



In the Shadow of Islam

Isabelle Eberhardt , Sharon Bangert (Translation)

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In the Shadow of Islam is an extraordinary evocation of the desert and its people by a woman who dressed as a man in order to travel alone and unimpeded throughout North Africa. In 1897 Isabelle Eberhardt, age 20, left an already unconventional life in Geneva for the Moroccan frontier. Gripped by spiritual restlessness and the desire to break free from the confinements of her society she traveled into the desert, and into the heart of Islam. Her experiences inspired a profound self-examination, and *In the Shadow of Islam* is today regarded as one of the true classics of travel writing.

In the Shadow of Islam Details

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Mani says

J'ai aimé le livre , les pensées d'Isabelle , qui a visité mon territoire (oued souf sud est d'Algerie) , elle le décrit mieux qu'un Algerien qui habite labas .

Kawthar says

actuellement c'est 2,5/5

un petit livre qui se termine en un jour je dirais plutôt que c'était un livre descriptif du Sahara ou la narratrice parlait d'ici de la de diverses choses dont ses sentiments de solitude de la nature qui l'entoure et j'en passe j'ai pas apprécié cette lecture

Shahine Ardeshir says

“In the Shadow of Islam” is a collection of travel notes written by Isabelle Eberhardt, a woman who chose to give up life in European society to go to Algeria, convert to Islam and then travel through North Africa disguised as a man, all in the early 1900s. If that isn't enough to tempt you into picking it up, I don't know what is!

Through her writing, which is detailed, rich and descriptive with details and full of respect, Isabelle instantly transported me into an entirely different world. Before technology or communication, before the Middle East or Northern Africa was equated with terrorism or oil economies. A time when the desert was beautiful, daunting, humbling and honest. A time, I suppose, that is long past.

What comes through in her words are her obvious love for travel and adventure, and her surprising open-mindedness to cultures other than her own. Her opinions on women's role in society (both what is it and what it should be) is exceptionally modern, and her honesty about her own troubles and search for peace are inspiring.

Although the book meanders (mostly because it's not a book as much as a collection of notes she made while on the road), it remains honest and alive through every page. I walked away full of admiration for the courage and openness of a woman who obviously knew what it meant to live each day to the fullest, and whose spirit has justifiably lived on over a century after her body left.

In an era of open plagiarism, popularist novels written to please popularist readers, it's a pleasant change to find something ancient, wise and authentic. What a rare find this book was, what a gem of a read it turned out to be.

Sarah says

I can't describe how powerful I found this book to be. Because it is real, unfiltered, showcasing how one woman is reaching the limits of her thought and experience and is not afraid to look at herself.

Yann says

Ce livre a une histoire un peu particulière, dans le sens où il s'agit de feuillets récupérés par miracle suite à la mort de l'auteur dans une inondation, protégés dans les restes de sa maison. L'édition a été faite par Victor Barrucand, lequel aurait semble-t-il un peu remanié ces textes: ce sont donc plus une collation de réflexions extraites d'un journal qu'un récit suivi, et leur authenticité est un peu suspecte.

J'avais découvert l'existence de Isabelle Erberhardt(1877-1904) dans France Et Algérie: Journal D'une Passion de Jacques Marseilles. Elle était présentée avec beaucoup de sympathie, comme quelqu'un ayant vécu avec les tribus nomades du Sahara, passionnée par l'Islam et désireuse de découvrir de nouvelles culture. Dans une certaine mesure, c'est bien le cas: on a un tableau réaliste par quelqu'un qui vit sur place des événements. Malheureusement, ces bonnes dispositions sont très rapidement gâtées.

Il s'avère que loin de vouloir découvrir quelque chose de nouveau et de réel, Isabelle Eberhardt est surtout à la recherche de ses propres rêves et reste prisonnière de ses préjugés, ne songeant qu'à s'étourdir d'orgueil et de solitude. Elle manque totalement d'empathie: comme elle est fière d'avoir un jeune esclave noir, dont elle ne manque pas de fustiger la gourmandise et la roublardise, et quel enthousiasme lui inspire le lamentable suicide d'une jeune épouse désespérée! On dirait ces voyageuses dont parlait Françoise Lapeyre dans son Quand Les Voyageuses Découvraient L'esclavage. Elle n'a à la bouche que le mot race, et tous les poncifs les plus éculés et les plus écoeurants. Elle semble totalement absorbée dans ses rêveries orientalistes.

Ainsi, aucun des êtres humains qu'elle côtoie ne semble lui inspirer la moindre commisération: les noirs valent à peine mieux que des animaux, les femmes comptent pour rien, les juifs sont accablés de mépris, et les tribus voisines sont des mécréantes pires que les chrétiens, et la vulgarité des gens autour d'elle ne la dérange *pas trop*. Elle adopte tous les préjugés autour d'elle sans aucune distance, et ajoute les siens propres, si bien qu'elle ne tarde pas à se sentir comme une petite reine supérieure au milieu de ses hôtes simples et rustiques. Elle n'oublie pas bien sûr de bien dauber sur la vie qu'elle a quitté, sur son sexe et sur l'autre, sur l'amour, sur tout. En fait, elle n'aime pas grand chose en dehors de sa petite personne et de ses petites exaltations mystiques et esthétiques. A imiter la vie des anachorètes, elle en adopte bientôt l'esprit.

