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Maid Marian's Transgressive Identities

Sherron Lux

We get only tantalizing glimpses of Robin Hood's Greenwood Lady, Maid Marian, throughout much of her history. French text sources take us back to *circa* 1283, to Adam de la Halle's musical *Le Jeu du Robin et Marion*, part of the pastoral strain of the legend which exists side by side with the emerging Greenwood strain at least through the fifteenth century. If we look at English and Scottish texts, Marian appears briefly in only two ballads before 1600, despite having been paired with Robin in the May Games for at least 200 years. Even after she appears in two plays by Anthony Munday *circa* 1600 and the twenty-sixth song of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, *circa* 1612 through 1619, Marian does not appear in the Matter of the Greenwood with any consistency until twentieth-century films and novels. When Marian does appear, she generally challenges accepted gender roles in some way, either openly or subtly—and even a subtle challenge can lead to some discomfort on the part of the status quo. Her brief appearances reflect a basically transgressive nature, which can account as well for her absence in much of the early Greenwood legend.

Marian's early transgressive identities are further enhanced by her various disguises in both early and later versions of the legend where she is often seen as someone other than herself: a boy, for example, in the ballad of *circa* 1600, "Robin Hood and Maid Marian" by S.S. (Child's No. 150), and even Marian-but-not-Marian in Ben Jonson's unfinished play *The Sad Shepherd: Or a Tale of Robin-hood*, published in the 1640 Folio. The Marian-but-not-Marian motif comprises both a true and a false Marian; despite the play's unfinished state, Jonson presents us with the most complex version of this form of Marian's identity crisis, which resurfaces in two twentieth-century films, C.M. Pennington-Richards' 1967 *A Challenge for Robin Hood* and John Irvin's 1991 *Robin Hood*. The dramatic possibilities Jonson introduces have largely been ignored, perhaps because Jonson's Marian virtually eclipses his

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Robin in complexity of character and, therefore, in interest for the audience/reader, although Marian does periodically appear in her boy-disguise, the more common form of her transgressive identity.

This paper examines primarily these two forms of Marian's identity, focussing especially on the ballad by S.S. and on Jonson's unfinished play, with some discussion of later Marians, as well. However, we need to begin in the late thirteenth century with Adam de la Halle's musical play, as it raises some basic questions of identity and transgression—a transgression by which Marian assumes the focal role.

Adam's *Le Jeu du Robin et Marion* basically expands the traditional form of the popular pastourelle, with variations. While in a traditional pastourelle we first see a singing knight riding through the countryside, who attempts to seduce a lone shepherdess of striking beauty, Adam's *Jeu* opens not with the knight, but with the shepherdess, Marion, alone with her sheep and singing to herself about how much she and her Robin love each other. *Robin et Marion* thus focusses on Marion from the beginning; despite Robin's later participation, we continue to see Marion as the primary character. When the chevalier enters, true to form, he attempts to seduce her. However, Marion foils all three of his attempts at seduction, remaining loyal to her rustic swain Robin as she repeatedly denies that the knight has any claim on her just because he is an aristocrat and she a shepherdess:

CHEVALIER: Cuideriés empirier de moi,
qui si loing getes me proière?
Chevalier sui et vous bergiere.

How easily you dismiss me!
Do you think you would be stooping to say yes to me?
I am a knight—and you a shepherdess.

MARION: Je pour chou ne vous amerai.
Bergeronnete sui; mais j'ai
Ame bel et cointe et gai.

I still won't ever love you.
A shepherdess I am, but I have a friend

who's handsome and well-bred and lively.

