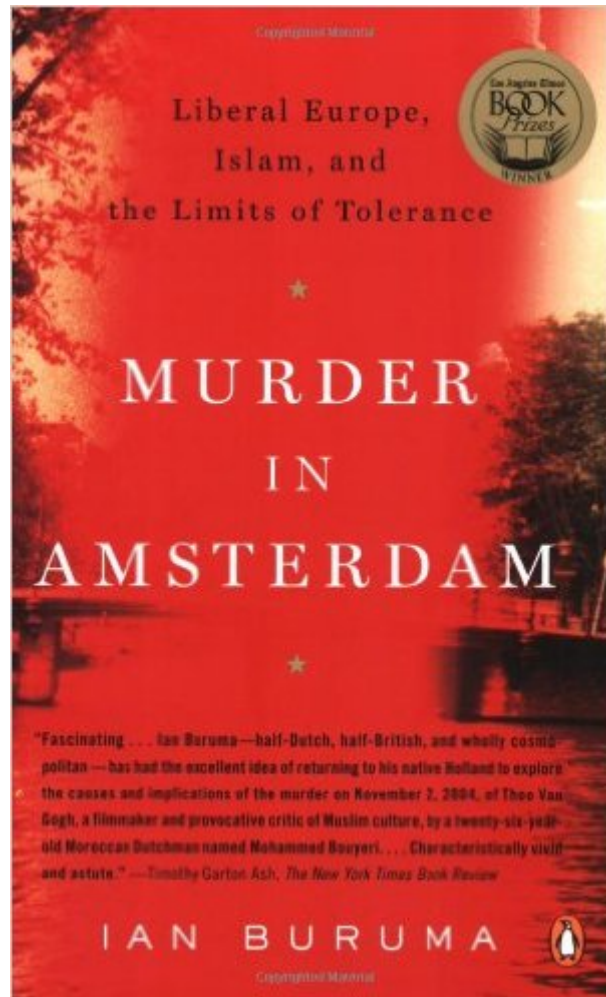


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Murder In Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam, And The Limits Of Tolerance



Synopsis

A revelatory look at what happens when political Islam collides with the secular West. Ian Buruma's *Murder in Amsterdam* is a masterpiece of investigative journalism, a book with the intimacy and narrative control of a crime novel and the analytical brilliance for which Buruma is renowned. On a cold November day in Amsterdam in 2004, the celebrated and controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was shot and killed by an Islamic extremist for making a movie that "insulted the prophet Mohammed." The murder sent shock waves across Europe and around the world. Shortly thereafter, Ian Buruma returned to his native land to investigate the event and its larger meaning as part of the great dilemma of our time.

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Customer Reviews

The Netherlands has always had a well-deserved reputation for tolerance, they have been cited by many as being the most liberal country in Europe if not the world. Against this background, Dutch-born author Ian Buruma explores why, in 2004, filmmaker Theo van Gogh was shot and stabbed to death by a certain Mohammed Bouyeri. The ostensible reason was that Bouyeri, a Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent, was deeply insulted by a film made by van Gogh and feminist Somali-born politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali regarding the mistreatment of women under Islam. On the whole, the non-Muslim Dutch were shocked and outraged, while Muslims simply had vague feelings of "understanding" for Bouyeri. Theo van Gogh was a classic "dorpsgek" or village idiot. Being of Dutch descent myself, I know the type only too well. As a provocateur, van Gogh was an equal

opportunity insultor; he offended Christians, Jews, Muslims and about every other social grouping. In his film "Submission," which angered the Muslim community, there were verses of the Koran projected onto the body of a naked woman. It was a puerile and tedious exercise, the kind of thing that gives art a bad name. If he had been as clever as he thought he would have known there would be consequences - the provocation worked only too well. Mohammed Bouyeri was rather typical of European-born Muslims; in fact, he had many similarities with the 7/7 and Madrid bombers, and also, for that matter, the 9/11 bombers, particularly Mohammed Atta. He enjoyed the freedoms of Holland while at the same time feeling estranged from the mainstream. Dating, playing soccer, and smoking pot had its attractions, but when he saw that women had the same rights, he retreated to the mosque and started listening to the radical imams.

Buruma writes very small, but very dense books about serious issues. His "Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies" published a few years ago was almost unreadable in some parts because he tried to say too much in too few words. But this book is really one that puts some "flesh on the bones" of that book by examining a real-life consequence of Islamic radicalism confronting Western societies open system. I suspect this book will be unwelcome in many circles because it makes a very good case that jihadists come in many forms and sizes, from lunatics like bin Laden to the single acts of murder by an equally crazed Islamist by the name of Mohammed Bouyeri, the assassin of Theo van Gogh on a street in Amsterdam as van Gogh rode his bike to work. As someone who has spent a lot of time in Holland over many decades, the effect of van Gogh's murder was far greater than that of Pym Fortuyn, who was also killed for being "politically incorrect." This book does some critical questioning of whether the West will wake up soon enough to understand that the centuries of change in European values have run in the exact opposite direction of millions of immigrant Muslims who seek to return to the "good old days" of Sharia law, even if most of its proponents have never lived under it. The second and third generations of Muslim youth all over Europe, who have alienated themselves from modernity, for a myriad of reasons, are a real threat to the values that the Western "elites" take for granted and are so arrogant that they cannot understand that millions of Muslims think they must be destroyed to save the world for Islam.

I had come back from Amsterdam and was looking for something to read that might make sense of this very cosmopolitan city with its seeming open door to the world. I couldn't have been more satisfied than with Buruma's engaging book that goes far beyond the death of Theo van Gogh in examining the nature of tolerance in this fair city and the greater Dutch Republic. The events which

Buruma describes are still fresh, and he writes as if composing a blog on the Internet with a steady stream of thoughts and observations, along with pithy interviews with leading Dutch political and cultural figures, who all have something to say on the subject of Theo van Gogh and his killer, Mohammed B. The author links the death of Pim Fortuyn with that of Van Gogh, in showing how sudden celebrity brings with it repercussions that the Dutch seemed to feel didn't exist in their liberal society. But then Holland has not always been such a liberal-minded country, and Buruma explores some of the historic roots that led to the steady influx of immigrants that have come to dominate cities like Amsterdam, much to the chagrin of the proud Dutch. The book is an antidote to the smugness of European liberalism that seems to feel that assimilation is natural in a secular democratic society. Events such as the deaths of Theo Van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn not only wipe the smiles off complacent faces, but send shock waves through the country. Buruma demonstrates how illiberal liberals can be when confounded by the nature of successive waves of immigrants who hold onto their religious beliefs instead of adopting the conventions of the new secular state.

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