

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 17

www.emrsociety.com

March 2016

18th Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XVIII Annual Conference in Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill and in Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 22-25, 2016. We are excited to return 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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Elizabeth Madox Roberts: No Joke

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MATTHEW NICKEL

Elizabeth Madox Roberts and H. R. Stoneback walk into a bar. At least, that's how the scene always plays over and over in my mind, but I've never been very good at those kinds of jokes. Still, let's imagine they did walk into Penn's Store and Jeanne was sitting there by the fire telling a story. And soon enough some people start picking on the porch and singing and the whole field starts blowing in the wind like some mystical breeze swept down over the knobs and around Little South and the dogs start hollering and some scraggly folk from up in New York laze about on the lawn and some elders talk to the kids and sell flowers and a wounded man salutes a veteran and a poet says a few words about love and landscape and the earth and little children running chase the dogs and the cats scratch and the outhouse door slams and a preacher is preaching under a big white tent with arms raised high up toward God or just tracing the clouds and pretty soon the whole darn county is raising voices for "Amazing Grace."

Roberts is no joke and what the Roberts Society experiences each year, the transformation that welcomes a different way of being, is something profound. It has saved many of us, reminded us of the sacred contract between the written word and the spirit of place. Sometimes we discover this in the rhythm of her words, in the reading of lyric and landscape;

sometimes in the first glimpse of that green field rolling under fences and barns and cattle crowding a spring; in the voices and manners of those who welcome us each year with open arms; in the singing and picking, the night long hymns that fill the air with hallelujahs.

What happens at a Roberts Conference is magic, and the testimonies given by hundreds of participants in the past eighteen years attests to the power of Roberts' words, her country, and her living community. And if Roberts is no joke, then H. R. Stoneback's—Stoney's—role in our Roberts experiences has been and continues to be no laughing matter. His gift has been the living word and he has been generous with his giving. Without Stoney there would be no Roberts Society, no Roberts Conference, simply said. Most of us never would have ventured forth into the bluegrass region of Kentucky with purpose, with direction. We would not have met the faces that we still prepare to meet, hear the voices of praise and thanksgiving in the pages and villages of Roberts' works. We never would have heard the sounds of hymns sung after midnight as tears mark the young faces of those who are feeling for the first time what it must be like to believe in God. There would be no road and no mariner and for many of us no mercy.

All of the above would amount to fantasy—maybe in this fantasy my jokes would make people laugh—and many of us would still be lost among the fading letters of a dusty anthology still wondering about the missing pages for a woman named Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Thus, we salute you Stoney for Roberts' Country, for the living word.

My EMR *Dinnseanchais*

FRANCES KEARNEY

A modern translation of the ancient Gaelic word *Dinnseanchais* is simply “topography.” But it is the Irish version that encapsulates my first-time trip to the Elizabeth Madox Roberts conference in Kentucky last April. Sounds strange? Let me explain.

Dinnseanchais (pronounced, dean-sha-cas) is a beautifully constructed word that is multilayered to convey: “outstanding,” “inspiring,” “ancient,” “established,” “high place.” To an Irish ear the word resonates of ancestral voices working the land, and to the eye it lends shapes, shadows, contours, and hues.

I had never heard of Elizabeth Madox Roberts until I was gifted a copy of *The Time of Man*, in 2014. Reading the novel, I was there, in Roberts’ *dinnseanchais*—feeling the clay under my nails as she had me digging the fields with Ellen Chesser. Roberts managed to give me a strong sense of what Kentucky was like more than a century ago. So it was with anticipation and a measure of trepidation that I set off from the rural hinterland of South Ulster to the Roberts annual conference to hear more about her writing and to see her country for myself.

Kentucky in April is green and lush and I could have been at home in Ireland if it was not for the expanse of the countryside—no diminutive ditches or fences to interrupt “the horizontal plane.” The kindness and friendliness of my fellow delegates put me at ease: from the moment Amanda gave me a lift to Shaker Village, to my return journey in Jane’s wonderful company. The mix of youth and wisdom—from the most contented toddler, Charlie, to the clever and lively students, to the worldly seasoned academics—gave the conference edginess and spirit.

On arrival, I took the opportunity to walk all around Shaker Village not only to get my bearings, but to soak-up that sense of stepping out of modernity into another time. The feeling of *dinnseanchais*—where the land holds memories, stories and voices from the past—that I got from Roberts’ novel came back to me at Shaker Village. Situated in the aptly named, “Pleasant Hill,” there was certainty of place in its ancientness that pre-existed the time of the Shakers, and with its striking landscape, had to be the most perfect pastoral setting to draw inspiration from and pay tribute to Roberts’ work.

The EMR conference was vibrant and alive, and for me, stood out as the most personable of academic gatherings that I have attended. I know that it is due to the absolute

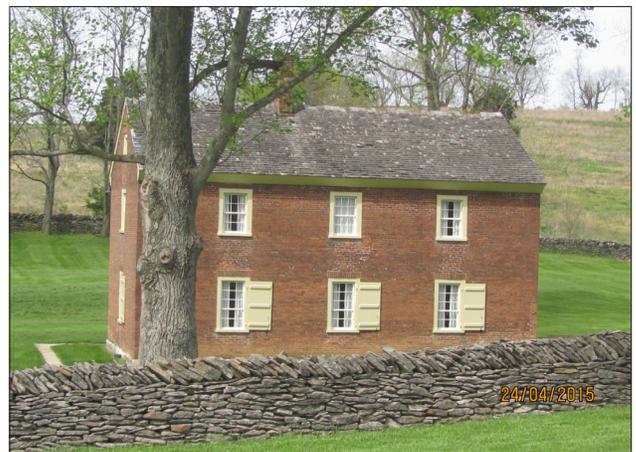
enthusiasm and dedication of all those who, year after year, champion Roberts’ writing and welcome new converts (like me) to her work. The innovative readings from Roberts’ novels and poems reflected the rich analyses and satisfaction that her writing offers. The organised events to Roberts’ home, her grave and, courtesy of Jane, my private tour of the school where Roberts taught, all converged to add even greater texture and perspective to what I already felt when I read *The Time of Man*.