(Text & trans. Focus 913 CD liner text)

Adam's spunky shepherdess insists on her own personhood, here partly defined by social class as she refuses to be dazzled by the possibility of an *amour* with a member of the aristocracy, happy to be loved by one of her own social standing. The chevalier sees a pretty, clever shepherdess, a creature with whom he might enjoy a pleasant springtime dalliance; he could almost have been reading Andreas Capellanus's familiar twelfth-century treatise on *The Art of Courtly Love*, Book One, Chapter 11, where Andreas, although not encouraging his friend Walter to love (we would say lust for) a peasant woman, does state that:

And if you should, by some chance, fall in love with some of their women, be careful to puff them up with lots of praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force. (150)

However, in Marion, the chevalier meets a peasant woman who sees herself as a person, and thus manages, with words alone, to foil the knight all three times he attempts to seduce her—even when he finally carries her off on his horse. At this point, Marion states firmly: "My lord, it's impossible;/there's no way it can work," and more literally and forcefully, "You are nothing I want" 'Sire, sachiés chertainment/que nenil; riens ne vous i vaut' (Focus 913 CD liner text; my trans.). This Marion's self-confidence stems from her clear sense of who she is and of her place in the world.

Adam's Marion makes no attempt to be other than she is: a woman, a shepherdess—although a particularly clever and courtly shepherdess—and a loyal lover who is ultimately re-united with her beloved; the importunate chevalier learns that even a woman in the lower orders of society can have pride in herself as a person, that she can refuse to become anyone's plaything. This insistence upon her own personhood, of course, represents a kind of transgression on Marion's part, since she is a shepherdess, a lower-class woman, and not a lady in shepherdess disguise who can either foil her would-be seducer with impunity, as in the ballad called "The Baffled Knight," or insist that her rapist

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marry her, as in another of Child's collected ballads, "The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter."

Later Greenwood Marians, while loyal, beautiful, and clever, sometimes find disguise—specifically, *male* disguise—necessary to assert their personhood and to accomplish a goal, common to all of them, of finding and/or being with their respective Robins. In the ballad by S.S., *circa* 1600, "Robin Hood and Maid Marian" (Child's No. 150), beautiful Maid Marian goes to the forest to seek her lover, the outlawed Earl of Huntington [sic], "drest...like a page" (st. 8). Ballad-writer S.S. quite possibly knew some of Shakespeare's comedies, including *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1594) and, especially, *As You Like It* (c. 1599-1600); in both plays a young woman disguises herself as a youth and enters the forest, where she encounters her lover—her lover, who fails to recognize her in her boy-disguise, even as Robin Hood fails to recognize his own "bonny fine maid" (st. 1) in her page-boy attire, with the added complication that Robin is also disguised. Keith Dorwick makes the intriguing observation that Shakespeare's heroines who cross-dress as males do so as youths rather than as men, in contradistinction to such earlier cross-dressed heroines as Dorothea in Robert Greene's *James the Fourth*, a character loosely based on the warrior-woman Arenopia who successfully passes as a man in Cinthio's fifteenth-century *Hecatommithi* (Dorwick 280, 283); S.S.'s "bonny fine maid" falls within the newer tradition of girl-as-boy espoused by Shakespeare, but with the martial characteristics of older heroines, as we shall see.

In addition to her boy-garb, Marian-as-page is particularly prepared for forest difficulties, as "With quiver and bow, sword, buckler, and all, / Thus armed was Marian most bold" (st.9). Here (and elsewhere, as we shall see) Marian proves herself Robin's equal in matters of disguise; however, on this day Robin also happens to be wandering the wood in disguise and meets the well-armed "youth" in an encounter not notable for its delicacy, as the two "provd foes, and so fell to blowes, / Whose vallour [the youth's] bold Robin admir'd" (st. 10). Therefore,

They drew out their swords, and to cutting they went,
At least an hour or more,
that the blood ran apace from bold Robins face,
And Marian was wounded sore. (st. 11)

