

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Newsletter

Newsletter No. 2
March 1, 2001

President's Message

The year 2000 was a noteworthy one for the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. We increased conference participation 100% from the year before, drawing on scholars from as far away as Oklahoma and Massachusetts, and we were able to participate in Kentucky Writers Day. Since last April, Society members have been putting into practice one of our most important resolutions, namely, taking advantage of the University of Kentucky's recent reprint of *The Time of Man* to introduce the book to a new generation of readers.

This year, we continue to welcome new faces to our annual conference, which, in addition to many familiar faces, will feature scholars from Maryland and North Carolina. Once more, we will participate in Kentucky Writers Day, and we are pleased to add Harrodsburg's Beaumont Inn to our list of conference sites. In addition, for the first time, we will be sponsoring Roberts events at other locations throughout the upcoming year. We have started to make inroads into print, with Steven Florczyk's "Sound and Sense in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's 'On the Mountainside,'" a paper that had its debut at the 2000 Roberts Conference, accepted for publication in the Spring 2001 issue of *The Shawangunk Review*. The Spring 2001 *Shawangunk Review* will also feature a review-essay on *The Time of Man* by John Langan and Fiona Paton.

Needless to say, much more remains to be done before Roberts receives the recognition due her. The list of possible topics provided with our calls for papers announcement is a clear indication of the amount of work waiting to be done on Elizabeth Madox Roberts. At this point, however, we can look back on what we have accomplished thus far, and what we have planned for the future, and feel a certain amount of justifiable pride. I like to think that what our group is attempting is among the more noble goals of literary scholarship, and I believe that, so far, we have performed it well.

Mission Statement

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society seeks to promote scholarship in the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, to encourage its teaching, and to pursue the goal of returning such classic novels as *The Great Meadow* and *The Time of Man* to print and keeping them there. Membership is open to all who love Roberts. We are a national organization, but are particularly interested in encouraging Kentucky membership

and establishing a liaison with members in the Springfield area. Anyone interested in membership, serving on the Advisory Counsel, or acting as a Kentucky/Springfield liaison, please contact John Langan at langank@matrix.newpaltz.edu or 583 Springtown Rd., New Paltz, NY 12561.

The Time of Man: 75 Years

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of Roberts's most acclaimed novel, *The Time of Man*. The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will commemorate this remarkable event with several gatherings so that we may continue to discuss the works of this great neglected author. Since our work this year will focus on *The Time of Man*, perhaps a short recollection of this novel that has inspired so many readers to pursue the study of Roberts is in order.

Scholars and critics have praised Roberts' first novel as one of the best works of American fiction. Ellen Chesser's story is one that is quintessentially and simultaneously southern and American, just as the works of William Faulkner and James Still. Ellen's struggle may be seen as a regional story as she must work to endure the hardships of transient life as the daughter of a poor itinerant tobacco farmer in Kentucky. Equally important, her determination to forge an identity into the landscapes of Kentucky makes her story universal and identifiable by all those who read it. Through Ellen, we come to see the essence of the human condition as it is intertwined with the country and embedded in the landscapes that surround us. We journey with Ellen as she experiences the adolescent confusion of ontological wonderment, loss of love, the abiding presence of sense of place even amidst the turmoil brought on by life on the road. Her story leads to an unwavering appreciation for those qualities of her life that prove all important: family and sense of the past, ritual, love, home, and place. It is no coincidence that we should recognize these qualities as attributes of the works associated with the Southern Renaissance, for *The Time of Man* occupies a key place amongst the works from that tradition.

Roberts' novel, through its well-crafted story of Ellen Chesser's growth into a woman, is one that scholars, teachers, students, and avid readers alike will continue to teach, study, and simply enjoy in the future as long as we continue to work to keep this great novel in print.

Report on The Second Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference

The Second Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference took place April 16-17, 2000. On Sunday, April 16, members of the Roberts Society took part in Kentucky Writers Day at Penn's Store in Gravel Switch, reading from Roberts's poetry and prose, while Honorary President H.R. Stoneback delivered an address that dealt with Roberts in the company of such other Kentucky writers as James Still, Jesse Stuart, and Robert Penn Warren. An estimated crowd of two hundred people filled the lawn in front of Penn's Store to listen to the readings, and then to the music of Dawn and Dava Lane. That night, the Society held its first dinner at the Beaumont Inn in Harrodsburg, partaking of the Inn's famous Sunday night buffet, an event that has already been agreed upon as vitally necessary to the success of every conference hereafter.

