

EMRS

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society



Newsletter No. 25

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August 2024

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 2024

AMANDA CAPELLI

In "On Poetry," Roberts reminds us that "Man is a child in his gropings for the objects which lie just beyond the present limitations of sense. We go into the unseen by way of visible, into the unknown by way of the known, into Nous by way of the flesh and the dust." These sentences resonate with me as I type my inaugural presidential message to you all groping for the right words, the right tone and turn of phrase to lead us into this next year while also acknowledging the losses we've suffered and the changes on the horizon. But I am also struck, as I often am, by Roberts' ability to put into words that which feels ineffable. We get to the unknown by way of the known. So, we will start there, with what we know.

This past July we celebrated the society's 25th anniversary. It was bittersweet, celebrating such a milestone without Stoney at the helm, but the event highlighted the significance of the relationship our little society has built with the community of Springfield. I was only able to witness part of it, chiming in via zoom during the business meeting, but I could sense a shift in the energy even as I sat at my desk 800 miles away, unable to travel as I awaited the birth of my son. It felt as though some of the new changes we had implemented were perhaps reinvigorating our commitment to the work.

Here are the highlights you may have missed if you didn't join us in Springfield last summer:

1. We moved lodging locations to the Hampton Inn which (cont. on pg. 2)

THE XXVI ANNUAL ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS CONFERENCE OCTOBER 3-6, 2024 SPRINGFIELD, KENTUCKY

The 26th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference will coincide with Springfield's Annual Sorghum Festival, so this year we invite papers focusing on agriculture, tradition, community, and celebration. We are excited to announce that our keynote speaker will be best selling author and Kentucky native Silas House, so papers dealing specifically with connections between his and Roberts' works will also be encouraged.

We continue, however, to welcome any and all papers exploring Roberts and her work through a wide variety of perspectives and lenses (Roberts and other southern writers, contemporaries, Modernists, etc.; regional and historical perspectives; recently published works by Roberts; first-time reader responses; essays of discovery; etc.).

While the vast majority of past submissions have taken the form of conference papers, we would also like to invite proposals for panels and roundtable discussions. See Society website for more details.

Papers should be no more than 15 minutes in oral presentation. Paper sessions will be held at the Hampton Inn in Lebanon. Please submit abstracts no later than September 1st.

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Email title and proposal to Program Coordinator:

Alex Pennisi (Culinary Institute of America) apennisi2@gmail.com



Direct all other conference inquiries to Conference Coordinators:

Goretti Benca (Marist)
gmbenca@gmail.com

James Stamant (Agnes Scott College)
jstamant@agnesscott.edu

Joseph Curra (SUNY New Paltz)
jwcurra.93@gmail.com

Additionally, the Bardstown School district is having a Book Drive for Dictionaries/Encyclopedias. Given that we are a literary society, we would like to take this opportunity to make a call for any dictionaries/encyclopedias you may wish to donate.

Check the Society website emrsociety.com for conference updates and more information.

See Silas House's website www.silas-house.com/ for more information about the author and his works.

allowed us to centralize many of our conference events—the opening reception, keynote, and paper sessions all happening in the Hampton Inn’s conference room.

2. We recruited Frank X. Walker, former Poet Laureate of Kentucky and self-described Affrilachian, to give the very special 25th anniversary Keynote. His talk focused on *My Heart and My Flesh*, discussing Roberts in the context of race and highlighting how important Lebanon, KY was to slaves during the Civil War.

3. We joined in on the Springfield Fourth of July festivities which included an unveiling of a mural banner of Roberts in the center of town and a screening *The Great Meadow* at the Springfield Opera House.

4. We left space in the program for participants to do a whiskey tasting at Heaven Hill Distillery in Bardstown or take a detailed driving tour of Roberts Country.

At this point, I’d like to thank the other members of the board—Conference coordinators Jamie Stamant and Goretta Benca, immediate past president, Dan Pizappi, 1st VP Joe Curra, our new 2nd VP, Gisèle Sigal, and, of course, our social media coordinator and Kentucky point person, Eleanor Hough—for accepting Zoom into their lives and continuing to meet monthly to stay on top of Roberts business. Great thanks as well to our behind-the-scenes point people, Alex Pennisi and Phil Westcott. Time is scarce and this labor unpaid. Thank you for all the work you do behind the scenes to make sure the conference runs, that newsletters get printed, that votes get counted, and all the other millions of things that need to happen to keep the EMR Society afloat.

This leads me to the unknown. What will the next twenty years look like for us? Is meeting in Springfield every year for an academic conference sustainable? I’m not sure.

We are set to meet this October, for our twenty-sixth annual conference. Twenty-six years. A great run by many counts. It’s no secret that I’ve been suggesting a move to a bi-annual conference for the last few years now. The conference used to be a way to get new students of Roberts engaged in the scholarship, but the make-up of our society has changed, with less and less of us actually in college classrooms teaching Roberts’ work. Shifting focus away from planning and attending an annual conference will leave more space for us to write and publish on Roberts and to bring Roberts to larger national and international conferences (like SAMLA and SSAWW) where we are struggling to fill the standing sessions we already have. How then do we continue the work of bringing new readers to Roberts and encouraging scholarship?

I’ve polled you all multiple times now. At the last business meeting, we took a straw poll to determine interest in shifting from an annual EMRS conference to a bi-annual model with a meeting at SAMLA in off-conference years. The result 10 in favor/ 2 abstain. We’ve also sent out a digital questionnaire and held a listening session this past October. We’ve talked, we’ve listened, and now it’s time to make a decision on what the next few years will look like for us moving forward. A formal vote on changing the annual conference to a bi-annual one will take place at the annual business meeting in October. Everyone

will be notified via email of the specific language and voting parameters.

I’ll end this now on a somber note, but one that perhaps also leaves us with a sense of hope. In June, many of us met in Michigan to celebrate Nathan Lee’s life. We sang songs in his honor. We blew train whistles around a bonfire on the banks of Lake Huron. We ate together. We cried together. We threw stones into the lake. Some of us carried stones back to NY and left them by the banks of the Hudson. We are more than a society of Elizabeth Madox Roberts scholars. We are a family. And I look forward to working with this family to ensure our traditions, our commitment to Roberts (and to each other), continue for at least another few decades.

