

# The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 10

www.emrsociety.com

March 2009

## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XI Annual Conference in beautiful Harrodsburg and Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 18-20, 2009. The conference headquarters—site of the opening banquet, keynote session, and annual business meeting—is the lovely and legendary Beaumont Inn in historic Harrodsburg. Academic paper sessions will be held at Saint Catharine College, just outside of Springfield, Roberts' hometown.

Please direct conference inquiries (registration, lodging, special events, etc.) to the Conference Co-Directors Brad McDuffie, Dept. of English, 1 South Blvd., Nyack, NY 10960 or bigtwohear tedriver@earthlink.net and H. R. Stoneback, English Dept. SUNY-New Paltz, 12561 or Stoney\_Sparrow@webtv.net.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Gregg Neikirk

Over ten years ago, H. R. and Sparrow Stoneback, together with a handful of graduate students from SUNY-New Paltz, established the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society to promote the Kentucky author's life and works. Since that time the society has grown and realized important successes, just as the early founders envisioned. For example, 2008 was a very good year overall, and for some great reasons that are in addition to the fact that 2008 was the 10th anniversary of our society.

In some ways, however, it was a year marked by deep sorrow: we lost two of our founding members, Sparrow Stoneback and Terry Ward. They were more important to our society than I can even begin to attempt to report here. Sparrow was more than "house mother" to us all, and Terry was our very solid rock of Springfield. We profoundly mourn their passing.

Yet it is no cliché to point out that both of these fallen colleagues would tell us: carry on . . . come together as usual and celebrate the successes of our society . . . set goals for ourselves which maintain and ensure the future of our mission. I know we all promise to do so.

Despite the reverberating loss of two of our best, 2008 was otherwise an extraordinary year for the Roberts Society, with the publication of not one but two scholarship-rich collections of critical essays on Roberts and the impressive list of activities of

EMR members in chairing numerous sessions and presenting papers at such major national venues as the SAMLA Convention and the ALA Conference.

And anyone who attended our Tenth Anniversary conference last year—with its free distribution of critical volumes, posters, and other shared materials—had just cause to celebrate the success of the Roberts Society and to marvel at the distance we have traveled since our modest beginning ten years ago, as the first group had envisioned.

The year also closed very well, and in recent months Roberts was featured in three important keynote addresses by our Honorary President, H. R. Stoneback—at the SAMLA Convention, the John Burroughs Conference at Vassar, and the Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities. Thus, quite literally, thousands of people heard the name Elizabeth Madox Roberts for the first time this year. "The amazing thing," Stoneback reports, "was the remarkable reaction to the Roberts passages I read in these keynotes and how scores of people (from many disciplines) said they simply had to read her work."

Thus, dear beloved Sparrow, good friend Terry, and fellow friends and members, on to our goals: it is to be hoped that in the coming years we will follow through and build on these achievements, continue to encourage scholarship and publication (especially the important EMR correspondence project), and continue our vital participation in national conferences (and now, International conferences, too! See the item elsewhere in this newsletter about "Roberts in Italy").

## IN MEMORIAM—SPARROW

Jane Arden "Sparrow" Stoneback passed away May 25, 2008 at Cumberland County Hospital in Kentucky. Born in Carter County, in the eastern Kentucky hill-country, daughter of Alice and Richard Hillman, she made her home in the Hudson Valley for the past four decades, making frequent pilgrimages back to Kentucky with Society members. Sparrow was the heart and soul of the Roberts Society, a member and Muse since its beginning. She was a scholar and teacher, offering to all students who went to Kentucky a vision of the spirit of place that Roberts' fiction springs from. She also gave her first Ellen-singing paper at the second meeting of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, and Sparrow's singing itself has converted many members to a greater love for the place of Kentucky. She was a major driving force that created and perpetuated interest in Roberts through her songs and love.

The world that she made in her singing was inseparable from her role as gracious host and adoptive mother to the extended family of generations of SUNY-New Paltz students and students beyond in Georgia, Texas, Connecticut, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky and France that she welcomed to her home and that she brought with her to Kentucky every year. This community, this communion of students and teachers, poets and writers, and the Roberts Society, salutes her as muse, inspiration, and a mother to us all: "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (Proverbs 31:28). She is survived by her husband of forty-six years, Founder and Honorary President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, H. R. Stoneback (Distinguished Professor of English at SUNY-New Paltz), her son and President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, Gregg Neikirk (Professor of English at Westfield State College in Massachusetts) and his wife Nancy, her son, Rick (CEO of the Cumberland County Hospital in Kentucky) and his wife, Robin, and her four grandchildren, Adam and Lee (Westfield, MA) and Rachel and Richard (Marrowbone, KY).



