



The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt

Isabelle Eberhardt, Elizabeth Kershaw (Editor), Nina Voogd (Illustrator)

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Eberhardt's journal chronicles the daring adventures of a late 19th- century European woman who traveled the Sahara desert disguised as an Arab man and adopted Islam. Includes a glossary. Previously published in English by Virago Press in 1987, and as The Passionate Nomad by Virago/Beacon Press in 19

The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt Details

Date : Published August 14th 2003 by Interlink Books (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9781566565080

Author : Isabelle Eberhardt , Elizabeth Kershaw (Editor) , Nina Voogd (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Travel, Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, History, Cultural, Africa, Adventure

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From Reader Review The Nomad: The Diaries of Isabelle Eberhardt for online ebook

Rebecca says

A thin volume, with little background; I likely should've started with a biography first. Was thinking she'd get to Morocco, but apparently not. Still, an inspiration for her love of the Maghreb and passion for travel. Too bad that, in her time, she had to dress as a man to do it ... and that she held her own gender in such contempt.

Mohsin Maqbool says

Isabelle Eberhardt in sailor's uniform.

ISABELLE Eberhardt was a Swiss-Algerian explorer and writer who lived and travelled extensively in North Africa. She was a polyglot as she was fluent in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Russian, German, French and Italian. Her mother took her to North Africa where she along with her daughter converted to Islam. However, her mother died towards the end of the year.

Isabelle travelled the Sahara desert disguised as an Arab man, calling herself Si Mahmoud Essadi. However, she is more akin to being a transvestite. She was flat-chested, her body full of hair and her teeth black due to smoking kif (a kind of North African drug) and drinking alcohol. She might have indulged in taking chira (another drug) too, as several of her male friends did. She got into the habit because of taking drugs with her brothers Nicolas and Augustin. In fact, they initiated her into the act.

The daughter of a Russian noblewoman and her children's anarchistic tutor, Isabelle Eberhardt was raised to be an independent thinker. Already finished the bottle but yet to finish the cigarette. The best of independence for some!

Her favourite pet was a dove, which died before she moved to North Africa. She mostly travelled on horseback. Her favourite horse was called Sufa, named after a region which she loved. However, on occasion, she would also use dromedaries (an Arabian camel, especially one of a light and swift breed trained for riding or racing) and mules. When the need was required, she could walk long distances too! She rejected conventional European morality in favour of her own path. She had several affairs. Her lover Slimane Ehnni was finally able to marry her two or three years after meeting her. I am surprised that she read the Quran but went against some of its tenets. The holy book clearly states that sex before marriage is forbidden in Islam. So is alcohol and taking drugs. But then not all Muslims follow the Quran and its tenets 100 per cent.

Dressed as a man, Isabelle travelled in Arab society, with a freedom she could not otherwise have experienced. She seems averse to females as she is mostly, if not always, seen in male company. Promiscuity can then be at its best.

A film entitled "Isabelle Eberhardt" was released in 1991.

The copy of the book that I have is called "The Passionate Nomad – The Diary of Isabelle Eberhardt", published in English by Virago Press in 1987. The Introduction alone is worth the price of the book. The tome includes "Notes" and a glossary towards the end, which prove extremely useful.

Had she lived longer, she would have turned out to be a fabulous travel writer. Her jottings about Marseilles, Tunisia, Algiers, the people that she meets, architecture, the deserts, the sunsets and various plants is absolutely stupendous. Her first two short stories had already been published in the journal *La Nouvelle Revue Moderne* in 1895 and 1896. She was writing a novel the manuscript of which was badly damaged in the desert flash flood that took her life in 1904 at the age of 27.

Mathilda May with Peter O'Toole in "Isabelle Eberhardt".

From the two letters which were published in a French newspaper and have been copied in the diary, I could easily gather that she was a brilliant writer and could also have become a political correspondent for newspapers and magazines. She often travels between Geneva, Marseilles and Algeria and Morocco in North Africa. She wrote articles for newspapers and magazines.

Her creative writing was top-notch. Here is one of her quotes: "Now more than ever do I realize that I will never be content with a sedentary life, that I will always be haunted by thoughts of a sun-drenched elsewhere."

An image of Isabelle Eberhardt ensconced in orientalist framing.

She carried several of her books with her, including those of Pierre Loti and Dostoevsky. In fact, the latter was her most favourite whom she kept reading over and over again. There came a time when she could not carry all her books, so she just tore and took the pages she liked the most.

Inspired not only by his tale of dangerous Oriental love but by his gift for disguise and self-invention, Isabelle wanted to be Pierre Loti.

The book is highly recommended for all those who love reading about history, cultures and travelling. Even for those who love reading about adventure.

Isabelle Eberhardt's grave at Ain-Sefra.

