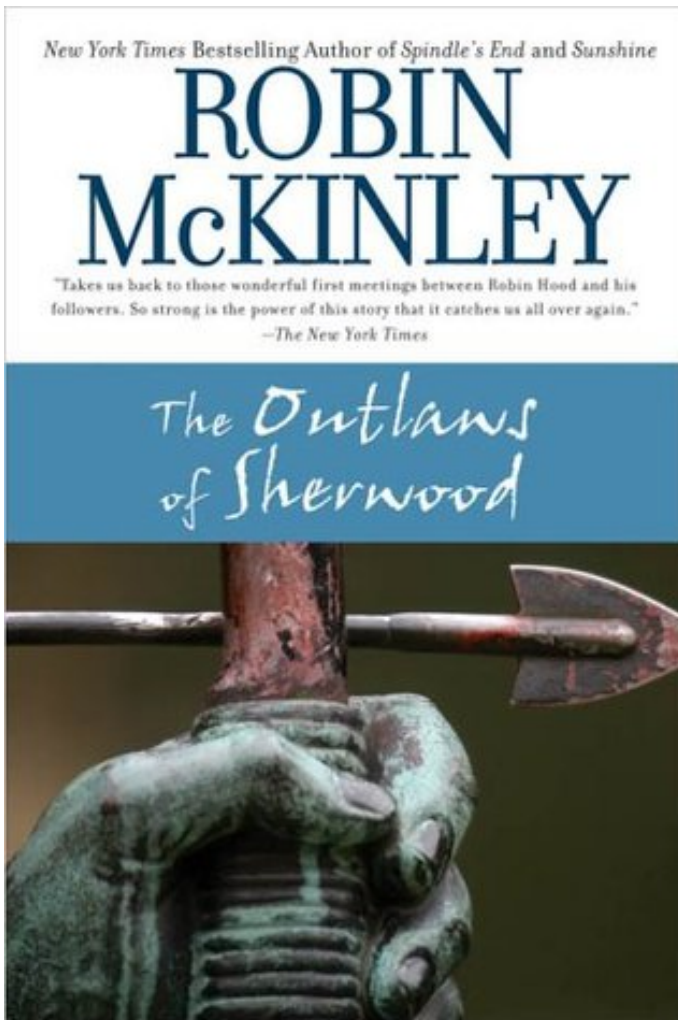

Robin McKinley

The Outlaws of Sherwood



Title: The Outlaws of Sherwood

Author: Robin McKinley

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Description

New York Times bestselling author Robin McKinley's vivid retelling of the classic story of Robin Hood breathes contemporary life into these beloved adventures, with Marian taking a pivotal role as one of Robin's best archers.

Insightful reviews

Anne: *Full disclosure: I like this book a lot, and I think its best points more than outweigh its flaws.*

To those disappointed by Robin Hood's sidelining, I want to point out that McKinley's title--[The Outlaws of Sherwood](#)--should warn you what she's up to. Robin Hood himself is not her main focus, though he is the key and the center of the plot, and the nucleus of all the relationships of the outlaw band. Traditional interpretations of heroism and heroes don't interest her, and mythic grandeur only when contrasted with reality: otherwise, why bother to reimagine folk or fairy tales at all; they're grand enough in original form? Myth-making, in McKinley's view, is a vital part of human nature. Fleshing out myth with realistic characterization is what makes her stories vibrant and relatable, and all it takes is about the second page or so ("[Robin:] did not hate the fact that he was a second-rate archer...") for Robin Hood to snap from godlike Mary Sue to complex, layered, interesting person.

She's explored this tension before and will again--the idealization of storybook heroes contrasted with what would be the gritty reality of practical deed-doing. [The Hero and the Crown](#) showed us dragon-killing as grim, thankless vermin disposal, a clear inversion of the most typically heroic deed in Western myth; in [The Blue Sword](#), Harry is consciously molded into a hero as a symbol she feels she can't live up to. All of McKinley's heroes are reluctant, uncertain, forced to step up to the plate by circumstance and character rather than high-minded inclination--they perform heroic deeds because there is no other option, not because they're bold, noble, pure, or powerful. Like Ursula LeGuin's Sparrowhawk, they spend their lives learning to decide to do what they must do.

She's never before been so explicit about what she's doing, either. There's practically not a character in the book who doesn't overtly refer to the act of myth creation and its contrast with the facts of their narrative. Friar Tuck tells us "tales are as much the necessary fabric of our lives as our bodies are." Marian consciously constructs a legend of superhuman archer Robin Hood; the common folk of Nottingham have their own tales and stories of a fairy 'Old One' Robin Hood, savior of the Saxons; the outlaws themselves add some gloss to their versions when drinking with town girlfriends; and robbed nobles exaggerate the shocking deeds of the outlaws, or are implied to be doing so. Finally, in the afterword, if you somehow missed it, she lays it out in her own voice and tells us how and why she manipulated the Robin Hood legend the way she did. This is a story about stories, a story about the impact of stories. The next time you read it, dig for quotes about stories, tales, myths, and you'll find them everywhere.