There are many anecdotes that are as vivid to me now as they were nine months ago. At Roberts’ graveside, the spontaneous, unassuming and poignant French recital of one of her poems by Gisèle was so different and special, as was Gregg’s gift of his book on Roberts to us all, and the religious mementos I received from Jane. My leisurely stroll around the nun’s graveyard at Saint Catharine College was interrupted by a double-take as I discovered my name-sake on a headstone! This left me thinking that perhaps some of my ancestors passed through or settled in Kentucky. The participation in the Kentucky Writers Day at Penn’s Store was somewhat surreal as I recited a poem from Stoney’s *Language of Blackberries* in Irish, ensuring that I pronounced every word correctly, only to realize (after I finished) that it did not matter; there were no Gaelic speakers in the audience to know the difference! The natural ease that I felt in assisting Jane with some post-conference research at Saint Catharine College was a measure of the relaxed atmosphere of the conference as a whole.

The perfect setting of place, people, and their presentations all fused to make the EMR conference a very memorable one for me. I will return for another conference, and in a quiet moment, read Roberts to see and feel what she did, where there are “rocks a-grownen.”

Thank you all for the warm welcome and my best wishes for another inspiring and outstanding EMR conference in April 2016.

Sláinte—Frances Kearney



24/04/2015

Roberts and Whitman?

H. R. STONEBACK

In connection with the Philadelphia conference noted later in the newsletter I will host a poetry reading at the national landmark Walt Whitman House in Camden, New Jersey. Conferees will take Whitman's favorite ferry across the river from Philadelphia to Camden. I recently heard someone remark that Camden, long at and near the top of the list as "America's Most Dangerous City," is the perfect setting for the home of "America's Most Dangerous Poet."

This note is, in part, a query—if anyone knows of Roberts-Whitman connections, please relay that information to me. (For example, evidence of how Whitman was viewed by the Chicago Poetry Club? Or any direct reference or obvious echo of Whitman made by Roberts.)

And this: I am in communication with the Curator of the Whitman House and in conversation we mentioned the long list of distinguished American writers who have visited the Whitman House over the past 132 years. I asked if there were old guest-books, specifically a register of visitors in the period 1910-1925. The Curator was not sure about a record of visitors in the 20s. He thought Marianne Moore had visited, wasn't sure about Ezra Pound. But he would dig in the archives. The mention of Moore set me thinking about Roberts-Moore-New York connections. Moore, as editor of *The Dial*, may well have visited the Whitman House, since it is a few blocks from the publication/printing office of *The Dial*. (Thus, the first American publication of *The Waste Land* happened in Camden, near the Whitman House. How appropriate.)

Is it possible then, that Roberts may have visited the Whitman House with Moore? Since it's an easy drive or train ride from New York (then as now), it is possible that when Roberts was keeping company with Moore in New York such a visit might have occurred. And if no evidence, no guest-book signatures turn up in the archive, well then—maybe some poet will *imagine* a Roberts visit to Camden. Also, Camden (once known as the "Music Capital of the World") was where the recording industry was invented, by the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA) sited a few blocks from Whitman's House. Maybe some poet will *imagine* the discovery of the lost recordings of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, made in the Camden Studio where the *Southern* music business was invented, where Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family made their records in the 20s (not to mention Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Enrico Caruso and many others). Imagine this: Victor record #20233-B-12, EMR with the Carter Family, A-side "Wildwood Flower" flip-side "The Time of Man." (Walt Whitman on bull fiddle?) At least Roberts—the *grand maestro* of the deployment of folksong and country music in fiction and poetry—would have appreciated the role of Victor records in disseminating folk music.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts at the 2015 SSAWW Conference

JAMES STAMANT

The EMR Society conducted a panel at this past year's Society for the Study of American Women Writers Conference (SSAWW) in Philadelphia, November 2015. SSAWW was founded to promote the work of American women writers, and with that goal in mind the EMR Society hoped 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. The conference is a major meeting, hosted triennially, welcoming conferees from the US, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, the Bahamas, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Pakistan, Poland, and Sweden.

The EMR Society's panel was organized by **Nicole Stamant** (Agnes Scott C). The theme of the conference was "Liminal Spaces, Hybrid Lives": **Damian Carpenter** (East Tenn S U), "A Life to Make Sense: Folk Music and Selfhood in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Black Is My Truelove's Hair*"; **Jane Eblen Keller** (U of Baltimore), "'Poets are born, and then made': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the University of Chicago"; **James Stamant** (Ind Scholar), "Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *A Buried Treasure* and the Rural Flâneur"; and **Goretti Vianny-Benca** (SUNY Ulster), "Looking in the Mirror Darkly: Recovering the Feminine Self in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'The Haunted Palace.'"

The Roberts Society panel helped to forge a new relationship with a large and important group of scholars and readers. Notably, during a discussion that occurred after the panel, a member of the audience conveyed her interest in Roberts, though she had not known of her before looking at the conference program. Before attending the panel, she read "The Haunted Palace" and *Black is My True Love's Hair*. Her attendance at the panel and the discussion about Roberts' work furthered her interest in Roberts, and she left with a better idea of who Roberts was and what her work was about. These types of interactions really serve as a reminder of how rejuvenating conferencing can be when things are working right. It is to be hoped that the EMR Society can look forward to more of these moments at SSAWW in the years to come.

Toward *The Great Meadow*

JANE KELLER

Below is an excerpt from Chapter Eight of Jane Keller's not-quite-finished but getting-there biography of EMR. The passage here describes an essay, now at the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, written many years before the ideas matured to become The Great Meadow.

