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THE MADWOMAN PERSISTS:
EXPRESSION AS FEMALE RESISTANCE IN EMILY HOLMES COLEMAN'S
THE SHUTTER OF SNOW AND H.D.'S *HERMIONE*

SPRING HEALY

HONORS PROJECT

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Introduction

Madness has long fascinated writers, inspiring a wide variety of narratives characterizing madness as frightening, disturbing, inhuman, and abnormal. Historically, representations of female madness have been provided by onlookers—usually men writing about madwomen, offering only an outsider’s perspective. It is not until the turn of the twentieth-century that women writers begin to enter the conversation, finally sharing their experiences with mental illness with their own words, revealing the damaging effects of patriarchy on women.

Emily Holmes Coleman’s *The Shutter of Snow* and H.D.’s *HERmione* share a number of qualities that mark them as notable modernist feminist novels. Both novels are authored by women, and focus on female protagonists that are either literally physically confined, or also figuratively confined by the patriarchal structure that dominates society. Both Coleman and H.D. insert aspects of their lived experiences into these stories, creating eerily realistic effects for the reader because of the basis in reality. Drawing from her own familiarity with postpartum depression and life in a mental institution, Coleman paints a clear picture of the effects of physical confinement. Coleman tells the story of Marthe Gail, a woman admitted to an insane asylum after giving birth, and who is forced to navigate an institutional world separated from society. H.D.’s novel is less about physical confinement and more about the female protagonist, Her, feeling trapped in a world of men. Much of *HERmione* reflects H.D.’s troubling relationship with Ezra Pound, as Her lacks control over her own life. In this paper, I argue that it is paradoxically through these confined spaces that these women are able to find their voices and identities. The two novels are representative of a substantial break from literary tradition, evident by their experimental nature and open dialogue about the topic of female madness. Both novels exhibit experimental writing that often borders on prose-poetry, ignores grammatical

conventions, and resists linear narratives. Emily Holmes Coleman and H.D. employ these experimental narrative styles to portray the lives of these women in a way that is visceral and sometimes lucid. This experimental writing affects the way the audience interprets the novels, revealing Marthe and Her's inner thoughts to the reader. In this paper I refer to Marthe and Her as "madwomen," referring to their patriarchy-induced madness.

History of the "Madwoman."

The word "madwoman" often brings to mind an insane woman—a woman who is mentally deranged or crazy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as "a woman who is insane. More generally (also hyperbolically): a woman who behaves like a lunatic, a wildly foolish woman" (madwoman, n). This definition, while emphasizing the negative connotation of the word, hints at the historical connection between mental illness and women. In literature, madwoman characters have traditionally confirmed this unflattering definition, as they appear wild and insane on the surface. It is only in recent years that scholars have paid attention, to and questioned, this portrayal of the madwoman character, delving deeper into the reasons why she might be represented in this one-sided way. The obvious observation is that the majority of literary history is dominated by men. This means that the traditional representation of women in literature is from a male perspective, revealing an extremely skewed viewpoint. Women who do not conform to the ideal patriarchal structure, or those who attempt to voice their own differing opinions, are marked as unruly or uncontrollable. This harmful mindset that is established in the patriarchal society and the neglect to women that accompanies it is one of the factors that lead women to go mad in the first place. To male authors and a male audience, women who reject authority are a problem, and must be incomprehensible. In turn, women who steer away from the patriarchy's grasp receive no support or encouragement, and are usually shunned or dismissed as

insane. To have one's legitimacy called into question would make any woman go mad.

In their revolutionary book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine the origins of the madwoman character in primarily Victorian literature, asserting that literary history is dominated by men, resulting in a female anxiety of authorship that is “profoundly debilitating ... eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture” (51). Nineteenth-century female authors worked first to gain confidence holding the pen, rejecting the notion that writing was a male-only endeavor. These women writers cleverly rethink portrayals of women in literature almost out of necessity. In dealing with their anxiety and alienation, a recurring “maddened double” appears in women's written work that combats the traditional representations of the domestic, submissive woman: “this figure arises like a bad dream, bloody, envious, enraged, as if the very process of writing had itself liberated a madwoman, a crazy and angry woman, from silence in which neither she nor her author can continue to acquiesce” (Gilbert and Gubar 77). While these women were able to include this fiery voice in their writing, nineteenth-century conventions still limited their creative content, meaning that their madwoman character was always in the background, lurking behind a more traditional domestic woman, never the main focus. Gilbert and Gubar connect the madwoman with a feeling of imprisonment, suggesting that “a ‘thinking woman’ might inevitably feel that now she has been imprisoned within her own alien and loathsome body,” thus the creation of the “monster” that is the madwoman as a way of expressing pent rage (89). Although the nineteenth-century yields a fresh voice for female authors, they were still under a significant amount of male control; women writers were not

allowed ultimate autonomy over their written material.

