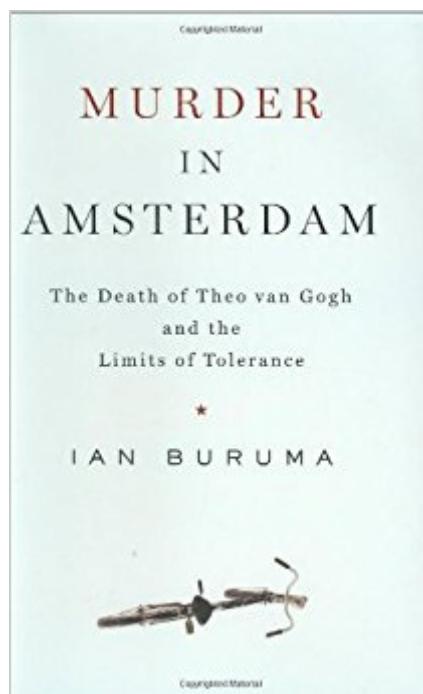


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# Murder In Amsterdam: The Death Of Theo Van Gogh And The Limits Of Tolerance



## Synopsis

Ian Buruma returns to his native land to explore the great dilemma of our time through the story of the brutal murder of controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh at the hands of an Islamic extremist. It was the emblematic crime of our moment: On a cold November day in Amsterdam, an angry young Muslim man, Mohammed Bouyeri, the son of Moroccan immigrants, shot and killed the celebrated and controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, great-grandnephew of Vincent and iconic European provocateur, for making a movie with the vocally anti-Islam Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali that "blasphemed" Islam. After Bouyeri shot van Gogh, he calmly stood over the body and cut his throat with a curved machete, as if performing a ritual sacrifice, which in a very real sense he was. The murder horrified quiet, complacent, prosperous Holland, a country that prides itself on being a bastion of tolerance, and sent shock waves across Europe and around the world. Shortly thereafter, Ian Buruma returned to his native country to try to make sense of it all and to see what larger meaning should and shouldn't be drawn from this story. The result is Buruma's masterpiece: a book with the intimacy and narrative control of a true-crime page-turner and the intellectual resonance we've come to expect from one of the most well-regarded journalists and thinkers of our time. Ian Buruma's entire life has led him to this narrative: In his hands, it is the exemplary tale of our age, the story of what happens when political Islam collides with the secular West and tolerance finds its limits.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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? Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

Do you wonder what is happening to American social discourse and politics? Why are the likes of a Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders attracting such strong followings? The story of liberal Europe since the 1960s helps to answer such questions, and is perhaps prophetic. *Murder in Amsterdam* focuses on the problem of multiculturalism in Holland, specifically the clash between liberals (now viewed as conservatives) who value historic notions of freedom, which they believe is threatened by growing Islamic forces, and liberals who envision the peaceful coexistence of Muslims with liberal Europe. Cynics ask, " How tolerant can liberalism be before it self-destructs?"The strength of this

book is its' balanced explanation of the influences that have led to this crisis, a clash of worldviews that led to the relatively recent murder of two prominent social critics by disenfranchised, radicalized Muslim youth. The weakness of the book is endemic to Western liberalism itself: a failure to understand the problem of conflictual worldviews. Enlightenment commitment to individual freedom and reason has too often blinded adherents to the reality that worldviews have social consequences, and when the numbers of individuals with mutually exclusive worldviews reach a tipping point, peaceful coexistence becomes impossible. The society will either collapse, or one worldview by force will prevail. "Progressive" liberals cannot see that. Holland (and all of Europe) is struggling with it, and the United States is not far behind.

A great read, but more importantly, a cogent examination of the Netherlands' - and by extension the West's - struggle to apply its liberal values to the challenge of political Islam. Even more topical in 2017 than when it was published in the mid-2000s.

The murders of both Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh are very important to everyone, not just the people of Holland. The fundamental problems of the Netherlands, and all of Europe for that matter, is the intolerance displayed by one religion over all others and the pressures put on the most vulnerable of people to murder those who disagree with them, and do so in the name of religion. This new and dangerous intolerance will eventually visit our shores also and inflame us before our blind leaders even know about it. Therefore, it is up to people like Ian Buruma and others to speak the truth and warn us of what has already happened and why, so that we will not be caught in the same trap of denial that has overwhelmed Europe. The book does that very well, teaching us that we have been asleep too long and have been assuming that "all's right with the world." All is not right with the world and it has become a very dangerous place. But it is the only world we live in and it is time to clean it up. Thanks, Ian, good job.

