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**FROM ROBYN HODE TO ROBIN HOOD,  
OR HOW A MEDIEVAL ROMANCE BECAME A TALE FOR CHILDREN**

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**Abstract**

Since defining children's literature is problematic, it is difficult to trace the history of children's literature to a precise starting point, though John Newbery's publication of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in 1744 is considered a landmark for the beginning of reading for pleasure marketed specifically at children. Prior to Newbery, literature marketed for children was intended to instruct the young, though there was a rich oral tradition of storytelling for children, and children adopted adult literature that they found diverting. Among the earliest examples found in English of this co-opted adult fiction are the Robin Hood tales.

It was only during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that childhood began to take on a new importance and adults began to recognize the special needs of childhood, including the need for childhood reading. However, most books were aimed at emphasizing the importance of religious behaviour and moral development, teaching children how to be good and proper human beings. We have to wait until the 18th century to see the rise of folktales – even though these were not considered expressly for children – and till the reign of Queen Victoria to witness a real blossoming of children's literature following the influence of the Romantic Movement which idealized childhood and led to a greater interest in children.

The Robin Hood legend is a clear example of how a set of medieval ballads originally told and written for adults gradually became, generation by generation, a masterpiece of modern folk-mythology meeting the needs and desires of its new audience: children.