Some twenty years earlier [i.e., around 1908, before Elizabeth left Springfield for Colorado], Elizabeth, still very much Miss Bessie, had found consolation for her loneliness and food for her hungry mind among a group of four other women, "ardent souls" passionately interested in literature and history. The leader of the little club was Mary Blythe McElroy, the "most beautiful person" who in 1921 had looked with such kindly admiration on Elizabeth's college achievements and long before had been among the few to encourage her aspirations. Elizabeth later made fun of the Chautauqua-like meetings of local ladies, amateurish and pretentious affairs in her view with nothing more elevated or stimulating than an encyclopedia to guide their discussions. The gatherings around Mrs. McElroy's tea table were more serious, at least as Elizabeth remembered them, and the two surviving essays she herself prepared for the seminars suggest some truth in the assessment. One was called "Life in the Early West: The Rough Timber Age."

She was no more than twenty-five when she wrote it, but she studied her sources, organized the material with care, and proposed with amazing prescience that "one of these days some other new thing is going to arise among us, some form more noble than epic, or grand opera, or oratoria" to tell the story of the long hunters and pioneers who ventured into Kentucky in the eighteenth century.

Of course she had grown up hearing these tales, both about her own family and the patron saints of the commonwealth, James Harrod, Benjamin Logan, and above all Daniel Boone, the larger-than-life scions of the "strong, honest race" of men and women who tamed the wilderness. They were, as she wrote in her essay, the American Siegfrieds and King Arthurs, genuine if by now semi-mythical heroes who survived amidst the "primitive unused elements" with nothing but wits and courage, guns and axes. They were cheerful, earthy souls, not grim, Puritan-like figures, she hastened to note, their "jokes, perhaps, a trifle rude and coarse measured by our hothouse standards." The women were as lively and resourceful, working as hard as any man and proud of the "linsey-woolsey gowns which they have spun, woven, and made for themselves." They were also a sturdy, unsentimental lot. If their husbands died or disappeared, as often happened, they "mourned sincerely but rapidly" and soon remarried, though seldom with the blessing of the short-supplied clergy. Partnership between men and women, with or without benefit of church or state sanction, was nonetheless "holy and sacred," necessary to both sexes, "a part of the great pathos of the whole."

The essay was a tad overblown and worshipful but already characterized by a recognizable Robertsonian style and sensibility, and looking back on it, Elizabeth realized that it was the origin of the novel she was beginning at last to devise in the spring of 1928. A vision of "these people coming over

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Roberts and the Academy

NICOLE STAMANT

Getting together teaching notes for a theory and methodology course, preparing to teach feminist criticism, I came across this paragraph in Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2006):

Even today, unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to underrepresent the contribution of women writers. For example, in Matthew J. Bruccoli's preface to recent editions of *The Great Gatsby*, he notes that the 1920s was "an age of achievement . . . in American literature" and lists the names of twelve authors to support his claim. Only one of those authors—Willa Cather—is a woman. (84)

Tyson provides a list of authors that she argues challenge Bruccoli's incorporation of only one woman, including Djuna Barnes, H.D., Ellen Glasgow, Susan Glaspell, Nella Larsen, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Marianne Moore, Gertrude Stein, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Why, she wonders, were these writers overlooked? She continues: "That many students probably recognize only a few of these names illustrates the marginalization of many women writers by literary history, though not necessarily by the reading public at the time these women wrote" (84). As we readers and scholars of Roberts can attest, it is not only students who may have trouble with Bruccoli's list of remarkable writers, but many within the academy as well. The task of uncovering the work of writers whose texts are out of print, whose lives remain uncharted in biographies, and whose "achievement[s]" continue to be regarded as unsubstantial is both daunting and exhilarating. The Roberts Society's mission, and the ongoing work of its members, corroborates Roberts' place on Tyson's list and others' as one of the most talented American authors during the country's "age of achievement."

“Turned Toward the Wonder of the Equinoxes”: Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ and Wendell Berry’s Agrarian Marvels

LEAH BAYENS

The literature of the American South provides an apt sampling of texts illustrating the conditions of and responses to historical flashpoints of significant social, civic, and gender inequities exacerbated by particular agricultural systems. In what follows, I put into conversation two such texts by central Kentucky writers which not only disclose certain foundations of contemporary agricultural problems generated during the time frames they depict, but which also provide models of an agrarian strategy for resilience and self-actualization that is complicated, candid, and sometimes only partially realized.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *The Time of Man* and Wendell Berry’s *Hannah Coulter* illustrate the “country commoner’s” trials in the face of agricultural systems weighted against the tenant and smallholder farmer, respectively (Clark 24). Taken together, Roberts’ Ellen Chesser and Berry’s Hannah Coulter are figures whose frugality, strength, creativity, and affection for others allow them to maintain an inherent sense of self-worth and to provide for themselves and their families in the face of debasing social and economic scenes.

Roberts—in 1926—and Berry—in 2004—represent historical flashpoints in the shift toward increasingly capital-intensive and industrialized farming. Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark points out that *The Time of Man* portrays “one of the most important social phenomena of the land—tobacco tenancy,” which gained particular momentum after the Civil War (86). Ellen Chesser’s life reflects thousands of Southern tenant and migrant farmers’ experiences at the turn of the twentieth-century, and Roberts composed the novel at a time when tenancy experienced a dramatic uptick. The novel *Hannah Coulter* takes up where Roberts left off by depicting mechanization and commoditization of American agriculture and the corresponding rural exoduses from World War II to the turn of the twenty-first century.

