



The Book of Absinthe: A Cultural History

Phil Baker

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La Fee Verte (or "The Green Fairy") has intoxicated artists, poets, and writers ever since the late eighteenth century. Stories abound of absinthe's druglike sensations of mood lift and inspiration due to the presence of wormwood, its infamous "special" ingredient, which ultimately leads to delirium, homicidal mania, and death. Opening with the sensational 1905 Absinthe Murders, Phil Baker offers a cultural history of absinthe, from its modest origins as an herbal tonic through its luxuriantly morbid heyday in the late nineteenth century. Chronicling a fascinatingly lurid cast of historical characters who often died young, the absinthe scrapbook includes Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Machen, August Strindberg, Alfred Jarry, Vincent van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Alphonse Allais, Ernest Hemingway, and Pablo Picasso. Along with discussing the rituals and modus operandi of absinthe drinking, Baker reveals the recently discovered pharmacology of how real absinthe actually works on the nervous system, and he tests the various real and fake absinthe products that are available overseas. The Book of Absinthe is a witty, erudite primer to the world's most notorious drink.

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