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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS:
HER INTERPRETATION OF LIFE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

by

Andrew J. Beeler Jr.

1940

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HER INTERPRETATION OF LIFE

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**ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS:
HER INTERPRETATION OF LIFE**

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an outgrowth of a study stimulated by the statement that Elizabeth Madox Roberts's fiction offers no interpretation of life.¹ An effort has been made to present her interpretation of life through an analysis of her life, her stories, her art, and her ideology.

The basis of the discussion is the content of Miss Roberts's six major novels: The Time of Man, My Heart and My Flesh, The Great Meadow, A Buried Treasure, He Sent Forth A Raven, and Black is My Truelove's Hair. Her other novel, Jingling in the Wind, is a fantasy and is referred to only occasionally. Similarly, only infrequent reference is made to her short stories and poetry.

The material on Miss Roberts and her fiction is exceedingly sparse. Other than the book reviews and the occasional references to her work in books of a general nature, the only studies of her fiction have

1. Hicks, Granville, The Great Tradition, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 278.

been made by Van Doren,² Adams,³ and Janney.⁴ Much of the material in Chapter I, "Her Life," was provided by friends of Miss Roberts. The plan of the thesis is to present the available facts about her life and to relate them to her fiction.

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2. Van Doren, Mark, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Her Mind and Style," The English Journal, Vol. 21, No. 7, September, 1932, pp. 521-529.
 3. Adams, J. Donald, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts," Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. 12, No. 1, January, 1936, pp. 80-90.
 4. Janney, F. Lamarr, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts," The Sewanee Review, Vol. 45, No. 4, October-December, 1937, pp. 388-410.

CHAPTER I

HER LIFE

CHAPTER I

HER LIFE

Material pertaining to the life of Miss Roberts is scant. There have been published articles by Rena Niles¹ and Glenway Westcott.² Some bare facts are in Who's Who in Kentucky³ and in Living Authors.⁴ The Louisville Free Public Library has a file of clippings from various newspapers about the life and work of Miss Roberts. The largest part of the material assembled here came from friends of Miss Roberts. Contributing to this information were Mr. Hambleton Tapp,⁵ Mrs. Sarah Middleton Simpson,⁶ Dr. F. Lamarr Janney,⁷

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1. Niles, Rena, "She Writes the Way She Weaves," The Louisville Courier-Journal, January 18, 1939.
 2. Westcott, Glenway, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: A Personal Note," The Bookman, 1930. (This article was reprinted in a brochure about Miss Roberts published by the Viking Press in 1930).
 3. Southard, Mary Young (Editor), Who's Who in Kentucky (Louisville: The Standard Printing Co., 1936), p. 594.
 4. Tante, Dilly (Editor), Living Authors (New York: Harper and Bros., 1932), p. 583.
 5. Mr. Tapp is a teacher at Louisville Male High School and has long been a personal friend of Miss Roberts. He gave the writer many of these facts about Miss Roberts's life.
 6. Mrs. Simpson is a former teacher of English at Western Kentucky Teachers College, Bowling Green, Kentucky. She has talked to Miss Roberts, and she gave the writer detailed accounts of this interview in person and by letter.
 7. Dr. Janney is head of the English Department at Hollins College, Hollins, Virginia. He has made an extensive study of Miss Roberts's fiction and wrote the writer a letter about her in April, 1940.

and Prof. Robert Morris Lovett.⁸

Elizabeth Madox Roberts was born in a small town and has lived in small towns and rural districts for the greater part of her life. She was born in Perryville, Washington County, Kentucky, in 1885, the daughter of Simpson and Mary Elizabeth Roberts. At the time of her birth, her father was head of the Perryville school. In Perryville her father as a boy of sixteen joined General Braxton Bragg's Confederate troop, shortly before the bloody battle opened there. After the Roberts family had lived at Perryville for a short time, Professor Roberts, as he was called, was elected head of the school at Willisburg, in the same county. The family lived there for a number of years. Later Mr. Roberts decided to take up surveying and storekeeping and moved to Springfield where he spent the remainder of his life and where his widow and most famous daughter now reside. Miss Roberts comes from a large family; she has five brothers and one sister now living. One brother died in the summer of 1939.

At the time of their removal to Springfield,

8. Prof. Lovett was teacher of English at the University of Chicago. He wrote the writer a letter about Miss Roberts in July, 1939.

Miss Roberts was in her early 'teens. Most of her education was received at home as both her father and mother were teachers and quite intelligent. Miss Roberts attended the high school at Springfield; later she taught in the rural schools of Washington County. It was during this time that Miss Roberts gained much of her knowledge of the way of living of the people in remote country districts of Kentucky. ✓ Here she learned how they spoke, how they lived, how they worked, how they played, what they thought; she also learned much of the fine knowledge that she has of nature--the sounds, the odors, the sights, that are so vividly and effectively described throughout her novels. Since she did not have good health, she abandoned teaching and spent approximately two years at home with her parents. During this interval she was not resting altogether. She spent much of her time walking over the lanes and roads near her home, continuing and enjoying her study of nature. Later she spent about a year with her brother in Colorado; she was delighted with the West. After she returned home, Miss Roberts entered the University of Kentucky. It was here that her literary ability was first recognized. She became associated with J. T. Cotton Noe, himself a

poet and a teacher at the University. He believed that her writing was of such high order that a better opportunity for growth should be provided. He communicated with Prof. Robert Morss Lovett of the English Department at the University of Chicago, who in turn invited Miss Roberts to come to Chicago. Prof. Lovett writes of her: "I remember Miss Elizabeth Madox Roberts at the University of Chicago as an exceedingly good student of English literature and a member of the Poetry Club. She wrote her first published book, a series of poems for children, while at the University. I do not remember that she had any difficulties except ill health, which has been a serious handicap throughout her career. Miss Roberts was often at my house, and needless to say was a great favorite with my family. She was, however, reserved, and told me nothing of her early life, surroundings, reasons for coming to the University, etc."⁹ She studied at the University of Chicago from 1917 to 1921, taking a Ph.B. degree and writing poetry which was awarded the Fisk prize and which later appeared in book form as Under the Tree(1922). While at the University she received credit

9. Letter from Prof. Robert Morss Lovett, July 12, 1939.

toward graduation for some of the poetry which she wrote while there. Soon after the publication of The Time of Man in 1926 Miss Roberts had a brick addition built to the family residence in Springfield. It is here that she spends much of her time. Here are her beloved loom and her fine library. In the frame portion of the building lives Miss Roberts's aged mother. Neither money nor persuasion could induce Mrs. Roberts to exchange it for a palace. Miss Roberts is very indulgent with her mother, catering as far as possible to every fixed habit and desire. Because of ill health, however, Miss Roberts now spends each winter in Florida. Her hobbies are folk arts, weaving and making small pieces of pottery. She has a flower garden and several acres of trees which occupy a great deal of her time during the summer months. She also plays the piano. She spends a great portion of her time in the sunshine, taking long sunbaths when this is at all possible. She is interested in ballads, folk-lore, and the rituals of the Catholic church.¹⁰

A close friend of Miss Roberts describes her as follows: "As to physical appearance, Miss Roberts is

10. Letter from Dr. F. Lamarr Janney, April 16, 1940.

rather tall, stately in carriage, and very dignified. Her blond hair is graying; her eyes are clear, blue, and intelligent looking, usually having a thoughtful, meditative expression; her nose is rather long, curving slightly at the bridge to give an aristocratic appearance. Her mouth is full and her chin is regular. She does not wear somber colors; however, the colors are more subdued than gay; she loves color as much as an artist. Her voice is low and musical; it is delightful to hear her read. She is very gracious in disposition and usually "clearing" in conversation, although she requires a certain amount of quiet and solitude. Her personality is generally pleasing. There is about her the spirit of quiet and repose. She does not seek people. Miss Roberts does not have a philosophy of life that might be described with a single stroke of the pen. One notices these things about her: she loves the South, is still an unreconstructed rebel; she loves to dwell upon the powerful, moving influences and personalities such as are found in He Sent Forth A Raven. This is probably one reason why she is so fond of Herman Melville, Emily Bronte, and Thomas Hardy; Moby Dick, Wuthering Heights, and The Mayor of Casterbridge are among her favorite books.

She is fond of quiet, solitude, a little grayness, and even a little of gloom and sadness. Perhaps this is the reason for her fondness for Nathaniel Hawthorne."¹¹ Her father exerted a profound influence on Miss Roberts, as did Hopkins, the English poet.¹²

Glenway Westcott, a friend of Miss Roberts who attended the University of Chicago at the same time she did and who has remained a friend throughout the years, has these observations to make of Miss Roberts: "There (at the University) was the young southern woman, alone absolutely original, unimpressed by the setting evils and plagiaries, meek and insinuatingly affirmative, untouched by but kindly toward all our half-grown baseness." In New York at a later period he says of her: "I saw her a few years later in a darkened, hot, but never warming room, seated with her yellow-crowned head almost between her knees as are certain Blake drawings; now signalling from the windows with a towel when she had need of human attendance, now like royalty in a convent drawing

11. For this quotation and much of the other material relating to the life of Miss Roberts, the writer is deeply indebted to Mr. Hambleton Tapp.

12. Letter from Dr. Janney, April 16, 1940.

apart in an arrogant and pious self-communion; abstractions forming out of the tedium, the shadows of past persons becoming the flesh of future characters -- thinking, thinking, remembering, biding her time, uttering extensive dreamy theories and troubling witticisms, with an occasional

✓ incorrectness of folk-songs in her speech. Or later still, when her timidities and her fatigues and her pride had become mere technicalities of living conveniently and extra charms, her thought clear to countless people but her person a riddle still, in a decorous skyscraper suite where society, music, the arts, all were represented as they should be in some slight precious form, she ignored the hour and the date for long periods while she wrote, often more than half of the twenty-four hours at a sitting; then, in a blue-feathered hat, a floating kerchief, ventured forth with a brother or a devotee into the common city, finding it as delicately bizarre as if she had invented it also; and about twice a year met critics and practitioners of her art, but in a corner or an alcove, one at a time, preferring (and with reason) to tire her mind by speaking rather than her heart by listening, with something blueblooded, almost Russian, in her

bearing. For the South is another of those lands of antique gentry brought low."¹³ He also speaks of her handling of her native Kentucky in her novels and how much she feels at home there.

In an interview reported by Miss Rena Niles,¹⁴ the following facts are given about Miss Roberts. "Weaving is hard work," she says, "at least it is for me -- I put as much of myself into a piece of weaving as I do in a story. It's really the same process -- repeated in a different medium. You have certain things you wish to say. You may say them with words, or notes, or colors, or lines. . . .or colored yarn. And no way is easier than the other." The author says that she has two or three books "going" at the same time -- for it is not unusual to find several writing tables in use at the same time in the Roberts home, each one being the resting place of a particular book, so that the writer travels among them and writes one chapter here and another there. Her notes are voluminous. They are all taken, however, before a book is ever begun. Once the actual writing is in full swing

13. Westcott, Glenway, Op. Cit., p. 6.

14. Niles, Rena, Op. Cit.

the note taking for that particular book is at an end. Her notes are scribbled in pencil on odd-shaped bits of paper and concern a variety of things --interesting facts of all kinds, historical and legendary; the use of archaic words; startling, newly-coined words; the things she has heard people say and the songs she has heard singers sing. Miss Roberts is very definite about what she believes, what she likes and dislikes. Approaching the subject of literature in general, Miss Roberts is not one to indulge in prophecy or manifesto. Literature, to survive, she thinks, must have style, and that the lack of style is one of the most serious faults of contemporary writing. The only way to develop style is to read the great writers, past and present, to read as many languages as possible. . . . and finally to have that feeling for sound and line, that something of the draftsman and composer, which enables the writer to set one phrase by the side of another in relationship so accurate that the changing of one word would constitute a major catastrophe. At the same time, Miss Roberts is never a self-conscious writer, no matter how much the perfection of her writing may suggest the careful weighing of each word. The element which the critics

call her "style" is totally unconscious. "Phrasing," she says, "is merely a matter of feeling. I am not conscious of any labor on this matter. The labor of writing is not in the phrase, but in the management of wholes or the bringing together of feeling and feeling to make all yield a satisfactory form."

Miss Roberts has received the Fisk Poetry Prize from the University of Chicago; the John Reed Memorial Prize Poetry (magazine) in 1928; the O. Henry Memorial Prize for a short story, "The Sacrifice of the Maidens," in 1931; and a prize from the Poetry Society of South Carolina in 1931. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1936 she was awarded an honorary Litt.D. degree from Centre College; in 1937 she was awarded a Ph.D degree from the University of Louisville.¹⁵

Her first novel, The Time of Man, was published in 1926 and represented several years' work; it was the October, 1926, Book-of-the-Month Club selection. The book was received with enthusiasm in England as well as in America. It has since been published in German, Swedish, Spanish, and Dano-Norwegian editions.¹⁶ It

15. Southard, Mary Young, Op. Cit.

16. The information about the various printings of Miss Roberts's books was sent to me by the Viking Press, July 17, 1939.

has also been published in the Modern Library edition in America. The book was widely advertised and loudly acclaimed at the time of publication. There appeared seventeen book reviews immediately after the book was published, and they were practically unanimous in their expression of the many fine merits of a "first" novel _____ Carl Van Doren: "A beautiful work of art;" Keith Preston: "Brimful of beauty;" Edward Garnett: "A work of genius; beautifully written and full of light;" Sherwood Anderson: "A wonderful performance. I am humble before it."¹⁷ The consensus of opinion regarding this book at the time of its publication was that although the plot is negligible, the characterization and the dialect are masterly achievements; the novel shows careful planning and authenticity of detail; the author has the ability to infuse drab lives with beauty; she has the ability to see, hear, feel and smell, showing her keen perceptions of nature.

