

# The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 11

www.emrsociety.com

March 2010

## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Roberts Conference

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will hold its XII Annual Conference in beautiful Harrodsburg and Springfield (Saint Catharine College), Kentucky, April 24-26, 2010. The conference headquarters—site of the opening banquet, keynote session, and annual business meeting—is the lovely and legendary Beaumont Inn in historic Harrodsburg. 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 Conference Co-Directors Brad McDuffie, Dept. of English, 1 South Blvd., Nyack, NY 10960 or bigtwohear tedriver@earthlink.net and H. R. Stoneback, English Dept. SUNY-New Paltz, 12561 or Stoney\_Sparrow@webtv.net.



## Presidential Message

Gregg Neikirk

Being President is good . . . you get to implement real *Change* if you want.

Or, you might fairly assess the status of operations and instead do more of what's working well, then continue on cheerfully, thriving on the talented people who make the organization a society of achievers.

As I prepare to pass on the position of President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, I know I have been lucky enough to enjoy the latter situation cited above: this group is very fortunate to be filled by literature experts who know a valuable thing when they see it.

The career of our Kentucky writer is an extremely important part of modern American literary study, and the talented scholars to whom I refer here have not only recognized this, but they've also meticulously demonstrated many of the both broad and focused truths concerning Roberts' writing in a dozen great annual conferences now. With the kind of people who continue to be dedicated to our group, then yes, being President is good.

The Society has grown in many

important ways over the last several years: not only are the numbers of people attending up (a necessary thing for any annual conference that plans to be held in future years), but the body of scholarship itself has grown in some very healthy ways. The Roberts Conference continues to attract new, sharp-witted researchers and writers every year, and a great many original and longtime members are getting ready to visit Roberts' hometown in Kentucky for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> time.

The body of Roberts scholarship has benefited accordingly: like good masons, the contributing members of the Society have laid many important blocks of foundation, and the research being added each year reveals a structure governed by careful and appropriate architecture. We should stay the course and continue to lay our stones.

I have especially enjoyed my honor as President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society over the last several conferences not only because the people involved are true, productive scholars, but as well, the group contains the most genuinely friendly people I have ever been involved with. As a continuing member of the Society, I truly look forward to the years to come with all of you.

## Roberts at Brunnenburg Castle

H. R. Stoneback

As readers of last year's *Newsletter* know, EMR was included in the Call for Papers for the VI International Richard Aldington Society Conference—also known as the II International Imagism Conference—to be held this coming June 20-22. A number of Roberts Society members will present papers at this conference, including at least

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## Record at Snake Creek Gap: Simpson Roberts & The War of the Confederacy

Jane Eblen Keller

Early on the bright, warm morning of May 9, 1864, Captain John N. Witt, age 35, commanding officer of Company C of the Confederate First (Butler's) Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, led his troops in an attack on Union forces at a place called Snake Creek Gap in north Georgia.

Witt, a native of Owen County, Kentucky, had enlisted nearly two years earlier, on September 2, 1862, in Owenton, the county seat, along with throngs of young men hot to ride. By the spring of 1864, he and his company were hardened soldiers, ready for whatever was asked of them. On May 8 and 9, this would be a great deal.

Up around Dalton, Sherman's Union forces were jabbing at Joe Johnston's Confederates who were dug in behind steep ridges and dense, rocky woodlands, with only a few points of entry (or exit). One of these, and thus a predictable flash point, was Dug Gap. On Sunday, May 8, Captain Witt's Company C, among others, fought all day to hold this, which they did "in a manner which History will record," as Witt reported. That evening, he received orders to move south to Snake Creek Gap, another vulnerable spot 18 miles away. Company C set off at 8 p.m. and marched all through the dark night, over very rough terrain.

Monday morning, May 9, had just dawned as the exhausted Confederate troops came in view of the gap—and the lead forces of the Union's Sixteenth Army Corps pouring through. With long practiced speed, Witt charged the skirmish line in a maneuver that helped delay, but could not stop, the Yankee advance. His report of



*A Photograph  
of  
Simpson Roberts*

these events noted "one man killed or captured." It is just possible that this man was Harrison Simpson Roberts, father of Elizabeth Madox Roberts.

Simpson Roberts, as his name appears in P.O.W. documents, was indeed captured at Snake Creek Gap on May 9, 1864, by troops of the Sixteenth Army Corps. The question is this: Was he the H. S. Roberts who had enlisted in the First Kentucky with John Witt on September 2, 1862, in Owenton, and received a \$50 bounty for his horse?

