

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 20

www.emrsociety.com

April 2019

21st Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XXI Annual Conference in Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill and in Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 26-29, 2019. We are excited to return our conference headquarters to Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill—a location quintessentially Kentuckian, an agrarian and historic venue rich with resonances of Roberts Country. Academic paper sessions will be held at Saint Catharine College, just outside of Springfield, Roberts' hometown.

Please direct conference inquiries (registration, lodging, special events, etc.) to the Co-Conference Directors:

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

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President's Message 2019

GORETTI VIANNEY-BENCA

As I watch the snow falling outside here in New York on this grey April day, I can't help but look forward to the warm Kentucky sun. Thinking about Kentucky floods me with memories of the fourteen Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society conferences I have attended, and I chuckle at the memory of the one year many of us had to run to Walmart to buy a winter knit hat and gloves due to a cold snap that this Yankee girl was not prepared for. And as I sit here writing my note to all of you, other wonderful memories pop into my mind like comic strip thought bubbles, and I am reminded of the many reasons why this literary society is so special.

The people who make up this society, who have come to these conference meetings to learn more about and discuss a female American writer, are what makes this society and its conferences extraordinary. Since its grassroots beginning with Dr. Stoneback (Stoney) and his graduate students from SUNY-New Paltz, this conference has brought strangers from all over the world to the mystical land of Kentucky with its bluegrass, rich history, and southern charm. And when the conference meetings wrap up, folks say farewell to new and old friends—at least until we meet again next time. That is what makes up my memories and what brings me back every year.

I do not think I am alone in this sentiment either. This is why we see seasoned members of the society bring their students,

colleagues, and friends to the conference each year. Not only do we want the society and the conference itself to grow, but we want to share the wonderful experience that is the conference. One of my hopes as President is that we all continue to invite and encourage others to join us and share in our fellowship.

Another recurring memory of mine, especially during springtime when I prepare to leave for the conference, is one of the things I always share with my students when I teach Roberts in my classes—how I felt when I first read Roberts. Part of their writing exercise is to express how they feel when they read Roberts' poetry. Their answers are consistent: they write about how they like the images, the beauty and simplicity of the language, and they discuss how Roberts' poems remind them of their own life. And for me, this moment in the classroom, when Roberts' writing resonates with my students' lives, is an equally valuable and wonderful experience. So, I encourage you to continue teaching Roberts' works and continue sharing them with others. Introduce your students, colleagues, friends, and family to Roberts and invite them to Kentucky next year!

Perhaps the theme of my note this year is memories because I am coming to the end of my term as your President. It has been an honor to serve you in this capacity. I hope to have opportunities to serve the society in other ways in the future. I look forward to seeing you all very soon!

Notes on EMR and Les Saintes-Maries

ALEX PENNISI

It goes without saying that Kentucky and the Camargue are worlds apart. They are in different countries on different continents, and there are about 4,500 miles that separate them. In between the two are a couple mountain ranges, huge stretches of hills and plains, and, well, the Atlantic Ocean. The muddy hills of a landlocked town like Springfield, Kentucky, are a distant memory when you are digging your feet beneath the sands of the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the distance, however, the 20th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference, one dedicated to celebrating the Kentuckian writer and the home she wrote about, would be held in a place of which she never wrote: Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. The annual spring convoy to Kentucky would be traded for a summer flight across the Atlantic to the South of France; bluegrass traded for green reeds, dark earth for white sands, and rolling hills for rocking seas. Why, though, would an author who is so celebrated for her connection to Kentucky and rural America inspire so many to travel to a place where she had never even been? Yes, the conference was held jointly with the Aldington and Imagism conferences, and we know that Roberts was aware of Aldington and his involvement with Imagism. And, yes, the evidence continues to persuade that Roberts was not only aware of Imagism but also indebted to it. There is no need to dismiss anything so pragmatic, but allowing for practical answers to do away with any other explanation is unnecessarily dismissive. The ties that bind Springfield to Saintes-Maries reach deeper than physical roots, and one

only has to read Roberts to find that those ties are with you wherever you go.

For whatever the reason, the most memorable moment in *The Time of Man* for me is right at the beginning of the novel when Ellen Chesser traces her name in the air. One of the times I remembered this scene was when we were driving through the South of France. There was something about the vastness and depth of the southern sky that drew me in. I could see layers that stretched above and beyond and ranged from horizon to horizon with clouds hanging low and sweeping high. There was a moment where the road bent and the highest clouds were thin and brushed overhead in long, broad strokes. Beneath was a layer of cumulous clouds that hovered slowly above a thin, flat, and fog-like mass that crept through the surrounding hills. All the while the sun shined high in the corner and spread through each level of sky and finally settled onto the earth passing by below. I am describing this picture because it has become a part of me. I did not feel like some mere observer. Instead, I felt I was a part of something. I knew I was a part of it and it was a part of me.

It would not be long before I felt it again. The morning after we arrived in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer the town would be celebrating its Festo Vierginenco, a gathering of young women from surrounding towns who dress in Arlesienne clothes and celebrate the customs of the Camargue. The festivities began outside the church with bells and drums and whistles welcoming the procession of young women to Mass. The procession was made up of young girls dressed in traditional gowns with colorful cotton skirts of red,

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Valedictory—*Ave Atque Vale*—Notes & Interviews Re: Dual Stoneback Retirement from *The Shawangunk Review* & The State University of New York

YOUR CORRESPONDENT

As this issue of the Newsletter goes to press also in press is Volume 30 of the *Shawangunk Review*, the journal founded by H. R. Stoneback in 1989, for which he has served as Senior Editor for 30 years. Well-known for decades to many members of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, who have published poems and essays on Roberts and other writers in its pages over the past 30 years, the *Shawangunk Review* features in its current issue the announcement of Stoneback's retirement from his 30-year editorship of the review as well as his 50th-year retirement from SUNY-New Paltz. It also includes a section of tributes to Stoneback (some by EMRS members) and, on the cover of the journal,

the portrait of Stoneback by the legendary Everett Raymond Kinstler, painter of Presidents—his Presidential Portraits on display in the White House; of Writers and Celebrities—Kinstler portraits hang in many museums, and over 100 of his works (far more than any other artist) are in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Asked by Your Correspondent about the current tribute issue of the *Shawangunk Review*, Stoneback observed: "I intended my farewell number of the *Review* to be a tribute to Kinstler, long the world's preeminent portrait artist, for his 93rd birthday. The issue includes other artwork by Kinstler—notably his portrait of Hemingway that was unveiled at the International Hemingway Conference in Paris last summer—and poetic tributes to Kinstler. I wanted my last issue of the journal to be a Kinstler Tribute that would rest comfortably and proud on the shelves next to acclaimed previous tribute numbers of the *Shawangunk*—