After finishing The Time of Man, Miss Roberts lived for a time in California, where she worked on her second novel, My Heart and My Flesh, which was

17. These comments were used in the publishers's advertisement in the book review section of the New York Times, October 10, 1926.

published in 1927. This book has also been published in England and is the only one of her books which has been translated into Braille. There were fifteen reviews of this book at the time of publication. The consensus of opinion was that the author kept this book on a psychological plane and that she was less interested in the events themselves than upon their effects on Theodosia, the heroine. The reviewers said that the author reached the height of her power in the conclusion of the book. They found it in spots rich in poetry and very beautiful and lovely. The adverse criticisms followed these lines: the heroine is not a real person; the author tried to handle an epic theme with the technique of a lyric; the theme and purpose were blurred; "she can wield as strange and compelling a prose as exists today, but when it escapes her [sic] , the reader is left floundering in a blanket of words."¹⁸ It has been called a "finely wrought novel, rich, original, and satisfying."¹⁹

Jingling in The Wind, a fantasy, appeared the next year (1928), but it is not to be considered a successor to

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18. Van Doren, Dorothy Graffe, Book Review, The Nation, Vol. 125, November 30, 1927, pp. 606-608.
19. Shirley, Mary, Book Review, The Outlook, Vol. 147, December 7, 1927, p. 443.

My Heart and My Flesh, inasmuch as she began it earlier and carried it along with her two other books, turning from one to the other for diversion. At the time it appeared there were eleven reviews, the smallest number of reviews for any of her books. Most of the critics do not even mention this book along with their study or general discussion of these novels. It was accepted as a bit of satiric extravaganza, as being good fun and gay. As usual, the bits of pastoral beauty were commented upon. The chief fault found with the book was that its intention was not clear. Under no circumstances was it to be compared with her two previous novels. The style was criticised as being high-flown and turgid.²⁰

The Great Meadow, following after an interval of two years, was published in 1930 and was the March, 1930, selection of the Literary Guild. It was the first novel Miss Roberts ever contemplated writing, the idea having been in her mind for more than fifteen years. Much of the material was given to her by her grandmother. Miss Roberts tells of the writing of this book: "I thought it would be an excellent labor if one

20. C. P. F., Book Review, The Nation, Vol. 127, October 24, 1928, p. 231.

might gather all these elements, these threads, into one strand, if one might draw these strains into one person and bring this person over the Trace and through the Gateway in one symbolic journey."²¹ This book evidently has ranked with The Time of Man in popularity. It has been published in England and has been translated into German and Spanish. This book was again published by Grossett and Dunlap in 1932. It was made into a movie by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer soon after its original publication. This book was very well received and was reviewed twenty-one times immediately after its publication. As usual, her style, her attention to detail, and her meticulous and careful planning were commented upon. It was regarded as being a good historical novel, employing a greater economy of words than The Time of Man. The chief faults found with the book were that the characters never seem to be real people and that the book lacks the real, breathless excitement usual in historical novels.

Her next book, A Buried Treasure, which was published in 1931, was expanded from a story which had

21. Tante, Dilly (Editor), Living Authors, (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1932), pp. 343-344.

appeared in Harper's in December, 1929, and January, 1930. (It has also been published by Grossett and Dunlap in a cheaper edition and has also been published in England.) There were fourteen critiques of it in various periodicals at the time of publication. It was also a Literary Guild selection. The favorable criticisms of the book may be thus summarized: "A simple story, but told with economy and art, containing suspense, pity, anxiety, good temper, and a happy ending."²² It was criticised as being fatiguing, and it was said that it did not come from within. There were also noted some discrepancies about time and farm work.

Miss Roberts's next publication was The Haunted Mirror, a collection of seven short stories, which appeared in 1933. These stories had previously appeared in The American Caravan, Harper's, The American Mercury, and Letters. There were twelve reviews, most of which merely commented upon the stories and the varieties of stories which appeared in the volume. Most of the comments praised the style and the attention to detail and word choice.

He Sent Forth A Raven appeared in 1935. There were twenty-one reviews at that time, and most of them

22. Van Doren, Dorothy, Book Review, The Nation, Vol. 133, December 16, 1931, pp. 675-676.

were uncomplimentary. The chief source of this unfavorable comment was the fact that the book puzzled more readers than it satisfied. The book was said not to be alive. Comments were made upon the beautiful descriptions and the diction but the characters were said to be "argument-racks, weak-winged aspiration toward survival."²³ It was also noted that the book is obviously the fruit of long and careful planning. Only a very few reviewers liked the book and many suggested that the writer should return to the human warmth and the clarity of The Time of Man. It was generally agreed that although this book was a failure it was an artistic failure. Miss Roberts's reaction to the reception of this book is interesting:

It has been the fashion to damn He Sent Forth A Raven. I have looked it over in tranquility, two years after it left my hands. It is not a fantasy. It follows the pattern of My Heart and My Flesh and is more like this book in feeling and structure than it is like any of my other books. The reviewers generally confused themselves looking into the characters to try to find the Raven. Once they got on the wrong track, there was no finding their ways back. The Raven in the piece is the dauntless spirit of that poor weakling, Man, trying to go his way alone. Old Stoner Drake had a world of Raven-ness in him, and thus he tried to flit to and fro, as is written in the

23. Clark, Eleanor, Book Review, New Republic, Vol. LXXXII, April 10, 1935, p. 251.

story of the flood, until the waters subsided. But he was defeated in the end by God's own weapon of senility; and, in spite of him, God's other weapon, Life, went on functioning in Jocelle and in her child. The book did not settle any of the problems of war, they say. Did anything settle any of the problems of the war? And isn't the old story still there to be told----of war's futility?²⁴

The latest novel by Miss Roberts is Black Is My Truelove's Hair, published originally in October, 1938. There were fourteen immediate reviews of this book, and as a whole it was favorably received and was pointed out as being a welcome change and relief from the preceding book. It was recommended that the book be given two readings, the first rapidly and the second more slowly. It was called a lasting book, and favorable comment was made upon the style and the beautiful pastoral descriptions. The chief adverse criticisms were made in the Saturday Review of Literature in this review:

...the major characters are too slight for their portentous roles. It is hard to understand what they stand for. The speech is unreal and the plot is melodramatic in outline.²⁵

*24. Niles, Rena, Op. Cit.

25. Graham, Gladys, Book Review, Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 18, October 25, 1938, p. 14.

Miss Roberts's first volume of poetry, Under the Tree, 1922, was a collection of childhood reminiscences. The other poetry, Song in the Meadow, she collected in 1940; this volume is divided into three parts. The first group, "Maidens and Loves," includes poems in the same vein as her first. The second group, "The World and the Earth," is about the world of today. The final group, "Legends," contains several Kentucky legends in verse.

This brief sketch may serve as a basis for an outline of the relation of Miss Roberts's life to her writing. She has consistently used a rural life background for her stories and has always portrayed country people. It is the life of such people that she wishes to interpret. Time and place have been interpreted in her novels in terms such as are natural to country people. Because of ill health, she has remained almost a recluse, although she will not admit that. "In the midst of all these reminiscences she looked up and said very firmly, 'But I am not a recluse-- I have traveled far--I have seen both the Atlantic and the Pacific.'"²⁶ This seclusion has given her much

26. Mrs. Sarah Middleton Simpson, Op. Cit.

time to think, and her biggest problems have been solved mentally; this attention to thought and the importance of the mind are emphasized throughout her writing. This helps account for the fact, also, that apart from her interest in portraying the folk whom she knows so well her greatest interest lies in psychological problems. The best examples of this are Theodosia in My Heart and My Flesh and Dena in Black Is My Truelove's Hair. The struggle for success, happiness, and personal well being that are portrayed in all of her fiction are also closely related to her own life. Her beautiful and abundant nature descriptions show that she has been a keen lover of nature always and that she is not unaware of its beauty. She has never married. While she has never written a very convincing love scene, her stories display unusual emotional power.

CHAPTER II

HER STORIES

CHAPTER II

HER STORIES

The purpose of this chapter is to state the theme and present a resume of each of Miss Roberts's novels as a basis for the subsequent chapters on her art and her ideology.

The Time of Man, published in 1926, has for its theme the universal theme of man's search for fairer lands. The theme is developed through a presentation of the life of Ellen Chesser, only daughter of poor-white Kentucky parents who are itinerant farmers. At the opening of the story Ellen is seen with her parents about to accept a year's tenancy at another farm; at the conclusion she is shown in a wagon with her husband and five children about to set out for a new land. Really, there is little more than this to the story, though the day-by-day experiences of Ellen and her family are related in such a manner that the story never becomes tiresome or trivial. The characters spend their lives moving from place to place, ever hoping and striving for a sense of permanency which often seems imminent just beyond the horizon. Ellen's girlhood is the natural one for a girl in her position in society;

her days are spent helping her mother occasionally in the two-room hovel which they call home and more often in the fields helping her father plant and harvest the crops. Dirt and squalor do not seem to penetrate her skin, hardened as it is to circumstances. She inherits from her parents the ability to find the bright lining of a dark cloud just as she inherits from them the desire for a home of her own. There is always the call of the land. There is always the answer of the road, beckoning away from the land which they do not own, inviting them with new promise, forbidding them to stay. Ellen's deepest, unconscious memories are bound up with it. As they travel from place to place, Ellen once more makes adjustments and new friends, whom she sees as often as possible and whom she thinks of often when not in their actual presence. Although she is perhaps totally unconscious of the fact, Ellen is an ardent student of nature, being keenly aware of the many changes which take place with the passing of the seasons. She dances and flirts and wonders about the pangs of begetting and bearing children. Her first love affair is unfortunate; she forgives Jonas, her lover, for his inconstancy and adultery, but he in turn deserts her for a brazen-faced newcomer to the community.

About the time when her family has decided that Ellen is a doomed spinster, she marries Jasper Kent, whom she has courted without passion and demonstration for several months. Ellen's hopes for her own home are reborn with her marriage; she says in part,

Or our own little house sometime, that belongs to us and all our own stock in the pastures. Three quick taps on the farm bell to call you to dinner. A rose to grow up over the chimney. A row of little flowers down to the gate.¹

The children come rapidly and Ellen is affectionate in her acceptance of them. In them there is the same placid acceptance of life that their mother and grandparents had. Their marital life is interrupted only by the accusation that Jasper is involved in an arson case; he is later freed of this. He then grows so jealous of Ellen that he refuses to acknowledge her last son, the weakest of the lot, as his own. After the death of this child, Jasper realizes his love for it and for Ellen, and all is peaceful once more. The story ends with Ellen, Jasper, and the children piled in a single wagon, beginning once more the trek to permanency, to happiness. Ellen's children carry with them

1. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, The Time of Man (New York: The Modern Library, 1935), p. 292.

the same desires and hopes that were hers years ago and that she still feels within the tender confines of her heart. She encourages them with the promise:

Some better country. Our own place maybe.
Our trees in the orchard. Our own land some-
time. Our place to keep . . .²

They went a long way while the moon was still high above the trees, stopping only at some creek to water the beasts. They asked no questions of the way but took their own turnings.³

The characters are true and lifelike and possess a vision and a yearning symbolic of the people of their type. The story is one of hopes ever defeated and ever renewed. Every page is bright with the beauty and the mystery of life itself. Memorable about the tale of the drab life of Ellen Chesser are her yearnings for beauty that are never relinquished and the beautiful manner in which Miss Roberts relates these yearnings. Surely no one without similar experiences could so vividly relate them.

The story of The Time of Man is told wholly from the author's feminine viewpoint which she has cleverly

2. Ibid., p. 382.

3. Ibid., p. 382.

and forcefully fused with that of the heroine. It deals primarily with the problems of the individual. Very early in the story Ellen realizes, "The world's little and you just set still in it and that's all there is."⁴ She also recognizes that the world is permanent and the individual but temporary. Much is made of the individual's feeling of proximity to the earth . . . the sounds, sights, odors. And perhaps the most significant interpretation presented here is that it is necessary for the individual to possess the will, the power to overcome the bonds of circumstances which threaten to enmesh him; physical wealth is not necessary; the important thing is "something comforting in her mind, like a drink of water after an hour of thirst . . ."⁵

My Heart and My Flesh, published the following year, has for its theme the search of Theodosia Bell for unity and meaning in life. The title of the book is derived from the Scripture: "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." The scene is a small Kentucky town, the counterpart of Miss Roberts's home town, and from discussions and descriptions in the book

4. Ibid., p. 3.

5. Ibid., p. 6.

the time is taken to be the first fifteen or twenty years of the present century. This story is also the story of a girl's life; it begins with Theodosia's young girlhood and continues for sixteen or seventeen years. Happiness for her seems elusive: after her mother's death she loses her best friends, realizes that she can never become a great musician, becomes fully aware of the cad that her father really is, and spends much of her time wondering what this life is all about. Happiness is restored to her at length after a long and serious illness and recuperation at the dilapidated farm home of her Aunt Doe, another family degenerate. The book is more philosophical and "mental" than any of the others, and the musings of the heroine seem to come from the pen of the author rather than from the lips and mind of Theodosia. Flashing panoramic scenes from Theodosia's childhood are shown against the background of one of the "best families" of the village. Even then we discern that she is not a normal child. As she visits her aunt accompanied by her grandfather and younger sister

. . . her joy in being there spread widely about her and suffused her knowledge of her aunt's way until she was scarcely sure that she was there at

all. Her joy in the farm and her pain in her aunt could not interfuse.⁶

While on this same visit her grandfather childishly reminisces and quotes Shelley.