-JULY 2024

SAMLA 95 (In)SECURITY: THE FUTURE OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

NOVEMBER 2023

JAMES STAMANT

At this past year’s SAMLA Conference, held in Atlanta, the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society hosted a roundtable discussion titled “What Does the Future Look Like for Single-Author Societies and What Will Their Place Be in the Study of Literature?” This panel was a bit of a departure for our society, which has often hosted a more traditional paper panel, with essays exploring Roberts’ life and work. The aim of this roundtable was to try to generate more conversation between our group and other author societies and to think about both our value and possible strategies for survival and growth. The panel was terrific, with a group that encompassed five different groups, including our own. James Stamant chaired the roundtable, and the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society’s Goretta Benca was one of the panelists. The other panelists included Kirk Curnutt, a longtime member of the Ernest Hemingway; Carolyn Denard, a founder of the Toni Morrison Society; Aimee Berger, one of the perennial conference coordinators for the Robert Penn Warren Circle; and Robert Meyer-Lee, a longtime member of the New Chaucer Society. All of the panelists had served in one or more capacities for the societies of which they were, or are, members, bringing a wealth of knowledge about the work that goes into starting and maintaining such organizations. The robust and lively conversation was followed by questions from a full room which included the President of SAMLA, Adam Parkes. The SAMLA 95 Presidential Address directly followed our roundtable, and Parkes began his remarks by mentioning the roundtable and calling it “stimulating”—if only he had mentioned Roberts’ name! Many members of the audience were interested in learning about how to start author societies or how to revive societies that had become defunct. What was clear was that there are many people who believe in the value of such societies and the work that they have been doing and continue to do. Our group picked up some ideas about moving into the future in a very changed environment and atmosphere, and I hope that we’ll be able to build on this success at future SAMLA meetings!

TWO WOODBLOCKS FROM CLARE LEIGHTON'S ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE TIME OF MAN AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

DANIEL PIZAPPI



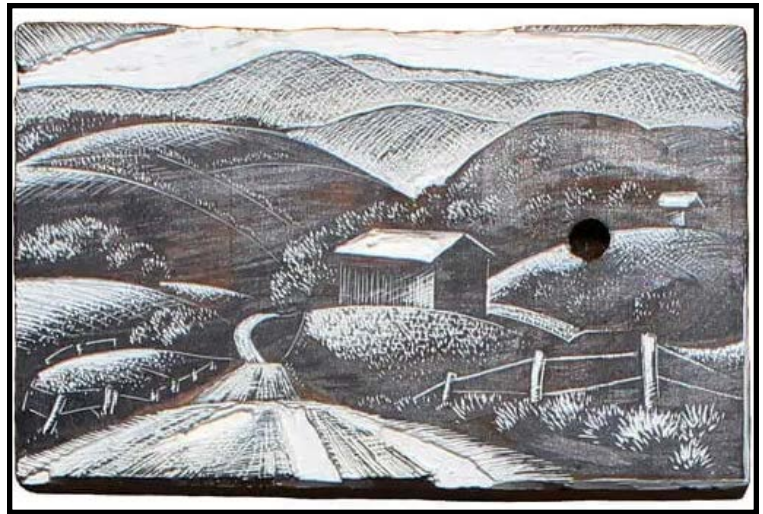
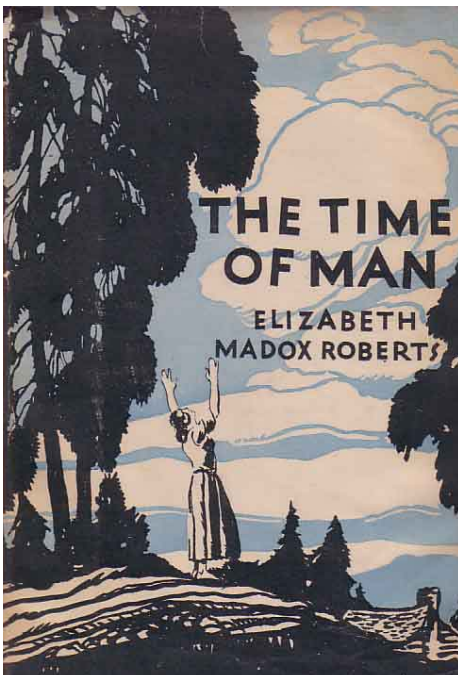
FRONTISPIECE ELLEN, BPL 564

Long time readers of Elizabeth Madox Roberts will no doubt be familiar with at least some of the woodblock illustrations that British-American artist Clare Leighton produced for the 1945 Twentieth Anniversary Edition of *The Time of Man* (Viking) that were featured on the cover of more than one subsequent edition.

Members of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society are certainly familiar with them. Those with memories longer than my own might recall that our own Jane Dionne presented a paper at the second annual EMRS conference in 2000 on "Clare Leighton's Wood Engravings for Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*."

In somewhat more recent EMRS history, society founder H.R. Stoneback found fertile ground for comparison between the cover illustration of the first edition of *The Time of Man*

THE TIME OF MAN,
FRONT COVER,
1926



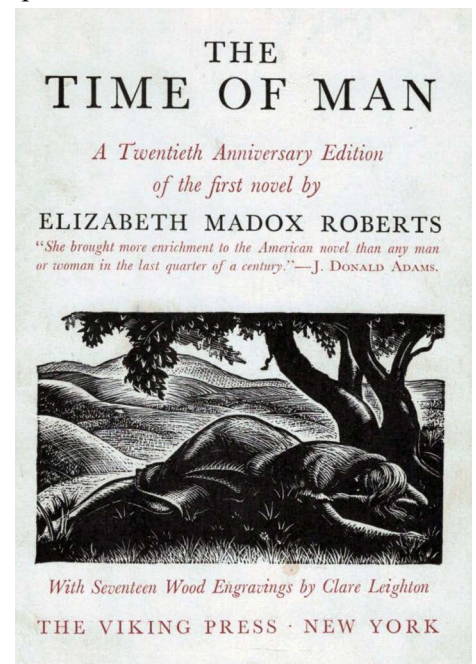
THOSE WERE ROLLING HILLS (KENTUCKY SCENE), BPL 566

(1926) and Leighton's later interpretation from the slipcover of the anniversary edition. In the March 2015 edition of this newsletter, Stoneback wrote of that first edition dust jacket illustration that it is "far more telling and accurate as a depiction of the spirit of Ellen Chesser and the novel than the Clare Leighton illustrations familiar to most readers from later editions of *The Time of Man*."

As I recall, Stoneback's main argument against, primarily, Leighton's slip jacket image was that its prostrate depiction of Ellen Chesser reflected a post-Depression turn in contrast to the earlier Ellen, who stands with her arms raised, a livin'. There's certainly something to be said for that argument, but I also note that Leighton produced 17 total woodcuts to accompany the 1945 edition. Many of these pictures are quite nice and capture equally important aspects of Ellen, her relationships, her labor, and the Kentucky landscape.

