

CLAUDE DUVALL PODCAST

by

Grayson Adams & Aiden Schuttler

Address
Phone Number

OPENING

Audio of horse hooves or a harpsichord piece that slowly fades as the story progresses to set the mood.

GRAY

Picture this: It's the mid 1600's. You are a mighty Lord of England's aristocracy, and you are riding through the countryside in a carriage with your beloved wife. It's a gorgeous spring day- the heath shines as lush grass sways in the wind, only perfect puffy white clouds scattered in the sky. You are traveling back to London from a trip to your in-laws via the main highway. You're passing through an area north of London called Holloway on your way home to your estate.

More horse/carriage noises

GRAY (CONT'D)

You bounce and jiggle along with the carriage, scratching at the delicate lace sewed to your ornately embroidered shirt and re-fasten a loose ribbon on your linen silk jacket. You may even be wearing a powdered wig, which has recently come into fashion and become all the rage in the courts. You give your young wife a tender kiss on the back of her hand as you sit next to her. Although it was an arranged marriage that took place last year, you feel yourself falling in love with her. You tear your eyes way from her and look out the window, spotting a few figures on the horizon. They're riding horses and coming straight towards you.

Man shouting

GRAY (CONT'D)

Your coachman yells at you from the driver's seat, saying its a gang of highwaymen, thugs who hold up coaches and steal the occupant's belongings.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

They're a nasty reality of your times, but you never thought you would be a victim. You look at your wife, whose face is drawn with worry. She is no doubt recalling the stories of highwaymen who have killed those they have held up. To calm herself, she pulls out a flageolet, a kind of flute, and begins to play a popular baroque song.

Flute music

GRAY (CONT'D)

Her skill with the flageolet has always been something you've admired about her. It helps calm you both as the riders approach your stagecoach, but the air is tense. One of the riders, a dapper man in fashionable clothing, pulls up alongside the coach. You flinch as he reaches inside of his coat, but he does not pull out a weapon. Instead, he pulls out his own flageolet and begins to play in concert with your wife.

Flute duet

GRAY (CONT'D)

The highwayman is every bit as skilled as your wife, and when the song is over, they share a coy smile. He's young and handsome, and you can taste something bitter in your mouth. He asks politely for your coachman to pull over, and seeing the other highwaymen surrounding the carriage, he complies.

Sound of man woahing a horse

GRAY (CONT'D)

The handsome flutist opens the door to the coach, but acts a gentleman, bowing to your wife and placing a kiss on her hand, not unlike you did only moments ago, but she seems to enjoy it far more. She giggles, not used to handsome men treating her like a princess.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

The man introduces himself in a strong french accent as Monsieur Duvall, and says that if she is so gifted with a flageolet, she must be a capable dancer as well. Before you can react, Duvall whisks her from the carriage and begins to dance the courante with her across the fields. Why has she never given you the look she now gives him as they face each other, dancing to a silent rhythm?

A couple laughing sound effects

GRAY (CONT'D)

You're furious. You despise this fancy French man for humiliating you. As they finish, your wife sits down next to you, her cheeks flushed, eyes glued to Duvall. He is wearing a playful smile, and he has the audacity to ask you how much money you have in the carriage. You tell him you have £400. He gives your wife a flirtatious wink and says he will only relieve you of £100. The other £300 is payment for the dance with your wife. Your blood boils, but your wife laughs coquettishly.

Coins clinking sound effects

GRAY (CONT'D)

You hand over the money, and he bows once more to your wife before riding off. You feel yourself shake in rage, hating the fact that you ever had the displeasure of meeting Monsieur Duvall.

The scene I just described was immortalized in a painting by William Powell Frith in 1860 titled "Claude Duvall" during a resurgence of interest in past folk heroes in Victorian England 200 years later.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Popular music from 1800s England fades in.

GRAY

The most prominent of Duvall's contemporaries was the highwayman Dick Turpin. Dick Turpin, and, to a lesser extent, Duvall himself, were written about in penny dreadfuls, which were cheap, popular serial literature produced during the 19th century. These tales took figures of the past and retold their stories painted in the light of folk heroes even though, unlike Duvall, Turpin was known as man who robbed stagecoaches through violence and sometimes killed the people he stole from. Yet, despite his record of brutality, in the penny dreadfuls, he was still made out to be a hero. Why?

GRAY (CONT'D)

By the 19th century, England had grown into as a nation of industry. Technology had advanced, and highway robbery was no longer a problem, so it was easier to recontextualize villains of the past as heroes. Penny dreadfuls were targeted at a growing working middle class who enjoyed reading stories of social defiance. Instead of putting their necks on the line and doing something about the issues they were unhappy with, they could read stories of charming rogues like Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and Claude Duvall to feel as if they were engaging with the problem without actually having to do so. Armchair social defiance, if you will.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

The stories of the charming rogue archetype, which originated in part with the charming highwayman, were never actually stories about or for the poorer classes, but for the middle classes, standing for the idea of rebelling. Bandits rarely identify with social justice or even with the poor they may represent, but they are co-opted nonetheless due to their proximity to poverty and its markers. This made it easier to mythologize Turpin and other merciless thieves as heroes.

