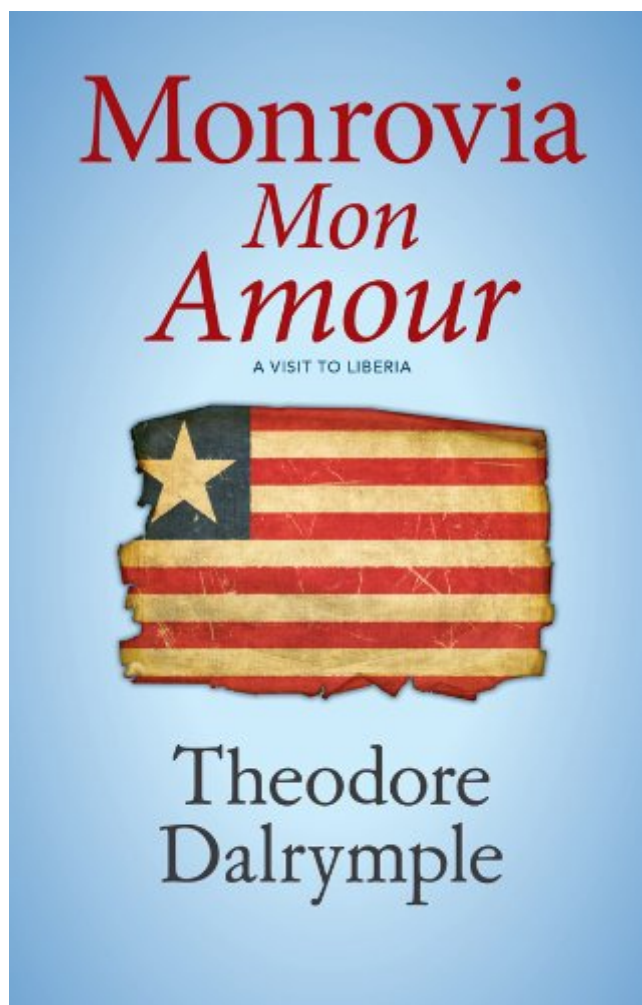


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Monrovia Mon Amour: A Visit To Liberia



Synopsis

As Charles Taylor begins a 50-year sentence for his role in the brutal civil war in Liberia, Theodore Dalrymple's memoir of a visit to the country, and its capital Monrovia, makes fascinating reading. Founded in 1822 as a refuge for freed African slaves from America, Liberia is a curiosity which became a catastrophe. For well over 100 years, it was a civilised and relatively prosperous country under the rule of Americo-Liberians, but it was thrown into chaos in 1980 when Samuel Doe led a revolution of those considering themselves 'natives'. The incumbent president was murdered in his bed, and his cabinet ministers paraded naked through the streets of Monrovia before being summarily executed by firing squad on the beach. Doe was a brutal and incompetent tribalist (also, say some, a cannibal) who was himself overthrown by Charles Taylor in 1990. Dalrymple arrives in Monrovia the following year, where giggling Liberians show him a videotape of Doe's torture and murder at the hands of Taylor's rival, the majestically self-titled Brigadier-General Field-Marshal Prince Y Johnson. In the film, Johnson is now a Liberian senator who calmly sips a Budweiser as the naked Doe's ears are hacked off. Unsurprisingly, Dalrymple forms the professional opinion that Johnson is a psychopath. Monrovia was once a peaceful and reasonably ordered city; now, it has been almost completely sacked. Burnt-out cars are everywhere; doors have been chopped up for firewood; rubble lines the streets, with the vandalism forming a systematic attempt to destroy every vestige of the old regime (and, the author speculates, of civilisation itself). The destruction of the university and library, for instance, seems to be little more than the revenge of the ignorant upon the educated. In a local hospital (once the pride of West Africa, now long ruined and abandoned), the professor of surgery's office has been ransacked, and medical books and papers have been ripped up; in another, infant welfare records have been smeared with faeces. In the wrecked Centennial Hall, the body of a beautiful Steinway grand piano lies on the floor, its legs senselessly sawn off. In a Lutheran church, Dalrymple finds the floor covered in the blood silhouettes of 600 Liberians massacred by Doe's soldiers. Dalrymple is the one who achieves the near-impossible by making a book about such barbarism at times amusing who lays much of the blame for what happened at the feet of Western intellectuals and their African counterparts. *Monrovia Mon Amour* is a profoundly moving and interesting book about a country which is little-understood and less visited.

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Customer Reviews

I'm about 25% of the way through, but judging from one of his other books, it's probably a good sample. It's refreshing to read country analysis without it being overtly political. Dalrymple tells the story objectively without having an agenda. It's an interesting tale, but sad since there appears to be no solution to the country's problems. The book is almost like an autopsy where the doctor has given up finding the true cause. He's now just trying to describe some of the symptoms. The book will make you question the foreign aid to this area. It's not a matter if it makes a difference, but if it's making it worse.

a well written and entertaining report of Dalrymple's sojourn to Liberia. I did enjoy the author's style and erudition. This was a nice complement to "The Wilder Shores of Marx" and "Zanzibar to Timbuktu". For those familiar with the Author's writings on the British underclass, the 3 books mentioned above are quite different in tone, leaving aside the cynicism and instead replacing it with a far more humanistic flavor. Overall, highly recommended.

This is a wonderful and horrifying travelogue to the proverbial heart of darkness. Dalrymple is an intrepid traveller, venturing into the hazards of war-torn Liberia, and he comes with good

background knowledge, a keen eye for the the telling detail, and no obvious prejudices. His account of the systematic, wanton destruction of a modern hospital, for example, is brilliant. Despite the grim subject matter, he manages to be an entertaining guide to this hell on earth. There are profound truths here about the realities of Liberia as a failed state, and the delusions of various interested parties in this African tragedy.

Author makes this tragic history, readable. I decided to read this before I visited Liberia. I had to stop because it was just too sad. I appreciated both the story and Liberia more once I got there and then couldn't put it down. It's great insight into different opinions of Liberia, its people, pre and post war. I knew the book was written after the first civil war and it saddened me to see that not much had really changed. The book is written really well like a memoir and I don't know how the author makes things light without offending but somehow he does. I highly recommend this book.

This book really describes the collapse of a country and is tremendously sad to read. However, it tells of things as they are, or at least as they were when Dr. Dalrymple visited the country. He describes situations that definitely do not get into our television and newspaper reports. The wanton destruction of buildings, hospitals, museums and libraries is indicative of the situation. Many of these facilities were donated by well meaning Western countries and/or organizations, including the USA. They evidently were not appreciated. One is left wondering, after reading this book, if foreign aid in these situations is worth it.

Dalrymple has painted a luridly accurate picture of Monrovia as it was in the bad old days. But his grim account is leavened with humor and humanity.

I read this book because I was seeking more info about the recent history of Liberia. Ebola is in the news and I wanted to read how a country can be so hapless as Liberia appears to be. The author's experiences some 25 years ago in Liberia are vividly told. While he describes a harsh place, the people he encounters are mostly genuine seeking a better life.

TD once again brings profound insight into the human condition. The destruction of Liberia was the systematic wholesale rejection of civilization as evinced by the piano in president's mansion, with its legged sawed off and defecated upon. What does an action like this say about the values of the countries inhabitants?

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