

## BOOKS

[*The Last Days of Europe: Epitaph for an Old Continent*, Walter Laqueur, Thomas Dunne Books, 256 pages]

# How the West Was Lost

By Theodore Dalrymple

FLYING TO ROTTERDAM recently, the largest and busiest port in the world, I was forcibly struck by the aerial view. I doubt there is a sight anywhere that is more eloquent testimony to the power of human intelligence and organization. Indeed, this applies to the whole of the Netherlands: a physically unpromising fragment of land, much of it reclaimed from the sea, has been diligently transformed into one of the globe's most flourishing regions, whose economic product exceeds that of the whole of Africa.

The text accompanying a book of photographs of the Dutch landscape that I was given as a present is an unconscious witness to the country's wealth. Extolling Dutch society's fundamental egalitarianism, the text stated that in Holland you will not see expensive cars, only middle-of-the-range models. The examples given were Mercedeses and BMWs.

The Dutch are probably the best-educated people in the world (though middle-aged people complain, as everywhere else, that standards are falling). Many Dutch have a vocabulary in English that exceeds that of native speakers in Britain and America. And for many years, the Dutch prided themselves that theirs was a country in which nothing ever happened. The business of Holland was business—plus social security with a bit of anti-Calvinist decadence thrown in. The country was so tranquil, contented, and firmly established that, fail-

ing a rise in the level of the North Sea, it seemed the idyll would continue forever.

But a couple of political assassinations, unprecedented in Holland for more than 300 years, suddenly illuminated, as if by a flash of lightning, a darker aspect of reality—one that was not confined to Holland but was Europe-wide. In a very short space of time, complacency gave way to a nagging sense of doom.

It is Europe's doom that Walter Laqueur explores and explains in this succinct and clearly written book. He does not say anything that others have not said before him, but he says it better and with a greater tolerance of nuance than some other works on this vitally important subject.

There are three threats to Europe's future. The first comes from demographic decline. Europeans are simply not reproducing, for reasons that are unclear. They seem to care more about the ozone layer and carbon emissions than they do about the continuation of their own societies. Or perhaps bringing up children interferes with what they conceive to be the real business of life: taking lengthy annual holidays in exotic locations and other such pleasures.

The second threat comes from the presence of a sizable and growing immigrant population, a large part of which is

in Birmingham, for example, I found a women-only table occupied exclusively by young Muslims dressed in the *hijab*. (They were the lucky ones, members of liberal households that allowed them out on their own.)

The third threat comes from the existence of the welfare state and the welfare-state mentality. A system of entitlements has been created that, however economically counterproductive, is politically difficult to dismantle: once privileges are granted, they assume the metaphysical status of immemorial and fundamental rights. The right of French train drivers to retire on full pension at the age of 50 is probably more important to them than the right of free speech—especially that of those who think that retirement at such an age is preposterous. While Europe mortgages its future to pay for such extravagances—the French public debt doubled in ten years under the supposedly conservative Chirac—other areas of the world forge an unbeatable combination of high-tech and cheap labor. The European political class, more than ever dissociated from its electorate, has hardly woken up to the challenge.

All this Laqueur lays out with exemplary clarity. He sees Europe, once the home of a dynamic civilization that energized the rest of the world, declining into a kind of genteel theme park—if it's

**THERE ARE PARTS OF BRUSSELS WHERE THE POLICE ARE ENJOINED NOT TO BE SEEN EATING OR DRINKING DURING RAMADAN.**

not necessarily interested in integration. As the population ages, the need for immigrant labor increases, and among the main sources of such labor are North Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. When I recently drove to Antwerp from the South of France, I thought I had arrived in Casablanca. There are parts of Brussels where the police are enjoined not to be seen eating or drinking during Ramadan. Similar accommodations are occurring all over Europe: in the Central Library

lucky. The future might be grimmer than this, of course: there might be a real struggle for power once the immigrants and their descendents become numerically strong enough to take on the increasingly geriatric native population.

