Sts. 3:1, 21:1, 82:3, 213:1, 262:1, 440:1, 442:1.

[2]PRO DL29/472/7672. Duchy of Lancaster Records. Also see *The Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, Appendix I* (London, 1884), 70-1. It seems likely that there are similar entries in earlier accounts; the surviving set begins in 8 and 9 Richard II. This "Waresdale" does not appear to be included in A.H. Smith, ed., *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (*English Place-Name Society* 30-7) (Cambridge, 1961-3; 8 vols.).

[3]Hunter, 30; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 78 n. 1, 105 n. 1.

[4]See E.M. Hallam, comp., *The Itinerary of Edward II and His Household, 1307-1328 (List & Index Society* 206) (London, 1984), 23, 52, 81, 85, 192, 237-8. He was also often in the vicinity of Knaresborough.

Robin Hood "porteur de la Chambre"

Of the three Edwards only the second made a progress that took him to Lancashire, and he made only one, from about 3 to 27 October 1323. Among his concerns were enquiries into the widespread poaching and plundering in Lancashire and elsewhere following in the aftermath of the defeat and execution of the earl of Lancaster. This is reflected in the *Gest* in the "comely" King Edward's exasperation at Robin's poaching.[1] Although the historical knowledge embodied in this incident is vague enough, it is, as Holt notes, one of the rare points where the tradition approximates at all closely to history.[2] Yet at the same time it should warn us against taking the *Gest* at face value as a historical account. The intractability of a highly complex historical situation has here been reduced to one robber's taste for venison; such a simplistic notion of historical cause and effect is quite typical of popular literature.

After his visit to Lancashire, King Edward in the *Gest* goes to Nottinghamshire and meets the outlaw there; the movements of Edward II correspond well with this, subsequent to his stay in Lancashire he came to Nottingham and remained there from 9 to 23 November 1323.[3] The first mention Hunter found of Robin Hood, the porter of the chamber, is an entry in the Journal de la Chambre for April 25 1324, when Robin Hood and 28 colleagues were paid 3d a day per head for their work in the period 24 March to 21 April.[4] The porters are styled "vadlets" in the accounts, a term that bears the rendering "yeomen".[5] If this Robin Hood could be shown not to have been in royal employ before the king came to Nottingham, matters would tally very well. Unfortunately those of the earlier accounts of the chamber Hunter knew do not specify the names of recipients, so they cannot be used as evidence that this was the case.

The last entry mentioning this Robin Hood, on 25 November 1324, records that on the 22nd of the same month was paid to

> Robyn Hod jadys un des porteurs poar cas qil ne poait pluis travailler, de donn par comandement - v. s.

When Robin has lost appetite and is sleepless and asks the king's leave to go on pilgrimage to his chapel in Barnsdale, Hunter finds "some correspondence in this to the words of the

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[1]Hunter, 27-30; E.W. Safford, comp., *Itinerary of Edward I* (*List & Index Society* 103, 132, 135.) (London, 1974, 1976-7); Hallam, 249; Holt (1982), 100-3. Hunter, 28, suggests that the epithet "comely" applied to this king is more appropriate "than it would be to his father or his son." Even so, Laurence Minot styles Edward III "Edward, oure cumly king": T. Wright, ed., *Political Poems and Songs* (*Rolls Series* 14, pts. 1 & 2) (London, 1859-61), I, 66 (l. 1.)

[2]Holt (1982), 103; also see Hunter, 29-30.

[3]Hunter, 29-30; Hallam, 250.

[4]Hunter discusses these accounts, 35-40.

[5]*Ibid.*, 36; Holt (1982), 46.

record [...] It may be but imagination, but it looks like a reality." Yet consider the evidence.[1] May 17 1324: payment for three weeks' service, but five days' wages docked for Robin Hood on account of absence. August 21: payment for 28 days, but eight days deducted for Robin. October 21: Robin had been absent for an entire period. Hunter comments: "He was growing weary of his new mode of life." November 25: seven out of 35 days deducted for Robin. The "career" of this Robin Hood was patched by absences. Look at the final entry once again: "Robyn Hod formerly one of the porters, because he could no longer work, as a gift by order, 5s." Surely the obvious conclusion is that Robin Hood was an old trusted servant, who was ailing and, eventually, dismissed with a gift in consideration of his past services. One of Robin Hood's colleagues was a Simon Hood who remained in service long after Robin had quit[2]; when eight days were deducted for Robin on August 21, four days were deducted for Simon. On one occasion seven porters remained behind while the king moved on, both Simon and Robin were among them. One possible inference is that this Simon was the son of Robin Hood and attended to him when he was sick, but this is of course a mere speculation. It is certain, however, that whereas in the *Gest* all Robin's men go with him to court, we find no Little John, Scathlock, Much the miller's son, Gilbert with the White Hand or Reynold among the porters of the chamber. To all appearances the royal porter was old and/or seriously ill, whereas the sprightly Robin Hood of the *Gest* recovers from his malaise soon after leaving court and lives on for 22 years. To marry the record evidence with the testimony of the *Gest* Hunter must assume that the royal servant merely suffered from an excessive longing for his wonted surroundings. This is a fanciful speculation, and at any rate it cannot account for another discrepancy. In the *Gest*, Robin obtains only one week's leave: he must be back at court within "Seven nyght" [443:3]; the dismissal of the royal servant is, on the other hand, manifestly final. There are thus rather serious differences between the circumstances under which the porter of the chamber and the Robin Hood of the *Gest* leave court. Due to one of Holt's discoveries it is even more difficult to match the circumstances under which Robin in the *Gest* becomes employed at court with the known career of the porter.

Holt found a fragment of the chamber accounts for the period 14 April to 7 July 1323, recording payment on 27 June to Robin Hood for the period 5 to 18 June.[3] Robin, the porter, was thus in royal employ more than half a year earlier than Hunter thought and consequently long before the king came to Nottingham. This, as Holt observes, "destroys the coincidence of detail which made Hunter's argument seem so attractive."[4] However, Holt himself suspected

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[1]Hunter, 37-40.
[2]Hunter, 36-8; Bellamy (1985), 127 n. 26.
[3]Holt (1982), 49-50, and see 193 n. 23.
[4]*Ibid.*, 50.

that an attempt would be made to reconcile the scheme of events in the *Gest* with our new knowledge of the career of Robyn Hod, porter of the chamber. This was not long in coming, for Bellamy in his *Robin Hood* (1985) actually suggested two ways of rationalizing the chronological discrepancy.

In the *Gest*, the king comes to Nottingham to catch Robin Hood a fortnight or less after the sheriff has been to London to discuss the matter of the knight with him; in 1323 Edward II was only in London in the period 1-18 April (the last time prior to this having been apparently early in December 1321),[1] and as the meeting of king and outlaw in the *Gest* occurs near by and in Nottingham subsequent to this, we must look for evidence that the king was in that town sometime in the period 19 April to 5 June 1323; at the latter date Robin the porter was already in royal employ. Such evidence is wanting, and Bellamy therefore speculates that the king may have paid the town a "flying visit", which has left no mark in the records. This could have happened while the royal household stayed at Croxton Kerrial, Leicestershire, on April 29, or at Newark, Nottinghamshire, on April 30, or when according to Bellamy, the king "was hunting in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire as he did on occasion between 23 March and 24 May 1323 while the court was at York."[2] For the latter period there is no indication in the recently printed itinerary of Edward II that he himself reached Nottinghamshire before April 29, and his household certainly only reached York on May 1. The relevant periods in which the whereabouts of the king himself are unknown, and where there would thus be room for a hypothetical hunting spree in Nottinghamshire, therefore seem to be 29 April to 14 May and 16 May to June 5 1323.[3]

As Bellamy sees it, Robin may have met the king late in April and may then have become employed in the royal household in May or June. However, this does not match other information that can be extracted from the *Gest*. For it tells us that Robin was still at large, when the king visited "Plomton Parke" and Lancashire, and this, we saw above, must have been in September and October 1323.[4] To solve this new problem resulting from his attempt at reconstruction, Bellamy points out that Edward in fact also visited a Plumpton Park - the Knaresborough locality - already in the period 26 February-16 March 1323, and thus before Robyn Hode, the porter, appears in the royal accounts:

> Perhaps the compiler of the *Gest* confused the two visits and added the royal progress to Lancashire because he knew the king had once stopped near Plumpton when on his way to that county.[5]

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[1] *Gest* sts. 325, 354, 365, 369-70, 380, 384, 422-3, 427; Hallam, 219, 240.
[2] Bellamy (1985), 39; Hallam, 240.
[3] Hallam, 238-42. On May 15 the king himself was at Rothwell (Yorks.)
[4] See above p. 71.
[5] Bellamy (1985), 39.