JANE ARDEN  
"SPARROW" STONEBACK

Beloved friend,  
mother, and muse

## Letters Project

William H. Slavick

William H. Slavick will have at the 2009 Conference a complete list of Roberts letters in hand, with some content annotation and questions to be answered; the list will also be available by e-mail. He expects to have the letters electronically accessible by then as well. It may be that Society members have come upon letters he does not have. A last appeal for letters will go out in March to Kentucky libraries and newspapers, and a final search of letters collections will be made.

## THE SPARROW MEMORIAL AWARD AND THE TERRY WARD MEMORIAL GRANT

H. R. Stoneback

In August 2008 the Roberts Society Executive Board established two memorial awards in the names of two of our most cherished charter members—Sparrow Stoneback and Terry Ward. These awards, to be presented at our annual April conference, were designed to encourage participation in our conferences by: 1) first-time presenters and 2) presenters with no institutional funding support. A call for donations to the awards fund went out in the summer of 2008 and thereafter. The Roberts Society expresses its deep gratitude to the following contributors whose donations (August-December 2008) helped to fund these enduring memorials (as well as the EMRS one-time donation to St. Catharine College in the name of Terry Ward):

Steven Florczyk  
W. L. Godshalk  
Nell Haydon  
Charlie Hughes (Wind Publications)  
Tina Iraca  
Wallace and Martha Murphree  
Gregg and Nancy Neikirk  
Matthew Nickel  
Becki Owens  
Gisele Sigal  
William Slavick  
H. R. Stoneback

Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. (Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer; or send check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant.)

**The Poetry Daily "Poet's Pick" (April 2008)—Elizabeth Madox Roberts**

H. R. Stoneback

During National Poetry Month in 2008, *Poetry Daily* announced: "We are bringing you a special poem each weekday in April," a poem selected by a well-known poet who also provides commentary on the chosen poem. On April 14 the "Poet's Pick" was "Father's Story" by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, selected by Maurice Manning, a widely published poet who teaches English and Creative Writing at Indiana University.

"Father's Story," first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1921), was included in Roberts' 1922 volume of poems *Under the Tree*. Manning begins his commentary on the poem: "This is a poem that makes me smile, because beyond its sweetness, I think it's also slyly subversive"—because of the way the poem puts a folksong "like 'Old Dan Tucker' and the Greek myth about Jason and the Argonauts in the same hopper." Manning continues: "Notably, the poem is in the same meter and stanza as 'Old Dan Tucker,' that is, the poem is a kind of ballad itself. Is it a ballad about story-telling or a story about ballad-making?" The poem does not resolve that question, Manning observes, and the lack of resolution is a good thing—"since the reader can enjoy seeing it both ways at once . . . the good humor of the ballad meshed with the tragic journey of the Greek myth, the local and domestic merged with the hoary weight of the classical."

In the course of his commentary, Manning notes that some of his reasons for selecting the poem "are personal," since he grew up in Roberts' country, not far from Perryville, where folks are "sort of proud" of Roberts as "a Kentucky writer." And he further identifies with Roberts since his earliest exposure to literature was also through family story-telling and ballad-singing. He concludes his mini-essay on Roberts with incisive observations about Roberts viewed from the contexts of regional and Appalachian literature.

It is good to hear Manning's voice on Roberts, and a very good thing for the poetry of Roberts to reach many new readers through the *Poetry Daily* "Poet's Pick" celebrations. And the next good thing the Roberts Society should pursue is to see that Maurice Manning comes home to Roberts' country and participates in one of our future conferences.

**Father's Story**

Elizabeth Madox Roberts

We put more coal on the big red fire,  
And while we are waiting for dinner to cook,  
Our father comes and tells us about  
A story that he has read in a book.  
And Charles and Will and Dick and I  
And all of us but Clarence are there.  
And some of us sit on Father's legs,  
But one has to sit on the little red chair.  
And when we are sitting very still,  
He sings us a song or tells a piece;  
He sings Dan Tucker Went to Town,  
Or he tells about the golden fleece.  
He tells about the golden wool,  
And some of it is about a boy  
Named Jason, and about a ship,  
And some is about a town called Troy.  
And while he is telling or singing it through,  
I stand by his arm, for that is my place.  
And I push my fingers into his skin  
To make little dents in his big rough face.