This book captured the current turmoil in Europe, which is almost exclusively cultural. It reads like a journal article and the writing flows very well. The research seems fair and honest. Even though there is always bias, this book seems to give the facts of each murder with very little personal spin. I found this book very helpful in understanding the underlying tensions throughout Europe as a whole. In the Netherlands specifically it helped me to understand a lot of the anger and division that exists and was a great introduction to the political and cultural turmoil that exists there. I would recommend this to anyone who is living in Europe or travels there often and wants to understand

current European tension.

It was a different type of book that gave many different perspectives on the issue of massive Muslim immigration into the Netherlands. Definitely an interesting read

In November 2004 Theo van Gogh was brutally murdered in the streets of Amsterdam. With the murder in 2002 of the prime-minister to be, Pim Fortuyn, the Netherlands was stunned by two horrendous crimes. Nothing comparable had happened in 300 years. Holland was such a peaceful little country, famous for its tolerance and liberalism. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll - everything seemed permissible. Ian Buruma was raised in the nicer parts of the Hague. He has been active in Oxford, Tokyo and Washington. Since 2005 he lives in New York. Following the two murders he went back to the Netherlands to try to come to grips with this new situation in his native country. His inquiry resulted in this book. He knew some of the people he interviews from back then. With one of them he had been playing in the sandbox; the future professor of Philosophy, Herman Philipse, the guy who seduced Ayaan Hirsi Ali both to a personal relationship - and to Atheism. Buruma thought of him even then as a somewhat pompous child. I suppose you have to be Dutch to be able to picture him heaving a rubber spade in his Oxford tweed jacket... (note that I'm actually a fan of his). Ian Buruma tries to expose the background for the two murders. Historically he illustrates this with the famous 'Regenten'- paintings by Frans Hals in Haarlem. 'Regenten' were representatives from the republican merchant elite who opposed both the royal House of Orange and the Calvinist church. In these gloomy but superb paintings, we, as present-day tourists, are haughtily and coldly observed by these members of the board - men as well as women. Sends shivers down your spine. Pim Fortuyn was certainly no Calvinist and only a lukewarm royalist, but Buruma contrasts his populism with the might of the Left Church; social democrats, liberals and the Green Party. Fortuyn was friendly with Theo van Gogh who also wrote some of his speeches and used to call him 'the divine baldy'. Van Gogh was an astounding enfant terrible. Unlike Fortuyn he grew up in an upper-class family. In high school he started a magazine which he christened the Dirty Paper. The topics were typically puberal in the toilet-humor vein. His partner in crime was a certain Johan Quarles van Ufford. The magazine only ever appeared twice, but it gives a nice idea of Van Gogh's shock-tactics. He loved to provoke all and sundry. Some of his utterances are probably not fit for printing, although he would punch my nose for saying so, but they are of the caliber of describing Jesus as a 'rotten fish' and famously - and fatefully - calling Muslims, well, something I apparently can't reveal here although it's all in the book. Many felt he actually deserved to die. But what about freedom of

speech? Is it absolute and without any restrictions whatsoever? Isn't there something in the constitution about discrimination and harassment? The law forbidding heresy had not been used since the sixties, when a well-known author portrayed God as a donkey. He was acquitted. Now this law has been revived and passions run high. The subtitle of the book is 'Liberal Europe, Islam, and the Limits of Tolerance' but Buruma only lightly touches on this. You would probably need yet another book to seriously address such an ambitious agenda. A scary thing I wasn't aware of, is how the soccer-fans of Rotterdam greet AJAX Amsterdam when they come to town. Apart from the customary 'filthy Jews' or 'cancer Jews', they collectively let out a hissing sound which slowly grows stronger. Buruma didn't know what to make of it until a friend explained: they are mimicking the sound of escaping gas. Who said that the Netherlands was so very tolerant?

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