

Collecting Robert M.

by Mathilde Roza & Jack Mearns

When expatriate writer Robert M. Coates' first novel, the highly experimental *The Eater of Darkness*, was published in the United States in 1929, its dust jacket copy read: "Since Ernest Hemingway no writer has been as much spoken of by the literary cognoscenti as Robert Coates....

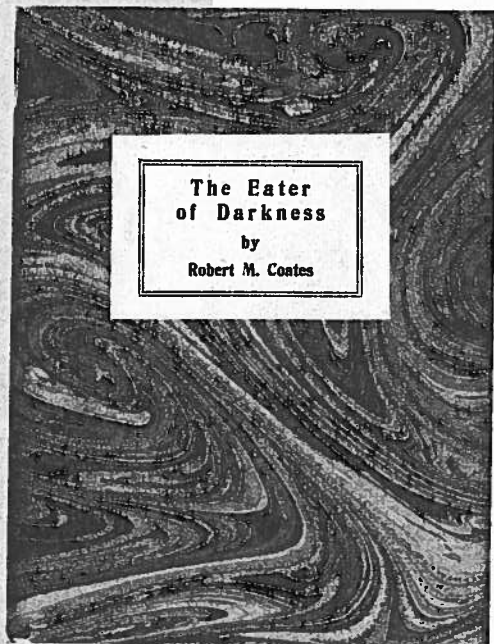
No other American writer of his generation has passed so thoroughly into legend." *New Yorker* staffer Brendan Gill reported that in the late 1920s Coates "gave the impression that he was going to be as famous as Hemingway became." In 1933, when Coates' second novel, the equally experimental *Yesterday's Burdens*, was published, *Time Magazine*, not typically a bastion of the avant-garde, wrote glowingly of the novel as a "tour de force," and almost mythically of its author.

Coates also wrote two popular best-sellers, 1930's *The Outlaw Years*, a gripping history of the bandits of the Natchez Trace trail, and 1948's *Wisteria Cottage*, a novel of obsessive love that leads to murder. After joining *The New Yorker* shortly after its 1925 inception, Coates became one of its most prolific

contributors, penning more than 100 short stories and serving as its art critic. In recognition of his literary achievements, Coates was elected to the prestigious National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1958. Yet, for someone so well-known and well-regarded in his time, Coates is nearly forgotten today.

ROBERT MYRON COATES was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1897. His mother was an early feminist. His father was a machinist, tool maker and part-time inventor who boxed in his free time. Coates' father also was possessed of a powerful wanderlust that repeatedly led him to give up thriving businesses and uproot his family. Even during his youngest years in New Haven, Coates moved five times. When he was 7, however, the family exchanged the East Coast for Cripple Creek, in the mountains of Colorado. After three years of gold-mining, Coates' father took his wife and only son on an unpredictable tour of the United States. Before he turned 18, Coates had moved at least 10 times, living in cities as far-flung as Cincinnati, Seattle, Portland, Springfield, Massachusetts and New York City. It was not until his high school days in Rochester, New York that Coates seems to have forged any real sense of home. This peripatetic lifestyle, in which he constantly found himself the "new boy," had lifelong effects on him. Coates' writing is full of alienation, a stifled longing for contact, and characters who are more observers than participants in their own lives.

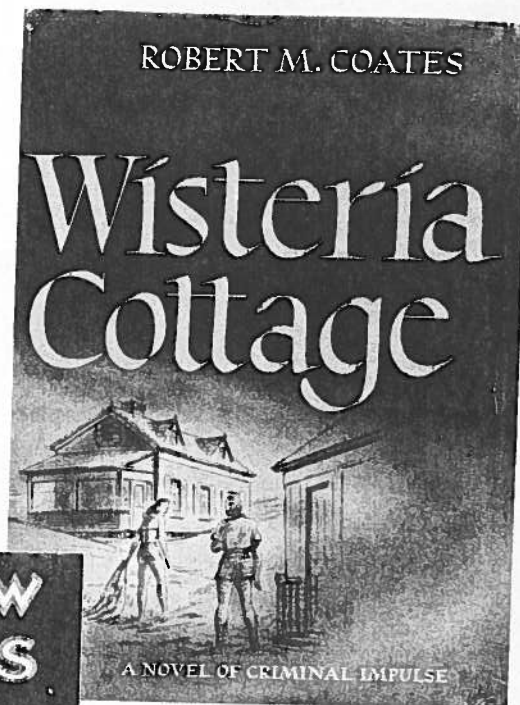
Late in life, Coates would recall that there was never a time that he did not want to be a



Coates

writer. At Rochester's West High, Coates' aspirations were realized. He was editor-in-chief of the school's literary magazine, contributing stories, editorials and poems. After graduation from high school in 1915, Coates attended Yale University. There, he was on the staff of the *Yale Literary Magazine* along with Stephen Vincent Benét and Thornton Wilder. Coates rejected what he saw as many of his fellow writers' shallow artiness, where pretty word-play was valued more highly than substance. He followed a realist's esthetic, which induced him to explore working-class life and popular culture, elements that would shape his later work. It was also at Yale that Coates was influenced by psychologist and philosopher William James' ideas on the multiplicity of identity and the importance of man's primal instincts. At this point, however, Coates' writing was still Victorian in style. He had not yet embraced the modernism that would soon infuse his work.