**"Tell of song in the meadow": Roberts and Folk Song in Context**

Damian Carpenter

In a 1916 speech at the National Institute of Arts and Letters, Theodore Roosevelt asserted: "American work must smack of our own soil, mental and moral, no less than physical, or it will have little of permanent value." Roosevelt was one of a growing number of people at the turn of the century who firmly believed that America's identity lay in its folk-culture—a culture that set its roots in the American soil. Just six years before this speech, John Lomax published the first comprehensive collection of American folk songs: *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. While Roosevelt, Lomax, and others were looking to the West, the delta blues tradition had emerged and by the time the great depression hit, "hillbilly" and "race" (i.e. folk) records had become a lucrative enterprise.

So, how does Roberts' use of folk song fit into this movement? To start, it is not mere coincidence that the Southern Renaissance was taking place at this time or that Andrew Lytle was calling on Southerners to "throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall." The Southern literary tradition is rich with folk-music and culture, not only evident in Roberts' work, but also in writers such as Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and others. Southern identity was rooted in the soil, those who worked the soil, their stories, and especially their music. Charles Joyner describes this dynamic folk-identity as "one of the world's great epics of cultural transformation," which is "best revealed in southern music."

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## 2008 Conference Report

Jamie Stamant

2008 marked the tenth anniversary of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. Last year's conference was contiguous with the launch of two new books of Roberts criticism, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (the first book-length collections of critical essays to deal with the life and work of Roberts). Before the appearance of these two volumes of criticism, more than four decades had elapsed since the last published book-length critical study of Roberts. Des Hymnagistes Press also published one festschrift of poetry, *Illumination & Praise: Poems for Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Kentucky*, including poems from both members of the Roberts Society and Kentucky poets. These new books on Roberts were presented at the meeting of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society last spring and coincided with a stimulating and full conference program. Participants from Maine, New York, Maryland, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma, Virginia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Connecticut presented their work on Roberts at St. Catharine College in Kentucky. We were also very enthusiastic to welcome France's leading Roberts Scholar Gisele Sigal (Universite de Pau/IUT de Bayonne).

The conference began with a greeting from Gregg Neikirk, President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, followed by the Keynote Speaker, H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Society, "Rickert and Roberts, Burroughs and Edmonson: Influences and Confluences (Together with Reflections on the Time of Man and the Tenth Anniversary of the Roberts Society)." On Sunday, April 20, the group spent the afternoon at Kentucky Writers' Day, held at Penn's Store in Gravel Switch, Kentucky. Later that evening, the attendees adjourned to Sutton Place in Springfield, Kentucky, for BBQ and an honoring of the Society by the Mayor, the City of Springfield, and Nell R. Haydon, Director of the City of Springfield Main Street/Renaissance. The attendees delivered their work on Roberts on the following day, Monday, April 21.

### 2008 Conference Program

**Session 1:** **William Slavick** (U Southern Maine), "Roberts' Admirer James Still"; **William Boyle** (SUNY-Maritime), "Kentucky Straight: Roberts and Offutt"; **Gisele Sigal** (Universite de Pau/IUT de Bayonne), "'Between Acknowledgement and Literary Creation': The Case of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Brad McDuffie** (Nyack College), "Songs That Give Back 'The Knowledge of Rain': Imagism, Vorticism, and the Poetry of Elizabeth

Madox Roberts"; **Noah Jampol** (U Maryland), "Personal and Persistent: Sin, Communion, and Complicity in the Southern Renaissance and Southern Gothic Genres."

**Session 2:** **Nicole Camastra** (U Georgia), "The Grand Spatial Configuration of a Symphony: Musical Influences in the Work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Alex Shakespeare** (SUNY-New Paltz), "'Sing the Story One': Elizabeth Madox Roberts, William Faulkner, and American Folk Song"; **Vicki Barker** (Carson-Newman College), "The Influence of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *My Heart and My Flesh*"; **James Stamant** (Texas A&M), "If a Tree Falls in Dionysus's Mind: Escaping Fictional Boundaries in Roberts' *Song in the Meadow*"; **Steven Florczyk** (U Georgia), "Moments of Union in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Haunted Mirror*."

**Session 3:** **Amanda Boyle** (SUNY-New Paltz), "Ellen Chesser and Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Search for Identity in *The Time of Man*"; **Nicole McDaniel** (Texas A&M), "'Her Lips Said': Self-Recognition Through Dialogue in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* and Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging*"; **Sharon Peelor and Shannon Harvey** (U Oklahoma), "Making 'a connection between the worlds of the mind and the outer order': Introducing New Readers to Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Her Writing"; **Goretti Vianney-Benca** (SUNY-New Paltz), "How to Make Elizabeth Madox Roberts Popular Again: Making EMR an 'Other'"; **Juliana Alexander** (Radford University), "'Myself Against the Chaos of the World': A Poststructuralist Look at the Work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts."