I recently made the exciting discovery that two of those images, in fact the original canceled wood blocks themselves, are available for purchase from London based fine art dealer Liss Llewellyn. The two woodblocks available are *Frontispiece Ellen*—a circular image of Ellen's stooped back as she walks with a

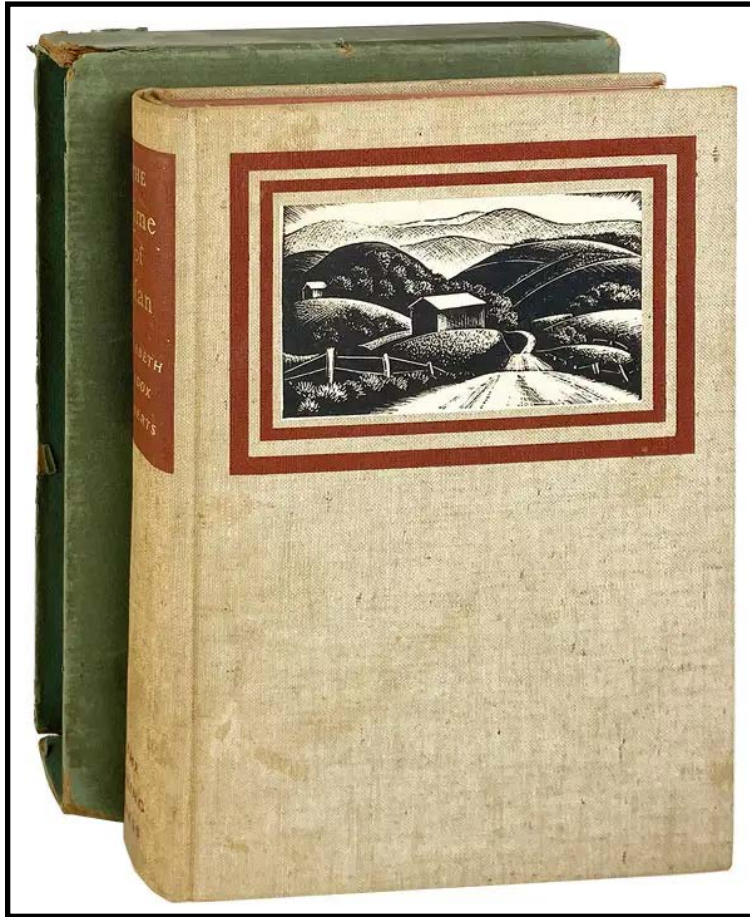
THE TIME OF MAN,
INSET WOODCUT,
1945



heavy milk bucket in hand, set against the faint indication of the rolling hills in the background—and *Those were Rolling Hills (Kentucky Scene)*—a small landscape depicting a dirt road bordered by split-rail fencing, a barn and maybe a house set against the Kentucky hills in the distance, which appeared on the clothbound front cover of the anniversary edition.

The Liss Llewellyn website contains listings for two more of Leighton's Roberts images that were recently sold (*The House at Phillips Place* and *Lovers In the Wheat field*) and one that is privately held by the artist's nephew, but open to inquiries (*Ellen and Her Children*).

Clare Leighton was born in London on April 12, 1898. Clare's initial interest in painting was nurtured by her father and her uncle Jack Leighton, who was an artist and illustrator. In 1915, she began her formal art studies at Brighton College of Art, later attending the Slade School of Fine Art from 1921 to 1923. She also studied wood engraving with Noel Rooke at the Central School of Arts and Crafts.



THE TIME OF MAN, 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, 1926 WITH WOOD CUTS BY CLAIRE LEIGHTON

She traveled extensively in Italy, France, and the Balkans, honing her style on engravings of rural landscapes and peasant scenes.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, Leighton visited the United States for several lecture tours. Leighton met radical journalist H. N. Brailsford in 1928, and they lived together for several years despite his inability to divorce his wife. After Brailsford's wife died in 1937, he experienced an emotional breakdown,

leading to the end of their relationship. Leighton moved to the US in 1939. She never married. She lived in Baltimore, where she became friends with H. L. Mencken. From 1943 to 1945, she was a member of the Department of Art, Aesthetics, and Music at Duke University. She became a naturalized citizen in 1945. That same year she was elected as an Associate member of the National Academy of Design and became a full Academician in 1949. Leighton died on November 4, 1989 (exactly three days after your author was born, as it were). Her ashes were interred in Waterbury, Connecticut.

Throughout her long and prolific career, Clare Leighton wrote and illustrated numerous books celebrating the countryside and the people who worked the land. In 1932, she became the first woman to produce a book on wood-engraving, titled *Wood-Engraving and Woodcuts*, which played a significant role in popularizing the medium. Among her most notable illustrative projects were the 16 woodcuts she created for Thornton Wilder's illustrated edition of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Longmans, Green and Company 1929). Leighton also illustrated classic works by authors such as Emily Brontë, Hardy, Thoreau, and Gilbert White, and brought to life the themes of contemporaries like Thornton Wilder, Elsie Symington, and, of course, Elizabeth Madox Roberts (*Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, Clare Leighton's Wood Engravings of English Country Life Between the Wars*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011).

The elaborate 20th anniversary edition of *The Time of Man* was produced during something of a renaissance in book publishing on the heels of the Second World War. According to John Tebbel in *Designers and Manufacturers, International Book Publishing: An Encyclopedia* (Eds. Edith S. Hoshino and Philip G. Altbach, 2015), it was designed by Milton B. Glick who had graduated from Harvard College and then worked at the Press of the London Mercury, in England, and the Printing House of William Edwin Rudge, in Mount Vernon, New York. During the war he had been a typographic consultant to the Office of Geographer, Department of State, and printing adviser of the Overseas Editions Project of the Office of War Information. In 1945, during his first year at Viking, Glick designed the new edition of *The Time of Man*, commissioning Leighton to provide the illustrations, no doubt based on her long history of respected works in the genre.

At the time of writing, *Frontispiece Ellen* (SKU: 6005) is listed at £1,100 and *Those were Rolling Hills (Kentucky Scene)* (SKU: 9705) at £1,900. Any members of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society interested in inquiring about or purchasing one of these works should contact Paul Liss at paul@lissllewellyn.com.

More information is available at the links below.

Frontispiece Ellen: <https://lissllewellyn.com/product/frontispiece-ellen-bpl-564-1944/>

Those were Rolling Hills (Kentucky Scene): <https://lissllewellyn.com/product/those-were-rolling-hills-kentucky-scene-bpl-566-1944/>

ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS - A PERSONAL RETROSPECTIVE PRESENTATION AND RECEPTION

GISELE SIGAL



Unfortunately, aside from my own works, the European reception of Elizabeth Madox Roberts' literary production is highly limited, if not extremely scarce. Thus, this presentation will humbly focus on my career path in France, marked by forty years of teaching English and forty years of academic study/research activity.

The following lines retrace my professional life, and detail the way the French educational system operates in a teaching/research environment.