Coates' Yale studies were interrupted by a stint in naval aviation during World War One. He attended ground school at M.I.T., followed by flight training—in biplane seaplanes—on Long Island. In one particularly dramatic incident Coates later wrote about both fictionally and in memoir, he carelessly put his plane into a stall. The plane hurtled toward the water in a tailspin, and Coates was saved from death only by the cool



head of his instructor, who was in the rear cockpit. The war ended before Coates completed his training, and he never received his wings. Coates returned to Yale and graduated with his class in 1919.

Following his graduation, Coates worked in the burgeoning field of advertising, as so many of his generation of writers did. But advertising work in New York did not satisfy his literary ambitions. So, after less than two years in corporate America, Coates asked his father to pay his transit to Europe so he

could join the swelling ranks of American expatriates in Paris. But having staked his son's four years at Yale, Coates' father refused him the money. In response, the younger Coates quit his job and retreated to a shack in Woodstock, New York, where he embarked on the simple, hermetic life of an artist. Coates' unpublished writings from this time display a shift, pointing to the major experimentation that lay ahead. Later, Coates recounted this period in his memoir *The View from Here*. In a watershed incident, Coates' father visited him and was so appalled by the squalor of his circumstances that he finally agreed to finance his son's expatriation.

Coates arrived in Paris in the winter of 1921, and soon found himself in the heart of the

Robert M. Coates

bohemian American quarter. He immersed himself in European literary modernism, absorbing the influence of Gertrude Stein, in particular, as well as avant-gardist movements like expressionism, futurism and Dadaism. But he fused these influences into a style uniquely his own. Coates also befriended Ernest Hemingway, Malcolm Cowley, Matthew Josephson and Ford Maddox Ford. He published pieces in the significant little magazines of the day: *Gargoyle*, *Broom*, *Secession* and, later, *transition*.

Coates was a core member of the literary crowd of the Lost Generation, but he was rarely in its forefront. He boxed and played tennis with Hemingway; in fact, it was Coates who introduced Hemingway to Gertrude Stein. Coates' connection with Stein was particularly close. She was an early promoter of Coates' work, saying "he was the one young man who[se work] had an individual rhythm, [whose] words made a sound to the eyes."

Coates' physical appearance also stood out in Montparnasse. He was a tall and imposing presence. Janet Flanner, who later became *The New Yorker's* Paris correspondent, remarked that with his sky-blue eyes, pale skin and bright red hair, "he looked like a flag."

As exciting as expatriate life was in Paris, Coates felt discomfort with the café-hopping ways of many of the Americans. He soon left Montparnasse to devote himself to serious writing. His work became more experimental and inward-turning as he strove to capture the subjective, sensory nature of reality.

Coates' first novel, *The Eater of Darkness*, has been described as a "hilariously misconstructed hurricane of happenstance, adventure and parody." It tells the tale of Charles Dograr, who temporarily leaves Paris for New York. There he befriends a mad scientist, Dr. Picrolas, who has invented a fantastic X-ray weapon that can kill victims soundlessly and from a great distance. Combining suspense with comedy, Coates at one point describes the sequence of people and objects the

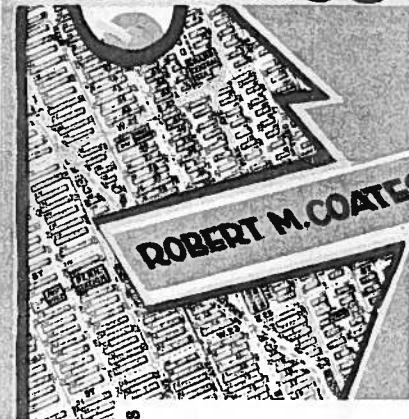
ray passes through before finding its target, including literary theorist Kenneth Burke and "the hand of the reader." At another point, Coates halts the narrative to print an ad for a burlesque house offering "high class vaudeville." Throughout the novel he draws heavily on American popular culture, including vaudeville, advertising and silent movies.

The book is also notable for Coates' own schematic renderings of the x-ray weapon. In its extensive use of prankish footnotes and general playfulness, the novel foreshadows the works of postmodernist writers like Thomas Pynchon and John Barth, as well as contemporary writers like David Foster Wallace.

The Eater of Darkness was first published in Paris in 1926 by Robert McAlmon's Contact Editions, which had already established itself as a "showcase for the talents of the expatriates," including Hemingway, Stein and William Carlos Williams. When Coates delivered the book to him, McAlmon recalled, it was like an illuminated manuscript, overflowing with brightly colored marginalia that were impossible to reproduce. McAlmon sent Coates home with orders to create a version that could be typeset. Difficult to find in collectable condition, the Contact edition of *The Eater of Darkness* is a fragile book. It was published in marbled wrappers, with paper labels on the spine and cover. The paper-covered spine often is brittle, sunned and chipped, and the book tends to split along the signatures.

