

# How To Read Robin Hood with a Queer Lens

## Using Queer Theory in Robin Hood

The purpose of this exhibit is to bring attention to the possibility of a queer intersectional reading of the homosocial bond in the Robin Hood ballads. I form my conception of queer intersectionality by looking at the intersections of masculinity and sexuality and how they function as oppressive structures. Queer theory offers a unique way to look at heterosexuality as an oppressive structure. Since queer theory is broad and uses multiple ways to examine sexuality, I take Cathy Cohen's summary of the theory as a basis for my argument:

*...queer theory focuses on and makes central not only the socially constructed nature of sexuality and sexual categories, but also the varying degrees and multiple sites of power distributed within all categories of sexuality, including the normative category of heterosexuality (439).*

Queer theory, according to Cohen, allows for an understanding of how sexuality is constructed and contained by social structures to marginalize and oppress those who do not fit the established “norm” (439). The perspective of queer theory I use in my analysis in “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisbore” focuses on how heterosexuality is affected by the (seeming) absence of homosexuality, and how heteronormativity seeks to keep out the “unnatural.” Though queerness in “Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne” may be seemingly non-existent, the fact that explicit queerness is excluded from the text and the initial readings of the text says more about how and why dominant structures do not acknowledge its existence. In Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” she suggests heterosexuality be examined as a “political institution” (637). She details a history of how heterosexuality was forced on women (through marriage, through motherhood, through rape) as a way to oppress them from obtaining a sense of their own sexuality. Rich’s essay conveys how a group of people with “deviant” identities can be erased from society by the dominant structure—heterosexuality. As both Foucault and Rich argue, through the exclusion of non-normative identities, the normative group acknowledges the other as a threat to their normativity.

## To Be Queer, But Also Intersectional

My usage of “queer intersectionality” theory versus simply “queer” theory is a critique on how queer theory often excludes multiple identities from analyses. First introduced by law professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, the term “intersectionality” addresses the need to look how people with multiple identities (race, gender, class, disability, etc.) are affected by multiple forms of oppression at once. Crenshaw explains “the way we imagine discrimination or disempowerment often is more complicated for people who are subjected to multiple forms of exclusion...” (huffpost.com). Adding “queer” with “intersectionality” into the conversation opens up room to examine multiple identities at once. Queer theory should by definition

include other marginalized groups, but, for instance, many queer people of color find that the queer community of mostly white gay men, are not receptive of acknowledging race and other intersectional identities into the community. In the legal essay, “Queer Intersectionality and the Failure of Recent Lesbian and Gay ‘Victories,’” Darren Rosenblum explains the need to acknowledge multiple identities in the queer community. Queer intersectionality serves as a way to examine how multiple identities, whether they be “natural” or “unnatural,” function side by side by side.

I must admit, in my reading of "Robin Hood and Guy and Gisborne" I did not acknowledge how race related to able-bodiedness and queerness. Future scholars could begin to figure out how those identities relate to each other and what those implications say about violence and sexuality in the Robin Hood ballads.

## **Tying All Queerness Together**

Queer theory and intersectionality allow a unique way to look at a variety of identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, class, to name a few—and their relationship to normative power structures. When scholars view the ballads with a queer intersectional lens, the Robin Hood ballads could then make a transition into being one that offers change about the way we look at gender, sexuality, and ability. The ballads pose an interesting question about what is a normal person and who decides that. Tim Beneke ends his book about manhood with some thoughtful words. I have injected here a bit to be more inclusive: “It is hard for a [“normal” person] to live a full emotional life while straining to appear [normal]. Ridding the world of [racist, ableist, sexist, homophobic, etc.] oppression will help free [normal people] as well as [those who do not fit into the norm]” (155, brackets added are mine). As long as there is an idea that there is a such thing as normal, people will continue to be forced to maintain it. Once we get rid of that, we can create safe environments welcome to multiple identities.

### Works Cited

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