



The Abominable Mr. Seabrook

Joe Ollmann

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The daring and destructive life of the man who popularized the word “zombie”

In the early twentieth century, travel writing represented the desire for the expanding bourgeoisie to experience the exotic cultures of the world past their immediate surroundings. Journalist William Buehler Seabrook was emblematic of this trend?participating in voodoo ceremonies, riding camels cross the Sahara desert, communing with cannibals and most notably, popularizing the term “zombie” in the West. A string of his bestselling books show an engaged, sympathetic gentleman hoping to share these strange, hidden delights with the rest of the world. He was willing to go deeper than any outsider had before. But, of course, there was a dark side. Seabrook was a barely functioning alcoholic who was deeply obsessed with bondage and the so-called mystical properties of pain and degradation. His life was a series of traveling highs and drunken lows; climbing on and falling off the wagon again and again. What led the popular and vivid writer to such a sad state?

Cartoonist Joe Ollmann spent seven years researching Seabrook’s life, interviewing surviving family and accessing long neglected archives, in order to piece together the peripatetic life of a forgotten American writer. Often weaving in Seabrook’s own words and those of his biographers, Ollmann’s *The Abominable Mr. Seabrook* posits Seabrook the believer versus Seabrook the exploiter, and leaves the reader to consider where one ends and the other begins.

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