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our Hemingway and Robert Penn Warren issues, our 20th Anniversary *Best of the Shawangunk Review* issue, all the issues to which so many nationally and internationally prominent writers contributed. And so many EMRS members also contributed. As for the decision to put my mug on this cover—I plead *not guilty*, that decision was made by other editorial hands.” (See Kinstler’s Stoneback reproduced here.)

Asked about his retirement from SUNY, Stoneback noted: “Well, all this half-century brouhaha over my retirement feels like a 50th Anniversary event celebrating my marriage to—as Johnny Cash might sing—a girl named SU(e)NY. My colleagues suggested I sing that at my retirement celebration. Other colleagues suggested I sing *Folsom Prison Blues*. I’ve been singing that song since the day I bought the original SUN (also rises) record in the mid-1950s and immediately incorporated the song into my band’s act that weekend—63 years ago. Been singing *Folsom Prison* longer than I’ve been teaching at SUNY-New Paltz. No, I said, I won’t sing *Folsom Prison* at retirement parties. SUNY has been not prison but liberation. And retirement is at most a minor jailbreak, enabling me to accept invitations to speak all over the world at times when I would otherwise be grading papers. And did I ever tell you the story about Johnny Cash in the army? His military MOS—that means *mode of service*—was Morse Code Interceptor. Cash liked to brag that he was the very first to intercept and report the news of the death of Stalin. Johnny first told me that at the Farmer’s Market in Nashville. I’d brag about it, too. And I’d be happy to be the first to intercept and to announce the Death of Stalinism in the current American Left. Check back with me later on that.”

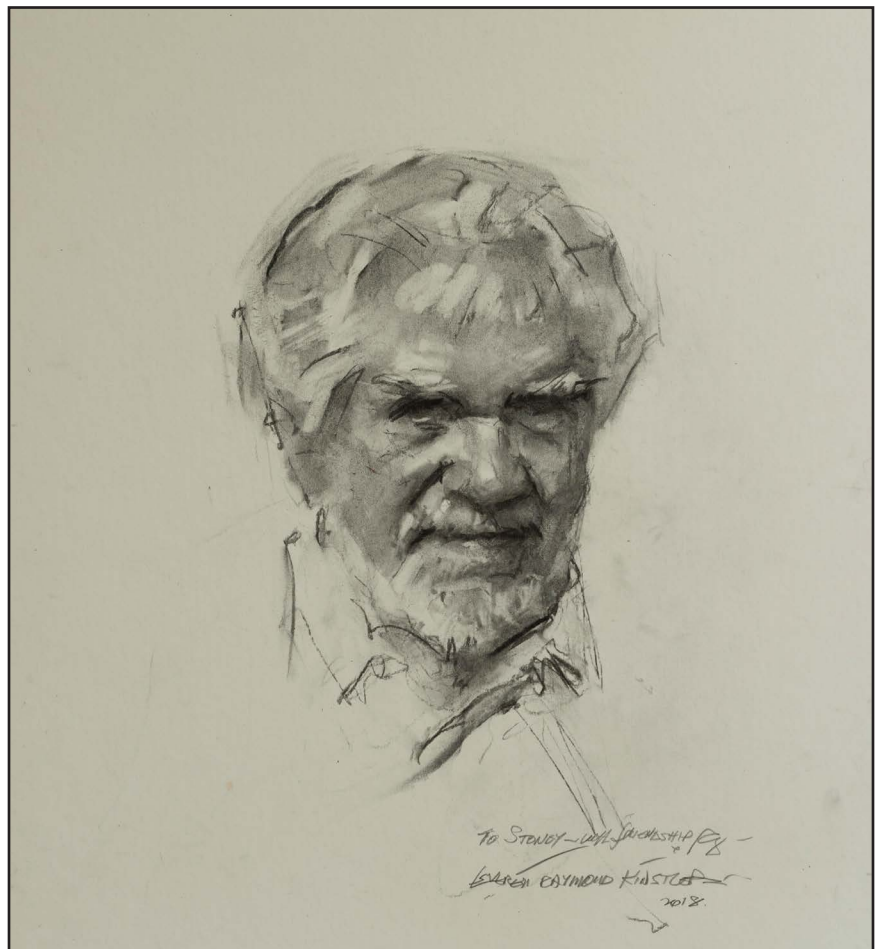
Asked what retirement meant to him, Stoneback observed: “Well, it surely doesn’t mean golf courses and tropical umbrella drinks at island resorts. I often tend to think simultaneously in French and English. Words like *brouhaha*. Words like *retraite*. That’s French for *retirement*. Looks and sounds a lot like *retreat*. But my motto lately has been my personal variant of the phrase that echoed over the battlefields of the Great War:

Retreat, hell! I just got here. Retirement is not retreat, it just means more free time to write. Ten unfinished books to complete. More freedom to write and travel. Keynotes and poetry readings already scheduled in foreign climes well into the 2020s. And I’ll see you at the next Roberts Conference, the next Hemingway Conference.”

Your Correspondent: “Is there anything else you’d like to say about retirement?”