Years later, Simpson owned a copy of the Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kentucky: Confederate Kentucky Volunteers, War of 1861-65. His copy, published in 1915 and now in the possession of the Public Library in Springfield, bears numerous pen and pencil markings, including an X next to the name of H. S. Roberts, Company C, First Kentucky Cavalry. If Simpson himself made this mark (as seems likely), and if it confirms his enlistment in the First Kentucky, we can enfold this information into Becki Roberts Owens's store of family history and posit an outline of Simpson's war as follows.

When his father was killed at the hands of Unionist Civil Guards in early September, 1862, young Simpson ran off to enlist in the Confederate army. Conveniently for him, the recruitment camp at Owenton was barely five miles up the road from his home in Henry County, an easy ride on the horse that would bring him a \$50 bounty. Moreover, he had good reason to be vague about his identity and thus to use his initials—H. S.—instead of one of his given names—Harrison Simpson. He was under age, possibly as young as fourteen.

So, according to this scenario, Simpson Roberts began and ended his military service as part of what General Joseph Wheeler described as the "gallant old First Kentucky Cavalry . . . as brave a body of men as any officer had the good fortune to command."

But there are some problems with this tidy tale. For one, the Adjutant General's Report includes many errors, including this dramatic one: Private H. S. Roberts is listed as "killed at Snake Creek Gap, Ga." Simpson Roberts, very much alive when (and if) he marked up his copy of the Report, let this mistake stand without annotation. Might he have left other errors uncorrected?

For another, every Union document with a record of Simpson Roberts—and there are many, including the amnesty papers he himself signed—lists his affiliation as the Second Kentucky Cavalry Regiment. Now the Second

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## Some Letters and a Poem about Roberts

H. R. Stoneback

Last summer I received a handwritten letter from a man in Indiana named B. R. Oney. He had just read, in *The Sewanee Review*, a book review of our recent critical volumes on Roberts. He had enjoyed very much reading through the *Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation*; he wondered if I could tell him how to get a copy of the other volume, *Essays of Discovery and Recovery*. Thus began a conversation that has both moved me very much and offered vivid confirmation of the compelling power of Roberts' fiction.

I asked Mr. Oney if he would like to send a statement about Roberts that we might print in our *Newsletter*. His next letter—also handwritten, which somehow adds to its testimonial force—provided this statement. He wrote, in part: "What a pleasure it was to receive your book and your fine letter. I'll need to wait . . . about a decision to attend the Roberts Conference in April. I appreciate your invitation and would love to come." Then he provided this statement: "Dr. Thomas D. Clark in his *History of Kentucky* made brief mention of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and her novels, *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow*. I read that passage at age 12 (1948) and through the years would see her name and novels mentioned in various publications. In 1960 I became a reader of serious literature and continued for a few years, never thinking to look into her works."

Mr. Oney continues: "I again became a serious reader in 1990, and during that same year read in succession, *The Time of Man*, *The Great Meadow* and *Under the Tree*. I yet consider *The Time of Man* to be the greatest work I've seen in literature. I continued to read her works and have been through them all except *Jingling in the Wind* and *The Great Steep's Garden*. I have shared some of her work with others and look into it again and again myself. I have been both blessed and educated by your *Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* and *Essays of Discovery and Recovery*."

He encloses with his letter part of a copy of a letter to him from one Kathy Jessop, no doubt one of those friends with whom he shared his passion for Roberts. She writes (also handwritten) to him (in 2003): "I would like to make some comments . . . on *The Time of Man* . . . I've thoroughly enjoyed reading this book . . . [it] not only depicts the poverty and the stages of growing up for Ellen Chesser, but what I took from the book more than anything was how it was written with such feelings, emotion, thoughts, such detail, so exact. Extremely well written. I've never read a book quite like this before.

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## Mayor Cecconi Takes Pride in Roberts' Books and Photo

Nell Haydon

Mayor John W. Cecconi and his wife Rita are shown displaying the newly acquired photograph of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and some of Roberts' first edition novels. The City of Springfield acquired the photograph and books at the estate sale of Joe Bishop—an avid fan of Springfield's native novelist and poet.

Mr. Bishop had already donated a number of Roberts' novels to the city. Mayor Cecconi was very hopeful to get more of her works for the city's collection.

The photograph of Roberts acquired by the city is an original work taken in her later years. The photographer was Harold Rhodenbaugh whose work appeared in *Look*, *Washington Post*, and *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY).

Eight of Roberts' novels were acquired by the city—including four first editions. The November 1931 edition of *WINGS*, which was published monthly by the Literary Guild, was also purchased. This booklet includes a review of *A Buried Treasure* by Carl Van Doren.

