

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 16

www.emrsociety.com

March 2015

17th Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XVII Annual Conference in Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill and in Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 24-27, 2015. We are excited to move our conference headquarters to Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill—a location quintessentially Kentuckian, an agrarian and historic venue rich with resonances of Roberts Country. 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 Co-Conference Directors:

H. R. Stoneback, English Dept., SUNY-New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561 and Matthew Nickel, English Dept., Misericordia University, 301 Lake Street, Dallas, PA 18612 or at:

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Nothing Lost: Always Found PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MATTHEW NICKEL

*Nothing is lost, ever lost! at last
you understood.*

—Robert Penn Warren

In the world of Roberts Scholarship—that's right, *world*—many things may not be immediately discernible in what we do and in how we work. It may seem to those currently affected by a kind of post-traumatic-MLA-syndrome, at first glance, that we gather as a group of provincial students and scholars scattered across a few states—mostly emanating from upstate New York—to trek toward Kentucky every year for what may seem to be a minor conference—just moments of fried chicken, BBQ, and a few scholarly attempts at reading *The Time of Man*. But those who have lived through the Roberts experience know it is more than merely sentimental, more than simply the enjoyment of a few days in the captivity of Roberts' landscapes. It becomes a living thing, resembling communion.

The world of Roberts continues to expand beyond our own turnings, and we are excited to welcome many new Roberts enthusiasts and scholars here and abroad. This past year has seen a rapid growth in Roberts interest, evident by our well-attended panels at national and international conferences and by our new members (see Stoneback's welcome within this *Newsletter*). At CEA in Baltimore, March 2014, Roberts scholars Jane Keller, Jessica Nickel, and Matthew Nickel participated on a special Roberts panel, and H. R. Stoneback's keynote

was largely devoted to illuminating the works and words of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. At the International Imagism / Richard Aldington Conference in Venice, June 2014, Roberts was the subject of Jane Keller's paper and was mentioned in Stoneback and others. The Roberts Society continues to hold two affiliated sessions at SAMLA in November, and we will have panels at both the American Literature Association Conference in Boston, May 2015, and at the Society for the Study of American Women Writers in Philadelphia, November 2015.

The Roberts Society is also proud to say that the Reading Roberts Series, under the General Editor H. R. Stoneback, is progressing according to schedule. Gregg Neikirk's play, *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts* is in production and will be published in time for our April Conference. Jane Keller's biography of Roberts is moving along. And the critical books on *A Buried Treasure* and the Roberts short stories are also well under way.

Most of this begins in Kentucky every April where Stoney, our pilgrim guide, brings us to the deep heart's core of Roberts' writing and landscapes. And those in Kentucky open doors that lead us onward beyond the local into the universal. Compared to most other single author societies, our attendance and presence is overwhelming. And our dedication to endure and prevail illustrates one fundamental way the academic world really works—beyond the narrow halls of the MLA: if we are excited about a writer and keep talking about her and writing about her and bringing others into her world—and if she is good enough—*nothing is lost, ever lost!*

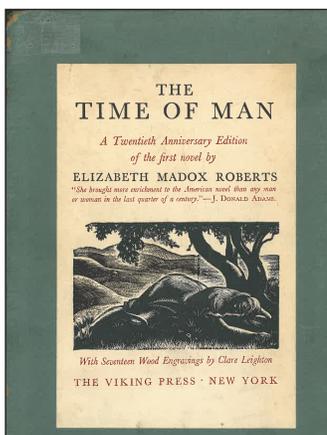
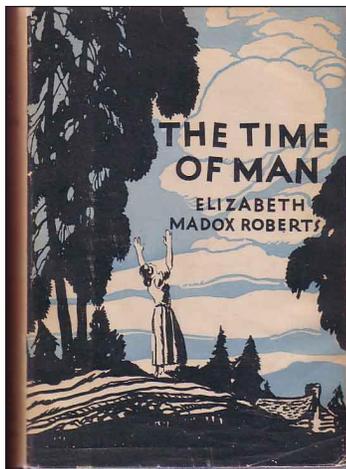
Welcome New EMRS Members

H. R. STONEBACK

Delighted to report that Roberts Society membership continues to grow, we are pleased to welcome new members from Misericordia University in Pennsylvania and, as always, many new members from the perennial Roberts wellspring at the State University of New York in New Paltz. We also particularly welcome our new member from Ohio, Don Scriven, an attorney (Scott Scriven & Wahoff LLP) and writer and Roberts aficionado from Columbus and one of our keynote speakers at the 2015 conference; and our latest member from abroad—swelling the ranks of our international membership (an optimist might say)—we welcome Frances Kearney from Northern Ireland, a PhD candidate at the University of Ulster, where she has just completed her dissertation on Hemingway and will, at this April's conference, present her paper marking her first foray into Roberts studies. Society membership—new members recruited, old members renewed—is the foundation of the ongoing Roberts Renaissance. Recruit! Renew!

Right: An image of the first edition of *The Time of Man*

“far more accurate as a depiction of the spirit of Ellen Chesser”



Left: Clare Leighton illustrations on later editions

The EMR Issue of *Firsts*: *The Book Collector's Magazine*

H. R. STONEBACK

This is to report that one of the major events in Roberts studies in recent years has occurred—the magazine *Firsts* has just published its extraordinary issue devoted primarily to Roberts and her work (January/February 2015 Volume 25: Number 1 & 2), which features Roberts on the cover and contains two articles on EMR by Don Scriven.

