

FOLLOWING STRANGERS

The Life and Literary Works of Robert M. Coates

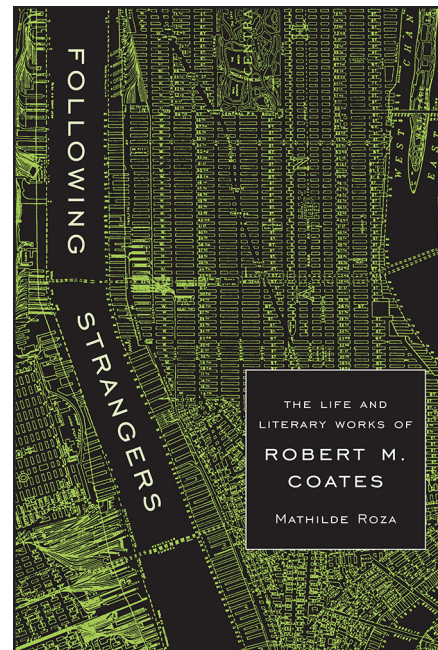
Mathilde Roza

Tracing the intriguing and often-overlooked life and career of Robert M. Coates (1897–1973), *Following Strangers* brings much deserved attention to the accomplishments of this twentieth-century fiction writer, essayist, critic, and poet. Mathilde Roza’s biography is based on extensive archival research and impressively documents Coates’s life from his Connecticut boyhood to his final publications. Along the way Roza surveys Coates’s many literary achievements as well as his personal interactions with iconic writers and thinkers of his era, including Gertrude Stein, Peggy Guggenheim, Reginald Marsh, Ernest Hemingway, Robert McAlmon, Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, James Thurber, E. B. White, and Nathanael West.

Roza grounds her study in Coates’s time at Yale University and his participation in the evolution of literary modernism that occurred between the end of the nineteenth century and World War I. Particular attention is given to Coates’s expatriate years in Paris, where he was influenced by the Parisian Dada movement while socializing with writers such as Stein and Hemingway. Roza delves into Coates’s return to New York City and his thirty-year association with the *New Yorker* as a critic and short story writer. She discusses Coates’s three most important novels as inventive acts of literary cultural reportage: his “Dada novel,” *The Eater of Darkness* (1926), summons up the artistic innovation and chaos of Paris in the early 1920s; *Yesterday’s Burdens* (1933) is analyzed as an exercise in “literary vaudeville” that captures the tragicomic mood of New York City in the early 1930s; and the confessional *The Bitter Season* (1946) portrays the gloom, loneliness, and intolerance of wartime New York.

In this first book-length study of Coates, Roza effectively balances the diverse interests and cultural occupations of this man of many talents, suggesting he deserves recognition for his strikingly idiosyncratic fiction, which tests the boundaries between modernism and postmodernism, and for the originality and diversity of his entire body of work.

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