

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 19

www.emrsociety.com

June 2018

20th Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XX Annual Conference in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France. Academic paper sessions will be held at Hotel Thalacap in Les Saintes-Maries. The Roberts Society will join with the X International Aldington Society and VI International Imagism Conference. We look forward to returning to Kentucky in 2019.

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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President's Message 2018

GORETTI VIANNEY-BENCA

As I write this brief message for the latest Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society newsletter, I am finding myself feeling a little bit off—like something is missing or out of synch. Spring is just starting to find its way to the Hudson Valley here in NY. And as April is coming to a close, I realize what that *something* is: I am not in Kentucky.

This year marks a monumental occasion. The landmark XX Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference is being held in Les Saintes-Marie-de-la-Mer, France, July, 30 – August 1, 2018. This conference is in joint sponsorship with the X International Richard Aldington Society

& VI International Imagism Conference. We hope to see many of you there!

This year also marks a deep loss to our society. Jeanne Penn Lane, owner and operator of Penn's Store in Gravel Switch, KY, passed away on February 2, 2018. Jeanne has been a long-time friend to the society. We will greatly miss her warm, welcoming smile.

Finally, on behalf of the society, I would like to extend my most heartfelt gratitude to our Treasurer, Tina Iraca. Although Tina is hanging up her Treasurer hat, she will remain an active member of the society.

In closing, I would like to leave with you the same request as last year, continue to read, teach, and share the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

In Memoriam:

Jeanne Penn Lane (1944 – 2018)

GREGG NEIKIRK

Longtime friend and promoter of The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, Jeanne Penn Lane, passed away on February 2, 2018 after a brief illness.

The proprietor of Penn's Store in the Forkland community of Kentucky, Jeanne was a faithful and generous promoter of the Arts in Central Kentucky. Many EMR Society members have read poetry and played music at the annual Kentucky Writers Day celebration and Songwriter's Showcase that she hosted at the historic general store and community center for nearly 20 years. Jeanne always made

special efforts to feature the scholars and singers from the April EMR Society conference gathering. A friend—and next-door neighbor—of EMR Honorary President Dr. H. R. Stoneback and family for nearly 50 years, Jeanne and her mother began managing the store when her uncle, Haskell Penn, passed away in 1993. Jeanne's daughter Dawn Osborn soon joined in making the store a local hub, and a place where music and poetry and the literary arts had a franchise.

Jeanne received a degree in Art from Eastern KY University, and taught Art in Kentucky schools for a great deal of years. She was also a poet and lyricist, and once worked as a contracted songwriter for 4Star Music and Jack Clement Studios in Nashville. Jeanne had a number of Billboard Top 40

continued on next page

songs during her music career. She continued her career as a working visual artist. Music, poetry, and painting were foremost in her life. When she wasn't creating her own art, she was promoting others, including her twin daughters, Dava and Dawn.

When our EMR Society members arrived each year at Penn's Historic Store to perform readings or songs, or to participate in the Songwriter's Showcase that she ran, the work behind the scenes was not always evident: but before each EMR conference, Jeanne did *loads* of work to publicize the events, secure venues and volunteers, and to contact dozens of poets and musicians to make sure they felt invited. Securing an emcee and starting e-mail and phone conversations with readers and performers in order to plan and organize the Kentucky Writers Day events took a great deal of voluntary time, extensive effort—and no small personal monetary expense—but Jeanne always said that while her work might have gone uncompensated, it certainly did not go unrewarded.

A visit to Penn's Historic Store on Sunday afternoons during the traveling EMR conference has been a consistent staple in the 4-day agenda for EMR conferences—members from a diverse group of states (and countries) have made the pilgrimage from Harrodsburg (or Shakertown) to Little South Road in Casey County on each Sunday of the conference, rain or shine.

There have been those oh so poetic Sun-days when the dogwoods and daffodils bloomed warmly, and Stoney & Sparrow sang traditional Kentucky songs to a welcoming audience, or eager graduate students from the North read

their tribute poetry in honor of our writer Ms. Roberts. There were also days when members had to gather up tarps and whatever pieces of rope they could find to construct makeshift shelters in order to read or sing protected from the grip of falling buckets of rain, and from the haunting sound of thunder echoing through the Forkland knobs. Whatever Mother Nature may have sent for the day, however, Jeanne was unmovable: the chance to engage the humanities would not be hijacked. The Kentucky River may be overflowing and thus a cancellation of the ride on the *Dixie Belle*. The creek might have risen too much for the conference to have the annual reception on Stoney's and Gregg's farm just down the Little South road—but the Penn's Store reading and singing event would be held: Jeanne and Dawn made sure that you could bet on that. April simply would not be the cruelest month in Jeanne Lane's world.

The EMR Society will certainly miss Jeanne Penn Lane: not only her presence, but the spirit of Kentucky Arts that she represented. Yet Jeanne would correct me there: she still *represents* . . . and her daughter Dawn, a first-rate singer and musician herself, may be standing behind the counter at Penn's Store the next time our conference is in Kentucky, spelled from the storekeeper's duties she's assumed from her mother just long enough to join us all outside to sing some favorite song of Jeanne Penn Lane.

Rest in Peace, Jeanne: the EMR Society members thank you for your service to the humanities, and for your support of the efforts of The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society.



JPL: Notes for a Dear Friend of 43 Years Standing—

H. R. STONEBACK

And I do mean *standing*, in all its senses, and Jeanne Penn Lane stood tall for all the things that matter most in life. Jeanne stood tall in her support of the arts in Kentucky and in her work with the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society from its beginning. Elsewhere in this issue, Gregg Neikirk's formal "In Memoriam" article admirably evokes Jeanne's support of the arts and the Roberts Society, and there is no point in my repeating what he says. I will simply add one thing: Jeanne was elected many years ago (by the Society's officers and overall Society acclamation) to be our first *Honorary Lifetime Member*. (See note on our newest *Honorary Lifetime Member* elsewhere in this issue.) Since Gregg's essay covers the formal memorial ground so well, let me tell the short story—not the novel—of more than four decades of friendship with Jeanne.