The magazine cover reproduces the dust jacket illustration from the first edition of *The Time of Man*, an image that is, we might note, far more telling and accurate as a depiction of the spirit of Ellen Chesser and the novel than the Clare Leighton illustrations familiar to most readers from later editions of *The Time of Man*. It is worthy of note for Roberts aficionados that this issue of *Firsts* contains a six-page essay on another southern woman novelist, the once celebrated now truly neglected Evelyn Scott; a five-page essay on William Faulkner; and a four-page article on Ernest Hemingway. Thus the Roberts articles, a total of *sixteen* pages, surpass the combined page allotment for Faulkner, Hemingway, and Scott.

The longer essay by Scriven carries the full title: *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Kentucky's Understated Feminist Writer Extraordinaire* and the précis in the table of contents reads as follows:

Over the last 50 years a number of female authors have been rediscovered, but Roberts remains neglected. Her great novels, among them *The Time of Man*, are not polemical or stridently rebellious as many of those accorded canonical status by those who would define feminist literature. *They are just better.* (My emphasis)

The second essay, entitled *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: An Annotated Checklist of First Editions* is summarized in this fashion:

Roberts' works are scarce, and since those who know her books covet them, pricey.

(For further commentary on the content of Scriven's essays, see the notes by Matthew Nickel elsewhere in this *Newsletter*.)

Speaking personally, I would add that one of the real pleasures of the past two years has been my correspondence with Don Scriven, about Roberts and the world. And I am pleased to report that he has accepted my invitation to be a keynote speaker at our conference this April, where he will display items from his Roberts collection. In addition, I asked, barely hoping this good news would be realized: through the generosity of Scriven and the publishers, copies of the Roberts issue of *Firsts*—a very attractive addition to every Roberts collection—will be distributed at the conference.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Stamp

JAMIE STAMANT

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society is currently taking steps to put Roberts's image on a United States postal stamp. Ultimately, the decision will be in the hands of The Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC), which is appointed by the Postmaster General. In order to win the committee's favor, the EMR Society has drafted a letter to send to prominent members of the Kentucky government and community; the letter urges them to support our initiative and will be circulated soon in the hope that we might achieve our goal within the next few years. The text of the letter is as follows:

I write to urge your support for an initiative to honor Elizabeth Madox Roberts by placing her image on a United States postage stamp. Born in Perryville, Elizabeth Roberts was a Springfield, Kentucky, poet, novelist, and short story writer who achieved pre-eminence in the 1920s and 1930s. Her 1922 volume of "butterbean" child poems, Under the Tree, still contributes to every anthology of verse, as she described her poems, "for children, age eight to eighty." Her 1926 novel, The Time of Man, which celebrates the search for identity and flowering of the daughter of tenant farmers, English novelist Ford Madox Ford termed "the most beautiful individual piece of writing that has yet come out of America" and Kentucky poet, novelist, and literary critic Robert Penn Warren called "a masterpiece." My Heart and My Flesh (1927) was a likely influence on William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels. In The Great Meadow (1931), her characters trace the pioneer journey over the Wilderness Road into Kentucky "to make a world out of chaos, "finding "a little harmony which men are able to make with one another or a few kinds."

Elizabeth Madox Roberts represented her state admirably in her published celebrations of Kentucky life over a century—she called her environs "the little country"—and in her exemplary struggle against limited means and illness to fulfill, against all odds, what she early saw to be her vocation. She was a woman who showed great courage by making the decision to attend college when she was already in her mid-30s. She studied at the University of Chicago, but after her schooling she returned to her home in Springfield, Kentucky. Uncertain

and worsening health plagued her through her remaining years. Yet, in two decades, she published twelve books, several of which were translated—into French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Norse. The pre-eminent Southern literature scholar of the last half century, Lewis P. Simpson, numbers her with Faulkner, Warren, Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, Andrew Lytle and Thomas Wolfe as a major southern writer. And, it should be noted, Warren (who was honored with a stamp in 2005) was greatly influenced by Roberts, and his work owes much to that inspiration.

A New York Times review of The Time of Man and Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises opined that Roberts' was the more certain of a long life. When a group of writers were asked to comment on Ezra Pound's Cantos, she was one of only two women asked to contribute (the other the English poet H.D.). The Time of Man was a Book of the Month selection; she was the first writer whose work was selected twice by the Literary Guild. Carl Van Doren wrote that the Editorial Board had agreed that "they must if possible avoid the selection of books by writers already represented on the Guild list." Roberts's novel, A Buried Treasure (1931), caused the Editors to reconsider that decision. Centre College and the University of Louisville awarded her honorary degrees, and she was initiated into the highly select National Institute of Arts and Letters. These are just a few of the awards and accolades that Roberts received in her lifetime.

