

she provides a flawlessly flowing translation of the surviving first part of a political activist's engaging and intriguing play, performed in Shanghai in 1904. But there is a sharp contrast between Karl's skill as a translator and the awkwardness of her own prose style. The translated passages are lively oases separated by arid stretches where a reader's energy flags in the course of convoluted sentences extending to points far over the horizon. While Karl provides evocative access to the voices and concerns of Chinese writers a century ago, she also obstructs that access with her ponderously abstract meta-translation of the writers' larger discourse.

Perhaps Karl's writing is not clear because she is trying too hard to be theoretical. Part of the problem is that she reads postmodern sophistication into the minimally theoretical musings of Chinese authors of a century ago. An example of this is her discussion of Tang Tiaoding's commentary of 1903 on recent events in the Philippines (pp. 105–113). In a single paragraph of five sentences, Karl confidently claims that "Tang was perhaps on one level elaborating a model", while "at a different level, Tang also powerfully suggested" and "felt ... history could be secured" on a global stage. Karl continues with the contention that "the point for Tang ... was not so much to counterpose a 'real' history against a white-manufactured fiction", and she concludes with the statement that "Tang seemed to wish to destabilize the seeming structural certainty of the world system itself" (p. 109). Karl's reading is fascinating, and her translation makes clear that Tang Tiaoding was brilliant and well-informed. Nonetheless, she runs a risk in her attempt to read another writer's mind.

Karl's own response to these criticisms might be similar to her recent reference in a book review to "the aversion to theory of the majority of Western historians of China" (*The China Journal*, no. 49, p. 185). The response to her own book is likely to disprove that off-hand remark. Many "Western"-based specialists are actually eager to read books placing Chinese history in abstract frameworks and will peruse this one with patience and appreciation. Moreover, Karl's first book has the potential to direct the attention of non-specialists to China. Although *Staging the World* does not seem likely to influence current fashionings of theoretical positions by the world's intellectual vanguard, it is nonetheless a promising rehearsal of future work on a wider stage.

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Stephen Knight — *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. Pp. xxi, 247.

I must confess to approaching this book with the suspicion that it was a simple reshuffling of materials previously published by Stephen Knight in several venues, most notably his *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). I am pleased to say that I was not completely correct in this assumption, since there is a certain amount of new material and many new ideas; nonetheless, the debt to the 1994 book is particularly clear. Knight tries to distance

himself from the earlier work by casting this new book as a “mythic biography”, as if he were investigating something entirely different. It only partly works, since he is never entirely clear about what a mythic biography is and he tends, as in his 1994 book, to try to cover all bases, including the hoary and definitely unmythic question as to whether Robin Hood can be traced to a real person (pp. 193–198). In the end, many may simply prefer this current foray as a more up-to-date, perhaps more readable, version of the earlier book, particularly if the latter is still on their “must read someday” list.

One of the attractive features of this new book is that Knight tries to establish a clearer sequence of the incarnations that Robin Hood goes through in his long history and opts for four main character-periods for the outlaw, which comprise the four chapters of the book. The first, “Bold Robin Hood”, deals with the yeomen period of the early versions of the legend up to the beginning of the sixteenth century and portrays a forthright Robin with a strong sense of what is right and wrong and the determination to do something about it. The second, which he titles “Robert, Earl of Huntingdon”, recounts the shift to a pensive, aristocratic Robin driven by injustice to a life of outlawry but finding, for the first time in the legends, a love interest in the newly emerging character of Marian. The third incarnation, belonging mostly to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, portrays the outlaw as “Robin Hood Esquire”, less lofty than the high noble figure of the Earl of Huntingdon but more in tune with his rural or forest setting and a much less complicated figure than either the earthy, unpredictable character of the early legends or the brooding personality of the earl. The final embodiment, presented in the fourth chapter, is the “Robin Hood of Hollywood”. This last chapter’s title suggests a concentration on film, although it is in reality a grab-bag of twentieth-century preoccupations with Robin in several forms, including a survey of the academic industry forming around the outlaw figure.