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After I returned from my year as a Visiting Professor at the University of Paris, flush with cash, in 1975 I bought the old farm that I renamed Roncevaux Farm, on the Little South Rolling Fork, next door to JPL's family farm. So Jeanne and I were friends and neighbors from the beginning of my time on Little South. The first Little South native that I sang and played guitar with was Jeanne. We sat next to each other in the singing circle around the big stone fireplace up the Fork at Rance Newton's old place. We sang and picked and harmonized for hours. And not long after that we sang at Roncevaux Farm, at the Forkland Heritage Festival, and, of course, on the porch at Penn's Store. From those earliest get-togethers, Jeanne always said to me: "Why do I feel like I've always known you?" Or *I feel like we've known each other forever*. And I felt the same thing.

Long, long before there was a Roberts Society with its annual gatherings at Penn's Store, there were many "singings" held at Penn's Store, often spontaneous and lasting for many hours. Sparrow and I would drive down the road from our Roncevaux Farm, and if we saw folks singing on the porch we'd stop at the store, join in, and maybe not get home for hours. Jeanne's uncle (and my dear friend) Haskell Penn, would watch us from the screen door, standing there in his overhauls with his enigmatic grin—but he never sang.

Other images from the memory bank: sitting on the store porch with the legendary Chet Atkins, my hands folded on my guitar as I watched his hands make Chet-magic on his guitar; sitting on the store porch with Billy Edd Wheeler, the celebrated poet-singer-songwriter that Jeanne had known since her time in Nashville and I knew from my Nashville years in the 1960s. On this occasion, Billy Edd was there to sing his "Ode to the Little Brown Shack Out Back," the only country hit song about a privy or outhouse. (In all my years of performing on stage, I never did sing Billy Edd's outhouse "Ode" but I must have sung a thousand times his greatest hits "Jackson" and "The Reverend Mister Black.") On this Penn's Store day Chet and Billy Edd were there to be the first to "initiate"—the first ceremonial users of—the store's new outhouse. Also on this day, Jeanne and I wondered if maybe the reason we both felt we'd known each other forever was because we'd met, even if just in passing, at Billy Edd's Music Row office in Nashville. Or maybe it was at some occasion at the legendary Cowboy Jack Clement's office? No, we concluded, we were pretty sure we'd never met in Nashville.

And then there were the early years of the Kentucky Writers Day programs at the store, elaborate programs that I helped Jeanne organize, with several times well over 100 people in the audience for readings and writerly talk. One year, somebody counted over 200 people in the audience

as I gave a long talk on Kentucky writers featuring Roberts and Robert Penn Warren. They were a better audience than most academic audiences, listening attentively through my detailed half-hour plus formal lecture, asking good questions afterward. That was the first time Jeanne and I talked about how she was probably a cousin to RPW through the Penn family connection.

But for me, now, the most cherished image from the memory bank is being backstage at the Forkland Heritage Festival, with Jeanne coaching daughters Dawn and Dava (in their early teens, I think) as they were practicing, preparing to go on stage at the Festival's Grand Finale show at the Old-Fashioned Bean Supper. Sparrow and I, also preparing to go on stage for our numbers right after Dava & Dawn, would stop and listen to the girls singing in perfect harmony and salute them and Jeanne with a thumbs-up. I cannot be sure what years I'm talking about here. Sparrow and I performed so many years at the Forkland Festival that the chronology is blurred. From the 1970s into the 1990s, every October, we did the *Stoney & Sparrow Folksong Concerts & Workshops*, long days (at least 8 performances on Fridays and Saturdays—I'm looking at an old Forkland Festival billboard as I write this) of outdoor singing for the festival crowds, and then Saturday nights the big show on the stage indoors. Now I remember precisely at least one year backstage with Jeanne and Dava and Dawn. It was 1986 and Holly Dunn's biggest hit song—"Daddy's Hands"—was near the top of the hit charts. It was a good record, but listening to Dava and Dawn singing it backstage at Forkland I thought *They're better than the record*. I told Jeanne this as we stood in the wings, watching them sing on-stage. Wet-eyed, Jeanne hugged me.

So many dear memories stored in the memory bank savings account. Just one or two more. When Penn's Store was hit by the bad flood, I asked Jeanne what can I do to help? We talked and talked about it, and I kept saying to her *Ne Quittez Pas—don't give up!* Then I came up with an idea—though far away in New York, I organized a Penn's Store Benefit Poetry Reading in New Paltz. Many poets pledged funds for their reading. From that reading, I created and had published a book, an anthology of poems for Penn's Store called *From Penn's Store to the World*. When I gave Jeanne the funds we raised for the restoration of the store, and all the remaining copies of the book, and told her how much she was admired even by my students who had met her only once at a Kentucky Writers Day program at the store—again a wet-eyed hug.

At last, an image comes to me from deep memory. It is 1962. I am 20 years old, just out of the Marine Corps, living

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in Lexington, Kentucky. I work for Sears and Roebuck, making truck deliveries, covering the entire central Kentucky region. With my partner “Tiny” (6-foot-4, 380 pounds teamed with my mere 6-foot-6, 240 pounds), we ride the back roads, delivering mainly appliances—we are the “heavyweight specialists” in rural delivery two-man carries (sans hand-truck) of refrigerators, freezers, stoves, and an occasional piano. Although I had known Kentucky for many years by then, and had lived at various times since 1958 in Fayette and Jessamine Counties, I had never been in the knob-lands of the upper Rolling Fork country. We made deliveries up and down the North Fork, down along the Big South Fork—and then I saw it for the first time: *Little South*.