This resurrection of Hunter's theory thus rests on a hypothetical visit of Edward II's to Nottingham and on the gratuitous assumption that the author of the *Gest* mixed up two visits which the same monarch made to Plumpton Park. This is not perhaps too much to stomach for a staunch believer, but it should be noted that this new scheme of things can only work, if we impute still another misunderstanding to the anonymous author, one which Bellamy does not note. If Edward's stay in Knaresborough in the period 26 February-16 March 1323 is now to be understood as the occasion referred to in the mention of "Plomton Parke", the *Gest* is certainly wrong in representing this as occuring after the sheriff's negotiations with the king in London, for as Bellamy notes, the latter can quite certainly only have taken place in April. It seems therefore that our only choice is to consider the sheriff's trip to London a fiction. To match the itinerary of Edward II in 1323 with the sequence of events in the *Gest* it is necessary to do some embroidery on the historical facts. Thereafter we must, in turn, do a little tailoring on the *Gest*. This is obviously not very satisfactory, and perhaps that is why an alternative but still more hypothetical explanation of the facts is offered.

In the scene where the outlaw recognizes the disguised king, we are told that "Robyn behelde our comly kynge [/] Wystly in the face" [410:1-2], whereafter the outlaw exclaims, "My lorde the kynge of Englonde, [/] Now I knowe you well" [411:3-4.] Robin must thus have seen the king before, and this, Bellamy argues, is more readily intelligible if he had previously been employed at court, for members of the general public were not often able to come at close quarters with their king. If the outlaw Robin was a former royal servant, it is also easy to understand how he acquired the marked courtesy with which he is invested by the author of the *Gest*. In this case it could be that Robin's outlaw life in Barnsdale took place between July and November 1323, *i.e.* after his first appearance in the royal household accounts and before his hypothetical meeting with the king at or near Nottingham.[1]

This is not entirely convincing. Earlier in his book Bellamy himself notes, as a near-contemporary chronicler also did, that Edward II "liked mixing with the common people of the realm",[2] and unless he always did so in disguise, many commoners must have seen him. The Scottish campaigns and the civil war in 1322 would no doubt have afforded the rank and file of Edward's armies an opportunity to become acquainted with the looks of their "comely" king. Many could have seen him when he was hunting. Furthermore, the king's angry words in the *Gest* when he notices the scarcity of deer in Plumpton Park, "I wolde I had Robyn Hode, [/] With eyen I myght hym se" [359:3-4.] and the narratorial comment during the meeting of

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[1]Bellamy (1985), 40-1.

[2]*Ibid.*, 9 and 14 n. 24; see the "post mortem" of Edward II in *Gesta Edwardi de Carnarvan Auctore Malmesberiensi*, in William Stubbs, ed., *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I. and Edward II. (Rolls Series* 76; pts. 1 & 2) (London, 1882-3), pt. 2, 91. For a modern characterization of the king, see Prestwich, 79-82.

monarch and outlaw, "Thus our kynge and Robyn Hode [/] Togeder gan they met" [409:3-4.], seem to argue against the assumption that they were alreay well-acquainted with each other. Robin's courtesy should not necessarily be explained by making hypotheses as to his biography; the author of the *Gest* was well acquainted with medieval romances and no doubt wanted his hero to have as polished manners as the knights of old. As was noted above, books on courtesy were a popular genre in the later Middle Ages.[1] If it is clear from the *Gest* that Robin had seen the royal visage before, it is also obvious that he had not been in royal employ prior to his outlawry: he only accepts the king's invitation to come to court with the express intention of seeing what the king's "servyse" is like, and should he not like it, he will return to the greenwood.[2] Furthermore, if Robin's outlawry occurred in the period suggested as an alternative by Bellamy - from July to November 1323 - it would only have been of about half a year's duration, and whereas we cannot say exactly how long Robin is an outlaw according to the *Gest*, it is certain that the loan extended by the outlaw to the knight has a term of one year, and the knight does not return to repay it until the expiration of this period.[3] Thereafter the outlaws dwell peacefully at home "full many a day" until the sheriff's treachery at the archery contest, whereafter they take shelter in the knight's castle "These forty dayes".[4] When the king comes to apprehend Robin, he seems to stay at Nottingham no less than half a year.[5] This means that Robin's outlawry in the *Gest* certainly lasts more than one year and very probably more than eighteen months. Furthermore, the sheriff could not have gone to London to discuss matters with the king during Robin's outlawry if this was in July-November 1323, for in that year Edward was only in the capital in April.

Both of Bellamy's attempts to re-model the salient features of Hunter's theory so as to reconcile them with Holt's find thus give rise to new complications. The first route of escape leads beyond the known facts of Edward II's itinerary and into the quicksand of surmise as regards possible mis-information on the part of the author of the *Gest*. The second takes its point of departure in a number of unnecessary assumptions and leads to the collapse of the whole temporal scheme of the *Gest*. Yet it remains true, of course, that Edward II had a "vadlet" or yeoman called Robin Hood in his employ, just as Edward "our comly kynge" has in the *Gest*; and both kings made a Northern progress that took them to Lancashire, a county rarely

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[1]See above p. 21.
[2]See above pp. 18-19.
[3]See st. 79 and *e.g.* 261.
[4]See sts. 281, 315.
[5]St. 365: "Half a yere dwelled our comly kynge [/] In Notyngham, and well more; [/] Coude he not here of Robyn Hode, [/] In what countre that he were." Bellamy (1985), 39-40, suggests that this is hypothetical, meaning: even if the king stayed at Nottingham, etc., he still could not etc.

honoured by royal visits in the later Middle Ages.[1] This is obviously very important. But just as significantly: even if the *Gest* shows some proximity to historical facts, there is so much discrepancy in important particulars that one must be extremely chary of attributing to it any value as a historical source where its testimony cannot be corroborated by external evidence.

The Wakefield Robin Hood

Hunter identified the porter of the chamber with a Robin Hood who figures in the Wakefield Manor court rolls for 1316 and 1317, and although he found no direct evidence to this effect, he argued further that Robin had joined the rebellion of Thomas of Lancaster; after the latter's defeat at Boroughbridge, Robin had become the leader of a group of those of the so-called Contrariants who had escaped execution. He lived as an outlaw leader in Barnsdale until he met the king and was pardoned "possibly for some secret and unknown reason".[2]

There is no evidence at all for identifying the royal porter with the Wakefield tenant. The *Gest* does not give the slightest hint as to where Robin Hood lived before his outlawry; it is tempting but hardly necessary to assume - as even one sceptic does - that as "Wakefield is a mere ten miles from Barnsdale" it is "the right place" to look for Robin Hood.[3] Outlaws, it has been noted, were by no means necessarily stay-at-homes; the Great North Road, which Robin infested according to the *Gest*, was a main artery connecting Scotland and the North with the Midlands and the South, and Barnsdale was a good place for an ambush; surely the prospective loot there could have attracted robbers from far away. If indeed there were evidence to connect the royal porter with Wakefield, a certain identification would still be difficult or perhaps impossible, for there were apparently as many as five men named Robert Hood within the manor of Wakefield in the relevant period.[4] When the court roll entry for 1317 shows that one Wakefield Robert Hood's wife was called Matilda, Hunter sees this as corroborating his identification, for

> the ballad testimony is, - not the *Little Geste*, but other ballads of uncertain antiquity, - that the outlaw's wife was named Matilda, which name she exchanged for Marian, when she joined him in the greenwood.[5]

Not only is this as Child noted "a trivial mistake"[6], it is also tendentious. Robin has no wife called Matilda in any ballad; In Anthony Munday's play *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (*c*. 1597), Matilda on joining Robin in the forest changes her name to Maid

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[1]Hunter, 28-9.
[2]*Ibid.*, 53.
[3]Holt (1982), 46.
[4]Bellamy (1985), 114-5.
[5]Hunter, 47. Hunter's italics.
[6]Child, III, 56 n.

Marian, but as Ward has shown,[1] Munday drew this Matilda/Marian hotly pursued by an infatuated King John from several traditions including stories about an historical Matilda Fitz-Walter who was alleged to have been poisoned by this monarch when he could not have his way with her. Maid Marian's unwarranted change of name is clearly a contrived device to allow the playwright to tap these melodramatic traditions. Only wishful thinking can turn this Matilda into her obscure Wakefield namesake. Maid Marian has no place in the medieval tales; whatever her origins were, Robin first joined hands with her when they were both featured as characters in the May games. She is first mentioned in an entry relating to the local May game in the Kingston-upon-Thames churchwardens' accounts for 1509 and in Alexander Barclay's third *Ecloque* (1513.)[2] Only in a few very late ballads does she appear as Robin's paramour and she is then always in company with Friar Tuck, a composite character who owes much, though hardly his name, to the anonymous "friar" of the May game morris dance which often included Maid Marian among its characters.[3] In the *Gest* and the early ballads the outlaw band includes no women at all.