Actress Juliet Stevenson retraces the journeys of turn-of-the-century traveller and writer Isabelle Eberhardt in the following video link. (BBC, 1994)
<https://vimeo.com/110999838>

The Australian-French co-production of "Isabelle Eberhardt" (1991).

Imen Laameri says

Perhaps I shouldn't have read Eberhardt's diaries after Leslie Blanch's *Wilder Shores of Love!* Isabelle Eberhardt reminds me so much of *Lawrence of Arabia* as both of them are sex-crazed, mysterious,

mysteriously in love with the Arabian desert and the gate from which colonialism entered the Orient...

Annabelle says

This is excerpts of Isabllle Eberhardt's diaries writing in 1900. She was an iconoclastic woman, Russian born in Switzerland of questionable progeny on the male side. The family's tutor ostensibly her father tutored her and converted her and her mother to Islam. She was brilliant speaking French, Russian, German and Arabic and a voracious reader. She dressed as a man and travled alone through Algeria sleeping in the sands and being sexually promiscuous. During the diary time she fell in love and married an Algerian soldier. She was a problem to the French occupiers since she was friendly with Algerians and was inducted as a Sufi. Her diaries are characterized by a heightened examination of her own consciousness and a fierce desire to learn and a mystical sensibility. Worth reading for the descriptive detail of the lands around the Mediterranean and the desert, as well as the political streams of oppression of woman and colonization of North Africa.

Juanita says

This is truly a story of one
of the most daring people I
have ever met. Seems a character
of fiction than real life.
Travelling through North Africa as
an Arab man.

Ronald Barranco says

Sometimes brilliant, sometimes rambling and depressing, Eberhardt's diaries give a first-hand account of a woman living on her own in the Sahara desert. Isabelle mentions the possibility of someone reading her diaries, but it is obvious that these journals were not intended for public consumption. Her writing and thoughts jump all over the place, understandably, since she died before she could edit or organize these writings.

Isabelle is the quintessential traveler. She hungers for new experiences and needs action in her life. She feels uncomfortable in "civilized" places and feels most at home in Algeria, among the native people living a simple life. Her most joyous moments seem to be when she engulfs herself into Islam and its culture, but Isabelle is not a conformist. She is determined to do things her own way, even when it seemingly makes her miserable.

Ember Leigh says

Isabelle Eberhardt could have easily been one of my childhood friends. Though she lived in the late 1800's,

her worries, woes, and tribulations echo that of many women these days in the throes of New Adulthood, struggling to strike out on your own, make sense of the world, and be true to some quivering idea of oneself buried deep on the inside.

Some of Isabelle's thoughts are verbatim for things I've written in my own diary. The solidarity felt with this wanderer and seeker from another time is shocking. Her affinity for religion and the path in which her life ultimately winds are both interesting and shocking. One can't help but think who she might have been had her life not ended so early.

Kaisha says

I gave this 3 stars, not because of Isabelle herself, but because of the prig of an editor who compiled this edition. I would be reading along, enjoying Isabelle's perspectives on life, and then the editor would interject "and here Isabelle goes on to describe her great sexual satisfaction in her lover..." or "Isabelle's drug habit had grown so strong that she roamed the streets of Paris smoking the leaves off any tree she could find..." WTF? Why cut these parts out, I ask? So I had to go out and get an actual biography of this fin-de-siecle bohemian to learn the rest of the story.

astrid says

Expectation, that sneaky bugger, remind me to throw it out of the house whenever I start reading a new book.

When I first found out about Isabelle Eberhardt I thought she must've been the coolest woman ever. She explored the Algerian desert in man's clothes. She did it at the time before youth hostel, travel agents and backpack tourist. Even better, she was only in her early twenties when she did it.

Compared to my cowardly wish to see desert from the edge, she has my utmost adulation. I wanted to be her BFF, lapping on her words as we sat together, shisha standing between us. But do I really want to? Sadly I don't, not after I read her diary.

I realize I'm not being quite fair with her. After all, diaries seldom show person in their best light, especially when the person doesn't have any power in editing or brushing up and hiding whatever skeleton they've unwittingly written down for posterity. Anyhow, isn't that what people were looking for in a diary? Somebody else's skeleton and dirty laundry? So I should've known what I was going to get.

What I wanted to read; adventure galore, description of desert landscape, survival story, tiny bit of romance. I want her to show me what I could've experienced if I were her.

What I've read; a rather snobbish, obnoxiously self righteous stream of consciousness. It could've been my diary. To get it straight. She's still a great persona. She had the gumption to do all the thing she has done, surviving a murder attempt, shouting her indignation on behalf of truth and justice. But maybe for a person to be able to do all those things she's not necessarily likeable? By me at least.