In the 1970's, English-speaking studies in France mainly concerned the United Kingdom due to its geographical and historical proximity to France; in English Literature the *French Agrégation and Capes* Competitive Academic Exams essentially focused on the studies of Shakespeare's plays and other literary canons: the works of: Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, the Brontë sisters, and Thomas Hardy to name just a few. The Americanist studies came in addition to the corpus conventionally studied, in a more particularly post-BA equivalent orientation. In France, three vectors characterize language studies: literature, civilization and linguistics. The students specialize at the end of their first University cycle.

It was quite natural for me to focus my studies on what I loved the most: literature, without worrying about other contingencies such as a professional opportunity or a financially satisfying career. I knew that I wanted to teach English and specialize in such a precious, captivating, and attractive environment. In September 1977 I started studying at the University of Toulouse le Mirail (now called Jean Jaurès University). As early as 1979, I was able to obtain a position as a Lecturer in English at the IPC (Institute for Commercial Promotion) to help finance my studies. From then on, time was necessary to reconcile studies and work. In the mid-80s, when I was finishing a Master's Thesis on Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*, I noticed that several critics and authors were comparing this novel to Elizabeth Madox Robert's *The Time of Man*. I decided to get it even though it was tedious and expensive at the time to order books in the United States.

I then turned to my Research Director and Supervisor for approval to direct my work towards a Diploma in Advanced Studies (DEA), and then a French *Thèse de Doctorat* (Doctoral

Dissertation) on Roberts as none had been written on her work. Moreover, women writers have always been on the sidelines of their male counterparts, as if they were destined to write only novels imbued with mawkishness or exacerbated sentimentalism; such an injustice has always revolted me and it has prompted my will to rehabilitate the work of a woman writer.

The Time of Man leaves an indelible mark on readers, through its introspection into the human soul, its lyrical qualities, the will to live that pushes to fight for existence against the circumstances, and the omnipresence of nature whose beauty exalts the feelings. The other novels are not left out and testify to this unsuspected power.

Although seeking recognition and legitimacy, Roberts refuses notoriety or pomp in order to be recognized as a writer for the sake of integrity. Her personality, her dignified and poignant life, her vast culture, the moral greatness of her message and the courage she exalts reflect quite well the climate of her work, from which it cannot be dissociated. For her, writing is a metaphor for one's own experience where the mind is forged, absorbs the vagaries of life and integrates a new level of development. Her works open the doors to an initiatory and identity journey, and symbolize an offering to humanity in a universal and timeless quest.

At the time, the AMS Press publishing house was the only one to offer works by Roberts, and their price was exorbitant. Nevertheless, I had to resign myself to ordering *The Great Meadow* and *Not by Strange Gods* for an amount equivalent to \$ 700 nowadays for both books when my income was very modest. At the same time, the interuniversity loan gave me the opportunity to order loan works on Roberts' works, as well as theses available in paper version by UMI (University Microfilm International).

After an inconsistent research activity due to my successive jobs (I worked full-time as a substitute teacher in various middle, vocational and high schools of the Toulouse Region from 1983 to 1990), waiting for a tenured position in southern France, I then passed the Academic Competitive Exams to become a tenured teacher in any school all over the country. Being single and childless with over 10 years of experience teaching English and very good grades, I was the perfect candidate for a position in a nice reputed school but I was assigned to teach in a middle school in a disadvantaged suburb north of Paris, 500 miles away from my home. In France, the Ministry of Education assigns new tenured teachers who either accept their work assignment anywhere or choose to resign. After a year in harsh living and working conditions, I could not bear the deterioration of the uninviting atmosphere of the establishment, (difficult and gloomy), not to mention the exorbitant financial costs associated with the place. There were only two solutions left for me: either resign and look for another job or apply to teach in a University thanks to my background and my Doctoral studies.

Not wanting the support of my research director for ethical and rigorous issues, I applied to several southern Universities and was finally accepted for an audition at the University of Pau on the satellite campus of Bayonne. An interview with a jury of more than fifteen people turned out to be conclusive

and I was accepted for a position as a tenured English Teacher in an International Business Department from the start of September 1992. In France, if one's research activity is centered on a subject far from literary or civilization-related canons and trends, the chances of being assigned to a language department are minimal. Therefore, the majority of Teacher-Researchers are assigned to technical, scientific, medical, artistic or business academic faculties totally unrelated to their research theme. This means that a job means a salary, and that passion is elsewhere: in research. However, this is not the case for colleagues assigned to a Language Faculty, where the works of students sometimes make it possible to nourish Assistant/Associate or Full Professors' own research, and where the competition programs favor a teaching practice plus an application centered on bridges - concerning the authors studied and the literary trends on the syllabi.

At the time, a duration of four to five years was necessary for the writing of a doctoral dissertation, and every Doctoral Dissertation must be written in French. If the candidate had a job at the same time, the duration was extended. It was a long-term task for me, and I was successively elated and discouraged by the magnitude of the project. My *Thèse de Doctorat* entitled: "*Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Ecrivain du Kentucky*" should have been defended in 1996 but the successive unavailability of the five national members of the jury decided otherwise. So I publicly defended it in April 1997. My parents were present in the audience as well as some relatives. I obtained First Class Highest Honors, and I will never thank my Research Director/Supervisor enough - Emeritus Professor Marcienne Rocard - for her unflinching support during all these years. I then applied to become an Associate Professor of English and took another exam called *Qualification sur liste de Maître de Conférences* which I passed in 1999. At University, my duties were cumbersome: teaching, grading, handling administrative tasks, supervising students for their internships or for their stay in foreign partner universities, assisting them for applications in Graduate Business Schools, participating in endless meetings... I was also Head of the Business Dept (*French Techniques de Commercialisation*) from 2011 to 2017 for two consecutive mandates.

At the same time, from 1982 to 2009, I used to chaperon French middle school and high school students during the Easter and summer holidays, first to the United Kingdom until 1985, and then to the USA to my sheer delight. Being from a modest family, I could not have dreamed of anything better. The accompaniments followed one another from year to year and I could thus take advantage of my free time to go to second-hand bookstores or to Barnes and Noble, Harcourt, (HBJ) Brace and Jovanovich Booksellers, to name a few. My accompaniments as a chaperone were located in large cities or near renowned sites. I was thus able to chaperon French high school students during the summer in the United States several times in NYC, Boston, San Diego, San Francisco, Charlotte, Las Vegas, Saint Paul, New Orleans, Orlando, Norfolk (VA), and drive a van to cross the United States from East to West. The opportunity to go to Kentucky was never offered as a destination to my dismay. The families who hosted me would show me around and I had the opportunity to visit other States bordering those where I was assigned with the groups, such as New Mexico, Wisconsin, Maine, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, Colorado,

Michigan...

In 2006, the family hosting me in Charlotte took me to Springfield, KY and it was an amazing experience. After all these years of constant work on Kentucky social history, its writers, its geographical environment, I finally found myself in a place that was familiar to me, like a homecoming. I was won over by a feeling of belonging that has never left me.