The case for making Robin Hood a supporter of the earl of Lancaster is not strong. John Harvey's *Discoursive Probleme Concerning Prophesies* (1588) is the only source I know of to mention tales about the earl as well as tales about Robin Hood. Among stories intended to "busie the minds of the vulgar sort" so as to "auert their conceits from the consideration of serious, and grauer matters," he mentions:

> the tales of *Hobgoblin*, *Robin Goodfellow*, *Hogmagog*, Queene *Grogorton*, king *Arthur*, *Beuis of Southhampton*, *Launcelot du Lake*, *Sir Tristram*, *Thomas of Lancaster*, *Iohn à Gaunt*, *Guy of Warwike*, *Orlando furioso*, *Amadis du Gaul*, *Robin Hood* and little *Iohn*, *Frier Tuck* and maid *Marian*, with a thousand such legendaries, in all languages.[4]

While this impressive list shows Harvey more knowledgeable about "such fabulous and ludicrous toyes" than he would have cared to admit, it does not connect Robin with Thomas of Lancaster any more than with, say, Lancelot. Neither does the *Gest* itself in any way connect the outlaws with the earl. However, Hunter argues that the great number of men in Robin's band - seven score - makes them more likely to have been outlawed for some common cause than for individual offences. One such "common calamity" was the Battle of Boroughbridge.[5] Yet it was shown above that in its number of members and all essential features Robin's band parallels

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[1]Munday, *Death*, sigs. D4v-E1r, F1v. H.L.D. Ward quoted in Child, III, 519.

[2]See Ritson, I, civ; S. MacLean, "King Games and Robin Hood: Play and Profit at Kingston upon Thames", *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 29 (1986-7), 85-94; B. White, ed., *The Eclogues of Alexander Barclay* (*EETS, OS* 175) (London, 1961 [[1]1928]), 166.

[3]Child, III, 122. See below p. 97.

[4]Quoted in F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Francis Thynne's Animadversions upon Speght's first (1598 A.D.) Edition of Chaucer's Works* (*EETS*, *OS* 9) (revised edn., 1875), 144.

[5]Hunter, 2-3, 48, and see 48-51 for details.

that in *Gamelyn*, and the conception of the outlaw band in the latter poem seems already to have been well-established in the first half of the 14th century when it was written.[1] There is, then, no need to look for a specific historical situation to explain the size of Robin's band.

Perhaps inevitably literary outlaw bands mirrored or parodied the hierarchy that was such a fundamental feature of real life. The literary conception of the outlaw leader as king of his men in turn influenced real robber chiefs. Thus, in 1336, Adam of Ravensworth sent a now famous minatory letter to the parson of Huntington (Yorks.), in which he styled himself "Lyonel, roi de la route de raveners" (i.e. "king of the rout of robbers".) The letter was addressed from "nostre chastiel de Bise en la Tour de Vert'" (i.e. "our castle of the wind, in the Tower of the Greenwood"). It was written in deliberate imitation of the style of royal writs. Adam de Ravensworth was thus apparently posing as "King of the Greenwood".[2] In effect if not literally, this foreshadows Gamelyn's being "crouned king of outlawes". The idea of an "alternative" kingdom in the greenwood is at least as old as the early years of the 14th century. On May 28 1309, an interesting but somewhat overlooked event took place at Stepney:

> fuit magnum hastiludium apud Stebenhethe, de quo dominus Egidius Argentein dicebature rex de Vertbois; et ipse, cum suis complicibus, fuit contra omnes venientes.[3]

When Giles d'Argentine, an illustrious knight of the reign of Edward II, disguised as King of the Greenwood at this tournament, it is possible but by no means certain that he was inspired by the Robin Hood tradition; he must, however, almost certainly have carried some generic notion of the forest outlaw leader in his mind, and such traditional characters must by then have become at least sufficiently respectable to be the playthings of the gentry.

Actual bands of outlaws or criminals were often quite large. The activities of the famous Coterel and Folville gangs, mainly in the reign of Edward III, are well documented;[4] although efficiently organized, these fraternities do not seem to have been tightly structured, they were part of a network of interlocking criminal "societies", so it is difficult to arrive at precise figures as to their "membership". Yet it is telling that when half a hundred adherents of the Coterel gang were brought to trial (and generally acquitted) in 1333, these would have constituted only about a quarter of the gang's following; in Derbyshire 175 persons were accused of supporting Coterel's gang.[5] Some recruits to these bands had committed crimes individually, others had no prior criminal record, but they were not generally former

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[1]See above p. 39.

[2]The text of this letter is quoted from Stones, 134-5; translation as in Holt (1982), 58.

[3]Stubbs, pt. 1, 157. This quote is from *Annales Londonienses*; for an almost identical passage in *Annales Paulini*, see *ibid.*, pt. 1, 267; and various mentions of the Argentines, pt. 1, 69, 76, 157, 230-1; pt. 2, 46, 203-5, 299-300.

[4]See the articles by Stones and Bellamy referred to above, p. 66 n. 1.

[5]Stones, 711, 715.

insurgents. We are lucky to possess the actual document effecting the pardon of Fulk Fitz-Warin and his band. This names 37 members outlawed because of their allegiance to Fulk and 15 others outlawed for individual crimes who had joined his band afterwards.[1] The ranks of actual outlaw bands might thus well be swelled by criminals outlawed for separate offences rather than for their adherence to a lost cause. Real outlaw bands may not quite have reached the numbers of active members found in Robin's and Gamelyn's bands, but then the nice alliteration of "seven score" no doubt meant more to poets than to outlaw chiefs.

In suppport of the contention that Robin and his men had fought on the side of Lancaster at the Battle of Boroughbridge, Bellamy notes that on an earlier occasion the earl's forces had included large numbers of green-clad men, and as Lancaster had inherited the earldom of Lincoln in 1311 - though he did not assume the title - Robin and his men's wearing Lincoln green may indicate allegiance to him.[2] However, Lincoln green is simply "a bright green stuff made at Lincoln" according to *OED 2*, which quotes the *Gest* as the earliest source for the name of this type of cloth; all other occurences are from the 16th century or later, and in no case does there seem to be a connotation of feudal allegiance. That forest outlaws wear green needs no specific explanation, modern hunters still do so, and for the same obvious reason.[3]

At the time when the *Gest* was written, the idea of large outlaw bands roaming in the woods and presided over by "royalty" was already well established. Whether or not a historical Robin Hood was the leader of such a band, he may well have been cast in this role at the suggestion of already existing outlaw traditions.

Little John

Hunter offered no real-life models for any of Robin Hood's men, but Bellamy has uncovered a few more or less likely candidates. As Little John is so prominent and as Bellamy's suggestions as to his identity greatly reinforce the importance of the porter of the chamber, we shall spend some time on Little John's trail before turning to the question of the original of the knight, Sir Richard at the Lee.

There is no shortage of historical Little Johns. Of several persons carrying some variant or other of the name mentioned by Bellamy, the more interesting are:[4] 1) A "John Le Litel" who acted as bearer in a burglary against one Simon de Wakefield at Hornington (Yorks.) This culprit had a brother named Elias, but his home locality is not stated in the record. One Simon Ward, a Thomas Ughtred and a large number of men of Hornington, Bickerton and Poppleton

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[1]T. Wright, ed., *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* (London, 1855), 224-8.
[2]Bellamy (1985), 116-7.
[3]*OED 2*, *s.v.* "Lincoln", 1. a; also see Ritson's excellent note, I, xxxviii-xl.
[4]Bellamy (1985), 122-4.

(all in Yorks.) were involved in this crime, which was the subject of a commission of oyer and terminer appointed in December 1318. 2) Another "John Le Litel" participated in the same burglary; he came from Leicester and had a brother called Simon. 3) In 1323, one "John Littel John", Thomas de Rede of Raskhill and Robert, son of Robert de Stutevill broke into, and poached in a park at Beverley belonging to William de Melton, archbishop of York. 4) A "John le Littel" is recorded as being palfreyman and sumpterman to Queen Isabella in 1311-12. 5) A "Little John" appearing in the *Jornal de la Chambre* for 1322-25 served Edward II as a sailor in September-October 1322, in March and early April 1323, in September 1324 and in January 1325. Bellamy, plausibly enough, assumes that this sailor may have been identical with a "John le Little involved in the seizing of cargo from a Flemish ship in the spring of 1323".