**Session 4:** **Matthew Nickel** (U Louisiana—Lafayette), "'Irregular sketchy outlines, like those of the landscape': *Birds and Poets*, Bovine Madness, John Burroughs, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Angela Green** (U Georgia), "A Far Piece to Go: The Migrant Worker and Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State College), "Men, Women, and Children: Defining Their Roles and Places in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Great Meadow*"; **Damian Carpenter** (Texas A&M), "Theology, Philosophy, and Horse Sense: The Interplay of Modernity, Chaos, and Knowledge in *He Sent Forth a Raven*"; **Tina Iraca** (U Connecticut), "*Black is my Truelove's Hair*: An Empirical Ballad by Elizabeth Madox Roberts."



## IN MEMORIAM—TERRY WARD

William Terry Ward, known to the Roberts Society as Terry Ward, passed away August 1, 2008 at Norton's Hospital in Louisville, KY. Terry's lightheartedness and welcoming smile in and around Springfield always made Society members feel at home. As a full professor at St. Catharine College, Terry Ward was one of the most important and indispensable members of the Roberts Society, coordinating and organizing on-site events at Kentucky Writers Day and at Saint Catharine College in Springfield, KY, hosting the Roberts Society with open arms at Saint Catharine College each year, and perpetuating a local interest in Roberts' work through the community and students at Saint Catharine College. His enthusiasm for Roberts and his scholarship have played an important role in the life of the Society, and we are all saddened at his passing.

WILLIAM TERRY WARD



## News and Notes

### Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* (Ed. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008) and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Ed. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008; ordering information for this second volume is available through the EMRS Blog: <http://emrsociety.blogspot.com>). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as never before published original pieces of writing by her. The books are essential to the ongoing discussion about her life and work, and we hope that they will become available in libraries across the country for current and future readers alike. For more information regarding ordering, please visit [www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com). It should be noted that there are still a few copies of *Illumination & Praise: Poems for Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Kentucky* (Ed. Matthew Nickel, Des Hymnagistes Press 2008) also available for sale through the EMRS Blog.

### EMR on MLA

The work of Roberts scholars will appear in the MLA International Bibliography for 2008. Scholars and aficionados alike should see listings of the most recent essays from *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* in the coming months as MLA bibliographers are working to index these volumes. If you have published a Roberts-related essay, please ask the MLA bibliographers to index the article so that all those interested may consult your work.

### CFP: ALA Symposium in Savannah, GA, Oct. 8-10, 2009.

Conference Director Olivia Carr Edenfield has requested a special panel on the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts at this year's fiction symposium to be held in Savannah, Georgia, in the fall. Please submit paper proposals (length: 15 to 20 minutes, depending on number of presenters) for this panel to Steve Florczyk, panel chair, at [sflorczyk@msn.com](mailto:sflorczyk@msn.com) before June 1, 2009. Roberts Society Honorary President H. R. Stoneback will deliver the keynote address at this year's conference. Details: Sessions run Friday and Saturday, October 9-10. On Friday, October 9, there will be a special luncheon as well as an evening reception including the keynote address by H. R. Stoneback. On Saturday, October 10, the luncheon keynote will be delivered by Kirk Curnutt. A final celebration will take place that evening.

### CFP: SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, GA, Nov. 2009.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold two special sessions at SAMLA 2009, Atlanta, Georgia. Session one, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts as Children's Literature," will be chaired by Jane Dionne. This session will explore the importance of using Elizabeth Madox Roberts' poems with students across all the grades. Suggested topics include but are not limited to: 1) in what ways Roberts' poems in *Under the Tree* affect children in the classroom; 2) children's responses to Roberts' poetry based on their age and experience; 3) techniques for teaching Roberts to a variety of children and special needs students; 4) how Roberts' poetry may encourage more poetry to be taught across the curriculum; 5) how Roberts' poetry, presumably for children, fits into the genres of Children's Literature and/or Modernism.

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## Teaching Roberts to Freshman

Goretti Vianney-Benca

My study of Roberts' works has led me to explore the simple, and yet simultaneously complex question of what happened: why did she go out of print, and why did I not know who she was? Over time, I have concluded that, although a shift in reading tastes may have contributed to Roberts' decline in popularity, it is largely her absence in the classroom that is to blame. So, following H. R. Stoneback, I set out to include Roberts' works in my own classroom. As a young adjunct professor, low on the professional ladder, I was relegated to teaching Freshman Composition. At first, the thought of trying to get students who could barely compose an essay with a clear thesis and specific and detailed supporting evidence to appreciate the simple, yet powerful, language and the intricately woven

themes of love, loyalty, and the strength of the human spirit in Roberts' *The Time of Man* made my head hurt. I knew I loved the work; would my students? They seemed to be more interested in their iPods and cell-phones than they were in learning to write academic essays or to read literature.