In spite of the differences in time frames, Berry’s and Roberts’ protagonists share a litany of similarities. Both hail from poor, tobacco-dependent Kentucky families. Both are excellent gardeners and hard field workers. Both understand the importance of following nature’s lead, as Hannah puts it, “never to plow too much in any year, never to grow more grain than we needed to feed our own livestock, and never to have too much livestock” (84). Both are frugal, Ellen scrimping and saving at every turn, and Hannah following her grandmother’s lead and stashing

“everything that might be of use, buttons and buckles and rags and string and paper sacks from the store” (11). Both reveal the difficulty of farm work; neither Berry nor Roberts romanticize labor or bucolic scenes. Both are resourceful and encourage curiosity in others, even in the throes of stark economic hardship. Perhaps most importantly, both are precocious and observant and engage journeys of self-actualization from the start, Ellen using the sky as a palimpsest writing her name in the air with her finger and high school valedictorian Hannah wondering “what was going to become of me” (16).

Where they part ways has more to do with the economics and social dimensions of being either stationary or mobile. Ellen and her family represent the wage and tenant farmers who, forced by the market to cast about to scrape together life, experience sharp economic and social instability. A moving scene at the Chesser’s St. Lucy farm illustrates how Ellen copes with the debilitating circumstances in complicated and rich ways. Guarding her hens under the morning star before toiling side-by-side with her father in a sharecropped tobacco field, Ellen listens to the St. Lucy bell “sounding across the cool dew of the fields” (272). The bell calls her to a reverie about the Dominican Brothers nearby, who would don their white robes and walk into the church, “indifferent to the autumnal equinox” and without knowledge of the “stubborn beasts upon which one cried with storms of words and oaths, and no knowledge of the crying hens, afraid of the skunk, of herself standing guard in the cool dawn” (273). For better and for worse, the “lagging beasts” and the earth’s seasonal cycles dictate the bulk of Ellen’s days, and she holds in a mind a voice that combines marvelous phrases like “autumnal equinox” and “morning star” with the oaths sworn at stubborn mules and chickens. At that moment, the great and the low converge in the garden, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts articulates a metaphor that encapsulates the essence of Ellen Chesser’s life: “The corn in the garden stood high and about it clung the beans, all inclined toward the wonder of the sun but belonging to their own hunger and to their labor in the furrows, all grown out of the soil and the rain and the seeds, but turned toward the wonder of the equinoxes, toward the light moon and toward the morning star” (273-274).

Like the garden she tends, Ellen too is grounded in and dependent upon the modest soil, which often renders her body and mind “of the earth, clodded with the clods” (263). Yet she also turns “toward the wonder of the equinoxes,” and even in the drudgery of routine and scarcity, she has the capacity for marveling, for thinking of “[l]ife and herself, one, comprehensible and entire, without flaw, with beginning and end” (382). Ellen Chesser’s life story is comprised of these seemingly disparate elements—the

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counterpoint of literally mind-numbing work and holistic reflections on self and universe inspired by beans and tomatoes (31). In Roberts' construction, the conditions that force the Chessers to tenancy and sharecropping without the prospect of permanency dictate the dreariness of itinerant laborers' work.

Hannah, geographically placed because she is somewhat economically stable, forges deep multi-generational and multi-familial connections in her community. She weaves together a reciprocal support system that provides some level of resiliency in spite of market forces. This rootedness in place, however, does not translate to the next generation. Echoing Ellen, Hannah is desperate for her children to be well-educated. Unfortunately, she learns that the "way of education leads away from home" (Berry 112). Without a viable heir, the ecological inheritance Hannah and her husband so painstakingly cultivated is left vulnerable—primarily to development as a suburban-style rural enclave. Yet Hannah, unlike Ellen, has options. She contemplates establishing a land trust "to keep it from ever being developed," she says, or "to donating it as a wildlife preserve" (178). In this light, Hannah can employ a degree of self-determinacy that is fundamentally unavailable for Ellen. Should Hannah put a legal easement on her land, she would symbolically secure the option of permanence in place that both Berry's and Roberts' texts construe as a potential key to fulfillment.

These women build a vision of feminized ecological agrarianism attenuated toward resilience, discernment,

frugality, and abiding connections to nonhuman community. They expose a hierarchy of tenant and poor smallhold farmers whose families and lands are vulnerable to the exigencies of an economic and cultural mindset that honors "modernization" above all. Community and ecological care, these texts suggest, might be had through economic and agrarian practices that respect the worker and the land.

In light of the current American farming scene, in which migrant laborers again constitute the backbone of certain agricultural sectors and in which small-scale, diversified farming has become increasingly difficult—if not, impossible—we require models that provide us with "equipment for living," as theorist Kenneth Burke would call it. The feminist ecological agrarian perspectives that emerge in Roberts' and Berry's novels present the efficacy of permanence, adaptability, and community cohesion. Even if Ellen and Hannah are only partially successful at times, they present the visions for agrarian thought and practice that foster moments of fulfillment and affection for place.

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The Berry Center— "We All Need To Be Agrarians"

H. R. STONEBACK

The Roberts Society enthusiastically applauds the work of The Berry Center (well-known to us through its programs at St. Catharine College), with its stated goal: "Together we will continue to put Wendell Berry's writings to work by advocating for farmers, land conserving communities, and healthy regional economies" (*The Berry Center Newsletter*, February 2016). Mary Berry, Wendell Berry's daughter and Executive Director of The Berry Center, has important things to say about the current cachet of "farm to table" buzzwords and how the "food movement" has not yet "made a difference in farm country. We haven't managed to put an economy around local production for local markets."

Mary Berry has been honored this year by her appearance

on the *Grist50* list of "innovators, organizers and visionaries who are leading us toward a more sustainable future"; and by her presence on "The Southern Hot List" of people "who are shaping the South right now." In a piece entitled "The Farm Aider" she writes: "We need to fix the broken connection between urban places and rural places. *We all need to be agrarians*" (emphasis added).

Mary Berry is right and I feel certain that Elizabeth Madox Roberts would heartily approve the message and work of The Berry Center. After all, Roberts knew well the work of that capital-A Agrarian movement, the Vanderbilt Agrarians; and Nashville Agrarians such as Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren were among the first to praise the writing of Roberts.