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Legal

We find here two evenly matched fighters—swordspersons?—with Marian’s military prowess even more transgressive than her male disguise. Claire Sponsler notes that during the late Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance (and beyond), certain cultural and/or religious authorities such as Thomas Aquinas believed that women cross-dressing as men were attempting to “better” themselves in some way “by becoming more male, even if only in appearance” and that, when necessary, a woman could use male disguise for her own protection, although “in most instances...women were strongly discouraged from impersonating men” (10). Furthermore, in *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber states that rigorous Elizabethan sumptuary laws designed to emphasize social and sexual differences among people, including a variety of strictures against women dressed as men, “did not prevent female-to-male transvestitism from enjoying a London vogue in the last decade of the sixteenth century (as it would again some ten years later)” (28), a vogue which both affected and was affected by stage-plays such as Shakespeare’s comedies in which a boy actor played a woman playing a youth. Our ballad Marian’s expertise with a sword, therefore, is more transgressive than her page-boy appearance, as this expertise connects her not with Shakespeare’s woman-as-youth heroines but with those slightly older military ladies such as Dorothea and Arenopia, mentioned above, both of whom appear as fighters (and Arenopia really *is* a warrior), while Shakespeare’s cross-dressed heroines, as Dorwick observes, are accomplished singers, poets, conversationalists, or other non-military youths. Ballad-writer S.S., then, has given us a Marian who, we suspect, is also a fine singer and a good companion—a courtly lady—but who appears as a page-boy-cum-fighter.

As Garber notes about various forms of cross-dressing in general, “transvestitism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself” (17, emphasis Garber’s). The ballad Marian disrupts categories as we see a beautiful young woman disguised as a page-boy who enters the forbidden forest alone and fights like a man rather than like the boy she appears to be or the woman she actually is—that is, she is not like the Shakespearean crossed-dressed comic heroine who, like Viola, attempts to avoid armed conflict or who, like Rosalind, swoons at the sight of her lover’s blood. Our ballad

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Marian fights bravely and well, and swoons at the sight of no-one's blood, not even her own. Furthermore, Marian is not the one who needs a breathing-space in the forest combat: she and Robin realize their mutual mistake only when Robin pauses to ask the "page" to join "my string,/To range in the wood with bold Robin Hood,/To hear the sweet nightingall sing" (st. 12); while this detail connects "Robin Hood and Maid Marian" with other ballads whereby Robin asks a *man* who bests him at swordplay (or, later, archery, or, still later, quarterstaff) to join his merry band, in Number 150 we see him deferring to a youth, a youth who reveals "himself," at the sound of Robin's voice, to be a woman, almost creating a double transgression. The lovers can disguise their physical appearance, but give themselves away by their voices. Interestingly, in Adam de la Halle's thirteenth-century pastoral, voice also proclaims identity, as Robin and Marion recognize each other's singing before they come into view of one another. In the ballad, voice likewise identifies the lovers to each other, allowing them to throw down their arms in joyful reunion and Maid Marian, her mission accomplished, joins her lover and his men in the forest. Like Shakespeare's Rosalind, then, Marian appears at the ballad's end as a woman, subordinated to a man—but does she *appear* as a woman, or does she retain her page-boy costume? S.S. leaves us hanging on this point, so to speak.

Speaking of medieval Robin Hood ballads and performances, in which Robin himself often cross-dresses, Sponsler states: "Besides functioning as disguise, cross-dressing also has symbolic force as a device that allows the outlaw to tap into the cultural power associated with the figures he cross-dresses as" (27); applied to Marian, we see a female "tap[ping] into the cultural power associated with" a male. We can connect this important observation with one which Valerie Hotchkiss makes in her fascinating study *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in Medieval Europe*, namely that disguise allows identity to be concealed "for different reasons, although in general the goal is participation in activities from which the disguised individual would otherwise be excluded" (10)—such as roaming the forest alone and joining an outlaw band. In her chapter on "The Disguised Wife," Hotchkiss further notes that

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A husband's enforced or voluntary absence serves as the impetus for disguise in all these stories of women's adventures outside the domestic sphere....as the male disguise signifies, the absence of the husband literally results in a loss of sexual identity. In disguise, the women breach male hegemony but also conform to male ideals of heroism [T]he women . . . are praiseworthy because disguise results in their eventual return to the lower status of women. (96-97)