Stoneback: “Well, I don’t want to get all wet and windy here. But I didn’t just learn the *Retreat, hell!* quotation for the Centenary of the Great War. I had it drilled into me 58 years ago at Marine Corps Boot Camp on Parris Island. And it’s always echoed in my heart with the actual *semper fi we*, not the merely personal *I*. The main thing I’ll miss in retirement will be my students, my classroom talk-time. But I’ve figured out the best surrogate for all that—I’m working on a one-man Holbrookesque play called *Survey of American Literature*. I’ve already talked with the pertinent authorities and venue for my World Premiere—at that legendary club and heart-home of American theater, THE PLAYERS, Gramercy Park, Manhattan, USA. See you at my *retraite-party* at The Players. *Retreat, hell! we just got here.*”

Everett Raymond Kinstler: Portrait of H. R. Stoneback
 Founding Editor *Shawangunk Review* 1989-2019
 Distinguished Professor of English SUNY-New Paltz 1969-2019
 Hail and Farewell



A Life Spent Between the House and the Chicken Yard: Ellen Chesser & Flannery O'Connor

BAILEY WALTMAN

I recently had the pleasure of attending a lecture given by Dr. Angela Alaimo O'Donnell of Fordham University on the life and work of Flannery O'Connor, and one tidbit of information stuck out to me—in declining to have a biography written of her during her lifetime, Flannery O'Connor allegedly stated, “there won't be any biographies of me because, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make exciting copy.” It seems to me that Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* is the direct antithesis to that statement—for a good chunk of the novel, Ellen lives her life in repetitive motion between the meager house they are allotted as tenant farmers and the enclosure where the turkeys are kept. Ellen becomes profoundly attached to her flock of turkeys, taking care of them day in and day out on behalf of Miss Tod, Wakefield's wife, who is supremely proud of her prize birds and of the excellent job Ellen does in raising them. When the fowl are sent away to market in the fall, Ellen watches with a lump in her throat, and Roberts writes that she “bent her bonnet down over her face and brushed off tears. Why, she wondered, should she be liking a flock of anything, flocks, things nobody could have forever?”

It is almost as if the birds become inherently associated with Ellen—her identity as “Ellen who feeds the turkeys” becomes extremely important to her—and, in a sense, she attaches part of herself to them, feeling empty when they must go. Self-identity is one of the primary themes of *The Time of Man*, and Ellen's turkeys become another vessel for the ongoing development of her sense of self and how she believes she fits into the world around her. Ellen also has a notable moment of personal reflection when she finds a peacock feather on the ground and wears it on her dress all day before taking it home to examine and display. While she's holding it, “suddenly it seemed that there was a baby in her hands, a little baby in the crook of her arm. Her baby, it was, and a great wave of power went over her. She was strong at once with a great strength. A wave of tenderness ran up her face and sank deeply into her eyes that closed to hold it. Her back felt its power to curve protectingly over a defenceless little thing and her breast reached out to it.” This is one of Ellen's first experiences with her motherly instincts that develop in full by novel's end, and the flock of turkeys and the lone peacock feather are the catalyst marking the beginnings of her transition from girl to woman.

In much the same vein as Ellen and her turkeys, Flannery O'Connor has come to be associated with the huge flock of peacocks she raised on her family farm in Georgia, of which she retained forty or more by her own estimation in a 1961 essay entitled “Living With a Peacock” published in *Holiday* magazine. When asked why she raised them, O'Connor stated she had “no short or reasonable answer” and that she was lead to raise them by instinct, though her relationship with them was more “menial” than motherly and that they were “her” peafowl only legally as they tended to treat her as “just another object.” However, she was very clearly attached to them as it becomes apparent throughout her essay. It follows that in the same way Ellen's identity becomes entangled with her turkeys, Flannery O'Connor has come to be associated with the image of the peacock—which she referred to as “the Muse.”

Roberts' novel proves that a life spent between the house and the chicken yard makes interesting fodder for a book—though I'm positive Flannery O'Connor knew that too. O'Connor's and Roberts' lives overlapped only by about sixteen years between 1925 and 1941 and it is dubious at best to make a guess at whether or not O'Connor knew anything of Roberts' work. Still, there is clearly exciting copy to be made from the experiences of both these women's lives—one real and one fictional—and we as the readers are still able to reap the benefits of such all these many years later.

Close Encounters: Roberts, Hemingway, Warren, Tate & Company*

JANE EBLEN KELLER
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

On December 15, 1920, a woman by the name of Mary Aldis gave a literary tea party in her elegant, top-floor, downtown-Chicago apartment at 100 East Chicago Avenue, just a block or so from Lake Michigan. Among the twenty-some guests that winter afternoon were members of the Poetry Club of the University of Chicago, including its current president, Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

Mary Aldis, then in her mid-forties, a poet and great patron of the arts, spent her summers, May through October, on her posh country estate in Lake Forest. While she was there, she sublet her city place. In 1920, her summer tenant was Y. K. Smith, older brother of Bill and Katie Smith, long-time friends of Ernest Hemingway.

So it was that in October 1920, when twenty-one-year-old Hemingway landed in Chicago, Y. K. Smith invited him to camp out at Mrs. Aldis' place until he could find a job and

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What, Ho? Essex, Ho!: A Lopsided Explanation

ADAM NEIKIRK

Next year I will enter a course of PhD study at the University of Essex, in the U.K. My dissertation, “a book-length poem or series of poems about the life and mind of Samuel Taylor Coleridge” (to quote from my own prospectus), will fulfill the requirement for a *terminal* degree in Creative Writing. Seeing as I hold a BA in Music and an MA in English (both awarded from Westfield State University, where I am currently teaching in the Philosophy department!), one might well wonder why I did not choose to pursue a doctorate in one of these two subjects, or even in Philosophy (it is much too difficult). Why Creative Writing? Why in England?

I shall attempt to answer these questions one at a time. Why Creative Writing? The Roberts and Hemingway scholar, and renowned poet H. R. Stoneback—who is also my grandfather—I have heard opine on more than one occasion that “all writing is creative writing.” While this may well be true in the spirit of syncretic thought, there must, I maintain, be some meaningful way to distinguish between ‘*created* writing’ (i.e. all writing) and ‘Creative Writing’; or between ‘writing that has been produced’ and the kind of product I intend to create to fulfill my course requirements: else, what would be the association of any accolade with being awarded a PhD in Creative Writing? It would not do to say, invoking some kind of academic transitive principle, that “all PhDs are PhDs in Creative Writing.” So, with apologies to Stoneback, I begin my explanation on a note of rather pedantic disagreement.

