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► **To cite this version:**

Gisèle Sigal. Soul, Fiber and Bone: Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Writings as an Extension of Herself. International Conference on Women and Vocation, Lille Catholic University, Jun 2014, Lille, France. hal-02326860

**HAL Id: hal-02326860**

**<https://univ-pau.hal.science/hal-02326860>**

Submitted on 31 Oct 2022

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**International Conference on Women and Vocation**  
**June 5-7, 2014**  
**Lille Catholic University - France**

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Abstract:

**Soul, Fiber and Bone: Elizabeth Madox Roberts' Writings as an Extension of Herself**

“Writing seems to be into the fibers of my being”, Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941) writes in her notes. She knew she would be a poet and a writer from an early age, there is no questioning to it. It is a matter of fact and the only way to live in that world, and to “survive in the chaos of sensations out of the vapors of the mind”, she adds in her letters. Such a calling becomes a natural drive and is a fundamental process to exit self-absorption and to maintain her original integrity.

For Roberts, writing expresses the yearning to overcome all obstacles. It is a vital and creative dynamism exacerbated by the daily ordeals in life, in a double determination to exist and to write.

She knows she is made for writing to express her bursting and abundant creativity which is based on and modelled after her native Kentucky. Writing is also a means to account for and to re-establish the awareness and the reconsideration of time and of space in a culture in transition, caught between tradition and innovation at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Living on the fringe of the family system, she has no talent for human contacts and is plagued by frequent agonizing migraines. “My soul slides through my wound”, she declares in her notes. Thus, Roberts’ impetuous calling to become a writer entails the building up of a self-imposed dungeon, a defensive mental fortress to cage herself up and live in her own world. Focused on her inner self, she gives expression to it and fulfills it with artistic inspiration drawn by her acute sensitivity to people and places. Writing is a way of knowing herself as her creative work is an extension of her thought and of herself. Hence, there is no distance between the writer and her vocation: her entire existence is subordinated to it.

In this paper, we will first examine Roberts’ determination and devotion to writing and to poetic art which comes with an acknowledgement of childhood memories and of Kentucky’s natural beauties. We will then consider her mission which is to expose odysseys of self-discovery on a meaningful, communal level of shared experience. Eventually, the issue of legacy - transmission and vocation - will be studied.

Short bio:

Gisele Sigal is an Associate Professor of English in the Pau University, Bayonne Campus south west France, where she has been teaching Business English for more than twenty years. She is also Head of the Business and Marketing Department.

Her research centres on Southern women writers at the turn of the twentieth century, such as Elizabeth Madox Roberts (who was the subject of her French Doctoral dissertation in 1996), Mary Noailles Murfree, Edith Summers Kelley, and Ellen Glasgow. She has written several papers and has made contributions in various French, American and Polish edited collections and journals.

## Introduction:

Writing is a means of communication and of introspection for Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881 – 1941), a Kentucky poet and a fiction writer who long ago faded to oblivion. For her, it is a way to baffle the daily ordeals in life, a harbour to heal the soul's wounds, a retreat to shun the body's pains, and a haven to express her bursting and abundant creativity. Then, like many other female writers, her art does not derive from a choice in life but from a deep feeling of belonging, an innate sense of who she is and who she wants to be. One of her close friends, Ms Shultz remembers her friend in those terms:

“At the age of eight, Elizabeth said she was a poet. We would be sitting by a stream out in the woods; Elizabeth would see a cricket or a grasshopper, and a poem would bubble forth. She loved nature! She could make a poem from anything”.<sup>1</sup>

Any childhood memory is nostalgic-driven. Although Roberts discloses little information on that time, her art is nevertheless indicative of mixed feelings. In her youth, she experienced doubts, fears, shelter in safe fantasy havens, and dread of nothingness, and of being abandoned. As the years of sufferings become hard to take, they enable faraway meadows of freedom and dreams to become more flower-filled and greener, which results in a heightened emotional intensity in her works, like in the following poem:

I draw my sights in when I sleep  
I gather back my word and call.  
I take my senses from the air  
And wind them in a little ball.