McKinley's skill lies in burying this theme in a great story that stays interesting, in part because

the third-person narrative POV jumps around and you don't spend too much time in any one character's head. Plot and character-wise, she fleshes out most generally agreed-upon elements of the Robin Hood myth--longbow archery, Sherwood Forest, robbing the rich to give to the poor, the quarterstaff meeting with Little John, the ragtag fugitives' motley characters (seriously, didn't we all wonder what a minstrel was doing in a forest?)--all are given plausibility, grounding, wit, motivation, and real character. I suspect that a lot of us double-X-chromosome folks are drawn to this book because she added some women to the traditional Robin Hood sausagefest, and realistic women at that. It's difficult to tell how anachronistic they might be, since there aren't a lot of records of women's inner monologues in the 12th century, but at least they aren't glaringly modern (Anne Perry, your Charlotte Pitt is a huge offender.)

Jen: Witty, this one.

I am loving the clever dialogue.

I confess when I started reading it I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to get through it, what with the very descriptive writing, and all... BUT, she proved me wrong (again). Several times have I laughed out loud while reading the altercations and discussions between the characters.

I think the author did really well adapting this tale to story form.

Edited to add:

Wow! I didn't realize it, but I never bothered to learn any version of the tale of Robin Hood other than the animated Disney one. What a story I've missed! I think I just might have finally found "my" "favorite" "fairy tale".

This one definitely is going on my list of books to buy and own for myself. The wit, the leadership, the loyalty... the girls who can do everything that the boys can, and just as well if not better... the significance regarding how myth becomes so prominent in the eyes of some that no-one realizes the humanity or inadequacy of the man that is the reality. The social awkwardness, politics, romantic entanglements...

Well done!

Angie: I have a thing for Robin Hood. Specifically Robin Hood retellings. I love Robin, Marian, Little John, Will Scarlet, Much the Miller, Alan-a-Dale, and the whole merry crew. I read [Ivanhoe](#) cover to cover just for Robin Hood's periodic appearances. And when I went on study abroad to England, I dragged my best friend all the way to Nottingham and Sherwood Forest as well so I could walk around in the woods and soak it all up. It's still one of the happiest, most golden days I can recall, that one. My first encounter with the tale itself was no doubt the Disney animated

version (which I still love watching with my son), but I'm pretty sure the first actual novelization I read was [Robin McKinley's](#) THE OUTLAWS OF SHERWOOD. And it remains my very favorite to this day. Admittedly, I seem to possess the McKinley gene. I love her writing. I love the unexpected, twisty paths she takes, the obstinate characters, and the wry humor. True to form, her Robin is not the typical Robin of legend. If you cherish the strapping, dashing, swashbuckling hero a la Errol Flynn, then this version is probably not for you. But if you like an unusual, but beautifully wrought, take on a classic then you really ought to give this one a shot.

The story opens with the following lines:

A small vagrant breeze came from nowhere and barely flicked the feather tips as the arrow sped on its way. It shivered in its flight, and fell, a little off course--just enough that the arrow missed the slender tree it was aimed at, and struck tiredly and low into the bole of another tree, twenty paces beyond the mark. Robin sighed and dropped his bow.

Robin is on his way to Nottingham Fair to meet his childhood friends Marian and Much and have a bit of well-earned frivolity. As an apprentice forester in the King's Forest, Robin barely scrapes by and his days off are few and far between. Unfortunately, while on his way he is ambushed by a few of the Chief Forester's men who have had it in for Robin for years. No one is more surprised than Robin when he wins the resulting archery contest and the skirmish ends in an attempt on his life and Robin's arrow buried in his attacker's chest. From this point on Robin is a wanted man. His friends convince him to go into hiding while they work up a plan to keep their friend alive and prevent the Norman overlords from raining down punishments on all the Saxons' heads as a result of Robin's "crime." Against his better judgement, Robin goes along with Much and Marian's plan and, in the process, he becomes a hero--albeit a reluctant one.

There is so much good in this book and it all centers around the characters. Either you will fall in love with Robin or you will not. And if you love Robin, then you will love all of the characters for they gather around him despite his adamant refusal that he is no hero because they need him. Marian and Much, his old friends, see this. They understand it and they try to help Robin understand it. Their love for him, their need to believe in him, and their willingness to walk away from their homes and their lives to follow him into hiding in Sherwood Forest reflect the desperate nature of the times and the ways in which this good man is able to inspire and take care of other good men and women like him who have been caught in the ever-tightening vise of Norman justice. I love watching this transformation, this coming together of such a motley band of comrades. Every time I read it I savor each one. And, as with any McKinley book, if you're a fan of strong female characters who do not do what they are expected to do, then this book is for you. Marian is awesome. It's Marian who is the excellent shot. It's Marian who has the vision and who knows Robin's potential before he does. It's Marian who risks more than anyone else to create the legend and keep it alive. There is one other standout female character, but I can't tell you any more than that as she is so excellent she must be discovered entirely on her own. Along with [Deerskin](#), I think this is the most emotional of McKinley's works because it is as grounded in reality as any retelling I've read. THE OUTLAWS OF SHERWOOD is an emotional, subtly humorous, visceral take on the legend and I cannot recommend it highly

enough.