The shift from Victorian literature by women to modernist literature by women was gradual. By the end of the nineteenth-century women writers were increasingly bold in writing about taboo subjects. Women writing at the end of the nineteenth century such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Kate Chopin employed the pen to describe their feelings of frustration over female entrapment. Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," first published in 1892, is regarded as an important early feminist piece of work. The short story illustrates the narrator's spiral into psychosis, as well as her experience with the dismissive treatment by men who do not listen to what she has to say, and who treat her like a child. The narrative is notable because it is written in first person and meant to be read as if it were the narrator's journal. Gilman's personal, private writing is a step closer to modern literature, as we get an intimate account of female hysteria *by a woman*, which was historically depicted only by men. In Gilman's story we see the narrator fight for her female voice to be heard, and we can hear her exasperation as she says her husband John "does not believe [she] is sick!" (131). Thus, by controlling (or refusing) her diagnosis, John literally confines her to a space wherein she is forbidden agency. The narrator complains that "[John] hates to have me write a word," expressing her lack of options for using her voice (133). The act of writing in her journal is a valuable form of expression, however, and by publishing this story, Gilman is able to vocalize what many of her female contemporaries also experience, but are unable to express. In this way "The Yellow Wallpaper" is one of the first narratives by a woman to detail the specifics of patriarchy-induced female hysteria, and paves the way for modernist female writers who touch on similar subject matter.

By providing some historical context surrounding the madwoman in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, as well as detailing small important shifts in female representation

in literature near the end of the nineteenth-century, I hope to make clear the negative connotations associated with the term “madwoman” traditionally. In my thesis I aim to turn this negative idea of the literary madwoman around, exploring the ways in which women are often pushed to madness by a dominantly patriarchal society. Using Emily Holmes Coleman’s *The Shutter of Snow* and H.D.’s *HERmione*, I argue that the modernist female writer uses her writing as a weapon against the patriarchy. Thus, the madwomen characters in my illustrations are not male depictions of unruly women, but rather they are instruments for these female authors (Coleman and H.D.) to voice their dissent. In other words, the madwoman character is a statement of resistance against patriarchal ideals. The madwomen characters in *The Shutter of Snow* and *HERmione* appropriate their situations and surroundings through various forms of expression, the novels’ experimental narrative styles, and physical separation from society. They gain autonomy and power despite their confinement to physical space and patriarchal societal structure, using these very limitations—what society provides them with—to resist and create legitimate identities.

Experimentation of Narrative Style

H.D. and Coleman’s novels both exhibit characteristics representative of modern literature: they are highly experimental showing a break from convention that aids in the effectiveness of the novels as a form of female resistance. Through experimental writing, these female authors are able to provide their protagonists with power against the patriarchy. Both novels employ writing styles that diverge drastically from writing of the late nineteenth-century, and lack traditional punctuation and proper quotations for dialogue. Much of the writing style in the two novels can even be described as stream-of-consciousness, reflecting Marthe and Her’s

thought processes. In addition, word choice and use of language is important in terms of the novels and their role as resistance. The narratives move fluidly, shifting point of view between narrator and other characters effortlessly. While point of view is not stable, temporality in the two novels is not stable either. Instead of offering straightforward linear narratives, Coleman and H.D. deliver novels that fluctuate between varying timelines; the novels are not necessarily presented in order of events, but rather shift around in terms of time.

Some of the significant structure changes featured in the two novels include fragmented, non-linear narratives, as well as a fluctuating sense of temporality. Whereas novels preceding the modern era traditionally tell a narrative in order of time and events, *The Shutter of Snow* and *HERmione* both occupy space in the realm of modern fiction where a narrative need not be told in a straightforward manner. What this means is that H.D. and Coleman are afforded freedoms in the way that they advance their narratives and are not limited to the traditional structure where time occurs in order. In both H.D. and Coleman's novels this non-linearity happens on a large scale where time shifts around, as well as with smaller sections of the narrative where time shifts within a given passage. Passages appear fragmented, as well, reflecting each narrator's scattered mind. Motivations for advancing narratives non-linearly and in fragments include the fact that the reader gets an impression of chaos and instability, reflecting the way that Marthe and Her navigate the world.

The writing style presented in *The Shutter of Snow* and *HERmione*, while highly experimental, is a significant factor in the way that the two novels resist the patriarchy. In *Shutter* especially, stream-of-consciousness is important in getting a glimpse inside Marthe's head—her thoughts unfiltered and unapologetic. With nurses and doctors attempting to pin her down, Marthe's narration flows out without proper punctuation or quotations to denote dialogue: "You

must get back into bed, they both said, you are getting excited again. Im not excited she screamed, cant you see its because youre all so crazy? She threw out her arms and her voice penetrated the bars and drew out their metal marrow. They put her quietly in the bed” (Coleman 14). Within this passage the point of view is unstable and it is rather unclear where speakers begin and end dialogue. Part of the confusion comes from the lack of punctuation, as there are no quotation marks indicating a change in speaker or apostrophes marking conjunctive phrases. [The fluid effect the lack of punctuation has is the notion that the reader is inside Marthe’s head.] Phrases flow together making it seem as if we are Marthe experiencing the situation firsthand, a whirlwind of activity fluttering around her. This free-flowing, honest narrative is one of Coleman’s tools against the patriarchy: she is able to express the inner workings of Marthe’s mind in an uninhibited fashion so that none of her thoughts or actions are censored.