As is to be expected in a relatively short book, the author does not explore matters in great depth. One interesting and important question is why Europeans have abjectly surrendered to the dishonest nostrums of multiculturalism. Why, for example, can a couple of Dutch

children be told by their teacher to remove the Dutch flag from their school bags because it might offend children of Moroccan descent—who, it should be noted, are supposed to be Dutch citizens? Why, when I arrive in regional airports in Britain, do I see signs for British passport holders written in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, and Hindi scripts, presumably for the benefit of British citizens who cannot read the Latin alphabet? Why do German courts rule that beating women is a religious right for Turks, just as terms such as “illegitimate children” have been banned from official usage as being denigratory and stigmatizing?

The answer surely lies in the shame of Europe’s recent past. The Dutch, for example, are aware that not only did many of them (or their parents and grandparents) collaborate enthusiastically with the Nazi occupiers, but no sooner was Holland liberated than it engaged in a bloody colonial war to try

to retain the East Indies. Under these circumstances, reference to the extraordinary positive achievements of the country came to seem like chauvinism or worse, and no pride in Dutchness could be communicated to immigrants. The same, *a fortiori*, applies to Germany and even to Britain, whose enormous achievements intellectuals have long been deconstructing.

Only the French, with their republican model, have gone in for a salutary monoculturalism, but unfortunately their economic and social policies helped, if not to create, at least to maintain Muslim ghettos. On one hand, the children of immigrants were told they were French; on the other, they were *de facto* excluded from the rest of society. Ferocious resentment was the result, and to coin a phrase, we ain’t seen nothing yet.

Laqueur makes the important point that shortcomings of the host countries notwithstanding, many immigrant groups have thrived without difficulty. He might have added that they have all successfully overcome initial prejudice against them. There is no Sikh or Hindu problem in Britain; the country has recently absorbed half a million Poles without any obvious tension or difficulty. (Tony Blair, with his usual perspicuity, predicted that when Poland joined the European Union, 13,000 Poles would move to Britain.)

This suggests—and Laqueur has no hesitation in so saying—that there is a problem peculiar to the integration of Muslims in Western countries, at any rate, when they are in such large numbers that they are able to make whole areas their own. Imbued with a sense of their own religious superiority, which considers a Muslim way of life better than any other, they are ill-prepared to adapt constructively to Western society.

Yet adapt they do, though not necessarily in the best way. The young men of the second generation adopt many aspects of American ghetto “culture,” which in conjunction with Islamic teaching and tradition, enables them to dominate women in a way that is to

them extremely gratifying. This prevents the women (who, as Laqueur tells us, and I can confirm from personal experience, are vastly superior morally and intellectually to their menfolk) from achieving all they might in an open society. In turn, the cheap and unconstructive satisfactions of domestic dictatorship discourages Muslim men from real achievement and engagement in the wider society around them. For the majority of young men of Muslim descent in Europe, the chief attraction of Islam is the justification it offers for the ill-treatment of women.

Is a “clash of civilizations” within Europe thus inevitable at some time in the future? Laqueur is cautious, as befits a man who has seen so much that was unprecedented in his own lifetime. Secularization, if only of a strange and not altogether reassuring kind, has already made deep inroads into the Muslim population. On the other hand, it may be that this very secularization is what calls forth religious fanaticism as a response. After all, Muslims can see in European Christianity an example of what happens when the light of reason and historical criticism is allowed into the purlieus of religious doctrine: it falls apart. Since Islam is so much a part of the identity of people wherever it has predominated, an attack on Islam, even or especially in the form of rational criticism, provokes an existential crisis.

Laqueur is neither apocalyptic nor optimistic but measured and open-minded about the future. Yet given the earnest frivolity of the European political classes, who face up to and legislate for every problem except the serious ones, it is likely that his prediction for Europe is accurate: it will sink into insignificance, more important, it is true, than Africa but no more important than Latin America.

Actually, I like Latin America. ■

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[Counterpoints: 25 Years of The New Criterion on Culture and the Arts, edited by Roger Kimball and Hilton Kramer, Ivan R. Dee, 512 pages]

## Where Criticism is Still an Art

By R.J. Stove

THIS BOOK TEMPTS a reviewer to turn his entire critique into a disclosure of interests. It also forces him to slough his squeamishness about first-person usage, a device Orwell correctly compared to “dosing yourself with some stimulating but very deleterious and very habit-forming drug.” *The New Criterion* has printed articles of mine in the past and will, I hope, do so again. Obviously I am not going to endanger this working relationship by comprehensively trashing the magazine’s hardcover spin-off. Yet an exhibition of toadying would be even duller to read than to write. (It is fit, though, to cite here a friend of Max Beerbohm’s, who allegedly said, “I like flattery, so long as it is sufficiently fulsome.” Beerbohm’s devastating rejoinder: “I impose no conditions at all.”) At best, a reviewer can merely combine candor about his background with detachment about the work under discussion. He should assess its merits and defects as if all *New Criterion* staffers were strangers to him. Amiable strangers, he trusts, but strangers nonetheless.