I was immediately enchanted by the look and feel of things as I drove the big truck up the narrow road along the small river that Tiny said was the Little South Rolling Fork. The valley, the river, the bottomlands and the knobs, and the way the farms defined and designed place, struck some deep *Deus Loci* chord in my place-soul. We pulled into a farm right off the road and made our delivery. There was a woman who dealt directly with us, and a teenaged girl in another room singing and playing the guitar. Obviously mother and daughter. There were some men outside working. They spoke to us as we carried our delivery inside. I do not remember what we delivered. I only remember the girl singing and the fact that one of the men called out “Tincy.” I thought it was a strange pronunciation of Tiny, my partner’s name embroidered on his Sears shirt. My name was also embroidered on my shirt, but nobody called out *Stonecy*. That’s all I remember but the image of the enchanted valley

entered my memory as another numinous place.

I moved away to Alabama, New Orleans, Nashville, Paris (France) and never saw the *Little South* country again until 1975, many years later. Looking for a farm to buy, I cruised every back road and dirt lane of my long-beloved Kentucky River Palisades country. But none of the places I saw and considered in Jessamine and Mercer counties were right. (Or affordable.) Then I remembered that other place. It was high on the short list of numinous places that haunted my telluric memory. In brief, I found the farm I wanted on the banks of the Little South and bought it. Next door to and sharing a creek-boundary with Jeanne’s family farm. I think I never did get to tell Jeanne the whole story of my Sears Roebuck delivery to what had to be her house, usually because our conversation was always interrupted, but she always remembered what seemed to be the first time we met in the mid-70s, when I stopped in my new neighbor’s farmhouse for a cup of coffee with Jeanne and her mother (everybody called her “Tincy”). I said: “I’ve been here, in this room before, long ago, and y’all were here, too.” I cherish exactitude, in memory as in most things, and my memory, when awakened and in full flow, usually scores around the 99th percentile on the exactitude scale. So now I remember and know why Jeanne always said *I feel like we’ve known each other forever*.

Forever is the longest word, dear Jeanne—and for at least that long we, all of us in the Roberts Society, will miss you and assuage our sense of loss and enact our love in striving to carry on your works and ways the best we can. *Requiescat in pace*, dear friend.

The Jeanne Penn Lane Memorial Literary Award

H. R. STONEBACK

This is to announce the creation of *The Jeanne Penn Lane Memorial Literary Award*, given by the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. Not necessarily presented annually, the award may be presented intermittently, per any schedule, for literary excellence and achievement by any Society member. The Society’s officers welcome nominations (with supporting evidence) from any member. We have already received nominations and we hope to present the first award at the 21st Roberts Conference, April 26-29, 2019. Most appropriately, the Award will be presented at Penn’s Store during *The Jeanne Penn Lane Celebration of Kentucky Writers*.

Our New Honorary Lifetime Member

H. R. STONEBACK

It gives us great pleasure to announce that Dawn Lane Osborn is our new *Honorary Lifetime Member* of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. Many Society members know Dawn from years of her participation in our conference activities held at Penn’s Store—especially events held on Kentucky Writers Day (now renamed *The Jeanne Penn Lane Celebration of Kentucky Writers*). We possess cherished memories of Dawn’s bright cheerful presence at Penn’s Store and her wonderful singing, and we look forward to seeing her during our 2019 conference weekend, when formal presentation of the award will be made. We also note that this award continues a family tradition, since Dawn’s mother, the late Jeanne Penn Lane, was our first *Honorary Lifetime Member*.

To Jeanne Penn Lane

EDWARD BUTLER

February 5, 2018

When I think about Jeanne Penn Lane
 I think about Penn's Store
 And then I think about Gravel Switch, Kentucky
 Those thoughts remind me of a bend on a dusty road
 A bend on a road leading to a spot at the river
 And thoughts about cool waters on a hot and sunny day
 And, I think some more about Jeanne Penn Lane
 About that old weather beaten sided store
 A store with a rusting tin roof
 A weather beaten old building standing against time
 With Jeanne Penn Lane and her daughters inside and
 Sometimes sitting on the porch, just the three of them
 And then just the two of them
 Listening to their music in their time
 And at times overlooking the crowds gathered there
 And when I think about those delightful memories
 That old store
 That dusty road
 And the field of green grass near
 I think about Jeanne Penn Lane
 And Penn's Store

Roberts and Hemingway in Paris

MATTHEW NICKEL

As most readers of this newsletter know, The XVIII International Hemingway Conference, *Hemingway in Paris: "Paris est une fête"* . . . *Hemingway's Moveable Feast*, will take place in Paris, France, July 22-28, 2018. This Hemingway Conference is the biggest Hemingway Conference ever, with over 500 participants from over two dozen countries. Our lineup of star speakers at the Sorbonne includes leading writer, literary critic and public intellectual Terry Eagleton (author of more than 45 books); the American writer/essayist Adam Gopnik (*New Yorker*, *Paris to the Moon*, and other works); Modernist Scholar, poet, singer, professor (and Honorary EMRS President) extraordinaire H. R. Stoneback; and an all-star lineup of special sessions featuring the authors of new and recent books on Hemingway, such as Timothy Christian, Mark Lurie, Steve Paul, and Nicholas Reynolds. Our host institution will be the American University of Paris, and our special events will take place in some of the world's most spectacular venues: all-day plenary papers at the

continued on page 9

Book Review

H. R. Stoneback, Matthew Nickel, and Jessica M. Nickel, eds. *Keenly Aware of the Ceremonies of Place: Essays on Elizabeth Madox Roberts*. Reading Roberts Series. Des Hymnagistes Press, 2017. 213pp.

