

## Medievalism Taken Personally: The Case of Alfred(o León) Duggan

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In my entry on “Modernity” in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, I argued that all medievalist texts must inevitably contain some relationship with modernity, and that their stance might be defined by considering the place of each text along three axes: (1) the author’s attitude to the Middle Ages; (2) the way the author delivers information about the Middle Ages; and (3) the author’s attitude to what I called “the medieval imaginary.”<sup>1</sup> There is a fourth issue which sometimes appears, and that is the degree of personal involvement that the author feels with the topics selected. For people who feel a strong degree of connection to the Middle Ages, medievalism does indeed become “medievalism-to-the-max.” One classic case of this appears from comparing the novels, in particular the early novels, of Alfred Duggan, one of the most prominent historical novelists in English of the twentieth century, with the events of his own life.

The course of Duggan’s life (1903-64) was both odd and unexpected. The greater part of it could be described as a particularly extreme example of “riches to rags.” He was born in Buenos Aires—his real name was Alfredo León Duggan—but came to England with his parents at the age of two. His father died in 1915, and his mother, Grace, two years later married none other than Lord Curzon, First Marquess Curzon of Kedleston. Between 1899 and 1905, Curzon had been Viceroy of India—which meant he lived in much grander state than Queen Victoria—and on his return to England had remained prominent in Conservative politics. He was a member of the War Cabinet during World War I, became Foreign Secretary 1919-24, but was passed over as Prime Minister in 1923. He died two years later, and there was a general sense that his last twenty years as a politician had been a failure, for all his advantages of birth and position.

Curzon was, however, immensely rich, as was Duggan’s mother Grace, in her own right and by inheritance from Duggan’s father. When Curzon failed in his ambition to become P.M., the joke was that he “has lost the hope of glory but he still possesses the means of Grace.”<sup>2</sup> Duggan himself, not surprisingly, became a playboy. When he went up to Oxford as an undergraduate in the 1920s, he became a member of the group that included Harold Acton, Cyril Connolly, Evelyn Waugh, Brian Howard, Philip Toynbee, Anthony Powell, and others. All had been at school at Eton, then as now the core of the British Establishment, all had literary pretensions. Several of them were also members of the group known as “the Bright Young Things.” The best account of them is given by Martin Green in his book, *Children of the Sun: Literary Decadence in the 1920s*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Richard Utz and Elizabeth Emery (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 149-55.

<sup>2</sup> The joke was Arthur Balfour’s, cited in *Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Major*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Arrow, 1997), 213, and repeated in the Wikipedia entry on “Grace Curzon,” accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace\\_Curzon,\\_Marchioness\\_Curzon\\_of\\_Kedleston](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Curzon,_Marchioness_Curzon_of_Kedleston).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of “Decadence” in England after 1918* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

Looking back at them from almost a hundred years later, one may well conclude that they were a far less attractive or talented group than they themselves thought. Sebastian Flyte in Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* is often taken to be a blend of Acton (who eventually received a knighthood for services to art) and Howard (who committed suicide). Connolly's most prominent book is the revealing *Enemies of Promise* (1938), which combined a memoir of childhood—he went to the same primary school as George Orwell—with an explanation of why Connolly himself had never written the works expected from him.

Duggan was the richest and probably the laziest and most dissolute of the group. He kept a Rolls-Royce outside Oxford (for undergraduates were not allowed to have cars within the jurisdiction of the University Proctors), for convenience in making trips to London. His stepfather, Lord Curzon, in the end refused to pay his debts, declaring “the Randolph Hotel, the tarts, and the night club will not be paid.”<sup>4</sup> Duggan would probably have been sent down from Oxford in disgrace (he had already been expelled from Eton) if his stepfather had not been the University Chancellor. He left without a degree, though, characteristically, a job was found for him with the Natural History Museum, which involved many years of amusing travel, collecting specimens and practicing amateur archaeology.