Honesty obliges the admission that during my youth I generally avoided the magazine. Back then, I judged publications by a simple yardstick. If they ran material like P.J. O’Rourke’s “How to Drive Fast On Drugs And Not Spill Your Drink,” I applauded them; if not, not. Since *The New Criterion* did not, I had little time for it. Eventually, *mirabile dictu*, one puts away childish things (unless one is O’Rourke himself, who on his own admission “bought more expensive childish things”). In my case, two gruesome family tragedies blew apart

what would otherwise have collapsed more slowly: that is, the entire hovel of semi-literate, consequence-free, protracted-pubescent heathenism in which I had previously dwelt. What had once seemed tedious and hectoring suddenly seemed urgently readable, including *The New Criterion*’s best articles. (The periodical also began championing philosopher-essayist David Stove; at times I still fear that my own *New Criterion* appearances have derived purely from being David Stove’s son.)

Subsequent exposure to Waugh, Belloc, C.S. Lewis, Arnold Lunn, Fulton Sheen, Joseph Sobran, and Russell Kirk—Kirk, in particular, left much the same impact on my thinking that a dozen jalapeños would leave on the roof of one’s mouth—confirmed that when it came to my erstwhile atheist home, “you can’t go home again.” From these authors above all, I learned that the West’s chief dividing line, far from being Right versus Left, was that of Christendom versus barbarism. A single cautionary sentence of Waugh annihilated the whole good pagan alibi: “It is no longer possible, as it was in the time of Gibbon,

proclaims, “is the one thing *The Conservative Mind* is not ... [it] isn’t history; it is a work of literature meant to achieve political ends.” Anyone who believes that Kirk wrote *The Conservative Mind* as an exercise in GOP instrumentalism, or that its original readers in their tens of thousands bought the book as such, will, in the Duke of Wellington’s words, believe anything. In Frum’s eyes, Kirk’s main fault would appear to consist of not being Frum. This offense, if offense it be, most observers will find eminently pardonable.

Similar solipsism informs Mark Steyn’s anti-European tirade “It’s the Demography, Stupid.” Although Steyn scores some points, all those were made years earlier by serious demographic thinkers—Alexis Carrel, Alfred Sauvy, Colin Clark, and B.A. Santamaria, to list a few—who worried over Europe’s birth dearth and dysgenics decades before Steyn showed the smallest concern for the topic. One misses in his chest-thumping prose any avowal of his predecessors’ existence. One also misses any positive reasons to deplore European implosion, as distinct from the purely

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to accept the benefits of civilization and at the same time deny the supernatural basis on which it rests.” The present book’s introduction acknowledges another Waugh aphorism: “Unstinting effort is needed to keep men living together at peace; there is only a margin of energy left over for experiment however beneficent.” Kirk could have said the same things.

As it happens, *Counterpoints* includes an exceptionally disappointing interpretation of Kirk by David Frum, and woe to any reader whose first exposure to Kirk (or to *The New Criterion*) derives from this source. While the essay does not altogether lack insight, its dismissal of Kirk’s *Conservative Mind* proves simply bizarre. “History,” Frum grandly

negative reason of fearing imams. What chances are there of halting this implosion while contraceptives—prohibited, before 1930, by every Christian church—are allowed? How exactly can Europe’s sexual revolution, and its practitioners’ alleged rights (Portugal being the latest country to legalize abortuaries), be stopped without at least a short-term alliance with sane Muslim leaders, in lieu of any more palatable enemy’s enemy? These are important questions that Steyn, far from answering, is incapable of even addressing. Quoting, as Steyn does, the babble of pro-abort hoydens like Cameron Diaz cannot substitute for hard, unfashionable cerebration. Steyn is better when dealing with Broadway’s chronicles. Happily, *Counterpoints* also