Classic Poetry Series

Emily Holmes Coleman - poems -

Publication Date: 2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Emily Holmes Coleman(22 January 1899 - 13 June 1974)

Emily Coleman was an American born writer, and a lifelong compulsive diary keeper. She also wrote a single novel, The Shutter of Snow (1930), published under the name Emily Holmes Coleman.

Biography

Coleman was born January 22, 1899, in Oakland, California. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1920, and in 1921 married psychologist Loyd Ring Coleman. In 1926 Emily Coleman, with her son John, arrived in Paris where she worked as the society editor for the Paris Tribune (the European edition of the Chicago Tribune). While in Paris Coleman contributed articles, stories, and poems to transition and became acquainted with others who wrote for the magazine. Coleman also worked for one year as Emma Goldman's secretary. She assisted at St. Tropez, during the period in which Goldman was writing her autobiography, Living My Life (1931). As an expatriate writer, Coleman continued to live in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s.

Although Emily Coleman's papers reveal her to be a prolific writer, her only published works were her contributions to little magazines, such as transition and New Review, and her autobiographical novel, The Shutter of Snow (1930). Based on her experiences as a victim of postpartum psychosis after the birth of her son, Shutter of Snow fictionalized her experiences as a patient in a mental hospital. Reviewers praised the novel as authentic and vivid.

Coleman's other writings also draw upon her personal experiences, particularly her strong religious beliefs. Following her conversion to Catholicism in 1944, Coleman's stories, poetry, and diary entries focused almost exclusively on her Catholic faith, which has been described as "mystical" and "fanatical."

Coleman's papers also reflect other elements of her life, for example her marriage (1940-1944) to Arizona rancher Jake Scarborough, the disavowal of this marriage following her Catholic conversion, her relationships to her son, grandchildren, and a diverse collection of friends. One particular group of friends in England, sometimes referred to as the "Hayford Hall Circle," is documented in her correspondence and diaries. Among this group were writers Djuna Barnes, John Holms, and Edwin Muir, as well as Peggy Guggenheim, Beatrix Wright, Antonia White, and others. From 1944 until her death the focus of Coleman's attention and activities was her religious life. She became involved with the Catholic left, developed friendships with Dorothy Day and Jacques and Raissa Maritain, and lived in a number of Catholic communities. At the time of her death on June 13, 1974, Coleman was being cared for by Catholic nuns at The Farm in Tivoli, New York.

The Liberator

Keys turning rattling in the loose locks opening high the doors that close again like death-hours coming faster

the walls are white and the line of beds is staring all the bars go up and down and none of them lead outward

and leaping eyes and stiff limbs follow the crunch of the keys

I am powerful now and I will break those that carry the keys with little hammers small hammers and hide in the porridge I will break all their heads and lay them in neat rows and lay them in neat rows and we shall wave high the keys and open wide a million doors and all of us shall dance in the snow and that poor woman in the spiral casket shall warm a wooden doll to her dress &nbs

the grating shall be taken from about the fire and the woman and the keys shall go within all of us shall &n Emily Holmes Coleman