As with the other “Bright Young Things,” however, clouds began to appear on the horizon. Duggan's stepfather died in 1925. His mother lost most of the family fortune in the Depression. By 1931, she and he were living in very much reduced circumstances. In 1938, Duggan volunteered for the Territorial Army, and when war broke out became a member of an Independent Infantry Company, forerunner of the later Commandos. He took part in the unsuccessful invasion of Norway, but was invalided out of the Army in 1941. One may reflect that Commando units would have little use for middle-aged former playboys, however glamorous. (Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, 1952-61, rather regretfully chronicles the compelled growth of military professionalism which sidelines his hero Guy Crouchback.) By the end of the war, Duggan was working as a factory hand, even more of a failure, it seemed, than any of his Oxford contemporaries.

And then, somehow, he reinvented himself. In 1950, he brought out a historical novel, *Knight with Armour*, and thereafter wrote a novel a year till his death in 1964, along with a number of straightforward histories. It is hard, in view of what has been written above, not to see *Knight with Armour* and its two immediate successors as meditations on Duggan's own experience.

An evident connection is the initial setting of *Knight with Armour*. In the days of his pomp, Lord Curzon had bought Bodiam Castle, in East Sussex, with a view to restoring it. On his death, it was bequeathed to the National Trust, but the Manor House attached to it remained in the family. By 1950, it was almost all that remained of the family fortunes, and Duggan and his mother were living there, from where they could look out at the castle and ponder the decline

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<sup>4</sup> See John Derbyshire, “Alfred Duggan's Past,” *The New Criterion* 23.6 (February 2005), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, <http://www.johnderbyshire.com/Reviews/Considerations/duggan.html>.

they had suffered. *Knight with Armour* opens with the sentence, “Osbert FitzRalph held the manor of Bodeham in Sussex from the Count of Eu.” He and his two sons live in a “timber-and-wattle hall,” the stone castle not yet having been built, and the opening scenes deal with the question of what can be done for the younger son, Roger, and how enough money can be scraped together to outfit him for his eventual decision to join the First Crusade in the service of the Duke of Normandy. Roger’s career, one may as well say at once, looks very like a romanticized, self-justifying, but also deeply ironic version of the latter parts of the author’s life up to 1950.

Briefly, Roger joins the Crusade, and serves loyally all the way to the conquest of Jerusalem. He makes one mistake right at the start, ignoring his father’s advice, which is to take an oath to serve the Duke “as long as he is out of his dominions,” i.e. to the end of the Crusade and beyond. This means that when Roger has a chance later on to take service with another lord, who means to stay in Palestine and needs knights to act as his castellans, he cannot take it without breaking his word, which he is too honorable to do. This reluctance also causes the break-up of his marriage, for Roger had by chance been able to win the favor of a young and beautiful, if penniless, widow, Anne de la Roche. She deserts him for his cousin Robert, more unscrupulous, more glamorous, more successful. Roger is afraid to challenge him, and walks away from the couple derided and humiliated. His warhorse is dead; his prospects are nil; all he has left is his armour and his knighthood.

Yet he still has a role to play in life, and it turns out to be the most vitally important role in the whole Crusade. The object of the Crusade was to capture Jerusalem, but when the reduced ranks of the Crusaders reached it, the defenders beat off repeated attacks. Famously, the eventual breach was made on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1098 by a single siege-tower, dragged up to the city wall, from which attackers scrambled over some kind of drawbridge or improvised gangplank and on to the walkway behind the wall. It was perhaps the most celebrated feat of arms of the Middle Ages. It inspired Torquato Tasso’s epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), while the credit for it, given to Godfrey of Bouillon, propelled him into the ranks of the Nine Worthies. Chronicle accounts give somewhat different versions of who was the first man into Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>—it was obviously a hotly-contested scrimmage, in which no-one could be quite sure what was happening—but in Duggan’s version, the man who won the day was none other than Roger de Bodeham. He is a member of the storming-party in the siege-tower, but first attempts at making a lodgment fail, and the Crusaders are discouraged. In this crisis Duke Godfrey shouts out, as he sees his chance slipping away: “Come on, you cravens, you dastards, you cowards, you bastards, you cuckolds,” and the last word pierces through Roger’s fear and his fever. Roger is a cuckold, and he cannot bear the humiliation of being reminded of it. He draws his sword and pushes his way forward. Duggan remarks, at almost the very end of the book, “in any battle more than half the men present only want to do the right thing . . . the knights in the tower were wavering, undecided whether to charge or not, and Roger’s push to the front was all that they needed to make up their minds for them.” They rally and storm across.

