In her introduction to this variegated collection of essays, Lois Potter states that "the most useful thing we can do with such a topic as Robin Hood is to complicate it, even overwhelm it with material, rather than to select in the interest of a single political, social or aesthetic agenda" (18). These essays, which emerged from a session of the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society at a 1994 Modern Language Association meeting in San Diego, California, measure up to the principle of variety set forth in Potter's opening pages. The book initially focuses on the Robin Hood plays of the Elizabethan era, then moves into a cross-cultural account of the figures of Robin Hood and Maid Marian, and concludes with three articles commenting on post-renaissance versions of Robin Hood. The strength of this collection lies in the way it delineates the limitless vitality, various significances, and diverse configurations of the Robin Hood legend.

Alexandra Johnston's essay, "The Robin Hood of the Records," examines the figure of Robin Hood in the context of the summer inversion ceremonies of sixteenth-century England. Johnston employs civic and ecclesiastical records, as transcribed by the Records of Early English Drama project, to outline Robin Hood's role as "a chief fundraiser for the parishes of the Thames Valley and the west of England" (40). A complex portrait of parish fundraising emerges from Johnston's summary of the records, as she suggests how Robin Hood in some districts acted as "a combined producer and stage manager of the festival events" (36), and cites evidence from Staffordshire and Yeovil to indicate the coercive aspects of fundraising activities and "the custom of accosting neighbors (and even strangers) and demanding money for the support of the parish" (38).

The next three essays by Edwin Davenport, Jeffrey Singman, and Michael Shapiro address various aspects of the Robin Hood tradition as depicted in Elizabethan drama. Davenport's "The Representation of Robin Hood in Elizabethan Drama: George a Greene and Edward I" analyzes how these two plays redefine the figure of Robin Hood. Davenport indicates how the anonymous George a Greene de-politicizes Robin Hood, casting him as "an amorous pastoral hero who fights for love" (54), and then re-politicizes Robin as "a subject and object of a socially categorizing culture, subject to its social divisions, able to point them out and assist in their operation" (55). Similarly, Davenport demonstrates how George Peele's Edward I also de-politicizes Robin Hood explaining that "a figure customarily associated with a politically charged form of community based on mutuality and an egalitarian sense of justice loses any connection with political action" (57). Singman's essay regarding Anthony Munday's Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon and Death of
Robert Earl of Huntingdon complements Davenport's analysis as it also addresses the political appropriation of the Robin Hood legend. Singman effectively crystallizes his critical project when he states that Munday "officializes his Robin Hood by offering a comprehensivist version of the legend that attempts to subordinate all prior versions to itself and be reworking its content along rational and hierarchical lines consistent with the cultural and social norms of the Elizabethan elite" (65). Michael Shapiro's "Cross-Dressing In Elizabethan Robin Hood Plays" concludes this section of the book and discusses the relationship between the practice of cross-dressing in traditional pastimes and female impersonation on the Elizabethan stage. Shapiro especially focuses on the figure of Maid Marian and illustrates how the Robin Hood plays of the 1590’s "could absorb and reenact the festal impulses involved in male cross-dressing rites and could both tamp down and amplify the disruptive or dissident potentialities of those impulses" (86).

The next section of this volume, entitled “Cross-Cultural Cross-Dressing,” traces aspects of the Robin Hood legend in Mexico, Russia, and Japan. In his brief essay, Max Harris comments on what he calls the "intriguing link between the Mexican Malinche/Marina and the English Maid Marian" (108). Harris proposes that the La Malinche character in traditional Mexican dances and figure of Maid Marian "share, at least in part, common roots in the European May games and in the Pre-Christian goddess traditions that underlie them" (107). Harris' deft speculations about cross-cultural influences serve as prelude to Natalie Kononenko's assessment of Russia's version of Robin Hood, Sten'ka Razin. Kononenko is intent upon analyzing the differences between the idealized version of Razin's life as described in "elite written sources" and the more ambivalent depiction of Razin in oral/folklore materials such as historical songs. Kononenko asserts that the written literature presents Razin "as a hero and champion of social justice" (26), but that oral sources encode their preoccupation with social justice in the symbol of cloth/clothing "to hide it from the authorities" (26). Kononenko succinctly describes the range of symbolic resonances for clothing in terms of status and power, pre-Christian beliefs, and materialism. Yoshiko Ueno's "Robin Hood in Japan" rounds out this cross-cultural group of essays as it details how the Robin Hood legend first made its way to Japan through translations of Walter Scott's Ivanhoe and children's versions of Robin Hood, Yoshisaburo Okakura's English textbook, and the 1922 Douglas Fairbank's film Robin Hood. Other salient moments in Ueno's essay include the depiction of Robin Hood as a "radical revolutionary" in the writing of Tomoyoshi Murayama, the endorsement of Michael Curtiz's film The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938) by the Ministry of Education prior to World War II, and the Robin Hood elements in Mokuami Kawatake's kabuki play Nezumikomon Haruno Shingata (1857).

Stephen Knight's "Quite Another Man":The Restoration Robin Hood' begins the final sequence of essays with a consideration of the "role of the English outlaw in the culture of the royal restoration" (169). Knight examines the drama, Robin Hood and His Crew of Soldiers, (performed, as Knight states, on coronation day in Nottingham) in order to foreground the "inhomogeneously conservative" nature of Robin Hood in the Restoration. Knight then scrutinizes a series of post-Restoration ballads and discovers evidence of a "peace-abiding, fun-loving, theatrically-mediated Robin Hood" (179), whose depoliticization contrasts sharply with

http://www.as.uni-hd.de/prolepsis/00_10_fit.html
the more violent and threatening character of earlier materials. Following this, Lois Potter offers a fascinating account of the relationship between the text and performance of Alfred Tennyson's *The Foresters* in the context of the nineteenth-century theater. Potter outlines the differences between Tennyson's written version of the play and Augustin Daly's popular production of it, and then suggests how both text and performance emphasize the strength and dominance of the Maid Marian character. Lastly, Katherine and Robert Morsberger provide a survey of twentieth-century film versions of the Robin Hood legend, one which attempts to historically contextualize the individual films. For instance, the Morsbergers draw a convincing parallel between the hostility and violence of the Normans towards the Saxons in Curtiz's 1938 *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and the Nazis' brutal oppression of the Jews. In another example, these critics find signs of Cold War politics in *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest* (1946).

These essays constitute a valuable introduction to the breadth and diversity of the Robin Hood legend. While the variety of critical perspectives in this volume are not intended to present a coherent and systematic assessment of the Robin Hood tradition, certain themes and ideas (such as politics, social justice, power relations) recur and help the reader to make connections between these widely disparate essays. A rich and complex sense of the Robin Hood tradition emerges from this collection and promises a fertile ground for future research in this area. This text may also be a valuable aid for teachers thinking about creating courses based on the legendary outlaw, as it suggests the different approaches and resources available for classroom use. Indeed, the references to dramatic conventions, cross-cultural influences, historical context, and film adaptations broaden the reader's critical horizons and force him or her to engage with the multiple forms and purposes of the Robin Hood legend.

**KEYWORDS:** Robin Hood, performance

**REVIEWED BY:** William Fitzhenry

**AFFILIATION:** California Polytechnic State University

**E-MAIL:** wfitzhen@calpoly.edu

**ADDRESS:** California Polytechnic State Univ., English Dept., San Luis Obispo, CA, 93407

**PHONE NUMBER:** 805-756-2979 (Office)

*Originally published in Prolepsis: The Tübingen Review of English Studies*

http://www.as.uni-hd.de/prolepsis/00_10_fit.html