But unlike Turpin, Duvall stood out as a hero even in his day, especially among women. Almost the only authentic account of Duvall is one slim volume entitled "Memiors of Du Vall : Containing the History of his Life and Death," which was published soon after his death in 1670. It was written anonymously, but it has since been established that it came from one of Duvall's contemporaries, William Pope, M.D. Although the account is the closest we have to an accurate story of his life, it was written as a satirical account that makes fun of Duvall and takes a particular interest in calling the women who swooned at him as foolish or easily manipulated.

BIO

Music from the 1600s fades in.

GRAY

Claude Duvall's life is shrouded in mystery because very little of his legend is verifiable. That doesn't stop it from being spread, though, and learning about his life gives us a deeper look into how he became part of the "charming highwayman" archetype.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

Claude Duvall was born in 1643 in Domfront, Normandy, France. Some sources say he was born to Pierre (a miller) and Marguerite (a tailor's daughter). At 14, he entered into domestic service and befriended some English exiles in Paris who were waiting for the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy from the Commonwealth. When Charles II restored the monarchy in 1660, his son, Charles Lennox, 1st Duke of Richmond, followed. As a page of Charles Lennox, Claude, now 17, migrated to England with his master as well. Soon after, he parted with his master and began his life as a highwayman.

Claude started his career on the main road heading north from London, in an area called Holloway. He saw significant success as he stole from the wealthy elite because of his good manners and an intimidating band of thieves, preventing them from encountering violent conflicts. Perhaps as a tactic to keep things from getting out of hand, or perhaps out of his natural gallant nature, he would flirt with the women while stealing from them. He'd kiss their hands as he smoothly removed their rings or flatter their figures while stealing from their husbands.

After doing this for some time, he started to make a name for himself, becoming a topic of discussion at high society parties, especially among the ladies. They would discuss how he dressed himself in dapper, fashionable clothes, always acted like a gentleman, and never forgot to bow. There were countless stories about him circulating around, making it hard to pinpoint if any of them were true, but all of them told of his polite, non-violent way of handling his thefts and the way he flirted with women.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

One of the most famous tales told of the time he pulled over a nobleman and his wife, the one told at the beginning of this podcast, which was reportedly one of many where he'd only steal from the male stagecoach occupants when their wives agreed to dance the "courante" with him.

Because he stole from nobles and other high-society people, he had a large bounty on his head from the start. Not everyone loved him, and that became clear when, ten years into his career, he was apprehended at a tavern in London's Chandos Street. Soon after, he was found guilty of six robberies (the others being unprovable) by judge Sir William Morton and sentenced to death. Although there were many pleas to the king to pardon him, none were successful. He was hanged at Tyburn on January 21st, 1670, aged 27 years old, in front of a massive crowd. His wake drew in so many people that a judge had to call for the crowds to disperse. It is said that he died to the sound of many ladies weeping for him.

Women also visited Duvall in his cell before his death, and many men at the time were confounded, not knowing what about Duvall drew so many admirers. It's no secret that women in the 1600's would have had little power or respect. Duvall was particularly interesting to the English gentlepeople at this time because many men used it as a point to show that women's obsession with Duvall was the problem, that they were foolish and foolhardy, which played into the narrative of gender dynamics at the time. Duvall became a symbol of larger societal issues and flaws. Duval's archetype persisted through the centuries because it served some manner of social function.

(MORE)

GRAY (CONT'D)

Even before the explosion of the romantic archetype in the Victorian period, Duvall as a character was a socially relevant tool. In his time, Duvall resembled Robin Hood, a pre-existing important English character, but then Dick Turpin resembled Duvall acting as an archetypal baton wherein Dick Turpin propagated the archetype in the Victorian period because he fit the mold codified by Duval, which was already interesting to people like Dr. Pope for other contemporary factors that ceased to be important by the time the Victorian era rolled around.

ARCHETYPE TODAY

Modern music fades in.

GRAY

The archetype endures today through the passing of the archetypal baton to figures and characters near and dear to us. Although Claude Duvall's original archetype of charming highwayman has been diluted into a larger archetype of "the charming rogue," it has remained commonplace in society because engaging with these characters, who symbolize larger societal issues, acts as inconsequential rebellion for the masses. Some of the most famous reiterations of the "charming rogue" include the beloved Han Solo from Star Wars, Puss in Boots from Shrek, Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean, Zorro, and V from V for Vendetta. There's no question Duvall's archetype will live on throughout history, because as long as people perceive social injustice, they will relate to and favor rebellious characters like Duvall.

Sound footage from the films

CLOSING

GRAY

It's difficult to ascertain where Claude DuVall was buried because different sources say different things. Many say he was buried at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. No headstone matches his name, but some claim it was destroyed when the church caught fire in 1759. The grave that may or may not have existed is said to have told of his heroic exploits in a poem that could have been written by Walter Pope— no relation to Dr. Pope, nor the famous satirist Alexander Pope, though he did make an appearance we had to cut— more than a hundred years later.

AIDEN

And now, a reading from DuVall's supposed grave—

Here lies DuVall: Reder if male
thou art,
Look to thy purse; if female, to
thy heart.
Much havoc has he made of both; for
all
Men he made to stand, and women he
made to fall
The second Conqueror of the Norman
race,
Knights to his arm did yield, and
ladies to his face.
Old Tyburn's glory; England's
illustrious Thief,
DuVall, the ladies' joy; DuVall,
the ladies' grief.