The writing style in *HERmione* seems slightly more traditional on the surface, but remains experimental and is wildly abstract in content. Where *Shutter* reads like a long prose-poem, flowing seamlessly between thoughts, *HERmione* maintains the appearance of a classic novel. The novel is not conventional, though, and positions itself as experimental by using abstract language. While H.D. does use quotation marks to indicate dialogue, her prose is no less dense than Coleman’s. Sarah Wood Anderson mirrors Virginia Woolf and discusses how language is inherently masculine, “as are the forms that language takes, namely sentences, novels, and so on” (Anderson 155). Thus, H.D. uses specifically feminine language to resist the masculine norms. The unconventional narrative style uses the same sort of free indirect speech we see in *The Shutter of Snow*, and allows for this shifting, omniscient point-of-view. For example, “Hermione Gart hugged HER to Hermione Gart. I am HER. The thing was necessary. It was necessary to hug this thing to herself” (H.D. 33). Within this passage the point-of-view

shifts between third-person and first-person seamlessly. This shift occurs regularly throughout the novel and points to Her's resistance against traditional masculine language. Her's obsession with words is also important because of the way she thinks through the relationships between actual objects and the words themselves. Most importantly, her fascination with repeating her name, associating it with herself is important to the reclamation of her identity. This is because of the way she alternates between ways of thinking about her name ("I am the word . . . HER"), indicating switches between thinking about herself from an outsider's perspective and as her own self (H.D. 32). The nickname "Her" for Hermione makes for some unclear phrases, as her name could be mistaken for the pronoun which would indicate a shift in point-of-view. Her provides the narrative (through free indirect discourse) and at times it seems as if she is rambling. The result is similar to Marthe's stream-of-consciousness so that Her's narrative appears lucid at times, creating a fluid, dreamlike effect. At one point she sits in a room on the telephone with George, zoning out and contemplating words:

Words make tin pan noises, little tin pan against my ear and words striking, beating on it, bella, bella, molta bella, bellissima, you are, he was saying bellissima and he must see Bellissima. Why didn't he talk English on the telephone? Anyway, far away voice of George making circus tent noises, little far away miniature Punchinello shouting outside a tent, Bellissima. (42)

This passage illustrates point-of-view shifts that contribute to representing Her's lucid mind. Within the passage the narration refers to Her in the first person with the pronoun "my" but this is a shift from rest of the novel where the pronoun used to represent Hermione is predominantly "her" and "she" through third person. The passage moves through various thoughts Her has while on the phone, including extracts from her (one-sided) conversation with George as well as

her distracted mind's wandering fixation on individual words. The way the passage moves through these thoughts is fluid and random, which reflects the way Her's mind works through situations and exemplifies the way H.D.'s writing style works to help the reader understand Her.

Expression as Resistance

Expression acts as a primary means of resistance for Marthe and Her in the two novels. Because the women are effectively silenced by the patriarchy through both physical confinement and more symbolic patriarchal restrictions, it is important for them to find ways to express themselves. Female expression is specifically important in countering the patriarchal confinement that limits women's verbal expression and bodily expression. Female movement and dance imagery are powerful resistance techniques for Marthe and Her. For Marthe especially, the female body is showcased in a way that is celebratory rather than objective, granting her a sense of power in female sexuality. There are moments where Her interacts with physical movement in a cathartic way, too. In addition to expression associated with the female body, language acts as a powerful means of expression for the two female protagonists—Marthe and Her. In a patriarchal world that exists to silence women's voices, Marthe and Her find meaningful ways to make their voices be heard. They find their voices through language—whether through verbal communication or writing. There are notable passages where Marthe uses speech and singing to her advantage, as well as parts where writing is featured as a mechanism for resistance. Similarly, Her's word choice (or H.D.'s, rather) in writing and speaking is important to female resistance in *HERmione*.

Language as Marthe's Resistance

Marthe uses language in *Shutter* in such a way that resists the patriarchy. It is the nature

of the oppressed to be silent and submissive, thus Marthe's use of language makes for a key tool in her resistance. The simple act of existing as Coleman's narrator places Marthe in an important position that provides a voice to one who would not normally possess one (the oppressed), and is demonstrated across the text through Marthe's vivid first-person account of resistance to oppression. In addition to providing the reader with narration, Marthe holds power within the context of the narrative when she gains access to writing. Shortly after obtaining a pencil through a scuffle with another asylum resident, Marthe can barely hold back her excitement and "held tightly to the pencil. She could write now, she could write two letters. They would know about it now because she would write" (12). Writing is a significant form of resistance to Marthe not only because it exists as an outlet for her to express herself, but also because it is something she finds joy in doing and inspires hope within her. The description of Marthe writing the letters shows the purging and inspirational effect the process has on her:

She sat at the big table in the hall, the bare white wood table with the dirty trays. She folded the piece of paper and tore it precisely in two. She held the pencil tightly and began to write words.