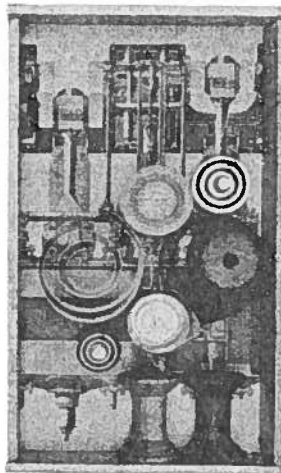
In late 1926, Coates returned to New York, where he wrote feature articles for *The New York Times Magazine* while still submitting experimental fiction to European journals. Always greatly inspired by the city of New York, he also sent material to the fledgling *New Yorker*. The magazine rejected his work, but did invite him to their offices. There, Coates met James Thurber, who would be a close friend through the 1930s. Thurber recalled that Coates' "great, baggy, flapping clothes, his barge-like figure, his gentle blue eyes and his red hair impinge unforgettably on the most jaded retinas." This was the start of Coates'

THE EATER OF DARKNESS



The Eater of Darkness

!?



by Robert M. Coates

\$1.15
\$1.25
C.M.

lifelong connection to *The New Yorker*. He was their book reviewer during the first years of the 1930s, and later served as art critic for more than 30 years. Beyond his many short stories, he also contributed profiles, casuals and unsigned pieces to many of their departments, including "Talk of the Town." In this way, Coates made a significant contribution to shaping the magazine's distinctive voice of urban sophistication. In fact, *New Yorker* and literary historian Ben Yagoda suggests that no other writer contributed as many words to the magazine as Coates.

Coates also soon began an important relationship with the New York publishing house of Macaulay. In the mid-1920s, Macaulay printed romances and sensational popular fiction. However, toward the end of the decade, its editorial offices became crowded with the boisterous antics of young men returning to New York from the Left Bank. These included Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley and Isidor Schneider. Under the leadership of its editor-in-chief, legendary African-American writer Wallace Thurman, Macaulay's list underwent a dramatic shift to translations of French surrealists and novels by the American avant-garde. Coates established his connection with Macaulay through their publication of his translation of André de Hevesy's biography of Christopher Columbus, *The Discoverer*, in 1928. A year later, he contributed a preface to Slater Brown's translation of André Salmon's *The Black Venus*.

In 1929, Macaulay issued the first hardbound edition of Coates' *The Eater of Darkness*. Issued in bright canary-yellow cloth with gilt lettering on the spine, its front board presents a striking design, as if the book's eye were gazing out at the reader: a small black square pupil is surrounded by an iris of

transition stories

Kay Boyle
 Franz Kafka
 James Joyce
 Elliot Paul
 Eugene Jolas
 Robert Sage
 Peter Neagoe
 Robert Desnos
 Murray Godwin
 Leigh Hoffman
 Ralph Manheim
 Gottfried Benn
 Vladimir Lidin
 Gertrude Stein
 Kurt Schwitters
 Robert M. Coates
 Leon-Paul Fargue
 Konstantin Fedin
 Matthew Josephson
 Philippe Soupault
 Emily Holmes Coleman
 William Closson Emory
 Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes

the title in gilt. The very scarce dust jacket presents, in lurid colors, the remarkable image of New York City's map transformed into a ravenous, wide-eyed monster. The jacket is also noteworthy for its rear panel, which prints a brief profile of Coates by Malcolm Cowley, in which he describes *Eater* as the "first purely Dada novel to be published in English." Today, *The Eater of Darkness* is commonly referred to as "the first surrealist novel in English." An unknown number of copies were sold with a red wraparound band printing praise from Ford Madox Ford. *Eater* was reissued in paperback by Capricorn in

1959, with an introduction by the author.

Also in 1929, the important anthology *transition stories* was published, in which Coates appeared alongside Stein, Franz Kafka, James Joyce and others. Its pictorial boards present a striking design of a stylized factory personified. *transition stories* also was issued in a boxed limited edition of 100 copies on large paper.

THE OUTLAW YEARS



contrast is, in the words of one bookseller, "as common as mud." This edition's brown cloth spine lists no dates, and the front board is dominated by a map that reprints a section of the map on the

For his next book, following a suggestion from Cowley, Coates spent several years researching the bloodthirsty land pirates of the Natchez Trace—"the most vicious and heartless rogues that ever went too long unchanged"—who preyed on travelers through the southern territories of the United States in the years after the turn of the Nineteenth century. Coates graphically evoked the brutality of these killers, while also bringing to life the multitude of characters found on the American frontier. *The Outlaw Years* was published by Macaulay in 1930 and was also the featured selection of the Literary Guild book club for August of that year. The Macaulay edition in yellowish orange cloth, with its spine listing in bright orange the years covered by the book, is uncommon, and scarce in dust jacket. The Literary Guild edition in

Robert M. Coates

pictorial end papers. Occasionally, copies of the Literary Guild edition may be found with the Guild's *Wings* magazine, which prints several interesting essays by and about Coates.