Miss Elizabeth's work has remained in print, and an unpublished novel, Flood, was published in 2012; The Time of Man is widely read and enjoyed in colleges and universities and handed on to new readers. Recently her work has also been republished overseas. Three book-length studies appeared in the 1960s. A Centenary conference at St. Catharine College in 1981 featured Simpson, Harriet Arnow, James Still, and her University of Chicago Poetry Club friends, writers Janet Lewis and Glenway Wescott. Three collections of her unpublished work and critical studies, many papers from the 17-year old Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society annual conferences, including work by European scholars, have appeared in recent years. The Society has also been publishing a newsletter since its inception, archived on the Society's website. The new St. Catharine College library includes a room bearing her name and a Roberts archive, too.

continued on next page

Notes on Roberts Stamp from previous page

This year is the centennial of her first, privately-published book, In the Great Steep's Garden; 2016 is the 90th anniversary of The Time of Man. Both would be timely occasions to celebrate this daughter of Kentucky who highlighted the will and perseverance of her fellow Kentuckians in prose and poetry. Please assist us in bringing Elizabeth Madox Roberts an honor that she greatly deserves, one that showcases a great artist and loyal citizen of the great state of Kentucky.

I write as, e.g., a resident of Springfield, teacher of Roberts' work, lover of great books, admirer of The Time of Man, etc.

Please utilize this template above and start urging your local and state representatives to get Miss Roberts on a United States postal stamp.

Roberts in Venice and Torcello 2014 (and Oak Park 2016?)

H. R. STONEBACK

In June 2014 a dozen members of the Roberts Society participated in the IV International Imagism Conference and the XVI International Hemingway Conference held in Venice and Torcello, Italy. While the conference papers primarily focused, of course, on Hemingway and Pound, Roberts received more than passing mention in several papers. And Mary de Rachewiltz, writer and scholar (and Ezra Pound's daughter) again affirmed her admiration for EMR's work. Several new members of the Roberts Society were recruited and at least one will present a paper at our 2015 conference.

Please note also that the XVII International Hemingway Conference will be held in Oak Park (Chicago) in July 2016—a perfect opportunity for Roberts scholars, given the Chicago location, to present papers exploring connections between Roberts and Hemingway. The Call for Papers, with an early deadline in Fall 2015, will be posted soon on the Hemingway Foundation & Society website (<hemingwaysociety.org>).

Landscape and Text-space: Scriven on EMR

MATTHEW NICKEL

It was with great pleasure that I received a copy of *Firsts* containing Don Scriven's two major articles "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Kentucky's Understated Feminist Writer Extraordinaire" and "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: A Briefly Annotated Checklist of First Editions." Scriven's narrative is compelling and rooted in that spirit of place so poignant and present throughout Roberts' writing. What I enjoyed most about his descriptions of Roberts' first editions is his thorough consideration of time and place. Scriven opens with a brief survey of Perryville—"what would become one of the bloodiest single days of America's Civil War"—and he brings us through the historical and literary contexts of Roberts' novels, surveying the vast habitations of Roberts' characters, themes, and scenes. His compelling introduction to Miss Roberts is both welcome and engaging.

As discussed in Stoneback's "The EMR Issue of *Firsts: The Book Collector's Magazine*" (in this *Newsletter* issue), Scriven's essays are situated in an impressive issue with articles on Evelyn Scott, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of Scriven's survey of EMR's first editions is the way in which he negotiates the apparent neglect of Roberts with her stature in the 1920s and 1930s, and he balances Roberts with other neglected—and for good reason—writers, as one of the best writers of her generation. He contextualizes Roberts among her contemporaries, yet sets her apart in her innovations. When he describes *The Time of Man*, he notes how

Not every reader sees the feminist thrust and implications of *The Time of Man* Ellen Chesser neither achieves material ease nor escapes the oppressive cycle of moving from one temporary work opportunity to another, and there is no reason for thinking things are likely to change. . . . What's more, at the end of the book Ellen not only opts to stay with her embattled husband when he suggests that she and the children stay behind while he searches for new work, but makes that choice without hesitation or reservation: "I'd go where you go and live where you live, all my endure life." In short, this is a far cry from the sort of overt attack on a patriarchal system and female domesticity that starts the salivary glands flowing among some today, especially on the political left, who purport to define what qualifies as feminist literature.

Scriven surveys all of Roberts' novels with close attention to style and content. As Stoneback mentioned, this edition should be on the shelves of all Roberts enthusiasts.

Roberts in *The Bookman*: March 1930

H. R. STONEBACK

Among the many items in the Roberts collection that I recently purchased—aside from Roberts manuscripts and her personal annotated copies of her own works on which I gave partial report in the 2014 *EMRS Newsletter*—is Volume LXXI No. 1 of *The Bookman* (March 1930). It seems very likely, given the nature and provenance of the collection, that this was EMR's copy of this major journal. Although the issue has no annotation in EMR's or any other hand, Roberts is a major presence. I have lately become a great believer in the scholarly principle that we should examine the original published appearance of work that we study and discuss. This is, for me, not just an axiom of historical scholarship but also a valuable benchmark of literary criticism, for the contextualization that consulting such publications provides.

The second article in the journal, after Paul Elmer More's ill-tempered lead essay on "A Revival of Humanism" (attacking Allen Tate, among others), is Glenway Wescott's "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: A Personal Note." There are no substantial differences in this original version of Wescott's warm personal appreciation of Roberts from the version titled "A Personal Note about Miss Roberts" and reprinted in the 1930 Viking Press pamphlet *Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. All Roberts scholars should read Wescott's essay, in whatever published form they can locate, both for its personal warmth and its critical acuity.