I curl them in a lonely ball,  
And wind them in a lonely mesh.  
I fold it over with my dream,  
And wind it round and round in flesh.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *EMR as seen through the eyes of a friend*, p.4

<sup>2</sup> *Song in the Meadow*, “Evening Song”, p.21

In that poem entitled “evening Song”, the narrator comments her perception of both the outer world and her inner life, explaining that sleep helps her make a mesh of her own sensations just like in a wool ball. The subtle use of various metaphors recalls Paul Ricoeur’s “metaphoric twist” (Ricoeur, 127) in a crafty network of interactions and declensions. Such questionings with a psychological scope reveal the duality of Roberts’ mind throughout her faithfulness to the children and adults’ worlds. Suffused with candor and wonder, these poems conjure up the very first sensations and emotions a child feels in contact with nature, without the distortion of rational and adult interpretation as corroborated here-below by a literary critic and anthologist:

“Most verses that attempt to record childhood are written by well-meaning and thoroughly mature adults, either in that tone of talking-down which, instead of being childlike, is merely a distortion of childishness, or on a note of highly exaggerated spontaneity and elaborate ingenuousness which fails to conceal sophistication. Occasionally, one finds a volume which mirrors the child’s world, in which the speech is straightforward without being shrill or mincing, whose simplicity is neither starched nor beribboned. Such a volume is Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *Under the Tree*.”<sup>3</sup>

Her poetic production restores the Lost Eden in a nostalgic perspective where time is shaped from a dream to return to the origin that is to say to Mother Nature. In her notes, the poet acknowledges:

“Poetry must appeal to the emotions each time it appears with the freshness and the vigor and the charm of a clear first impression. It flashes into media where the intellect goes crawling and groping. Poetry is forever trying.... To come nearer to a statement of the universe, or to a statement of some small contributory factor to it”. (EMR Papers).

The fundamental myth underlying Roberts’ poetic art is the one of the Return that feeds on poetry itself. Thence, each happy or painful stage in existence is an initiatory ordeal within that vast Orphic myth of the discovery process of poetry. Indeed, Roberts is in keeping with a long line of female novelists and poets who experience writing like a second skin, like a matter of course: the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, Doris

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Untermeyer, *The Freeman*, reprinted in *EMR A Personal Note* by Glenway Wescott, p. 26

Lessing, or Margaret Drabble, to name but a few, all embraced the profession of writer as a determination of existence. Roberts' own existence was subordinated to the act of writing in a double determination to be a social historian (and acknowledge the Kentucky's heritage) and to explore different techniques with her novels and short stories. Therefore, a whole web of intertwined concerns and reflections on her devotion to writing will be presented in this paper.

**1. Writing as a therapy: to express her attachment to Kentucky, to exorcize her ill-being, and to express her own identity.**

Born in 1881 in Perryville, Kentucky, she was the second in a family of eight, grew up in the backwash of the reconstruction period, and was deeply afflicted by the poverty which followed the disruptive war. When she was six, the family moved to Springfield, KY in a frame house. Her father, Simpson Roberts, a former Confederate soldier had a part-time job as a Surveyor which provided a very meager income. Elizabeth was a shy, sensitive girl, and all indications are that her childhood had many desolate moments: "Myself, a little girl trying to climb out of my sordid world by the way of high towers [...] above the shanties of High Street" (EMR Papers), Roberts writes in her papers. Even though childhood is the place where she loves to take refuge in and to meditate over, it is clear from her papers that those years were a mix of joy and of despondency:

"Lonely from the beginning of time... Strange, strange, could not eat. Would not play. Lonely. Would creep up into the dark of the stair and sit in desolation".<sup>4</sup>

Or more explicitly:

"Sitting on the stairs, the dark stairs, with the door closed, alone, shaking with misery... A feeling of the utter uselessness of everything. All things were related and all things were nil. I was akin to no one. People were nothing, relations were nothing. I did not know what was the matter. I only knew that I was alone in a spaceless, thing-less universe. These fits of feeling often overtook me when I was very young, four, five, six years old..... It might have been that they were natural reactions from an over-acute

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<sup>4</sup> The Journals, EMR Papers gathered at the Library of Congress, Washington) and quoted by EM Rovit p.8

realization of relations and things, a sensitive reaction to sensitive recognitions of matter, a matter-less world resulting". (EMR Papers).