AMANDA M. CAPELLI

She would take the turkey bread in her hand and go, bonnetless, up the gentle hill across the pasture in the light of sundown, calling the hens as she went. She was keenly aware of the ceremony and aware of her figure rising out of the fluttering birds, of all moving together around her.

The 6th volume of the Reading Roberts Series sources its title from the above lines, taken from the second chapter of Roberts' most widely-read novel, *The Time of Man*. Place, as the title suggests, permeates the collection. Though perusal

of the essay titles might provoke seasoned Roberts scholars to dismiss it as a volume comprised predominantly of past conference papers, despite some predictable buzz words, the collection is a valuable resource for those who would like to see Roberts scholarship take a more interdisciplinary turn.

The thesis of *Keenly Aware*—presented in H. R. Stoneback's opening essay—that "Roberts-magic" is universal, that Sense of Place in Roberts' prose is just as effecting in Hawai'i as it is in Springfield, serves well as a framework for understanding the ensuing essays as a body of work in conversation with the past and a turn towards the future. At its heart, Stoneback's essay calls for interdisciplinarity, for "new departures in Roberts studies." Reading Roberts alongside Charles W. Moore's meditations on architecture and place, reveals new layers to well-read passages. Though we know that capital-P Place is more than geographical, Moore's work reminds us of the ontological structures embedded in the buildings we call "home." For Stoneback, this vision extends to the Beaumont Inn and Shaker Village.

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For me, perhaps, that towering Victorian on Maple Ave., Roncevaux Farm, or Penn's Store. Though not part of Roberts' original vision, these places have become touchstones of the Roberts legacy: "Places," as Moore writes, "where people know what they are doing together, what they share, as well as where and what they are as individuals at a special point on the surface of our planet."

Frances Kearney positions Roberts against foreign soil, and it is here that we see *Keenly Aware's* "Roberts-magic" at work. Kearney reads *The Time of Man* alongside Irish writer, Patrick Kavanagh, reminding us all that Sense of Place is not limited to any one author or geographical location. In Irish, the word "Dinnseanchas," as Kearney illustrates, translates to "the idea that the land holds an essence or memory of its people." The following essay, by Matthew Nickel, reaffirms Roberts' canonical-place among the Modernists, unpacking the dialogic between Roberts, Henry James, Hemingway, and Eliot, citing Ecclesiastes as a unifying force behind the works of all four authors. These three essays by Stoneback, Kearney, and Nickel—the only essayists not alphabetized—complete the opening triptych, presenting theories that contextualize Place in all its myriad configurations. As many of the essays in *Keenly Aware* demonstrate, Roberts is not the first, only, or last writer to experience and document the *deus loci* of her homeland.

Keenly Aware is useful to new students and burgeoning literary critics as many of the essays reference Roberts scholarship published in previous volumes. Brief abstracts and author bios, though, would be helpful in creating some much-needed context to what these essays are and to whom/what they are responding. The repetition of Roberts as a "forgotten author," for instance, still permeates many of the essays in this collection, despite so much work done by our scholars that prove the contrary. This is not to say that the collection shouldn't also be mandatory reading for veteran scholars as well. Both are necessary as we strive to keep Roberts alive in literary and critical discourse.

With *Keenly Aware* the Roberts project sets itself firmly in *place*, with EMR Society members acting as architects and preservationists of the Robertsean magic that inspired us all to complicate our ideas about what place really is and the locations we call home.

On the Society's 20th Anniversary & Looking Ahead to the 25th

H. R. STONEBACK

Several people have asked me recently why we are not having a special celebration of the Society's 20th Anniversary. In the world of come-and-go literary societies, it is a thing well worth noting that our Society, which started 20 years ago with the six founding members standing on the bridge over the Kentucky River, has lasted with style, always steadily growing during our two decades of existence. New and recent members are urged to have a look at our Newsletter Archive on our website <emrsociety.com>, both to learn the Society's history and to see many good articles published in the Newsletter over the years, reflecting cutting-edge research in Roberts Studies.

Pondering the 20th Anniversary celebration inquiries, I think back to our 10th Anniversary celebration when we had a new book of Roberts studies, a special full-color Newsletter, conference posters, EMRS T-Shirts, EMRS Tote Bags and Coffee Mugs. Why didn't we do this for the 20th? One reply is the traditional answer for all anniversaries: the 10th is the first benchmark, followed not by the 20th but by the landmark Silver 25th Anniversary. Another answer is this: the upcoming 20th Anniversary Conference in the summer of 2018 is jointly co-sponsored by the IRAS—International Richard Aldington Society—and the Imagism Group. It would be overly Whitmanesque and unseemly to celebrate ourselves, the members of one society, in the joint presence of other societies. Besides, holding our first international Roberts Conference in France seems like celebration enough for the 20th. But there will be one 20th Anniversary surprise in France—stay tuned.

Thus, I hereby announce the formation of an ad hoc committee of the whole to start thinking about what we might do to observe the 25th Anniversary in 2023. That means all Society members are invited to share ideas with Society officers about what we might do in April 2023—books, a book/CD of *Songs & Poems for EMR & Kentucky*, posters, t-shirts, tote bags, coffee mugs, special events—you name it. And let's hope we're all still around to celebrate together!

Elizabeth's Enduring Imagination: Hymns to Daughters of the Gods

TINA IRACA

It is wonderful to return to this conference and to the kindness and warmth of many dear old friends, and it is my joy to meet those of you whose names I know so well via e-mail and conference registration forms. Surely, I know some small part of you for that organic reason that people instinctively relate to one another; simpatico seekers, Roberts readers, intellectual kin mesmerized by Roberts' modernist ethos that is increasingly understood and appreciated through a postmodern perspective and achingly longed for from a syncretic, hybridized post-postmodern gaze.