Jamie: Jamie Poorman
APA Citation: McKinley, R. (1998) *The Outlaws of Sherwood*. New York: Greenwillow.
Genre: Adventure
Format: Print (paperback, 368 pages)
Awards: -----
Selection Process: Booklist review, college Library magazine assessment
The Outlaws of Sherwood is aptly named - whereas retelling the legends of Robin Hood in medieval England, McKinley explores some of the characters, following their stories, actions, and techniques instead of focusing in basic terms on Robin himself. Many characters, frequently featured within the legends, are awarded together with Maid Marian, Little John, Friar Tuck, Richard the Lionhearted, the Sheriff of Nottingham and the minstrel, Alan-a-dale. The atmosphere of the book, as well, holds actual to past models of the legends - Robin and his males hiding within the center of Sherwood wooded area situated close to the village of Nottingham. Robin himself, whereas last a prime character, isn't really continually the guts of the action. As every one guy reveals his solution to the band, his tale is gifted after which intermittently during the publication - a bit history info, his struggles to discover a spot within the band, and his function within the occasions that follow. whereas following the lives of Robin Hood and his men, the reader in simple terms gets as a lot outdoors information because the outlaws themselves; thus, Robin is gifted as a mortal guy - a guy suffering to construct a brand new existence within the forest, suffering to feed, clothe, and educate his motley band of followers, and caring approximately their each move. The tall stories of Robin Hood, of his courageous deeds, and ability as an archer, come as a shock to Robin and his band, as they see themselves doing basically what they have to to outlive and occasionally support a fellow Saxon in need. This retelling of the age-old legends has whatever for everybody - from severe motion scenes to romantic quests. The motion does crawl from time to time and will believe a bit slowed down with info of medieval life. Descriptions of social classes, clothing, weaponry, meals, and different trials of everyday life can look a section tedious yet all interact to create an real portrayal of medieval lifestyles in England.
Recommended.

skein: the tale of Robin Hood is so regularly suitable that it can go beyond the (comparatively) little concerns approximately old accuracy - so sayth McKinley. through and large, i locate myself agreeing with her. during this case. Overall a truly stress-free little ebook - it might be nice to learn aloud; it really is extra tale than novel, which ... is commonplace of McKinley.
Drawbacks: the varied little characters appear to glide out and in with no rather creating a mark - until the purpose is "there have been a lot of individuals residing within the Sherwood forest", which does not require giving names & backstory to all of them, right? Minor characters without notice turn into important, and it seems that significant characters (Lady Marian, say) lay approximately for chapters doing actually nothing, whereas each person dotes on them for being OMG so great. that is frustrating. And the writing. a few sentences have been dependent so queerly, and the character's inferences have been so oblique, that I truthfully couldn't comprehend what used to be being said. And the finishing was once a piece glib. And the romance of Robin & Marian fell flat, after the tingly tantalizing pride in their flirting early on. it truly is like later seasons of the X-Files: you will have Mulder and Scully to hook up, yet dammit the entire pleasure is long gone after they eventually do. But generally it was once very very enjoyable. i admire Robin - his self-deprecation, his self-awareness, his accepted-but-unwanted accountability for the outlaws - all used to be very rather well done, and am I asserting 'very' too much? particularly attention-grabbing - how Robin is the leader, yet takes a again function within

the plot: it makes the Robin Hood tale illustrative & approximately allegorical, instead of particular. And in some way extra credible. is that this a trait of the unique stories? i'll search them out.

Susie: i discovered that I loved him and that he got here alive for me as Robin Hood. he isn't the common model - he's a reluctant hero, extra compelled into the position by means of his buddies than through his personal wishes. ("That's why we want you,' stated a lot comfortably. 'You're a pessimist and an excellent planner.' 'I have be began to devise and be pessimistic,' acknowledged Robin angrily.") Robin is just typical - he isn't nice with a bow, he can carry his personal in a conflict yet he isn't fighter; he was once within the flawed position on the mistaken time and from there a legend bloomed that he by no means wanted, yet couldn't deny. Yet, he has those moments the place he simply has a tendency to shine. occasionally it used to be in a verbal conflict over what to do or what method of take (his motion tending to be the extra conservative approach). different occasions it used to be the style within which he approached clash with an off-handness that healthy the movie-esque view of Robin. And different occasions it used to be the anger and worry that bubbled to the skin making him extra human and extra Robin Hood in one instant. ("[A]nd he stood a moment, head bowed and legs braced, observing his fallen enemy; and he realised his arms have been trembling.") What is excellent approximately Robin is that this normalcy and the actual fact that, of everyone, he seems to be the least taken through their values. He does think in justice, yet he additionally believes within the sheer indisputable fact that he desires to stay alive. via a mix of continual friends, a Sheriff's iron fist, and Robin's hope for justice, the legend involves existence and, by way of the top of it, it seems that to do a similar for Robin.

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