Sans doute que ce témoignage pourra encore grossir l'étude de l'histoire des mentalités. J'ai regretté l'indigence de l'appareil critique qui aurait pu donner plus d'explications concernant les termes vernaculaires employés. Il y a une partie de l'œuvre qui est fascinante et passionnante car authentique. Mais la mentalité de l'auteur était éreintante. On est plutôt soulagé d'en voir la fin.

Czarny Pies says

Isabelle Eberhardt was a Jewish, anarchist, Sufi, Talib whose spirit of adventure led to her death in 1904 at the young age of 27. I think we can safely assume that she was the only one that there ever was. Given the current state of the world it is very unlikely that there will be any more in the future. Her writings then offer some highly unique pleasures. "In the Shadow of Islam" is a wonderful book about the little people of Algeria during the period of French rule. I do not, however, think that it is the best introduction to her work. I

would try either the "Obliviion Seekers" or "Au pays des sables" first.

This book's highly misleading title was chosen by the posthumous editors. It has essentially nothing to do with Islam as a spiritual quest. It is about living in Muslim country under the occupation of a European colonial power. Eberhardt's quick sketches and short stories demonstrate the same brilliance as can be found in Turgenev's remarkable "Mémoires d'un chasseur" about life in rural Russia in the 19th century. As Eberhardt was like Turgenev also a Russian living in exile, I find it inconceivable that she had not read this work.

Eberhardt writes short, efficient stories young girls who fall into prostitution, miserable Frenchmen who try to farm in Algeria, unhappy Berbers in the colonial army, poor mendicants, women in arranged marriages and simple tradesmen who all find life a tremendous struggle in a French colony that seems to bring neither prosperity nor happiness to no one. It is a truly a great book about the victims of the colonial system both amongst the Europeans and the Arabs.

Iina Allonen says

Kirjasta jäi ristiriitaiset fiilikset. Hymähtelin myötäilevästi naïveille ajatelmille jotka nostivat kiusallisesti mieleen Siepparin ruispellossa. Kasvutarinaksi tästä ei silti oikein ole. Sveitsiläisnainen seilaa maghrebilaisaavikoilla, -keitailla ja -kylissä, suureksi osaksi Ranskan siirtomaaherruuden ansiosta, orientalismista huumautuneena.

Islamin tasa-arvoon ja reiluuteen viehättyneenä matka on tietenkin tehtävä mieheksi pukeutuneena, jotta pääsisi näkemään myös paikat joihin naiset eivät pääse....samalla hän halveksii länsimaisten naisten tapaa olla ja elää, tuomiten nämä pinnallisiksi keimailijoiksi, ja korottaen itseään henkisyiden ilmentymäksi, koska tekee ajatelmatyötään aavikoilla ja keitailla. Kyrrytteli myös tapa jolla hän iloitsi muita alaspäin painamalla siitä miten _hän_ henkistyneesti voi iloita pienistäkin asioista (tähtitaivaista, auringonlaskuista, naisista kaivolla), mutta haikailee kuitenkin jo seuraavassa kappaleessa syvemmälle aavikon siimekseen matkakuumeensa vallassa.

Hän tekee kuitenkin mielenkiintoisia vertauksia paikallisten ja länsimaalaisten nuorten suhtautumisesta esimerkiksi huvituksiin ja seurapiirielämään, koska tuntee molemmat tavat.

Liikkuva aavikkofilosofielämä miehenä lienee hänelle hyvin sopinutkin, ottaen huomioon että hänen asetuttuaan paikoilleen ja palattuaan ns. viimeiseltä aavikkomatkaltaan rauhaa & tasa-arvoa kunnioittavan muslimimiehensä luokse, tuli hän sattumalta tapetuksi samaisen miehen kättentyönä.

Matkapäiväkirjatekstejä on ansaitusti käytetty kylien kulttuurihistorian haisteluun; kuvaukset ihmisten arjesta olivat poikkeuksetta kiinnostavia. Myös maisemakuvaukset olivat kuin olisi ollut matkalla itsekkin.

Jokin kirjasta jäi silti puuttumaan, enkä tiedä olisivatko tulvaankadonneet lehdelmät tuoneet siihen lisää syvyyttä.

metaphor says

I've always been astonished to see that a fashionable hat, the right bustline, a pair of stiff boots, a little suit of cumbersome little furniture, some silverware and porcelain is enough to quench, in so many people, the thirst for well-being. While very young I was seized by the world's existence and I wanted to know it to its limits. I

wasn't made to whirl through intrigues wearing satin blinders. I didn't construct myself for ideal: I went for discovery. I'm quite aware that this way of life is dangerous, but the moment of danger is also a moment of hope. Besides, I have been penetrated by this idea: that one can never fall lower than oneself. When my heart has suffered, then it has begun to live. Many times on the paths of my errant life, I asked myself where I was going, and I've come to understand, among ordinary folk and with the nomads, that I was climbing back to the sources of life; that I was accomplishing a voyage into the depths of my humanity.