Theodosia thought sometimes, when he read aloud, seeing his moving mouth running perpetually along the channels of song, that he must know some truths, some eternal, some ways unknown to her, and she would yearn with an inner sob of longing that he might impart this thing to her, whatever it might be.⁷

As Theodosia grows older, Annie (her sister) and her mother die, and the care of the household is Theodosia's responsibility. She continues her study of the violin, hoping to carry out the desire of her grandfather that she become an accomplished musician. She is visited by Conway, Frank, and Albert, three young men of the town. She is told by her teacher that music must come from the soul, and she wonders about the soul and what it is. Her desires for excellence in music increase.

I want to play the fiddle to the end of the earth. I want to go to the end of music, and look over at the edge at what's on the other side.⁸

From the half-articulate murmurings of her grandfather during a serious illness, she is prompted to look at some old papers hidden away by her grandfather, which reveal

6. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, My Heart and My Flesh (New York: The Viking Press, 1927), p. 41.

7. Ibid., p. 44.

8. Ibid., p. 93.

to her that her father is the father of three mulattoes in the town. A short time after this discovery Theodosia is forced to lock her own door against her father. She has just about decided to accept the repeated offer of Albert to become his wife when he comes to tell her goodbye, accompanied by Flo Agnew, a new girl in the town with whom he has fallen in love. Shortly after that Conway is burned to death. In desperation for company and urged from within, Theodosia goes to visit Lethe and Americy, the two half-whites who she knows are her sisters. Later she takes Stiggins, her slobbering half-brother, with her. Her grandfather dies and her father leaves for Paducah. Everything that is hers must be sold. She wonders; she ceases wondering with this thought: "Who am I that I should know?" While she is visiting the negro women Lethe leaves to kill Ross, her man who has been found unfaithful. After this episode Theodosia becomes very ill and in her delirium tells that she has murdered Ross. As she improves, her doctor suggests that she go to the home of her Aunt Doe to recuperate. The house has degenerated with her aunt and is filled with dogs who even litter in the wide halls. For a long while Theodosia is too ill even to care; later,

books, frequent visits from Frank, and an itinerant salesman are her only contacts. She is visited by many and varied and strange voices and her life and the lives of those around her are reviewed. There come from them strange sentences about the categories of the flesh. She says, "Oh, God, I believe, and there's nothing to believe."

At once a vivid appearance entered her mind, so brilliant and powerful that her consciousness was abashed. Larger than the world, more spacious than the universe, the new apparition spread through her members and tightened her hands so that they knotted suddenly together . . . her body spread widely and expanded to its former reach, and the earth came back, herself acutely aware of it. A pleasure that she still lived to participate in this recognition caught her throat with a deep sob . . . "I'm still alive," she sang under her breath, "I'm alive, I'm alive!"⁹

From the peddler she learns of a vacancy in a rural school nearby, and she is able to secure the position. She is very happy here, staying for a few weeks with each family of the community. At last great peace settles over her. The concluding pages of this book, following the confusion, frustration, and repulsive incidents of the main narrative, are overwhelming in

9. My Heart and My Flesh, pp. 255-256.

their beauty and simplicity.

The leaves of the poplar tree lifted and turned, swayed outward and all quivered together, holding the night coolness. The steps returned to the pasture going unevenly and stopping, going again, restless. They went across the hollow place and came back again toward the rise where the cows lay. They walked among the sleeping cows, but these did not stir, for it was a tread they knew.¹⁰

And so the story ends.

As can be readily seen, this story also deals with the problem of the individual, even more so than The Time of Man, since it deals absolutely with the problems of an individual who is not a representative of any particular group or society. The story seems to be a counterpart of the life of the author in many ways; the time and scene are particularly reminiscent of the time of Miss Roberts. It is a well known fact that as a young person she strove toward artistry in much the same manner that Theodosia longed for excellency in music. A person of Miss Roberts's temperament is bound to have suffered much, and she has been handicapped throughout her life by ill health. And surely she, like the heroine, has searched for long for "unity and meaning

10. Ibid., p. 300.

in life." She, of course, has achieved success and has realized her ambitions. Miss Roberts here again emphasizes the fact that the will to continue is centered in the human organism. Early in life Theodosia wonders over "truths and externals," and throughout the book the importance of education and knowledge is stressed. Her belief that "small talents are treason" is also comparable to her own life. She also says in a moment of desperation: "O God, I believe and there's nothing to believe." In spite of her resolves she is ever aware of her own insignificance. She says, "Who am I that I should know?" She is always conscious of self, and wonders what her part is in the scheme of things. "This is my spirit, my soul. It's here. This unit. I can almost touch it with my words . . . I perceive the earth, myself imbedded into it, attached to it at all points."¹¹ This book emphasizes the ugly aspects of life and is told from within rather than from without.

Jingling in the Wind, a fantasy published in 1928, is entirely different from anything else that Miss Roberts has written and for that reason it will be referred to but infrequently in this thesis. It is a peculiar story,

11. Ibid., p. 186.

having for its hero one Jeremy Jessup of Jason County, a professional rainmaker and one unexcelled in his field. He is a poet and lives with his brother and sister-in-law who try to influence him in his work after they have been urged to do so by their friends. His companions are largely the production of his imagination and consist largely of queer insects and animals. Such a life is lonely for him and he longs for flesh-and-blood companions. He leaves his own locale to attend the Rainmakers's Convention which is held in the metropolis, and while there he is practically worshipped as being the greatest rainmaker of them all. On this trip he goes first to Hummingbird, a busy little town, and from it takes a motorbus which finally breaks down "beside a liquidambar tree a few paces from a gnarled thornbush." While thus stalled, the characters indulge in the telling of stories, much as in The Canterbury Tales, and it is these stories that practically fill the volume. They are short, satiric, and amusingly complicated. In her account of the convention in the city Miss Roberts satirizes various present-day people and conventions which obviously do not meet with her favor. At this convention they conduct a search for a poet, but the poets are all gone since they have been sent out of

America by foundations and philanthropists offering fat prizes and fellowships to keep them in Europe. The story has a beautiful style and there are sentences and paragraphs of rare beauty. The satiric elements are also well-handled, but it is not always easy to see what is behind the subtle references. It has been said that Miss Roberts worked on this novel as a sort of relaxation from some of her other works and so it may be understood that this is merely a lyrical fantasy. It lacks the popular appeal of her other novels and for that reason it has been read less than any of her other books. It is perhaps for this reason that the author has written no more like it.

The Great Meadow has for its theme the power of man's mind and will over outer circumstances. To develop such a theme Miss Roberts tells the story of a young Virginia girl's trek to the wild lands of Kentucky in the 1770's. It is essentially the story of Diony Hall just as The Time of Man is the story of Ellen Chesser and as My Heart and My Flesh is the story of Theodosia Bell. Diony as a young girl is fascinated with the tales of the exploration and settlement of Kentucky which are brought to her in her comfortable Virginia home. She is particularly delighted with the tales that

are brought of the bravery of Daniel Boone. From these tales she first has the desire to make order out of chaos. "The passion spread widely through her and departed and her hands were still contriving the creamy fiber of a fleece."¹² Her natural gift of imagination is increased with the frequent perusal of letters her father receives from a boyhood companion. From these letters

Diony would imagine leisure and letter-writing, a courier waiting at the door, his horse tied to a post but impatient to be off.¹³

Berk Jarvis, a neighbor of the Halls, leaves for the new lands that have attracted all of the youths of Virginia, and while there he sends back a proposal of marriage to Diony. She accepts, because of her love for Berk and because of her desire to see and to live in these new lands. He returns and they are married. Almost immediately they begin their long journey to Kentucky.

Suddenly, in the tinkling of bells, she knew herself as the daughter of many, going back through Polly Brook, through the Shenendoah Valley and the Pennsylvania clearings and roadways, to England. . . . In herself then an

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12. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, The Great Meadow (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1932), p. 24.
 13. Ibid., p. 35.

infinity of hopes welled up, vague desires and holy passions for some better place, infinite regrets and rending farewells mingled and lost in the blended inner tinkle and clatter.¹⁴

The journey to Kentucky is accurately and vividly described, day by day, as is the life in Fort Harrod after their destination is reached. As she reaches the fort

Diony had a sudden overwhelming sense of this place as of a place she had known before. Feeling that she had been here before, that these events were the duplicate of some former happening, she left her little mare to graze by the trail and walked cautiously into a meadow.¹⁵

Soon after their arrival at Harrodsburg and soon after Diony has made adjustments to this new sort of life she is greatly impressed by an impromptu visit of Daniel Boone. "You always felt at home in the world," Diony said to him.

"You felt at home with what way the sun rises and how it stands overhead at noon, at home with the ways rivers run and the ways hills are. It's a gift you have, to be natured that way."¹⁶

"I'm not the Boone kind," she said, "I never was . . ."¹⁷

14. Ibid., p. 24.

15. Ibid., p. 173.

16. Ibid., p. 186.

17. Ibid., p. 187.

One day when she and Elvira, Berk's mother, are in the forest searching for food, Elvira is scalped by two Indians in her efforts to save the lives of Diony and her unborn child. For a long while Diony is very ill. Their son is born while Berk has gone in search of salt. Soon he makes good his promise to revenge the death of his mother. "Her life was cut apart, Berk going, and into the rent poured anger."¹⁸ Berk fails to return and finally news comes that he has been killed; Diony is reluctant to accept this as being a true fact. She continues to worry: "I'm a strong woman, but I'm not of the Boone kind. I'm the other sort."¹⁹ Finally she consents to marry Evan Muir, Berk's friend, who accompanied them on the trip from Virginia. Sometime after their son is born, they are surprised to see Berk Jarvis walk out of the wilderness. Berk places no blame on Diony or on Muir. He explains at length his horrible experiences with the Indians and tells how he managed to escape them. Later Berk and Evan argue over the right to possess Diony and the cabin. Diony deliberates and then chooses Berk because he is more of the Boone kind.

18. Ibid., p. 247.

19. Ibid., p. 274.

The whole mighty frame of the world stood about her then, all the furniture of the earth and the sky, she a minute point, conscious, soothing the hunger of a child. Beene, she contrived, was a messenger to the chaotic part, a herald, an envoy there, to prepare it for civil men.²⁰

Miss Roberts has contrived once more to present her theme and her own ideas without entering herself at all. Instead, her point of view is intermingled with that of the heroine in such a matter that they become one. The importance of the mind is emphasized here in a stronger way than in any of her other fiction. While still a girl, Diony is impressed with the words which she reads about knowledge which she reads from one of her father's books: "All knowledge is of three sorts, that derived by way of the senses, that by way of the passions, and ideas formed by help of memory and imagination."²¹ It is a significant fact, also, that in his country home in Virginia at the time of the Revolutionary War, Diony's father has such books as Berkeley's The Principles of Human Knowledge. It is from him that Diony inherits her keen mind and her incentive for knowledge. Thomas Hall is an unusual character in this story of early Virginia

20. Ibid., p. 338.

21. Ibid., p. 22.

and pioneer Kentucky, and it is easy to imagine such a character as being conceived in the image of Miss Roberts's own father. The author's treatment of this pioneer theme and the trite Enoch Arden theme is an unusual one, for she has made uppermost the power of man's mind and will over outer circumstances. All the way through, the mental triumphs over the physical, and it is through such power that Diony and Berk Jarvis triumph. Particularly strong in expressing this theme is a repetition of his speech to the Indians which Berk gives to Diony and Evan Muir in the dramatic conclusion of the story:

You put me in your kettle and you'll not eat one bit of my strength. You'll eat ne'er a thing but my weak part and you'll breed weakness in your bones. Iffen you don't learn better ways to make strength you are all doomed and you'll all go in the kettle of some better kind. You leave me be . . . When life goes outen me the strong part goes too, and I take it wherever I go when I go away from here . . . You couldn't eat ne'er a bit of it. Whe'r I go to heaven or whe'r I go to hell or whe'r I go no place at all, wherever I go from here my strength goes along with me. I take my strong part and you'll never get it inside your kettle and you couldn't eat it inside your mouth. God, what a race it is here, to think it could eat strength the like of that.²²

22. Ibid., pp. 331-332.

Important also is Diony's classification of men, her admiration for Boone, and her decision to remain with Berk because he is more of the Boone kind in whom was personalized the power of reason over the wild life of the earth. From early girlhood, too, Diony strives to make order out of chaos, another recurring idea of the author. Perhaps in this book more than in any of the others is there attached the great importance of time in the lives of individuals, not in the successive passing of minutes, or days, or even years, but in the effect such changes have upon the physical and mental actions of the people.