After Wescott's piece on Roberts, essays of particular note include G. K. Chesterton's "Magic and Fantasy in Fiction" and Allen Tate's "The Same Fallacy of Humanism." We may well imagine Roberts reading these pieces with great interest, Chesterton for his characteristic religion-centered meditations, Tate for his exposure of the fallacies

of Humanism (with a capital-H) as it was understood in the raging debates of the 1920s and after. One of the dissertations or books waiting to be written on Roberts is a study that will carefully examine and situate Roberts in the contexts of capital-H Humanism and religion.

In the book review section, we find a negative review of *The Great Meadow* by one Grenville Vernon, who asks: "Why is it then, that judged by the highest standards, *The Great Meadow* fails to satisfy?" Vernon's answer, hardly convincing, is that Roberts fails "the supreme test [of fiction]—that of vividness and inevitability of personality." His main case in point is the characterization of Diony, which he finds flat and reductive, making her "just another pioneer wife." With the supreme arrogance of the unaccomplished book reviewer, Vernon opines that Roberts fails because "she does not yet know the depths of the human heart." And the bone he throws Roberts in his conclusion is this:

Yet in a day of shoddy fiction, of unimaginative realism, of ignoble offerings to the Great Goddess Lubricity, a book such as *The Great Meadow* is of good omen. Miss Roberts, like Miss Cather, shows that she is interested in things of the spirit. She is a young woman [at 49?] and with the growth of years there ought to come a deepening in psychological insight and a greater intensity of feeling . . . she ought to go far. (97-98)

Finally, near the back of the issue, we find *The Bookman's Monthly Score*, their version of the monthly chart of best-sellers. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* holds the #1 position, followed by (to name only the still-remembered books), Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, still at #4 in the year after its publication, then at #5 Ellen Glasgow's *They Stood to Folly* and at #6 Edith Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed*. It is only March 1930—did Roberts make *The Bookman* Hit Parade later in the year?

Roberts Panel at the Society for the Study of American Women Writers

JAMIE STAMANT

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will be represented at this year's conference of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW) in Philadelphia. It is the first time that the EMR Society has submitted a panel to this prestigious conference, and we have already been accepted.

The panel was organized, and will be chaired, by **Nicole Stamant** (Agnes Scott College). The lineup for the panel is as follows: **Damian Carpenter** (East Tennessee State University), "A Life to Make Sense: Folk Music and Selfhood in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Black Is My Truelove's Hair*"; **Jane Eblen Keller** (University of Baltimore), "'Poets are born, and then made': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the University of Chicago"; **James Stamant** (Independent Scholar), "Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *A Buried Treasure* and the Rural Flâneur"; and

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Poet's Corner

In this occasional newsletter column, we like to publish poems inspired by Elizabeth Madox Roberts and our conference. This year, we are featuring a poem by Gregory Bruno, "Meditation at a Country Store," and a poem by Evan Hulick, "Big Two-Hearted Branch."

Big Two-Hearted Branch

*Sparrow's Branch: Little South,
Rolling Fork, Kentucky*

EVAN HULICK

We walk down to the river,
To the sacred stream,
Of baptismal waters,
On Jordan's shores,

From this river extends,
A sacred branch,
Clear, cold water
Flowing, glittering
In the sunlight,

The currents of the branch
Ebb and flow
In trickling streams
That bask in holiness
As the mosses flow,

This is a big two-hearted branch,
Its waters mingle in tiny sacred springs,
Upon the hard, smooth stones,
Formed by the Hand of God.

Meditation at a Country Store

For H. R. Stoneback

GREGORY BRUNO

Arrogant Northern pilgrim comes
To ancient Kentucky country store
By Roberts' sacred call,

musing prose drew him,
out from cell phone cage
And crass computer identity
To feel the soil in his soul.

No longer blinded by bourbon
He knew he had arrived,
Over, turning turning turning
The roll, round back hills
And meadow lands, loved lands
Worked and ordered, his eyes peeled at the
Revelation of what the land could be

He saw Westchester:
The lower Hudson Valley, worked and extinguished,
Gutted with pavement webs and river veins,
Saw Mill River, the Bronx River, Sprain Brook,
Hutchinson River—Parkways.
Running through golf courses and packed villages
Ardley, Irvington, Bronxville, Scarsdale,
elegant and elite, cramped and stuffed
isolated, and Irvington again, Tarrytown, Dobbs Ferry,
all parasites of the River,
and White Plains, Yonkers, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon,
City centers a flaky psoriasis of the land.

Then Ulster:
With its mountains and hills,
Wild and not well tended, the towns peeking out,
New Paltz, Highland, Gardiner, Rosendale
Teasing the land, overgrown
Teeming with angry orchids.
Across the river and into Poughkeepsie
The Hudson continues to be abused.

Now, eyes wide open:
Springfield, Harrodsburg, Danville,
His feet pressed against lush
Manicured blue grass running for miles,
where rivers and brooks can be rivers and cricks
and burly well-fed livestock line the roads.
No longer would he be kept
From the soil in his soul,
Firmly rooted he was nourished.
He left Kentucky full and never left the land.