If such a distinction can be had, it may modify Stoneback’s sentiment; as: “all writing is creative writing; but not all writing is Creative Writing.” But how may we decide upon the essential nature of such an apparently semantic difference as capitalization? And, having done so, what might we call it? Perhaps it is the first, and more important question, which a product such as mine is designed in part to answer—and, at that, to answer as much through self-experience as through abstraction. For it is not ‘merely’ fiction, nor even ‘merely’ poetry that I intend to write at Colchester (the very old town where the university has set up camp), but, in fact, a poetical *biography* of S. T. Coleridge, the English poet and philosopher, whom I have studied, written about, and read intensively since about 2012, when I first encountered him during my ill-fated year as an MFA candidate at the University of Mississippi (an institution that accepted me on the strength of Stoneback’s

recommendation—sorry again!).

In my estimation, the kind of product which I intend to produce, a ‘poetical biography,’ may be a species of genre rare for what it is in the world of literature. And the question of its genre and its rareness must be settled, like the question of a semantic distinction which has been recently posed, not by any descriptive account of what it is—which in literary criticism always hinges far too much on a somewhat intractable description of ‘what it looks like’—but will be settled more deeply and more thoroughly by an understanding of how it has been made. Not what it is, but how it is made distinguishes it, first as ‘Creative Writing’; then as, perhaps, something unique in general, the history of the life and mind of this Coleridge fellow, not only written as poetry but also *seen* as poetry (following on the original and plain ‘seeing as fact’—or what Coleridge called ‘spontaneous consciousness’) and used as materials for poetry.

An Extreme ‘Ars Poetica’?

I do not believe my project belongs to ‘ars poetica’ at all, in fact; for it is not poetry about poetry or the poetic process; nor is it even about ‘Coleridge the poet’ (at least not in such a way that my overarching desire is to frame him as a poet). While the question of what poetry *is* is, to my mind, implicit in the very attempt to create a biography out of the stuff that is both informative and deep, and both serious and whimsical, I am less interested in one special sense of Coleridge in his role as poet, or wanderer, or drug addict, or Sage of Highgate (in latter years), and more interested in the existential condition that attended his various changing of roles, transformations and home-leavings, and family-findings that made him strike out continually toward the border of different overlapping communities of the long eighteenth century, toward what some academics call ‘liminal space.’ That is one reason why the book/dissertation is entitled *Your Very Own Ecstasy*; the word *ecstasy* means “standing apart from oneself,” and my subject is Coleridge (who liked to call himself “STC,” his initials) the self-exile, a total failure of a man in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, and even his close friends, because of his inability to apply himself regularly to some fixed purpose. But *we* see him differently, when *we* are the young, shiftless, entitled ‘Millennials’ reaching through nuclear fog toward the end of postmodernity.

Some years ago I proposed to a conference led by the Romanticist and deep ecologist Timothy Morton a (subsequently accepted but not delivered) paper entitled “Coleridge as Green Field.” The idea at the center of that paper has grown into the diffuse force backing the

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will of whoever it is that is in charge of making these poems (for it has never really been me): that Coleridge can be seen as a kind of human who inspired in others something that goes beyond emotionality, something that the philosopher Jacob Needleman has written about very well in his work *Lost Christianity* (to which I refer you if you want to track my thinking further), a kind of complexity that stands apart from the Charles Lloydish spectrum of high and low feelings with which contemporaries regarded the wayward Coleridge, *just in the way* that a green field, or a mountain scene, gives us something of pause, and something of a human response, but also quiets all that is interpersonal in us, and makes us think rather of something impersonal toward which we might secretly harbor inappropriate feelings.

Lastly, to cap it all off, here is the poem with which I am somewhat sure the book will begin (as a kind of preface), a poem that expresses one or two other and various desires of mine as author, and expresses them for all our sake (I hope) quite succinctly:

On Difficult Objects

To dissolve oneself in a Difficult Object
Is easy, when we are disposed
To the sidwinding forces of Beauty,
And want to go where she goes.
We are the younger siblings of Beauty,
Though she has been away at war,
She smiles at us, in remembrance;
She is not like she was before.
Still, I stand in front of the mirror,
Wearing Beauty's favorite dress;
Her too-big shoes surround on my feet,
And I look like she did in the past.

Close Encounters from page 4

a more permanent place to live. The plan suited Hemingway perfectly. The apartment, with an elevator and splendid views of the lake, was a "very nice joint," he reported, and if the arrangement was to be short-term—the lease would run out at the end of the month when Mrs. Aldis returned to town—it also proved to be momentous because Hadley Richardson was also staying there. She was visiting her old school friend, Katie Smith, Y. K.'s sister.

One of the most famous romances of the twentieth-century literary world began when Ernest and Hadley met in the very apartment where—a mere six weeks later—Elizabeth Roberts drank tea and read her poems.

Hemingway was not there. Mrs. Aldis had no reason at all to invite an unpublished unknown. Still, it is a pretty weird close encounter if you ask me, and here is another. Janet Lewis, later a fine novelist, always a first-rate poet, was Elizabeth Roberts' closest friend at the University of Chicago, and she grew up in Oak Park not far from Hemingway. They were exactly the same age; he was born in July and she in August of 1899. The Lewis home on North Scoville Avenue was a few blocks from the original Hemingway home on Oak Park Avenue and less than a mile from the house on North Kenilworth where the family moved in 1906. They both went to Oak Park and River Forest High School, where they both wrote for the school newspaper and literary magazine. Hemingway no doubt took little if any notice of Lewis, a self-described wallflower in those days and also a year ahead of him, but she was friends with his sister Marcelline and knew him "vaguely."