Three books critiquing Roberts' work were acquired. One of the authors, Ruel E. Foster, is also a native of Springfield. In Dr. Foster's handwritten note to Mr. Bishop, he states, "Joe, Miss Roberts' work gives us a remembrance of things past, a glimpse into our first world and a glory from the earth—all very lovely things. I hope this book gives you a vision of each of them. . . ."

Mayor Cecconi is delighted that the city was able to purchase these works and states, "I know that this collection of Roberts' books will allow residents to see Ms. Roberts' vision for many years to come."

*Springfield Mayor and Mrs. John W. Cecconi with Roberts first editions and a portrait of the writer*



## 2008 Conference Report

James Stamant

2009 marked the eleventh annual meeting of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. Participants from Maine, New York, Kentucky, Mississippi, Maryland, Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina presented their work on Roberts at St. Catharine College in Kentucky. We were also very happy to welcome back France's leading Roberts Scholar Gisele Sigal (Universite de Pau/IUT de Bayonne).

The conference began on Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, with a greeting from Gregg Neikirk, President of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, followed by the Keynote Speaker, H. R. Stoneback, Honorary President of the Society. His Keynote was titled "Home & Path, Body & Space: The Architecture of Place in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Fiction." The Keynote was followed by the presentation of the 2009 Terry Ward and Sparrow Memorial Awards.

On Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, the conferees attended a reception at Roncevaux Farm, hosted by Gregg and Nancy Neikirk, before continuing on to Kentucky Writers' Day festivities at the historic Penn's Store, Gravel Switch, Kentucky. Then the group adjourned to a reception in Springfield, Kentucky, where the Mayor and City of Springfield, along with Nell Haydon (Director, City of Springfield Main Street/Renaissance), hosted a wonderful dinner for the Roberts Society members. Noelle Spicher's Springfield High School students read poems by Roberts for those gathered.

On Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, the attendees delivered their work at St. Catherine's College after a "welcome" from Leo Hamelin. Following the papers, the conferees attended a memorial reading at Roberts' grave, and the conference closed with the annual business meeting on the night of April 20<sup>th</sup>.

### 2009 Conference Program

#### **Session 1 Roberts' Classical and Poetic Foundations:**

**Jerry Salyer** (Bellarmine U), "*Esse est percipi*: Nature, Neighbors, and *nous* in the Work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts"; **Kelli Palinkas** (SUNY-New Paltz), "The Significance of St. Lucy in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Damian Carpenter** (Texas A&M U), "My Old Kentucky Inscape: Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Gerard Manley Hopkins"; **Sharon Peelor** (U of Oklahoma), "The Dark Night of the Soul and the

Writing of Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Literary Device and Philosophical Concept."

#### **Session 2 Situating & Contextualizing Elizabeth**

**Madox Roberts' Fiction:** **Crissy Rogowski** (SUNY-New Paltz), "Roberts, Faulkner, and the Southern Renaissance"; **Gisèle Sigal** (Université de Pau—IUT de Bayonne), "Fortitude and Faith in Books by Four Southern Women Novelists: Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Mary Noailles Murfree, Ellen Glasgow, and Edith Summers Kelly"; **Alex Shakespeare** (Boston College), "'My, my. How a body gets around': Wandering Women in the Novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts and William Faulkner"; **Vicki Barker & Nicole Drewitz-Crockett** (Carson-Newman College), "'An Uneven Stair': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Question of Appalachian Identity"; **Jane Eblen Keller** (U of Baltimore), "The Residue of Disaster, the Leavings of Tragedy: Women and Violence in Roberts' Fiction."

#### **Session 3 What Lies Beneath: The Folkloric, the Vernacular, and the Land in Elizabeth Madox Roberts'**

**Works:** **Matthew Nickel** (U of Louisiana-Lafayette), "'The most natural growth, indigenous to the soil': Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Folklore"; **Amanda Boyle** (SUNY-New Paltz), "Exploring The Light and The Dark: Superstitions, Omens, and Folklore in *The Great Meadow* and *Black is My Truelove's Hair*"; **James Stamant** (Texas A&M U), "Terra Incognita in *A Buried Treasure*"; **Kelly Sullivan** (Boston College), "Timescape with Cabin: Vernacular Architecture, Regionalism, and Modernism in Roberts' *The Time of Man* and Synge's *The Aran Islands*."

#### **Session 4 Staging Roberts: In Classrooms and Beyond:**

**William Slavick** (U of Southern Maine), "Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Literary Marketplace"; **Gregg Neikirk** (Westfield State College), "Staging *The Great Meadow*: A Play in Progress"; **Daniel Butler** (SUNY-New Paltz), "Imagination and Dignity"; **Jane Massey Dionne** (Independent Scholar, Greensboro, NC), "Teaching *The Haunted Mirror*: Helping Students Find Interest and Relevance in Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Short Stories."