Although Hotchkiss here is discussing wives, we can apply many of her statements to our ballad Marian: her lover's enforced absence provides the impetus for her adventure "outside the domestic sphere"; in her male disguise, Marian breaches male hegemony while conforming to "male ideals of heroism" in her swordfight with Robin; and finding her lover results in the end of her adventure and the return to her subordinate female status, as

At last they ended their merriment,
And went to walk in the wood,
Where Little John and Maid Marian
Attended on bold Robin Hood. (st. 20, emphasis mine)

Later Marians also borrow the boy-disguise, crossing social and gender boundaries and threatening to destabilize cultural norms; for example, in Thomas Love Peacock's 1822 burlesque romance, *Maid Marian*, in a scene towards the end of the book, a knight riding through Sherwood Forest dismounts to fight with "a fine young outlaw" (532); they fight hard until Friar Tuck interrupts them, exclaiming, "'Well fought, girl'" (533) to the knight's astonishment: "'[I]f this be indeed a lady, man never yet held me so long'" (533). In addition to simply being a more practical mode of dress for woodland living, Marian's boy-disguise allows her to blur the boundaries of traditional male and female roles; had the knight come across a young woman leaning against a tree, her skirts and hair blowing gently in the breeze, his response would have been less belligerent. As it is, part of the identity of Peacock's Maid Marian is her astonishing versatility, a versatility unsuspected by men who, in their ordinary encounters with her, merely see an

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elegant, aristocratic young woman: Peacock's Marian, like her sisters, can spin, bake, and converse as a woman, but she can fight only as a man, echoing our early-seventeenth-century ballad Marian. Peacock's Lady Matilda/Maid Marian is something of a paragon; her confessor, Brother Michael ("a decidedly upmarket version of Tuck"—Knight 183), describes her as generous, kind, sensible, resolute, and highly skilled in recognized "feminine" crafts—but with troublesome mythological overtones connected with sexual aggression: "for embroidery an Arachne: for music a Siren: and for pickling and preserving, did not one of her jars of sugared apricots give you your last surfeit at Arlingford Castle?" (450). Even one of her staunchest male admirers may feel subtly threatened by Peacock's Marian, as the negative mythological analogies suggest. Of course, Brother Michael already knows of Marian's skill with both bow and sword, something Sir Ralph, Prince John, and King Richard all learn later, to their respective discomfitures, when the young squire or the youthful outlaw who bests them turns out to be a lovely, aristocratic young woman; again, Marian's transvestitism allows her to transgress several culturally-inscribed boundaries at once. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, can Peacock's Marian exist only in a burlesque romance? Offhand, I know of no other nineteenth-century Robin Hood text in which Marian—if she appears (as she does not in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, for instance, but more on that another time)—succeeds as both completely "feminine" and completely "masculine"; Tennyson's Maid Marian in his 1882/1892 play *The Foresters*, for example, appears at one point disguised as her long-lost brother, "the Red-Cross Knight," but this "knight" refuses to fight Robin even when the outlawed earl accuses the seeming knight of shaming "his" sister through "his" cowardice. Needless to say, *The Foresters* takes itself quite seriously, even in those moments which actually border on the parodic, such as the scene with Marian-as-Red-Cross-Knight (shades of Spenser!).

Despite (or perhaps because of?) appearing as a character in a burlesque romance, Peacock's Marian is beautiful, brave, and skilled in many arts, as is Robin McKinley's Lady Marian in her 1988 novel *The Outlaws of Sherwood*. McKinley's Robin, a fine leader but a fairly mediocre archer, chafes against the legends already growing up around him, and refuses to attend the shooting match at Nottingham Fair. However, Marian, a superb