On Monday, April 17, the conference proper was held at Saint Catherine College in Saint Catherine. Professor Terry Ward of Saint Catherine delivered the welcome to conference attendees, and John Langan followed with the formal opening. The first session, chaired by John Langan, featured four papers. Sheila Donnelly's "My my. A body does get around": Ellen Chesser in Yoknapatawpha County" examined the influence of *The Time of Man* on Faulkner's *Light in August*, arguing for Faulkner's indebtedness to Roberts. Breida Gallagher's "Grounded Identities: Elizabeth Madox Roberts's Two Sisters" compared Ellen Chesser, protagonist of *The Time of Man*, with Diony Hall, protagonist of *The Great Meadow*, highlighting the similarities between the two characters. Tina Iraca Green's "Ellen Chesser's Journey: Revelations of Self and Meaning" considered the literal and metaphorical journeys taken by Ellen Chesser in *The Time of Man*, linking them to the development of Ellen's existential self. Finally, Sharon Peelor's "Writing on the Horizontal: Reading and Teaching Ellen Chesser's Odyssey in *The Time of Man*" explored the resonances of Homer's *Odyssey* within *The Time of Man*, and offered thoughts for the way such resonances might be incorporated into the teaching of Roberts's novel.

The second session, chaired by Steven Florczyk, proved a change of pace, as the panelists eschewed conventional papers in favor of more creative and innovative approaches to Roberts's work. Mark Bellomo's "Returning to Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*" used a series of dialogues with his friends, students, and mother to evoke his reasons for returning to the novel time and time and again. Jane Dionne's "Clare Leighton's Wood Engravings for Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*" was a slideshow presentation of the life and work of Clare Leighton, whose famous woodcuts have graced every edition of *The Time of Man* since first they were included in it. Finally, Jenica Shapiro's "Ritual and the Natural World in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*" employed the device of a letter written to Roberts to expound on the novel's more personal meanings for Ms. Shapiro.

Following the second session, Honorary President H.R. Stoneback delivered the Conference Keynote Address: "Folksong and Folkplace in the Works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Or, Numinous Country and Country (Numinous) Music," in which he revisited his treatment of Roberts's use of

folksong in his 1970 Vanderbilt dissertation and his paper and concert of Kentucky folksongs at the Roberts Centenary Conference in 1981. In an unexpected treat, Sparrow Stoneback sang several of the folksongs that Roberts uses in her work. Professor Stoneback concluded that Roberts deploys song in her fiction more successfully than most writers, and Roberts's songs are truly country, truly numinous.

After lunch, conference participants were pleased to be joined by Professor Wade Hall of the University of Kentucky, whose introduction begins the current reprint of *The Time of Man*. Chaired by Breida Gallagher, the third session of the conference was devoted to Roberts's lesser-known works. Steven Florczyk's "Sound and Sense in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's 'On the Mountainside'" considered Roberts's use of sound in one of her short stories, "On the Mountainside," specifically as it connects to her representation of her character's inner development. John Langan's "The Place of Suffering in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *My Heart and My Flesh*" combined a discussion of the function of suffering in Roberts's second novel with an analysis of its distinctive, symphonic structure. Gregg Neikirk's "'Oh, To Make a World Out of Chaos': Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *The Great Meadow*, and the Kentucky Frontier" drew on his experience as editor of the Harrodsburg Herald to illuminate the Kentucky history and sense of place that informs Roberts's second masterpiece, *The Great Meadow*. Finally, Fiona Paton's "The Stylistic Subtlety of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's Short Fiction" performed a stylistic analysis of several Roberts short stories in order to demonstrate Roberts's use of folk speech as a way to break down the distance between author, characters, and reader.

The conference concluded with a brief, lively discussion with Professor Hall, who shared several items of Roberts memorabilia he had brought with him with the conference attendees. Once the conference was over, Professor Terry Ward guided several attendees on a tour of Saint Catherine's two chapels, pointing out features of each that appear in Roberts's short story, "The Sacrifice of the Maidens." Leaving Saint Catherine, conference attendees journeyed to Roberts's grave in Springfield, where the Second Annual Graveside Reading took place, with selections from Roberts's prose and poetry, as well as original poems inspired by Roberts's life and work, read. That night, closing ceremonies took place at The Beaumont Inn's Goddard Hall, where a rousing evening of folksong made for a truly memorable end to a memorable two days. Leaving the next morning, attendees were already looking ahead to the 2001 conference.

In Memoriam: Dava Lane

All of us who were privileged to be at Kentucky Writers Day last year to share a beautiful April day of song and poetry with Dava and the Lane family were shocked by her death last summer. The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society has made a contribution to Dava's Memorial Scholarship fund at Saint Catharine College in Saint Catharine (home of the Roberts Conference 1999-2001). Readers of this newsletter who wish to contribute to the fund should contact Jeanne Penn Lane, 5604 Little South Road, Gravel Switch, KY 40328, or call her at Penn's Store: 859-332-7715.