#### **Session 5 New Approaches to The Time of Man:**

**Goretti Vianney-Benca** (SUNY-New Paltz), "Emotional and Material Stability in *The Time of Man*"; **Brad McDuffie** (Indiana U of Pennsylvania), "River of Time: James Still's *River of Earth* and Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man*"; **Mert Sanivar** (SUNY-New Paltz), "From the Kentucky Earth to the Anatolian Earth: A Comparative Reading of the Female Characters Called Ellen and Alive in Roberts' *The Time of Man* and Halide Edip Adivar's *Strike the Harlot*"; **Oona Morrow** (Clark U), "*The Time of Man* and the Pleasure of Possession."



## Visiting *Eleanores*

H. R. Stoneback

As the *Newsletter* goes to press, I am in the process of trying to arrange a tour of *Eleanores*, the home of Elizabeth Madox Roberts in Springfield, to coincide with our annual conference this April. It has been many years since the Roberts Society last visited EMR's home.

When I saw Joan Hamilton (the current owner of *Eleanores*) in Springfield last year, she graciously invited us to tour the house again. We are presently in communication about the timing of a possible tour. Joan writes that there are some house repairs to be attended to and she must check her horse show schedule for April. We are hoping to arrange a tour for either Monday the 26<sup>th</sup>, immediately after the EMR Memorial Graveside Reading (around 6), or on Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup>, immediately after our Springfield Dinner (also around 6). We hope to have the tour situation clarified by the time the conference program is printed. This early notice may have some effect on travel plans of conferees, so we wanted everyone to know in advance about what may indeed be a rare opportunity to visit *Eleanores* this April.

## The Critical Work of Constante González Groba of the University of Santiago de Compostela.

William Slavick

In "Spiritualizing the Domestic Sphere: 'Infinite Affirmation' in the Journeys of E. M. Roberts's *The Time of Man*" (*Literature and Belief*, 23 February 2003), Constante González Groba has ably placed Roberts' work in the context of criticism that focuses on the complex feminine domestic realm; his examination explores Ellen Chesser's quest for a home place, to bring order out of chaos, which leads to the inner order she achieves. His essay "Building a Home in the Wilderness: Domesticity and Imperialism in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Great Meadow*" (*Journal of the Department of English*, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal) adds

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## Rovit Reviews Critical Books in *The Sewanee Review*

Matthew Nickel

The recently published critical books on Roberts, *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* (Wind Publications 2008) and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Quincy & Harrod Press & The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society 2008), have received a substantial and favorable review by Earl Rovit in *The Sewanee Review* (117.3 (Summer 2009): lxii-lxiii). Rovit, the author and editor of several critical works such as *Ernest Hemingway* (Twayne 1963), *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall 1975), and co-editor with Arthur Waldhorn of *Hemingway And Faulkner in Their Time* (Continuum 2006), also wrote his dissertation on Roberts, later published by the University of Kentucky Press (*Herald to Chaos: The Novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts* 1960). After summarizing the contents of the two books and briefly summarizing Roberts' life, Rovit describes the tone of the collections as "a potpourri of praise with a tincture of resentment at the failure to recognize the value of Roberts's contribution to American letters." His concluding paragraph analyzes the mystery of literary reputations, noting how difficult it is for scholars to resurrect neglected authors.

The Roberts society is familiar with this mystery, but significant progress worth noting has been made in the last two years. For instance, the Roberts Society still holds multiple panels at two prominent national conferences (SAML A and ALA), and the Roberts Society will be an affiliated sponsor of the II International Imagism Conference (along with the International Richard Aldington Society and the Nick Adams Society), June 2010 at Brunnenburg Castle, Dorf Tirol, Italy. Most importantly, Roberts has received wide scholarly attention through H. R. Stoneback's legendary keynotes at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (November 2008), the 7th Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities (January 2009), and the ALA Conference in Savannah (October 2009). As noted in last year's newsletter ("Roberts Featured in Stoneback Keynotes—SAML A and Hawaii"), the University Press of Kentucky expressed interest in publishing Roberts' work, and they solicited from Stoneback a critical study, which he is now working on—*Kentucky Writers: Recollection and Remembrance*—featuring Roberts.

Rovit makes key points in his analysis regarding the difficulty of reviving interest in neglected authors, but, as noted above, the efforts of the Roberts Society have not been completely "futile." "Readers," as Rovit writes, certainly "harbor their own subjective preferences and passions," and it is "impossible to legislate or coerce genuine love." But the Roberts Society's aim, through what Allen Tate termed "illumination and praise," is not legislation or coercion. Instead, the approach of most of the essays in the two collections offers readers, familiar or unfamiliar with Roberts, a light into a dark-side of the literary canon—into the neglected shadows of literary brilliance—allowing for the possibility of love.