*Evan Hulick
one of the
Sparrow
Memorial
Award Winners*

SSAWW from page 5

Goretti Vianny-Benca (SUNY-Ulster), “Looking in the Mirror Darkly: Recovering the Feminine Self in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ ‘The Haunted Palace.’”

The theme of this year’s conference, taking place in November, is “Liminal Spaces, Hybrid Lives.” Nicole Stamant utilized that theme in her “overview” of the panel’s submission:

Mary Lou Emery writes that, in global modernist fiction—as in the works of William Faulkner, Jean Toomer, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts—the “subjectivities of working women engage the twinned dynamics of freedom and dispossession, agency and commodification.” Roberts’ characters certainly examine what these ideas might mean as they do most often exist in the space between these polarities, negotiating familial history and community absence, for example, or attempting to maintain agency in the face of poverty. In her novels, short stories, and poetry, as well as in her own lived experience, Roberts investigates the thresholds she and her characters inhabit as they challenge easy definition and elide facile classification. Her

characters extend and repeatedly expose such binaries as impermanent constructs as they challenge expectations for marriage, childbearing, material wealth, work, and gender. And, as a rural American Modernist whose biography is full of unconventional elements, Roberts herself vacillates between such “twinned dynamics.” The hybrid nature of her life informs her work as her poetry and fiction make manifest the liminality of rurality—of rural geographies, rural bodies, and rural lives—to remind readers of the complexity of humanity and the trap of reductive analysis. This panel, organized by the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, engages the conference theme, “Liminal Spaces, Hybrid Lives,” with papers devoted to uncovering the transgressive and potentially subversive elements of Roberts’ work and life, reconsidering the connections she forges between art and education, community and subjectivity, and the intimate and the global.

SSAWW was founded to promote the work of American women writers, and with that goal in mind the EMR Society hopes to both stimulate an interest in Roberts among the members of SSAWW and to introduce her to those who may not already know her work.

Publication Notes

In this occasional newsletter column we will report recent books by Society members. Although Society members also publish numerous essays on writers other than Roberts, these articles will not be recorded here. But please send us your citations for any essays published on Roberts that are not included in EMRS publications. *Reminder:* The Reading Roberts Series, under the general editorship of H. R. Stoneback—as reported in the 2012 Newsletter—is a thriving concern. The Series published three books in 2012 and looks at two more in 2015; more volumes are in progress. Stay tuned.

Florczyk, Steven. *Hemingway, the Red Cross, and the Great War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 2014. {Critical monograph}

Neikirk, Gregg B. *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. New York: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2015. {Play about the life of Elizabeth Madox Roberts}

Nickel, Matthew. *Hemingway’s Dark Night: Catholic Influences and Intertextualities in the Work of Ernest Hemingway*. Wickford, RI: New Street Communications,

2013. {Critical monograph}

---. *The Leek Soup Songbook*. West Park, NY: Des Hymnagistes Press, 2015. {Collection of original poems}

--- & Stoneback. *Garlic Odes & Leek Songs (Chansons d’ail & Poireau-Poèmes)*. New York: Anachthon Press, 2014. {Collection of original poems}

Stoneback, H. R. & Matthew Nickel. *Affirming the Gold Thread: Aldington, Hemingway, Pound & Imagism in Torcello and Venice*. Bradenton, FL: Florida English, 2014. {Collection of critical essays}

---, Kempton, Nickel. *Ghosts in the Background Moving*. Bradenton, FL: Florida English, 2013. {Collection of critical essays}

---, Gery, Kempton. *Imagism: Essays on Initiation, Impact, and Influence*. New Orleans, LA: UNO Press, 2013. {Collection of critical essays}

---. *The Stoney & Sparrow Songbook*. West Park, NY: Des Hymnagistes Press, forthcoming. {Collection of original songs with accompanying sheet music and stories}

---. *Why Athletes Prefer Cheerleaders*. West Park, NY: Des Hymnagistes Press, 2013.

Conference Report 2014

JESSICA M. NICKEL

The XVI Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 26-28, 2014. Our conference began with a gracious reception at Kentucky Lit, hosted by Chad Horn. Goretti Vianney-Benca, Co-Vice-President of the Society, welcomed us at the Beaumont Inn, and then H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Roberts Society, followed with his keynote address: "Ginglen in the Wind: Reflections on a Roberts Collection." We enjoyed a wonderful meal topped off with the presentations of the Sparrow Memorial Award.

On Sunday, conferees enjoyed an old-fashioned tent meeting and hymn sing at Penn's store, where Stoneback offered his sermon, "The Ballad of P. P. Bliss: In Praise of a Great Gospel Songwriter"; the conferees traveled to Roncevaux Farm, and then attended Kentucky Writers Day. In the afternoon, the Society was honored at Mordecai's Restaurant by Mayor John W. Ceconi, The Springfield City Council, Nell Haydon and Main Street Renaissance, and the Ladies of Springfield. Conference participants were then given a tour of Elenores, Roberts' house, hosted by Joan Hamilton.