archer, seeking to make Robin's legend live, attends the match disguised as a youth, and everyone thinks she is Robin Hood—especially with her incredible shooting. While McKinley's Marian initially chooses her disguise, and while this disguise is initially successful, her false identity backfires when the cruel bounty hunter Guy of Gisbourne gives "Robin Hood" a wicked sword-thrust, badly wounding Marian. In the end, Marian is restored to her full identity as a woman—although a woman of considerably more spirit and innovation than custom (or her father's favored suitor for her) deems acceptable. Impressed by this unusual young woman, however, King Richard makes her his new Sheriff of Nottingham, further complicating Lady Marian's already complex identity, and perhaps even becoming complicitous in her social and cultural transgressions. Written in the late 1980s, *The Outlaws of Sherwood*, while amusing in several places, does not have to become a burlesque romance in order to present Marian as a strong, capable young woman who cross-dresses all too successfully as a young man. McKinley's Marian is considerably more realistic than Peacock's, also, in that although she is a beautiful, aristocratic young woman trained as a proper lady who happens to enjoy archery and the great outdoors, she is not a domestic paragon, as she "loathes" the enforced needlework. However, this Marian's transgressiveness extends even to the loathed needlework, as she uses it as a way to obtain some private space for her thoughts within the circumscribed boundaries of her father's house: if she appears to be contemplating her needlework, the women leave her alone, freeing her to actually plan the next stage in the Saxon rebellion into which she has entered along with Robin, Much, and several other displaced folk—mostly men, but some women, as well, most of whom cross-dress in their rebellious Greenwood environment.

Turning from print to film, in Ken Annakin's 1952 film for Walt Disney, *The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men*, we find Joan Rice's bright, spunky young Lady Marian, although forbidden by the Queen Mother (Martita Hunt) to risk going into Sherwood Forest to look for her now-outlawed childhood friend Robin (Richard Todd), borrowing clothes from a page-boy and joining up with the wandering minstrel Allan-a-Dale (Elton Hayes), who is also going through Sherwood, and who believes the "page" to be "a young gentleman." (As far as I can determine

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at present, Rice's young lady is the first film Marian to take up the boy-disguise.) In her page-boy disguise, Marian even tussles with Robin over the question of a certain miller's honesty. However, in her struggles with Robin, Marian forgets to lower the pitch of her voice; in addition, her spirited attack gives Robin a hint which is confirmed when her glossy dark hair escapes its confines. As in earlier Robin-and-Marian stories, here voice is again the first clue to the "true" identity hidden beneath the outward appearance. When he realizes who she is, Robin takes Marian back to the outlaws' camp, where they persuade her of their good faith; she collects money from them towards King Richard's ransom. Marian's boy-disguise here allows her to circumvent not only the Queen Mother's orders but also societal constraints: an aristocratic young woman of good character heading out to Sherwood Forest to seek a proscribed outlaw, indeed! Rice's Marian has loyalty and courage, but cultural customs forbid her to act; since boys are allowed to act, since boys are allowed beyond the circumscribed boundaries where girls live in the world of this film (and in the actual medieval world), Marian puts on boy-disguise. Had she attempted the adventure as herself, she would have been apprehended and returned to the castle long before she could have reached the forest; male disguise is essential to her success here, as she "taps into the cultural power" (Sponsler 27) associated with being—or, at least, appearing to be—male.

More recently, in John Irvin's 1991 film *Robin Hood*, Uma Thurman's intense and beautiful Lady Marian cuts and dyes her hair, dons boy-disguise, and heads for the forest in search of the outlawed Robert Hode, Earl of Huntingdon, now known as Robin Hood (Patrick Bergin); Thurman's Marian desperately seeks to escape a hated, enforced marriage with a cruel knight. Ironically, her boy-disguise as "Martin Pride" is so good that while Robin—who already loves Marian—knows "Martin" looks familiar, he cannot place the young stranger, partly because, in addition to putting on male appearance, Marian carefully lowers the pitch of her voice, thereby also disguising the one feature which could give her away despite her careful assumption of male attire. Again, the disguise is an escape from her familiar, circumscribed female world, a world in which her guardian, her powerful uncle, has legal control of her person. At heart, she remains Lady Marian, even when to outward appearances she is "Martin Pride."