Then in January of 1923, Lewis and Hemingway met again, at least metaphorically, in the pages of *Poetry* magazine where six of his poems immediately followed five of hers. (It was his first and her second appearance in the venerable journal.) Both Lewis and Roberts were avid and thorough readers of the magazine and both probably read Hemingway's poems. Otherwise, there's no evidence that Roberts read *The Sun Also Rises* or that he read *The Time of Man*, both first novels published within two months of each other, hers in August, his in October of 1926. But what Hemingway said of his novel is spookily applicable to Roberts': "A damn tragedy with the earth abiding as the hero."

Now, Roberts' close-if-no-cigar encounters with Hemingway or any other literary figures were possible for one key reason: the Poetry Club at the University of Chicago. That is a long story, but had it not been for the little club, Roberts would not have been at Mrs. Aldis' tea or known Janet Lewis, or, or, or So the origins of the Poetry Club interested me, and it was great fun to discover a kind of canker at its heart in the person of its self-proclaimed "founder," one Harold Alexander Van Kirk. Born c. 1893, he was endowed with good looks of the wolfish sort, charm of the serpentine sort, an intellect of the know-it-all, I'm-smarter-than-you-are sort, and a major talent for exaggerating what few achievements he did manage—and inventing some he did not. He did not, as he claimed, "found" the Poetry Club. One of his professors did that. Van Kirk did organize the first sessions, and he attended one or two of them, in the fall of 1916. By 1920, though, when the club had become famous and its members were being feted by people like Mary

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Aldis, Van Kirk was long gone from the scene, forgotten in Chicago but remembered elsewhere as the kind of wannabe star, not far from a charlatan, who struts and preens like a minor character in *All the King's Men*—which leads us to Roberts' connection to Robert Penn Warren.

The fellow Kentuckians never met, but Warren admired Roberts' work and first treated it in some depth in an essay-review, "Not Local Color," in the winter 1932 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. When Warren wrote that essay, he was teaching at Vanderbilt and living unhappily in a downtown Nashville apartment. In the summer of 1932, he found more congenial quarters in an old overseer's cottage on the grounds of one of Nashville's grandest estates, a few miles from campus. The place was called Riverwood and for nearly a century had been the homestead of the enormous Cooper clan, among Tennessee's most colorful, influential, and once-richest families. When Warren lived in his cottage, down the hill from the huge and imposingly columned main house, Riverwood was still owned by a Cooper, one Sarah Cooper Burch and her husband, Lucius Burch, who was dean of Vanderbilt's medical school. It was the Burches' son, then a student at Vanderbilt, who suggested Warren move to the grounds of his family's estate in 1932.

And here is the Roberts connection: Sarah Cooper Burch, châtelaine of Riverwood and Warren's friendly landlady, was first cousin to and nearly exact contemporary of Rosamond Milner (1875-1955), Roberts' intimate friend and, I'm sure, lover. Milner was long the literary editor of the Louisville, Kentucky, *Courier-Journal*, but she had grown up in Nashville and was a Cooper on her mother's side. All her life, she remained close to her many, many Cooper cousins, aunts, and uncles, some of whom had in fact reared her after she was orphaned at age four.

Did she meet Warren during the two years he lived there? I do not have proof she did—or did not. But as they say in detective novels, she had motive and opportunity. She knew and admired Warren's work. Part of her job was to seek out writers. And she several times visited Nashville and her Cooper kin in the early 1930s. And Milner would have told Roberts all about it. We do not know, for sure, what their secrets were, but we do know they did not keep them from each other.

And finally to Allen Tate, whom Roberts actually did meet. (Tate, by the way, also knew Riverwood; he spent a couple of weeks there with Warren in 1933.) Roberts met Tate and his wife, the novelist Caroline Gordon, in New York City in 1927 and again in 1930 when Katherine Ann Porter joined them for tea. A year or so later, the Tates briefly visited Roberts in Springfield. The friendship between them was

cordial but by no means intimate and soon fizzled out. Yet in 1943, when Roberts' brother gave her papers to the Library of Congress and Tate was serving as Consultant in Poetry, he wrote of his "affection" for a writer with whom he shared "a common local history."

In 1959, Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon divorced. Almost immediately, Tate married a much younger woman, Isabella Gardner. She was a poet, a former actress, and an independently wealthy member of a famous Boston family. Robert Lowell was her first cousin. She was named for a great-great-great aunt, Isabella Stewart Gardner whose home is now the glorious museum in the Fenway. This second Isabella Gardner, Belle, as she was known, lived a tempestuous life, to say the least. Allen Tate was her fourth and last husband. And her first was none other than—Harold Alexander Van Kirk. Let me summarize: Allen Tate's second wife, Belle Gardner, had been married to the same fellow who claimed to have founded the Poetry Club at the University of Chicago.

Van Kirk had married Isabella in 1938. He was twice divorced, teaching high school in Trenton, New Jersey, working at the fringes of the theater world as a drama coach, and still possessed of his wolfish good looks, serpentine charm, know-it-all intellect, and talent for self-aggrandizement. Belle, twenty years younger and starry-eyed, fell hard for all of it. He professed undying love, quit his job, lived large on her money, and took it for granted that Belle would take over the care of his two neglected young children from his second marriage. Belle was ok with all that—until Van Kirk began sleeping with her friends and indulging his taste for hard liquor, wild parties, and expensive firearms. Barely four years after marrying him, she left, then married twice again before hooking up with Tate who left *her* after six years. (By the way, one of the stepchildren Belle cared for during her brief first marriage was Anneke Van Kirk who later married Woody Guthrie.)

Harold Van Kirk ended his days, at nearly ninety, after some years as a teacher in a community college in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, still bragging about academic degrees he never earned, famous writer-friends he never had, and his "founding" of the Poetry Club. That last was at least in the general vicinity of the truth—a close encounter shall we say. He never met Roberts, Hemingway, Warren, or Tate, but unbeknownst to him, he did make the connections between them possible. Now that would have been something to crow about.

**Paper delivered at the X International Aldington, VI International Imagism & XX Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference, July 30-August 1, 2018, Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.*

Conference Report 2018

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

The XX Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society joined with the International Richard Aldington and Imagism Conference in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France, July 30 - August 1, 2018. Our Conference took place at the Thalacap, by the sea in Les Saintes-Maries.