The words unfolded and came out on the paper. They slid up and floated and came down and stood in line. She was making them, she was saying things with a pencil on a small piece of yellow paper. It was a letter to her father and there were the words, the words that she was capturing out of the red lights and pinning under her pencil like squirming moths. The moths had yellow tails and pulled desperately away from the pencil.

That was done. There were two letters. There would have to be envelopes and then where would be the addresses. She could remember the addresses well enough. She could

write those too, and then the letters would go out and she would be free. (12)

For Marthe, writing is liberating and the act of putting a pen(cil) to paper allows her to actively express her thoughts in an organized manner. The passage also demonstrates Marthe's belief that her writing will eventually lead her to actual freedom, a notion that stems from her faith in writing as communication.

Verbal communication is just as important for resistance against the patriarchy as writing because it is a literal representation of voice being expressed as resistance. Within the patriarchal structure women are systematically policed into silence and submission. Marthe's husband Christopher participates in this structure as illustrated by an interaction between the couple where he asks, "What else do you want? I want to go home, that's all I want. Dear child you can't go home, not just yet. I am perfectly well. You have had a serious breakdown he said. The hell I have she cried to him. She told him what she needed (26). Christopher attempts to control Marthe like a child by explaining her mental condition to her and by telling her that she is unable to go home, but Marthe retaliates with clear, bold words. Marthe's power in this passage stems from the command of language that she possesses; not only does she counter everything her husband says with confidently delivered speech, but she curses at him in a spit of rage.

Marthe's voice is also a powerful tool for expression through her singing. At the beginning of the novel Marthe is strategically confined by the doctors and nurses to her bed "wound tightly and strapped into the canvas sheet," unable to move freely (21). As a result of this physical confinement her voice is compromised, and for Marthe, "pain was nothing now and she didn't care. She looked at the window and began to sing. Her throat was sore and the singing came out like the sound of a motor boat. I can never sing again" (21-22). Marthe's singing literally pains her, as she is in a location where she is being silenced by the patriarchy (the

asylum). In a scene where she is bathing in close proximity with other women Marthe finds her voice, again. While the nurse does not allow for another woman to sing jazz songs, Marthe is told she is allowed to sing and is encouraged by another woman bathing to sing. Her song:

came out staggering and climbed awkwardly up to the cruel height beyond it. They came holding sideways their golden bowls and climbed and climbed and found relief in sinking. They came each in their turn, stronger and more intent to stay. It was now a crying light and a chariot race to the far mirages in the sea, and up and up into the depths of the cream-incensed sarcophagus they whipped their fleeting runners.

It was a song, a perfect song, a note of clean and fixed control. It came to her in that moment, and in the drunkenness of sound she was in a trance of silver goblets and all her body became that song. She lay and was the instrument, and poured forth from her still throat a single needle-pointing cenotaph. (30-31).

Marthe's song illustrates her voice becoming clear again as she develops an ability to express herself through music. The clarity of the song helps reveal the control she has over her voice, which she employs as a means of resistance.

Language as Her's Resistance

Much like language aids with Marthe's resistance, language acts as a mechanism for Her's survival through expression. For Her, language is soothing—it helps her sort through ideas and issues, as well as form her identity. Defeated by her failure out of college at Bryn Mawr, Her demonstrates signs of madness repeating her name in a circular fashion: “Her Gart stood. Her mind still trod its round. I am Her Gart, my name is Her Gart. I am Hermione Gart. I am going round and round in circles. Her Gart went on ... I am Hermione Gart, a failure” (4). Here we experience Her's identity crisis firsthand as she attempts to make sense of her existence. The

simple act of repeating words is her way of trying to form meaning, and is part of what gives her power and control in her language. By repeating her name over and over again, Her creates an identity for herself. Language is Her's power—it is her expressive tool for resistance. George, unfortunately, stifles Her's ability to use words the way she yearns to. Although “words [are] her plague and words [are] her redemption,” the magic of words is temporarily inhibited by George's voice and Her thinks, “Almost words would work charm . . . but not yet. George ha[s] broken charm, chanting in harlequin nasal those words out of New England” (67). Her soon retaliates verbally when George attempts to silence her—he tells her not to talk, “but she talk[s]” in an act of resistance (68). The comparison of Her to a tree that follows is a beautiful representation of her strength as she “was stronger than the upright little tree. She was stronger than anything. She was too strong” (68-9). Not only is language important to Her's formation of identity but its imagery is also powerful in the way that it paints her strength. Hermione comes to an important realization when she realizes the powerful effect writing can have on her voice as “it had not occurred to Her to try and put the thing in writing” (71). Her soon uses writing as an expressive outlet that allows her to resist against the patriarchy in a productive way.

