**Coleman, Emily Holmes (1899-1974)**

Emily Holmes Coleman was an American poet, short-story writer, novelist, and diarist.

[image of Coleman]

Emily Tyler Holmes was born on January 22, 1899, in Oakland, California, to John Milton Holmes, an insurance executive, and Lucy Adams Coaney, who was sent to a psychiatric home when Coleman was seven. After attending a New Jersey boarding school, Coleman studied English at Wellesley College from 1916-20, and in 1921 married Loyd (*sic*) “Deak” Coleman, who joined the advertising firm of J. Walter Thompson in 1928. Following the birth of their only child, John (1924-1990), Coleman developed toxic exhaustive psychosis and was institutionalized for two months in the Rochester State Hospital. Her trauma informs her surrealistic novel, *The Shutter of Snow* (Routledge; Viking, 1930), groundbreaking for its treatment of post-partum depression.

[image of original book cover]

Moving to Paris in 1926, she settled on the Left Bank and became a society journalist for the Chicago *Tribune*, where Ernest Hemingway admired her writing. She was befriended by *Tribune* colleagues Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul, who published her surrealistic stories and poems in eight issues of their magazine, *transition*,between 1927 and 1932. Coleman earned a place in Peter Neagoe’s anthology, *Americans Abroad* (1932), alongside figures like Henry Miller, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein.

Eager for personal and artistic autonomy, Coleman put her son in the permanent care of his governess (Emily and Deak arranged periodic visits with him), and divorced Deak in 1932. In 1928, she had gone alone to St. Tropez to help the revolutionary Emma Goldman edit her autobiography. Through Goldman, Coleman met Peggy Guggenheim with whom she formed a close friendship set within a network of artists, intellectuals, and lovers in France and England that included Djuna Barnes, George Barker, Kay Boyle, Douglas Garman, David Gascoyne, (Sir) Samuel “Peter” Hoare, John Ferrar Holms, Humphrey Jennings, Helen and Giorgio Joyce, Mina Loy, Edwin Muir, Dylan Thomas, and Antonia White.

Coleman, financially supported by her father, in turn provided funds to friends like Barker and Barnes. In addition, she was responsible for editing and then convincing T. S. Eliot to publish Barnes’ masterpiece *Nightwood* (1936). Barnes dedicated *Creatures in an Alphabet* (1982), her last book, to Coleman.

Coleman’s output slowed in the 1930s as she suffered recurring periods of depression, especially due to disappointments in her many sexual relations. The first ‘final’ draft of her second novel, “The Tygon” (unpublished), based on her lovers Lelletto Bianchetti and Hoare, was completed in 1936, but she spent the next three decades revising it. Perhaps her greatest literary legacy is her diary, which she began in Europe and updated for over forty years, and which offers an iconoclastic and passionate account of her modernist milieu.

[image of diary page]

Having lived an ‘unconventional’ life abroad, Coleman returned to the United States in 1938 and converted to Catholicism in 1942, after which she produced hundreds of religiously-themed poems and paintings. In 1968, she became a member of the Catholic Worker Farm community in Tivoli, New York, where she remained until her death in 1974.

**List of Works**

*The Shutter of Snow* (1930), London: G. Routledge & Sons.

**References and Further Reading**

The Emily Holmes Coleman Papers at the University of Delaware Library.

Goldman, Emma (1931) *Living My Life* vol.1, New York: Alfred A. Knopf

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Plumb, Cheryl J. (ed) ‘Introduction’, *Djuna Barnes Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*, Normal: Dalkey Archive Press.

Podnieks, E. (2012) (ed) *Rough Draft: The Modernist Diaries of Emily Holmes Coleman, 1929-1937*, Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Podnieks, E., and Chait, S. (eds) (2005) *Hayford Hall: Hangovers, Erotics, and Modernist Aesthetics*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.