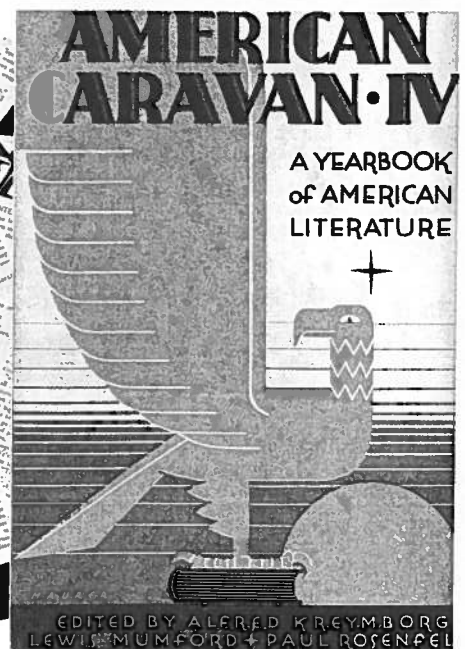
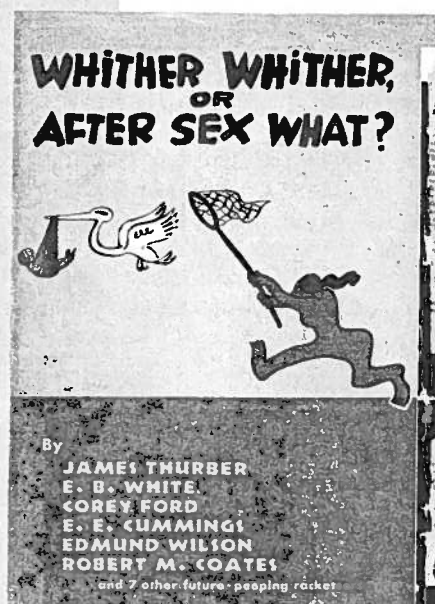
The jacket for the Macaulay edition bears a striking design by Wenck of a man about to be hanged, while the Guild edition sports an abstract jacket. There are at least four states of the Macaulay jacket. In the first state, the title appears in white on the spine within a brown box. On the front panel, the man's head and the rope are printed in brown, and the title is outlined in brown. The rear panel of the jacket presents synopses of "Outstanding Figures in The Outlaw Years." A second state has the identical front panel, but the rear panel prints an extended excerpt from the book and a plug from Carl Van Doren. In both states, "Macaulay" appears in large print across the base of the spine.

In 1932, the book was issued in a remainder binding in light grayish brown cloth, with "Gold Label Books" printed at the base of the spine. Two different remainder jackets exist. One is similar to the second state jacket, except that there is no brown printing, and "Macaulay" appears in small print beneath a seal at the base of the spine. The last state is similar to the second state, except that the base of its spine reads "Gold Label Books" and its rear panel presents a list of the publisher's titles. *The Outlaw Years* has been reprinted several times in paperback. One notable paperback edition, released during World War Two, was as an Armed Services Edition (T-15), a collectable in its own right.

During the early 1930s, three other important anthologies boasted Coates contributions. Macaulay's 1930 *Whither, Whither, or After Sex What?* represented a who's who of young New York intelligentsia including E.E. Cummings, Edmund Wilson, James Thurber, Kenneth Burke and the Macaulay circle. The anthology is presented in the form of a satirical symposium on modern American culture, with each contributor taking on a major issue of the day. The book was illustrated by the artist William Gropper. *Whither* was later remaindered by Gold Label Books. *The New Yorker Scrapbook* (1931) reprinted one of Coates' "The Dada City" pieces, which had pushed the boundaries of *New Yorker* fiction, along with pieces by Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. This anthology is extremely rare in dust jacket. Finally, 1931 also saw publication of Macaulay's *American Caravan IV*, which reprinted two Coates pieces, in addition to work by William Faulkner and W.C. Williams. *American Caravan IV* appeared in a limited edition of 250 copies in glassine wrapper, signed by two of its three editors. The trade edition was later remaindered by Gold Label.

Using his income from *The Outlaw Years*, Coates built a house in Gaylordsville, Connecticut, where his neighbors were Cowley, Josephson and modernist painter Peter Blume. From 1930 to 1933, Coates was in charge of book reviews for *The New Yorker*. This profession and his new exurban home would figure prominently in his next novel.

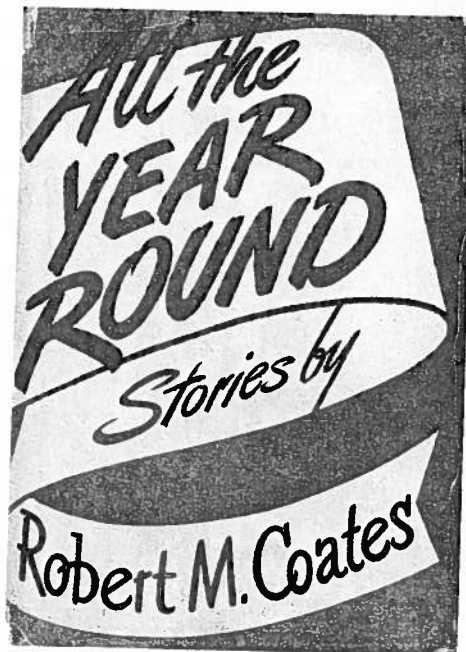
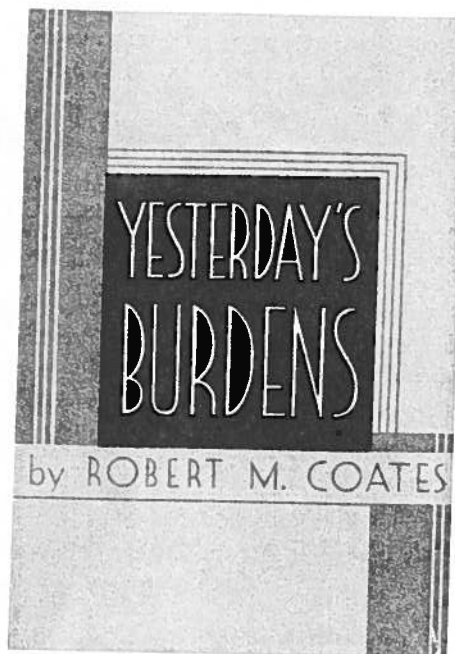
Coates worked on his second novel, *Yesterday's Burdens*, for several years. It was only after he had given up his job as book reviewer that he was