Altogether, this rather simple organization has the virtue of providing a plausible and pleasant framework within which to situate the evolution of the outlaw. There are some surprises, such as Knight’s curious reticence in exploring Robin’s homoerotic persona, which Knight himself did so much to promote, although, he claims, somewhat accidentally (p. xv). Instead, Knight tends to deflect the issue by pointing to Robin Hood’s lack of sexuality as a whole (for example, pp. xv–xvi, 154) and prefers to employ the more subdued concept of “homosociality”, encompassing the whole range of male-male contact. A cautious approach is also evident in his handling of the *Gest of Robin Hood*, the longest and most complex of the outlaw ballads. Thought by many to be the earliest of the legends, Knight clearly places it later in the cycle (probably after 1450) and as having a distinctively upper-class tone lacking in many of the supposedly earlier legends, such as “Robin Hood and the Monk” (p. 28).

In the end, though, Knight tries to answer the fundamental question of why Robin Hood has been such an enduring figure of popular imagination. Knight, in the final pages of his book, claims it is because Robin is the archetypal figure of resistance: “He [Robin Hood] combines vigour, movement, and youthfulness with his key feature of resistance to wrongful authority; and though there is certainly more to

reform, restitution, and redistribution than running and jumping and looking good in tight clothing, the idea that such energies should be committed to some form of resistance is at once the central idea, the basis for endurance, and the strongest value of Robin Hood's mythic biography" (pp. 209–210).

To me, this seems a somewhat banal conclusion. Most of the great figures of legend and quite a few of fact (Arthur, William Tell, William Wallace, Simon de Montfort) were similarly born of resistance. Rather, the Robin Hood figure may have a much more basic appeal to the individual in all of us. For this, we need look no further than the Robin of the earliest legends. He was clearly a figure of deepest conformity (loyal to the king, deferential to women, and respectful — mostly — of the church and its ideals) who nonetheless liked to consider himself as a non-conformist. In harbouring this self-delusion, he was not unlike many if not most of us today, thoroughly integrated into the values of modern society, yet cherishing the thought that we are somehow unique and worthy of special attention. Robin Hood remains so popular because he panders to that illusion that each of us is the centre of attraction, the sun to everyone else's moon. In truth, Robin does often appear sun-like compared to the lunar personalities around him. But it is not always a comfortable universe he inhabits. His energy is all too often reflected back at him from these surrounding figures more powerfully than he expects. Thus the story of Robin being bested or at least discomfited in fights by a whole host of characters — Little John, Friar Tuck, the potter, the butcher, even Marian herself — is a common theme in the stories, each reacting to Robin's energy and aggression with an equally potent force of his or her own. The potentially destructive nature of these encounters is almost magically transformed into something wonderful — true love in the case of Robin and Marian, life-long friendships in the case of Robin and his male combatants. The basic warmth and good-heartedness of this vision is seductive, and we are still under its spell.

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Frédéric Laugrand — *Mourir et renaître. La réception du christianisme par les Inuit de l'Arctique de l'Est canadien (1890–1940)*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002, xxiii, 560 p.

L'historien, notamment le spécialiste d'histoire sociale, apprendra beaucoup de cet ouvrage de Frédéric Laugrand, produit de sa thèse de doctorat en anthropologie présentée à l'Université Laval en 1997 sous la direction de François Trudel. Il y prendra d'abord une leçon de modestie, devant tout le travail que doit s'imposer l'anthropologue, travail qui fait la richesse de la recherche. Laugrand avait comme objectif premier de comprendre le phénomène de conversion chez les Inuit de la terre de Baffin. Pour ce faire, il a dû en chercher les racines dans le Québec arctique (Nunavik) et au Keewatin, apprendre l'inuktitut, mener des entrevues (il en a fait plus de 40 auprès d'aînés inuit), se familiariser avec les pratiques de deux religions