Monday, July 30 we started with the **Opening Keynote Speaker: Steven Florczyk** (Hampden-Sydney College): *Pilgrims' Progress: On the Road with Aldington, Hemingway and Roberts.*

Session 1: Gisele Sigal (Université de Pau, France - Bayonne Campus): Robert Penn Warren's *Night Rider*; and Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* through the Prism of History; **Autumn Holladay** (SUNY-New Paltz): Facing "God's Great Flood" with Roberts and Warren: A Study on Home; **James Stamant** (Agnes Scott College): "Endure the war": Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Robert Penn Warren; **Daniel J. Pizappi** (University of Tennessee): "Bereft of every purpose": Seeking Redemption in the Floods of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Robert Penn Warren

Session 2: Jessica M. Nickel (Misericordia University): Revisiting *The Time of Man* and Introducing it to *All the Living*; **Matt Wessels** (SUNY-New Paltz): I Sing of Dionysus and Kentucky: Revisioning Aeneas' Spirituality in *The Great Meadow*; **Eleanor Hough** (Binghamton University): "What would it be to be a bird afraid of a scarecrow?": Gender Relations and Bird Imagery in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *Black is My True Love's Hair*; **Nathan Lee** (SUNY-New Paltz): Woven Autochthonics: Folk Language in *The Time of Man*

Session 3: Jane Eblen Keller (Independent Scholar): Close Encounters: Roberts, Hemingway, Tate, Warren & Company; **Valerie Hemingway** (Independent Scholar): Hemingway, Miró and Imagism; **Matthew Nickel** (Misericordia University): Some Thoughts on *Poetry & Writers in Provence*. After our sessions for the day, we enjoyed an opening reception at the Thalacap and a memorial poetry reading for Catherine Aldington.

Tuesday, July 31 at the Thalacap

Session 4: John Beall (Collegiate School, New York): Pound's "White Light" in Canto XXXVI: Provençal Poets, Cavalcanti, Dante, and H.D.; **Anthony Ozturk** (Pepperdine University): Ezra's Dada: Pound as Dadaist; **Michele Reese**

(USC Sumter): *Les Imagistes en France*: Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Jean Toomer; **Evan Hulick** (Catholic U. of America): Pound and Roberts: Imagist Reactionaries to "The Great War" through *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, *The Cantos*, and *He Sent Forth a Raven*

Session 5: Jeff Grieneisen (State College of Florida): Hemingway: New Naturalist in the Modern Era; **Colleen Stewart** (SUNY-New Paltz): A Sense of Place, A Sense of Self: Hemingway's *Garden of Eden* and Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *My Heart and My Flesh*; **Peter Camilleri** (Independent Scholar): Mythology and Modernism in Roberts; **Rebecca Johnston** (Santa Fe College): Childhood Imagined

Session 6: Nicole Stamant (Agnes Scott College): *Chez Soi* in Imagism: The Place Memory and Hospitality of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*; **Zach Stewart** (SUNY-New Paltz): Clods and Roses: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Imagists Finding Humanity in Earth, Gardens and Place; **Eleanor Candee** (SUNY-New Paltz): Roberts as Imagist: Rocks are Growin'; **Courtney Ruffner** (State College of Florida): What kind of Paradise lies within "Canto XVII" and from where does it hail?

Session 7: Andrew Frayn (Edinburgh Napier University): "They fell to pieces at a touch": Richard Aldington, the First World War and the Male Body; **Elizabeth Vandiver** (Whitman College): Recreating the Imagined Past: Richard Aldington's "Myrrhine and Konallis"; **Alice Bailey Cheylan** (Université de Toulon): Richard Aldington's Reviews of the Poetry of Women Poets before and after The Great War

Session 8: Patrick Quinn (University of Cambridge): Nos Cedamus Amore: Let us All Yield to Love; **James Meredith** (Colorado State University): Republishing Aldington's *Death of a Hero*: Looking Back; **Vivian Delchamps** (UCLA): Pain and H.D.'s Healing Imagination

"A 97th Birthday Salute to Frédéric Jacques Temple" with Eric Forbeaux & H. R. Stoneback

Our paper sessions ended with the **Closing Keynote Speaker: H. R. Stoneback** (SUNY-New Paltz): The International Aldington and Imagism Conferences: Retrospect and Prospect

Wednesday, August 1

Our Conference concluded with a boat ride on Le Petit-Rhône to Clos de la Barque Pavilion and a "conference-closing banquet"—a festive lunch al fresco with paella, mussels, sangria, and a poetry reading.

Notes on EMR from page 2

yellow, green, purple, and brown. This style of dress has its roots in honoring the beauty of Arlesienne women and distinguishing them from popular styles more common in Paris at the time. Many wore sashes and ribbons and had their hair made up neatly in buns with hairpieces at the centers. The young women smiled and waved to us as they walked into the church, stopping frequently to speak with friends and family along the way.

The church was bright inside and the stone it was built from was sandy and light. The windows and doors were open for the morning sun to shine in, and the building was tall with high ceilings where smoke from burning incense had room to mingle with salty air. Along the walls and close to the ceiling were paintings of sailors and fishermen and fish. There was a statue of a pilgrim to our left and a shrine for Saint Sarah toward the front. The sermon was recited in Provençal, and the locals and others who recognized the melodies sang along during the hymns. I did not sing because I did not know the melodies, but I felt the voices of the congregation welcoming me to join. A stranger in a foreign place, I felt comfortable in the unfamiliar, like a foreigner being welcomed home.

I could write more about our time in Provence, breakfast-buffets on sun-soaked balconies, boat-rides up le Petite-Rhône, the best paella you have ever had, gardians high on white horses, riding white horses, spotting flamingos in the distance, moonlight bullfights, midnight sand-fights along the sea, etc. There is too much to put into words. Ultimately, what our time in Provence renewed in me were the senses that we celebrate in Roberts' writing: her senses of place, past, community, and family. What is most important about this renewal, though, is the understanding that these senses are not strictly Kentuckian, and that they are not confined to any single place. These senses are human; if you remember, you take them with you wherever you go.