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<sup>5</sup> See John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 350-55.

Roger also gets over the gangway, to find himself facing one of the “Ethiopians” of the Moslem garrison. He strikes at him with his sword, but the blow from a man weakened by dysentery and hunger is easily turned. The Ethiopian strikes back, and Roger falls from the wall, to lie dying at its base. But he is inside the wall, and as he dies he hears his comrades shouting “*Ville gagnée!*”, “Town taken!” They are his own last words. Roger de Bodeham has given the vital last impetus to take Jerusalem and end the Crusade. But no-one noticed him, or what he did, and his moment of heroism was born of deep humiliation. It is a profoundly ironic ending.

How far might we consider Roger as a projection of his author? The Bodiam/Bodeham connection is obvious, and gratuitous. We do not know what humiliations Duggan had to endure in his fall from wealth to poverty. Humiliations there must have been, especially (for someone from his intensely snobbish background) in ending up as a factory hand among the working class. Cuckolding cannot have been a problem, for Duggan did not marry till 1953, but it would be no surprise if former girl-friends spurned him, or even the “tarts” who annoyed his stepfather. Did Duggan console himself with the thought that he had at least kept his word and his honor, like Roger? Or with the thought that even a fallen no-account, like himself and Roger again, might still have a great deed in him? Duggan’s volunteer war-service did at least entitle him to consider himself a sort of inglorious and unnoticed Crusader.

Nevertheless the general impression made by *Knight with Armour* is ironic, anti-heroic, deeply sad, more like the aftermath of a defeat than a victory. The feeling is increased by its two immediate successors, *The Little Emperors* and *Conscience of the King*. These are in a sense paired novels. They deal with events in England, respectively AD 405-12 and approximately (for by this time dates have become approximate at best with the collapse of literacy) AD 450-520. Between them, the two cover what must be the most obscure development in English and indeed British history, the shift from Roman *Britannia* to Anglo-Saxon *Engla-land*, “the land of the English,” as also from organized imperial bureaucracy to chaotic warlordism on the edge of becoming monarchy. What caused it all, and whose fault was it?

Both novels came out in the same year (1951), but although *Conscience* seems to follow on from *Little Emperors*, they were in fact published in reverse chronological order. *Conscience of the King* might well be regarded as the best of Duggan’s fifteen. The joke in the title is that its protagonist, Cerdic, legendary founder of Wessex and ancestor also of the present Royal Family of the United Kingdom, has no conscience at all. He kills two of his brothers with his own hands, is responsible for the death of his father, and murders his wife as well. He is moreover a turncoat. He was born into a Romano-British family, some forty years after the Roman withdrawal from Britain, as a younger son. His father was trying to convert his position as *de facto* ruler of what would become Sussex (the land of the South Saxons) into a hereditary monarchy. Meanwhile other Romano-Britons, notably Aurelius Ambrosius and eventually Artorius (“King Arthur”) were trying to maintain Roman traditions and rally the British population to hold off or drive out the invading Angles and Saxons. Cerdic goes along with this for a while, but possesses a useful skill. He has bothered to learn the language of the invaders, partly following the model of his

grandfather<sup>6</sup> and assisted by his Germanic slave-nurse. This means that when the moment comes—his murder of his elder brother is discovered—he can flee and join the other side, the side of the invaders.

The story rather neatly solves a question which had often been noted, namely that while Cerdic was seen as an ancestor of the Saxon kings of Wessex, his name looks like a mangled version of a British one, Cara(c)tacus, or Caradog. Duggan also manages to integrate a good deal of the information given in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about the conquest of Sussex and then the founding of Wessex, and (when it comes to “King Arthur”) to provide a rational explanation for early legends, as interpreted by historians of his own era. The important point, however, for the question of personal involvement in the story, may be the fact that for a while Cerdic appears to be conducting a tour of what would be important archaeological sites in the South of England: the Roman cities of Venta (Winchester), Corinium (Cirencester), Calleva (Silchester). Duggan’s descriptions are clearly based on the discouraging findings of archaeologists during the 20th century: Roman mosaics with on them the mark of open fires, villas with central heating and bath-houses abandoned for mud huts, roads making detours round broken columns instead of shifting the columns. They all point to a collapse of civilization which Cerdic certainly accelerates, but does not cause.