Mjt says

The thing about memoirs is that they are like journal entries. There isn't really a story with a progressing plot. It took me a while to finish because I wasn't motivated to read someone's thoughts about the landscape. She also doesn't really explain a lot about the culture that is already familiar to her but isn't to a westerner. She uses (what I'm assuming is) Arabic terminology to describe certain places or people and never gives a translation or explanation as to what it means or what it may liken to in western terms. Simultaneously, she writes from an outsider standpoint, so some of the things she says about the varying cultures coexisting, the slaves, the treatment of the women, are purely objective and, from a more socially aware point of view, ignorant and harmful. She does, however, eloquently paint vivid pictures of the days she spent wandering through these towns and the people she met there. It was difficult to get motivated to start reading, but once I started I couldn't stop. She doesn't often offer her reflections on the state of things or her feelings about her experiences, but when she does it's captivating. It reminds me what's at the heart of travel. If you love poetry, read this!

BrokenTune says

Combined review of both *In the Shadow of Islam* and *The Oblivion Seekers*.

In the Shadow of Islam & *The Oblivion Seekers* are both collections of writing by another lady travel writer that I have encountered - Isabelle Eberhard.

Never heard of her? I had not either, but a quick look at her biography ensures that I will look at a more in-depth biography about her.

"ISABELLE EBERHARDT (1877–1904) was born in Geneva, the illegitimate daughter of a former Russian Orthodox priest and a part-Russian, part-German aristocratic mother. Her father was an anarchist and nihilist who was to convert to Islam, and his daughter's life was to take similar dramatic turns before her tragically early death at the age of twenty-seven. Increasingly isolated from her family and her inheritance, she was plagued by emotional and financial problems, but she had a fierce will. From an early age she dressed as a man for the greater freedom this allowed, and she developed a literary talent and a gift for languages, including Arabic. Like her father Eberhardt became drawn to Islam. She converted while in Algeria with her mother. After her mother's death she cut all ties with her family, called herself Si Mahmoud Essadi and travelled throughout North Africa. She became involved with Qadiriyya Sufi order, married an Algerian soldier, worked as a war reporter, helped the poor and needy and fought against the injustices of French colonial rule. She was also the victim of an assassination attempt but later successfully pleaded for the life of the man who attacked her. She openly rejected conventional European morality of the time, preferring to choose her own path, and drank alcohol, smoked marijuana and had numerous affairs. She died in a flash flood in Aïn Séfra, Algeria, in 1904."

Eberhardt, Isabelle. In The Shadow of Islam (Modern Classics) (Kindle Locations 25-32). Peter Owen

Publishers. Kindle Edition.

In both collections, *In the Shadow of Islam & The Oblivion Seekers*, Eberhardt describes life in northern Africa, Algeria to be precise, from the point of someone actually living with the people at around 1900. She doesn't cling to any European perspectives she may hold and gives a voice to the people she encounters, their beliefs, their customs, their reasoning. She describes tribal rivalries, domestic issues, love, slavery, hardship, wealth - all of which seems to have its place in her settings. The stories are not connected and aren't really stories either. Rather they are vignettes of observations or conversations mixed with stories.

Because Eberhardt does not give the account from the perspective of a European traveller, but of someone who is searching for her own self, she does not judge. or at least, she pretends not to judge.

The stories truly are interesting. However, her writing is - lyrical as it is - does at times come across as too stylised to be a true account of her observations. Some poetic licence was no doubt at play.

When looking at both collections separately, *In the Shadow of Islam* is a better book. It contains one or two stories that are also in *The Oblivion Seekers* but I found the translation of the stories in *In the Shadow of Islam* to have a much better flow.

In a way this is surprising because *The Oblivion Seekers* has gathered more praise on account of the translation by Paul Bowles, which in my opinion is not warranted. I found Bowles translation hard to read.

In the Shadow of Islam - 3.5*

The Oblivion Seekers - 2.5*

Amanda says

Intrigued by the legend of a young woman in the late 1800s who learned Arabic, converts to Islam, and explores Morocco and Algeria - always dressed as a man in order to have more access and freedom in her explorations - I picked up this book. I think the woman is more interesting than her book, which nevertheless does offer her journal notes, observations and thoughts. An interesting enough read, fueled and made a lot more so by my own imagination...

Neva Akben says

"Hayatın içinde tek başına yol alanlar nasıl da görkemlidirler. Mutsuz görünüyor olabilirler fakat onlar güçlü ve kutsaldır. Tek başına ilerleyen varlıklar... Diğerleri yalnızca yarım ruhlardır."