Her greatest sin for me is how judgemental she could be. Her brother, who was the last family tie she has, married a normal woman which she didn't like. What followed was whining on how he has changed, his

betrayal on the bond they had, evil sister in-law poisoning him. Everything except that if his brother has chosen this type of woman for a wife, perhaps that's the kind of life he wanted, perhaps they as a couple actually more similar in character than he to the sister. I'm not rejecting the possibility that his brother's household has treated her shabbily when she was forced to bunk with them. Money and inheritance sure soured and blacken even better person. But I didn't enjoy reading about it for the most part of the diary. Especially in the holier-than-thou and innocent-victim light that she used. Just because her brother didn't consciously and continuously strive to foster his intellectual and spiritual domain, didn't mean he's a less worthy human being.

The bigger part of the rest of the diary was about how wonderful it was to have found her soul mate. I'm glad for her, I'm sure if I were to find mine, I'd have dedicated my whole diary to him. Unfortunately I was annoyingly jealous and bitter about her whole romance. My bad.

The last stroke to fell the monument. The editorial comments. Dear lord. From the beginning it has been noted that not all entries are included. Repeated quotations and random scribbles or mundane travel notes (expenditure, etc.) have been omitted. Instead, we lucky reader are provided with some narration filling up the gaps in the heroic effort of making sure we could have a chance of piecing up her life. I'm really grateful. Honestly she's not a really diligent diarist. But this just made me wonder what has been taken out, would I have understood anything if I relied on her words only, did I miss any juicy bits? Not really likely as the narration even tried to inject some excitement by letting us know of her kef and alcoholic binges which couldn't be seen from the entries. Still it's rather uncomfortable to have this second voice interjecting now and again.

So there, I myself have been rather judgemental here. I have this silly tendency to judge non-fictional story the same as fictional. With this review I've condemned Isabelle for not writing her diary the way fictional adventure story is written. But, no matter how exhilarating her life was, why bother to publish her diary if it's not that interesting anyway? Where can I actually read her writing on desert exploration? Do I even dare to risk reading it? Would I like her writing? Questions and questions and I'm getting further away from the desert.

Lousy two stars and I was being generous.

Emily says

"Eberhardt's story is reason enough to read these collected memoirs; Born in Geneva in 1877, she moved with her mother to Algeria, converted to Islam, and lived her life as a man. She had many friends, lovers and enemies, and died in a mysterious desert flood at age 27." (from Conde Nast Traveler, one of the 86 best travel books ever written)

Xio says

Inspired by my own desire and fueled by the biographical accounts of true adventurers I cut my hair down short donned my boots and overalls and went into the wide world hoping to pass for a boy wanting to engage, but to be left alone.. This set of diaries is not the book I read. My out of print version is named "Vagabond" and is written by I Eberhardt, but while she kept a journal she also wrote a tale of herself.

She cut her hair, donned male muslim dress got herself down into N Africa and though they found her out they let her be and she died in a flash flood, I think addicted to opium or hashish.

My kind of romance.

Samantha says

This was hard to rate as some of Eberhardt's observations are outstanding but the diaries are poorly compiled and much is cut out or left to rushed descriptions from the translator. Look forward to reading some of the novels of this fascinating figure

Karen says

I'm halfway through and disappointed. Eberhardt was a very interesting character who as a young woman decided to live in North Africa, converted to Islam, and frequently dressed as a boy to enjoy more freedom than she would as a woman in this era (ca 1900) and environment. She is enraptured with her surroundings. I was hoping for something as evocative and powerful as Beryl Markham's *West With the Night* or Durrell's *Prospero's Cell*, but her diaries seem thin somehow. Maybe it's the translation.

Madrileña Reader says

Summary: "I have a feeling of voluptuous melancholy", "People are so basic and boring", "I'm special and sensitive".

Jessica says

While I'm glad I read these journals of Isabelle Eberhardt, I can't truthfully say that I enjoyed reading them. Her story is so intriguing, but I'd rather hear it told by someone else.

Just before the turn of the century Isabelle left her adopted home of Geneva and headed for Algeria which held her fascination for the duration of her short life. She caused a stir almost everywhere she went dressing as a man and being inducted into elite male societies and causing trouble with French colonial military. She wandered with very little means and alternated between states of elation at writing, living in her chosen country and reveling in her devotion to Islam and deep despair and as she calls it (over and over again) "infinite sadness." Within the confines of a conservative Arab society where women had few rights, Isabelle ingratiated herself, smoked kef, drank and had many sexual escapades before (and perhaps after) meeting her husband Slimene. Someone tried to assassinate her.

Isabelle had a pretty extraordinary life, but I'd rather hear it told by someone else (though the introduction is wonderful) in an abbreviated and edited version.