Driven by the feeling of being cast off, neglected and alienated from the others, Roberts added to the misfortune of poverty, the somberness of bad health. She was a delicate child and showed a tendency toward what they called in those days "weak lungs"; she was also thirsting for knowledge, music, literature, and philosophy. In his biography on Roberts, Woodrow Spears observes that her father encouraged her to read classic books by Shakespeare, Chaucer, Berkeley, Milton, Hardy, Joyce, Tolstoy and the Greek dramatists:

"For her, the Greek spirit was the one alive in the Odyssey and in her main characters. The virtues of Orpheus and Homer were the virtues living in the people [of her fiction]". (Spears, 55).

All those readings helped her carve and develop both her identity and integrity. In their biography on Roberts, Campbell and Foster add:

"Occasionally, friends and acquaintances would come and visit to talk of literature and the problem of writing, and would read excerpts with some interpolated commentary" (Campbell & Foster, 68).

Their epic, poetical and philosophical scope coupled with old records, journals, local stories and personal notes she would carefully gather, would help her mold her fictional world. Deprived from other gateways to the world, she engages in what is for her a constructive and intoxicating escape throughout the clear excitement and feverishness of her passionate character. Indeed, writing is primarily, for Roberts an act of identification to childhood, the only possible way to solve the contradictions of her life; it also becomes a setting for happiness, a confined area, an un-spoilt place where time stands still, not in a process of decline but in the impetus and prospect of creation.

In June 1900 she graduated from High School, then taught school until 1910 while writing poetry despite ill-health. In 1910 she went to Colorado to visit her brother and lived over a year there. A collection of pristine poems was soon published in various magazines.

Ill-health of various sort dogged her till she discovered in the 1930's that she suffered Hodgkins' disease. Her long delayed college career (partly due to her illness and to her father's refusal to pay for further education) was also source of concern. In 1917, she enrolled the University of Chicago, and soon became an integral part of a small literary coterie of young men and women who shared her interest in fiction and in poetry: Janet Lewis, Yvor Winters, Maurice Lesemann, Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott remained life-long friends.

Robert Morss Lovett, who taught Elizabeth at the University of Chicago could not: "remember that she had any difficulties except ill-health, which has been a serious handicap throughout her career". (Papers) By 1920, in a letter to Glenway Wescott, she wrote:

"I am writing a novel too, these days..... But then I fell ill for several days, and ah me, what a devastating experience. For two days through the pain and misery the story lived and then came convalescence, weariness and apathy and my puppets are all dead..... All these I made march through headache and pain. She [Sallie May, her protagonist] may be only a dream strife, a useless endeavor – myself on endless stairs that hang over a precipice, clutching". (EMR Papers).

After her graduation in June 1921, she returned to Springfield and became a full time writer, completely absorbed in her work, having almost no outside interests which were not related to her writing. Far from urban hustle and bustle, she longed for quietness and rest to praise the Kentucky's natural beauties with its peaceful countryside, green meadows and rolling hills. She also felt close to the poor Kentucky people, and to the children she had taught. However, there is strong evidence that her parents were baffled by her unorthodox ambition to be something as impractical as a writer and offered little in the way of support or encouragement. An in-depth examination could lead to a common allegation on the urge to write, whose drive is similar to the desire for a child for others. But if giving birth is clearly vital to ensure the survival of a species, the urge to write appeared to be, in those times, as borderline, subversive, almost pointless. At that time, various friends of hers had urged her to leave