On the first day of class, I received a collective groan when I noted that the class would read a novel the last half of the semester. My head hurt again. By the time we got to the point in the semester where we were ready to begin the novel, more than one of my students asked me if there were CliffsNotes for it. I happily told them no. Then, I was informed by one of my students that "the book must not be that good if they didn't even make CliffsNotes for it." I responded: "Roberts is *too* good for CliffsNotes." The

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## Roberts Featured in Stoneback Keynotes—SAML A and Hawaii

Matthew Nickel

H. R. Stoneback's keynote, "Spirit of Place: Close Reading, Canonical, Cartographical, and Cultural Literacy," delivered at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Convention, November 7-9, 2008 brought Elizabeth Madox Roberts to the forefront of academia. His discussion began with a carefully delineated analysis of place, connecting writers like Lawrence Durrell to Jesse Stuart, James Still, and Roberts. Through Stoneback's mixed narrative and critical style, the audience was carried into actual places, Kentucky farms, the undulating hills and knobs, through the bluegrass region, and to Vanderbilt University where Stoneback first discovered two dozen copies of Roberts' *The Time of Man* deep in the library stacks. Stoneback proceeded to read the first hundred pages there in that library, being moved beyond words.

After an intense reading of extended passages from *The Time of Man*, which seemed to leave the audience spell-bound, Stoneback launched into an analysis of twentieth century literary studies, beginning with a critical clarification of the landmark textbook, *Understanding Poetry* (Cleanth Brooks & Roberts Penn Warren). Although the approach to close reading and literary study that Brooks and Warren so admirably taught has been neglected in recent decades by many English Departments, Stoneback reminded his listeners, this volume—voted one of the "50 Best Books of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"—did more to shape good habits and techniques of close reading and literary analysis than all other such works combined, especially during the decades when New Critical approaches prevailed (c. 1940s-1970s). If the art of close reading has declined, Stoneback observed, such a grievous loss "might most accurately be attributed to the over-zealous reaction against the New Criticism that set in sometime around the late 60s and still flourishes in provincial English Departments." Then he noted that he was taught at Vanderbilt by leading 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation New Critics and was never taught "a hermetic, ahistorical, apolitical mode of doing criticism": "I was taught this defining stance: start with the text and the rest will slowly happen. I was taught to bring to bear on the text everything I could manage to master regarding period, culture, history. I was taught to surrender no resource of knowledge I had attained and, in the end, what I got from any work would be the measure of what I brought to it. But I had to start with the text. Exactitude precedes amplitude." The center of Stoneback's critical message powerfully urged students and professors to start with the text and not some worn out theory, so that readers can grasp the autonomous object, the well-made poem or story, and rescue it from the dark hallways of critical obfuscation and obscurity. And Close Reading, Stoneback cautioned, "must not become Closed Reading."

Stoneback's keynote was wound tightly together, and his discussion of fidelity to the text led directly into his consideration of the Canon. He began with Jacques Derrida, reminding his audience of Derrida exclaiming: "I love the canon." From there, Stoneback brought us back to basic Modernist principles, emphasizing how we can have both the traditional texts and the new ones: "And why shouldn't we study Hank Williams, Elvis Presley, and Bob Dylan along with the old English and Scottish and Irish and Appalachian songs and ballads. Along with is the key term here." The past is never past, he stressed, and perhaps we might meet Baudelaire with Stoneback and Pound in the Tyrolean Alps, or we

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## Roberts in Italy

H. R. Stoneback

The VI International Richard Aldington Society Conference—also known as the II International Imagism Conference—will be held June 20-22, 2010 at Brunnenburg Castle (home of Mary de Rachewiltz, poet, Pound scholar, translator, and daughter of Ezra Pound) in Dorf Tirol, Italy. This early announcement will allow ample time for potential conferees to plan, mark calendars, and avoid conflicts. The Call for Papers invites proposals related to the conference theme—“Imagism and Ezra Pound: Richard Aldington, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, Elizabeth Madox Roberts & Others.” (Topics should address the connections of one or more writers—not limited to those writers named in this conference rubric—to the matter of Imagism and Pound.)

Primarily under VI International Aldington Conference sponsorship, this conference also has affiliated sponsorship of The Nick Adams Society and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. (Limited travel awards for graduate students participating in this conference may be available. Please inquire when you submit your conference proposal.)

We will begin considering conference proposals on September 1, 2009 (although earlier topic inquiries are welcome). The final deadline for all proposals will be January 15, 2010.