So, repeating an earlier question, what was the cause? A rather challengingly plausible, and maybe personal, answer is provided in *The Little Emperors*, which, as stated, deals with the pre-Cerdic period, this time narrowly and precisely dated to 405-12 AD. The protagonist here is furthermore a marked contrast to Cerdic (as Cerdic was to the inept and unlucky Roger de Bodeham). He is not a king, not a warlord, and not even a Romano-Briton. He is a career bureaucrat of the Roman Empire: Caius Sempronius Felix, Praeses of Britannia Prima, head of the province’s civil administration. He comes from the Eastern Empire, is a native speaker of Greek, and his hobby is writing an epitome of Virgil. He has antiquarian interests, is half-heartedly Christian because the Empire has become so, is dedicated to the ideal of keeping civilization in being. He has two problems, a long-term one of which he is barely aware, and a short-term one which preoccupies and misleads him.

His long-term problem is that civilization no longer works. Ever since the Emperor Diocletian, civil and military affairs have been kept completely separate; the empire is rigidly hereditary in all occupations from baker to soldier, a system policed by the *agentes in rebus*, the secret police; the penal code necessary to keep this going rests on torture and execution. All prices are fixed by law. The main aim of government, meanwhile, is to collect the taxes, to pay for the army. At one point, it is suggested that maybe it might be an idea to allow people, for instance, to choose their jobs, but Felix says immediately that that is what the barbarians do, and they all choose either to be untrained swordsmen or incompetent peasants, with no smiths even to repair their

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<sup>6</sup> In a final “Note” Duggan claims credit for spotting a possible “German”-speaking grandfather for Cerdic in Fraomar, king of the Buccinobantes, brought into Britain by the Roman authorities as a military reinforcement.

implements. A modern reader assumes, I think, that Felix has to be wrong, but Felix's point of view is the one that dominates the novel.

Meanwhile Felix's short-term problem is that the inhabitants of Britain are disloyally rebellious, and set up one separatist Emperor after another. Their titles are also the titles of sections three to five of the novel, "Marcus Emperor Semper Augustus," "Gratianus Emperor Semper Augustus," "Constantinus Emperor Semper Augustus." The word *semper*, "always," obviously gets more and more ironic, as none of the "little emperors" lasts for long. Constantinus is the one who leads the legions out of Britain to contest for rule of the Empire, only for them never to return. In the end, Felix himself comes out the wrong end of yet another palace revolution, discovers that his own freedman is the head of the secret police, and is given one chance to escape before the new administration formally takes over, when it will be his freedman's duty to arrest him and torture him to death (a sentence Felix himself has never had any compunction about inflicting). He flees into the wilds, and discovers a world he has never imagined, of renascent tribalism—which will in the end fuse with the warlordism of *Conscience of the King* to terminate civilization. The irony of the ending is, however, that desk-bound Felix discovers that his struggle to maintain civilization has been completely misguided. Peasants living under the rule of tribal warlords are safer and better-off than the downtrodden subjects of Rome.

One element in Duggan's presentation of late Roman Britain is again archaeological. The last official duty Felix performs is to inspect St Albans, and what he comes upon is the site revealed to us in the 20th century by excavation: a run-down city with broken walls, patched roofs, and unmended roads—not sacked or burned, but abandoned. This element, as already stated, is markedly stronger in the next novel: one might say, same places, different universe.

But once again, the cause of it? An interesting feature here is the "Historical Note" which Duggan appended to his novel. In this, he says that he thinks people have been misled by the scope and scale of Gibbon's massive *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which runs from before the Christian era to 1453. Awed by the size of the book, people have come to think that the fall of the Roman Empire was a terribly long and gradual process. Not so, says Duggan. The Empire collapsed in the seven years covered by the novel. At the start of that period, it seemed invincible: Stilicho the great Magister Militum had just annihilated the barbarian incursion of Radagaisus in Italy, while virtually simultaneously an Irish assault on Britain led by the famous High-king Niall of the Nine Hostages had been totally defeated. Only seven years later, however, Gaul was abandoned, the route was open for barbarian invasions of Spain and North Africa, Rome itself had been sacked, and Britain had been told no help was forthcoming and to look to its own devices—a situation thought at the time to be temporary, but which was never rectified. Duggan sums up in his appended "Historical Note":