Yet, here we are, "we happy few, we band of brothers" and sisters, we English majors, professors, scholars, we Roberts literati—if I may revise, with apologies, Shakespeare's Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech (4.3.60)! Not unlike Saints Crispin and Crispinian's rescue from obscurity by Shakespeare's pen, the words that you have written for this conference continue the efforts to restore Roberts to her rightful place in the twentieth-century American literary canon. In particular, it is impossible to understand the development of early modernism without making reference to Roberts' work. How can scholars study and revere Faulkner, yet know nothing of Roberts, whom Allen Tate listed on his "roll-call" of the twentieth century's "best Southern writers" and who he observed proves that Faulkner "did not rise out of a cultural vacuum"?¹ With each passing year, the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society has responded to and has increasingly remedied the critical neglect of her work. These efforts have been successful. A cursory Google search reveals a wealth of scholarship on Roberts, much of it relatively recent. When I attended my first EMRS conference seventeen years ago, nearly the entire delegation could fit into one large car: our plenary and closing session were one and the same, and the dearth of Roberts' criticism was, likewise, limited, which made writing those early papers acts of faith in ourselves, in each other, and in Elizabeth's enduring imagination. So we offered up our papers to the world, as small as it was, Springfield, Harrodsburg, New Paltz. Our words were our hymns to Elizabeth, that daughter of the gods whose characters broke our hearts and whose words healed them. Like Ellen Chesser, we wrote Roberts' name "on the horizontal plane" of the air and like good Berkeleyans, our perception created reality (*TOM 1*). We sent our words off to the academy, to back porches, to publications, to kitchen tables, to hotel balconies where Sparrow sang to us, to

Penn's Store where Terry Ward read to us in his familiar straw hat, and toward St. Lucy's, always looming in the distance. Our thoughts, like Ellen's as she "huddle[d] in the [broken-down] wagon" (1) were articulated in the physical world and we understood like Ellen in the first days of a new tenancy "In [our] mind[s] [we] touched something [we] almost knew" (6). My first communion with Roberts' prose is best described in Ellen's consciousness when as a girl she arrives at yet another farm, a strange new place and finds relief in the familiarity of nature:

The treetops above the roof, the mist in the trees, the points of the roof, dull color all belonging to the farmer, the yellow wall, the distance lying off across a rolling cornfield that was mottled with the wet and traced the lines of low corn – all touched something settled and comforting in her mind, something like a drink of water after an hour of thirst, like a little bridge over a stream that ran out of a thicket, like cool steps going up into a shaded doorway. (*TOM 6*)

Like Ellen, we find a familiarity in literature that "touches something we almost know," so we fold these stories into our minds, wrap them in our own words, and recognize them as the narratives of our own lives. We continue to explore the writing of Elizabeth Madox Roberts because her works ask the overarching questions of our humanity, in Ellen's words, "Oh, why am I here and what is it all for anyway?" (*TOM 89*). And, then Roberts' texts inspire us to our own understanding, our moments of epiphany such as Diony Hall Jarvis' glorious deliverance from the perils of her wilderness journey into the embrace of the symbolic natural setting of Harrod's Fort that expresses the hope, vibrancy, freedom, and energy of her future:

They had come out of the rugged hills. Diony looked at the trees and the growth of the new world into which she had entered. . . . Through the dark of the forest bright streaks of color swept quickly or glided softly about—the birds. They were red, yellow, blue, gray, brown, gold-and-green, black washed over the bronze and lit with fire. They were living jewels in the dark of the great trees. . . . The path emerged from the hills and came out onto the great fertile mantle over the earth . . . Diony could not now remember what lay far behind. Over her thoughts flowed continually a freshness as if the world were new-born. (*TGM 170-2*)

Roberts is a daughter of Kentucky as are her fictional progeny including our beloved Ellen Chesser in *The Time of Man*, the enduring Diony Hall in *The Great Meadow*, the resilient Theodosia Bell in *My Heart and My Flesh*, and the spiritually-healed Dena Janes in *Black is My Truelove's Hair*. Her characters tread the wet roads, the "beaten

paths,” (*TOM* 34), the corn and turnip fields, the “turnings and crossings” (*TOM* 72), the “canelands” (*TGM* 14), the traces, “the rolling hill slope[s] that edged away [from] the marsh[es]” (*TOM* 137) of Kentucky in buck boards and wagons, on horseback and on foot. And, while their voices sing the distinctive songs of their characters’ times and places reflecting not only Roberts’ art but her thoughts and concerns within her own personal, cultural, and historical context, these fictional voices perform the vital duty of all good storytelling: they represent eternal human struggles and epiphanies in the search for identity and they teach us who we are.

This is one reason why Roberts’ novels are not constrained by their regional context. Their themes including loss, love, class, self, history, race, and philosophy belong to the permanent literary universe, and every time I re-read one of Roberts’ novels, I understand more about our shared humanity and, of course, myself. Although I am no Kentuckian, no Southerner, and like Diony, “I’m not the Boone kind,” not like Daniel Boone who “never was lost” but “always felt at home in the world” (*TGM* 187, 186), I learn about Self and identity from these fictional women from another time who inhabit Roberts’ timeless and transcendent fiction. It is like the swath that Boone cut through the wilderness described in Diony’s exchange with the legend himself in *The Great Meadow*:

“Like all the balance I walked to Kentuck, or rode my nag, over your road,” she said, “marched here over the trace you made out for us. I’m obliged to you for a road, right obligated and beholden.”