Movement and Marthe's Resistance

Coleman wields Marthe with another mode of expression through movement and exploration of her body. To explore the notion of movement in *Shutter* I will first introduce Mary Ann Caws' essay “Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem” where she discusses some of the problematic ways that female bodies are represented in surrealism. She explains that in surrealist texts, women's bodies are often split apart, fragmented, and disconnected—they are “Headless. And also footless. Often armless too; and always unarmed, except with poetry and passion. There they are, the surrealist women so shot and painted, so stressed and dismembered,

punctured and severed: is it any wonder she has (we have) gone to pieces?" (Caws 11). Because surrealist women are so disjointed—never revealed as cohesive bodies, but rather objectified parts—they are stripped of their ability to communicate. A surrealist image of a female torso, sectioned off, is without a head, therefore unable to think or speak. Caws expands upon this notion, saying that surrealist women "can neither speak nor think nor see, nor walk and run, certainly not love and paint and write and be. Surrealist women, problematic and imprisoned, [are] for the other eyes" (11). In addition to pointing out that surrealist women portrayed without heads are without the ability to speak and think, Caws also reminds us that these women cannot move independently either, since they do not have feet. Yet, it is important to note that Marthe refuses to adhere to these objectified representations of the female body. The scene where Marthe takes off her clothes is key since her body is not shrouded by the confinement of clothes. Upon her companion Annabel's prodding, "Marthe took off her clothes too. She stood without embarrassment small and white. Your body is like a shoot of spring through muddy ground, said Annabel" (51). It is important to note Marthe's lack of embarrassment, showing that she is completely comfortable with her nude body. While she (literally) strips herself of clothes that represent the confines of society, it is also interesting to note that her nude body means that her body is whole. Reflecting Caws' notion that women's bodies should be whole and free, rather than objectified and fragmented, Marthe's nudeness and ability to be comfortable with herself emphasizes the way that Coleman creates a new version of the surrealist woman. Instead of allowing men to objectify her, Marthe occupies space in an all-female context where she celebrates her own body for the sake of her own pleasure. Finding joy in her liberated body is resistance in and of itself.

One of the various ways Marthe explores her body is through dance. It is helpful examine

Marthe's behavior in relation to Isadora Duncan and her essays on modern dance. Duncan is most renowned for breakthrough ideas about dance, and how it should be something that is inherently natural. She believes that a woman's body should be celebrated and that dance, especially is a way to revel in novelty and escape convention. In her essay "The Dance and Its Inspiration: Written in the Form of an Old Greek Dialogue," Duncan describes the dancer's "exquisitely poised head, those shoulders gently sloping, those breasts firm and round, the ample waist with its free lines, curving to the hips, those limbs and knees and feet all one perfect whole, one instant and the vision was radiant in its loveliness and then vanished" (746). It is worthwhile to look closer at this idea of the oneness of the female body in terms of both breaking away from classical ballet, and from the rigid standards of Victorian society. In classical ballet, the dancer is tightly confined in a corset-like costume, unable to fully express herself (according to Duncan). Similarly, Victorian women were also heavily clothed and literally tied down by societal norms. Duncan believes that classical ballet inhibits the body because it is inherently unnatural, naming the "deformed human body as 'false dance'—which is the corseted body, or confined body. Not natural" (749). Duncan praises the unclothed female body because "Nudeness is truth, it is beauty, it is art. Therefore it can never be vulgar; it can never be immoral ... My body is the temple of my art. I expose it as a shrine for the worship of beauty" ("The Freedom of Woman" 750). Duncan's ideas are important because they focus on the uninhibited female body, but do not objectify it. Duncan believes that nudeness is not at all vulgar because it is natural and whole. Coleman's portrayal of Marthe dancing connects to Duncan's notions of female expression, and furthers the idea that Marthe is a new sort of madwoman because of her expression of madness.

The way Marthe gains autonomy through dance relates to Duncan's notion that dance represents freedom from the confines of Victorian society. Duncan says:

If my art is symbolic of any one thing, it is symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are warp and woof of New England Puritanism. To expose one's body is art; concealment is vulgar. When I dance, my object is to inspire reverence, not to suggest anything vulgar. ("The Freedom of Woman" 750)

This passage makes clear that modern dance represents freedom for women, an escape from Victorian corsets. Duncan's idea that dance should inspire "reverence" (a sense of deep respect, or awe) is important, as well. She claims that women should demand respect, which is certainly unusual for the early twentieth-century. In relation to Duncan's ideas about dance as freedom, Marthe's dancing evokes a beauty that is natural and in one of the rooms at the hospital, "[Marthe] whirled in a black volcano and began to dance" (51). Here we see how dance creates a sense of autonomy and fluidity in Marthe's character. The image of a "black volcano" whirling invokes a rather primordial ritual. Marthe's natural dancing represents her newfound expression through movement.