A Buried Treasure is next in the Roberts chronology. Even after it was lengthened, the tale is little more than a short story divided into five parts. The theme is that the human spirit is the buried treasure par excellence, although at first reading the story seems to lack the deep meaning of her other books. The theme is derived from the beautifully-worded thoughts and reminiscences of Philly Blair, the heroine, at the end of the story. This story is quite simple and is the sort of fiction that is suitable for oral reading since it exemplifies the beautiful rhythm and word-choice for which its creator has become famous. The tale is one of

Andy Blair, a poor Kentucky farmer, and his wife, Philly. Their prosaic manner of living is interrupted when Andy finds a pot of gold hidden in an old tree stump which he is chopping for firewood. After much elation and speculation over their new-found treasure Andy and Philly decide to give a party at which their great fortune will be revealed to the neighbors. As the time for the party approaches, however, they become afraid that such an action will result in the money being stolen from them. As a last minute resort, they persuade two of the neighborhood youths, long harboring the idea of matrimony, to marry at their home as a surprise for their friends who have gathered, speculating what the surprise is all about. The rest of the story deals with the simultaneous joy and constant fear of the Blairs regarding their new-found wealth and of the reconciliation of the newly-wedded couple with the girl's irate father. The story is also mingled with the story of Ben Shepherd who comes to this community in search of some ancestral data which he hopes to discover on the tombstones of the various family graveyards and from his questioning of the people of the neighborhood. All ends peacefully after two thieves who have come under the guise of housepainters are thwarted

and the precious treasure is once more hidden away from the house. After things are settled and Philly has time to think, she realizes that perhaps, after all, the consequences of treasures are few. This change in attitude is brought about chiefly by recalling the life of her deceased daughter and by her recollections that there comes the idea that the human spirit, life, the individual, are of great importance and that they are greater than material things by which so much store is set. The story occupies only a few days in the lives of a few people in a small community. The events develop steadily from the discovery of the gold to the conclusion, which is once more a scene of rural quietude and peace. Particularly impressive are the descriptions of the warm June days and the Kentucky landscapes. The attention attached to the importance of the individual is particularly striking here, especially at the conclusion. It is also significant to notice the unimportance which the author relegates to material wealth in contrast to the importance of individual ideas and thought. There is also revealed the questioning attitude about life and the ways of life which are also noticed in other

Roberts novels. Brought forward, also, are the connections between man and the natural world which surrounds him. Although a great portion of the book is devoted to the love story of the community youths, it remains unromantic and lacks the force to make it seem real. Miss Roberts fails steadily and consistently to make her lovers and her few love scenes dynamic. The greater part of the time the romance of the young couples is left to the reader's imagination.

Perhaps the greatest change in the writing of this author came with He Sent Forth A Raven, published in 1935, which has for its theme the relationship of man to society and to God, and in which she attempts to handle the conflict between individualism and communal well-being. Although the expressions of these ideas are clothed in a story which is original and captivating, the combinations lead to a first impression of incoherence and confusion.

Stoner Drake made a vow, solemnly spoken, weighted with passionate words. If Joan Drake should die he would never set his foot on God's earth again.²³

These words open the book and are repeated at intervals to provide a sort of key to the entire novel. The story is of the fulfillment of this vow. Stoner Drake, hardened by the loss of his second young wife, manages to keep the promise and yet

23. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, He Sent Forth A Raven (New York: The Viking Press, 1935), p. 1.

be able to manage a two-hundred-acre Kentucky farm by building a bridge from a second-story balcony to an adjoining building. Every event in the story is subordinated to his demands and whims. With him live Martha, the only surviving child of his first wife, and Jocelle, the daughter of his dead son. He manages to break Martha permanently by accusing her of harlotry when she is visited by her lover, a young man whom she met at the university. Jocelle provides his chief contact with the outside world, and it is as much her story as it is his. Perpetual guests at the farm are two half-crazed rustics, Jack Briggs, an itinerant preacher, and Sol Dickon, eccentric carpenter who has written a book about the universe which he calls "The Cosmos." Other frequent visitors at the farm are Walter and J. T., Jocelle's cousins, and John Logan Treer, the county farm agent who serves as Miss Roberts's mouthpiece arguing for the values of communal interests. The outbreak of the World War greatly upsets the inhabitants of the household. There follows much argument against war and all of its horrors. The boys enlist after Walter has humiliated Jocelle on the day of his departure. Treer leaves after pledging himself to Jocelle. Later word comes of Walter's death;

this news is closely followed by the celebration of the Armistice. After Treer returns he is insulted by Drake in much the same manner that the old man ruined his daughter's life by making a lewd thing of her beautiful love affair. Treer, however, knows the situation much better and marries Jocelle during his allotted one-hour stay at the house. They leave, but Jocelle returns later to the home of her grandfather to bear her daughter, Roxanna. Drake's mind eventually becomes softened, and he even forgets the name of the woman whose death caused his awful vow. He asks Logan to return with his family to care for the farm and himself. It is characteristic of this author to have her books end in peace and contentment after much frustration. This one ends after the old man has decided to favor Treer by asking him to return to the farm. "He nodded his head, his eyes were still bright. His smile came and went, faintly moving his thin face. He walked back to the hearth and sat in his accustomed place."²⁴ Simple as the story may sound, it is complex and tightly woven; Miss Roberts spent five years in the writing of it. There is much description of the work at the farm; there is also much that is weird and uncanny. There is little action; it is chiefly a novel

24. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, He Sent Forth a Raven, p. 255.

of words and more of the mind than of the actions of the body. In connection with the book written by old Dickon there is much talk of the cosmos. Outstandingly new traits of this book, however, are the arguments against all the evils of war and for some kind of collectivism. Miss Roberts speaks against war through Martha, Jocelle, and Drake, and through Walter when he visits the farm on furlough. She satirically resents "the war to end all wars." Walter says at the outbreak of the war:

"Everybody states what he is fighting for might get a showdown. [Sic] But it'll be to protect American bizness wherever she floats a flag. Bizness as usual. Food blockade. Munition blockade. God it's a puken age!"²⁵ . .

After he returns on furlough he says in part:

"I know where I'm going. I know what's there. I've found . . . Crawl in a shell-hole and die with the hungry rats if you're not already dead twice over with your guts one place and your brains another . . . Duty first and then pleasure. Target practices. There's not a blamed blasted son-of-a-bitch in the company can crack 'em off neater than yours truly . . ." ²⁶

Jocelle in her delirium following the incident with Walter on the day he left for war thought that

25. Ibid., p. 255.

26. Ibid., pp. 157-158.

. . . she would give birth to some further monstrosity of war, as if she would tear a Gargantuan incestuous birth through her breast . . . War, violent and fearful, self-justifying, religious in preparation for battle, it forgave itself while it worked ruin upon the earth.²⁷

Evidently Miss Roberts has also been disturbed by the conditions of the farmers around whom she has lived all of her life and it is because of this upset that she speaks in favor of collectivism. Throughout the book various characters express their ideas on the subject and subsequently suggest measures for reform. The whole idea is summarized in this speech which Treer makes to Stoner Drake:

"Deeper than his personal desire there is in every man a need for his kind. Man is a collective creature, a focus where many men, living or dead, come together. A world of shared experiences that would at last lead to a world of shared good, shared comforts, shared security. Left to himself from birth man would become a jittering animal."²⁸

The author is once more emphasizing the individual instead of society and she regards individual importance as being most significant. The necessity of education is

27. Ibid., p. 167.

28. Ibid., p. 148.

mentioned here, too; both Martha and Jocelle have the benefits of "higher" education, Martha at the university and Jocelle at the seminary. Here again the handling of the romantic element in human lives is unsatisfactory. Religion is given attention through the preaching of Jack Briggs, a lay preacher of the evangelical sort, and the frequent accounts of his conversion. Drake, however, remains adamant and will listen to none of them. As a whole, Miss Roberts has not succeeded very well in the handling of this theme. It is an impressionistic, not a realistic book. The situations are not real, and her characters do not develop into the real, life-like, loving people of her other books. She perhaps was too greatly obsessed with her own ideas to put them into a form that would enlighten and entertain. She attempted to show the relationship of man to his fellows and to build up a just relationship between them.

In her latest novel, Black Is My Truelove's Hair, Miss Roberts returned to her former form of writing and subject matter, much to the delight of her critics, most of whom were utterly discouraged and disgusted with He Sent Forth A Raven. In this story she handles the principle of return, showing how a person through his

own willingness may overcome his mistakes of the past and return to his former state of mind and life. This is another story of the life of a young woman, though it occupies only about one year in her life. Enough is given of the past to make the reader feel that he knows the character, even though only an excerpt from an entire life is given. Dena Jones is at first seen with a torn dress, a troubled face, and downcast eyes, "walking a narrow roadway in the hour of the dawn."²⁹ She hears footsteps and is afraid. She leaves the rural highway and continues her journey in a roughly plowed field which leads her away from the possibility of meeting people. After a long journey, painful at every step, she reaches the home of her sister, Fronia, with whom she has lived for several years at the edge of a small Kentucky village. Through her stream-of-consciousness and her conversation with Fronia and Nat Journeyman, a neighboring "orchardist-philosopher," it is discovered that Dena left Fronia's home eight days earlier with Will Langtry, a truckdriver whom she thought she loved. After they had traveled awhile, Dena discovered that Langtry did not love her and that he had no idea of

29. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, Black Is My True Love's Hair (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), p. 1.

marrying her. The look in his eyes told her that. Fronia receives her sister kindly, but Dena thinks constantly of the escapade which upset her dreadfully, and she is haunted by the fear that he will return someday to make good his promise to return and kill her. Adjustments are hard for her to make in the village, although she is helped by the kindness of her sister and a few intimate friends. The story passes from one summer to the next. (Only a careful reading will show that the action is not continuous.) Dena spends her time helping her sister with the house work, working in the garden, caring for the poultry, discussing her plight and the plights of others with Journeyman, and finally falling in love with Cam Elliott, son of the village miller. All the while she is mentally threatened with the return of Langtry. She receives two messages that he has not forgotten his promise and that he will return someday soon to fulfill it. The bans of marriage between Dena and Elliott have been published twice when Langtry does return. Dena hides, but eventually in the night as she goes to Nat Journeyman's for protection, Langtry finds her. He shoots, but his aim is poor. "I couldn't hit y'," he sobbed. "Twice I

tried. My hand went outward and up . . .³⁰ She tells him to try again, but he weeps and wonders why he would ever try to do such a thing. Journeyman appears, buries the gun, and promises to shield Langtry until morning. Dena then leaves for home, thinking of Cam, and peace at last is restored to her troubled mind.

She went evenly forward, up the small rise and around the faint curve where the way gave slightly forward toward the right but veered back and rejected the curve thenceforth, as if none had been. The lane closed about the sound of her feet and muffled this to one step and a step, that went in a solitary tread along the narrow roadway.³¹

Simple as the story may appear, it has much meaning and has been carefully planned and meticulously wrought. Throughout the story there is the constant dread in Dena's mind, a dread which she cannot escape even in the prosaic life that she leads in the small Kentucky town. Suspense is there; the reader feels Dena's emotions with her. The story swells to a powerful climax, reached in a picturesque Kentucky moonlight. Following this rising of tempo there follows Miss Roberts's characteristic conclusion of peace and quiet following much physical and mental

30. Ibid., p. 278.

31. Ibid., p. 281.

anguish. More important, perhaps, than any of these things, is the admirable way the author has handled "the principle of return." Dena says early in the story, trying to impress herself with the idea that all of life is not gone for her, "I'm alive. I got a right to live."³² Her life, her actions, and her conversation lead to the idea that we should try to save a little life for ourselves. There is also much discussion as to what constitutes right and wrong. The idea presented is that "there's no rights or wrongs to anything," that all is a mental attitude. The importance of religion and prayer is emphasized. Dena is the most religious of all of Miss Roberts's characters. A leading principle brought forward in this book is that what will be will be. She also thinks that each person is really three people: what one is, what one thinks he is, and what others think of him. Dena also searches for order out of chaos. She is also visibly affected by the weather and nature, and as she spends a great deal of her time outdoors it is here that she does most of her thinking and that we get an insight into her character. This

32. Ibid., p. 7.

book is not particularly philosophical or psychological but from the many streams-of-consciousness of its heroine we get many of the ideas of its author.

The short stories of Miss Roberts, most of which were combined into a volume called The Haunted Mirror in 1933, offer approximately these same thoughts. Most of them portray certain incidents in the life of people similar to those who occupy the pages of her other books. A beautiful story called "The Sacrifice of the Maidens" describes the rites by which a nun takes her final vows. In "Record at Oak Hill" we find a character with communistic ideas like those of Treer in He Sent Forth A Raven. Under the Tree, Miss Roberts's volume of poetry which appeared in 1922, consists largely of childhood reminiscences, described not from an adult viewpoint but through the eyes of a child, thus making a unique volume and one that is particularly striking, especially after one has read this author's prose contributions, which are never really simple or childlike. These poems of childhood show that even as a very young child Miss Roberts was of the immensity of life and of the world. The poems

are written so convincingly that it is easy for one to believe that they must be the actual recollections of a child, not of an adult. Her last book, Song in a Meadow, 1940, appeared too late to be included in the thesis. ✓

CHAPTER III

HER ART

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The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Miss Roberts's art of story-telling in terms of the organization, treatment of time, place, and consciousness, and style. The discussion of the art will be related to the subject matter outlined in the preceding chapter and will lay a basis for an analysis of her ideas.

The novels are of average length, but they are divided into but comparatively few chapters and these chapters are not given headings, but are divided into certain divisions affecting the action of the story. Ordinarily the only further division is made in the spacing between paragraphs in the story. In He Sent Forth A Raven there are a few of these subdivisions which have titles, but there are no more instances of this. The divisions as a whole are few, as the story is divided into only a few major blocks, and run smoothly and definitely from the introduction to the conclusion. Events which occurred prior to the action of the "present" time are related only casually, usually in the streams of consciousness and in the conversation. Details are

thus added to increase the reader's information in such a manner that the thread of the story will not be dropped, and at the same time the reader is guided in his understanding and appreciation of the story. It is characteristic that each of Miss Roberts's novels ends amidst peace and tranquility after much mental and physical anguish on the part of the heroine. The conclusion is usually made more forceful and at the same time more peaceful by having the finale take place in a setting outdoors and concluding with a beautiful word picture of nature.

Two lines of development are always outstanding and are closely connected with each other. These are the personality development of a main character in each book and the leading up to a crisis, the warnings of which are always evident. In each story the leading character, always a girl, is faced with great problems and decisions; the solving of these problems forms the climax of the story. This chapter will attempt to analyze the other various aspects of Miss Roberts's art in relation to these two aspects of her story pattern. These are characterization and treatment of time, space, and consciousness.