“You’re right welcome to it,” Boone said. “If I marked out the way, you had to go it with your two feet, and so the road’s yours too for the trouble you took to walk it.” (185)

Roberts’ novels are the “trace” that she has “made out for us”; her characters’ journeys are our own in that they represent our intellectual struggles to come to terms with our own political or personal contexts and constraints while we go on the way. Her characters’ voices are not silenced by time or geography; they abide. They clear the thickets of our own expeditions to know the world and our place in it. While Roberts clearly represents the historical voice of specific times and places and the cultural constraints of such moments, her philosophical themes do not tarry in the past. Diony’s will, Ellen’s ethereal spirit, Theodosia’s intensity, and Dena’s learned wisdom connect as deeply with readers today as they always have. For example, Ellen’s economic and political powerlessness and her formal educational deficiencies do not disqualify her from existential queries and expression, nor from moments of triumphant

understanding and agency any more than economic and educational privilege might yield. The triumph of her characters’ momentary epiphanies and satisfaction contrasts with the relentlessness of their struggles. Roberts reminds us that the heights of our happiness are fleeting no matter what our social or cultural context may be. Because Roberts’ novels depict painful struggles, we are enthralled by their characters’ transitory sparks of brilliant light in the midst of dark circumstances. The journey motif of the tenant farmer in *The Time of Man* symbolizes all human struggle and uniquely forces existential examination.

Roberts’ preoccupation with the eighteenth-century Irish philosopher George Berkeley’s tenet that the mind informs matter, that reality is a manifestation of the senses, finds flawless form in her poetic style. Berkeley’s immaterialism revolutionized epistemology in the early eighteenth century, and Roberts transformed poetic prose and the philosophical modern novel in American literature in the 1920s and 30s. Roberts’ novels are Berkeleyan tutorials that teach us of Berkeley’s claim that “to be is to be perceived” known famously in the Latin phrase, *esse est percipi*. She channels Berkeley’s view that individuals can only directly know sensations and ideas, not just the objects themselves through her characters’ cosmic interiority. For example, Diony yearns “to make a world out of chaos” (*TGM* 24); that is, as she explains in Berkeleyan language, “any small part of the whole mighty frame of the world, are withouten any kind or sort of shape until somebody’s mind is there to know Her thought leaped then beyond articulation and settled to a vast passion of mental desire. Oh, to create rivers by knowing rivers, to move outward through the extended infinite plane until it assumed roundness” (*TGM* 24).

To create the world by knowing the world is Roberts’ recurring message that we embrace. We know Roberts’ fictional worlds through her books that we treasure. We know, like Ellen’s son, Dick, that “the wisdom of the world is the dearest thing in life” and that “it’s found in books” where you “find the wisdom of all the ages” (*TOM* 381). Thank you for finding wisdom in Roberts’ books, for pondering it, for writing it down and then sharing it at this conference.

Notes

1. Specifically, in “Faulkner’s ‘Sanctuary’ and the Southern Myth,” Tate writes, “The index of *The Southern Review*, published in Baton Rouge from 1935 to 1942, would be a roll-call of the best Southern writers of this century: Katherine Anne Porter, Caroline Gordon, Andrew Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Stark Young, Elizabeth Madox Roberts. These are the leading fiction writers of the older generation, with Faulkner

at the head of the table; and they are sufficient evidence that he did not rise out of a cultural vacuum.”

Works Cited

- Roberts, Elizabeth Madox. *The Great Meadow*. NY: Viking, 1930.
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 Tate, Allen. “Faulkner’s ‘Sanctuary’ and the Southern Myth.” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1968, pp. 418-27, www.vqronline.org/essay/faulkner's-“sanctuary”-and-southern-myth. Accessed 12 April 2017.

Roberts and Hemingway from page 5

Sorbonne; walking tours through Hemingway’s neighborhoods; a PEN/Hemingway reception in the *Tour Eiffel*—literally up on/inside the Tower, in the *Salon Gustave Eiffel*; a poetry and song fundraiser at the American Library of Paris, and a closing banquet on the bateau-mouche *le Jean-Bruel*, with an open roof deck for viewing the magnificent sites of Paris, and a closed-in deck for gourmet dining (live music included).

We are excited to announce that there will be five papers devoted to intersections between the writing of Ernest Hemingway and Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Moderated by Roberts’ official biographer Jane Keller, we will have papers by the following: Matt Wessels (SUNY-New Paltz) will consider the pilgrimage variations of Roberts’ *The Great Meadow* and Hemingway’s “The Strange Country”; Leah Santucci (Independent Scholar) will focus on the Spirit of Place in Hemingway’s *A Moveable Feast* and in Roberts’ *The Great Meadow* and *The Time of Man*; Eleanor Hough (Binghamton University) will consider trauma and abuse in *The Sun Also Rises* and *Black is My Truelove’s Hair*; Kristen Capitano (Misericordia University) will focus on ritual in Hemingway and Roberts; and Jane Dionne (Independent Scholar) will discuss young readers reading Hemingway and Roberts. Though none of the scholars have suggested they have uncovered evidence that Roberts and Hemingway indeed met at a dance in Oak Park (and eloped in Paris?), the Roberts Society is excited that we will have representation—there are more papers on Roberts than Fitzgerald—at the International Hemingway Conference in Paris. Onward to Paris!

Rites and Observances

H. R. STONEBACK

I have been unable to determine if any of our Roberts Society members were able to be present at the funeral observances for Jeanne Penn Lane this past February. I could not attend because I was in Antarctica, and Antarctica is a *fur piece* from Kentucky. But I was there in acknowledged spirit, as an honorary pallbearer. And all Society members were represented by the large standing Floral Spray (with EMRS banner) that was sent to the funeral home. We think that Society members should know what our treasury is used for, aside from making conferences, giving awards and conference grants, and publishing books and newsletters. For the JPL funeral notice see the Penn’s Store website www.PennsStore.com.