(N.B. Since many prospective attendees will be at the 14th International Hemingway Conference in nearby Switzerland, please note that the dates of the Hemingway conference—June 25 to July 3—do not present a conflict and allow for an unhurried progress from one conference to the other).

We look forward to seeing you in the glorious mountains of northern Italy, in one of the most extraordinary conference venues in the world—Brunnenburg Castle—in June 2010!

H. R. Stoneback  
For the Aldington Society

(For further information, please contact H R Stoneback:  
Stoney\_Sparrow@webtv.net or Stonebah@newpaltz.edu)

## News & Notes from page 5

Papers may focus on one or more levels, from elementary to college. Papers should be fifteen minutes long. Please submit title and brief abstract by April 15, 2009 to Jane Dionne at [janedionne@yahoo.com](mailto:janedionne@yahoo.com). Session two, “Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Influence of Philosophy,” will examine the influence of philosophy in the life and writings of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Some suggested paper topics include but are not limited to: 1) philosophical influences on Roberts’ work; 2) how philosophy may influence and be exemplified through literature, with a focus on Roberts’ writing; 3) the philosophy of existence in relation to the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Papers should be fifteen minutes long. Please submit title and a brief abstract by April 15, 2009 to Amanda Boyle at [Boyle687@newpaltz.edu](mailto:Boyle687@newpaltz.edu).

### EMR Online

We now have a Roberts Society Digital Archive at the official Roberts Society website: [www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com). Past issues of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter* are available online there. Please also visit the EMRS Blog for news, and publication information: <http://emrsociety.blogspot.com>.

### EMR Panels at SAMLA 2008 Convention in Louisville, KY

The Roberts Society was well represented this year at the SAMLA Convention in Louisville, where Steve Florczyk (University of Georgia), chaired a panel including papers by William H. Slavick (University of Southern Maine), Vicki Barker (Carson-Newman College), and Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-New Paltz). Goretti chaired the second session, which included papers by Natalie Khoury (University of Georgia), Jane Keller (University of Baltimore), and Amanda Boyle (SUNY-New Paltz).

### EMR Panel at May 2008 ALA Meeting, San Francisco

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society sponsored a panel at the 19th Annual ALA conference in San Francisco, May 22-25, 2008. For the second consecutive year, the Society presented at ALA; the panel was chaired by Steve Florczyk (University of Georgia) and featured papers by Victoria L. Barker (Carson-Newman College), Michael Beilfuss (Texas A&M University), and William H. Slavick (University of Southern Maine).

### Reviews of Wind Publications

A review of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* (Wind Publications 2008) and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Quincy & Harrod Press 2008), will appear in the *Sewanee Review*, perhaps as early as the summer number. *The Mississippi Quarterly* also has a review; the editor “is hard at work.”

### Ranking Roberts

In soliciting her support for a review of the Wind Publications, Elizabeth Spencer remarked that Allen Tate had once observed that he considered Roberts superior to Willa Cather.

### Roberts Featured in Stoneback Keynote *from page 6*

might work through tobacco rows with Hemingway and Roberts in Kentucky. As long as we have a good map and we follow the text, the rest will slowly happen.

Stoneback's emphasis on Roberts in his keynote in conjunction with other great authors had an immediate forceful impact on his audience. He concluded by quoting Roberts' *The Great Meadow*, specifically the passage in which Diony dreams of the "wearying infinitives of the wilderness" coming to an end and yearns to "make a world out of chaos." His connection of this passage to his discussion of literary criticism and academic fads and fashions was poignant, and his impassioned call for a return to the text was responded to by a prolonged and unanimous standing ovation. Following Stoneback's keynote, the most talked about writer at cocktail parties, at panels, and even in the hotel bar was Elizabeth Madox Roberts. In addition, the University Press of Kentucky approached Stoneback immediately after his plenary address seeking advice on which Roberts books to get back in print, and also soliciting from him the critical study he is now working on: *Kentucky Writers: Recollection and Remembrance*—which will feature Roberts.

In addition—and perhaps more remarkable since Honolulu is a long way from Roberts' home terrain of Louisville (the SAMLA venue)—there was a similar reaction to Stoneback's use of Roberts in his Keynote Address for the 7th Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities (January 2009). Again quoting extensively from *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow*, Stoneback wove Roberts into the tapestry of his meditations on what he posited as the "Hawaiian Sense of Place." Of the roughly 1,000 people in the audience at this international and multidisciplinary conference, less than a third were English and literature professors and graduate students, and many were from fields such as architecture, art (history and performance—music, painting, sculpture, etc.), philosophy, religion, and so forth. And yet, Stoneback reports, "the reaction to Roberts especially was truly remarkable: people from many disciplines, scholars from Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Europe and the Americas, excitedly told me that though they'd never heard of Roberts before, they would now seek out, read, and teach Roberts. Maybe, at last, the Roberts Revival is approaching its full flowering—in some worldwide way that we dared not dream of a decade ago when the Roberts Society had its modest beginning. Or maybe we knew this could happen, given the extraordinary power, the timeless and universal appeal of Roberts' art, and that's what we have always worked toward."