One year later, I met my "Kentucky family", a group of enthusiasts, united around Harry Stoneback, a true standard who would bring his troops together. Of course, his gatherings are different from the conventional and selective conferences that we have in Europe - where expertise and formality prevail - but the loyalty to these meetings have transcended divisions. For nearly 20 years, our reunions have endured, even if some are no longer with us, they remain in our hearts, whether they have left the group, they can no longer come due to their health, or they are no longer of this world. They all weave an unbreakable bond that unites us.

My papers on Roberts have been presented at more than thirty conferences in France and in Europe, as well as in scholarly societies, and numerous academic workshops. Half of them have been published in reviews, journals and books.

I have had the opportunity to meet with a few American colleagues who either had heard of our dearest Harry Stoneback, or who had worked on Roberts. Last March at the ASA conference in Cullowhee that I attended, a young colleague presented an article on *The Great Meadow*.

Nevertheless, Roberts' place in letters in Europe is tenuous, if not to say tiny. My work continues to promote her writings but now that I am retired, I have engaged in a French HDR: Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (Authorization to Supervise Doctoral Dissertations). I am required to write a substantial monograph on various writers and their works plus a comprehensive record of my academic works. A period of three years of intensive work is necessary under the supervision of a Full Professor, an expert in the field. Hence, I have been devoting myself to the study of a set of Kentucky writers such as Harriet Simpson Arnow, James Still and Janice Holt Giles in order to gather a homogeneous corpus around Roberts with the same aim of recognition and discovery by a European readership.

Simultaneously, I am looking for a job in the US that would allow me to immerse myself in the American society, now that I am retired.

My career path is marked by my deep attachment to Elizabeth Madox Roberts, to Harry Stoneback, and to our loyal group that meets every year. It is an invaluable opportunity to share our passion for this writer and to participate in her recognition. I feel privileged and honored to be part of the EMRS and to know you all.

Thank you for your interest in my long retrospective presentation.

Long live the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society.
fYou are all in my heart,
Gisele Sigal.

IN MEMORIAM: NATHAN LINDSAY LEE



NATE AT RONCEVEAUX, 2022. PHOTO BY RACHEL PIZZAPI

A NOTE FROM JERRY AND PAM LEE

We'd like to extend our thanks to the members of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society for the kind words and/or presence of so many of you at the celebration of his life. Many thanks also to those who donated to the H.R. Stoneback Award in Nathan's name.

This society was vitally important to him and one of his biggest concerns was it would fizzle gradually away after the death of Dr. Stoneback. He was deeply vested in working towards its' continuance and bringing new members in. We are delighted to see so many familiar names working toward that common goal.

If there is anything we can do to help at any time please let us know. Your camaraderie and meeting of the like-minded meant everything to our son. We truly believe the annual conference was the highlight of his year.

*With deepest thanks,
Jerry & Pam Lee*

IN THIS NEVERENDING SEASON OF MEMORIAMs

BY ELEANOR HOUGH

The last few years of editing the newsletter for this society has felt a bit like a constant barrage of elegiac prose and lengthy "in memoriam" sections. For the last newsletter that Stoney contributed to, before his death in December of 2021, he wrote a section titled "In This Long Season of Memoriams," in which he eulogized many friends of the society, among them his friends and his family. In 2022, of course, we included many memorials for Stoney, in 2023 we published two, and this year we have even more memoriams to write and to read.

While writing this, I have revisited that long collection of memoriams written by Stoney in 2021, squirreled away in my disorganized Google drive, and am struck by a few passages that I will republish here. First, I will include a passage he wrote in response to his inability to attend Billy Graham's public memorial, which reflects how I felt after Stoney's memorial (which I did not miss) in 2021.



NATE READS AT ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS GRAVE, 2023. PHOTO BY MARIE D'APICE

“After that, maybe I thought well that should do it for a while as far as essential Memorials go. We always want to think that those we love, those we must honor, will live forever.”

And:

“Nothing is more important in this life than the unmissable Memorial Services that must be attended, all other obligations put aside to do so—even in pandemic times. To make a presence at a Memorial is to bear witness to the mystical solidarity and communion of saints and sinners on this earth.”

In 2021, I attended four Unmissable Memorial Services. One was held over Zoom in February and two were back to back in Binghamton in the early summer, when Phil and I put off our move from the Lexington suburbs into the city center an extra week to stay in New York. Stoney’s was the fourth. I canceled my flight back to Kentucky, stayed an extra week in New York, and finally returned home—as many of us did—with a case of COVID19. Some time after returning home to Lexington following Stoney’s funeral, I sent a text message to Nate Lee, telling him that no one who I loved was allowed to die in 2022, but preferably no one would ever die ever again. Nate kept half of the promise he never actually made in that conversation and waited until 2024. I still don’t have many words to express how I feel about Nate’s truly untimely death, so instead I will quote from the elegy he wrote for Stoney back sometime in 2022:

“When somebody you love dies, a very many people will tell you they are gone. Forever. And you will feel guilt over your grief, because their telling you that is an accusation—of what? If sentimentality is the spurious and ostentatious display of emotions incommensurate to their object, Who can call you sentimental, for holding on to what few and temporary things made you see what it was in life worth the living?”

Nate was a stalwart fixture of the EMRS, having not missed a conference beginning in 2013. He was the leading expert on her oft-maligned 1928 novel *Jingling in the Wind*, and the leading (and perhaps only) scholar of Roberts in the Digital Humanities. He held a Bachelors Degree in Playwriting from Belmont University in Nashville, and a Masters Degree in English from SUNY New Paltz. He was pursuing his PhD in Literature and Folklore at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and had passed his qualifying exams to move forward to ABD status in December. The University of Louisiana awarded Nathan the doctorate posthumously in August, his father Jerry Lee walked for him in the graduation ceremony. In the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, Nathan acted as Program Co-Chair for the 2023 society conference, and excerpts from his most recent unfinished longer writing on *Jingling* were published in the 2023 edition of this newsletter.

Nate and I had become much closer over the last few years, both being in PhD programs that we began during the depths of the pandemic times. Nate, like me and like many of us, was simultaneously fiercely passionate about and somewhat disillusioned by higher education. We exchanged emails about staying in academia to shift paradigms in the neoliberal

university and text messages about dropping out of academia to open tinned fish and martini bars. Nate talked me through my serious internal debates about leaving my program often, reminding me that there is always something new to say, and that there is a value in saying it. In one of our last correspondences, he sent me an article about Hemingway and James Baldwin, introducing it this way:

“Anyway, the paper pulls a lot from Edward Said and Cornel West and is the best non-IHS/us take on Hemingway I’ve seen in a long time.”

Nate’s presence in the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, as a scholar of Roberts’ work and in the larger field of literature and literary folklore, and in the lives of the members of the society, will be greatly missed.

