

Murder in Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam, and the Limits of Tolerance

By Ian Buruma

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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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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Van Gogh, a provocative media personality in the Netherlands, was shot and stabbed on an Amsterdam street in November 2004 by a young radical, the son of Moroccan immigrants, who accused him of blasphemy against Islam. When Buruma (*Bad Elements*) returned to his homeland in an effort to make sense of the brutal murder, he quickly realized there was more to the story than a terrorist lashing out against Western culture. Exploiting the tensions between native-born Dutch and Muslim immigrants, van Gogh drew attention to himself with deliberately inflammatory political theater that escalated beyond control. Buruma refuses to blame the victim, though, giving equal weight to critics who insist Islam must adapt to European culture rather than the other way around, like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch politician who scripted van Gogh's final film, an avant-garde indictment of the religion's treatment of women. There is a strong sense of journalistic immediacy to Buruma's cultural inquiry, and if the result is a slim volume, that's because his dense, thoughtful prose doesn't waste a single word. (Sept. 11)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

The well-traveled Ian Buruma, a Bard College professor, previously published *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (2005) and *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (2002), among others. Buruma's account of Theo van Gogh's death was first published in the *New Yorker* in January 2005. The book, an expanded version of the magazine piece, is timely. Buruma receives much praise for his writing and reporting skills, though several critics comment on the book's lack of structure. Buruma's willingness to examine the story from all angles is his strength, leading in the final analysis to a nuanced understanding of the situation and an evenhanded piece on a seemingly impenetrable issue. The book suffers from this impenetrability as well: Buruma provides a record of the events but few answers to the questions he inevitably raises. But has anyone else managed to answer these questions yet?

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From [Booklist](#)

The Netherlands may be the Western country most affected by radical Muslim violence, with two major assassinations since 9/11, those of politician Pim Fortuyn, who had called for restrictions on Muslim immigration (Fortuyn's assassin wasn't Muslim, however), and media celebrity Theo Van Gogh, director of a film lambasting the Qur'an on women. Buruma returned to his homeland after Van Gogh's murder to gain understanding from figures in Dutch and Dutch Muslim politics and society who might provide it, including the Somali-born politician who wrote Van Gogh's fatal film, a Muslim prison chaplain, a teacher, a historian, and another Dutch Muslim politician. Their testimony disclosed that the vaunted Dutch multiculturalism is failing second-generation Dutch Muslims, the cohort to which Van Gogh's assassin and ordinary Muslim hooligans belong. There is enough credible blame for the situation to blanket all institutions and social strata in the Netherlands. Buruma sees the problem as primarily denying second-generation Muslims a home in the country in which they were born. An ideal, absorbing companion to Bruce Bawer's excoriating *While Europe Slept* (2006). Ray Olson

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Users Review

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