Misled by the scale of Gibbon's great history, we are accustomed to think of the Fall of Rome as an age-long decline; actually, the Western Empire was destroyed in the seven years covered by this novel, and its destruction was [my emphasis] *as sudden and unexpected as the fall of the twentieth-century European Empires in Asia.*

Duggan, of course, in 1951, had just lived through the latter process, whose most obvious example was the independence of India and the accompanying Partition into India and Pakistan of 1947. The process of independence for former British, French, Dutch and Portuguese colonial possessions would continue for the rest of his life. What might be seen as especially curious—and parallel again to Felix’s situation—is that as far as India was concerned, this was emphatically not the result of defeat in war. Just as Roman armies in 405 had decisively defeated barbarian invasions, so the Sirkar-i-Hind (which people now call “the Raj”) had not only defeated but annihilated the Japanese army which marched against it in 1944, and had gone on to reconquer former British possessions in Burma and Malaya, as well as Dutch possessions in the East Indies.

So (for yet a fourth time), if it was not defeat in war, what caused the fall of the twentieth-century empires? One might remember here that Duggan’s stepfather had been Viceroy of India—a very much grander and more powerful version of Caius Sempronius Felix’s role as Praeses of Britannia Prima. Judgements on Curzon’s Viceregal tenure are mixed, but there is a general opinion that (as with his political career as a whole) the surface pomp and grandeur were not matched by solid achievement. It has also often been felt that the practice of exporting grandees from Westminster to rule India, despite knowing nothing of the country, its customs or its languages, only undid the efforts of the India Civil Service, largely-staffed by Indian-born Britons from families with generations-long roots in the country. One should note that Duggan’s Praeses Felix is likewise an outsider from the Eastern Empire, who does not speak a word of the (Celtic) language commonly used by his subjects, and sees no reason to learn any: he lives in a Latin-speaking enclave as Curzon lived in an English-speaking one. So one answer to the question of what caused the European empires to fall so suddenly might well have been, in Duggan’s mind, “administrators like my stepfather.” Political decline and fall was a personal issue to him, like his own individual decline and fall.

Duggan did nevertheless manage to re-invent himself, going on to write twelve more historical novels (and several other works of popular history) between 1952 and 1964. The range of topics is very wide, and this is not the place to give a complete Duggan bibliography, but in brief there are two more Anglo-Saxon novels; two more set in England during the early Middle Ages; five dealing with Classical history; and three Crusader novels. This last group consists of *The Lady for Ransom* (1953), *Lord Geoffrey’s Fancy* (1962), and *Count Bohemond* (1964). The last two in particular read like reprises of *Knight with Armour*.

The range of the novels makes them hard to summarize, and deciding what made writers choose their subjects is a notoriously subjective matter. Duggan may well have simply been attracted by a particular character or chronicle, which he felt was capable of development. Nevertheless, a few themes stand out. These, I think, are at the core of Duggan’s historical vision, and they are:

- the fall of empire
- the failure of democracy

- the concomitant rise of Caesarism
- the nature of feudalism.

They all also form part of his diagnosis of contemporary, and personal, decline and fall.

I have discussed the “fall of empire” theme in the paragraphs above. The next two themes are connected, and were a concern to others besides Duggan, as in Robert Graves’s two novels *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* (1934, 1935). Two of Duggan’s novels deal with the same critical period of political change, relating to each other rather like *The Little Emperors* and *Conscience of the King*. *Winter Quarters* (1956) observes the creation of the first triumvirate, Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, while *Three’s Company* (1958) deals with the second, which consisted of Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar (eventually first Augustus), and the unknown and insignificant Lepidus, who is the novel’s protagonist. Like Graves’s *Claudius*, Lepidus is a hereditary member of the Popular party, who might be expected to stand out for individual rights and the restoration of the republican constitution, to which he is indeed devoted. But the right moment somehow never comes. It is always too risky. One of the original and unexpected features of the novel is an ironic commentary at the end of each chapter from the lady Claudia, a spoiled and idle aristocrat straight from the pages of Evelyn Waugh, which makes it plain that she speaks for the old ruling classes: and they (the “Bright Young Things,” one might say) take no interest in constitutions or political changes as long as their amusements are not interfered with. This short-sighted attitude will end with most of them dead or discredited, as was the case with much of the aristocracy of Europe during Duggan’s lifetime.

