



# The New Vichy Syndrome: Why European Intellectuals Surrender to Barbarism

*Theodore Dalrymple*

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**The New Vichy Syndrome: Why European Intellectuals Surrender to Barbarism** Theodore Dalrymple  
Western Europe is in a strangely neurotic condition of being smug and terrified at the same time. On the one hand, Europeans believe they have at last created an ideal social and political system in which man can live comfortably. In many ways, things have never been better on the old continent. On the other hand, there is growing anxiety that Europe is quickly falling behind in an aggressive, globalized world. Europe is at the forefront of nothing, its demographics are rapidly transforming in unsettling ways, and the ancient threat of barbarian invasion has resurfaced in a fresh manifestation.

In *The New Vichy Syndrome*, Theodore Dalrymple traces this malaise back to the great conflicts of the last century and their devastating effects upon the European psyche. From issues of religion, class, colonialism, and nationalism, Europeans hold a “miserablist” view of their history, one that alternates between indifference and outright contempt of the past. Today’s Europeans no longer believe in anything but personal economic security, an increased standard of living, shorter working hours, and long vacations in exotic locales.

The result, Dalrymple asserts, is an unwillingness to preserve European achievements and the dismantling of western culture by Europeans themselves. As vapid hedonism and aggressive Islamism fill this cultural void, Europeans have no one else to blame for their plight.

## **The New Vichy Syndrome: Why European Intellectuals Surrender to Barbarism Details**

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### Tika says

"You might say of Europe that it had lost its purpose, and not found any to replace it."

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### Mary Catelli says

A look at thinking in Europe. Hits on all sorts of topics. Demographic fallacies. Greek problems with debt -- reflected on a few years ago. the decline of religion. The effects of World War I (including that the "disillusionment" took some time after the war to hit) and World War II. Colonies and their loss. And more.

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### Robson Tavares Abreu says

Impressionante a velocidade com que europeus se renderam ao barbarismo.

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### cool breeze says

Theodore Dalrymple is a marvelous essayist, but he is at his best when he allows his mind to wander freely onto whatever topic catches his interest. Thus, his best books are collections of essays on various and diverse topics, typically collected from his periodic online and print essays over time.

As he himself put it in Farewell Fear,

“Whenever it is imperatively necessary for me to read a book pursuant to something I am currently writing about, I immediately lose interest in it... and then I want to read about something else entirely.

Often I read more than one book at a time. When I tire of one I fly to another. My mind is magpie-like, attracted by what shines for a moment”

This book is different. Although structured as short essays, clearly Dalrymple forced himself to sit down and write a collection of essays on a common theme. It is still very good, but not as good as his best work.

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### Bill says

Interesting analysis of the would be" United States of Europe."

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## Greg says

Theodore Dalrymple (Anthony Daniel's nom de plume), applies his considerable erudition and wit to the decline of Western Civilization yet again, this time looking at continental Europe and specifically looking at the European Union as an institution. The title is misleading since the subject of the title is tangential to the book as a whole which traces the intellectual and sociological transformation of Europe in the twentieth century and frankly has little to do with the surrender to barbarism which is merely a symptom of a larger cultural malady. I guess the publisher needed to capitalize on post-9/11 hysteria among the right-wing to drum up book sales.

A lot of what is here you may have read before in Daniel's columns for the New English Review and The New Criterion. One perspective on the decline of Western Civilization that I had not considered before or read elsewhere was the idea that near universal access to higher education is partly responsible because skepticism, as a philosophical discipline, undermines common sense, moral and aesthetic judgements that undergird the culture and enable the widespread acceptance of a debasement of the culture as a whole.

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## Steve says

Theodora Dalrymple is one of the most interesting writers at this moment in our cultures story. All of his books are worth reading.

This one will serve as a useful pre-read for the referendum on the year to take place in June 2016.

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## Caitlyn says

Good, but my edition badly needed a better editor.