Understandably, the last person on this list is Bellamy's "prime candidate for being the Little John of the *Gest*."[1] Like the king in the *Gest*, Edward II had an employee named Robin Hood and he made a northern progress; that he also, like the *Gest*'s king, has a Little John in his service can hardly be set aside as a mere coincidence. Hunter's identification of the porter of the chamber with the Wakefield Robin Hood still seems gratuitous, but even in view of the manifest difficulties in matching the known career of the porter with the sequence of events in the *Gest*, there can now be little doubt that this royal servant has something to do with the Robin Hood of the *Gest*. Yet let us not be blinded by enthusiasm, for this identification of Robin's sidekick gives rise to complications. This Little John was already in royal employ by September 1322, and hence long before Robin met the king and was pardoned by him, which according to Bellamy would have been in May or June 1323, or alternatively, in July same year[2]. So he could not have helped Robin serve the king or take part in the archery contest at the feast in the greenwood in the scene leading to the outlaws' pardon. It might of course be assumed that Little John had taken to the woods after September 1322, but in this case he must have been commuting regularly between Barnsdale and court, for he was also in royal service as a sailor in March and early April 1323, at or shortly before the time when Edward II would have met and pardoned the outlaws in the Nottingham area.[3] It is odd that this Little John was still in the king's service early in 1325 after Robin had quit court, but then again the *Gest* does not actually state that John is among the "Seven score of wyght yonge men" [448:3] who welcome their leader back to the forest. At one point, the *Gest* tells us, all Robin's men have left court except "twayne, [/] Lytell Johan and good Scathelocke [/] With hym all for to gone." [435:2-4] Surely this sounds as if John was at court *with* Robin Hood and the other former outlaws, whereas on record evidence Little John, the mariner, was busy coasting England in the

[1]Bellamy (1985), 123.
[2]See above pp. 73-76.
[3]See above p. 73.

king's service. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of Little John as a sailor. The *Gest* does not give the slightest hint that he was other than a landlubber. Certainly, as Bellamy argues, when Little John tells the sheriff (in fytte III) that his name is Reynold Greenleaf and he was born in Holderness in the East Riding it fits in none too badly with the fact that most sailors would have come from coastal regions, but whatever its exact implications, this is, as Bellamy notes elsewhere, a fabricated identity.[1]

Bellamy speculates that since Little John, the mariner, was at Hull in the period when the archbishop of York's park at Beverley was looted, he may be identified with the "John Littel John" (No. four on the list above) involved in this[2]. However, this seems unlikely, for "Littel John" was the latter person's surname. In Colchester there was a "Litel Jon" in 1350, and in 1372 a "John Lytelion".[3] Similarly at Ashburton (Devon), we find a "John Lyttell" in 1487/8 and 1489/90, and again in 1555/6 and 1557/8 a "John LitelJohn" or "John Litle John".[4] That a person named Little John in both cases precedes one surnamed Littlejohn suggests that the surname was derived from the combination of Christian name and adjective. Indeed, this is a quite natural way to account for the surname; nor is this type of surname formation unparallelled.[5] If there were any evidence of a connection between the mariner Little John and the "John Little John" poaching at Beverley, it might have been assumed that the latter was the former's son, rather than that they were one and the same person.

The Little John of Leicester (No. 3 in the list above) who took part in a burglary in Yorkshire in 1318 is of some interest, and we may add something to the details offered by Bellamy. In 1323, a Henry Cooper, imprisoned in Leicester on suspicion of larceny, "appealed" one "Geoffrey le Pultere" and "Littele Johannes", his groom, as well as one "Rob. Sabyn le Siveker", all Leicester men, for their share in various burglaries.[6] There may of course have been two criminals called Little John in Leicester within a five-year period, but it seems much more likely that this is another reference to the burglar of 1318. Among the miscreants participating in the crime committed the latter year were, it should be noted, John and William Bradburn who were later to be staunch supporters of the notorious James Coterel.[7] If the two records of Leicester Little Johns refer to the same man, he is the only one of

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[1]See below p. 83.
[2]Bellamy (1985), 123.
[3]P.H. Reaney, ed., *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (London, 1958), 202, *s.n.* "Littlejohn".
[4]A. Hanham, ed., *Churchwardens' Accounts of Ashburton, 1479-1580* (*Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series* 15) (Torquay, 1970), 11, 14, 134, 138.
[5]See Reaney, *e.g. s.nn.* "Brownjohn" (p. 50) and "Horrabin" [Grey Rabin or Robin] (p. 169.)
[6]Bateson, M., ed., (rev. by W.H. Stevenson & J.E. Stocks), *Records of the Borough of Leicester [...], 1103-1327* (London, 1899), 379.
[7]Bellamy (1964), 700-1.

this name who has yet been shown to have persisted in crime as well as associated with such "big shots" as the Bradburns.

As the case stands, the mariner cannot be identified with any of his criminal contemporaries of the same name, but when he appears in royal employ at the same time as Robin Hood, the porter, and when the *Gest* preserves at least a faint memory of the northern progress of their royal master, only an incurable sceptic could write this off as mere coincidence. However, it is clear that this Little John was in royal service before as well as after Robin Hood. Once again chronology is the problem.

The sheriff of Nottingham

Bellamy's candidate for the role of sheriff of Nottingham is a Henry de Faucumberg[1] whose chief credentials are that 1) he was sheriff of the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire bailiwick twice (from 29 November 1318 to 5 November 1319 and from 1 June, or perhaps from Easter, 1323 to Easter 1325) as well as of Yorkshire twice (from April 1325 to 30 September 1327 and from 16 August to 5 December 1330).

2) In March 1326, De Faucumberg was appointed to help arrest members of the Folville gang for their share in killing a baron of the Exchequer. Hence Bellamy concludes that he was considered especially skilful in hunting down "notorious criminals".

3) Official enquiries were made into his alleged abuses of office.

4) A Henry de Faucumberg who may have been the sheriff seems to have held land under the manor of Wakefield, where a Robin Hood also figures among the landholders.

5) Faucumberg, the sheriff, held land in Holderness and seems to have felt he belonged there.

These facts are obviously suggestive. It is hard to see why a sheriff of the Notting-hamshire/Derbyshire bailiwick should be engaged in pursuing a Yorkshire outlaw; at first sight, at least, it would make better sense if the sheriff's current bailiwick was Yorkshire and he was only called the sheriff of Nottingham because he had once held that office. Yet there are serious objections. The manifest topographical confusion in the *Gest* is a result of an attempt to fuse together two groups of stories centering on different localities, and it is the sheriff's presence in Nottingham which draws the outlaws to that town.[2] If the sheriff actually persecuted the outlaws in his capacity of sheriff of Yorkshire, but was still called "the sheriff of Nottingham" because of his past career, why should the *Gest* still have him based in Nottingham while at war with the Yorkshire outlaws? Neither are Faucumberg's two periods as sheriff of Yorkshire actually so helpful in explaining his pursuit of the outlaws, for they occured long after Robin,

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[1] *Ibid.*, 41-57: Ch. 4, "The Sheriff of Nottingham."

[2] See above p. 66.

the porter of the chamber, had left the royal household, and hence still longer after his hypothetical outlawry. The anomaly of a Nottingham sheriff chasing Yorkshire outlaws should be explained by the history of the tradition rather than by history proper.

That Faucumberg was selected to effect the arrest of the Folvilles should not necessarily be taken as an indication of his expertise as an outlaw hunter, a skill, by the way, in which the *Gest*'s sheriff of Nottingham was notoriously lacking. Faucumberg may have been appointed for this task simply because as former sheriff of the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire bailiwick he had extensive knowledge of the Midlands in which the Folvilles chiefly operated. Corrupt and extortionate sheriffs do not seem to have been a rare species.[1] Even if the Faucumberg holding land under Wakefield manor was the sheriff, there still is no evidence for identifying any of the Robin Hoods also holding land there with the porter of the chamber.

The most persuasive argument in favour of Faucumberg's being the sheriff of the *Gest* is that he held land in Holderness, for as just noted, Little John pretends to come from that very place during his "job interview" with the sheriff (st. 149). To Bellamy

> the implication is that he [Little John] was counting on the high opinions which most men have for the things, persons and parts they were associated with in their youth to gain him employment.[2]

If for the moment we regard the *Gest* as an historical source rather than as a piece of popular fiction, and allow ourselves to speculate on the motives of one of its characters, we cannot help finding Little John an oaf thus to stir up a hornets' nest. To venture an analogy: imagine the predicament of the spy who, operating in a foreign country, finds himself faced with a baffled an inquisitive native who would have been his childhood neighbour according to the bogus life story wheeled forward. On the other hand it must be admitted that the author may have chosen Holderness because he knew that De Faucumberg came from that town. Yet as we have seen, Fulk and Hereward use aliases when staying at foreign courts, and in all probability Little John's using the name Reynolde Grenelefe was inspired by this.[3] That the author chose Holderness rather than some other place may be explained in several ways. Perhaps he simply liked the name? Or if this does not satisfy historians' and literary historians' desire to make things make as much sense as possible, is it more satisfactory to note that Holderness was probably one of the stations on Edward II's northern progress?[4] The literary analogues make it

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[1]For various other corrupt sheriffs of Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire, see Bellamy (1985), 28-9, 44; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 15; Holt (1982), 59-60, 77, 154; Maddicott, 289-93.