A week after Nate’s death, Dr. Robert Waugh, Professor Emeritus in the SUNY New Paltz English Department, and long-time friend, if not member, of the EMR Society passed away. I first met Dr. Waugh over email when I took Stoney’s AmLit II class in 2013 and he assigned us to read and correspond with a living poet. I read Waugh’s book of unrhymed sonnets about the sea and asked him if he ever played music. He responded with a joke about his famous rendition of Peggy Sue, which could often be heard at Stoney’s annual “Big Show” for the Understanding Poetry class. Waugh received his PhD from Harvard in Comparative Literature in 1968 and began his teaching career at New Paltz that year. At New Paltz he taught a number of different classes in the English Department, ranging from European Literature to Classics. He retired from full-time teaching in 2010 but continued to teach classes occasionally until 2016. He was 81.

As difficult as it is to attend the many Unmissable Memorials we’ve had to in the last half-decade, to accept that those people who we convince ourselves will never die are mere mortals, and to further accept that we ourselves are, the alternative feels much worse. The clichés about grief are many, and for good reason—perhaps the only universal truth is that we all will die, or maybe it is that we all will bury someone we love before we get there. As I write this, I’m pushing my son on a swing, and the juxtaposition of his unshakeable toddler joy with the sadness I am holding and spilling onto the page feels almost too heavy handed of an image. To live a life marked by joy necessitates that we live a life also marked by loss. We cannot have one big feeling without its opposite, or without the knowledge that they are not opposites, but rather always connected.

I will leave you with a final excerpt from Stoney’s long season of In Memoriams from 2021:

“Tragedy and loss are what we are given freely and generously and always, however unexpectedly. Memorials celebrate the life and work of lost loved ones and exemplars. Joy and hope may also come through Memorials. Joy arrives like some mystery of the higher blessedness. Hope is what we must create and cultivate. Life is Memory and forever. Honor is Memorial and immemorial.”

Hallelujah innyhow.

GOODNIGHT, GOODNIGHT

BY AUTUMN HOLLADAY

I've been dreaming of a place
Where all I love is still alive.
It exists somewhere between France and Kentucky;
Captured in the songs of Hank and Johnny;
Somewhere under the tree
And in the Mediterranean Sea
Within a numinous light;
When all the love was still there
And we really were that free then:
A home to come to,
A peace to yearn for.
It smells of jasmine
And tastes like wine;
Looks like a garden
Freshly weeded
That sits along a porch
With a rocking chair—
Where you will be,
Where I will find you,
When we meet again,
My old friend.

NATE READING AT PENN'S STORE IN 2016. PHOTO BY
RACHEL PIZAPPI



MEMORIAM FOR NATHAN LINDSAY LEE

BY GREG BRUNO

All I have to offer, right now, are my words in hope through these fragments I can be with you though not there.

I. A Brief Note For Nate

A little over a decade ago, I was in a spring Stoney class reading EMR for the first time, planning to go to my first conference. That same spring, Stoney spoke at a Cormac McCarthy conference and came back talking about some young fellow from Tennessee who he had met there: this guy had read all of McCarthy and wanted to go to Kentucky. After class smoking outside JFT, Stoney said I should room with him, both of us being first timers. So that's how I met Nate — splitting a room with him at the Beamount (see Dan's note in the EMR thread re:the pink Cadillac). Nate had been out of college for a couple years, and showed up with several notebooks of handwritten notes: I don't remember him sleeping that night typing them into his first conference paper. Exhausted, the next morning, he spoke so loud and close into the microphone. It was jarring sitting right next to the speaker on our panel, bombasted by his delivery, his idiolect. Back then, he was much more playwright than academic.

Couple years after that, I was fortunate to really get to know Nate when he moved to New Paltz to do his MA. Nate moving to New Paltz was a big deal for all of us in that crew. It also meant we got to witness first hand his development as a writer, a musician, an academic and a teacher. A keen reader, it was readily apparent in conversation the man was a genius. It shined very brightly through his music. First time I heard Rex's Blues was Nate playing it in Stoney's kitchen. I went straight home and learned how to travis pick that night.

It wasn't just classes, conferences and Stoney's, it continued at the Wurtz apartment with Chris—so many songs there—and also at the TeaRoom where many of us worked, courtesy of Alex being de facto manager, to supplement the meager TA stipend.

Over the years, after I left New Paltz, each time I saw Nate he was a notably better writer, artist, academic and musician. Most of all, he was a good friend to me personally. Kristin tells me that when I first took her to New Paltz, right before Hemingway Paris 2018, to meet my friends at Huckleberry's, Nate pulled her aside to tell her what a great guy I was (owed a far belated “thanks man”).

All this to say: with Nate goes a good friend, a profound influence on me during a foundational time in my life, and a generational talent. His presence has left an indelible mark on my being I will always carry with me.

II. For the Remaining on the Road and Elsewhere

When it is a contemporary, a peer, who leaves us: there is both the Loss and a confrontation of our own mortality. For me, there's been a systemic shock, that I feel but is hard to look at directly: engendering contradictory and simultaneous appreciation for, repulsion of, Life.

A. Some Echoes in Shakespeare and Faulkner: an Interlude
The night before Alex called to relay the News, we (Kristin and I) had gone to Sleep No More at the McKittrick Hotel in Manhattan. Sleep No More is an immersive experimental retelling of MacBeth through five hotel floors where you wander the halls and rooms in a crowd wearing masquerade masks, encountering various scenes through happenstance. The experience is depersonalizing and jarring.

There's little to no actual dialogue in Sleep No More, at least that we saw, but it struck a deep chord and brought me back to the following MacBeth passage where Faulkner pulled the title for that one novel (the same novel inadvertently lead me to Stoney, to Nate, to you all, for our paths to cross, all those years ago).

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

Macbeth's words make me profoundly upset reading them back now in this context. For a time, I truly identified far too much with the protagonist Faulkner imagined out of it. A decade ago, it was Stoney who helped me realize, through Faulkner, the joy that existed in that novel and how to really read Dilsey's section. How we must repudiate that thought and live by the Values.

B. Big Two-Hearted Broken Heart: Hold Steady

In the whirlwind of this, I've thought so much about Stoney, and my time with him, and I guess because in the lifetime it will take to process him, in this moment, I can begin to look at his Loss (perhaps rather than look too closely at another Loss). I'd like to believe Stoney left us with the tools necessary to endure the tragedies of life.