For more information about The Berry Center, see their newsletter; support their work, be an agrarian, and help to fix the urban-rural "broken connection."
(Contact info@berrycenter.org).

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the Trace” had grown ever clearer in her mind’s eye, and her idea for inventing “some other new thing” to portray the great epic had become ever more detailed—and far more complex and ambitious.

I thought it would be an excellent labor if one might gather these threads into one strand, if one might draw these strains into one person and bring this person over the Trace and through the Gateway in one symbolic journey, in one spiritual consummation that gathered the thought or the genius of a century.

Moreover, she would not only “fuse the old matter” into a “tangible form” but also make that fusion an “inquiry into all those undiscoverable principles by which physical matter exists.”

Janet Lewis believed that this inquiry into the nature of matter was one of two key aspects of all Elizabeth’s fiction and poetry. “She worked, I think, at trying to realize the reality of the external world—it seems to me that’s what her books are mostly about.” And the attempt to grasp corporeal reality was also her means of taming what she perceived to be the chaos of the world around her and in her own tormented soul. These were grandiose goals, much grander

than what Janet herself aimed for. She knew, of course, that all art was to some extent a way of putting “things in order in your own head...taking confusion and putting it in order. But I wasn’t trying to put the whole universe in order.... And yet I think that’s quite true for Elizabeth; I think that’s really what she was doing.”

Elizabeth would not have argued. For her, all art was a quest for Truth and a way to “search . . . emotions minutely to see what they portended.” She was not unaware of her audacity. Again and again she asked herself: ““Do you think you are God himself? Do you think you will find an answer to such a query as you have propounded?”” Well, maybe not, but she would never stop trying.

The “actual writing,” at least of prose, was never difficult for her; she wrote fluently and easily. What was difficult was the formulation of the questions she wanted to address. “It is the inward act of preparation that tears and rends and wrenches.” She often compared the process to weaving. She couldn’t begin to work the shuttle until she had the whole pattern—“the effect I wish to produce”—very clearly in mind. Only then could she choose the methods, techniques, and symbols best suited to her purpose—and for the serious novels, experimental techniques, big ideas, and big symbols.

Roberts, Daniel Boone, and the Unknown

MARC CIOFFI

Three of the last four papers I have submitted to literary conferences have been about Daniel Boone, and, subsequently, I have been reading a lot about Boone. The biographies, the dime novels, the blogs, the PBS documentaries, the comics, the coonskin hat descriptions, and everything else. This brief obsession began after I read Roberts’ *The Great Meadow*. Of course, I had, unknowingly, been exposed to a cast modeled on Boone countless times before. Yet Roberts was the one who made me fascinated with Boone.

Roberts’ depiction of Boone intrigued me because she reveals absolutely nothing about him. What little stage presence Boone has in *The Great Meadow* does not disturb the enigma he has gathered over so many years. In fact, the brief appearance Roberts grants him conserves that enigma and allows the second-hand news and gossip about Boone to inform her novel’s plot. Other writers, such as James Fenimore Cooper, did the opposite, using their plot to dissect or supplement the complex mythology of Daniel Boone. Yet, despite Roberts’ reticence about Boone, his spirit informs *The Great Meadow*. He is a human tasked

with human chores, limited only by flesh and blood.

And maybe this is what makes Roberts’ use of Boone so brilliant. No one else has written him as such an understated character; no one else has dared to make him so *human*. When he finally appears in the novel Diony does not recognize him. There! There the disparity between fact and fiction, rumor and reality, myth and history, is exposed. Boone is more valuable as an idea than as a man. He did not have a halo, but he can convince you that halos exist.

Casey Jones and Jesse James, Crazy Horse and Davy Crockett. With one foot in myth and one foot in history, these figures straddle something else: the unknown. In an age when almost any question can be answered by a device a majority of people carry in their pockets, the unknown is a diminishing phenomenon. But we need that enigma; we need confusion and wonder. Those, not a portable Google search, are the virtues that prompt humans toward discovery and innovation.

We need to maintain the mysterious if we at all value the experience of standing wrapped in awe. However, it is difficult. Particularly because the unknown imbues much more fear than awe. Thus, it goes against our preference for self-preservation. But that’s the same risk it takes to have any faith at all.

A Portrait of EMR and Henry James

MATTHEW NICKEL

I have been on a hunt for the last few years to gather information about the influence of Henry James on Elizabeth Madox Roberts. It has been fairly easy to observe the intersections and intertextualities of James in Roberts, but I am concerned with finding substantive evidence—letters, manuscript notes—that traces the lineage of American Literature directly from James through Roberts. Thus, as you read this, dear reader, please tell me if you

have discovered any information to help me along my way.

Both writers are indebted to the quest to render time in prose, with the modern anxiety of signification. In James' *The American Scene*, time rolls back upon itself; in Roberts, especially in *The Time of Man*, time present and time past opens the isolated self into self amid landscape, "Ellen wrote her name in the air with her finger, Ellen Chesser, leaning forward and writing on the horizontal plane," concluding with the mantra: "We ought to be a-goen on." During the composition of *The Time of Man*, Roberts expressed to Monroe Wheeler the following:

The story runs like this: A level of clods and dusts and
continued on page 12

Hemingway (and Roberts) in Chicago and Paris

H. R. STONEBACK

This summer the 17th Biennial International Hemingway Conference (17-22 July, 2016) will take place in Oak Park/Chicago. With around 300 participants and about 200 presentations, including several by Roberts Society members, it is to be hoped that the name of Roberts might be mentioned. I know that in my role as President of the Ernest Hemingway Foundation & Society, I will refer to Roberts in my plenary presidential address. I still have the hope that someone, somewhere—where more likely than in Chicago?—in some audience will present some lost evidence that Roberts and Hemingway crossed paths.