There are but few characters in each book, for

the purpose of emphasis and detailed portrayal. In every instance the story is built around the life of the leading figure, in whom one is always able to visualize the author. Since the author has never cared for crowds, it is only natural that her fiction is not crowded with people, especially with any who are not directly connected with the central figure. As a result, Miss Roberts's philosophy of life is derived from an essentially individual viewpoint.

As has been stated before, each of these novels is concerned primarily with one person and is an excerpt, varying in length and intensity, of her life. Almost without exception, the character is introduced as being aware of her personal identity and in that manner she is made known to the reader. Throughout the book she is shown chiefly through her emotions and thoughts; as a result, the delineation of character is more of a character sketch than a personal description. Occasionally there is a bit of personal description interspersed, but it is rare and is subordinated to some other plan, frequently to show that the person is changing physically. There are recurring characteristics and descriptions. The heroine is never quite satisfied with her lot and is always trying to change herself or

her surroundings in some manner. She is always a dreamer, taking fragments of conversation or printed material and weaving from them fanciful tales of travel and finery for herself. More significant than these facts is the impending tragedy or crisis toward which the heroine is always drawn. In The Time of Man Ellen is always searching for physical and mental betterment, which she never finds although she does not give up the search and hope. The whole theme of My Heart and My Flesh is concerned with the efforts of Theodosia Bell to find unity and meaning in life; she becomes so obsessed with this idea that she temporarily loses her powers of reason. Jingling in the Wind lacks this, but in a certain degree even the Rainmaker is not satisfied with his lot and wishes to improve his social life. The crisis in The Great Meadow is, of course, the return of Berk to Diony after he has been gone for several years and she, in the meantime, has married another man. Her great plan and idea is to make order out of chaos and to make herself of "the Boone kind." The plot of A Buried Treasure becomes nil after Philly and Andy finally dispose of the treasure to their own satisfaction. The problem in He Sent Forth A Raven concerns not only Jocelle but her entire family and it

is a struggle between individualism and communal well-being. Dena Janes's problem in Black Is My Truelove's Hair is a problem concerning only the individual: her efforts to reestablish herself in society after she has cut herself away from it. Perhaps Ellen and Diony are the most vividly drawn of the girls and Jocelle lacks more of the embodiments of an actual character. The other characters in the books are mentioned and included in the stories only as they affect the central figure. The family is left in the background, and the men characters are usually not very striking. Ellen's father is scarcely mentioned, and not a man in My Heart and My Flesh is portrayed as having much power or reason; the single exception to this is Theodosia's grandfather. Her father is a cad against whom she must lock her own door, and her lovers are represented as being fickle always. Jeremy in Jingling in the Wind is of course a fanciful character and possesses but few real human attributes. In spite of the fact that Diony has two husbands, the two best represented men in The Great Meadow are her father and Daniel Boone, from whom she receives all her inspirations and hopes. Andy in A Buried Treasure is definitely subordinated to his wife. There are four men of widely divergent types in He Sent Forth A Raven:

Stoner Drake, whose vow forms the beginning of the story; the weak "communist," John Logan Treer; Sol Dickon, the eccentric carpenter who writes a book on the cosmos; and Jack Briggs, the reformed preacher. Because of his very nature, Drake is the strongest of these characters. Nat Journeyman, the philosopher who counsels Dena, is the only male character of any significance in Black Is My True Love's Hair. Her two lovers are but necessary characters. The characters are alike in that they represent rural or smalltown Kentucky folk but they differ in their desires, although the significant fact is that each is trying for her own happiness and content which is reached with the single exception of Ellen. She does not attain the security that has been the goal of a lifetime, but she remains happy and cheerful in the furtherance of her search. Each of Miss Roberts's heroines is given to deep and forceful thinking. The handling of this device, and the frequently recurring ideas of Miss Roberts and her characters will be discussed later.

Careful attention is also given to the handling of the time element in each of these novels. The author's purpose is to give her books a definite time setting, to indicate the importance of time in the lives of most

people, and to utilize her keen perception of time and nature. The following are the devices used to show the passage of time: the mention of days, months, seasons, and work on the farm; the age and descriptions of characters; historical events; the actual passage of time mentioned; the birth and age of the children; actual dates; the passage of day; contemporary figures; and the customs of the times. In the mention of the passing of days the author mentions the events of Monday, Tuesday, etc., and she also utilizes such expressions as "It was another day." The months are mentioned not only by names but by various descriptions as well. Her descriptions of the seasons, coupled with the various farm tasks, are most striking. "The grass was high and full with seeds and the white clover was in bloom . . . late June."¹ "By autumn the turkeys had grown almost to maturity and they filled the lot with their dark, bronze, brown waves of motion."²

The days flowed swiftly around the tasks of garnering, the burying of the potatoes, the plucking of the corn. Apples had been dried in the sun and beans were laid by. The pumpkins were brought in from the fields in wagon lots and a choice few were set in Miss Tod's

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1. The Time of Man, p. 64.
 2. Ibid., p. 97.

cellar for winter food. Then Henry began to plow his tobacco field for its stand of rye and the season was done.³

Frequent mention is made of gardening, the preparation of food, and the preparation of clothing for a certain season to indicate the passing of time as it affects the characters of the story.

Descriptions of the characters also show the passing of time:

She seemed to be aging though she was but twenty-six. Her brown hair was lightly scattered with flying threads of white that spread in an untamed spray, that drifted unwanted and unassimilated to the brown mass.⁴

"Jocelle being seven years old . . ."⁵ "When Jocelle was in her thirteenth year."⁶ "She knew herself for a slim maid, one hundred and fifteen pounds in weight, eighteen years old, slim at the hips, long round legs and slim ankles."⁷ "She grew tall in a year. Her rounded breasts were uptilted-- two small graceful cups -- as if they would offer drink to some spirit of the air."⁸

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3. The Time of Man, p. 110.
 4. He Sent Forth A Raven, p. 125.
 5. Ibid., p. 27.
 6. Ibid., p. 55.
 7. Ibid., p. 98.
 8. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 61.

In The Great Meadow and in He Sent Forth A Raven the author uses actual dates to substantiate her story. These two books are more definitely placed as to time than any of the others. The Great Meadow, of course, is a story of the settlement of Kentucky and the facts related in it are historically accurate. In this book she mentions actual dates, men, and events, which give a contemporary setting for the tale. The story begins in 1774 and develops progressively from that point. Later 1776 is mentioned and is followed by news received in the Hall household that Congress has declared the colonies free. The mention of George Washington and his military maneuvers also lends an air of authenticity. After Diony and her husband are located in Fort Harrod, such an event as the siege of Boonesborough gives the story a definite time. Actual dates are also presented in He Sent Forth A Raven near the beginning of the story and after an interlude of several years the World War fills much of the lives of the characters. The first date is 1901 and the story lasts until a few years following the Armistice. Near the beginning several dates aid in presenting in retrospect the childhood of Jocelle. The progress of the World War is followed rather

closely throughout this book, too.

In other instances the author merely tells us that time has passed, but this is done effectively: "The kitchen clock pecked dizzily at time and let it pass unhindered."⁹ "Days passed, flowing without monotony, for the people on the farm made a difference between one day and another."¹⁰ "It is the four arc'd clock of the seasons ticking its tick-tock around the year"¹¹ "It was late morning and the beginning of summer."¹² Of course there are mentioned many customs of life that aid in placing the time of the story. Such a small thing as the installation of the first electric lights in the small Kentucky town where Theodosia lives in My Heart and My Flesh shows the time of the century.

There is also expressed an emotional time in each of the books by Miss Roberts; that is, there is a certain mood of day or night, of light or darkness, expressed in each. In The Time of Man the feeling given is one of fresh air and sunlight and the smell of cool Kentucky soil. Perhaps this feeling is most vividly portrayed because Ellen is always a girl who loves the clean fresh

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9. The Great Meadow, p. 119.
 10. He Sent Forth A Raven, p. 177.
 11. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 27.
 12. Black Is My True Love's Hair, p. 79.

air and who spends most of her time outside helping her father and later her husband with farm tasks, such as setting tobacco plants, and caring for the garden and the fowls. Too, the people are always moving from one place to another, and with this moving there comes the description of the countryside and musings of the value of each place as it is passed. There is but little of the action of this story which takes place at night. This feeling of outside daylight fits in admirably with the general theme of the book.

My Heart and My Flesh is psychological more than any of the other books, but the major part of the action outside of the mind takes place in the out-of-doors. In spite of this fact, however, the feeling of sunlight and fresh air does not prevail and much of the story is morbid and bitter. Even the outdoor scenes are cluttered up with thought of fear and the indoors. A feeling of hopelessness and despair is evidenced and in general, a much more pessimistic note than is found elsewhere impresses the reader. At the beautiful conclusion, following Theodosia's reawakening, there is given another of the beautiful pastoral scenes and the story ends in bright sunlight on the landscape and in the heart of its leading figure. Jingling in the Wind is

similar in type to these, as it is at times a story of the outside, abounding in minute descriptions of nature. There is, however, an atmosphere of sheltered space rather than open space. The Great Meadow has two divisions: besides the feeling of the prairie and the broad gateway leading to a new land and a new life, there is at times the feeling that the people are shut up within walls or within themselves. At the beginning of the story we find Diony, along with the rest of the Hall family, happily confined to the four walls of their comfortable home and the shady pastures of the acres surrounding the domicile. With the tales of the exploits of a new land, however, the walls are not sufficient to contain the spirit of Diony, and she is at last able to escape them. The mood from then until she reaches Kentucky is influenced by the natural surroundings of the characters and the very fact that they must of necessity spend their time outside. After their destination is reached, the feeling becomes divided again. Diony divides her time among her cabin and the rest of the fort and occasional visits outside. After Fort Harrod is reached there follows but little description of nature. A Buried Treasure has been called

a summer idyll,¹³ and it really is little more than that. The atmosphere of the entire story, brief as it is, is that of Kentucky in June: a Kentucky where "the grain fields turned about with the turning of the land, arising and dipping past the locust trees, held the land together and made a faintly darkened line against the brightening wheat."¹⁴ Practically all of the action takes place in the warm sunlight or in the light of a beautiful moon, and this feeling of light passes through the entire story. Even in the scenes where Andy and Philly are so deeply concerned with the fate of them and their gold, this feeling of brightness does not wholly pass. He Sent Forth A Raven is another book whose action takes place within the confines of a limited area and within the little and distorted minds of its characters. The vow of its leading masculine figure keeps the greater part of the action within the house, and with the exception of a few scattered descriptions of nature and of the work being done on the farm, all other places are but mentioned in the story. Even the great war is reenacted within this little

13. Janney, F. Lamarr, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts," Sewanee Review, Vol. XLV, No. 4, October-December, 1937, p. 399.

14. Roberts, Elizabeth Madox, A Buried Treasure (New York: The Viking Press, 1932), p. 65.

space and discussed only as it affects the few people. As a result, the emotional tone is one of grief, of worry, and despair, in the time of darkness. Black Is My True Love's Hair is more closely related to A Buried Treasure than to any of the others, since it is definitely a story of outside daylight. The great part of the action takes place outside; the feeling of light and warmth pervades the story. There are only a few incidents in the entire book which do not occur outside and impart the feeling of a time that is warm and a time that is light. It is interesting to note that even the powerful climax of this book takes place outside on a warm summer evening. It is also interesting to observe that practically every important incident of each of these books occurs within the spring or summer months. At times the winter months are neglected altogether, and at other times they are barely mentioned. The author has not been able to observe the workings of nature to any great extent during the winter months in the past several years since the greater part of her winters are spent in the Florida sunshine. This also accounts for her emphasis on light and sunshine throughout her fiction.

The time-span of the action given in the majority

of the books is from childhood through maturity. The Time of Man is the longest in regard to the time of life covered. A Buried Treasure and Black Is My True Love's Hair are the shortest in respect to time covered. In each of these books there is given the aspect of a "limitless" time; that is, practically any of the stories could have occurred at any time and they are far-reaching in the effect produced. The theme is one to enlist the interest and activity of man at all times. The very theme and title of her first book show that Miss Roberts is interested primarily in the problems of man throughout the ages, and not for any particular space of time. As was indicated in the previous discussion of the devices utilized to portray the passage of time, The Great Meadow and He Sent Forth A Raven are more definitely placed as to years than any of the others are. In spite of that fact, however, The Great Meadow reaches into the past and into the future in its implications. As Diony starts her journey into the wild lands of Kentucky she reflects and goes back through her ancestors into the years. She is at the same time drawn into the future and into her new home; by her desire to make order out of chaos and her wish to make the world a place fit for civilized men's

children to be born into, she is definitely connected with the future.

A final aspect of Miss Roberts's treatment of time is her concern with the influence of time upon the individual. There is a psychological treatment of time related to the consciousness of the central character as well as an objective treatment of time related to the natural time, the seasons and work, of country folk. She is more interested in the individual's concern with time than she is in presenting chronological details of days, weeks, or years. By such a treatment, greater emphasis is placed upon time.

This same dualism is to be seen in her treatment of place; that is, Miss Roberts is interested in treating place both objectively and subjectively. She shows place as it is important in setting the scene of the story and later as it affects the consciousness of the individual.

Kentucky is the scene of all of her stories. She describes the villages and farms, the places which she has known always and where she has lived all of her life. Throughout the books the city is spoken of as a remote society and the emphasis is placed entirely upon the country, a fact which is not difficult to understand if

one considers that Miss Roberts writes entirely of the people and places she knows best.