As we can see just from this far-from-complete survey, Maid Marian in her boy-disguise periodically arrives in the Matter of the Greenwood. The boy-disguise, which she chooses, allows her to circumvent societal constraints and take charge, however temporarily, of her own existence and identity—thus transgressing the cultural “norm” which insisted upon a woman’s subordination, a “norm” assisted by the popular late medieval conduct books which taught a young woman that “it is her social lot to be disciplined” (Sponsler 63).

Less frequently, and far more troubling, two Marians occasionally appear in the Greenwood legend, one true and one false. Ben Jonson gives the most complex manifestation of the true and false Marians in his unfinished play *The Sad Shepherd: Or a Tale of Robin-hood*. Here, Robin and Marian are “The chiefe Wood-man, Master of the Feast” and “His Lady, the Mistris” (7). Malcolm Nelson observes that, styled neither outlaws nor aristocrats, Jonson’s Robin and Marian “belong to the native tradition, but are more refined than their followers....noble sweethearts and gracious hosts” (220). In *The Sad Shepherd*, Marian is far more active than Robin; while he gives the orders and greets his banquet guests, the shepherds and shepherdesses, Marian, a keen huntress (partly modelled after Drayton’s huntress-Marian in *Poly-Olbion*), takes her men to hunt the main course, at Robin’s request: “Away then, when my Robin bids a Feast, / Twere sin in Marian to defraud a guest” (I.i.20-21). But Marian will herself be defrauded, in a sense, by the old witch Maudlin of Papplewicke, who hates Marian for her beauty and generosity, as well as for her relationship with Robin—a sexually romantic relationship; as Stephen Knight observes, Jonson’s unfinished play “is the only Robin Hood text until recent times that actually shows Robin and Marian as being in sexual rapport” (141). By means of an enchanted girdle (probably borrowed from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*), Maudlin appears to Robin and the other men as Marian; she insults Robin, the woodsmen, and the shepherds, bewildering them and creating difficulties for the true Marian, as the men turn on her and Robin repudiates her. Jonson’s Marian is a woman of spirit, however; she first becomes bewildered and angry as the men accuse her of something she would not do, of behavior foreign to her nature, and even when Robin’s repudiation distresses her, she maintains her (outward) poise.

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Fortunately for Marian, the shepherdesses vouch for her, and Robin finally suspects the truth, that Maudlin is deluding them all, so when Maudlin later reappears as Marian, Robin pursues her and takes her charmed girdle (the only time we see this Robin act), forcing her to be seen "in her own shape" (III.iv stage direction). Marian's refusal to accept subordinate status not only encourages the shepherdesses to assert themselves, but also results in Marian's finally being proved "innocent."

Despite its dramatic possibilities, the conflict between a "true Marian" and a "false Marian" has not taken hold in the Greenwood tradition, perhaps because this conflict can shift the focus of a story from Robin and his lieutenants. In Jonson, the true and the false Marians are not two aspects of the same woman (Tom Hayes notwithstanding), but two ways of seeing a woman: the true Marian is not only beautiful but kind, generous, brave, and loyal, even when she does appear to transgress social and cultural boundaries as she hunts in the forest and more or less lives with Robin, unwed; the false Marian, even when physically attractive (as she is not in *The Sad Shepherd*) is a traitor. (Can we detect a little male anxiety here?)

Two films do play with the motif of the true and false Marians. Returning to John Irvin's 1991 *Robin Hood*, we find Robin riding joyfully out for a secret rendezvous with Lady Marian at a certain deserted farmhouse. Fortunately, Robin takes the newest member of his band, young "Martin Pride," along as his squire—and we know that "Martin Pride" is really Marian in boy-disguise. Upon learning that Robin has had a message from "Marian," Marian-as-Martin all but propels her bewildered leader out of the vicinity of the old farmhouse, even as Robin tries to respond to the seductive calling of "Marian," in reality Nichole, the pretty mistress of Marian's uncle the Baron Daguerre. Had Robin not taken "Martin" with him, the outlawed earl would have found himself back at Daguerre's castle in chains—or dead. Therefore, Marian's transgression essentially saves her lover's life. Of course, once she has unmasked the false Marian, Marian-as-Martin must confess her true name and gender to a surprised but delighted Robin, although for awhile yet she remains "Martin" to the others.