[2]Bellamy, 52.

[3]See above p. 50.

[4]Hunter, 29, noted this, but drew no conclusions from it. Hallam, has no entry showing Edward II in Holderness, but for instance we find him (or at least the court and household) at Sutton in Holderness wapentake on October 17 1322: Hallam, 232.

unlikely that John's employment with the sheriff under an assumed name was a historical event, if the mention of Holderness nonetheless argues in favour of De Faucumberg, it is not necessary to assume that he actually crossed the path of a historical outlaw called Little John during his career. The facts are satisfactorily explained by the assumption that someone in the course of the development of the tradition used De Faucumberg as a model-in-part for Robin's famous but unfortunate enemy, perhaps in a wish to hang him out to ridicule. We should still remember that De Faucumberg's two periods in office in the Yorkshire bailiwick occurred after the events of the *Gest* would have taken place, more precisely early in the period of 22 years which separates Robin's return to the forest from his death at the hands of the prioress of Kirklees, a period which the *Gest* passes over in just one stanza (450). As in the cases of Robin Hood, porter of the chamber, and Little John, the sailor, the evidence is suggestive of some sort of connection, but close attention to chronology reveals serious problems.

The knight

Bellamy's suggestion as to the original of the knight, Sir Richard at the Lee, is closely connected with his hypothesis that the *Gest* was written as a piece of propaganda to vindicate the author's patron, one John de la Lee, who was steward of the king's household 1361-68. In the mid-1360s, he was appointed to enquire into concealed royal profits such as wards, marriages, escheats and forfeited lands.[1] This and other tasks he pursued rather high-handedly and apparently not without illegitimate personal profit. His methods were the subject of complaints in parliament, which eventually in May 1368 led to his removal from the position of steward of the king's household. William lord Latimer, whose complaints against De la Lee were instrumental in bringing about his fall, succeeded to his position. John de la Lee may also - so Bellamy suggests, although this seems more speculative - have become enmeshed in a factional squabble in which one party, including Humphrey de Bohun V, with whose family De la Lee had a long-standing and close connection, supported Nicholas Neuton's claim to the archdeaconry of Cornwall, while the other party, including William Latimer and, significantly, the abbot of St Mary's, York, backed Alexander de Neville's claim to the same position. The *Gest* would have been composed at the time of De la Lee's precipitous fall from grace in 1368 in order to give his tainted image a much-wanted boost. Since John de la Lee died on January 22 1370 it would seem to follow that the poem was composed before that date.[2]

However, if this John de la Lee was the author's patron, he was not, in fact, the original of the knight of the *Gest*; this, it is suggested, was his uncle, Richard de la Lee, who was parson

[1]Bellamy (1985), 88ff.
[2]This, however, is not made quite clear; see Bellamy (1985), 96-7.

(!) of Arksey, *c*. 6.5 miles south-east of Barnsdale from July 1319 to the spring of 1321.[1] This latter person may have had some dealings with Robin Hood and his men in the period of the Battle of Boroughbridge - although there is no evidence of this - and Sir John de la Lee would then, at the time of his fall some forty-five years later, have commissioned the unknown author of the *Gest* to write a poem about his uncle's friendship with these then famous outlaws based partly on older tales and partly on information which Sir John offered about his uncle and his criminal friends.

The hypothesis that the *Gest* was written as a piece of propaganda to improve the image of this high-ranking royal servant fallen from grace has the advantage of explaining the central role allotted to Sir Richard at the Lee. Yet there are serious objections. The earliest known readers' comments - if so they may be termed - on the *Gest* specifically, are the incipits and explicits of the early 16th century prints; they describe the poem as *e.g.* "a lytell geste of Robyn hode and his meyne, And of the proude Sheryfe of Notyngham" or as being about "kynge Edwarde and Robyn hode and Lytell Johan".[2] Important as the knight's role may seem to us, his plight and friendship with the outlaws was not what stuck in people's minds. There is a great number of literary allusions to the Robin Hood tradition, beginning with that in Langland in about 1377,[3] yet not one early writer suggests that this most central Robin Hood tale could in any way be connected with political circumstances of the 14th century, let alone with this John de la Lee. As noted above, the Scots chronicler Andrew of Wyntoun mentions Robin Hood in his work completed *c*. 1420, when he was an old man whose "memory would have taken him back to the middle of the 14th century"; all he had to offer is a few general "facts" obviously culled from then current traditions, but in putting Robin's and Little John's period of activity under 1283-5 in the reign of Edward I, he was at least "trying to place Robin in a historical context";[4] if the downfall of this John de la Lee and the circumstances surrounding it were as notorious as Bellamy suggests and if this was the reason for writing the *Gest* (in the 1370s), it is surely odd that Wyntoun should ignore this "historical context" entirely. That the true purpose of the *Gest* should have gone undetected until the late 20th century is a little hard to believe. If Bellamy's hypothesis is right, we must certainly conclude that the rather accomplished poet was an utter failure as a propagandist.

Look at the matter from a slightly different angle. As Dobson & Taylor have rightly noted, in "almost every instance" pre-Reformation literary allusions to "the popular enthusiasm for

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[1]Bellamy (1985), 99ff.

[2]The colophons etc. are most easily accessible in Child, III, 78, 79, 81, 85, 89; but also see facsimilies ed. by W. Beattie and [J. Farmer] in the bibliography below p. 99.

[3]See above p. 8.

[4]Keen (1979), 176; Holt (1982), 52; and see above p. 3.

Robin Hood tales remain intensely disparaging." This was no doubt "a manifestation of a long tradition [...] of Christian reprobation of secular and unholy stories",[1] and Robin Hood tales were probably singled out simply becasue they were exceptionally popular, rather than as being especially obnoxious; yet surely, in this climate of opinion the choice of such a story as the medium for propaganda and a means of vindication seems very ill-adviced. What, one wonders, might a former royal administrator with a blemished reputation hope to gain by having a writer spin out a yarn about his uncle's having made common cause with a band of outlaws? The *Gest* does, of course, put it all in a very favourable light, and it might conceivably have had a beneficent effect on popular opinion, but it is hard to see how it could have improved Sir John's image among his peers and betters, those who had any influence to exert, for better or for worse, in his case.

The central role of the knight in the *Gest* is not really in need of a historical explanation. For the transactions at St Mary's the author (of the *Gest* or more likely of fyttes I, II and IV) needed a good man of substance fallen on hard times and so chose a nameless knight. When the more miscellaneous and less well-integrated fyttes III, and V to VIII were added, this knight was somewhat artificially identified with a Nottinghamshire knight called Sir Richard at the Lee. The frequent appearances of the knight in the *Gest* thus serves to connect the various strands with one another; arguably, moreover, the potential readership of the *Gest* is widened, and its respectability increased by the inclusion of a knight among the dramatis personae. This also brings the poem more in line with the tradition of knightly outlaw tales from which it borrows so freely.

On general grounds Bellamy's hypothesis that the *Gest* was written for this patron thus seems unlikely. Neither does Sir John de la Lee's circumstances seem to bear any obvious resemblance to those of the knight in the *Gest*. That Sir John through his allegiances should have been an enemy of the abbot of St Mary's appears to be a mere sepculation. Yet there is one piece of evidence which may suggest a tenuous link between Robin Hood and John de la Lee. In the ballad of *Robin Hood and Queen Katherine*[2], Robin and his men, shooting for the queen, win an archery contest in which the other team represents Henry VIII. Some of the archers were probably historical characters, and Bellamy concludes that the archery contest was a real event taking place on 23 April 1541. This is not impossible, for the king was himself an avid bowman and had previously participated in at least two Robin Hood May games; acting as Robin Hood and his men, the royal guards had staged an elaborate archery display in the king's honour on May Day 1515, and His Majesty had himself "abashed" his queen and her ladies when, in 1510, he and twelve courtiers had entered the queen's chamber

[1]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 3.
[2]Edn. in Child, III, 196-205.

disguised as Robin Hood and his men and performed "certayn daunces and pastime [*sic*]" there.[1] Among the queen's archers in the ballad is a Sir Richard Lee, who Bellamy, again not implausibly, identifies with a person of that name who was in Thomas Cromwell's employ in the early 1530s and became surveyor of Calais in 1536, though he was not in fact knighted until 1544.[2] In the B-version of the ballad - the "most superior" according to Bellamy - the queen summons Sir Richard at the Lee thus:

'Come hither to mee, Sir Richard Lee,
Thou art a knight full good;
For I do know by thy pedigree
Thou springst from Goweres blood.[3]