\* \* \*

(Stoneback's complete keynote address, as delivered at the SAMLA convention in Louisville, will be published in the forthcoming issue of the South Atlantic Review)

### Reaction to Roberts: One Reader Writes

*Dr. Elizabeth Kraft, University of Georgia, recently read Roberts' The Time of Man for the first time after hearing Stoneback's keynote at SAMLA 2008. Her letter of thanks for the recommendation given her by Society members offers a poignant statement that speaks to the Society's mission and the power of Roberts' work. We thank Dr. Kraft for allowing us to publish her letter as a reminder of the way that Miss Roberts' literature continues to find new readers.*

Just a note to thank you for your passionate conversation about Elizabeth Madox Roberts at SAMLA. I made it to the one session (the one on which Natalie read), and, of course, I was attuned to the name and therefore paid attention to H. R. Stoneback's remarks about *The Time of Man* in his plenary.

I'm about 40 pages from the end of that novel—which I read, for the most part, in one sitting today! It is wonderful, as you all said it would be. My mother is reading it too. I ordered a copy for each of us from UP of Kentucky at the convention.

My mom grew up during the Depression in northwest Georgia. Her experience was different from the Chessers (not so ambulatory), but her family did live a year as tenant farmers on the Tate estate in Fairmount, GA (that's "Tate" of the Tate Center, by the way—his mother's farm, I believe).

My mother is quite taken with Ellen Chesser and her experiences. We had a long discussion about the book on the phone today.

In any event, it is rare for me at this point in my career to encounter a "classic" I've never read, and it is rarer for me to encounter a book I can recommend to a family member (readers but not scholars). But, thanks to you, I have done both. The authenticity and vision in *The Time of Man* are profound and moving—so much so that I wonder why I was not told of this novel before!

I thank you for your informed and informative enthusiasm which led to this very pleasurable reading experience for myself and my mother as well!

Elizabeth Kraft  
University of Georgia

## “‘Quietude and Scrupulosity’: Elizabeth Madox Roberts—*Imagiste*”

H. R. Stoneback

In the keynote address at the ninth annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference in 2007, I first made the case for the influence of Ezra Pound on the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. I presented fresh evidence and expanded the argument for Pound-Roberts connections in my essay “In a Station of the Modern (‘Ah, how I Love Pound!’): Roberts & Pound, Post-Symbolism, Imagism, Melopoeia, Phanopoeia, Logopoeia, and Mo(o)re” (*Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation*, eds. Stoneback & Florczyk 2008), where I argued that Roberts was in her own way an important Imagist poet. All of this seemed to me to be groundbreaking material for the study of Roberts that would advance the necessary process of placing Roberts properly in Modernist contexts, a crucial matter that has been largely neglected. The all-important Pound-Roberts linkage had been completely overlooked. I marveled that this should be so, and I was rather pleased with the new directions for study I had charted. I was even more pleased to be the *first* to christen Roberts an Imagist. Or so I thought then.

But that was before I read Ford Madox Ford’s essay, “Those Were the Days,” which bears the date August 1, 1929, and was published as a foreword to the volume *Imagist Anthology 1930*. Ford reminisces about the early days of Imagism, about other Modernist movements such as Cubism, Futurism, and Vorticism, and he recalls the roles of Richard Aldington, F.S. Flint, H.D., and especially Ezra Pound in shaping the “perdurability of Imagism.” For the student of the history of Imagism it is familiar terrain, at least until Ford makes this startling statement: “Vorticism . . . clear[ed] away all but the last, last, last vestiges of the Concord School and [made] possible . . . oh, let us say Elizabeth Madox Roberts because in her quietude and scrupulosity of English she is a sort of Imagiste too” (xv; the second ellipsis is Ford’s). Ford, as Roberts scholars know, was a persistent champion of Roberts’ work, having proclaimed, for example, that *The Time of Man* was the finest American novel yet. And we might add that Ford’s *terms* for the qualities of Roberts’ work that identify her as *Imagiste*—“her quietude and scrupulosity”—are precisely chosen words that characterize her language and style; and they are resonant words that invite a religious, perhaps mystical, understanding of her work. So, it is now official—Roberts *is* an *Imagiste*, thus christened by Ford (one of the original *Imagistes*); and she is an *Hymnagiste*, thus confirmed here (by the founder of the *Hymnagistes* movement).