## Washington County High School Students Read Roberts

Noelle Spicher

For students at Washington County High School in Springfield, Kentucky, studying the literature of Elizabeth Madox Roberts brings writing close to home. For many high school students who may feel a disconnect between literature and their own lives, the words of a local writer often help renew their faith in literature. When students are able to see their own small town portrayed unmistakably through the language of a published author, the relevance

of literature to their own lives becomes more apparent.

A recent opportunity at Washington County High School has provided a chance for students to connect with the local author. AP Literature and Composition students at the high school have been asked to read poems by Roberts at the annual conference in Springfield for the past two years. Last year Michael Cook, Kristen Harrod, Lauren White, Brittany Wells, and Daniel Zevotek all read poems from Robert's collection entitled *Under the Tree*. This year's AP English students will soon begin a study of Roberts' literature, allowing them to experience a familiar voice and to readily await the upcoming conference.

### Some Letters and a Poem about Roberts *from page 3*

#### Some Letters and a Poem about Roberts

I even think and feel the thoughts that she expressed throughout the book." Ms. Jessop praises Roberts at length: "I never even thought of a book being written in such detail. I've read books that made me feel all the emotions, but this book went even farther. By expressing how complex the mind really is. Expressing the emotions for the situation at hand, and how the mind can think of several things at once, and to explain all that in detail. I thought it was superb."

She praises the way Roberts depicts the "tragedies" of life—death, loss of parents, loss of a child, betrayal. She cites specific page numbers and discusses the passages. For example, she notes: "On page 97, she writes about things never ending, they go on and on. You could never see any end to anything and it goes on and on. Eating and wanting to eat again. Wanting things and then having things and then wanting. I've thought all [these] things myself." She ends her discussion in this fashion: "I thank you Brother Oney for another wonderful book. And thank you for loaning me *The Doll Maker*. . . I'm sorry I didn't get to talk with either one of you Sunday night at Church. I hope to see you both Wednesday." Reading such letters as Ms. Jessop and Mr. Oney write about Roberts, one might wonder: who needs to read literary criticism? Or maybe the highest calling of literary criticism is to lead such readers as

these to rediscover Roberts.

At the end of his letter to me, B. R. Oney writes: "I also took the liberty of sending you a poem I did nearly 15 years ago, and a photo of myself standing by Eliz. M. Roberts' grave." The photo is somehow very moving: he stands there, reverently, holding his hat in his hand, by EMR's grave. And this is the poem he sent me:

*"For Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941)"*

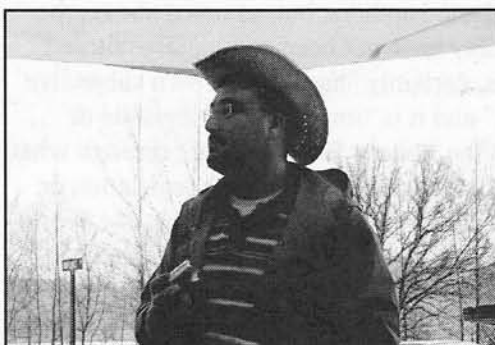
*Politics and Conflicts of mankind  
Have been so long portrayed as proving grounds  
For those most worthy of consideration  
Of holding highest seats within our minds.*

*But countrymen, we need not search for Clays,  
Johnstons, Morgans, Crittendens, Barkleys, Coopers,  
Nor others who are of more recent fame.  
Shall not we honor those who nourished us?*

*We've had the truest dear ones of the soil:  
The farmers, teachers, poets, men of God,  
And wives and mothers such as Ellen Chesser.  
I clearly see them as Kentucky's best.*

At the end of the poem is inscribed: "B. R. Oney February 15, 1995."

Clearly, as long as there are Brother Oneys in this world, we need not worry about Roberts being neglected, about Roberts finding the readers she deserves.



*Mert Sanivar  
(SUNY-New  
Paltz) at his  
first Kentucky  
Writers Day,  
2009*

### Constante González Groba *from page 5*

considerably to our understanding of the extent of Diony Jarvis' domestication of the wilderness in relationship to the pioneers' imperial conquest of the Kentucky wilderness.

González sees Roberts' analysis of the feminine consciousness as more intense than those of Chopin, Glasgow, McCullers, and Welty, and Roberts scholars should consider his critical work.