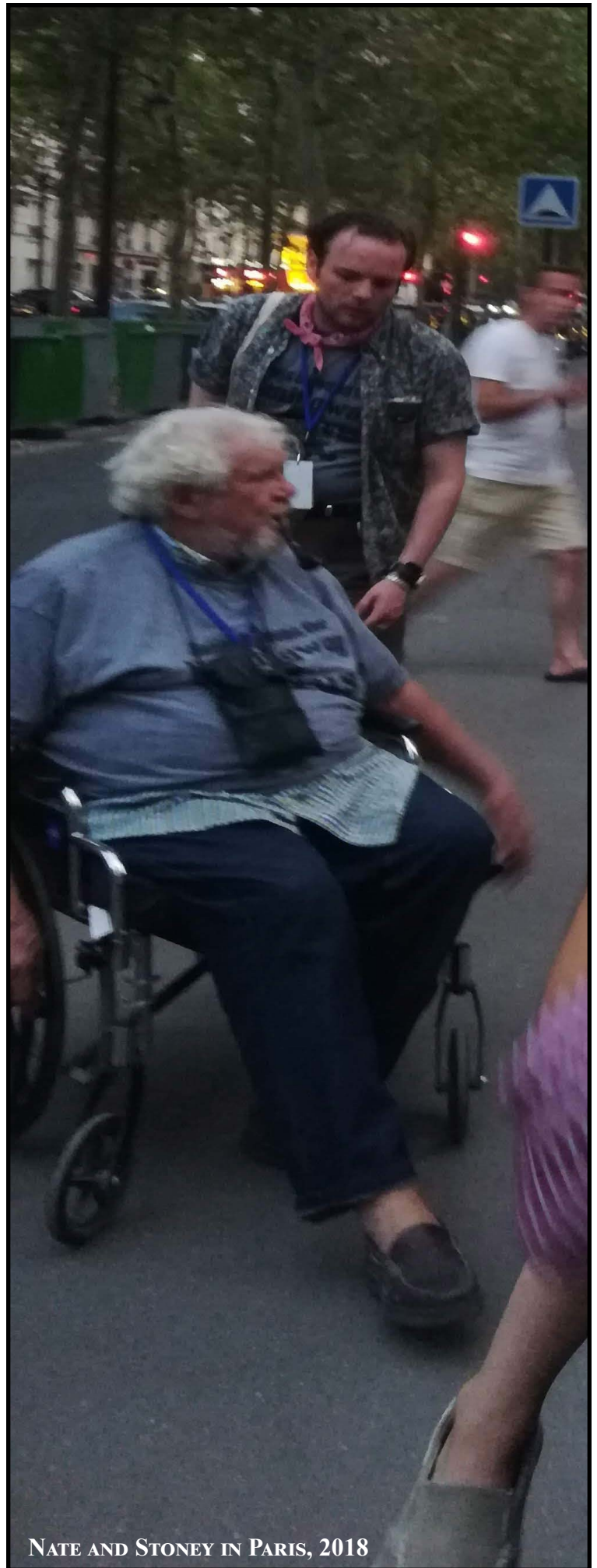
The initial spark that brought me into Stoney's class at 21, to get the MA, to teach for a time, attend a dozen conferences, was a love of Faulkner, compelled by angst and ennui. At first, I was skeptical of Hemingway, and I came out years later, ("people only start to make sense after thirty" Stoney once said), holding Hemingway's work deepest in my heart because of Stoney, because of you all, because of the Values.

And so, I've clung tightly to a simple Michigan trout metaphor: hold steady. All I can think to do.

C. Obligations

I wish I could be with you all and I hope to see many of you soon but I am pulled by many obligations (familial, legal and otherwise)—please forgive me.

I do miss you all—please be well—
Greg (and Kristin and Etta and Cash)



NATE AND STONEY IN PARIS, 2018

A MEANDERING ON WISDOM

FOR NATE LEE

PHIL HAZEN WESTCOTT

In my mind's eye I still see you there
pressing too hard on strings and plucking
too hard and yet being just
the right amount of
Enough.
Loud and boisterous when the occasion called for it —
demure and reserved when needed.
Blessed.
Always blessed.
Always knowing the next move
to get us back to that circle —
that music —
that whiskey
just a little bit quicker.
I cannot distinctly recall our first meeting. Meeting the cast
isn't the same as a personal
introduction. I
remember our second,
arriving late in New Paltz.
Going to that expensive bar with the games
upstairs,
you working, us drinking. Snug's with Alex later,
endless conversation, always, forever and forever and forever...
your tiny little room, Chris had just moved out, we slept on a
floor
or maybe a mattress. Just a few hours —
we were on our way to something
or maybe from? Details have never been my strong suit
unlike you, who could have told me what color
shirt I was wearing that night.

You played piano the same way, fervently
I was always afraid a string would break
but somehow you knew the right amount of pressure
What was called for in the moment.
A toast or a *tête à claques*
always, a perfect balance of what you knew
what you thought we should know,
what you wanted to learn,
never forced,
Vivid.

Yours were the thoughts that brought me to tears
after Stoney passed —
not because they were so brilliantly different
or more
than what the rest had to say

Because they were enough.
(*Maybe a little more than enough —
but enough, nonetheless.*)

The truth we are all seeking was the journey
you are already on —
have been on for longer than I knew —
I just realized 3 months ago as

you played Joplin
and my son stood there, laughing
clapping, you forgetting the end of the tune,
(*Or was the piano too out of tune for you to continue?
Perhaps it was both. Perhaps you
needed a break.*)

—

My best friend shot himself when I was 19.
My bandmates died during Covid.
All of my grandparents were gone before I left for college

I am not unfamiliar with loss. I am too close to too young —
too soon — *too present to be gone.*
All this is to say
I miss you today
and tomorrow
and every day. It is too long since we last
spoke. I was never good at reaching out,
always depending on the other.
You did until you didn't — *I should have noticed* —
young fatherhood present in my mind,
you are still talking about the next time
you drive through
getting
'the real species at that place that only takes cash'

—

I cannot touch this gravity without spiraling.

—

I keep coming back, the constant metaphor of grief
'*Like an ocean, it comes in waves.*'
You are vast and deep and endless and I am still
Driving my car
On the way to the beach.

—

I love you.

—

I miss you.

—

*J'arrive;
fin.*

9:34am, 4/12/24



2016 IN THE TENT. PHOTO BY RACHEL PIZAPPI



A TRIBUTE TO NATHAN LINDSAY LEE

JAMES STAMANT

[Editor's note: Jamie wrote this as part of the email chain shared among members of the Society in response to Nate's passing. We felt it was important to include, but it picks up in media res.]

These tributes to Nate are really quite extraordinary, but Nate was quite extraordinary so they are truly fitting. I was thinking about what Nate's father posted about Nate's favorite place in the world, the lake in Michigan, and it got me thinking about a conversation I had with the poet Kamilah Aisha Moon, a colleague and friend who also died way too young. We were talking about my father, a month before he passed, when we knew it was coming, and she asked about our place on the lake in New York, a special place for my family and our destination once the semester ended. When my father did pass, that May, Aisha sent me a short but meaningful message that stayed with me which I thought I'd share here: "Yes, remember and say his name in that special place...spirit rustling in the treetops, rippling the water."