H.R. Stoneback, for the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

Looking Ahead to 2001

2001 promises to be a busier year than ever for the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society. The year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The Time of Man* (as well as the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of Roberts's birth, and the sixtieth anniversary of her death) and events have been scheduled throughout the year and across the country to commemorate this event. At this point, we have tentative schedule information for four events, two taking place during spring 2001, and two during fall 2001:

Third Annual National Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference April 22-23, 2001

at **Penn's Store**, Gravel Switch, Kentucky
&
at **The Beaumont Inn**, Harrodsburg, Kentucky
&
at **Saint Catharine College**, Saint Catharine, Kentucky

PROGRAM OUTLINE

- I. Kentucky Writers Day at Penn's Store Historic Landmark
2-4pm Sunday April 22
Speakers—Readings of Poetry and Prose—Songs
- II. Conference Banquet and Opening Session at The Beaumont Inn
6-9pm Sunday April 22
- III. Paper Sessions at Saint Catharine College
9:30-4:00pm (or until the necessary hour) Monday April 23
- IV. Third Annual Roberts Graveside Memorial Reading
4:30pm Monday April 23
Springfield Cemetery
- V. Annual Business Meeting of the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society
&
Closing Ceremonies
7:30pm Monday April 23
Terrace of Goddard Hall (weather permitting)
- Tuesday AM—Departure

Conference Directors: H.R. Stoneback & John Langan

Conference Program Chair: John Langan & Program Committee

Conference Location Coordinator: Terry Ward

Kentucky Writers Day Program Director: Jeanne Penn Lane

for further information, please contact John Langan at (845)-658-8211 or langanj@matrix.newpaltz.edu

(2001 cont'd)

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Symposium:

Westfield State College, Westfield, MA

A Celebration

of the 75th Anniversary of the Neglected
Classic American Novel *The Time of Man*
with the

Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

Symposium Director: Professor Gregg B. Neikirk

PROGRAM

Tuesday Afternoon, September 18, 2001

Welcome: Gregg B. Neikirk

Keynote Address: "Writing Kentucky in Massachusetts: Or, Elizabeth Madox Roberts in Stockbridge"

H.R. Stoneback, SUNY New Paltz

Presentation: "On the 'Roberts Revival' and the Roberts Society"
John Langan, President, Roberts Society, CUNY Graduate Center

Panel Presentations: TBA

American Literature Association:

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society will also be sponsoring a panel at this year's meeting of the American Literature Association, which will take place in Boston from May 24-27. Our panel, scheduled for Friday, May 25, is titled "Recovering a Lost Masterpiece: Seventy-Five Years of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*." As of this writing, we have received several interesting proposals, and will be deciding the makeup of our panel within the near future.

Graduate Forum

Celebrating

The 75th Anniversary
of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's
The Time of Man

Recovering a Neglected Classic

November 13, 2001

8:15pm (location TBA)

Organizer/Moderator: H.R. Stoneback, SUNY New Paltz

Panel Discussion Leader: John Langan, CUNY Graduate Center

To participate in the panel discussion, please contact John Langan at langanj@matrix.newpaltz.edu

The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society

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

President: John Langan, CUNY Graduate Center

Vice President: Breida Gallagher, Independent Scholar

Vice President: Steven Florczyk, SUNY New Paltz

Advisory Council: Mark Bellomo, SUNY New Paltz; Lynne Crockett, New York University; Sheila Donnelly, SUNY Orange; Tina Green, SUNY New Paltz; Jeanne Penn Lane, Penn's Store; Gregg P. Neikirk, Westfield State College; Sharon Peelor, University of Oklahoma; Susan Piperato, Writer; Terry Ward, Saint Catharine College

Kentucky Recollections

If "home is where the heart is," then my heart is full in the early spring, anticipating my yearly pilgrimage to Kentucky. Visiting such historically resonant places as Saint Catharine's College, Penn's Store at Gravel Switch, and the Beaumont Inn at Harrodsburg, enables my colleagues and I to connect with the works of Elizabeth Madox Roberts in a truly meaningful way. It is of course, one thing to read about the country of her novels, but it is an altogether different experience to empirically witness Kentucky's hills and valleys, its towns and villages, and the people that Roberts' characters derived from. Roberts' writing -- her style -- her texture and passion -- have never been given recognition in proportion to her talent, and it is because of this that I make this pilgrimage. That, and (of course) the "best fried chicken I have ever eaten in my life" at the world's famous Beaumont Inn.

Mark Bellomo, SUNY New Paltz

As I drove the Kentucky countryside from the airport in Lexington to Harrodsburg and then on to Gravel Switch and to St. Catharine, I had what surely was an Ellen Chesser/Diony Hall "moment." A realization flooded my senses as masses of redbuds dissolved into a background of green, sloping fields that were neatly ordered by patterns of dark brown fences. I knew what Roberts meant by "the pageant always flowing" as I gazed at the herds of Black Angus and the chestnut- and earth-skinned horses abundant on the land of Elizabeth and her people. Even the road rhythmically collapsed into alternating arcs, taking "its own turnings" as I imagined it would. I had never been to Kentucky before, but I knew it from Roberts's novels, and I knew why she loved this soil that, even to a stranger from the north, had the faint recognition of home.

Tina Green, SUNY New Paltz