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House Of Coates



Synopsis

"An exquisitely haunting, melancholic treasure of a book about people who drop out and populate tiny towns and rural communities, and the longing and loneliness of the human condition." Judy Natal, Photo-Eye "One of the great American moves is vagrancy, the freedom to drift, the right to look at things from outside the mainstream. The prose in House of Coates hums with this irreducible freedom. The photographs are both perfectly artless and undeniably visionary. Any question of fiction, non-fiction, subterfuge, or narrative trickery is superfluous in a book like this one, so appealingly strange, so delicately balanced, and so incontestably bound to its time and place." Teju Cole, author of Open City "A very handsome paperback edition...a new afterword wraps the whole mystery of Lester beautifully." MinnPost "As Brad Zellar so vividly illustrates in his new limited-edition collaboration with photographer Alec Soth, 'House Of Coates,' broken men have always been with us, haunting us, providing a mirror. Society may label them bums, homeless, or pariahs, but Zellar's empathetic writing allows the reader to get inside one broken man, and therefore all." Jim Walsh, MinnPost "Washed up in the shadow of a refinery, Lester B. Morrison, legendary recluse, documents his life in a series of photographs taken with a disposable camera. In a landscape of off ramps, warehouses, and SRO hotels occupied by terminally lonely men, love and faith break in, quietly offering human connection and the possibility of redemption. Brad Zellar has worked as a writer and editor for daily and weekly newspapers, as well as for both regional and national magazines. He is the author of Suburban World: The Norling Photos, The 1968 Project, Conductors of the Moving World, and House of Coates. Alec Soth is a photographer whose first monograph, Sleeping by the Mississippi, was published by Steidl in 2004. Since then Soth has published over a dozen books including Niagara (2006), Dog Days, Bogotá (2007), The Last Days of W (2008), and Broken Manual (2010). Soth's work has been exhibited at Jeu de Paume in Paris and Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

House of Coates is a dark and compelling book about people who don't manage to connect in the modern world for reasons not even they themselves seem able to articulate. When the main character makes the attempt to do so you realize he seems to be grasping at chimera and doesn't really know either, expect that something seems to be missing in either his ability to find meaning in his life, or life in general. He seems condemned to lead a lost, sad, solitary existence. The explanation for this quandry seems ineffable to both the writer and the main character. The photos only contribute further to this mystery of incompleteness. The photographer and writer are to be commended with trying to make us better acquainted with this isolated, painful life that some people seem to have confined themselves to, either through mental illness, or inability to connect with the broader world.

This book caught me by surprise. I typically read genre fiction of one ilk or another and would never have picked this up except for high praise it was given by others. There is so much wonderful writing in here that I'm delighted that I gave it a try. Here's a little piece: "Have you ever had the feeling that there wasn't a soul left on the planet that remembered your name or face or the sound of your laugh? That was a Lester question, and his answer was yes." Now you know a lot about Lester and how you are going to learn more about him in the book. The photographs were also much more than they appeared to be. Flipping the pages before starting to read, I dismissed them as technically awful and thematically uninteresting. Wow. Marry them with the text and now they are perfect. They capture the spirit and soul, or lack thereof, of Lester's world and life. This is a poignant view into a world most of us give no thought to. It is a view well worth absorbing.

I was given House of Coates by a friend with accompanying high praise for both the writing by the author, Brad Zellar, and the photography by Alec Soth. Before I had the opportunity to settle down with it, I read the jacket reviews and leafed through it quickly to look at the photographs. My initial impression was the photos didn't live up to the acclaim. It was only after reading the story that I

understood author and reviewer Teju Cole's description of the photos as "perfectly artless and undeniably visionary." I've struggled whether to declare them an indispensable part of the tale, but rare is it to find them so well knitted. I don't know if they have collaborated on other works, but I'd eagerly look forward to more from the duo of Soth and Zellar. Of course, I can't ignore the great job penned by Zellar. I found the unique format of the storytelling a bit jarring at first, but it came together for me, and I especially enjoyed the almost playfulness of the mysterious epilogue. While others have described the melancholy nature, I found it refreshing and artful that Zellar went beyond pure pathos by giving Lester B. the strength to reach out among the desolation and connect with his spirit guide, Majel, climaxed unexpectedly by the hope of baptism into a new life--something else that was hiding in plain sight.

Just one of the best books in my collection. The short story is tragically funny and relatable on so many levels and the images combined with the binding and presentation make for a really compelling little piece.

A gorgeous, heartbreaking book about loneliness. It traces, in words and snow-drift-laden photos, the amount of space that can be taken up by desolation. What makes a person exist? Is it a baptism? A trail of (disposable) photos? Can a person be brought into existence by someone who is trying to find him (or her)? Zellar and Soth have built a highly thought-provoking piece of literature.

What a marvelous, affecting novel. In a series of terse, self-contained vignettes, Mr. Zellar opens for us the sad, shadowy world of the homeless -- the loneliness, covertness and defeat; one, for which most of us, scarcely exists. That Mr. Zellar has succeeded in bringing this world to recognizable, three-dimensional life and has done so in fewer than 135 pages is a remarkable achievement indeed. I am eager to read more of Mr. Zellar's work.

I loved everything about House of Coates. I went by myself on a bleak Sunday afternoon in February. The service was exceptional, and the burgers lived up to their reputation. DO NOT miss the little brown mushroom soup. Shady characters and all, this place has an authenticity that serves up both small- and capital-t Truth, smack dab in the middle of nowhere. Not since discovering the cafeteria at the Museum of Jurassic Technology have I enjoyed such a satisfying dining experience.

Really enjoyed the book. Felt like I was travelling through an old Springsteen song. The story follows

a "broken man" named Lester as he skirts his way along the margins of small towns and society. Simple twists of fate steer this man and move him through life. House of Coates is amusing, striking in its imagery, and on the whole possesses an emotional and spiritual familiarity rarely found in books today.

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