Duggan’s most unexpected theme, however, is his growing affection for the practices of feudalism. This did not quite surface in *Knight with Armour*, though that novel did show an interest in the mechanics of feudalism, based on oaths personally exchanged between lord and liege. The affection starts to appear in *The Lady for Ransom* (1953), which includes a running contrast between the Norman feudal society and the much more modern-seeming Byzantine Empire. Its hero, called Roger like Roger de Bodeham, is a “Gasmule”—a half-breed (Norman father, Greek mother) who joins the service of a band of Norman mercenaries under one Roussel de Balliol, who enter the service of the Byzantine Emperor to fight in what is now Turkey around 1070. (One might note that Duggan’s Oxford college was Balliol.)

The running irony throughout the novel is that Roger, though we tend to identify with him as a Westerner, is continually surprised in the Byzantine world by what we regard as normal. He sees the Greek general’s servants buying food in the marketplace, and is shocked—has he no land of his own to send him supplies? He thinks using forks rather than fingers at table is a dirty habit for people who don’t wash their hands. He discovers that rents are paid in money, not kind, and rather disapproves. When he encounters the Byzantine army, he discovers that the soldiers have to wear uniforms and put up with what is immediately recognizable in the modern world as the



kind of “chickenshit”<sup>7</sup> which no Norman knight or sergeant would put up with for a moment. These reactions make Roger look silly, barbaric. But his insights can be more penetrating. He notes that Roman soldiers are regularly paid, rather than living off loot, but have an ethic of doing what they are paid to do and no more. The taxpayers furthermore pay taxes to support the army, but they will not fight themselves, and they do not make their own justice: in Roger’s of course biased opinion, these citizens of what is recognizably a modern state are not really free.

The underlying argument is that living under feudalism might be more attractive in some ways than being a citizen of a modern state. Roger sees the weaknesses of a disciplined army at the battle of Manzikert, which is lost, when it comes to it, partly by treachery and partly by the do-your-duty ethic of the Roman army: they drill well, but unlike glory-hunting Normans they take excuses to filter to the rear. Similar observations have often been made about the democratic armies of World War 2. Their soldiers might be brave enough, but they lacked personal motivation.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in *The Lady for Ransom*, the civilian citizens of Ancyra are glad to accept Frankish protection after Manzikert, because the “tallages” which the Normans take under feudal law are considerably less burdensome than the taxes of the Greek or Byzantine state. There is a moment when one can imagine the Anatolian peninsula becoming neither Byzantine, as it was, nor Turkish, as it now is, but a French-speaking protectorate like the later Outremer; but Roussel misses his chance, is defeated by and ransomed from the Turks by his wife Matilda, and the story rather peters out with Roussel being poisoned as part of a Byzantine intrigue.

We get a similar set of ironies in *Lord Geoffrey’s Fancy*, which is set in Greece, but a Greece which was—as has now been all but completely forgotten—for a while another Norman-ruled and feudally-organized state like Outremer. In it, all Classical names have been unthinkingly Frenchified: Athens is Satines, Sparta or Lacedaemon is La Cremonie, Thebes is Estives, and so on. Furthermore, in this world, as in Chaucer or Shakespeare, you really can have a Duke of Athens, and the whole setting is a kind of “midsummer night’s dream”—feudalism under the blue skies of Greece, not in the rain of England or Picardy. The “point of view” narrator of *Lord Geoffrey’s Fancy* is a happier and more fortunate counterpart of Roger de Bodeham, one William Briwerr, another English knight seeking his fortune in the East, taken into the service of Lord Geoffrey de la Bruyère, who is happy to accept William’s service as a long-lost cousin. Unlike Roger’s cousin Robert, however, Lord Geoffrey is an honorable man, and the story ends happily for William, if not for Geoffrey.