**News & Notes**

**Help Spread the Word on Roberts**

Please request that your local libraries order copies of *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* (Ed. Stoneback and Florczyk, Wind Publications, 2008) and *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery* (Ed. Stoneback, Camastra, and Florczyk, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008). These volumes offer not only reprints of valuable touchstone articles but also the most recent essays on Roberts' work as well as original pieces of writing by her that have never before been published. The books are essential to the ongoing discussion about her life and work, and we hope that they will become available in libraries across the country for current and future readers alike. For more information regarding ordering, please visit [www.emrsociety.com](http://www.emrsociety.com).

**ALA Symposium in Savannah, GA, October 2009.**

Roberts Society members presented at the American Literature Association Symposium on American Fiction in Savannah, GA, October 9, 2009. H. R. Stoneback featured Roberts' in his ALA keynote address, "'Wine-Drinking Mystic' Close-Reads the *Terroir* of Southern Fiction." Vicki Barker (Carson-Newman College), Jane Keller (University of Baltimore), and Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-New Paltz) presented papers on the Roberts panel. The Roberts panel was chaired by Steven Florczyk (University of Georgia), and participants and audience members followed the presentations with an enlightening discussion about Roberts' role as a literary figure in terms of Feminist readings of her work.

**SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, GA, November 2009**

The Roberts Society was well represented this year at the SAMLA Convention in Atlanta, where Amanda Boyle (SUNY-New Paltz) chaired a Roberts panel. Presenters included: Alison Fugit (SUNY-New Paltz), Roy Vespoor

(SUNY-New Paltz), Cristin Rogowski (Wagner College), and Jane Keller (University of Baltimore). A second Roberts panel was chaired by Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-New Paltz). Presenters included: David A. Davis (Mercer University), Jane Dionne (Independent Scholar), Amanda Boyle (SUNY-New Paltz), and Goretti Vianney-Benca (SUNY-New Paltz). In addition, two other Roberts Society members presented papers on Roberts in the Special Session: The Preservation of Place: Regionalism and Ecological Conversation: Matthew Nickel (University of Louisiana—Lafayette) and Damian Carpenter (Texas A&M University).

**CFP: SAMLA 2010**

**Elizabeth Madox Roberts and the Southern Renaissance**

Chair: Alex Shakespeare (Boston College):  
The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society invites papers dealing with Roberts in conversation with writers associated with the Southern Renaissance—Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson—and themes common to this broadly formulated "group" of writers. While any and all pertinent abstracts are welcome, of special interest are papers examining the ways in which Roberts' texts are taken up by other writers, as well as papers which examine themes (e.g., agrarianism, the making of Southern history) common to Roberts' and other authors' works. Papers should be 15-20 minutes in oral presentation. Please submit title and a 250-word abstract to Alex Shakespeare ([shakespeare@bc.edu](mailto:shakespeare@bc.edu)) by May 1, 2010.

**Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Discovery and Recovery**

Chair: Cristin Rogowski (Wagner College):  
Papers for this session may deal with all aspects of Roberts's work and life. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to, the following: Roberts in the context of Southern literature; Roberts and other writers; Roberts

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*The 2009 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference attendees hosted by the Springfield Main Street/Renaissance*



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and Southern Agrarianism; Roberts's literary and stylistic influences; Roberts and nature writing; Roberts and Modernism; Roberts and the novel; Roberts as poet; Roberts as writer of short fiction; Roberts and Regionalism; Roberts and the politics of literary reputation; Roberts and feminism; and Roberts and Kentucky. Papers should be 15-20 minutes in oral presentation. Please submit title and a 250-word abstract to Cristin Rogowski (Cristin.Rogowski@wagner.edu) by May 15, 2010.

### 2009 Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Award Winners:

2009 Terry Ward Memorial Awards were given to: Nicole Crockett (University of Tennessee) and Kelly Sullivan (Boston College). 2009 Sparrow Memorial Awards were given to: Oona Morrow (Clark University), Sharon Peelor (University of Oklahoma), and Crissy Rogowski (SUNY—New Paltz). Donations to sustain the Memorial Awards program may be made at any time. Contact Tina Iraca, EMRS Treasurer at tinair@hotmail.com, or send a check made out to Tina Iraca, with notation of amounts to be applied to the Sparrow Memorial Award and the Terry Ward Memorial Grant to: Tina Iraca, 16 Montgomery Street, Tivoli, NY 12583.

### A Play About Elizabeth Madox Roberts?

Nell Haydon, Director of City of Springfield Main Street/Renaissance writes that the city of Springfield is thinking about locating funding for a stage play on Roberts' life and writing. It is hoped that the Children's Theatre might perform the play. Any eager playwrights may contact Nell Haydon at springren2001@yahoo.com.