finally able to finish it. One chapter of the novel had appeared in *American Caravan*, while three others had been published earlier in *The New Yorker* under the title "The Dada City." Indeed, the Dada influence continued to be visible in Coates' literary style. Coates composed the book like a collage, employing an experimental writing style that incorporated billboards, advertising slogans and traffic signs to make immediate and vivid the perceptions and experiences of the characters. In *Yesterday's Burdens*, Coates' "Dada" spirit brings to life the cacophonous, visually chaotic and mentally demanding life of New York City.

The novel contains a large autobiographical dimension, and engages in intricate experiments with "doubles." Thus we have a narrator (who is called Coates) recounting the events in the life of one of his literary characters (called Henderson), who has Coates' own date of birth, profession, circle of friends and red hair. In a final surreal gesture, the book has three alternate endings. Set in the first years of the Great Depression, before it became clear the economy would not bounce back, *Yesterday's Burdens* evokes that time's mood of melancholy, uncertainty and apprehension.

Before *Yesterday's Burdens* was issued by Macaulay in December 1933, the publisher entreated Coates to change the title of the book, whose pessimistic tone they feared would repel potential readers. Coates adamantly refused. The novel appeared in purple cloth, with navy blue lettering on the spine and front cover. The jacket, printed in light and dark blue and copper, has a pleasing, subdued art deco design. At least two alternate bindings exist: royal blue cloth printed in orange, and dark green cloth printed in red. In 1975, *Yesterday's Burdens* was reissued in the Lost American Fiction series with an excellent



New Yorker. Coates had no formal training in art, and saw himself as an intermediary between the work of art and the public. He is generally credited with coining the term "abstract expressionism," which he used in 1946 to describe the new American art movement that was developing. Coates continued to write "The Art Galleries" column for *The New Yorker* until 1967, when Harold Rosenberg took over his position.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Coates began contributing more and more short stories to *The New Yorker*, building a reputation for himself as a "New Yorker writer." Coates' first collection of short stories, *All the Year Round*, appeared in 1943. The collection was dedicated to *New Yorker* fiction editor Gus Loblano, and all but seven of its 28 stories had first appeared in that magazine. Consequently, critical reception focused on the controversial issue of the "New Yorker type of fiction," and whether or not such a formulaic genre actually existed. However, critics generally agreed with the *New York Times*' Weldon Kees, who said there was "more variety to be found in [Coates' collection] than in most of such one-man shows."

Certainly, in terms of subject matter, Coates' grim and violent stories helped stretch the boundaries of what *The New Yorker's* editors deemed allowable. The most famous of these stories, "The

afterword by Malcolm Cowley. A hardcover edition was printed by Southern Illinois University Press and a paperback edition by Popular Library.

Coates' third novel did not appear until 1946. In the intervening 13 years, Coates tried unsuccessfully to write a fact-oriented book about a polar expedition and another novel about New York, one even more intricate than *Yesterday's Burdens* had been. Neither project worked. Actually, Coates had little opportunity to write longer fiction. From 1937 onwards, much of his time went into his new job as art critic for *The*

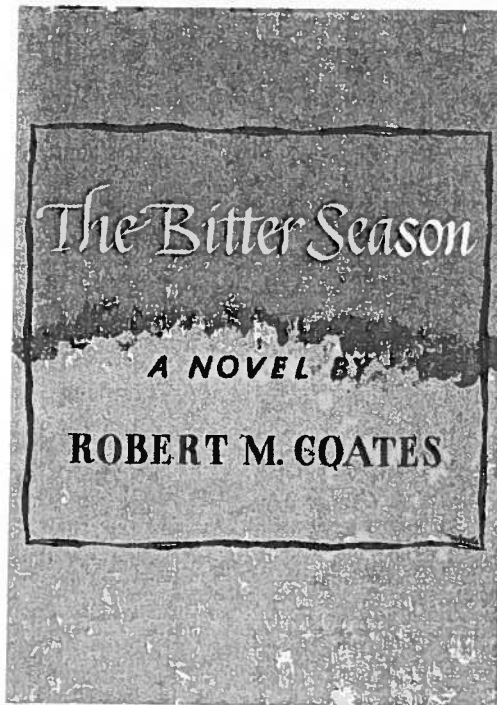
Robert M. Coates

Fury"—which relates the violent death of a pedophile—and "The Net"—a story of involuntary murder—were anthologized numerous times. Coates' short stories, set either in New York City or the countryside, are written in a seemingly effortless but terribly precise and painstaking style. They powerfully capture feelings of dislocation, alienation, anger, frustration and loneliness, and frequently include an element of violence.

All the Year Round began Coates' relationship with one of the premier publishing houses of the day, Harcourt, Brace. Although it was a wartime book, *All the Year Round* is a sturdy volume printed on high quality paper. It is bound in grayish blue cloth, with a jacket printed in gray and red. The first edition must say "first edition" on the copyright page. A second printing is denoted on the copyright page with "[b · 9 · 43]."