What is with all the Knives?

JOHN MOOERS

As I was reading some of the stories of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, a question came to mind. Namely, what is with all the knives?

In *The Time of Man*, after Ellen realizes that her relationship with Jonas is over, her hate and pain swells up while she is cutting some bacon. “She was cutting with a butcher knife, the great blade making stabs through the meat, cutting quickly and deep.” She keeps thinking of him as she cuts. “An awful strength came to her arm; she stabbed deeper, driving the knife to the handle.” Her rage against him increases. “She would kill Jonas. She would stab him with her knife, thus and thus! She hated him.” Ellen pours her rage and anger out through the knife. “Deep in her body arose waves of hate, and a strength beyond any she had ever known drove the knife into the dried flesh.” Well, okay then. Lesson learned. Never stand in front of a Roberts character when she is mad and has a knife in her hand.

Roberts’ novel *My Heart And My Flesh*. “Before Lathe’s hand lay a knife. It was sharpened to a ken edge and the point was well tapered.” Theodosia and Lethe talk about Lou and Ross and how Lou is taking Ross away from Lathe. Lathe’s jealous rage begins to surface. “I’ll cut her clean open with this here knife.” More and more anger comes to the surface. “Lou. My hand on her heart. I’ll tear the guts outen her side.” Theodosia moves in close to Lathe feeling her rage. “Lou. I’ll stab to the heart of her. I’m not afeared. I’ll stab fitten to kill.” And Theodosia stands close, feeling Lathe, becoming “mingled with Lathe’s anger and hate.” Finally, Lathe rushes out taking the knife with her. Later Theodosia imagines what will happen: Lathe will “plunge the knife into hated flesh. Her hand would feel the dull resistance of human bone and it would rain up and down,

continued on last page

News & Notes

Help Spread the Word on Roberts

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Keenly Aware of the Ceremonies of Place: Essays on Elizabeth Madox Roberts* (Eds. Nickel, Stoneback, and Nickel, 2017); *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).

Gale Series Children's Literature Review

Gale's Literature Criticism Online database, to which most North American university libraries subscribe, has added the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. A recent entry focuses on her works for children, and they previously included her other works in the Twentieth Century Literary Criticism series.

EMR Panel at the November 2017 SAMLA Conference in Atlanta, Georgia

Chaired by **Nicole Stamant** (Agnes Scott College): **Nicole Stamant** (Agnes Scott College) "The Rich Man, the Shoemaker, and Me: The Folktale Foundations for *A Buried Treasure*"; **James Stamant** (Agnes Scott College) "'It's a pot of gold': Civil War and Depression-Era Distrust in *A Buried Treasure*"; **Emily Banks** (Emory University) "'Witches and such like hags': Techous Sexuality and the Queer Uncanny in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'The Scarecrow.'"

CFP: SAMLA, Birmingham, AL, November 2-4, 2018

Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Insight and Reflection

Papers for this session may deal with all aspects of Roberts' 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; Roberts and religion; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and the politics of literary reputation; Roberts and feminism; and, Roberts and Kentucky. Papers engaging directly with the conference theme, "Fighters from the Margins: Socio-Political Activists and Their Allies," are also encouraged. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent by June 1, 2018 to Daniel J. Pizappi, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, at dpizappi@vols.utk.edu.

2017 Roberts Society Award Winners:

The 2017 **Sparrow Memorial Award** was given to **Alex Pennisi** (SUNY-New Paltz)

The 2017 **Butterbean Award** was given to **Christopher Paolini** (SUNY-New Paltz)

The certificate **For Outstanding Contributions to Roberts Studies & Distinguished Service to the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society** was given to **Tina Iraca** (SUNY-Dutchess)

Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Goretti Vianney-Benca, EMRS Treasurer at bencag@sunyulster.edu, or send a check made out to Goretti Vianney-Benca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and The Jeanne Penn Lane Memorial Literary Award to: Prof. Goretti Benca, SUNY-Ulster, Department of English, Philosophy, and Foreign Languages, 491 Cottekill Road, Stone Ridge, NY 12484.

Reading Roberts

In 2017, The Reading Roberts Series published *Keenly Aware of the Ceremonies of Place: Essays on Elizabeth Madox Roberts* (Eds. Nickel, Stoneback, and Nickel, 2017), an essay collection including many Roberts Society members. 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.

Conference Report 2017

JESSICA M. NICKEL, DANIEL J. PIZAPPI,
AND AMANDA CAPELLI

The XIX Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference took place April 21-24, 2017. Our conference began with a gracious banquet aboard the Dixie Belle, passing through the numinous Kentucky River Palisades and High Bridge country. Our first day of academic papers was held at the beautiful Shaker Village. In the evening, Goretta Vianney-Benca, President of the Society, welcomed us to our conference banquet at Shaker Village, followed by H. R. Stoneback's co-keynote, "EMR on Moloka'i?—Folk Voices & The Furious Sound of Memory in Jack London, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Lois-Ann Yamanaka" and Tina Iraca's co-keynote "Elizabeth's Enduring Imagination: Hymns to Daughters of the Gods." We enjoyed a great meal topped off with the presentations of the Sparrow Memorial Awards. On Sunday, after a wonderful reception at Roncevaux Farms, 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 returned to the Saint Catharine College Mother House, Old Chapel. Academic papers were presented throughout the day by many new and veteran Roberts scholars and we closed with our annual traditional graveside reading.