In addition to the general sense of freedom that accompanies dance, Marthe also gains a sense of sexual freedom. From the shower scene with Brunmark we get this image:

Marthe danced lifting her legs and leaning to the spray. Brunmark bent to the turning of her bright nickel spigots, leaned to hold the hose that rushed at Marthe's spinal column, played it up and down the middle of her back, holding her out and erect like a stone majesty. Brunmark's cap fell to one side and she shifted her feet to the changing of the waters. Dance dance Brunmark, throw away your cap and dance. Come out from under your stiff legs and float about the spray. (82)

If near the beginning of the novel Marthe was not comfortable with her sexuality, this passage illustrates the point where she becomes comfortable with her body. Marthe turns showering into

an extremely intimate activity by dancing nude. The fact that she is comfortable dancing in the shower without clothes accompanied by another person points to her sexual freedom. Instead of remaining repressed and passive like a traditional twentieth-century woman, Marthe controls her body the way she wants. The natural movements related to water in this passage also imply a sexual freedom related to femininity. The fact that she embraces her body shows her control over her own sexuality. Instead of spiraling out of control in a traditionally insane way, Marthe instead departs from this traditional narrative and paves the way for a new kind of madwoman: the creatively expressive madwoman. This is important because it shows that Coleman recognizes that expressiveness brings some autonomy to women, especially in the context of the asylum.

Movement and Her's Resistance

Just as movement is important for Marthe, dance and movement of the body are also crucial to Her's resistance, and dance imagery plays a role in Her's representation of freedom. There are countless times in the text that elicit an image of spinning or whirling. One moment of clarity for Her results with "something that has been going (kaleidoscope whirl) star and whirl, frost flowers on a windowpane, rainbow prismatic frost flowers going (kaleidoscope) round and round her right head, became... static" (105-6). This passage invokes a whirlwind of color swirling, and is reminiscent of a dancer spinning. This free-flowing movement could easily be interpreted as Her's madness exemplified, but it more accurately represents her expression of clarity in that moment. Near the end of the novel Her's feet are featured as allowing her to move through space with agency. There is a moment where Her, "Now standing on her feet, ... realized that she liked her feet. I have been wandering, she thought, too long in some intermediate world" (221). This passage demonstrates the liberation Her experiences at the end

of the novel when aspects of her madness begin to disappear. The foot imagery we get with her wandering around is representative of her newfound freedom from the oppressive George, as she explores life without those constraints. Walking around contemplating her situation, Her thinks, “I am free of George,” in an effort to move forward (223).

Separation from Society and Appropriation of Control

Confinement plays an important role in both Coleman and H.D.’s novels, surfacing in the form of the suffocating patriarchal society and as the structural confinement that physically polices women’s bodies. Patriarchal confinement is harmful to women since it aims to limit their movement and agency through space as well as silence their voices, but it is within these constricted spaces that Marthe and Her are able to gain valuable insight that ultimately lead them to autonomy. By experiencing life excluded from society, Marthe and Her are afforded a unique perspective on what it means to be inclusive; the two women become painfully aware of what they are fighting against because of their marginalization. For Marthe, the secluded environment in the asylum allows her to explore certain freedoms that she would not be granted otherwise. In the asylum Marthe explores her sexuality, learning that she can use her body for pleasure regardless of the presence of men, and with the discovery of queer female relationships. Marthe and Her are both controlled by important men in their lives—fathers, husbands, brothers, lovers—and these men take advantage of their positions in society and treat the two women horribly, often not asking their opinions but instead treating them like unthinking children. Her is shamed by her father and brother, and physically and mentally abused by George. While these are less than ideal conditions to exist in, it is the reality for Her and Marthe. These conditions spark anger, frustration, and action for the women as they appropriate their situations and turn to

expression as a legitimate form of resistance.

Marthe's Confinement as Providing Liberation

Marthe's physical separation from society acts as a unique kind of confinement that, ironically, creates an environment suitable for interesting freedoms to surface. By existing in a space far removed from the "real world" which is more shrouded in patriarchal culture, Marthe is able to explore female sexuality, pleasure, and queer relationships. In the traditional patriarchal structure, women are limited in the ways they can experience and enjoy sexuality, as they are conditioned to believe sex is solely for procreation. While the asylum represents Marthe's physical imprisonment, it also separates Marthe from the men in her life, placing her in a female-centered environment. Without men surrounding her dictating every move she makes, Marthe ventures to explore female sexuality in new ways that are independent of men. The asylum still exists within the patriarchal structure, but it provides a space enough removed from male control to allow these small freedoms for the women occupants. At one moment in the text Marthe examines a flower arrangement in the hall:

She touched a flower with the edge of her fingers. She licked the petals and divided them with her tongue. She breathed in the flower. There was a marking stick in the plant and she began to dig with it. She dug all the hard black earth around the plant. She breathed excitedly. This was her garden again the one she had before the baby was born. (49)

This passage employs floral imagery to emphasize Marthe's self-eroticism, showing the reclamation of her body from the patriarchy. The image of her licking the flower petals invokes an erotic experience highlighting Marthe's pleasure. Her pleasure here is significant because she finds it in the absence of men; rather than depending on men for sexual gratification, this passage reveals Marthe's sexual autonomy—her independence from male presence in sexual acts.

Finding pleasure in her own body is an act of resistance for Marthe because it excludes men from the equation all together. The passage where Marthe takes a shower accompanied by Brunmark is also illustrative of female pleasure in the absence of men, and introduces the notion of queer companionship between the two women. Marthe, inviting Brunmark to join her in the water, yells “dance dance Brunmark, throw away your cap and dance. Come out from under your stiff legs and float above the spray. Be still be still Brunmark cried out above the rush of the spray. They laughed and shouted and the water mounted and leaped and fell again” (81-82). Marthe, a married woman, is unlikely to be exposed to situations where she is so intimate with other women in her normal life. However, these kinds of close female bonds are facilitated by the asylum environment that exists separate from reality, allowing Marthe to explore her own sexuality without significant barriers.