Also in 1943, Coates began working on what became his third novel, *The Bitter Season*. As he had in his previous two novels, Coates zoomed in on a particular moment in American history. Having portrayed his perspective on the 1920s in *The Eater of Darkness* and the early 1930s in *Yesterday's Burdens*, Coates now provided a portrait of New York during the five months that preceded the Allied Forces' invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944. His vision of New York on the home front is probing and deeply troubling. Conveyed through so-called "Interludes," Coates' narrative is especially powerful when he portrays instances of anti-Semitism, racism and latent fascism. The experimental "Interludes" are injected into the equally probing depiction of a civilian too old to engage actively in battle, but not too old to divorce his wife and fall in love with a Dutch refugee. The resulting feeling is one of helpless inconsequentiality, loneliness and worry. The novel slowly adopts a more hopeful mood when the Allies finally invade and the narrator "wins" his love by evicting from her apartment a man who had been blackmailing and harassing her. Like *Yesterday's Burdens*, *The Bitter Season* was inspired by autobiographical fact: like the protagonist of the novel, Coates was in the middle of a painful divorce from his wife, Elsa Kirpal. In June 1945, Coates married writer Astrid Peters.

The Bitter Season was considered "imperfect" by the critics, but it was generally agreed that, as *The New York Times Book Review* wrote, the novel was "lofty in conception, expert in design and altogether worthy of profound respect." Harcourt issued the book in tan cloth, with red lettering on the spine. Published in 1946, the book's cheap wartime paper today is typically found browned. The jacket is printed in gray and red. Following the success of Coates' subsequent novel, in 1949 Victor Gollancz published a United Kingdom edition of *The Bitter Season* in green cloth stamped in red. Its cream-colored jacket is printed in green. Coates' U.K. editions tend to be scarcer than their U.S. counterparts.



The Bitter Season was Coates' last full-fledged experimental work. The two novels that he produced next were psychological thrillers, involving the violent deaths of several women at the hands of psychopathological males. Both novels are set in New York. The first of these, *Wisteria Cottage*, is based on an actual murder case and tells the horrific story of Richard Baurie, a former psychiatric patient. Having lost his own home, the outwardly charming Baurie successfully infiltrates the home of Florence Hackett and her two daughters. He persuades the family to rent an isolated summer cottage on Long Island. There, consumed with jealousy and increasingly bewildered and disgusted by what he perceives as the

destruction of female innocence and decency, Baurie finally slaughters Florence, one of her daughters and a hapless male visitor. The terrifyingly convincing novel was bombarded with praise when it came out, and came close to being a best-seller.

Parts of *Wisteria Cottage* were serialized in *Harp-er's Bazaar*. It was published in its entirety in September 1948 by Harcourt, Brace in gray cloth with blue lettering on the spine. Its pictorial jacket depicts the beach cottage where the novel's mayhem transpires. The copyright page must read "first edition," as there was at least one later printing, designated by a letter and date enclosed in brackets. Although there had been a U.K. edition of Coates' translation of *The Discoverer*, this book was the first of Coates' own work to be published in the U.K. Victor Gollancz issued it in 1949 in orange

cloth, with a light yellow jacket. Some copies were sold with an orange wrap-around band quoting critical praise from New York papers.

Wisteria Cottage has been reprinted in paperback several times: in 1950 as a Dell mapback (371), in 1955 by Lion Library as *The Night Before Dying* (LL45), in 1962 by Popular Library (SP358), and in 1985 by Arbor House, in their Library of Contemporary Americana, with a new introduction by Brendan Gill. In 1953, Coates granted a movie option for *Wisteria Cottage* to United Artists. When it was released in 1958, the film boasted two directors (Robert Gurney and Irving Lerner)—never a good sign. Entitled *Edge of Fury*, it garnered a poor reception. It is very difficult to find a copy of this film.

Around 1950, Coates moved to Old Chatham, New York, where he settled down with his second wife, Astrid Peters, and her daughter, Ingrid. There, Coates started on his second crime novel, *The Farther Shore*. Coates' last novel tells the story of a Hungarian immigrant who falls in love with a young waitress in a small New York restaurant significantly named "The Ideal." Indeed, it is the man's abstract idealization of womanhood that causes him to go after her, marry her (in a surrogate way, for it turns out she is already married and has two children) and, finally, murder her in a last delusional attempt to protect from the evil of the city what he believes to be her innate innocence.