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## Sandra says

Theodore Dalrymple is a super interesting author, even if you don't happen to agree with him all the time. This series of essays is Dalrymple at his best, with a sober and levelheaded analysis of the current European (and Western) maladies.

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## Kbord says

I saw this on the "new" shelf at the library and picked it up.

This book should be subtitled "Why Europeans deprecate themselves."

It is a judgmental book that explains the European psyche and how it got there (especial attention is paid go World Wars I and II leading to a total peace/total war mindset with no middle-ground spectrum).

It was a very interesting read, but major points are docked for assuming too much previous knowledge about world or European history, and also for using too many uncommon French phrases without explanations (usually that's a problem with Latin phrases, not French). So, I give it a 3.

Also, "miserabilism" is defined in a footnote on page 154. There are 155 pages. Who would wait until the second-to-last page to define a major theme of the book? (Perhaps it was explained at first mention, I don't remember.)

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## **Janice McMillian says**

### **Interesting take on Europe**

Interesting but I would have like to know more about European culture and how it has changed. This just touched at it.

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## **Inert1 says**

Dalrymple is what the world needs more of, a smart guy willing to tell it like he thinks it is. He provides a richly textured diagnosis/lamentation about the state of Europe, asking--and sometimes answering--pointed questions that many people shy away from, while maintaining a fundamentally optimistic outlook about the feasibility of positive change.

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## **Carolyn says**

Deep, subtle analysis of the European psyche by a psychiatrist. The author is highly opinionated, and his opinions mostly match my own; I liked them and the way he expressed them.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Europe was the center of the world of art, science, finance, manufacturing, culture, and military power, with colonies across the globe. Well before the end of the 20th century, the colonies had become independent and it was clear that the U.S. had taken over the leadership in nearly all areas, with consequent wounds to Europeans' self-regard and self-confidence, and a good bit of national sovereignty had been surrendered in an effort to create the European Union and thus prevent future great wars.

I learned quite a bit about the 20th century, especially the two great wars, both factually and from the European point of view. Dalrymple is British, his wife French. He does a good job of admitting his own biases, and tries to be as objective as possible.

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## **Gyoza says**

This book is an interesting series of short articles on the pessimism that pervades the intellectual world in Europe, and the United States to some extent too. There are several causes suggested in public discourse that are said to have caused this intellectual climate, and Dalrymple examines each one, among them the

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cynicism said to result from the destruction of two world wars (a cynicism in little evidence while the wars were actually going on), moral relativism resulting from lack of an objective moral standard, and a selective understanding of European history that strongly emphasizes the wrongdoing and leaves out the accomplishments.

The result is that many Western intellectuals don't recognize that they have inherited anything of value from their forbears and therefore are incapable of defending it. Hence the allusion to the Vichy government in the title. Oddly enough, this nihilistic point of view does not cause humility in those who hold it, but pride, because they are aware that Western civilization is humbug, and no one else is. If you have met people like this, as I have, and you can't figure out where they're coming from, this book offers an explanation.

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### **P.S. Carrillo says**

I had this book on my shelf and remembered only slightly it's contents from a reading a few years ago. After a second reading, I can understand why it didn't make much of an impression the first time. The writing style and organization is at times incoherent, the author makes many vague historical references and attempts clarity with footnotes that seem to have no relation to his train of thought. It seems that the text was dictated verbally and later transcribed by an indifferent editor. Also, it seemed that the author was hesitant to state his real opinions about Europe's identity crisis, so the book lacked teeth and felt tiresome in its attempts to state both sides of any issue. No wonder Europe is in decline. He did make some salient points about World War 2 and the effects it had on European power and attitudes towards itself. His quick thoughts on the United States were far too optimistic. We are walking in the same footsteps as Europe, culturally and socially, and our Protestant roots and belief in our own exceptionalism won't save us. We can blame the globalization of financial markets for that. We will all collapse together in one big human tsunami of greed and stupidity.

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