Child's A-version has "Gawiins" for "Goweres", but Bellamy may be right that the latter reading is original; arguably it is the more "difficult" reading and should therefore be supported. On the other hand, descent from Gawain is a very obvious commendation for a knight, whereas the reading "Goweres" seems less suited to the context. But if the latter reading is chosen, one would naturally think of John Gower, the poet. Nothing in the known pedigree of Sir Richard at the Lee, surveyor of Calais, connects him with Gower. He was, however, a Hertfordshire man; and in the 1360s another Hertfordshire Lee, Sir John de la Lee, the steward of the king's household, was involved in wrongfully acquiring land from an underage heir; John Gower also participated in this transaction. This connection between the poet and the royal steward does not, of course, amount to blood-relationship, but Bellamy notes that another John Gower was slain at Albury (Hertfordshire) and that John de la Lee's chief residence appears to have been there; although there is no evidence that the poet ever had children, the John Gower slain may have been his son - or perhaps a nephew - and he may have been placed by him in John de la Lee's household to be brought up there; the intention may have been that he should have married a daughter of John de la Lee, if his untimely death had not precluded it. This would have "brought the younger Gower into the annals of the de la Lees".[4] So it might, but little of this is more than pure speculation, and it still does not explain how Sir Richard at the Lee, the surveyor of Calais, could claim descent from the poet John Gower. It should also be borne in mind that all this is based on a variant reading in one version of a ballad first recorded in the second quarter of the 17th century, but perhaps dealing with an actual event of the mid-sixteenth century.

Sir John's uncle, Richard de la Lee does not seem an obvious candidate for the original of

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[1]Ritson, I, xcix.
[2]Bellamy (1985), 83.
[3]Child, III, 201, st. 25. The following discussion refers to Bellamy (1985), 84-7.
[4]Bellamy (1985), 87.

the knight in the *Gest*.[1] Yet he does resemble his literary namesake in a few respects; he often borrowed money, mostly smaller amounts, but on one occasion he acknowledged a debt as high as £200; there is, however, no evidence to suggest that he ever borrowed money from St Mary's Abbey or its abbot. It is possible that he held land in Harthill (Yorkshire) up to 1331, this may have brought him into contact with De Faucumberg, the sheriff, who held land there. There is a possible link between Richard de la Lee and Edward II: The king presented a person by this name to a living in Bletchingley (Surrey) in 1324. Various records of Richard de la Lees' being in trouble because of poaching - they may all refer to "our man" - are probably not as significant as Bellamy thinks, for in the *Gest* it is the outlaws who poach, not the knight.

If some of this is suggestive, it is nonetheless extremely odd that this parish priest should be turned into a knight. But Bellamy has an explanation. Sir John de la Lee's enemies would have included "Alexander Neville and his ecclesiastical supporters", and hence we find enmity towards higher secular clergy in the *Gest*, as reflected for instance in Robin's order to his men to "bete and bynde" bishops and archbishops; under such circumstances it "would have been of little benefit" to let it be known that Sir Richard had actually been a parish priest.[2] However, in *Gamelyn* we have already met a brand of anticlericalism similar to that in the *Gest*[3], and it is important to be aware that in both tales only cruel, greedy and powerful higher clergy and monastics are under attack. Robin himself is extremely devout and, significantly, the prior of St Mary's, unlike the other monastics, takes pity on the knight.[4] There is clearly no *en bloc* condemnation of all men of the church. Robin might have been as sympathetic to a poor parish priest as he is to the knight.

The knight's "auncetres" have been knights a "hundred wynter here before" [47:1-2]. His castle is "Double dyched [...] about, [/] And walled" [309:3-4], his lands yield £400 a year (sts. 49, 92, 130). When he sets out to pay Robin back, he has a retinue of "an hondreth men, [/] Well harnessed" [133:1-2]. He has travelled far and wide, taking part in "ioustes and in tournement" [116:1]. He has a wife and children (st. 50).

Richard, the parson, came from a knightly family; he had a son of under twelve years in 1331 and so must have "taken a wife or mistress" before becoming parish priest of Arksey in July 1319, hence Bellamy concludes, "there may have been a secular interlude in his ecclesiastical career." As for the knight's castle: Richard de la Lee "may have made the acquaintance of a knight who had a castle reminiscent of the one mentioned in the *Gest*."[5] Is this pleadable?

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[1]For what follows, see Bellamy (1985), 99-105.
[2]Bellamy (1985), 133; see above pp. 13, 84.
[3]See above p. 40.
[4]See above pp. 13, 15.
[5]Bellamy (1985), 100, 104.

Bellamy seems to ignore that the knight's son in the *Gest* is "twenty wynter olde" [52:3]; it must not be assumed that this son was really the infant born in 1320 or later, for the knight incurred his debt because he had to raise money to save his son who had accidentally killed a knight and squire in a tourney (sts. 53-4). Robin's outlawry would have been in 1323, the knight's loan from the abbey, whose payment was then imminent, had a term of a year, and the accidental killing of course happened earlier, so the unfortunate son would have been born around 1300. It seems, then, that our parson was given to procreative "secular interludes". If we assume that Richard de la Lee was himself twenty years old when he became a father, he may still just possibly be identical with the Richard atte Lee who was one of the Black Prince's yeomen in about 1354, but he can hardly have been the person so called who was outlawed, apparently for poaching, in 1351/2?[1] If there is a remote possibility that a septuagenarian could still be in active royal service, he certainly seems over the hill where illicit deer stalking is concerned, but then, as Bellamy admits, it is uncertain whether the royal servant and the poacher should be identified with the parson.

The basic problem involved in reading the *Gest* as a historical source is this: where to draw the line. It is very much a case of "in for a penny, in for a pound." If some facts in the patchy and uncertain life-record of Richard de la Lee seem to match with a reading of the *Gest* that insists on taking it as a historical source, can we then simply write off as fiction details in the story which do not tally with history? If we can, then how can we have faith in the autenticity of much other "information" in the *Gest*, when the historical facts are neither plentiful and certain, nor as obviously corroborative as could be wished for? It still seems to me that unusually drastic cosmetics are required to turn this parish priest into such a knight as Robin's friend.

The 13th century Robin Hood

Before finally evaluating the results of the previous literary and historical analyses, we must take a brief look at the sparse but convincing evidence for a 13th century Robin Hood. Holt argued in 1960 that the "topics of the *Gest*, the sheriffs, the royal forests and ecclesiastical usury, are essentially problems of the thirteenth rather than the fourteenth century", a view he expressed also in the following year and, with some qualifications, in his 1982 monograph. Dobson & Taylor have reached similar conclusions. However, Bellamy and Maddicott have argued that these themes would be just as natural in the 14th century, while Keen suggests that the historical background implied by the earliest ballads is most likely that of the period 1350-1450; we have seen above that the social and cultural issues and ideology expressed in the *Gest* may also be taken to indicate a period of composition in the latter half of the fifteenth

[1]Bellamy (1985), 103-4.

century.[1] The conclusion must be that no certain period of origin can be arrived at by examining the broader issues of the *Gest*, for if a theme, *e.g.* the matter of the sheriff or that of monastic usury, would have been relevant to a 13th century audience, it could equally well have been so to one of the following century: if an older theme continued to be perceived as intelligible and relevant, later poets need not have discarded it. Much more convincing are the few hard facts we have as to the 13th century Robin Hood tradition.

Before the end of the 14th century we find at least four persons surnamed "Robinhood". Three of them are found in Sussex: a "Gilbert Robynhod", 1296; in 1332 a "Robert Robynhoud"; and in 1381 a "Thomas Robinhood". A "Katherine Robynhod", figuring in London in 1325, was probably the daughter of a Robert Hood who died in 1318; that the surname was here a patronymic led Dobson & Taylor to conclude that it could be used "as a heritable family surname quite without benefit of any deliberate allusion to the outlaw of legend." Yet as Holt has argued, even if all the other three persons surnamed "Robinhood" were also children of a man named Robert Hood, the formation of a surname from a Christian name *and* a surname is quite unusual and probably bespeaks some knowledge of the Robin Hood tradition. Dobson & Taylor and other historians, including Bellamy, have since endorsed this point of view.[2]

Recently D. Crook has brought to light strong evidence that the tradition existed in some form or other around the middle of the 13th century. A Berkshire eyre held at Reading and Wallingford, from early February to early March 1261, indicted two women and three men "de pluribus latrociniis et receptamento latronum" - "for several larcenies and harbouring of thieves" - they had fled the law and were consequently to be put in exigend and outlawed, or "waived" as the term was when women were concerned. The prior of Sandleford was amerced for having seized without warrant the chattels of one of the culprits, "Willelmus filius Roberti le Fevere". More than one year later, on or shortly before 21 April 1262, it was recorded at the exchequer that the king had recently pardoned the prior who had unwarrantedly seized the "catalla Willelmi Robehod' fugitivi". The one responsible for thus significantly altering the name of the fugitive was probably a clerk in the central administration or the personal clerk of one of the itinerant justices, and hence there is no reason to think that he was a Berkshire man who could have known anything about this William. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the

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[1]Holt (1960) repr. in Hilton (1976), 253; Holt (1961), repr. *ibid.*, 267-9; Holt (1982), 75-81; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 13-5; Bellamy (1985), 58-72; Keen (1979), 135-42; Maddicott (1978), 276-80; and see above pp. 9-11.