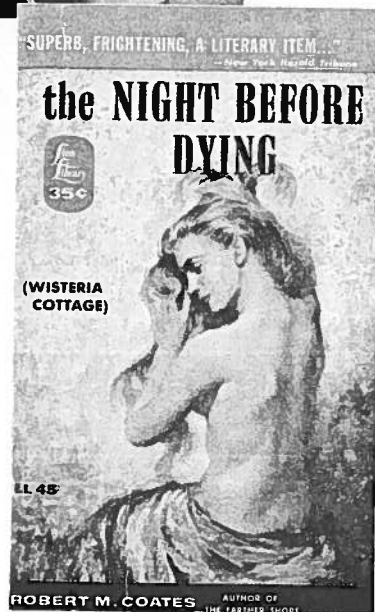
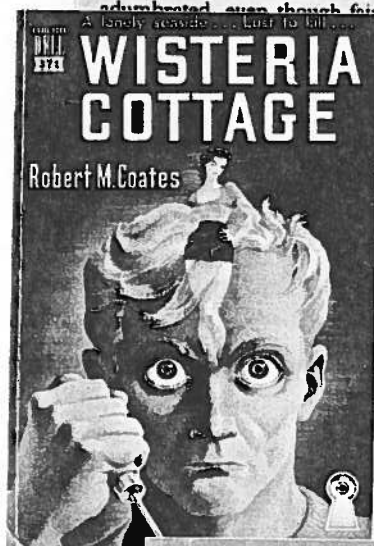
More ambitious than *Wisteria Cottage*, *The Farther Shore* is a study of character. To many critics, however, Coates' emphasis on the frequently dull mind of his "ordinary" working-class protagonist made for rather uninteresting and heavy-handed writing. *The Farther Shore* was published by Harcourt, Brace in 1955 in black paper-covered

WISTERIA COTTAGE

a novel by
ROBERT M. COATES

THE OPENING SENTENCE:

"From the Psychiatrist's Report: 'It is usually difficult to determine the exact moment when a criminal intention first enters the subject's brain. But in the case of Richard Baurie it apparently was at least adumbrated even though faintly, the first



boards with silver lettering on the spine. That same year, it was issued in the U.K. by Gollancz as *The Darkness of the Day*. It was also reprinted in paperback in 1955 by the Popular Library as *The Night is So Dark* (G173).

In 1957, Coates' second collection of short stories, *The Hour after Westerly*, was published. It contained 15 pieces, all of which had first appeared in *The New Yorker* from 1946 on, and was again dedicated to fiction editor Lobrano. In this volume, Coates excels at transforming seemingly average situations into unusual ones, employing the absurd (e.g., "The Man Who Vanished"), the unexpected (e.g., "In a Foreign

City" and "The Law") or the supernatural (e.g., "The Hour after Westerly"). Many combine the conventions of the essay with those of the short story in a fashion that parallels the fact-fiction writing of *New Yorker* journalists Joe Liebling and Joseph Mitchell. Coates, however, reserved the right to be exploratory in a whimsical or semi-metaphysical manner—often to very enjoyable effect. The frequently anthologized "The Law," which describes the collapse of the law of

averages, is a prime example of the humor Coates employed. *The Hour after Westerly* was published by Harcourt, Brace in bright orange cloth stamped in silver. This collection appeared in the U.K. as *Accident at the Inn*. Published by Gollancz in 1957 in red cloth stamped in gilt, it is Coates' scarcest U.K. book.

Coates had intended to write a third murder novel, but turned to writing autobiographical sketches and anecdotes instead. Many of these were printed in *The New Yorker* before being collected in his book of memoirs, *The View from Here*. *View* was Coates' final Harcourt book; it came out in

A Robert M. Coates Checklist

ROBERT M. COATES published novels, collections of short stories, travel narratives, and a memoir. He also contributed to significant and collectible anthologies of Lost Generation writers.

The Eater of Darkness

Paris: Contact Editions, 1926
No statement of printing
First edition, in wraps, \$800-\$1,000

NY: Macaulay, 1929
No statement of printing
First U.S. edition, \$400-\$500

An unknown number of the Macaulay edition were sold with a red wrap-around band quoting Ford Madox Ford.

also notable:

NY: Capricorn, 1959
Includes a new introduction by Coates.

transition stories

Eugene Jolas & Robert Sage, Editors
NY: Walter V. McKee, 1929
No statement of printing
Limited edition, 1/100 numbered copies in slipcase, \$200-\$300
First trade edition, in wraps, \$100-\$200

The Outlaw Years

The History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace
NY: Macaulay, 1930
No statement of printing
First edition, \$200-\$300

also notable:

NY: Literary Guild, 1930
NY: Gold Label Books, [1932]
[n.p.]: Editions for the Armed Services, [n.d.]
NY: Pennant Books, 1953

Whither, Whither, or After Sex, What?

Walter S. Hankel, Editor
NY: Macaulay, 1930
No statement of printing
First edition, \$100-\$200

THE NEW YORKER Scrapbook

NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931
States "FIRST EDITION" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$300-\$400

American Caravan, IV

Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford & Paul Rosenfeld, Editors
NY: Macaulay, 1931
No statement of printing
First limited edition, 1/250 signed copies, \$100-\$200
First trade edition, \$40-\$60

Yesterday's Burdens

NY: Macaulay, 1933
No statement of printing
First edition, \$100-\$200

also notable:

Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL:
Southern Illinois University Press, 1975
Includes a new afterword by Malcolm Cowley.

All the Year Round

A Book of Stories
NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$30-\$50

The Bitter Season

NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$30-\$50

L: Victor Gollancz, 1949
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$20-\$30

Wisteria Cottage

NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1948
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$100-\$200

L: Victor Gollancz, 1949
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$50-\$75

An unknown number of the Gollancz edition were sold with a orange wrap-around band quoting critical praise.

also notable:

NY: Dell, 1950, mapback
as *The Night Before Dying*
NY: Lion Library, 1955
NY: Popular Library, 1962. Includes a new introduction by Brendan Gill.