Exclusion from society impacts Marthe a considerable amount, especially by making her acutely aware of the patriarchal system and conditions she is fighting against. This is due to several factors, including the small (but important) liberations she is afforded while separated from society. The awareness she garners in relation to her surroundings and situation provides her with a power that comes along with marginalization—a power that the patriarchy tries to stifle. Marthe’s power in marginalization comes from her resulting understanding of inclusivity—that is, the knowledge that she gains in result of being pent up in the asylum. For example, Marthe is questioned by a group of doctors who ask her if she knows where she is and she responds, outraged:

Do you all really think I am so crazy that I dont know where I *am*? ... My dear doctors, I am sure that as alienists you have no superiors. But surely when its written all over the sheets, and the blankets, *and* the laundry bags, not to mention the letters I receive from

home, you cannot believe that I dont know this is the Gorestown State Hospital of
Gorestown. I may be insane but I protest Im not feeble-minded. (88)

Marthe's insistence of at least some mental capacity reflects her insight of her situation. She is horrified that the doctors do not take her seriously and retaliates with a very powerful message that indicates that she does, in fact, know where she is. In this moment, her power comes from her understanding of her situation. In another moment where Marthe is aware of her surroundings, she questions the humanity of her condition wondering, "just because Ive got a toxic exhaustive psychosis is that any reason why I have to be treated like a dog?" (32). Marthe obviously suffers from serious mental illness, but maintains a self-awareness that allows her to reflect on her surroundings, which ultimately gives her power despite marginalization.

Marthe endures substantial misfortune from the men in her life, as her father, husband, and male doctors aim to control her through physical confinement and symbolic restrictions. One of the aspects of confinement that bothers Marthe the most is the fact that nobody takes her seriously and really listens to what she says. This is difficult for Marthe because she feeds off of expression; being misunderstood, to Marthe, is the equivalent to being ignored. One of the ways in which she is silenced by the patriarchy includes the language that is used to speak to her by men. Her husband Christopher constantly refers to Marthe with diminutive language as if she were a child. He tells her "Dear child you cant go home, not just yet ... you have had a very serious breakdown he said. The hell I have she cried to him" (26). In this passage Christopher tries to explain to Marthe her own symptoms, as if she is not an individual, thinking person. In response, she curses at him, claiming the right to her own mind. Christopher attempts to stifle her voice and opinion, but she responds even louder and stronger. She eventually shouts at him, "You dont know what youre talking about," and tells him to get out of her room (27). Instead of

simply remaining quiet like he wants, Marthe speaks her mind in resistance. Similarly, in the passage where Marthe argues to not be treated like a dog, Dr Brainerd, a woman, calls her “child” and tries to keep Marthe subdued like the men would, an example of a woman who participates in the patriarchal structure willingly, as she takes part in the plan to confine Marthe. Regardless all of these actions working against her, Marthe’s rage is only sparked even more and thus expresses loud and strong her voice in resistance.

Her’s Confinement and Appropriation of Control

H.D. also creates a world where her female protagonist is confined by the patriarchy. Although Hermione is not literally confined with physical boundaries, she is limited in the sense that she is unable to move freely through space due to the controlling men in her life. Her feels an intense confusion regarding her home as she ponders: “if she [goes] away, her spirit [will] break; if she stay[s], she [will] be suffocated” (9). Her confliction stems from the dependency she has on her family, and the lack of freedom she has because of it. Her also worries that she has disappointed her father, and feels inadequate because of she failed out of her college, Bryn Mawr, in conic sections, which is a heavily math and science-based field. Her’s father and brother have significant achievements in science, and “Carl Gart, her father, had been wont to shrug away psychology as a ‘science’” (4). Her’s father and brother both demonstrate proficiency in science, thus Her’s failure in science sets her apart from her family right away. Because of this, she feels constrained by her father and brother and defined by her perceived failure. This is illustrated by the way Her talks about herself in relation to how her father and brother talk about her, as she thinks “science, as she saw it, had eluded her perception. Science, as Carl Gart, as Bertrand Gart defined it, had eluded her perception” (6). In this passage we see how Her is conditioned to think negatively about herself in a way that reflects the perceptions her

father and brother voice of her. In this way, Her is trapped in a way of thinking about herself that stems from patriarchal control. The novel highlights the ways that Her gradually rejects these notions as the narrative progresses. By the end of the novel Her escapes these confining ways of thinking about herself—developing oppositional language through her frustration and anger—and structures a new identity that exists around freedom and individuality.