To present her idea of place, Miss Roberts uses these three plans almost exclusively: the actual mention of names--towns, cities, rivers, and other geographical features; lengthy and minute descriptions, meticulous in detail; and the work and customs of various localities. Each little town is given a definite name, familiarly a counterpart of the author's native Springfield. In addition to this fictitious name of the locale, each story mentions such familiar places as Louisville, Frankfort, and Bowling Green to definitely place the less familiar scenes. In The Great Meadow the route traveled from Virginia to Kentucky is described accurately and fully and includes the names of the various rivers, passes, and trails over which the settlers passed. The others are less definite. In each book the author presents several descriptions of the town, the farm, or the surrounding territory in order that the reader may have a sense of the surroundings. Following is a description of Wolflick, the locale of He Sent Forth A Raven, showing how carefully the author describes the towns of which she writes:

The land rolled in broad undulations of green if the season were moist, or of brown during the dry autumn months, and the landscape was not unlike the swell of an active sea, lifting in large billows or sinking into a trough. The roads rayed outward from the towns, going as the land went, rolling in constant curves around the hillsides or was sufficient soft limestone to make a firm roadbed, or near the creeks the roads were often made of gravel. Later, the coming of gasoline traffic brought changes in the methods of road-building. A few roads were broadened to become boulevards between the large towns. The inland counties then had but one or two good roads that were quickly whipped to dust by the motor vehicles, and the network of county roads became ill-tended lanes over which vehicles jolted as best they might. Thus Wolflick became year by year a more remote place, lying far, on a crossroad, scarcely visible except by those who had some urgent need to go there.¹⁵

The house is also described in great detail, even to giving the number of rooms, the size of the rooms, and exact descriptions of doors, windows, and furniture. The most detailed description of a complete town is found in Black Is My Truelove's Hair, a part of which follows:

The village was shaped much like the letter n, if the letter were turned sidwise so that the open base of it lay toward the east. . . Across the top ran the road which was known as the Glen or the Glen Road, and the point where this line met the right-hand leg of the letter was the busy corner where an oil station

15. He Sent Forth A Raven, pp. 17-18.

dispensed fluids of three kinds out of tall blue and red fountains. Along this leg the highway swept to roll over a bridge a few hundred feet to the west and thus out of the county. The highway was identical with the right-hand leg of the n. A finery of appearances set this end of the village far above the left-hand side, where the road was but roughly paved and where Fronia's cabin made its humble and remote stand. At the corner beside the oil station was a mending shop, and across the way a food store and a drinking place where beer was sold. Farther eastward along the highway and at the right-hand base of the n, St. Mark's church with its churchyard, which was a lapping carpet of white and gray stones. The stone-dotted carpet spread and rolled with the rolling of the land, over two small hills and an intervening valley, for the village was old and many had died there.¹⁶

This is followed by a description of the houses and gardens of the town. Various details of farm work and work peculiar to the inhabitants of small towns are also interspersed throughout the novels to lend an air of authenticity.

In contrast to her treatment of actual places is Miss Roberts's use of "conceptual" place. This is frequently shown through the images of far-off places, brought about chiefly by the tales heard and occasionally by books read. Each of the heroines is given to "thinking a picture." Ellen always visualizes the home that is hers; Philly sees herself unequalled in her community after they

16. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, pp. 25-26.

have discovered the buried treasure; Diony sees a great state growing from the rugged Harrod's fort; Jocelle's mind pictures the horrors of war in explicit detail. In this connection, also, each of the girls has a sense of the world beyond her own realm. Confined as they all are to one place and without the privilege to travel afar, the girls never for a moment lose cognizance of the fact that without there is a vast territory and that they are but a small part of a tremendous society. Each thinks frequently of herself in relation to the world as a whole. Jocelle and Ellen are particularly fascinated by old geography books which they see. Diony, perhaps more than any of the others, is able to visualize a whole civilization outside her own. Each of the novels also presents a definite feeling of "inside" or "outside," which was discussed in relation to the conceptual time.

Miss Roberts's treatment of "inside" time and place are related to her emphasis upon the consciousness of the leading character, used chiefly to reveal the theme of the story and to portray more clearly the individual character. This is again related to the author's own life; she is a deep thinker who spends much

of her time alone and who solves many of her problems mentally. Much of the real background of each story is given by the stream-of-consciousness method. This is especially true of My Heart and My Flesh and Black Is My Truelove's Hair. There are two chief divisions of this consciousness: consciousness of self and consciousness of the world. Included in the consciousness of self are a desire for knowledge, desire for travel, desire for luxury, and personal emotions--hatred, love, fear, passion, desire, sorrow, security or insecurity, and a desire to restore order out of chaos. In the consciousness of self, the heroine is interested in these problems: concern over the world at large and the people who inhabit it; and awareness of the position of the individual in the world: "I got a right to live;" wonder over "truths and externals"--"what is this world, this life, all about?"; visions--"thinking a picture"--of faraway people and places. It is sufficient to note here that individual thought is a recurrent theme of this author and that it is regarded as being very important. Without the use of such methods, many of the subtle inferences would be overlooked or misunderstood. It is important to note also that the author has deftly handled this device, so that seldom, if ever, does it interfere with the clarity

or continuity of the story.

These characteristics of her art are related to a style that is peculiarly her own. The chief features of her style are her planned and polished sentences, her unusual vocabulary, her vivid and complete descriptions, her reproduction of the vernacular of the people of whom she writes, the Biblical quality of her prose, and the lyrical quality which predominates all.

Her sentences are carefully planned:

There were lovely girls in his mind as the sunset faded, as the light slanted away from his small ravine and gave it an early night. He wondered, feeling the nearness of the two, Robbie May and Bonnie, as they had passed him on the road, at the curious warmth that he had sometimes seen in the eyes of two, a boy and a girl, in the beginning of their kindness toward each other, and he wondered if this mark were ever upon himself. Then a fear arose within, and he thought that he would stay where he was and let well enough alone, turning straightway from this determination to contrive again, faint new desires arising. In his bold thinking he saw a long way ahead, leaping over the difficulties that surrounded him, seeing Robbie May and the other girl at Blair's party; and he thought that if he might dance once with each one of them he would be willing to accept his vacation as finished and call it well spent, that he would be willing to go back to the place from which he had come.¹⁷

Her descriptions are vivid and complete:

17. A Buried Treasure, ppl 106-107.

The afternoon was nearly spent but the men of the farms were busy in the fields and so there were no passers along the road. The light on the river was brilliant now and the water was burnished to silver and fire, for the sun was beyond it and but an hour from setting. From some of the cabin chimneys a thin line of woodsmoke arose to spread lightly toward the north and lie as a frayed feather among the trees. Supper fires were lit. A woman in a little bare pen beyond a tangle of green shrubs and before a tangle of river light beat on an old pan to call home her fowls. The sound was steady and the rhythms quick, the sort she always used for her hens, and thus only her own came clattering with wings outspread and long necks craned, from the roadside gravel. In another place another woman was calling her fowls in a three-toned cry, 'Chee-ah-Kee', and certain white hens with their broods were running toward the sound. The evening quiet of the hamlet and the music the women made to call the fowls was not disturbed by the hum of the passing motors that came but faintly into the dell.¹⁸

Miss Roberts has been faithful and accurate in her efforts to reproduce the vernacular of the people of whom she writes. She has emphasized the rhythm of speech of the country folk and has shown a difference between the speech of the educated and the uneducated.

'Cam is shy before a girl now because he's new come to man's estate. He's strong as a man should be, though, and sweet inside, and his mind full of some pretty girl he can't yet call by name, and he sleeps no more these moonlit nights than a mockingbird, and for the same reasons. . . Take notice to Cam, just a notice, and watch a little what a fine way he's got and how sweet he is inside take notice. . .'¹⁹

18. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, pp. 153-154.

19. Ibid., p. 161.

'Durned if here aint a louse,' one said.
 'Oh, shut up.'
 'Keep it to yourself, hit's your'n.'
 'Well it is one, now.'
 'Well kill hit then.'
 'Hit's a taterbug.'
 'Hit's a gnat or a flea, maybe.'
 'Flea your hind leg! Hit's a body louse!'
 'Step on it with your foot.'
 'What was it, Dorine?'
 'It was a spider, Mammy.'
 'Call hit a spider for manners!'²⁰

'If the Indian is not man enough to hold it let him give it over then;' he said. 'It's a land that calls for brave men, a brave race. It's only a strong race can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there.'²¹

The Biblical quality of Miss Roberts's fiction is indicated in such titles as He Sent Forth a Raven and My Heart and My Flesh. Both of these books show her attention to the Biblical style not only in manner of presentation but in the matter as well. The lyrical quality here is comparable to various parts of the Bible, particularly the Psalms.

The beautiful lyrical quality is most evident in her narration and description:

In January came a dry frozen time, hard and cold. Each cow made a long white breath in the morning air. Henry worked hard all day at fencing and Ellen was never done finding wood and bringing it to the cabin to keep the fire

20. The Time of Man, p. 118.
 21. The Great Meadow, p. 105.

on the hearth. In the night sometimes the lonely horse-hoofs went galloping along the beaten mold of the pasture road, thumping on the frozen dirt. The sound would waken her with a thrill of pleasure, a joy at being awakened for any purpose, at feeling herself suddenly alive again. Into the joy would come a sadness at the lonely throb of the horse's feet that beat dimmer on her ears and faded farther and farther away.²²

The hot weather beetles cried all day, making a clicking sound that burst out of the weeds and the grass, out of the half-grown corn and the thick tufts of the wheat. The grain fields turned about with the turning of the land, arising and dipping past the limits of the wire fences, rolling up into the washed-out places where a few locust trees held the land together and made a faintly darkened line against the brightening wheat. The land rolled forward toward the harvest, or it rolled backward toward the time of planting, toward the long sequence of harvests and plantings, moving backward, over and over, the soil turning, revolving under the plowings of many springs.²³

Miss Roberts frequently uses short, staccato sentences for emphasis. Very often the sentences, both in narration and in conversation, are not true sentences but only phrases giving an impression of lingering thought and suggesting a stream-of-consciousness. She also uses the device of repetition and enumeration for effect. Stoner Drake's vow is repeated nearly a dozen times in He Sent Forth A Raven, as well as are his distaste for war and his interest in the

22. The Time of Man, p. 105.

23. A Buried Treasure, p. 65.

farm. Likewise, the author uses frequent enumeration of details.

Logan gone, the soil elements were delineated gayly with Martha or read from the journals-- water, carbon, silica, aluminum, iron, magnesia, soda, sulphuric acid, potash, lime²⁴

And Jocelle would be thinking in feverish jargon of the summer, the world outside where war was being prepared. Encampments, enlistments, embarkments, military jargon, war readiness, propaganda to enlist citizen action.²⁵

There is much of the weird and uncanny throughout her books even though there is little action; the action shown is seldom exciting or dramatic. This is perhaps the source of some of the criticism of her style. "The clearest feature of her style is monotony. Her books murmur."²⁶ This criticism may be refuted, however, since the murmuring presents a musical sound that changes at regular intervals to prevent monotony.

But the best test of the style of Miss Roberts is the reading aloud of several pages chosen at random from any of her novels. Her style may be compared to a symphony, since it has moments of sweetness and light, rises to a powerful swelling, and closes finally with beauty and power, quiet and solitude, predominating.

24. He Sent Forth A Raven, p. 147.

25. Ibid., p. 166.

26. Van Doren, Mark, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Her Mind and Style," The English Journal, Vol. XXI, No. 7, September, 1932, p. 522.

CHAPTER IV

HER IDEOLOGY

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Miss Roberts presents the problems of the rural people of Kentucky in connection with the problems of a highly gifted individual. Although the problems are related to the particular people she presents in her fiction, they are problems of universal nature and interest.

Miss Roberts has interpreted life through the people in whom she is most interested. Since she has spent the greater part of her life in small towns and villages and remote rural districts, it is naturally these country people whom she knows and understands and whose lives she wants to reveal and portray in her stories. From a study of her life and her fiction it appears that her contacts with all the problems of life have arisen from her association with the people of rural Kentucky, and in trying to solve the problems of life, she has used these people as the subjects of her study. In the portrayal of these people she has done an excellent job. Her findings are told in relating what the people do, what they say, what they think. The viewpoint of the author is infused with that of the leading

character in each of the stories. She has managed to express herself through these other people in a way that is clever and subtle; seldom is it evident that the author herself is speaking. This intrusion is most evident in My Heart and My Flesh, in which the author never succeeds in making Theodosia a real, living person or in making her philosophy quite clear. There is a less pronounced evidence of this in He Sent Forth A Raven; Jocelle is never the lifelike character of Ellen in The Time of Man. Again the impressionistic technique is more clearly emphasized. Her thoughts of war and collectivism do not seem always to come directly from her heart and mouth.

The novels of Miss Roberts are interpreted wholly from a feminine viewpoint. She has made a woman the central figure of each of her novels and has subordinated every other character to that person. The men never appeal to the reader as being true men, but instead they are portrayed as being mere "people" necessary to the telling of a good story. The observations of life are also essentially feminine. The style, attention to detail, the unusual emphasis upon the feminine character, the choice of words, and the delicate handling of scenes pertaining to sex show that the author is a woman who

has not experienced some of the things of which she writes.

Never once is a problem discussed which is peculiar to the interest of an industrialist or of a city dweller. Grave problems affecting the world at large, such as the war and the problem of collectivism as discussed in He Sent Forth A Raven, are never discussed as they affect the world in general but only as they are of interest to the welfare of the "folk."

All significant facts pertaining to life and an interpretation of it may be subdivided into considerations of (a) man, the individual; (b) the community; (c) the cosmos. They are ranked this way in order of the emphasis given by the author. Man's relation to society is stressed. The sphere emphasized is the community; the people who inhabit these stories are unable for the most part to see beyond the confines of their own community. The cosmos is portrayed as the pervading order holding everything together. The people are vaguely conscious of such an order, even though they are not especially interested in it or in its function. This is accounted for largely by the fact that such people are not directly affected by the actions or of the affairs beyond their own limited sphere and for that

reason are not primarily interested in it. This shows again the emphasis upon the individual and the author's interest in solving the problems of the individual rather than the problems of society as a whole.