And in July 2018, the 18th Biennial International Hemingway Conference will take place in Paris (the conference co-directors are H. R. Stoneback and Matthew Nickel). We hope some paper proposals will deal with Roberts and Hemingway—and we will welcome such proposals. We can think of a half-dozen ways of doing that—ask us. Watch for the Call for Papers (probable deadline September 2017) on the Hemingway Society website <hemingwaysociety.org >.

Roberts Mentioned in Hemingway Films

H. R. STONEBACK

In 2015, I was extensively interviewed on-camera for two important forthcoming Hemingway documentaries. In my Paris interview for a film tentatively entitled *Hemingway and Fitzgerald*, the legendary French director Claude Ventura asked me about the importance of the year 1926 and *The Sun Also Rises* in Hemingway's career. I replied that the two most important novels of 1926 were *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Time of Man*; and these two books represented the agrarian-expatriate arc of American experience, the glory of our modernist fiction, and they were enduring masterpieces not just of the 1920s but for all time. I said much the same thing in my interviews for George Colburn's forthcoming *The Young Hemingway*. I have no way of knowing if my comments about Hemingway and Roberts will end up on the cutting room floor. At least I tried.

The Latest: Neikirk's *Coming Home*

The *Danville Advocate Messenger*, a regional paper which covers six Central Kentucky counties, recently featured Gregg Neikirk's play *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. In a full-page article that appeared in October (2015), *Advocate* writer Bobbie Curd reviewed the play and informed readers of the history and significance of the Springfield writer Roberts, who was born near Perryville in Boyle County.

The Roberts Society was also a prominent part of the article, as the journalist explained the efforts that the EMR Society has made over the last seventeen years to promote Roberts' writings, and delivered information on how to access the

website www.emrsociety.com.

My Old Kentucky Home ("The Stephen Foster Story") Managing Artistic Director Johnny Warren was also quoted in the feature article. Warren, directing his wife, actress Jennifer Warren, presented one act of Neikirk's play at a recent EMR Society gathering in Springfield, where Jennifer Warren captured the audience's attention with her very realistic portrayal of Ms. Roberts. Johnny Warren is quoted as saying that he "was happy to lend his experience as a stage director to this project. My wife, Jenn, agreed to play the role of Roberts in the staged reading. The reading was presented with little more than a prop typewriter, a microphone, a single actress . . . and the loving words

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Conference Report 2015

JESSICA M. NICKEL & DANIEL J. PIZAPPI

The XVII Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 24-27, 2015. Our conference began with a gracious reception at Shaker Village, after which many Roberts Society members performed as “Stoney & the EMRS Traveling Troubadours” at the Kentucky Fudge Company in Harrodsburg, KY. Our first day of academic papers was held at the beautiful Shaker Village, followed by a reception at Kentucky Lit, hosted by Chad Horn. In the evening, Matthew Nickel, President of the Society, welcomed us to our conference banquet at Shaker Village, followed by H. R. Stoneback’s keynote, “On Judging a Book By Its Cover: Proletarian Realism or Hallelujah Anyway?” and Don Scriven’s keynote, “From Journey in the Dark to a Haunted Mirror: One Collector’s Path to Unearthing EMR First Editions.” We enjoyed a wonderful meal topped off with the presentations of the Sparrow Memorial Award. and the Butterbean Award.

On Sunday, conferees enjoyed readings and performances at Penn’s store for Kentucky Writers Day. In the afternoon, the Society was honored at Mordecai’s Restaurant by Mayor Debbie Wakefield, 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.

April 25 Sessions:

Session 1: Jane Keller (U of Baltimore): “Something of Myself”: Readings from the preliminary draft of the biography of Elizabeth Madox Roberts; **Frances Kearney** (U of Ulster in Northern Ireland): Ellen Chesser’s “Great Hunger”: An Irish Reader Discovers *The Time of Man*; **Rachel Wissner** (SUNY-New Paltz): *The Great Meadow* and the Women’s Literary Tradition; **Matthew Nickel** (Misericordia U): The Sacrifice of Ideas: Henry James & Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

Session 2: James Stamant (Agnes Scott C): Memento Mori and the Blairs’ Lives With and Without a Treasure; **Jacob Hebda** (U of Baltimore): Planting Values: Tree Symbolism in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *The Time of Man*; **Daniel J. Pizappi** (SUNY-New Paltz): “We sprang from a race of giants”: Myth-making in Roberts’ *Song in the Meadow*; **Eleanor Hough** (SUNY-New Paltz): Ellen Chesser and The Female Sense of Self: A Discussion of the Ethic of Care in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *The Time of Man* and an Exploration of the Work as a Predictive Feminist Praxis.

Session 3: Chair: Alex Pennisi (SUNY-New Paltz): “I’m Ellen Chesser and I’m A-liven”: Achieving Selfhood through

Language in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *The Time of Man*; **Emily Halbing** (Misericordia U): Happiness as Defined by the Short Stories of Elizabeth Madox Roberts; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State U): Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts of Springfield.

April 27 Sessions:

Session 1: Gisèle Sigal (Université de Pau, France): In the Meanders of Mind and Matter: the Case of Elizabeth Madox Roberts; **Bill Slavick** (U of Southern Maine): Contemporary Southern Writers and Elizabeth Roberts; **Leah Bayens** (St. Catharine C): “Turned toward the wonder of the equinoxes”: Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ and Wendell Berry’s Agrarian Marvels

Session 2: Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-Ulster): Looking in the Mirror Darkly: Recovering the Feminine Self in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ “The Haunted Palace”; **Danielle Walsh** (SUNY-New Paltz): The Poetic Ritualism of Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ Prose Shaping Ellen Chesser’s Character in *The Time of Man*; **Jane Dionne** (Ind Scholar): *The Haunted Mirror*: Teaching Guides for EMR’s Short Stories.