Springfield, Kentucky. In a letter addressed to Poetry Editor Harriet Monroe, Arthur Winters flat out stated that: “She was forced into a very unhealthy isolation there”<sup>5</sup> However, by 1928, after much traveling about and extended stays from California to New York, Roberts decided to make her permanent home in Springfield. There she could live more comfortably for less money in central Kentucky and was convinced that her parents depended on her. Besides, her brothers and sister had left home, four for far-flung places. She used her first significant royalties to create a decent space for herself in her parents’ small house since privacy was vital to her; meanwhile she was struck with its corollaries: solitude, loneliness, isolation and exile. Within the social context of her time, the quest for freedom inevitably entailed a doomed artistic seclusion. Working against the odds, she struggled to write collections of poems and four novels within four years, between 1926 and 1930.

The acute loneliness in which she lived induced the use of limited dialogues in her prose, with a strong emphasis on the narrative itself and lengthy explanations or monologues that describe the characters’ inner thoughts and emotions. Unlike Thackeray or Eliot, she does not directly interfere. Neither does she lean over the reader’s shoulder to give her opinion as an aside. Her unobtrusive manners and dignified reserve make her keep the distance of an omniscient remote narrator, if not unbiased. Sometimes, however, the main character will look alike the writer, allowing the expression of a primary narcissism or a personality’s contradictory facet that cannot reach unity and favors, to a certain extent, the opposition between matter and mind, and between body and soul.

In sharp contrast to Elizabeth’s condition of always teetering on the edge of ill-health, of having severe headaches, of having to take ray treatments for her skin, was the triumphant health and physical savoir-faire with which she equips each of her heroines – Ellen Chesser, Theodosia Bell, Diony Hall, Jocelle Drake, and Dena Janes. They are all by the end of their

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<sup>5</sup> Poetry Records, Chicago, Jan 11, 1924.

story tall, full bodied, lovely women with a bursting vigor deriving from their identifying themselves with that vital principle of life which courses through nature. This nature symbolism is embodied in Dena Janes' love for nature in *Black is my Truelove's Hair*. Lying in the sun, she feels: "The great flood of nature poured into her from above"<sup>6</sup>. Roberts lives throughout her fiction; she is every main character to challenge the odds.

Her speech is not much targeted to an original rhetoric but rather to favor an intimate relationship between idea and expression as the writer confesses:

"I oscillate between an identity of myself with the actors and a condition of aesthetic detachment, the latter way prevailing more often - producing form and aesthetic sense of the tragedy or beauty of the scene. [...] The prose style is thoroughly functional in its attempt to parallel the actual process of a mind perceiving sensation and gradually transforming it into realized experience".  
(EMR Papers).

Roberts' longing for happiness and love is also patent in her works. However, her shyness, her illness and her vocation were deterrent to romance and marriage. Her calling then resonates as a declaration of intent and of belief, a profession of faith or a confession of some kind. Consequently, the requirements of such a calling position her outside the classic family patterns and her celibate life is indisputably part of those prerogatives.

## **Part 2: Writing is a mirror effect: an intricate narrative experience to provide order**

Hostile to innovations, to the glitter, to daring assertions, and to a slackened syntax, Roberts is endowed with classic tastes. Her style is neither superficial nor fluttering, not even entangled in clothing, decorum, or tearfulness. It represents a substance. For her, the interest in life does not lie on the external outer and material world, but on the contrary on the inner world of sensations which turn into ideas, symbols and images. Introspection is rendered through an inner monologue which suits best the writer's purpose:

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<sup>6</sup> *Black is My Truelove's Hair*, p.243.

"The stylistic norm - a common level of impression and reverie, is reached in the flowing prose which captures the essence of a richly contemplative mind. (McDowell, 59)

Thus, the language used by the impersonal narrator becomes poetical in the descriptions of nature, lyrical in the rendering of passionate feelings, of poignant reminiscences of silent griefs, and melodramatic in heart-wrenching scenes depicting splitting. Roberts does not play with words, she lives them. Through the mastery of her clear-minded and insightful craft, she shows a secure control of the concept of ideas as Critics have praised:

"Roberts' style is more than just 'frosting on a cake'; it is crucial to her theme of "the inner world of sensations becoming ideas". The balance which she tried to attain between poetry and realism requires the literary existence of an active, perceiving, remembering, willing imagining mind expressing its ideations through sensuous symbols and images". (Rovit, 130).