It has been mentioned before that the author is interested in the problems of the folk, both the educated and the uneducated. The people of The Time of Man, for instance are uneducated, poor, struggling, itinerant farmers, moving annually in their search for fairer lands. It is seldom that books, authors, or knowledge are actually commented upon. My Heart and My Flesh is an exception. Also near the end of the story when Ellen and her brood and their few worldly possessions are piled in the wagon, making another search for a land of beauty and plenty, a discussion of the stars leads one of Ellen's sons to make this statement:

"You could learn that too in books, it's said. . . But the wisdom of the world is the dearest thing in life, learnen is, and it's my wish to get a hold onto some that-there. It's found in books, is said, and that's what I know. I couldn't bear to settle down in life withouten I had it. It means as much as all the balance of life, seems like. Books

is what I want. In books, it's said, you'd find the wisdom of all the ages."¹

The best exponents of education in these novels are Theodosia's grandfather in My Heart and My Flesh and Diony's father in The Great Meadow. Miss Roberts says in regard to old Anthony Bell:

The memories of his college sat lightly upon his mind, guests indulgently entertained when they were given any recognition. He had never overtaken the attitude of learning.²

Theodosia as a child is greatly fascinated with his reading, particularly of the poetry of Shelley.

Theodosia thought sometimes, when he read aloud, seeing his mouth running perpetually along the channels of song, that he must know some truths, some externals, some ways unknown to her, and she would yearn with an inner sob of longing that he might impart this thing to her, whatever it might be . . . She would sit quietly among these, her elders, trying to understand, gaining a rich exaltation where the words revealed their splendor even if they withheld their thought. She was eleven years old.³

Diony's father reads Berkeley's The Principles of Human Knowledge and discusses it with her. Its contents are carefully gone over in her mind. He impresses upon his daughter the importance of an education, and both Diony

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1. The Time of Man, p. 381.
 2. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 43.
 3. Ibid., p. 44.

and her father are alarmed at the younger daughter's inability to read and at her utter indifference to its importance. This represents a sort of unschooled education, but one that is important nevertheless. There is some evidence of book learning in He Sent Forth A Raven. Martha and Jocelle are both sent to a seminary, and there is mention of Martha's having once attended a university. Treer, the farm agent, also represents the educated man. Drake's knowledge seems to have come from the soil, from life. Dickon represents the man whose knowledge has not developed, whose interest is in a single thing. Briggs, the preacher, is both unschooled and ignorant. In Black Is My Truelove's Hair the contrast of the educated is presented in the person of Nat Journeyman, the village philosopher, who assists Dena and all the villagers in the solution of their problems. There is noted in all of the books by Miss Roberts a tendency to divide her characters into the educated and the uneducated. Much is made of intelligence and the power of reason, while there is but little emphasis upon actual schooling and degrees. Miss Roberts does not intend to minimize the importance of an education obtained at school; she merely wishes to emphasize the fact that something else,

a bigger, more subtle thing is necessary.

Emphasis throughout all the books is placed upon the personal identity of man. The Time of Man opens in this way: "Ellen wrote her name in the air with her fingers, Ellen Chesser, leaning forward and writing on the horizontal plane."⁴ Later:

Then out of nothing she came into a quick and complete knowledge of the end. You breathe and breathe, on and on, and then you do not breathe any more. For you forever. Forever. It goes out, every thing goes, and you are nothing. The world is all there, on and on, but you are not there, you, Ellen. The world goes on, goes on without you. Ellen Chesser. Ellen. Not somebody heard about and said with your mouth, but yourself, dead. It will be. You cannot help it.⁵

The reader is introduced to Diony in The Great Meadow in a similar way:

1774, and Diony, in hearing him break a song over the taut wires and fling out with his voice to supply all that the tune lacked, placed herself momentarily in life, calling mentally her name, Diony Hall. 'I, Diony Hall,' her thought said, gathering herself close, subtracting herself from the diffused life of the house that closed about her. . . . 'I, Diony, Hall,' her hands said back to her thought, her fingers knitting wool.⁶

4. The Time of Man, p. 1.

5. Ibid., p. 27.

6. The Great Meadow, p. 1.

Dena Janes in Black Is My Truelove's Hair also is aware of her identity, her existence, and early in the book we are made aware of this fact:

'I'm alive,' she said. 'I got a right to live then.'⁷ . . . She continued to commune with herself in her distress and to recite again her right to being. Another as a voice, answered or questioned. The arguments were slow, as delayed by the tapping of her feet.

'I am here, now,' she said.
 'Here,' her steps answered. 'How did she come here?'
 'The way every other one comes here.'
 'There's no rights or wrongs to anything.'
 'I have got a right to live,' she answered.
 'Alive is all she is. She's got a right to that surely.'
 'Once you get alive you have a right to go on.'
 'There's no rights or wrongs. It just happens.'
 'Only God or some of the saints can end it.'

She clung to the last statement. . . .
 'A right to a life that makes good sense. . . .
 A hat on your head if the others have got on hats. A name for yourself, your name that you were born with, or his name when you marry. . . .'⁸

These quotations are sufficient to show the emphasis placed by Miss Roberts upon the importance of man's being aware of his identity and being sure that he has a right

7. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, p. 7.

8. Ibid., pp. 8-9.

to live and to make his place in the world. It appears to her also that it is necessary occasionally for man to stop and remind himself of his position in the world.

In connection with this importance attached to the realization of man of his own identity, there is a constant stress upon the importance of man: "One man is worth a million blades of grass." In all of her stories Miss Roberts tells of people and what they think and say and do. She is not particularly interested in society or industry or "ism." Her careful attention to people shows that she regards man as being of the utmost importance. This is not a statement found in any of her stories, but all of the inferences are there. I believe that this idea is most vividly portrayed through her constant emphasis upon the glory of the commonplace. Surely the whole story and theme of The Time of Man, with its emphasis upon common beauty, illustrates this. It is realized also at the conclusion of My Heart and My Flesh wherein Theodosia finds peace and contentment among these "shepherds of the earth" after her many horrible experiences. After the anguish and pain of her life, all finally becomes settled, and

there appeared the "Arise-ye of her resurrection."⁹
 "I'm still alive," she sang under her breath, "I'm
 alive, I'm alive."¹⁰ Man's importance over all else
 is shown later after Theodosia has firmly established
 herself in the little rural community away from all
 noise and chaos.

Then she remembered hell. A clear sharp
 memory, acutely realized, the more acutely
 realized in that it fell in this moment of
 pleasure. Self appeared, saturated with
 memory-realization, herself subtracted from
 the earth and elevated to a pinnacle of
 searching, her body hungering, seeing itself
 slipping into decay. . . . She heard the
 noises of the night, the tree-frogs and
 crickets, the frogs at the wet place behind
 the milkhouse. The frogs set themselves
 against the night as if to saw a hole into
 the dark, but when they were done there was
 a season of quiet. The night was warm and the
 people indoors slept noisily, their breathing
 and their sighs in sleep a protest against the
 heat. She heard them faintly as they moved or
 threshed at their beds or sucked inward at the
 hot close air. Outside the purity of the night
 spread over the cut fields and the cows were
 laid down on the open pasture-top near the
 ragged tree. Steps came off the farther slope,
 man's steps, sublimated and hollowed by the
 distance, feet walking through the grass, about
 the barns, off to the farther end of the pasture.
 They were lost then and denied as being delusion,
 an impossible. The night was warm and all but
 herself were asleep, drugged by the heat indoors.
 She saw them laid to sleep or crumpled into
 relaxed postures, in their beds, up and down the
 countryside, from farm to farm, abstracted, a

9. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 256.
 10. Ibid., p. 256.

man asleep. Man lies down to rest, but the cows rest half kneeling, their crumpled forefeet ready to rise. She saw Caleb Burns asleep. The leaves of the poplar tree lifted and turned, swayed outward and all quivered together, holding the night coolness. The steps returned to the pasture, going unevenly and stopping, going again, restless. They went across the hollow place and came back again toward the rise where the cows lay. They walked among the sleeping vows, but these did not stir for it was a tread they knew.11

In this connection it is also significant to note that the people always possess such characteristics as show their own powers over the rest of the things that inherit the earth, along with the many desirable traits that each of the characters possesses which enable him to succeed in his own efforts. It has already been mentioned that each of the stories has a happy ending, showing that everything comes to him who waits. Personal virtues are also emphasized. Good triumphs over evil; sincerity, over deceit; honesty, over deception. In everything the author has written she has shown that man is an important creature and must be reckoned with as such.

Closely allied to this problem is Miss Roberts's recognition that man is a symbol, a spirit, affected by the visible and audible world. Ellen Chesser, for example,

11. My Heart and My Flesh, pp. 298-300.

is not merely a girl whose parents are listless tenant farmers. She is presented as a symbol of all that she represents and the implications of her life spread far beyond the vividly sketched boundaries of the Pigeon River country. Her drab life was made brighter since it was supplemented with yearnings for things of beauty, things that neither she nor her family had ever had. And these were not things of great value or significance to most people:

She wanted to sit beside Tessie and talk about a house. She wanted to talk about a desert where camels walk on long lines, or about glaciers where men explore for poles, or about men walking into mines with little lights on their hats--about the wonders of the world. "If I only had things to put in drawers and drawers to put things in. That's all I'd ask for a time to come."¹²

She thought that with the change of one or two externals everything might change--a room to sleep in which there would be pink and blue, herself reading a book by the window.¹³

In her mind the house touched something she almost knew. The treetops above the roof, the mist in the trees, the points of the roof, dull color, all belonging to the farmer, the yellow wall, the distance lying off across a rolling

12. The Time of Man, p. 41.

13. Ibid., p. 40.

cornfield that was mottled with the wet and traced with lines of low corn -- all these touched something settled and comforting in her mind, something like a drink of water after an hour of thirst, like a little bridge over a stream that ran out of a thicket, like cool steps going up into a shaded doorway.¹⁴

Miss Roberts enriched Ellen's actions, yearnings, and fate with a kind of beauty known to the poetic imagination but never found in naturalistic fiction.¹⁵ In other words, in her treatment of man, or woman, the author has brought out the beauty of sounds and sights and smells and has hidden away most of that which is barren or ugly. She does have the ability, however, to present vivid scenes that are sordid and unpleasant. Her descriptions of the decadent house in which Theodosia lives with her aunt in My Heart and My Flesh are terrible in their wording and in their effect. Diony in The Great Meadow possesses many of the same characteristics as Ellen; she is able to see the beauty and the significance of life. Miss Roberts herself is so cognizant of all the beauty of life and nature that she had instilled this

14. Ibid., p. 6.

15. Janney, Op. Cit., p. 390.

attribute into the minds of the characters she has created.

Miss Roberts emphasizes the fact that the human spirit is invaluable. She has never failed to make the spirit a thing of primary significance, and in most instances it is this that keeps the characters going in the way that they should go. It is interesting to note that the real theme of The Buried Treasure is that the human spirit is the buried treasure par excellence. This idea is revealed to the reader near the end of the story as Philly Blair is reflecting on life and on all of the things which had happened to her within the last few days. In the other stories as well it can be noted that Miss Roberts makes each of the girls have the spirit to forge ahead to overcome all obstacles. The indomitable will of the individual is an outstanding and recurrent characteristic. Miss Roberts regards this will as being exceedingly important for the success of any one. Such an observation may be likened to her own life, for surely she had had many obstacles to overcome and many disturbances to combat in the solving of her own life problems and in the achievement of the success that is hers. Ellen Chesser feels from the beginning of her story that she has a

place in life, and her will is an indomitable one that refuses to relinquish such an idea. At times she is depressed with the futility of this search for fairer lands. As they move once: "'Oh, what for?' she cried softly when she sat among the household goods at the back of the wagon. She saw the last of the yellow lane crying, 'What for anyway?'"¹⁶ She has periodic spells of loneliness and unhappiness, but her good humor is gradually restored to her. "It's no known how lovely I am. I'm a-liven. My heart beats on and my skin laps around me and my blood runs up and it runs down, shut in me. It's unknown how lovely."¹⁷ An unsuccessful love affair brings her unhappiness, but this is gradually forgotten in favor of a new romance. The trouble of her husband and the illness of her youngest son bring her grief greater than any she has ever known. The death of the child causes Jasper Kent to repent and he returns to her. She and her family start out once more on the road which they hope will lead to their happiness. Ellen Chesser's philosophy of life is much the same as that of her creator; in spite of the fact that she does not

16. The Time of Man, p. 71.

17. Ibid., p. 71.

quite understand the order of things she refuses to be defeated by the fate that fails to bring her long-sought goal. Diony in The Great Meadow has much this same philosophy of life. She shows early in the story that she has the will to face adversity in her willingness to leave a home of love, comfort, and security to brave the discomforts of an unsettled region, all for the purpose of "making order out of chaos." Greater proof of her outstanding courage and will to continue is shown in her recuperation from the horrible Indian attack in which her mother-in-law was killed. The attribute of courage also is demonstrated in her acceptance of Berk at the conclusion of the story because he is of the Boone kind. Theodosia Bell, heroine of My Heart and My Flesh, does not possess this proximity to life and earth, but more than any of the other girls she is disturbed by it. The loss of her mother and grandfather, the loss of two of her lovers, her failure to excel in the production of beautiful music, the realization that her father is a cad against whom she must lock her own door -- all of these things finally break the spirit of Theodosia, but after a lingering illness she recovers.

