



The Dead Ladies Project: Exiles, Expats, and Ex-Countries

Jessa Crispin

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When Jessa Crispin was thirty, she burned her settled Chicago life to the ground and took off for Berlin with a pair of suitcases and no plan beyond leaving. Half a decade later, she's still on the road, in search not so much of a home as of understanding, a way of being in the world that demands neither constant struggle nor complete surrender.

The Dead Ladies Project is an account of that journey—but it's also much, much more. Fascinated by exile, Crispin travels an itinerary of key locations in its literary map, of places that have drawn writers who needed to break free from their origins and start afresh. As she reflects on William James struggling through despair in Berlin, Nora Barnacle dependant on and dependable for James Joyce in Trieste, Maud Gonne fomenting revolution and fostering myth in Dublin, or Igor Stravinsky starting over from nothing in Switzerland, Crispin interweaves biography, incisive literary analysis, and personal experience into a rich meditation on the complicated interactions of place, personality, and society that can make escape and reinvention such an attractive, even intoxicating proposition.

Personal and profane, funny and fervent, *The Dead Ladies Project* ranges from the nineteenth century to the present, from historical figures to brand-new hangovers, in search, ultimately, of an answer to a bedrock question: How does a person decide how to live their life?

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