Monday morning the Society was greeted by President William D. Huston and Leah Bayens at Saint Catharine College. Academic papers were presented throughout the day by many new and veteran Roberts scholars. The conference ended with a poetry reading at Roberts' grave.

Session 1: Vicki Barker (Carson-Newman C): "A Wall Standing Before Kentuck": A Discussion of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Historical Sources for *The Great Meadow* and their Influence on the Novel's Portrayal of Appalachia; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State U): The Great Global Meadow: The Significance of Roberts Novels Around the World; **Bill Slavick** (U of Southern Maine): The Kentucky

of Roberts, Merton, and Berry; **Cynthia Cain** (Independent Scholar): Church Bells & Bird Song: Listening for the Holy with Roberts' Women; **Jenna Niece** (Saint Catharine C): Novice to Novel (Jenna Niece was the recipient of the Terry Ward Memorial Award)

Session 2: Gisèle Sigal (Université de Pau - IUT de Bayonne): Meditation over Alienation: The Rewriting of Southern Myths in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' "The Sacrifice of the Maidens"; **Steve Brahlek** (Palm Beach State C): Crackers, Race, and Nature: An Introduction to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings; **Mickey D'Addario** (Marist C): Making Sense of Roberts: More Than a Regionalist; **Amanda Capelli** (U of Louisiana at Lafayette): Re-Configuring the Canon: Roberts and the Southern Literary Tradition; **Jane Dionne** (Independent Scholar): Teaching Guide for *The Time of Man*

Session 3: Jane Keller (U of Baltimore): "Something of Myself": Readings from the Preliminary Draft of the Biography of Elizabeth Madox Roberts; **James Stamant** (Agnes Scott C): Spaces of *A Buried Treasure*

Session 4: Nathan Lindsay Lee (Independent Scholar): Hear the Hillfolk or the Bad New Highway; **Dan Pizappi** (SUNY-New Paltz): Flowering out of stone: Roberts, Modernism, and Comparative Mythology; **Evan Hulick** (SUNY-New Paltz): "The bell at St. Lucy rang...": The Christian Imagery of Roberts' *The Time of Man*; **Gregory Bruno** (SUNY-New Paltz): Diony: Namesake, Prophecy and Identity

Session 5: Chris Vecchiarelli (SUNY-New Paltz): "Bright new machines that would go clickity click across the sparkling meadows"—Modernity in Twain and Roberts; **Joe McNulty** (Independent Scholar): In from Out: Smallness & Solitude in EMR's Poetry; **Peter Camilleri** (SUNY-New Paltz): Ellen Chesser: Beyond Victory and Defeat; **Christopher Paolini** (Independent Scholar): Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Song in the Waste Land



Chad Horn's Kentucky Lit
Book & Cigar Store welcomes
The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

Roberts, Wendell Berry, and Sustainability

GREGORY BRUNO

This past November, The Roberts Society attended the 86th South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) Conference, which focused on Sustainability and the Humanities. Wendell Berry, one of Kentucky's most prolific contemporary writers, was the keynote speaker. Berry, the author of volumes of essays that illuminate our destructive economic practices and culture, was exactly the right person to discuss subjects like sustainability and the humanities. At the same time Berry's writing is always an homage to the Kentucky land he knows and loves, and his talk focused on the local first.

Berry's plenary drew from his life's work and illustrated the role of the humanities in an effort to create a sustainable society. He began his address by dedicating it to one of his English professors from college who would never accept a paper from him on the first or second draft. In order to have a sustainable society, Berry urged us, we must have a sustainable culture that maintains high standards. Our current culture and economy only values what can be measured. Berry argues, not only in this address, but also throughout much of his work, that a truly sustainable culture is based on virtues that cannot be quantified, virtues like honesty, thrift, care, good work, generosity, and imagination.

After Wendell Berry's speech The Roberts Society waited to speak with Berry. Matthew Nickel, President of the Society, spoke on behalf of those present thanking Mr. Berry for a fine discussion. He also inquired about his sheep that needed to be sheared last April—the reason he was unable to attend our annual conference in Kentucky. Mr. Berry praised Elizabeth Madox Roberts as a fine writer and told us to continue doing our “good work.”

Wendell Berry's praise was apt. The Roberts Society's work is noble and urgent, and we must dignify a true artist such as Roberts by returning her to the cultural consciousness. Reading Roberts is a step in the direction of a sustainable culture. The seeds of Berry's emphasis on sustainable local cultures are present in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' visions of Kentucky in *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow*.

In this time of ecological crisis we must turn to literature and writers such as Wendell Berry and Elizabeth Madox Roberts and their visions of sustainable local cultures. Berry captures the contemporary American experience, the problems with our “anti-economy” and our culture that allow this crisis to continue. Roberts, writing roughly seventy years prior to Berry, writes about functional local communities and cultures that are economically and morally sustainable. In the whole picture of existing in a sustainable society, each aspect is important to a properly functioning whole. While literature will not fix ecological crises in any physical ways it can provide the foundation of a sustainable society.

Reception at Kentucky Lit

JAMIE STAMANT & MATTHEW NICKEL

Chad Horn graciously hosted the EMR Society at Kentucky Lit, on Harrodsburg's South Main Street. As usual, there were refreshments and socializing, with members of the society having a chance to say “hello,” utilize a little tobacco, and donate to the Sparrow Memorial Award by purchasing items in the store at whatever price they named.