### Appalachian Heritage Review

In addition to the substantial review by Earl Rovit in *The Sewanee Review* (see page 5) and Victor Kramer's review in the *Mississippi Quarterly* (see page 9), *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment and Reclamation* was reviewed in the spring 2009 edition of *Appalachian Heritage* (Volume 37.2) by the magazine's editor, George Brosi. This publication has been operating since 1973, and its prestigious editorial board has included the likes of David Madden, Harriette Arnow, Billy C. Clark, Jean Ritchie, and James Still. The magazine is published by Berea College, through the Appalachian Center.

### EMR Correspondence on the Way to St. Catharine Deposit

Last spring Lebanon fiction-writer and photographer Wallace Kelly's daughter contacted Bill Slavick with an offer of Kelly's correspondence with Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Mr. Slavick agreed to accept them for deposit in the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Collection soon to be deposited in a new St. Catharine College Library. The letters, between 1932 and 1939, discuss Kelly's early fiction efforts and, later, in 1939, Roberts' interest in Viking Press, using one of Kelly's photographs of her. She had been much distressed by a Louisville Courier-Journal illustration of an article that she greatly disapproved. Kelly became a focus of her continuing irritation.

### Introducing Roberts to a New Generation

Brad McDuffie

This past semester I taught the *Time of Man* in my Modern Novel class at Nyack College. I've taught some of Roberts' stories before, but it was my first time teaching her masterpiece. The entire class seemed to enjoy the novel, but several students had especially strong reactions. One student, Natasha Miller, visited my office before class and told me how much she "loved this novel." As she attempted to articulate this love to me, she began to get emotional, eventually bursting into tears. It was the type of response that I understood perfectly.

Being affected by the text on this level, for me, is a sacred space that affirms everything I know and love about literature. Natasha seemed a little embarrassed by her emotions, and she apologized for them. I emailed her later and told her how much it meant to me that she shared her thoughts about *The Time of Man* so openly. I told her not to apologize; her reading of the novel was life sustaining, making my job immensely rewarding. Here are some of her reflections on the novel (below). She will be attending her first EMR conference this spring.

*We started reading The Time of Man after spending a few classes on As I Lay Dying, a perfect order. My mind was already filled with thoughts of the word made deed from Anse's journey to Jefferson to bury Addie. Ellen demonstrates the same character when she tells Jasper that he's "wedded deep" and that not even Hester Shuck can unwed him. Ellen doesn't give up on her marriage when it gets tough. Her words of commitment to him are bound and true. I like when Ellen's father tells her about how rocks grow. It reminds me of the stories my dad used to tell me from his farming days, that you could pick all the rocks in a field and there would be, without a doubt, more to pick the following spring. Ellen teaches me how to wonder about life instead of looking for answers at every turn. She is a strong woman with faith like a mustard seed and a vision to endure.*

—Natasha Miller



## Review of Critical Books in *Mississippi Quarterly*

James Stamant

Both of the new critical books on Roberts, *Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation* and *Essays of Discovery and Recovery*, were reviewed by Victor A. Kramer in the *Mississippi Quarterly* (61.4 (Fall 2008): 667-70). Kramer's review, appearing in one of the leading journals of record in Southern Literary Studies, is very positive, even laudatory. He begins by writing: "These books are a quite useful step toward the needed restoration of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's name in the consciousness of scholars and readers of American literature." In the four-page review, Kramer summarizes individual essays by senior Roberts scholars such as Wade Hall, William Slavick, and H. R. Stoneback, noting their importance to Roberts scholarship. He also praises younger scholars who contributed to these volumes, pointing to the overall importance of these books. He writes: "These two collections fill an immediate need. They stand as proof of the importance of a writer many contemporary readers, teachers, and students have forgotten. We are indebted to these several scholars for this assembled evidence of a resurgence of interest in the accomplishments of Elizabeth Madox Roberts."

Kramer also identifies the importance of the previously unpublished work by Roberts in both volumes, the republishing of classic essays on Roberts, and the plethora of new scholarship—all of which can be found in the two critical books. Kramer is not only enthusiastic, he is hopeful that the uncovering of new resources and the appearance of new scholarship will lead to more work on Roberts in the future: "These books will serve to introduce a new generation of readers to Roberts. We can also see what kind of additional research may follow because of the good work done by these editors and this new generation of scholars."

## Record at Snake Creek Gap from page 2

Kentucky was John Hunt Morgan's unit. Yes, that Morgan, legendary leader of "lean and hard Kentucky horsemen," as the historian James McPherson describes them, whose daring raids and dashing horsemanship so often stymied Union armies. Was Simpson one of Morgan's Men? Other scraps here and there support that possibility and put a whole other face on the nature of his war.

