



The birth of Robin Hood

Anonymous

Robin Hood was the hero of a group of ballads written between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. They narrate the story of a yeoman who, outlawed for some unknown reason, became the leader of a gang of bandits who lived in Sherwood Forest. Traditionally dressed in green, with a bow and arrow as his weapon, he is the champion of the weak and the friend of the poor, since he steals the money from barons and knights, bishops and abbots, and gives it to those who are in need. He is a sincere worshipper of the Virgin, but a vigorous hater of the corrupted clergy. His life is marked by frequent encounters with the Sheriff of Nottingham and by loyalty to King Richard the Lionheart, though he helps himself freely to the king's deer. His death is surrounded by mystery; some versions of the legend have him killed by a nun, who bled him to death.

The members of his gang, the 'Merry Men', live in the forest with Robin and help him in his adventures. Among the most famous are Little John, who is huge, strong and hot-tempered, though extremely generous; Friar Tuck, who is the chaplain of the gang and has an enormous appetite; Maid Marian, Robin's lovely girlfriend. The Maid Marian element was probably introduced for the purpose of the performances held in Robin's honour on May Day, the spring festival on the first day of May. The following ballad is of Scottish origin and deals with the circumstances of the hero's birth.

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| <p>O Willie's large o' limb and lith¹
And come o' high degree,
And he is gane to Earl Richard
To serve for meat and fee².</p> | <p>But ye'll come to my bower⁸, Willie,
Just as the sun gaes down;
And kep me in your arms twa
And latna me fa' down⁹.</p> |
| <p>5 Earl Richard had but ae daughter
Fair as a lily flower;
And they made up their love-contract
Like proper paramour³.</p> | <p>25 O whan the sun was now gane down
He's doen him till her bower;
And there by the lee¹⁰ licht o' the moon
Her window she lookit o'er.</p> |
| <p>10 It fell upon a simmer's nicht
Whan the leaves were fair and green,
That Willie met his gay ladie
Intil⁴ the wood alane.</p> | <p>30 Intill a robe¹¹ o' red scarlet
She lap¹², fearless o' harm¹³;
And Willie was large o' lith and limb
And keppit her in his arm.</p> |
| <p>O narrow is my gown⁵, Willie,
That wont to be sae wide;
15 And gane is a' my fair colour
That wont to be my pride.</p> | <p>And they've gane to the gude green wood;
And ere the night was deen¹⁴
35 She's born to him a bonny¹⁵ young son
Amang the leaves sae green.</p> |
| <p>But gin⁶ my father should get word
What's past between us twa,
Before that he should eat or drink
20 He'd hang you o'er that wa'⁷.</p> | <p>Whan night was gane and day was come
And the sun began to peep¹⁶,
Up and raise the Earl Richard
40 Out o' his drowsy¹⁷ sleep.</p> |

1 o' limb and lith. Di corporatura.

2 fee. Compenso.

3 paramour. Amante.

4 Intil. Until.

5 gown. Vestito.

6 gin. Se.

7 wa'. (Scottish) wall.

8 bower. Bosco.

9 latna ... down. (Scottish) Do not let me fall dawn.

10 lee. Il versante protetto dal vento.

11 robe. Abito.

12 lap. Si sdraiò.

13 harm. Danno, offesa.

14 deen. (Scottish) Done.

15 bonny. Bello.

16 to peep. Far capolino.

17 drowsy. Profondo.



- He's ca'd¹⁸ upon his merry young men
By ane, by twa, and by three:
O what's come o' my daughter dear,
That she's nae come to me?
- 45 I dreamt a dreary dream last night –
God grant it come to gude –
I dreamt I saw my daughter dear
Drown in the saut¹⁹ sea flood.
- 50 But gin my daughter be dead or sick,
Or yet be stown awa²⁰,
I mak a vow, and I'll keep it true,
I'll hang ye ane and a'.
- They sought her back, they sought her fore,
They sought her up and down;
55 They got her in the gude green wood
Nursing her bonny young son.
- He took the bonny boy in his arms
And kist him tenderlie;
Says, Though I would your father hang,
60 Your mother's dear to me.
- He kist him o'er and o'er again:
My grandson I thee claim;
And Robin Hood in gude green wood,
And that shall be your name.

18 ca'd. Called.

19 saut. Sale, salato.

20 stown awa. Rapita.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and write down the equivalent in modern English of the following words from the ballad.

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|------------------------|---------------|
| 1 gane | 8 gaes |
| 2 ae | 9 licht |
| 3 simmer's nicht | 10 gude |
| 4 alane | 11 ane |
| 5 sae | 12 mak |
| 6 twa | 13 kist |
| 7 ye | |

2 MATCH the highlighted words in the text with their Italian translation.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 di alto rango | 5 allegra signora |
| 2 promessa | 6 impiccherebbe |
| 3 senza paura | 7 si è recato giù |
| 4 triste, malinconico | 8 prendere la parola |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

3 READ the text again and do the following activities.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Who are the characters? | 3 Point out the descriptive details of the setting. |
| 2 What are you told about their relationship? | 4 Outline the main events in the story. |

> COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

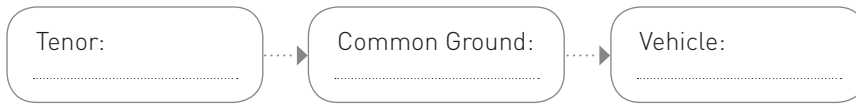
4 FOCUS on the sound patterns of the ballad and answer these questions.

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|--|--|
| 1 What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? Is it regular? | 3 Point out examples of alliteration in the text. |
| 2 Is the length of lines and stanzas regular? | 4 Find examples of words and phrases which are repeated. Can you identify a refrain? |

5 CIRCLE the personal pronouns and decide where narration and dialogue are used. Who are the speaking voices?



6 ANALYSE the terms of simile in line 6 using the diagram below. Who is it referred to?



7 POINT out the adjectives referring to Willie. How is he connoted? Why does he fascinate Earl Richard's daughter?

8 UNDERLINE the words connected with Robin Hood. What colours are linked to his birth?

9 CONSIDER the subject matter of this ballad. Tick as appropriate and give reasons for your choice. It deals with

- ☐ the supernatural.
- ☐ domestic tragedy.
- ☐ religion.
- ☐ history.
- ☐ love.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE**

10 REFER to 1.9 in your textbook and identify the features of the ballad as a poetic form in this poem.