***Excelsior!* EMR in France 2018 And Looking Forward to Our 25th Anniversary Conference in Kentucky**

H. R. STONEBACK

Our 20th Anniversary Conference in France last summer was a great success. Record-shattering numbers attended the event in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. However, we must remember that the large numbers were attributable to the fact that it was a *joint conference* with the Richard Aldington Society and the Imagism Group; and the record number of conference attendees was also, in part, a reflection of the fact that the International Hemingway Conference in Paris immediately preceded our EMR/Aldington/Imagism Conference, and many conferees attended both international events.

Excelsior—ever onward and upward—is a fine and happy word and notion. But looking forward to our 25th Anniversary Conference in Kentucky in 2023, I want to say a few things here. First, as Founding Honorary President with the longest overview re: conference participation, I am now concerned about declining conference attendance, for this year (2019) and in the next few years leading up to the 25th Anniversary. One major factor contributing to my concern about the future is this: Since our beginnings and through all the years, the primary source of new EMRS membership and conference attendees has been my American Lit seminars, defunct as of now. After 50 years of teaching at SUNY-New Paltz, and to celebrate my Golden Jubilee wedding anniversary with “a girl named SU(e)NY,” I have just announced my retirement (effective May 2019). Thus I ask that all officers and program co-chairs (current and former) as well as all EMRS members make a special effort to recruit new attendees at our conferences. If everyone works on bringing just one new member to the conference every year, our future is assured. It is also to be hoped that members who may not be able to attend every year will continue to pay the modest annual membership dues (and others will rejoin) in order to receive this Newsletter and stay up to date on EMRS news. And send in Newsletter contributions.

My fondest future-wish is this: Many old (now true in several senses) members will plan to rejoin the EMRS pastoral fold, and (the Good Lord willing and the creek don't rise) I will be there at the 25th Anniversary Conference with many old and new friends. *And please*—send me whatever ideas you may have about how to make our 25th Anniversary Conference a truly Grand Event. Dream Big! All dreams and notions, great and small, welcome. See you in Kentucky!

P.S. In the late 1950s, a 16-year old penniless folksinger hitch-hiking through the Cumberland Gap on the old Dixie Highway with a guitar slung on my back, I passed a sign that read “Excelsior, KY”—an old coal-camp, a mining village no longer there. *Excelsior*—the bright tomorrow “ever onward and upward!”—has moved to Shaker Village and Springfield!

News & Notes

2018 was a big year for EMR. Roberts Scholars gave papers at numerous conferences at home and abroad; **Christopher Paolini** finished his MA Thesis (SUNY-New Paltz) on Roberts titled “Modernist Sensibilities in the Poetry of Elizabeth Madox Roberts”; and **Matthew Nickel**’s essay “Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Modernist” was published in *Mississippi Quarterly* Vol 69, No 4.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Ernest Hemingway Panel, International Ernest Hemingway Conference in Paris, France, July 22-28, 2018

Chair: **Jane Eblen Keller**

Matt Wessels (SUNY-New Paltz) *The American Pilgrimage: Visions of the West in The Great Meadow and “The Strange Country”*; **Leah Santucci** (Ind Scholar) *A Moveable Feast and the Wonder of Kentuck: Spirit of Place in Ernest Hemingway and Elizabeth Madox Roberts*; **Eleanor Hough** (Binghamton U) *Trauma As Universal: Female Reactions to Domestic Abuse in Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises and Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ Black is My Truelove’s Hair*; **Kristen Capitano** (Misericordia U) *Order After Chaos: The Motif of Ritual in The Sun Also Rises and The Time of Man*

EMR Panel at the November 2018 SAMLA Conference in Birmingham, AL

Chair: **Daniel J. Pizappi**

Emily Banks (Emory U) *White Womanhood in My Heart and My Flesh*; **Eleanor Hough** (Binghamton U) *War Brides: An Analysis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s He Sent Forth A Raven*; **Daniel J. Pizappi** (U of Tennessee) *High Water (Re)Activism in Roberts, Warren, and House*

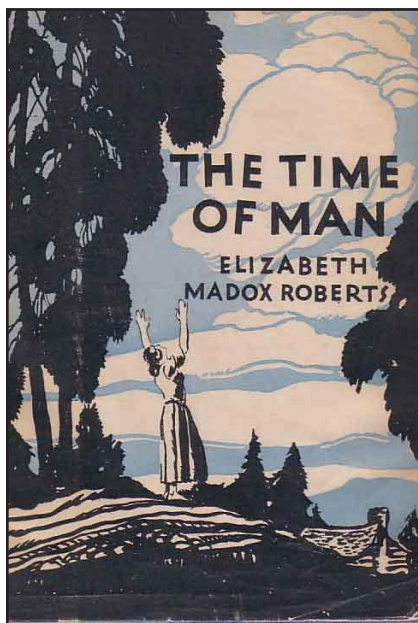
CFP: SAMLA, Atlanta, GA, November 8-10, 2019 Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Insight and Reflection

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 are also strongly encouraged. Abstracts should be 250 words and sent, by May 27th, to Jamie Stamant, Agnes Scott College, at jstamant@agnesscott.edu.

Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Goretta Vianney-Benca, EMRS Treasurer at benca@sunyulster.edu, or send a check made out to Goretta Vianney-Benca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and The Jeanne Penn Lane Memorial Literary Award to: Prof. Goretta 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.



Left: Ellen Chesser on cover from the first edition of *The Time of Man*

Right: *Miréio* statue in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France

See Nickel, “The Miracle of Place”



The Miracle of Place: Kentucky and Les Saintes-Maries

MATTHEW NICKEL

Wherever the arts are nourished through the festive contemplation of universal realities and their sustaining reasons, there in truth something like liberation occurs.

Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings*

It has always been natural to me to think of Elizabeth Madox Roberts in the Camargue. As readers of this newsletter will observe, the Roberts Society ventured to France in 2018 to join with the Aldington/Imagism Conference in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on the Mediterranean coast. There were a few question marks on the faces of some Imagists and Aldingtonians who had never really heard of Roberts nor considered connections between Roberts in France, but it was a perfectly normal thing in my mind and has been for more than a decade. Alex Pennisi's fine article in these pages explains the basic reasons for reading Roberts in Provence—it makes perfect sense—and anyone who has read or watched Pagnol knows well the ways in which rural Kentucky and its local characters reverberate throughout rural Provence. They may not play boules in Kentucky, but the atmosphere of work and play, the very uniqueness of the characters, and the way landscape forms and shapes the people provides for us numerous parallels over plenty of pastis and bourbon. And when I lived in the Camargue years ago, I thought about Roberts and Kentucky quite often, in the market or marshes, around horses and in the sun, listening to old men and watching people work. It was so perfectly natural, I was sure someone had already written about it.

And of course, he who has been called the Pied Piper of Kentucky Literature might also be named the Pied Piper of Southern France. He, H. R. Stoneback, had already written about Roberts and Southern France, and, more precisely, about Southern France's greatest modern writer, Frédéric Mistral who not only inspired "his own version of a *southern renaissance* in France," but who also "won the Nobel Prize in 1904."

In one of his most important essays ever (and certainly in Roberts studies), "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Regionalist & Agrarian Visions & Revisions—In the Lowlands and 'On the Mountainside,'" Stoneback explicates Roberts' Regionalism, her Agrarian visions, and within that essay, he discusses how regionalists write out of and not about a profound sense of place. In his "resistance to what often

seems to be the prevailing view that literary regionalism and agrarianism are tired old relics from a now defunct pastoral-agrarian age, or the overworked soil-depleting harvest of Southern and Midwestern 'local color' writing," Stoneback makes a unique comparison between a Southern French writer, Mistral, and a writer from Kentucky, Roberts, and finds they write out of (and often about) the same things: the local particularities that carry us on through to the universal truths about suffering and redemption, about being and loving. I'll quote from Stoneback's essay, worth revisiting after our conference in Les Saintes-Maries:

Mistral's identity and rapport with place, his uses of the Spirit of Place, have a great deal in common with Roberts, and Mistral's most celebrated character, who gives her name to his most famous work, *Miréio* (*Mireille*), is a close cousin to Roberts' most famous character, Ellen Chesser. In many ways, Mistral is a near-perfect match for and a forerunner of Roberts. In fact, read Richard Aldington's biographical-critical study, *Introduction to Mistral*, and every time the words *Mistral* and *Provence* occur, substitute for them *Roberts* and *Kentucky*. (This approach would make a pretty good essay, a fine French-American international conference paper—and my readers are welcome to it for free.) There are, however, two key differences; Roberts did not win the Nobel Prize, although she deserved it more than overrated contemporaries who did, such as Sinclair Lewis; and there are no statues of Roberts in public places. The most famous statue of Mistral, it might be added, the one that presides over the Place du Forum in Arles, was so beloved by the locals that when the Nazis were melting down French statuary Mistral mysteriously disappeared, to resurface only after the Germans were vanquished and expelled from Provence. And perhaps the most compelling statue, anywhere in the world, of a character from literature is the striking figure of *Miréio* that presides over the public square in les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Perhaps the Roberts Society should establish a Roberts Statue Committee and not rest until Roberts presides forever over the courthouse square in Springfield and Ellen Chesser holds eternal sway over some quintessentially agrarian landscape of field and barn, river and road.

Nobody formally mentioned Mistral in Les Saintes-Maries last summer, as far as I heard, but I know a few of us were thinking about him, about *Miréio* and about Ellen Chesser, and the fate or luck that Ellen endured. For those who know it, the image of Ellen Chesser on the original edition of *The Time of Man* and the image of *Miréio* present quite enough to warrant a few conference papers next year.

continued on next page

Miracle of Place *from page 11*

To illuminate Stoneback's point further, we might read the opening of Mistral's epic and instead of La Crau, think of Ellen Chesser's journey, Roberts very own Odyssey, through the country of the bluegrass. I'll quote it first in Provençal and then in English (trans. by Harriet W. Preston 1874):

*Cante uno chato de Prouvènço.
Dins lis amour de sa jouvènço.
À travès de la Crau, vers la mar, dins li blad,
Umble escoulan dóu gran Oumèro,
Iéu la vole segui. Coume èro
Rèn qu'uno chato de la terro,
En foro de la Crau se n'es gaire parla*

*Emai soun front noun Iusiguèsse
Que de jouinesso ; emai n'aguèsse
Ni diadèmo d'or ni mantèu de Damas,
Vole qu'en glòri fugue aussado
Coume uno rèino, e caressado
Pèr nosto lengo mespresado,
Car cantan que pèr vautre, o pastre e gènt di mas !*

I sing the love of a Provençal maid;

How through the wheat-fields of La Crau she strayed
Following the fate that drew her to the sea.
Unknown beyond remote La Crau was she;
And I, who tell the rustic tale of her,
Would fain be Homer's humble follower.

What though youth's aureole was her only crown?
And never gold she wore nor damask gown?
I'll build her up a throne out of my song,
And hail her queen in our despised tongue.
Mine be the simple speech that ye all know,
Shepherds and farmer-folk of lone La Crau.

Writers who write out of a spirit of a place inevitably write with an eye to a spirit, a *deus loci*. And these spirits inhabit a greater place, a world created by the Great Spirit Himself. To be an agrarian writer then is to be a spiritual writer, to be concerned with first things first, to write of a world in which there is Truth and Beauty and Goodness. And though one may paint things with different colors and brush strokes, things are things, being what they are, and Truth unchanging is still Truth in either Kentucky or the Camargue, in either bourbon or pastis, fried chicken or mussels with garlic. And discovering that, the Truth, is somewhat miraculous and liberating and worth the joy of singing that many of us experience in these good and beautiful places.

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

*Honorary President: H. R. Stoneback, SUNY-New Paltz
President: Goretti Vianney-Benca, SUNY-Ulster
Vice President: James Stamant, Agnes Scott College
Vice President: Matthew Nickel, Misericordia University
Secretary/Treasurer: Goretti Vianney-Benca, SUNY-Ulster
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>.