So which was it? The gallant First or the romantic Second? (Or both?) Either one would have put him at Snake Creek Gap on May 9, 1864.

One thing is certain. Unlike Captain Witt or John Hunt Morgan, Simpson Roberts survived the war. When he was released from the federal prison at Camp Morton, Indiana, in January, 1865, he was not yet (or just barely) twenty. When he died sixty-eight years later, the last Confederate veteran in Washington County, he had had a long time to tell his tales. It's a terrible pity that we shall never know what they were.

## A Pilgrim of Roberts Speaks

Olivia Carr Edenfield

At the American Literature Association's Conference in Boston in 2007, I was invited to a party to celebrate the publication of Jim Nagel's new book. Not long into the hour, I was introduced to H. R. Stoneback and a handful of his former students, all of whom have become my friends. I count this gathering as one of the many blessings in my life, for it was there that I first met the "traveling geniuses," the students of Stoneback's and Stoney himself—the guide, the itinerary maker, the leader of the pilgrimage.

It has been over two years since I stepped onto the raft and joined them on their journey. One of the greatest gifts of the ride has been coming to know the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, whose scholarship Stoneback and his students have almost single-handedly reinvigorated. Each one told me to start with *The Time of Man*, and, wanting to be more a part of their conversation, I began reading my way through the novels. I was of the mind that if Roberts is what they were reading, I wanted to be reading her too. And since that time, my husband, my colleagues, my mother—everyone I know—is reading Roberts. Good disciple that I am, I spread the word wherever I go. At a Savannah restaurant over Christmas break, I met a young couple from Kentucky who had not read Roberts' work. They left with a list of her titles, thankful to have heard about her and her writing.

My interest is often in domestic space, and houses are a central motif in Roberts' writings. I connected with her novels in part because of this strong imagery. While I look forward to a time when I can focus on her more critically—getting my ideas down on paper—right now, I am content to read what my friends have written, this group of scholars who trained with Stoney. I am blessed to be sailing down this river, reading and talking about Roberts. Ernest Hemingway is on board. And Breece D'J Pancake. Everyone has something to say.

## An Inquiry Regarding Mabel Medora Williams

H. R. Stoneback

Recently, I received a letter of inquiry about Roberts from Bob Symon. He wrote, in part: "My wife is Cassie Williams Symon. Her Great Aunt was Mabel Medora Williams. Cassie is an aspiring writer and knows that Mabel was very close friends with Elizabeth Madox Roberts." Roberts, of course, dedicated her last book, *Not By Strange Gods*: "For Mabel Medora Williams." And Harry Campbell and Ruel Foster report that Ms. Williams was EMR's "dearest friend and companion" in the 1930s (*EMR: American Novelist* 67-69)

Mr. Symon continues: "Over the past few years, we have been trying to find papers relating to Mabel as Cassie believes that Mabel was a writer and wants to find examples of her work, any letters that may be in existence, anything." He adds that they haven't located any Williams papers—"though we did find a book written by Ms. Roberts in the University of Louisville Library that has a personal inscription to Mabel." Unable to help Mr. Symon very much, I wrote back, telling him I would share his inquiry with Roberts Society members.

In addition, Symon noted that he read in a previous *EMR Newsletter* that the papers of Mabel Medora Williams were auctioned after her death, and "a Lexington collector" bought the Williams papers (which included some letters from Roberts). He would very much like to locate those papers and have copies of any pertinent material. If any readers of this note have information to share with Mr. Symon, please contact me for his address.

## Roberts at Brunnenburg Castle from page 1

two papers that will deal with Roberts and Imagism.

As I also reported in last year's *Newsletter* (in "Quietude and Scrupulosity": Elizabeth Madox Roberts—*Imagiste*"), I have been disabused of the notion that I was the first to call Roberts an Imagist (in *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation*). Ford Madox Ford beat me to that (in 1929).

In any case, although we cannot promise "quietude and scrupulosity" we look forward to seeing many Roberts Society members in the glorious mountains of the South Tirol (Italy), at Brunnenburg Castle (home of Mary de Rachewiltz, poet, Pound scholar, translator, and daughter of Ezra Pound). Suggested advance reading: *Ezra Pound: Father and Teacher*, the extraordinary memoir by Mary de Rachewiltz.

## The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

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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 Kentucky membership and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area in particular. Anyone interested in membership can contact President Gregg Neikirk by email at: [gneikirk@wsc.ma.edu](mailto:gneikirk@wsc.ma.edu).