A significant portion of Her's confinement also comes from her unstable relationship with George. Her develops, throughout the novel, a realization of the limitations George places on her. Regarding her identity as an artist, George refuses to consider any of her work seriously, treating her writing more as a hobby than a possible career. The power dynamic between the two is unequal; George abuses his position as a man to gain control over Her, causing her to feel inadequate and trapped. George explicitly doubts Her's abilities as an artist or poet and at one point asks her "Who helped you do this thing, Hermione?" Her responds to him by saying, "What thing do you mean George, who helped me do what thing?" In this same interaction, George goes on to say, "Well I'm ballyhoo damned if I'm going to help you with your bally writing," showing his selfishness (148). The fact that George asks Her who helped her indicates that he assumes she is unable to produce work on her own, and that he does not believe in the work she is performing. Her effectively uses language to counter his verbal attacks that her "pomes were rotten," quipping back, "I heard you say my pomes, my *poems* were rotten . . . just how now are they rotten?" (167). Her, fed up with George's insults, talks back to him twisting his own words into an attack at him. Her begins to recognize that her relationship with George is not equal and that he does not value her as an artist—but rather as a sort of muse. Her later reflects that: "I was not what George wanted. He wanted fire to answer his fire and it was the tall sapling, the old Laconian birch tree, the runner and the fearless explorer (my mind was) that

drew spark from him” (219). This passage demonstrates the way that George aims to conduct their relationship (with dominance and control), and the way that Her resisted this with her strong mind and verbal expression. The degree of George’s control extends to Her’s sexual agency, as he uses her body how he pleases, controlling her to submission. The climax of this power dynamic occurs in a scene where it appears that George rapes Her and “now more than ever she knew they were out of some bad novel” (173). Although Her is severely disadvantaged in this scene, she remains able to form productive thoughts, thinking “women are stronger. I am stronger,” invoking the irony that women are inherently stronger because they must endure advances by men regularly (173). The passages demonstrate George’s control over Her, but also her relentless resistance to the patriarchy. By the conclusion of the novel she overcomes her confinement—both from her relationships with George and Fayne and from her father and brother—gaining her own individual identity through expression as a means of resistance, finding her voice as an artist.

Marthe and Her both experience significant barriers to their freedom, which only forces them to resort to powerful methods of resistance. Through their various forms of resistance, the two women appropriate the notion of the madwoman—reclaiming the term as a powerful tool in their subversion. In Marthe’s case, she uses the resources she has, including her ability to express herself, to make the best of her physical confinement. Marthe resists the patriarchy and gains an identity through these various expressive behaviors. It is within the context of the asylum that Marthe is able to express herself, as the specific environment lends itself to personal exploration in the absence of regular male presence. Similarly, Hermione is trapped by her family and George, who underestimate her abilities and stifle her creativity. Her, like Marthe, is forced into action due to her entrapment. Her’s frustration and anger as reaction to her confinement fuel a

spark that guides her resistance, and ultimately, her liberation from patriarchal confinement. Both women garner control of their lives despite their lack of autonomy, showing that female resistance is both effective and obtainable. Marthe and Her mark the creation of a new sort of madwoman character who turns to productive modes of creative expression in order to represent female resistance.

Conclusion

In the shift from Victorian to modern literature, female authors gain a clearer, more accurate voice that better reflects their feelings about female issues, and become more critical of the overarching patriarchal structure. Emily Holmes Coleman and H.D. embody this new female voice as they construct narratives in unconventional ways and write female characters who struggle to survive in a patriarchal society. Marthe and Her, the “madwomen” who pervade these two novels, are trapped by societal functions that aim to police them. Despite the forms of entrapment that the two women experience, they are able to appropriate their surroundings in effective ways that eventually lead to their respective liberations. Artistic forms of expression, experimental narrative styles, and physical separation from society are part of what assist Marthe and Her in acquiring autonomy. By working with and against the limitations society provides them with, they resist patriarchal control and create legitimate identities for themselves.

It is important to take note of the theme of persistence in *Shutter* and *HERmione* and how it relates to female resistance. Both Marthe and Her relentlessly fight against the patriarchy, each developing mechanisms to support themselves in ways specific to their situations. Their collective struggle consists mostly of finding their voices and contemplating what to say—resisting the silence that men attempt to shroud them with. To find their voices, Marthe and Her use their surroundings best they can, resisting confinement and silence with expression and

unconventionality. While Her and Marthe are fictional examples of women who embody characteristics of female resistance and their authors wrote in the modern era kick-starting feminist discourse, women today still face virtually identical challenges, illuminating the unceasing necessity for female strength and resistance. In recent American political news female Senator Elizabeth Warren was silenced while speaking by fellow senator Mitch McConnell. McConnell's reasoning for silencing her, in his words, is that "she was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted" (McConnell). His reasoning highlights the fact that female persistence is often viewed as troublesome, while also emphasizing the pervading patriarchal mindset that still exists in today's society. The unexpected consequence of McConnell's retort lies in the fact that the phrase "nevertheless, she persisted" has been adopted by many women as a cry of resistance. Much like Marthe and Her turn characteristics of the madwoman into methods of resistance, women today use the tools the patriarchy provides them with to defy and resist, appropriating the dissenting views. If Marthe and Her teach us anything, it is about the power of persistence as a mechanism for female resistance and empowerment—silence is not an option.

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