[2]Dobson & Taylor (1976), 12; (1983), 216-7; Child, IV, 496; Holt (1982), 52-3; Bellamy (1985), 31-2, 34, 35, and especially 135-6; Crook (1984), 530-1. An (admittedly somewhat cursory) examination of the great number of names included in Reaney has not revealed any analoguous formations, but it must be noted that this dictionary includes mainly surnames still in use.

unknown clerk "seems to have known something of the legend of Robin Hood",[1] if so, Robin Hood must have been known to him as an outlaw, for he gave this name to a refugee from justice.

Whatever his exact significance for the tradition, Edward II's porter was not the original Robin Hood; if such a person lived, he must have flourished sometime before the 1260s. The only known candidate to meet this bill is the "Robert Hod" or "Hobbehod" recorded in the 1220s, who was first put forward as a candidate by Owen and later championed by Holt.[2] All we know of him is that he was a tenant of the archbishopric of York and, more significantly, that he had fled the law and was thus probably an outlaw, for the sheriff of Yorkshire in 1230 accounted for 32s. 6d. "de catallis Roberti Hood fugitivi."[3] This Robin Hood not only lived early enough to give rise to a tradition current in the 1260s, he is also the only person so called who we know was probably an outlaw. Arguably, as Bellamy has suggested, the nickname "Hobbehod" may even indicate a certain notoriety.[4]

What then of the porter of the chamber and the heavy load of hypotheses laid on his shoulders? There is no evidence to identify him with any of the Robin Hoods of Wakefield, no evidence that he frequented Barnsdale, fought on the earl of Lancaster's side or indeed was ever an outlaw. Perhaps the most persuasive argument for De Faucumberg as a model for the sheriff of Nottingham is that his origins in Holderness render Little John's pretending to come from that town more intelligible. But if he thus remains an interesting candidate, it is nonetheless hard to see how a sheriff of Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire could become the prime enemy of Yorkshire outlaws; that he became sheriff of Yorkshire *after* Robin, the porter, left court, worn out from service, cannot explain this anomaly. That the outlaws are so swiftly and conveniently transported from Barnsdale to the Nottinghamshire area whenever the sheriff is to make one of his un-heroic appearances can hardly be accounted for by this or any other historical hypothesis. The case for accepting Richard de la Lee as the original of the knight of the *Gest* and his nephew as the author's patron has just been discussed, so let us note merely that neither the life circumstances of the parson, nor those of the steward of the royal household seem to bear a close resemblance to those of the knight; a Robin Hood tale - even one where Robin is as genteel as he is in the *Gest* - seems a very poor choice as a vehicle for propaganda in view of contemporary attitudes to such tales. Still a few central facts remain: Edward II did

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[1]Crook (1984), 530-4.

[2]Owen (1955), 733-4; he first suggested this candidate in "Robin Hood in the Light of Research", *The Times, Trade and Engineering*, xxxviii, no. 864 (new ser.), February, 1936, xxix: cf. Holt in Hilton (1976), 254 n. 79; I have not yet been able to procure a copy of this article. Also see Holt (1982), 53-4; Dobson & Taylor (1976), 16; Bellamy (1985), 19, 20, 23, 24, 32, 34, 136.

[3]I quote from Dobson & Taylor (1976), 16.

[4]Bellamy (1985), 136.

make a progress that took him to Lancashire and the spoliation of the lands of the late earl of Lancaster, which had now become forfeit to the Crown, was one of his concerns there. He did have a Robin Hood and a Little John in his employ. Even if a decrepit porter and a mariner are hardly entirely satisfactory models for the two famous outlaws as they are portrayed in the *Gest*, and even if we have seen that there are serious problems with chronology as regards their career at court, it is clearly necessary to attempt to reconcile our knowledge of these facts with the evidence for a 13th century Robin Hood tradition. Before this can be done it will be of service to take stock of our findings in the literary analyses of the *Gest*.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The previous chapters have discussed the questions of the date of composition of the *Gest*, its literary characteristics and its sources; the evidence for placing the origins of the tradition in the fourteenth century has been examined in some detail and it has been demonstrated more briefly that the Robin Hood tradition existed in some form already in the 1260s, and that an outlaw called Robin Hood flourished in the 1220s. It is now time to review our findings and attempt to reconcile them to one another.

It was noted in chapter one that Child's and Clawson's brief statements on the age of composition of the *Gest* are by no means final. The mentality expressed in the text suggests that a date in the latter half of the 15th century is just as likely as one in any earlier period; such a later date is supported by the textual evidence which seems to point to a date of composition not very long before the text was first printed. Tending to the same conclusion, though by no means certainly, is the appearance of the proverb - discussed in chapter two - which seems to have had its greatest vogue in the period from the late 14th century to the end of the 16th, and the name Lincoln green which, apart from in the *Gest*, is only recorded from the mid-16th century onwards.[1]

A substantial effort was made on the part of the author to ensure a measure of unity and continuity of plot. One of the chief means of establishing the latter is the knight, who, it was argued in chapter four, has the additional function of adding a more chivalrous touch to the tale, thus arguably bringing it in closer conformity with the earlier outlaw tales whose heroes are knights, as well as widening the range of social classes to which the poem might appeal. An additional stylistic feature to lend unity is the use of parallel incidents and situations, sometimes reinforced by extensive verbal parallels with judicious variations. If there are inconsistencies such as the knight's coming from overseas with a retinue in fytte II, and the confusion over the one or two monks accosted by Robin's men in fytte IV, which remains a problem although the difficulty has been exaggerated by some critics, it is nonetheless evident that the *Gest* as a whole bears the stamp of a single structuring mind. It is certainly not a series of ballads crudely tagged on to one another. A more sophisticated analysis is clearly required to account for the composition of the poem. Yet inasmuch as it is assumed that the component tales were ballads, such an analysis is seriously hampered by the apparent lack of dialect evidence to distinguish the individual original strands, as well as by the dearth of early Robin Hood ballads that come close enough to any parts of the *Gest* to represent later developments

[1]See above pp. 50-79.

of their sources. Clawson's analysis, the most exhaustive and detailed attempt made to establish the outlines of the original ballads, has a fundamental bias in that it is assumed from the onset that the poem can only have had pre-existing Robin Hood ballads as its main sources. This view, it has been shown, must have been based on the theoretical pre-conceptions underlying Hart's study which is flawed by a perverse indifference to the known chronology of the popular literary genres. Our knowledge of the latter indeed suggests that a large stock of 14th century Robin Hood *ballads* - *i.e.* poems in quatrain stanzas rhyming "abcb" or perhaps "abab" - is distinctly unlikely. In view of the lack of surviving ballads older than the mid-15th century, it seems inherently more likely that the sources were more akin to metrical romances and hence metrically more diverse than what the word "ballad" implies. To borrow materials from such sources for a poem in quatrains would naturally require rewriting them quite substantially, which accords better with the conclusion that the author himself contributed much to the whole. If there is no direct evidence as to the metre and other characteristics of 14th century Robin Hood tales, the assumption that they may have been metrically diverse does gain some little support from the Lincoln Cathedral fragment of *c*. 1420 which is not part of a ballad quatrain.

As chapter three has demonstrated there is no need to assume that the sources of fyttes I to IV were Robin Hood ballads, or even ballads at all. Fyttes I and IV in all probability borrowed from *Eustace* and *FFW*; fytte II perhaps evinces some slight inspiration from *Gamelyn*; the third fytte has a close parallel in *FFW*. In addition to these secular, popular narratives, fyttes I and IV also draw on some form of a well-known exemplum and a widespread miracle of the Virgin. Fyttes V and VI have no obvious analogues in surviving older tales, which is well in keeping with the conclusion that they consist largely in original matter contributed by the author for the sake of furthering the plot and connecting the two last fyttes about Robin and the king with fyttes I-IV. Fytte VII and the earlier part of fytte VIII have no really close analogues, but it is evident that they are tailored to the pattern of the very popular king and subject tales. The author must have known a tradtion or a tale relating to Robin Hood's death and he must also have had access to tales featuring two of Robin's men who have since disappeared from the outlaws' ranks. However, it is obvious that tales about older outlaws formed much the most important group of sources, they not only lent motifs and incidents to the poem, but also closely parallel the general features of Robin Hood's band, their mode of life and principles of conduct. The over-all impression is that the *Gest* is too derivative of older non-Robin Hood tales to merit much confidence as a historical account, and enough now lost Robin Hood matter has been included to make us suspect that the author may have excluded original material that might have assisted the search for a historical Robin Hood.