Her first novel, is narrated through the lens of the heroine, as if the writer could not escape her power: "I felt the moment Ellen entered the book that here could be but one point of view" (EMR Papers). In *The Great Meadow*, both the historian and the regionalist betray their existence behind Diony Hall, the main character, constantly in the spotlight. And so it is in Roberts' novels with a unique hero by whom the whole story unfolds:

"Instinct had warned me, that a narrative should adhere to the central figure, and that looseness of structure as well as thinning substance, was the result of a too variable field of vision". (EMR Papers).

Subsequently, the writer's technique shifts to a contrapuntal approach in two times: "The point of view must be clear, straight, and restricted... to two angles of vision" (EMR Papers). *A Buried Treasure* is an attempt alternating between Philly Blair and Ben Shepherd's perspectives. Such an in-depth and innovative process leads to a combination of kaleidoscopic reflections which achieve success in her last novel: *Black is my Truelove's Hair* with the opposition of Dena Janes and Nat Journeyman's narrative viewpoints. The first section belongs to youth whereas the second one is centered to the old man, and the last part refers to both, in turn. Consequently, youth and old age counteract, along with illusion and experience,

blind aspiration and lucid weariness, powerful mistakes and powerless goodness, vivid memories and the remembrance of hidden emotions, where Nat Journeyman is the writer in the fullness of the writer's 55 years at the time she wrote the novel:

"Apart and knowing, he stood with time, identical with time, as it passed over, as it moved like the river, as it began far back among a hundred runlets and more, to flow unrecognized and changeless through minor degrees of turbulence and calm".<sup>7</sup>

An acute sensitivity to people and things is exacerbated in that passage, as if the moments of heightened awareness were to be remembered so that mind (order) prevails over anarchy and confusion. The writer is subjected to opposite feelings: "The difficulty is to choose material from the chaos about me and the apparent chaos that is myself... Myself against the chaos of the world"<sup>8</sup>; she confesses, and these turbulences that knock her down naturally ricochet in her prose fiction.

"The line floated from the design in a continual wasting, perpetual dissolution, and her own mind strove to bind its own threads, to regather its lint and impose some well-knit conclusions to the chaos."<sup>9</sup>

Later she makes this penetrating and poignant note which is not a statement of neurotic self-pity but a reasonably fair summation of her life at that point: "I have known tragedy for a long time, and what it is to be marked, estranged and what it is to die over and over, and to be recreated from within, forever recreated" (EMR Papers). Hence, streaks of narrative fracture question the traditional coherence in paragraphs, spelling, or word order, be they concatenated or cut up: such a bursting process frees rampant latent energies into numerous sensations.

"She lay in the heart of evil and slept all the night, lying as if she had been drugged [...]. Later in the morning she stirred slightly and was aware of herself as the residue of disaster, the leavings of tragedy, the nothing of the evil hereafter. A faint cry for pity hushed itself from her lips".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Black is My Truelove s Hair*, pp.36-37

<sup>8</sup> From EMR Papers, quoted in Mc Dowell, p.37

<sup>9</sup> *My Heart and My Flesh*, p.158

<sup>10</sup> *My Heart and My Flesh*, pp.197-198.

Among them, the call or cry is an essential voice which comes back to the pre-writing experience; half way between the voice and the word, the signifier and the writing process, the call or cry helps prove one's existence in its Greek meaning of "ek-sistere" which means going out of oneself. Nevertheless, it also expresses pain of misunderstanding, and of isolation.

Such an oscillation between mind/matter and body/soul, discloses both her female self (through her female protagonists and poetic realism) and signs of manliness (through the use of disconnected tropes, epiphoras and diaphoras where long paragraphs interweave with flashes of action which freeze the instant in a point of no return).