Session 3: Amanda Capelli (UL Lafayette): “Beyond the Peacock”: Re-Visioning Place in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ Fiction; **Bridget Martinez** (SUNY-New Paltz): Through the Haunted Mirror: A Lacanian Reading of Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ Short Story Collection *The Haunted Mirror*; **Evan Hulick** (SUNY-New Paltz): “A mystery stood in a clear pattern”: The Tri-Fold Mystery of Death, Sin, and Life in Roberts’ “The Haunted Palace,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “The Sacrifice of the Maidens”; **Jessica M. Nickel** (Misericordia U): “Toward mystery and the unexpected”: Reading the Grotesque in the Short Works of Roberts and O’Connor.

Session 4: Christopher Paolini (SUNY-New Paltz): History in Harmony: State-Singing Salvation in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ “Conversations Beside a Stream”; **Adam Neikirk** (Westfield State University): The Beginning of Infirmity: Roberts, Creativity, & the Hard Problem of Consciousness; **Michael D’Addario** (SUNY-New Paltz): “Nothing left but kill, kill, kill”: Violence in *The Time of Man*; **Maia Painter** (Misericordia U): Words of Destruction and Creation in “The Sacrifice of the Maidens.”

Session 5: Peter Camilleri (SUNY-New Paltz): “A living dog is better than a dead lion”: *The Time of Man* and *All the Living*;

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Photo by Rachel Pizappi



Conference 2015 *from previous page*

Gregory Bruno (SUNY-New Paltz): “A flower of panic bloom across her chest”: Stability in *All the Living* and *The Time of Man*; **Marc Cioffi** (SUNY-New Paltz): Beholding the “heap of unexplored corners there must be” in Literature of Place: The

“small gaps” Lit by Daniel Boone in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Maurice Manning.

The Conference was concluded with an annual Graveside Roberts Memorial Reading in the Springfield Cemetery and our Annual Business Meeting at the Springfield Inn.

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).

RIP Chip Owens: it is with great sadness that we report that Chip Owens, Becki’s husband, passed away June 7, 2015. The EMR Society made a \$350 donation in Chip’s name to the UK Marley Cancer Foundation, Lexington, KY. Our thoughts and prayers are with Becki and her family.

EMR Photographer

Rachel Pizappi is the Roberts Society official photographer. We thank her for her service in 2015.

EMR Website

The Roberts Society has an updated website. We thank Greg Benca for his hard work.

Stoneback Receives SAMLA Award

At the 87th Annual Convention of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association in Durham, N.C. (November 2015), H. R. Stoneback received the rare SAMLA Honorary Lifetime Member Award. His speech on that occasion—“Remarks on the Acceptance of the SAMLA Honorary Lifetime Member Award”—was published in the February 2016 SAMLA Newsletter. Stoneback made reference to his first SAMLA papers a half-century ago, when, as a PhD candidate at Vanderbilt, he made his earliest public commentary on Roberts and her key role in Southern and American Literature.

In another special event at the 2015 SAMLA meeting, Roberts Society members and others paid tribute to Stoneback’s scholarship in a session entitled “Scholarship in Honor of H. R. Stoneback” chaired by Joseph Flora and with papers by Allen Josephs, Linda Patterson Miller, Bryan Giemza, Evan Hulick, and closing comments by H. R. Stoneback. And in the annual Saturday evening conference plenary Special Session, “Music and Poetry,” in which Stoneback has been a featured participant (as poet/

songwriter/performer) since the beginning of the annual “Music & Poetry” event, Stoneback again addressed the convergence of poetry and songwriting. And he—together with others, including Roberts Society members Jessica Nickel, Chris Paolini, Dan Pizappi—performed some of his songs.

EMR Panels at November 2015 SAMLA Convention in Durham, NC

Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect, chaired by **Amanda Capelli** (U Louisiana-Lafayette); **Eleanor Hough** (SUNY-NP) *Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Feminine Sense of Self: An Analysis of the Ethic of Care in Roberts’ Oeuvre and a Discussion of Her Works as Predictive of Contemporary Feminist Theory*; **Emily Halbing** (Ind Scholar) *Reconciliation with Modernity: Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ Under the Tree and the Poetry of Robert Frost*; **Marc Cioffi** (SUNY-NP) *History and Myth, Legend and Legacy: The Pioneers and Daniel Boone in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ The Great Meadow*.

Music and Muses in the Poetry and Fiction of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, chaired by Jessica Nickel (Misericordia University): Evan Hulick (SUNY-NP) “They grew and they grew to the old church top” in *The Cave* and in *The Time of Man*; Chris Paolini (SUNY-NP) “Our Singing Country”: The Music of Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ “Conversations Beside a Stream”; Dan Pizappi (SUNY-NP) “Songs have been sung in America”: Tracing the Folk Songs in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ “Conversations Beside a Stream.”

CFP: SAMLA 2016 (Jacksonville, FL; Nov 4-6, 2016)

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; Roberts and manuscripts; Roberts in the context of Southern literature; Roberts and Southern Agrarianism; Roberts’ literary and stylistic influences (i.e., Synge, Hardy, Joyce, Homer, Hopkins, Beethoven, Pound); Roberts and religion; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and the novel; Roberts as poet; Roberts as writer of short fiction; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and the politics of literary reputation; Roberts and feminism; and, Roberts and Kentucky. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2016 to James Stament at stamentjames@gmail.com.

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EMR: Utopian, Dystopian, Kentuckian

Papers for this session may deal with aspects of Utopia/Dystopia in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Suggested topics include but are not limited to: the pastoral myth, the machine in the garden, agrarianism and Roberts, Roberts' work and Kentucky settlement (esp. *The Great Meadow*), and Roberts in connection with other Utopian/Dystopian writers/texts. Please submit an abstract of 250 words by June 1, 2016 to Daniel J. Pizappi at dpizappi@yahoo.com.