I know we will remember and say Nate's name in a number of special places, and we will definitely feel his spirit rustling everything. I could imagine no less.

24TH ANNUAL ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS SOCIETY REPORT

ELEANOR HOUGH

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society met in July 2023 for our XXV annual conference in Washington County, KY. This conference saw some changes and some new additions to the conference, as well as the continuation of many of our tried and true traditions. We also had some special additions specific to the XXV conference.

In new traditions, we moved our conference center to the Hampton Inn in Lebanon, KY—just over the border of Marion County—in response to the fickle nature of the Springfield Inn in recent years. We all enjoyed the hospitality of the Lebanon Hampton Inn and are excited to return there this year during the first week of October for our XXVI annual conference.

In special events, we were thrilled to welcome Affrilachian poet and former Kentucky Poet Laureate Frank X. Walker as our keynote speaker. He gave an enlightening and rousing speech about Blackness in Roberts' work and the larger field of Kentucky literature and folk culture. He also discussed and read from his own poetry, including his current project blending archival research with creative work.

The next day we held paper sessions at St. Catherines (see the following for a list of participating scholars and paper titles).

- Daniel Pizappi (Univ. of TN): “nothing left but the knowledge that it had been taken away”: Itinerancy and Exile in Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Sonora Babb
- Gisèle Sigal (Université de Pau, France – Bayonne Campus): “Journeying out in the wilderness: Transition and Transposition in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’: *The Great Meadow* and Harriette Arnow’s: *The Dollmaker*”
- Michael Beilfuss (Missouri Southern State University): “His words ...made strong pictures’: Narrative and the Ethics of Attention in Elizabeth Madox Roberts”
- Autumn Holladay (MSIS at UAlbany): “On the Radio and On the Screen: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Other Media”

- Jane Dionne (Independent Scholar): “Life dictates Art, Art depicts History: EMR’s KY through its Artists...In Her Time”

- Evan Hulick (CUA): Meditations on Life and Death in *The Time of Man* and H.R. Stoneback’s *Voices of Women Singing*

- Eleanor Hough (Univ. of KY): “She hated her for the pain’’: Reproductivity and Childbirth in *The Time of Man*

- Nathan Lee (UL Lafayette): “‘Against the blue of the welkin’: on ‘Loss’, Revival, and Weirdness in *Jingling in the Wind*”

- Joshua Briggs (Pace University School of Law, incoming class of 24): “No Laws of Man: Natural Law, Natural Disasters, and EMR’s *Flood*”

- Joseph Curra: *Edens Revisted* (SUNY New Paltz):

- Alex Pennisi (Culinary Institute of America): *Strange Traces in Not by Strange Gods: the History of Kentucky Theater and The Donner Party in “I Love My Bonny Bride”*

That evening we also were happy to be included in Springfield’s Independence Day Celebration, with members reading from Roberts’ work and discussing our relationship with the place. As part of the Celebration, we were able to be present for the unveiling of Springfield’s newest mural banner, a portrait of Roberts by Springfield native, painter Don Rok Keene.

Following tradition, we then spent a day at the Historic Penn’s Store in Gravel Switch, where we also celebrated the Fourth of July with a barbecue and poetry and song shared with local Kentucky poets and musicians.

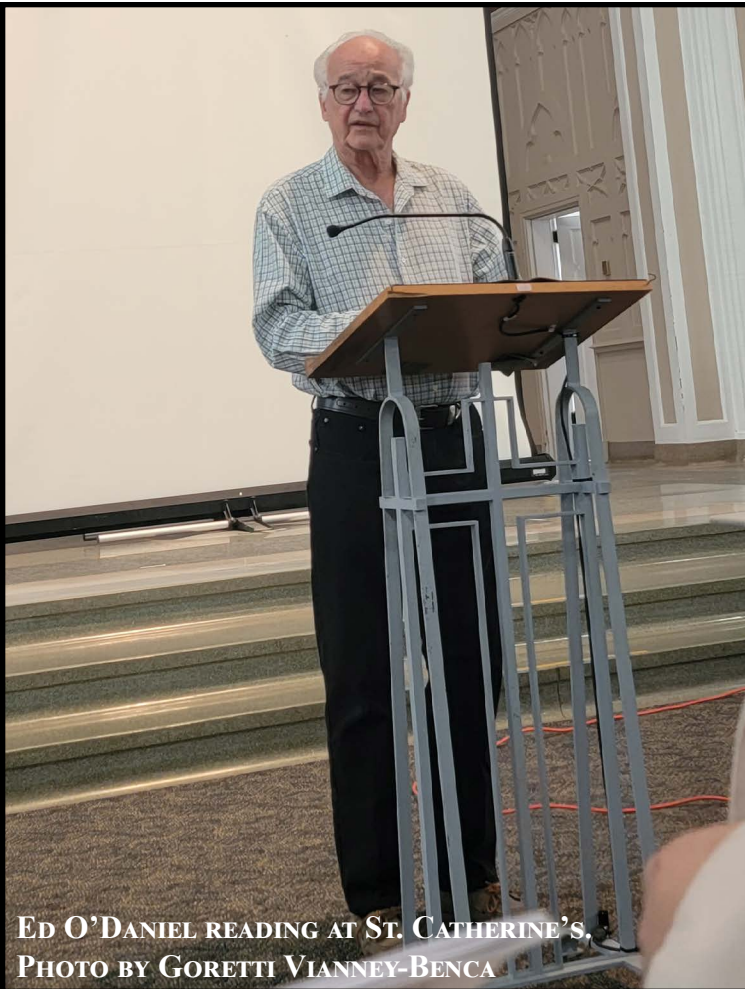
On our final full day, we screened the film version of *The Great Meadow* at the Springfield Opera House, in cooperation with Springfield Main Street. It was a really special opportunity to bring our group together with the community. Overall, the 25th Anniversary Conference for the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society was a rousing success, and we look to the future with inspiration.

MAYOR ESSEX INTRODUCES THE EMRS BEFORE SELECTED READINGS DURING THE SPRINGFIELD CELEBRATIONS



PHOTO BY GORETTI BENCA

MEMBERS POSE IN FRONT OF PENN'S STORE, 2023.



ED O'DANIEL READING AT ST. CATHERINE'S.
PHOTO BY GORETTI VIANNEY-BENCA



MURAL-CANVAS OF ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS IN
SPRINGFIELD, KY. PHOTO BY GORETTI VIANNEY-BENCA



THE ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS SOCIETY

*ILLUSTRATION BY F D BEDFORD FOR THE
1930 RE-ISSUE OF ROBERTS' UNDER THE TREE*

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and to encourage the teaching of her literature. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but we are always interested in encouraging Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Amanda Capelli.