The Society was also welcomed by a few special guests: Kentucky's own ‘Son Of Ernest’ Billy Crank (currently starring in multiple commercials and filming a full length movie as the son of the late Jim Varney character); Bobbi Buchanan, founder and Editor of *The New Southerner*; and Cultural Ambassador to Haiti Yolantha Harrison-Pace.

Mr. Horn also arranged for a venue across the street as the book and cigar store became crowded. June Bug's hosted Society members with a wonderful cake that had been decorated as Roberts' *The Time of Man*, cheese and crackers, and bottles of Ale-8 (a soda that is native to the region). The hospitality shown to the society at both establishments, and from both businesses, was greatly appreciated and made for an exciting start to our 2014 conference program.

We thank Chad Horn and guests for always making Harrodsburg a special place to come to. And we look forward with enthusiasm to seeing him again in 2015.

News & Notes

Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect* (Eds. Stoneback, Boyle, and Nickel, 2012); *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* (Eds. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008); and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Eds. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as original pieces of writing by her that have never before been published. 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.

At the 2014 conference opening banquet, H. R. Stoneback read a message to the Roberts Society from **Wendell Berry** and announced that Mr. Berry had graciously accepted the award of **Honorary Lifetime Membership in the EMRS**.

The Roberts Society is proud to announce **Jessica Nickel** (Misericordia U) was the winner of The Robert Hacke Scholar-Teacher Award by the College English Association, March 2014. Nickel's essay, "Reading Roberts' *The Haunted Mirror*" was published in *The CEA Critic* 76.3 (November 2014).

Katy L. Leedy (Marquette U) read a paper, "Beyond her understanding': Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'The Haunted Palace' and the Changing South" at the 13th International Conference on the Short Story in English. The conference was held in Vienna, Austria, July 2014.

EMR Panel at March 2014 CEA Conference in Baltimore, MD

The Roberts Society had a panel at CEA with papers by **Matthew Nickel** (Misericordia U), **Jessica Nickel** (Misericordia U), and **Jane Keller** (U of Baltimore). **H. R. Stoneback** gave the keynote speech, focused in large part on Roberts.

EMR Panels at November 2014 SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, GA

The Roberts Society was well represented this year at the

SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. **Amanda Capelli** (U of Louisiana) chaired **Elizabeth Madox Roberts: The Earth, Environment, and Sustainability** panel with papers by **Jared Young** (Independent Scholar), **Daniel J. Pizappi** (SUNY-New Paltz), **Gregory Bruno** (SUNY-New Paltz), and **Ieva Padgett** (Emory U).

Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-Ulster) chaired the **Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect** panel with papers by **Nicole Stamant** (Agnes Scott College), **James Stamant** (Agnes Scott College), **Evan Hulick** (SUNY-New Paltz), and **Jessica Nickel** (Misericordia U).

CFP: SAMLA 2015 (Atlanta, GA; November 13-15)

Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect

Papers for this session may deal with all aspects of Roberts's work and life. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to, the following: Roberts and new work (particularly her posthumously published unfinished novel *Flood*); Roberts and her manuscripts; Roberts in the context of Southern literature; Roberts and Southern Agrarianism; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and Kentucky; Roberts' literary and stylistic influences (i.e., Synge, Hardy, Joyce, Homer, Hopkins, Beethoven, Pound); Roberts and religion; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and feminism; Roberts and the novel; Roberts as poet; Roberts as writer of short fiction; and, Roberts and the politics of literary reputation. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by May 30, 2015 to Amanda Capelli (U of Louisiana) at axc7464@louisiana.edu.

Music & Muses in the Poetry and Fiction of Elizabeth Madox Roberts

Paper topics for this session may deal with music and performance in the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, including (but not limited to): Roberts and Music; Roberts and Folksong, Folktales, or Folk-speech; Performances in Roberts' writing; Music and Poetry in Roberts; Hymns and Roberts; or other music- or performance-related topics found in Roberts' writing. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by May 30, 2015 to Gregg Neikirk, session chair, Westfield State University, at gneikirk@westfield.ma.edu.

2014 Roberts Society Award Winners:

The 2014 **Sparrow Memorial Awards** were given to: Daniel Pizappi (SUNY-New Paltz) and Evan Hulick (SUNY-New Paltz).

The 2014 **Terry Ward Memorial Award** was given to Jenna Niece (St. Catharine College).

continued on next page

Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer at tinair@hotmail.com, or send a check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant to: Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery Street, Tivoli, NY 12583.

Reading Roberts

The Reading Roberts Series now includes Roberts, *Flood*, a posthumous and unfinished novel edited by Vicki Barker; a collection of essays, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect*

& *Retrospect*, edited by H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel; an anthology of poetry, *Kentucky: Poets of Place*; and Gregg Neikirk's play, *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. For more information regarding ordering, please visit www.emrsociety.com.

EMR Digital Archive

Past issues of *The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter* are now available online. Please go to www.emrsociety.com to browse the archives.