### Teaching Roberts to Freshman *from page 6*

student rolled his eyes at me. My head began to hurt again. To my great relief, the classes covering the novel were productive. Each day more students participated in the conversation and comments were insightful and intelligent. Some students liked the novel, because it reminded them of *The Little House* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Others liked the “highs and lows” of Ellen’s life that rendered her a “relatable” character. Several liked the novel, because it left the ending open to the reader’s imagination; and a few enjoyed the novel, because it contained a suicide and a “beat down.”

When the essays were turned in, I took a pre-emptive Advil. Of course, there were a handful of essays that included the minimal plot summary and points made in class discussion, but there were a number of essays that discussed the use of language, the importance of music or song, Ellen’s Everyman quality, and how the novel exemplifies the passage of time and enduring strength of people who prevail. But none of this impressed me as much as the students’ last journal response for the class. I always

ask them to tell me what they liked and disliked about the course at the end of the semester. About half of the students wrote that they enjoyed the novel, expressing how interesting it was to read a work they probably would not have read in any other class or on their own. Two students even recommended the novel to someone else. That made the whole experience worthwhile.

That is why I taught Roberts, to get her out there, and to get students interested in her work again. If only two students liked her work enough to recommend the novel to someone else, that is two more people who have been exposed to Roberts’ works. If we, as Roberts scholars, wish to revive interest in Roberts, we must continue not only to discuss her work and present papers at conferences each year, but we must also teach her works in our own classes. I think we can see the results of teaching Roberts each year as the Society grows, and it is exciting to know that several hundred more people have been exposed to Roberts in the last year after listening to Stoneback’s critical keynotes in Louisville, KY and Hawaii (see “Roberts Featured in Stoneback Keynotes—SAML A and Hawaii” in this newsletter).

## Roberts and Folk Song *from page 3*

Roberts explores this duality in "Conversations beside a Stream" from *Song in the Meadow*. The poem sweeps across the American soil from the Kentucky River to the rolling Columbia: "We will sit here by this stream . . . By the Missouri, the Niagara, the Tennessee, the lovely Housatonic, the Sacramento, the Brazos, the Columbia, the powerful Colorado, the gentle Cedar River, or the Echo River that flows under the earth." Historically, it moves from the days of the Southern and Western pioneers, to the light of the Revolutionary War and dark of the Civil War, then across the sea to England "and Lord Randall and Lord Lovell, and we descend from them all, from the bonnie George Campbell and the cruel but just Barbara Allen." Here, Roberts exemplifies the complicity of folk songs and a sense of the past bound with the land.

Roberts references approximately twenty folk songs in this six page poem, including: "Darling Nelly Gray," "Motherless Children," and "Poor Boy Blues." These folk songs represent American history in a particularly Southern way, simply because the majority of the songs, including the three mentioned above, are Southern folk songs, sprung from Southern soil and culture. Yet, the opening lines of the poem ask "to tell of song in the meadow," suggesting a larger consideration of the folk song, not just in terms of history, but in terms of the land. Roberts' poem suggests that folk songs exist without the individual, that "one to himself alone / cannot make a song." Folklorists and artists have often echoed these thoughts. For instance, in his introduction to *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, Alan Lomax notes that "the individual author is so unimportant that he usually is lost sight of altogether." Bob Dylan claimed that his songs came to him magically, as if they already existed, and he was lucky enough to tap into that current of song. Arlo Guthrie once said that writing folk songs was like fishing in a stream: "unfortunately," Arlo says, "I was fishin' down-stream from Bob Dylan."

The implication is that folk songs come from some place greater than the individual, which Roberts addresses in the last section of "Conversations." She writes, "We are sitting beside the stream, beside the River of Man's flowing life, his time, his way on earth," and that flowing life from the River of Man is where folk songs come from, not from one man or woman, but from a particular human communion. This is strikingly similar to that central passage in *The Time of Man* when Ellen Chesser discovers that deep sense of place and time, a sense of communion in a simple phrase: "the time of man." It is there, in that recognition of time's flow through the land, the streams and rivers, the meadow and soil, that we begin to learn where songs swim and grow to be voiced by the people, sung by the folks for the folks.

## The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

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### Mission Statement

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and to encourage the teaching of her literature. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but we are always interested in Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Gregg Neikirk by email at: [gneikirk@wsc.ma.edu](mailto:gneikirk@wsc.ma.edu).

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