Consequently Roberts' work does not expose any pure interiority, which takes up Kierkegaard's assertion. For the writer, "within" is both confinement and distress, but also deliverance and emancipation.

Indeed, three major strands come out in her writings: the individual's creating order out of chaos, the pattern of spiritual death and rebirth (which emphasizes the individual's internal psychological adjustment), and the process of alienation from society, either actual or imagined, which is followed by a psychological crisis and then a satisfactory integration of the individual into his or her world.

Therefore, the personal and artistic patterns of development in Roberts is one of shifting emphasis rather than substantive change in coming of age novels. The process by which the individual apprehends or creates his world and reaches an intuitive understanding of both this world and his position in it is her primary preoccupation. In an unpublished essay entitled "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Light by Refraction", Kentucky poet Jane Mayhall applies Nathalie Sarraute's theory of tropism to Roberts' work in defining the wonder of her fiction. What she says applies as well to the short fiction as to the novels. By way of paraphrase: "art wants to capture the gropings that may occur and be dimly sensed in the "sub-conversational

world of inner monologues” and be registered as “dim premonitions long before the feelings are rendered conscious in speech form”. What Roberts groped for, writes Mayhall, was that very sub-conversational world.

**Part 3: Writing to leave a mark and convey a message: The odds and vagaries of a literary reputation:**

Women’s writing invariably seems to provide an ideal setting for a clash between a craving for writing which is an innate talent for Roberts, and a society which shows either systematic open hostility towards that craving or displays a softer form of it called irony or deprecation which is even more perfidious.

Women’s literary status is known for being rooted in a misunderstanding of the text arising out of a fundamental belief that to be canonical is to perpetuate the patriarchal dominance in literature. It was Roberts’ misfortune to be denied literary recognition despite temporary praise. In an obituary, Time listed her as:

“A novelist whose grave, searching stories of her mountain people were told in a dignity of language that made her one of America’s most distinguished women writers”.<sup>11</sup>

And in 1944, J. Donald Adams wrote the following comment:

“It is my own conviction that she brought more enrichment to the American novel than any man or woman who has come to the writing of fiction in the last quarter of a century”. (Adams, 126)

Unfortunately the popularity of her early works was not sustained. In a culture in transition, caught between tradition and innovation at the beginning of the twentieth century, they have progressively faded into the dark shadows of literary history and are now rarely anthologized. On the surface, Roberts is not doing anything new. Her writings often depict female domesticity in an apparently positive, or at least neutral light. Even though her characters are

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<sup>11</sup> Obituary, Time, 37, March 24, 1941, p.67.

repeatedly poor white people striving to improve their stations in life, her women neither rebel against the domestic role of early pioneering or itinerant farming American women nor spearhead politically charged rallies to fight for change. Like her, Roberts' characters are also tortured souls. Therefore, by creating female characters who stand by their men or appear otherwise weak or disempowered at times, Roberts is unfortunately immediately relegated to the outdated, old fashioned discard pile of the current revised canon.

Additionally, she chose a private and quiet life with a small circle of intimate friends and family instead of a public and outspoken life. Therefore, the homeland of the soul becomes a sanctuary where the need for an inner life results in fierce intransigence, exceptional will power and a strong disregard for the futilities of life and social habits:

“I do not join myself onto things. I am free deeply within. ...I have preferred to skirmish not in the inner citadel but rather out in the meadow beyond the wall and the moat”. (EMR Papers).

Likewise, the impecunious life and the too mortal frame wracked by her various illnesses deeply affected her. In a letter dated May 30, 1940, she complained to her friend Marshall Best that she had thought her ten books would have yielded:

‘A small steady income.... It is discouraging... to have to go on simply tearing out one's brain in chunks for the pay of a pittance’.<sup>12</sup>

Had her works been written by a male artist, they would probably have aroused more interest, let alone yielded more income. Such bold statements may, to some extent, account for Roberts' misfortune as a woman writer. How about the following quote by Editor and writer Edward Wagenknecht (Cavalcade of the American Novel)? Referring to *The Time of Man*, he held:

“Some of the episodes [in her books] were sordid; and, perhaps, the author had missed one of the sources of spiritual energy: religion. The general absence of the subject was noticeable”. (Wagenknecht, 18-19).