April 22 Sessions:

Session 1: Jane Keller (U of Baltimore): Readings from the New Biography of EMR; **Mark T. Lucas** (Centre C): *The Time of Man* and *As I Lay Dying*: A Comparative Reflection; **Bill Slavick** (U of So Maine): Theodosia's Black Shadow, Faulkner's Challenge; **Sharon Peelor** (U. of Oklahoma): First Time Readers: The Roberts Papers at the Filson

Session 2: Christopher Paolini (SUNY-New Paltz): Walter de la Mare, the Chicago Renaissance, and the Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts; **Rylie Fitzgerald** (Misericordia U): Ellen Chesser's Journey Enduring with the Earth; **Daniel J. Pizappi** (U of Tennessee): "Their Menacing Withdrawals": Ellen Chesser's Sense of (Dis) place; **Matthew Nickel** (Misericordia U): A Modernist Education: Professor Pound, Eliot, Laforgue, et al., & Roberts

Session 3: Joseph Curra (SUNY-New Paltz): Reflections and Affirmation of Character in Place and Setting: A Close Reading of Setting in the Works of Elizabeth Madox Robert and Ernest Hemingway; **Marc Cioffi** (Independent): Do Not Go Westward to Move Through Time: Place as Defense against the Weight of Time in the Works of Roberts, Warren, and Manning; **Jessica M. Nickel** (Misericordia U): "Clear of the tangles and marshy places": Manuscript Sleuthing for Crime and Judgment in Roberts' "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"—with Thoughts on Faulkner and Hemingway; **Zach Stewart** (SUNY-New Paltz): "Wounds into Wisdom": Poetry and Romance in the Dialect of Roberts and Faulkner

April 24 Sessions:

Session 1: Gregg Neikirk (Westfield State U): Symmetry—and Chaos—in Roberts' *The Great Meadow*; **Gisèle Sigal** (Université de Pau, France): An Allegory of Universal Legitimacy Chiseled out from Regional Materials: Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* and James Still's *River of Earth*; **Leah Santucci** (Misericordia U): Planting the Seeds of Personal Growth: Embodying Empathy and One's True Self in *The Time of Man*; **Jessica Jones** (SUNY-New Paltz): Self-Actualization through Labor in *All the Living* and *The Time of Man*

Session 2: Damian Carpenter (East Tenn St U): In the Epic Mood: Hart Crane, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and C. E. Morgan; **Lauren Hayden** (Misericordia U): Sense of Place in Roberts' *The Time of Man*; **Alex Pennisi** (SUNY-New Paltz): Ceremony and Ritual in "Telling": Odyssean "Songs" of the Self in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*; **Autumn Holladay** (SUNY-New Paltz): "A Dog that Hoots like an Owl": Reassessment of Freedom in *Black is My Truelove's Hair*; **Jane Dionne** (Independent): A Teaching Guide for *Jingling in the Wind*

Session 3: Colleen Stewart (SUNY-New Paltz): The Formation of the Kentuckian Voice: Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Song in the Meadow* and Form; **Evan Hulick** (SUNY-New Paltz): Roberts' *He Sent Forth A Raven*—Or, Why One Must Reject Despair, Evermore; **Nathan Lee** (SUNY-New Paltz): A Dyspeptic Optimist Tends No Garden: *Jingling in the Wind*; **Elizabeth Oxler** (UL-Lafayette): Orality in the Meadow(s): Text, Textuality, and Lineage in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Lee Smith

Session 4: Alexis Williams (Misericordia U): Some Thoughts on Feminism in *The Time of Man*; **Peter Camilleri** (SUNY-New Paltz): Mythology and Modernism in Roberts; **Sierra Krohnemann** (Misericordia U): The Education of Ellen Chesser: Life Lessons from Nature; **Emily Halbing** (U of Pittsburgh): "Necessary and simple": Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Sacrament of Marriage

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference Joins Aldington and Imagism in Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France 2018

The X International Richard Aldington Society & VI International Imagism Conference—with the XX Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference—will return to its conference headquarters in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France, July 30 – August 1, 2018. The International Richard Aldington Society was founded and its first conference held at the home of Catha Aldington in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the summer of 2000. In 2007 and 2010, the first two Imagism Conferences were held at Brunnenburg Castle in Italy, with the Aldington Society and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society as joint sponsors of the 2010 conference. In 2018 the Roberts Society will hold its first-ever annual conference abroad, in conjunction with the Aldington/Imagism meeting.

Under the joint sponsorship of the EMRS, the International Aldington Society, and the VI International Imagism Conference, our conference will be held in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, July 30-August 1, 2018. We hope to see you in France, but do not be alarmed—we will return to Kentucky in April 2019.

Knives from page 9

stabbing deeper with each blow, letting out the blood, tearing through flesh until her hate had eased itself.” Theodosia becomes so atuned to Lathe’s hate and rage that the next morning when she hears of the killing she confesses as though she herself had done it. “I stabbed his throat with a harness knife. I cut his throat.” Well, okay then. Lesson learned. Never, ever, stand in front of a Roberts character when she is mad and has a knife in her hand.

We also see this pattern in Roberts’ short story “Record at Oak Hill.” Buchman was stabbed, murdered, or “killed” as Morna puts it, with the very same walking stick knife they hold in their hands.

Well, okay then. Again, lesson learned. So, what does this tell us? Does Elizabeth Madox Roberts have a deep seeded knife fetish? Does she work it out through her fiction? Or is it a more common theme in the time and place where she grew up?

I made the observation, but I must confess I do not know where to go from here. The one thing that I do know for certain: never stand in front of her characters when they are mad and have a knife in their hands.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

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

President: Goretti Vianney-Benca, SUNY-Ulster

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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 Goretti Vianney-Benca at: <bencag@sunyulster.edu>.