Nevertheless, in the culture clash of Greek versus Norman, or as we tend to see it, modern versus feudal, the main point seen by William is similar to that of De Tocqueville observing American democracy: in a modern non-feudal society, the individual subject is lost in the mass,

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<sup>7</sup> I take the term from Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), ch. 7, “Chickenshit: An Anatomy.” It could be defined as pointless harassment of lower ranks.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, the German Army comment on British troops in North Africa, quoted in Barrie Pitt, *The Crucible of War 2: Auchinleck’s Command*, pb ed. (London: Macmillan, 1986), 171: in brief, tenacious and well-disciplined, but lacking in initiative if left without orders.

and is powerless against the state. William declares, “these people have plenty to eat and some of them wear silk. But they are all slaves [to an Emperor],” and “they will obey [their next Emperor], whoever he may be. No self-respecting Frank could be happy among [such people].” Lord Geoffrey replies to his cousin William’s exposition that you can either pay taxes to an authority who decides what the tax-level shall be, or “you can carry a sword and guard your own head night and day . . . But you can’t have safety and freedom together. We [the Normans] have chosen the second way.”<sup>9</sup>

We, readers of Duggan’s time or our own, by contrast have chosen the first. We are not armed in any significant sense: the handguns and assault rifles so commonly owned in the USA offer no hope of serious resistance to the power of the state. We do not fix our own levels of taxation except at many and uncertain removes (and in Duggan’s time and place the tax rate had reached a level of 98% on “unearned income,” such as dividends: it’s no surprise his family was impoverished). Movies like *The Godfather* (1972) show the deep attraction even for modern Americans of something very like early feudalism, the personal bond of man and lord, or “Don” to use the modern term, of course from Latin *dominus*, “lord.”

I will close by offering a comparison between Duggan and Sir Walter Scott. Obviously, any brief comparison of two such large corpuses of work must be broad-brush at best, but some generalizations seem to be true. One is that the authors would take up distinctly different positions in the hypothetical three-dimensional model of medievalism mentioned at the start of this essay, in particular with regard to axis 3, relationship to “the medieval imaginary,” Scott may be said to have all but created this with his anachronistic jumble, in *Ivanhoe*, of friars and Templars and Saxon freedom-fighters, while Duggan takes pains (as in his “Historical Note” at the end of *The Little Emperors*) to distance himself from popular opinion.

A final difference, though, relates to the question of personal involvement. Scott’s medievalism, powerful though it was, might well be described as “medievalism-to-the-min.” While he thought that the modern world could learn chivalry and courtesy from the medieval one, he assumed that these should be grafted on to the political structures of the modern world, with which he was quite content. Indeed Scott’s medievalist image of the medieval British world has remained hegemonic not only among British politicians<sup>10</sup> but among British historians too: they note his anachronisms, but the idea that England, Scotland and the United Kingdom are essentially amalgams of (in reverse order), English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish; Highlander and Lowlander; Saxon and Norman and Briton and Dane, is now received wisdom, if increasingly under challenge from below. Scott tended furthermore to write of successes, or romantic failures.

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<sup>9</sup> The conversation takes place near the start of chapter 9, “The Parliament of Ladies.”

<sup>10</sup> Ex-Prime Minister Blair declared that his favorite novel was *Ivanhoe* (1820). The claim may be doubted, but it is significant that he felt this novel of ethnic amalgamation *ought* to be his favorite novel.

Duggan was attracted by contrast to great and serious failures—the fall of the Roman Republic, the fall of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine loss of Asia, the Norman loss of Outremer—or to ironized successes, like the founding of Wessex, the founding of Rome, the capture of Jerusalem. There can be no doubt that these are related to his own circumstances, personal and national. That is what made Duggan’s medievalism “medievalism-to-the-max,” felt personally, even bitterly.

One may feel that those circumstances have gone by, become dated or irrelevant. Nevertheless, at the heart of Duggan’s historical vision, there is a consistent critique of several sacred cows currently still sacred and not normally critiqued: the virtues of democracy, the readiness of citizens to make sacrifices for it, the degree of freedom allowed in a democracy, the ability of voters to control their own non-elected bureaucracies. How many of us would in practice prefer feudalism, or godfatherdom, as we might prefer to call it? How many of us have silently resigned from citizenship? How rapidly can political institutions which seem invulnerable collapse? Unlike Scott, Duggan does not offer a myth, but he does offer a warning.