An earlier film makes more extended use of the motif of a true and a false Marian. In C.M. Pennington-Richards' 1967 *A Challenge for Robin Hood*, Robin de Courtenay (Barrie Ingham) is

not attracted to blonde, blue-eyed, but haughty "Lady Marian Fitzwarren" (Jenny Till), but he is quite taken with her maidservant, black-haired, dark-eyed, modest "Mary" (Gay Hamilton). Of course, lovely "Mary" turns out to be the real Lady Marian Fitzwarren; as her young brother Stephen later explains to Robin, Marian hid with the servants when the Normans came to her family's castle after driving out her father and brother. Apparently the Sheriff of Nottingham needed a Lady Marian Fitzwarren, so he gave another woman the title and the true Lady Marian became Mary the maidservant: quiet, simply dressed, humbly obedient—all in a vain attempt to remain unnoticed. The Sheriff notices her, however; he accosts her in a dark passage of the De Courtenay castle and attempts to make an assignation with her. When he lifts her hand to kiss it, the humble maidservant transgresses social lines and slaps him, shocking him:

SHERIFF: A girl of spirit—good. Men have been killed for doing less to Nottingham.

MARIAN (feigning wide-eyed innocence): Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you were the sheriff.

SHERIFF (patting her cheek): Well, now you do.

MARIAN (slapping him again): So there's another for good measure.

She continues through the passage, leaving the sheriff bemused; after all, it is not every day that the rabbit stands up to the wolf, so to speak! However, the wolf retains his appetite for the rabbit, which leads to further complications later.

Gay Hamilton's Marian, like other Marians, insists on her personhood—even when she adopts another identity. In her guise as a maidservant, although she does not cross gender lines, Marian does cross-dress socially, lowering her status and rendering her more vulnerable, but she generally attempts to deal with the threat. Once Robin learns her real identity from her young brother, of course, he and his band can take her back to Sherwood, to the joy of young Stephen—and of Robin. Once in the forest, Hamilton's Marian retrieves her name, but changes her maidservant's plain black gown for a tunic and hose similar to what most of the outlaws wear. This Marian, however, seems to dress merely to suit the circumstances; the outlaws know her true identity, so she has no

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need to pass as a youth. Only close to the end of the film is the false Marian publicly unmasked when Robin, despite the risk, returns to his cousin's castle to rescue Marian and her young brother, who have essentially been re-abducted by the sheriff's men. Unfortunately, the false Marian here becomes one of those loose ends which never gets resolved; we never learn who she really is, nor what happens to her after she leaves the room when Robin both denounces and dismisses her. Perhaps this is partly because Gay Hamilton's Marian, despite the possibilities of her complex identity, is never allowed to become a well-developed character, because to develop Marian's character in this film would be to risk Robin's supremacy. Gay Hamilton's Marian is forced into becoming a woman she is not; as a maidservant, she lacks both the freedom and the power she could have had had she been able to disguise herself as a boy—even the power to confront the woman who usurps both her name and her position.

This brief discussion of Maid Marian's transgressive identities is far from complete—for example, what are we to make of the ballad narrator's statement that Marian's beauty surpasses that of Helen of Troy, Fair Rosamund, and Jane Shore? Still, we can make some observations. All our Marians who spend some time disguised as boys choose to do so, as the boy-disguise allows them to maneuver through the minefield of culturally-inscribed gender roles to accomplish their various quests, even though most of them, restored to their true female selves, so to speak, also find themselves once again in disturbingly subordinate female positions. In the true-and-false-Marian motif, we have two ways of seeing a woman, one positive and one negative: one brings love and reconciliation to the community, while the other brings a kind of death to that same community. However, polarities—girl-boy, true-false—do not explain Maid Marian. Her identity, like our own, is actually far too complex for such binary pigeonholing. But of course: after all, we created her, did we not?

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