2015 Roberts Society Award Winners:

The 2015 **Sparrow Memorial Awards** were given to: **Frances Kearney** (University of Ulster, Northern Ireland); **Jacob Hebda** (University of Baltimore); **Rachel Wissner** (SUNY-New Paltz); **Peter Camilleri** (SUNY-New Paltz). The 2015 **Butterbean Award** was awarded to **Chris Paolini** (SUNY-New Paltz).

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.

The Honorary Lifetime Membership Award 2014 went to **Wendell Berry** and the **Honorary Lifetime Membership**

Award 2015 went to **Chad Horn**.

Reading Roberts

In 2015, The Reading Roberts Series published 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.

Society Publications

1. **H. R. Stoneback**, *The Stones of Strasbourg & Other Poems*. Codhill/SUNY Press. 2015.
2. **H. R. Stoneback**, *Hemingway's Paris: Our Paris?* (Third edition, Second Printing). Also as an Audio-book. New Street Communications. 2015.
3. **Matthew Nickel**, *The Leek Soup Songbook*. Des Hymnagistes Press, 2015.
4. **Matthew Nickel**, *The Route to Cacharel*. Five Oaks Press, 2016.
5. **Gregg Neikirk**, *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. Reading Roberts Series, 2015.
6. *Kentucky Writers: The Deus Loci and the Lyrical Landscape*, Eds. Matthew Nickel & Daniel Pizappi. Reading Roberts Series, 2016.

Neikirk's Play *from page 8*

crafted by Gregg—words inspired by and in admiration of the Kentucky poet and novelist whose history he has spent many caring hours exploring. It was a beautiful evening.” Warren added that “although there are no current plans that I am aware of to produce the play locally, I would welcome the opportunity to be involved if such an opportunity arose. I know that would be a great joy to all who helped bring the original scene to life.”

Curd's feature article also listed important facts about Roberts' publications, including Roberts' induction into the inaugural year of the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame, and the attention paid to Roberts by Earl Hamner (as reported to the EMR Society by H. R. Stoneback). Curd summed up Roberts' writing in this way: Robert's characters are “poor in material possessions, but rich in character, ethics, and love. Harrodsburg and Springfield people fill her novels and poetry. She is known for her plots which feature epic Greek figures in the form of single Kentucky women. That is, the struggles these women characters overcome in her novels have been compared to Greek epic tragedies: critics have often complained that American literature has plenty of male heroic figures (Huck Finn, etc.), but that all we had as heroines were the likes of Pollyanna . . . until Elizabeth Madox Roberts came along and tried to rectify that with her Kentucky women characters.”

A color photo of the front cover of *Coming Home: A Vision of Elizabeth Madox Roberts* was also included, adorned by fine art work by Jessica Nickel. *The Advocate Messenger* has a large readership in the six affected counties, so Gregg Neikirk is optimistic that the play will soon make a Kentucky stage or two.

Roberts (and others) in Philadelphia**H. R. STONEBACK**

“Making Pacts: Before & After Imagism,” the 5th International Imagism & the 9th International Aldington Conference, will be held in Philadelphia 30 June-2 July 2016. The conference, co-directed by H. R. Stoneback and Matthew Nickel, will feature at least one paper dealing with Roberts—by our very own Jane Keller, biographer of Roberts. If you are interested in attending this conference, based at two extraordinary venues (the Franklin Inn Club and the Wells Fargo building) in historic center-city Philadelphia, contact Nickel or Stoneback.

EMR & James from page 8

furrows. Then a mind plays. Comes a flash of mind, and under the influence one of the clods becomes aware of itself and the world around and the mesh and the bounty and wonder of the sky. But the play of the mind comes to an end through a sort of disaster, a trifling disaster, scarcely noticed in the physical action and the emerged clod goes back, and the traces of the flame that leaped once are effaced by time and forgetting, a very little time, only she who had the experience dimly remembers that there was something, once, now gone, but what was it? and nothing answers anything. I have attempted something which Henry James might have done, but with what a different medium! (Library of Congress).

It is a different medium, indeed. Her description of *mind* and *flash* remind one of Eliot's emphasis in James on drama through subtlety. Eliot writes: "It is in the chemistry of these subtle substances, these curious precipitates and explosive gases which are suddenly formed by the contact of mind with mind, that James is unequalled." What is prefigured in Henry James becomes actual in Roberts. In *Portrait of a Lady*, James describes Isabel's thoughts as evocative of "interesting pictures. These pictures would have been both landscapes and figure-pieces." The entire drama of *The Time of Man* relies upon the manifestation of landscape

as a character attribute: Ellen moving across country with her cow as companion—would that Henry James had only written *Portrait of a Bovine Princess*—Ellen looks back at the mountains behind her, "shapes dimly remembered and recognized," and "With the first recognition of their fixity came a faint recognition of those structures which seemed everlasting and undiminished within herself, recurring memories, feelings, responses, wonder, worship, all gathered into one final and inner motion which might have been called spirit."

Roberts' writing is powerful and captivating, containing more outward energy—yet still catalyzed within the crucible of the mind—than anything in James. In 1918, Eliot and Pound lamented James' passing, but more so, they lamented the ignorance of the modern reader who fails to lament James' passing. Eliot: "it hardly matters that very few people will read James. . . . there will always be a few intelligent people to understand James, and to be understood by a few intelligent people is all the influence a man requires." Can the same be said for Roberts—that there will always be a few intelligent people to read her—perhaps that makes our Roberts Society one of the intelligent ones? Still, we should take their advice, for James offers a key not only into the world of Roberts' fiction, but into the world of many of the novelists we love.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

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

President: Matthew Nickel, Misericordia University

Vice President: Goretti Vianney-Benca, SUNY-Ulster

Vice President: James Stamant, Agnes Scott College

Secretary/Treasurer: Tina Iraca, Dutchess Community College

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>.