The results reached with regard to the hypotheses as to the historical Robin Hood have just been summed up; as Bellamy's elaborate construction is quite speculative it is very difficult to

falsify it, the argument rests rather heavily on probabilities and possibilities, these can be assessed and differing results may be reached, but they are difficult to prove or disprove conclusively. However, the fact that there was a Robin Hood and a Little John at Edward II's court and the details about his northern itinerary are clearly significant; but so also is the evidence of a 13th century Robin Hood. There are various ways to reconcile this evidence, the accent can be put on the later or the earlier Robin Hood. Bellamy, not surprisingly, regards the Robin Hood and Little John of the 1320s as in all essentials the originals of these characters as they are portrayed in the *Gest*; on the other hand, Holt, who favours the Robin Hood of the 1220s, admits the possibility that the porter of the chamber had some influence on the tradition: "What attraction his name had to the folk of Nottingham, and what Robyn Hode the porter may have contributed to the tale of Robin Hood the outlaw can only be guessed."[1] Yet we may speculate a little on what each of these characters - or rather, traditions - may have contributed to the whole.

Throughout this study it has occasionally been suggested that fyttes I, II and IV may have existed in some form as an independent tale before the *Gest* was written. The facts pointing to this conclusion are 1) The plot is sufficiently self-contained. 2) This section of the *Gest* ends with the type of pious conclusion characteristic of medieval romances. 3) More of its incidents can be shown to be derivative, and to be so more obviously, than is the case with the other sections (excepting fytte III). 4) It is firmly rooted in the West Riding, whereas the other fyttes are predominantly centered on Nottingham. 5) Its setting is detailed and shows an intimate knowledge of the Barnsdale area; such local knowledge is not found elsewhere in the *Gest*, not even in the passage in fytte VIII taking place in Barnsdale. If these arguments are accepted, it follows that fyttes I, II and IV are much more likely to have existed before the *Gest* was written than to have been written and inserted into a Nottinghamshire context by the author of the *Gest*, for it is unlikely that the writer responsible for the specific and realistic local detail in the setting should have chosen to fit them into a Nottinghamshire framework with the result that the poem is marked by over-all geographical inconsistency and confusion.

That there was a tradition about an outlaw called Robin Hood in the 13th century is not the only relevant fact we know about this period. The leader of outlaws living in the forest was probably already a well-established figure, for on the evidence of the slightly later *Gamelyn*, Giles d'Argentine, the knight, must have posed as outlaw chief when he entered a tournament as "rex de vertbois" in 1309.[2] Three years earlier, Barnsdale was already considered so dangerous a place for travellers that its name alone was thought sufficient to explain the extra expense involved in increasing the armed guard of three Scots church dignitaries travelling

[1]Bellamy (1985), 136-7; Holt (1982), 105.
[2]See above p. 78.

south.[1] It is therefore possible that the image of Robin Hood as the "master" of outlaws lurking in Barnsdale had already come into being well before the *floruit* of the porter of the chamber; this conception of the outlaw may reflect the doings of the Robin Hood, "fugitivus" of the 1220s, but this is of course pure speculation. It is significant in this connection that the part of the *Gest* in which the outlaws are based in Barnsdale - fyttes I, II and IV - appears to have been composed at an earlier date than the whole poem, it may incorporate such an older and more original conception of the outlaw. That Robin Hood, the porter of the chamber, and Little John, the mariner, were outlaws and frequented Barnsdale is a mere speculation, and it is clearly unnecessary to assume this if Barnsdale had already been made notorious by a previous Robin Hood. However, as the Robin Hood tradition already existed, it is possible that the royal porter gave inspiration to Robin Hood tales because he bore this famous name. Two early outlaws, Hereward and Gamelyn, were pardoned by the king and went to court with him or were promoted. The heroes of king and subject tales were pardoned their trespasses and rewarded for their hospitality. It is obvious, therefore, that the career and name of the royal porter fitted well into a literary pattern that seems already to have been established. There is no reason to make him an outlaw or indeed a criminal.

If there were thus at least two models-in-part for the Robin Hood figure, it is not altogether impossible that there may have been more. Robert or Robin Hood was not an uncommon name, and once it had become famous, other persons may have attracted attention because they carried it and were seen to be like Robin Hood in some respects. One such Robert Hood was the servant of the abbot of Cirencester who killed Ralph of Cirencester in the abbot's garden sometime in the years 1213-16; another Robin Hood was imprisoned in 1354 for offences against the forest law committed in Rockingham Forest.[2] Yet there is no suggestion in any Robin Hood ballads that the tradition was ever set in Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire where these men were found.

Perhaps just as interesting is one Robert Hood who has not been mentioned in previous studies. "Frater Robertus, dictus Hode" was a canon of the Augustinian priory of Plympton (Devon), but apostatized and returned to secular life "in quo diu extitit dampnabiliter vagabundus." Sometime before May 1328, he returned to the priory and begged to be readmitted, but the prior's answer was a peremptory "nullo modo"; this occasioned a lengthy correspondence between the prior and the bishop of Exeter.[3] An over-enthusiastic Devon local historian might argue that Plympton, sometimes spelt "Plumpton", is the Plumpton Park where

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[1]See above p. 64.

[2]Holt (1982), 54.

[3]F.C. Hingeston-Randolph, ed., The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, (A. D. 1327-1369) (London, 1894-9), I, 353, 522, 566; see *ibid.*, 353-4, 522-3, 565-6, 566-7; Wasson (1986), xxix-xxx.

Robin poaches in the Gest, and he might note that the parks and manors of the bishop of Exeter and other church property were being looted and their deer stock poached in this very period.[1] He might suggest that the anticlericalism and -monasticism of the *Gest* would be the more intelligible if its hero bore a grudge against a stern prior who had forgotten the parable of the lost sheep. An early historical Robin Hood in Devon might also go some way towards explaining that the Robin Hood May game tradition flourished earlier and much more vigorously there than elsewhere. Indeed through the ages, several much more frivolous and naive suggestions have been made to account for the origins of Robin Hood; yet the authors of *Eustace* and *Gamelyn* were not expressing new sentiments when they ranged high monastics among the villains of their tales, and the wealth of folk drama in Devon in all probability has more to do with the relative affluence and cultural autononmy of what may be termed the middle classes in this county. The early tales are so emphatically and exclusively Northern and North-Midland, that the canon of Plympton and his namesakes of Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire must be set aside as mere curiosities.

One habit of real medieval robbers has certainly influenced the Robin Hood tradition: they used aliases. We have already come across Adam of Ravensworth who called himself "Lionel, king of the rout of robbers" in 1336. In 1502, one prankster, or rather a criminal, "renued many of Robin Hodes pagentes", calling himself "Grenelef", the "surname" adopted by Little John in fytte III.[2] Much more significantly, Robert Stafford, chaplain of Lindfield, Sussex, in 1417 or earlier formed a band of armed criminals who under his leadership murdered, robbed and poached in Sussex and Surrey; he had, as one royal writ puts it, adopted "the unusual name, in common parlance, of Frere Tuk", or as another writ states, he had "assumed the name of Frere Tuk newly so called in common parlance". That the name evidently seemed novel strongly suggests that we have to do with the original of Friar Tuck, a character who only found his way into the ballads in the 17th century, but had apparently been accorded a role in the May games already around 1475, when he appears in *Robin Hood and the Sheriff*, the sole surviving fragment of genuinely medieval English folk drama.[3]

The problem with this use of noms de guerre is that we cannot be sure that "Robin Hood" was not used in this way. One wonders, for instance, whether the clerk who in 1262 changed the name of William son of Robert the Smith to "William Robehod" regarded "Robin Hood" as a kind of John Doe for outlaws? If so, we should perhaps sum up the matter in laconic encyclopaedia style as "Robin Hood, generic name for medieval English outlaw chiefs".

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[1]Hingeston-Randolph, I, 352-3.
[2]See above pp. 58 n. 4, 78.
[3]See above p. 12, n. 5.

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Abbreviations

ASnSL: Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen. Elberfeld, 1846-9; Braunschweig, 1849-.
EETS [,ES/OS]: Early English Text Society [,Extra Series/Original Series]. London, 1864-.
EHR: English Historical Review. London, 1886-.
P&P: Past and Present. London, 1952-.
REED: Records of Early English Drama. London, Manchester, Toronto, etc., 1979-.
Rolls Series: Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages. London, 1858-.
STS: Scottish Text Society. Edinburgh, 1883-.

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