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<sup>12</sup> Letter to Marshall Best, Viking Press Editor, May 30, 1940.

Such an appalling comment could possibly suggest a clear willingness to minimize a female artist's work for what was considered a magnum opus at that time.

In a quest for inner reaches of the soul and room for reverie, Roberts' works have a hint of a secret diary but casual readers are left dumbfounded and unsettled. The vast majority of critics mostly agree with Clifton Fadiman, from *The New Yorker Review*, that: "A veil had been drawn between herself and the coarse-grained world, and this inaccessibility was marked in the stories" (Fadiman, 68). Indeed, in her later poems and short stories, characters move from complete individuality toward conception and execution in allegorical and symbolic terms. The trend towards increasing complexity of design and of intellectualization results in lack of understanding and progressive disinterest from critics and readers:

"She wrote "difficult books. For those whose frame of reference was not modernist and intellectual [...], her novels did not possess many grains of sense, inside or out". (Keller, 44).

As a matter of fact, obscurity and insularity here and there pervade her late works. However, in a letter to Fred Millett three years before her death, Roberts confesses:

"I scarcely have any defined theories or views of literature. It seems inevitable that the work itself should be the criterion, the proof, the sufficient-unto-itself. I regard my work as an art and pursue it as such".<sup>13</sup>

Her hopes have been bitterly disappointed but she refuses to compromise. Her seven novels, collections of poetry and short stories clearly distinguish a democratic individualist, a philosophic humanist and an artistic transcendentalist. In a letter to a friend dated August 1927, Roberts describes her writing habits:

"I do not have any rules for doing anything. Rules have no chance whatever of staying with me. I have spent months on end trying to learn and apply some rules, but they become an entanglement. My sense of words is much too raw and immediate, too emotional, for me ever to get out by rule".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Roberts letter to Fred Millet, March 13, 1937. Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Marshall Best, August 18, 1927, Viking Press Files.

Consequently, diving into the intricacies of her fiction may be complex and opaque for the general audience and may have hampered transmission. In her time, most critics found her novels either “monotonous”, “too obscure” or with “shadowy characters”<sup>15</sup>.

Such statements raise the issue of her legacy. Who were her followers in her time? Who are they today? Who claimed to have been influenced and marked by her writings? The underlying complexity of her works makes her literary heritage problematic and yet, more contemporary American scholars such as Wendy Pearce Miller, Harry Stoneback, Susan Donaldson, and European ones such as Simone Vauthier, Gerald Preher, Constante Groba to name a few, and many others now find it necessary to force Roberts’ works into modern social frameworks in order to reignite interest in her literary production. According to Professor Harry Stoneback<sup>16</sup> Faulkner had two books by Roberts in his personal library with annotations.

### **Conclusion:**

Through short stories, poems and novels, the reader experiences a concentrate of Roberts’ writings at the crossroads of many literary genres she craftily masters and interweaves.

Indeed, reading Roberts does not leave unconcerned or unmoved. One does not emerge unharmed after perusing her works. It is like delving into somebody’s privacy whose complexity, distress and singular will cannot but move and impress. It is also to acknowledge the prejudice that befalls her and attempt to help rediscover her works.

The writer has never copied anybody, nor claimed to be a follower of any other writer and has remained unique in her artistic designs as well as in her interpretations of life. The artist is utterly faithful to her art:

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<sup>15</sup> The New Yorker, October 1938

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Professor Stoneback, April 2008

"The novelist strives for those delvings into meanings and half meanings which we like to make in our effort to enlarge the capacity for experience and to revalue the human race." (EMR Papers).

While yearning for integrity and for spiritual motivations, Roberts charted the obscure seas of her own consciousness; she followed her own path to suit her own temperament and looked for truth in the act of writing.

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