EMR Included in *The Encyclopedia of the Environment in American Literature*

MICHAEL J. BEILFUSS

The *Encyclopedia of the Environment in American Literature*, edited by Geoff Hamilton and Brian Jones, was a long time in the making. I first came across the call for papers early in 2009. I was pleasantly surprised to find Elizabeth Madox Roberts' name among the available entries and signed up to write about her "Life and Works" and *The Great Meadow*, as well a number of other entries. The project was well under way when I joined, but due to a number of delays, not least of which was the bankruptcy of the original publisher, the book didn't see print until 2013. Despite the obstacles in bringing the project to fruition, the lead editor, Jones, soldiered on and managed to place the book with McFarland.

Coming in at 350 pages, the encyclopedia is meant to be introductory. The target audience of the work is upper level high school students and/or undergraduates. As such, the entries are short, no more than a page or so. The focus of the encyclopedia is not so much nature writing, as one might suspect based on the title, but rather, as the Preface explains, the focus is "on works that have unquestionably reflected and shaped the environmental imagination of Americans This is an encyclopedia of the *environment*, imagined and revealed in literature, not of *literature* on or about the environment."

In the brief Introduction, the editors single out Roberts as among the few authors who have significantly contributed to the "hard-won wisdom" of the "land in all its local specificity and color." Unlike many of the other authors included in the encyclopedia, she is afforded two entries. For the "Life and Works" entry I was charged with composing a brief biography as well as an overview of Roberts's works. The short entry (500 words) focuses on her relevance to the

topic of the encyclopedia. Drawing on scholarship by H. R. Stoneback, Robert Penn Warren, Earl Rovit, and members of the EMR society, I highlighted her autochthonous nature and commitment to a sense of place.

I inquired about writing an entry on *The Time of Man*, but the editor was committed to including a single entry on *The Great Meadow*. Since I was able to reference *The Time of Man* in the "Life and Works" entry, I felt free to focus exclusively on the later novel in this longer (1500 word) piece. After providing a brief summary, I introduce the argument with Bishop Berkeley that Roberts sustains throughout the book. She refutes Berkeley, not as Samuel Johnson did by kicking a stone, but by using "poetic realism" to establish Diony's deep, personal (and communal) connection with the surrounding environment.

Although the novel often idealizes the landscape of Kentucky, Roberts also provides plenty of tension between the settler's dreams and the harsh reality of frontier life. I also zeroed in on Roberts's inclusion of what I see as quite significant details of the natural environment, specifically the presence of passenger pigeons and ivory billed woodpeckers in the landscape crossed by Diony and her fellow settlers. The former was long extinct and the latter was clearly well on its way to extinction when Roberts was composing the work. As I state in the encyclopedia, the message, if any, that Roberts intended to send by including these details is up to interpretation, but they may serve to subtly indict the settlers for their naive rapacity of the land they so loved.

Other authors included in the encyclopedia that may be of interest to Roberts scholars and enthusiasts include Wendell Berry, Ezra Pound, Robert Penn Warren, and Ellen Glasgow, among others. The *Encyclopedia of the Environment in American Literature* is available through the publisher as well as on Amazon.com. The list price is \$75.00.

The Reading Roberts Series Presents

Gregg B. Neikirk's *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*

Praise for Neikirk's Play:

This play has something for everybody, has much to offer both rooted autochthons, that is, those "sprung from the land itself," and displaced anachthons, those seeking a vision of coming home. Neikirk cultivates this terroir admirably while suffusing the play with an overarching vision of home as the world that a writer creates in her writing. To say that *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts* belongs on the bookshelves of every Roberts aficionado and scholar is

to state the obvious. It also belongs in the library of everyone who knows about leaving home and coming home, everyone who has ever thought or dreamed of writing home.

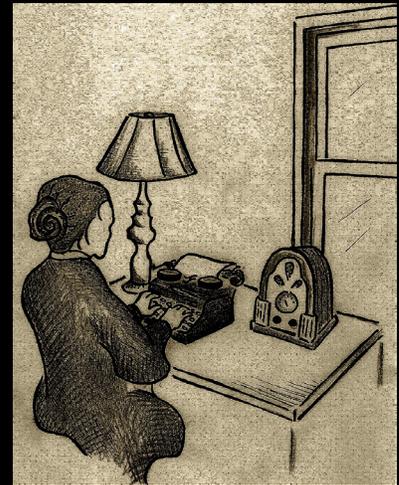
—H. R. Stoneback

Neikirk's focus here is exactly right. For Roberts to have written so poetically with life from within is a testimony to her spirit; despite the ailments that darkened most of her life, the vision she offered is of such brilliant and life-affirming passion that all we have to do is imagine. Through his woven vision of Roberts, her places, her memories, her creations, Neikirk has offered us a work that gives real emotion. He brings us to the roots of who Roberts was and in turn who we are as we journey through Roberts' literary landscapes.

—Matthew Nickel

COMING HOME

A VISION OF
ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS



GREGG B. NEIKIRK

If you are interested in buying a copy, please visit www.emrsociety.com for ordering information.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

Honorary President: H. R. Stoneback, SUNY-New Paltz

President: Matthew Nickel, Misericordia University

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EMRS Newsletter Editors: Matthew Nickel / James Stamant

Visit us on the web: www.emrsociety.com

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 Matthew Nickel at mattcnickel@gmail.com.