The farther Shore

NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1955
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$40-\$60

as *The Darkness of the Day*
L: Victor Gollancz, 1955
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$20-\$40

also notable:

as *The Night is So Dark*
NY: Popular Library, 1955

The Flour After Westerly

NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1957
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$100-\$200

as *Accident at the Inn*
L: Victor Gollancz, 1957
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$50-\$100

The View from Here

Informal Recollections of Mostly Happy Yesterdays
NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960
States "first edition" on the copyright page.
First edition, \$60-\$80

Beyond the Alps

A Summer in the Italian Hill Towns
NY: William Sloane, 1961
No statement of printing
First edition, \$40-\$60

L: Victor Gollancz, 1962
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$20-\$40

The Man Just Ahead of You

NY: William Sloane, 1964
No statement of printing
First edition, \$40-\$60

L: Victor Gollancz, 1965
No statement of printing
First U.K. edition, \$20-\$40

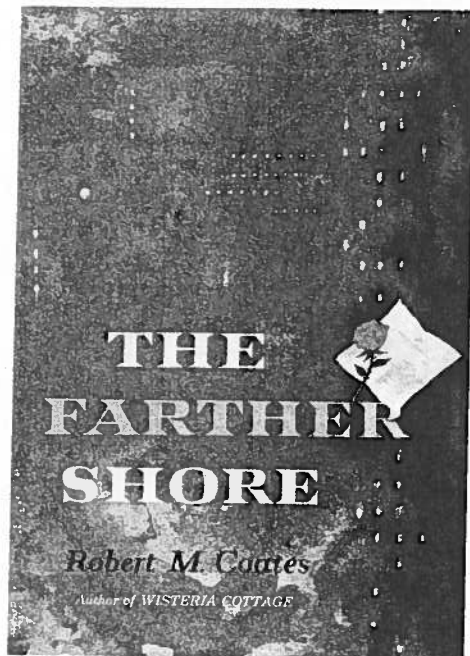
South of Rome

A Spring and Summer in Southern Italy and Sicily
NY: William Morrow, 1965
No statement of printing
First edition, \$25-\$50

1960 in beige cloth with gilt lettering on the spine. There was no U.K. edition. Subtitled *Informal Recollections of Mostly Happy Yesterdays*, *View* steered clear of the recesses of a psyche whose creations were obsessed with darkness and murder. There are, however, illuminating anecdotes about the author's youth. And, though the Paris pieces offer few insights into his famous contemporaries, they do depict amusing aspects of Coates' expatriation, including a disastrous attempt to walk from Paris to Rome.

As a final project, Coates turned to travel writing. Based on his art-oriented excursions in Italy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he wrote two travel volumes. *Beyond the Alps* (1961) was published by William Sloane in mustard-colored paper-covered boards stamped in green, with a brown cloth spine. Subtitled *A Summer in the Italian Hill Towns*, its jacket depicts a stylized village. The book is also noteworthy for containing photographs by Coates' wife, Astrid Peters Coates. Gollancz put out a U.K. edition in 1962 in blue cloth with gilt lettering on the spine. In 1965, Coates followed up with his final book, *South of Rome*, which was published by Sloane in beige paper-covered boards and a green cloth spine lettered in silver. There was no U.K. edition.

Coates' third and last short story collection was *The Man Just Ahead of You*, which contained 13 pieces. Only one story, "The Captive," was of recent date (1963). The other 12 appeared in *The New Yorker* between 1942 and 1958. The book strikes an interesting balance between the author's previous two collections. It contains thought-provoking stories in the realist mode of *All the Year Round*, in which social or moral responsibility often is flouted (e.g., "Memento" and "Getaway"), as well as fantastical stories in the metaphysical vein of *The*



Hour After Westerly (e.g., "The Return of the Gods" and "The Happy Hour"). The title story combines the personal essay and short story forms to present one of Coates' theories on metropolitan fate. It speculates that the rude and hurtful encounters city dwellers experience in our day-to-day lives are not really reactions to us. Rather, they are reactions to the deeply unpleasant person who left the scene just before we arrived. *The Man Just Ahead of You* was published by Sloane in 1964 in three-quarter black cloth, lettered in orange and yellow. Gollancz issued a U.K. edition in 1965, in orange cloth stamped in copper across the spine.

At the end of his career, Coates could look back on five novels, three collections of short stories, two travel books, one book of memoirs, one historical work, and a long list of uncollected short stories and journalistic articles. The diversity of his oeuvre is striking. Coates explored many genres and styles of writing, including a host of unusual literary innovations. It can be argued that this wide spectrum of literary identities caused harm to his reputation. After all, it is difficult to "shelve" Coates in any straightforward way. It can also be argued, however, that this diversity makes collecting the works of such a writer all the more interesting.

Upon Coates' death from cancer on February 8, 1973, his *New Yorker* colleague Brendan Gill asserted in an obituary that "Coates never achieved the wide recognition that his talents deserved." Likewise, another *New Yorker* colleague, William Maxwell, told the National Institute of Arts and Letters that Coates "was a much better writer than is generally acknowledged. He had no talent for self-publicizing and counted on true merit's receiving a proper recognition."

Coates was a remarkable blend: a genuine writer's writer, who pushed the boundaries of style, and a popular writer who excelled at every literary form. Today, Robert M. Coates' "true merit" is ripe for rediscovery. ■