At once a vivid appearance entered her mind, so brilliant and powerful that her consciousness was abashed. Larger than the world, more spacious than the universe, the new apparition spread through her members and tightened her hands so that they knotted suddenly together. . . Her body spread widely and expanded to its former reach and the earth came back, herself acutely aware of it. A pleasure that she still lived to participate in the recognition caught her throat with a deep sob. . . "I'm still alive," she sang under her breath, "I'm alive, I'm alive."¹⁸

This frustration and gradual recall to life are only vaguely present in A Buried Treasure, but Philly Blair is made of the same stuff, and she possesses this power and willingness to forge ahead. Such a rich acceptance of life is entirely missing from Miss Roberts's next novel, He Sent Forth A Raven. Martha does not have the energy with which she can cope with the affairs of the world, and she is permanently broken by her father. Jocelle, however, is perhaps too much like her grandfather, and for that reason she refuses to be shaped entirely to his will and makes a life of her own. The whole theme of Black Is My Truelove's Hair is connected with this principle. The entire story is the relation of how Dena Janes, through her own energy and fortitude, is able to return to the place in society which she had abandoned in a moment of weakness. And she is able to

18. My Heart and My Flesh, pp. 255-256.

do it, with the book ending in characteristic fashion, happiness being at last restored to the troubled. This idea that the will to continue is centered in the human organism is one of the most evident interpretations of life that the author presents throughout her books; in addition to this, it is also closely allied with her own experiences, and for that reason it is presented as a real, vital problem and its solution.

It is also noted that Miss Roberts thinks with her characters that a person is three persons: What one is, what one thinks he is, and what others think of him. This idea is displayed prominently in My Heart and My Flesh and especially in Black Is My True-love's Hair.

Man is close to the earth, to life; he must recognize its proximity, its immensity: this is another of Miss Roberts's observations. In this connection much has already been said. Man must feel his place in the earth. He must realize that he is near it, and that much of the real "life" he has comes from this nearness to it. Because of this attitude much has been made of the physical surroundings of man. Always there is much evidence of the appeal to the senses.

She reached to the mantel and found there a little twig she had broken from a wild-cherry tree. When she had broken a small stick from the twig she peeled back the bark and to make a little brush which she dipped into her snuff can. The brush came out of the can heavily tasseled with the fine brown powder of the tobacco and this she placed in her mouth beside her lower teeth for a consolation. The savor spread mildly through the nerves of her mouth and soon it engendered a soft and delicate laughter at the base of her tongue. She spat a little of the brown mixture into the fireplace and sat quietly apart.¹⁹

Callie opened the organ and began to play a march, filling the whole house with a great leaping of noises out of the reeds, the time beaten with the windy pedals that sucked at the air and blew up the music or let it fall away from moment to moment.²⁰

About her the first sounds of the morning lifted and jargoned. A flock of pigeons took flight from a ragged elm tree and went fluttering off toward a distant barn that showed but the ridge of its roof above a hill, and the barn and the hill were yellow with coming light. The woodland at the left was full of life, now that the dawn was well settled over the hilltops. A thrush was calling. Little birds went from clump to clump in undulating flight. The woodpecker spoke a word that was human in sound and almost human in meaning.²¹

The small house was heavy with steam and the odors of human sweat, of drying clothes.²²

19. A Buried Treasure, p. 24.

20. Ibid., p. 24.

21. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, pp. 3-4.

22. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 133.

She was standing before the waning fire and her body was partly chilled by the coolness of the room, the corners of which were never warmed in winter. The near-frost crept toward her and sent envoys to beat light trills and quavers at her nerve-ends, but such was her inner warmth that the chill was for the most part shed.²³

Then Diony would sink into a web of pain and gratitude, and in the tangle at last some inner spark or motion would arise which wanted to be free of the web and wanted to be of some unity or account in its own right.²⁴

There was a smell of pigs about in the weeds where she lay.²⁵

Out of Bower's house a low voice droned fitfully.²⁶

The light glinted, as if sprays and jets of radiance shot out from a staring eye.²⁷

A sweet smell of cut grass spread over the farm.²⁸

One of the dogs, Old True, died in the upper hallway, stretched out stiff when the morning food called Theodosia down the stairs, laid out across the carpet. Later one of the tenant men dragged her away, the body pulled by a rope making a dull stiff clattering of noises on the hard stair. The strong sour odor of her death pervaded the hall for many days after.²⁹

23. He Sent Forth A Raven, p. 75.

24. The Great Meadow, p. 207.

25. The Time of Man, p. 46.

26. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, p. 55.

27. Ibid., p. 55.

28. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 209.

29. Ibid., p. 209.

It is significant also to notice that in these books it is characteristic for the human mind to have a questioning attitude about things. In each of the stories the leading character particularly has this attitude. It is shown in her direct speech as well as in her streams of consciousness. A slight mention of a new subject or one in which the girl is particularly interested will bring forth a volley of questions. "Why?" "Wherefore?" "What is this life all about?" "Who am I that I should know?" All of these and many other questions are asked. They are manifest especially when each girl is facing a crisis and when she is being forced by circumstances to make a decision of great importance. On occasions such as this, she will think about the problem, asking herself all the questions which pertain to it and which will assist her in solving her own problems. This also shows that in most instances the individual is interested in self improvement and that in this manner he is able to increase his own knowledge. Closely related to this idea is the use of much "inward gazing" engaged in by all of the girls. Ellen sees her own house -- "Such a leetle house is all I want no matter how leetle. . . I'd make it fair in some way or how with things set

about proper, or with vines and trees and flower-pots"³⁰ -- and through her talks with friends and glimpses into other books she is able to see and visit many foreign places with beautiful and curious symbols. Diony also is able to imagine much finery and beauty through letters, books, and conversation and through her own imagination. This is noted particularly in her visions of the growth of a greater state from the fort. The visions of Theodosia are not of such a nature, but concentrate more vividly upon the horrible experiences that are hers. Philly's dreams and visions are largely the result of her wondering about what to do with the treasure and about how she will entertain her friends. As Dena James in Black Is My Truelove's Hair is taking her daily sun bath in the lot behind their house, she too is able to imagine:

The whole light of the earth, and the life of it, belonged to this bright reach of the day that came into being under the sun, but only within the air of the world. Following this thought, she came to the thought of cities and the people there, of people hurrying along the roads, people at work in houses, in fields, in ships, people getting born, getting old, getting sick or well, lame or black or white or happy or evil, people at their prayers, in prison, studying books, making things, people as children, as unborn, as loving other people or fighting

30. The Time of Man, p. 49.

wars. They, some of them, were going high up in the air, almost beyond the reach of the air, to find out the truth about the light of day.³¹

Individual strengths and weaknesses are emphasized. Each character is shown in moments of strength and in moments of weakness. Her trials are shown as she attempts to make restitution; the reasons that she has faltered are also presented. This is shown, I believe, to emphasize the characteristics again that go to make up a real person and to show that no person is without fault, even though the author does attempt to have right always triumph over all that is evil and wicked. Very often the individual is shown to be aware of his own shortcomings and to utter, "Who am I that I should know?" This presentation of both sides of a person's personality also makes clear Miss Roberts's aim to show a person's full and clear personality. It may also be noted that the author considers personal happiness and personal attainment of greatest importance. Each of the heroines of the novels is searching for her happiness always and it is a happiness and contentment that relates directly to the individual herself. Miss Roberts's stories are largely

31. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, p. 91.

concerned with such a problem. She believes definitely that a person must struggle and search for happiness before it is definitely his. The greater part of The Time of Man deals with the constant search of Ellen and her family for their utopia which might be described as "a house fixed up, the shutters mended and porch don't leak. To sit on a Saturday when the work is done. A vine up over the chimney."³² Hers is an appreciative attitude and she never gives up even when things look the darkest. A similar personality is that of Diony in The Great Meadow, although her ambitions are of a less personal nature and not so definitely noted. Her greatest desire is to make a world out of chaos, a place fit for civilized man's children to be born in. Related to this is her personal desire to be more the "Boone kind." Her other personal desires seem to be only the natural ones to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Personal well-being or satisfaction is the sustaining thread throughout My Heart and My Flesh. Theodosia at an early age longs for truth and knowledge. For many years her desire is to achieve artistry in music; she fails to relinquish this idea in spite of much

32. The Time of Man, p. 273.

discouragement. Finally she has little left in life except the hopes that she has for happiness, and eventually a broken body and a broken mind leave her without these. It is not until she has suffered a great deal with all of the pains of death that suddenly life and hope are restored to her. Hers becomes a happy life after she lives awhile among the simple country folk who fill her mind with pleasant trivialities which cause her to lose her old fears. Philly in A Buried Treasure has a life that is alternately happy and perturbed. The tranquility that has been hers is disturbed after the finding of the precious kettle. Gradually she is made happy when they decide to keep the gold and hide it about the farm, and she is serene in her reminiscences about her life and the lives of her family and friends. It seems for a long while in He Sent Forth A Raven that even Jocelle does not know what she wants and that among so much frustration there can be no sense of well-being. One feels a sense of decay and degeneracy in the gradual quietude that rests upon the people of the farm household. As Miss Roberts has explained, it is senility that finally defeats old man Drake and after that he is powerless to continue his resistance toward all that will give him peace. One never

feels quite satisfied with the happiness of the people in this story. The strength and vitality of the struggling seem to be lacking; and although the book ends in the usual peaceful manner, the happiness does not seem to be complete. The old method is restored in Black Is My Truelove's Hair; Dena gives up her happiness for an escapade that she thinks will bring her peace of mind and happiness. When this fails, her struggle for happiness becomes a long and arduous one. Thus we see that Miss Roberts is concerned with the happiness and well-being of her characters and that she has made a pattern to fit each, and that that pattern is probably fashioned very closely to fit her own life in the pursuit of happiness. Throughout all of these books there is mentioned the search for happiness and Miss Roberts regards it as being absolutely necessary to make up the life of a well-rounded individual.

Emphasis is placed upon the necessity of beauty in every person's life. There is a desire for beauty, and the effects of beauty upon the person are many. This is best portrayed in her descriptions that are lovely and beautiful and in the desires for her characters to possess something that is beautiful. The

personal desires of the girls which have been related show this attribute. Throughout the books there are many descriptions of the natural beauties of the world that affect the characters.

Some light sorrel horses had stood by a fence, and the queenanne's-lace-handkerchief was spreading quite beyond the creek path. 'Oh, it's a good morning. I someways like a day like this,' the words arose and flowed back into a mingled picture--a path along a cornfield where sweet hot weeds gave out their savors in the sunshine of noon, the man in the low field plowing all day, the horse and the plow and the figure of the dark creature that bent over the plow-handles making an even pattern of dark lines that crept slowly over the earth and continued all day, pleasant to see and of no effort to herself.³³

All of her books abound in these vivid nature descriptions.

Miss Roberts clearly believes that life is best mirrored by the "shepherds of the earth" and that there is glory in the commonplace. She has shown this in the story that she tells, in the people who inhabit these stories, and in the descriptions and explanations that she has given. This ties up nicely with her general interpretation of life and with her own personal experiences.

33. My Heart and My Flesh, p. 201.

She also believes that life comes from within, and that the meaning of life depends largely upon the individual. This has been shown in her efforts to stress the importance of the individual's own search for happiness and in her desire to let the person solve his own problems. Emphasis is also placed on the mind, "the thinking part." Many of the struggles undergone, however, are only mental and all of them reach their solution through the power of the person's mind. Greatest emphasis of this is shown in telling the story of The Great Meadow. Early in life this fact was impressed upon Diony by her father and she never forgets it.

Although there is a slight indication of the fatalistic attitude, that whatever will be will be, it is shown that man must make the necessary adjustments to participate in the community of which he is a part. The desire for order out of chaos is typical and recurrent in man.

Naturally a book that puts so much stress on these matters will stress man's personal emotions and conflicts. The economic struggle is not made very much of in any of Miss Roberts's books. All of the people are agrarians and do much manual labor at all times, and although they are by

no means wealthy, only a little is said of their struggles. At any rate, the evidence is that they are all satisfied with their economic condition so long as they are fed, clothed, and sheltered. Morals and ethics are dealt with as they affect the individual and not as they affect society as a whole. It seems to be the idea of the author that such things are always an individual problem; and so long as a satisfactory solution is reached for the person concerned, all is well. For example, in Black Is My Truelove's Hair, Dena is never condemned or scolded for the wrong that she has done; Miss Roberts is interested primarily in having her make an honorable return to the community of which she had so long been a part.

Miss Roberts has not been particularly successful in her portrayals of romance and sex. This may be due to her lack of experience in such matters. This leads to the belief that they are not considered to be of very great importance by this author. There are but few instances in which there are portrayed love scenes of passion and warmth. Instead, they are but barely mentioned. Diony in her love for Berk, and Dena in her early love for Langtry are the best examples of real love that we have in these novels. As Diony thought of

Berk

...her eyes would search his averted face and his drooping eyes, his unguarded mouth, and she would love him with a rush of passion that almost stilled her heart in its beat, would love him for the dangers he had passed and the cruel images that were pictured on his mind, and she would gather all into her forgiveness and forget it and shelter it there.³⁴

In retelling her affair with Langtry Dena says,

And if a bird sang on a limb outside Frony's house, I would think it had something to do with Bill, or if it was the pink and shiny gray shiny mold on the barn door, or the flower on a saucer, or my own hair combed out, or Ada's blue dress for fall, or anything whatever. It all had Langtry in it somewheres. Even my own body and all the ways it can feel in all the places on my skin. And I wanted him to have the best always.³⁵

Romances are mentioned in each book and there is always the element of a love story, but such events are always passed over quickly. There is a meeting of two young people and shortly thereafter they are engaged. Her treatment of sex is even more sparse and unreal. Instead of taking its regular place in the lives of the characters, it is whispered and passed by. For instance,

34. The Great Meadow, p. 101.

35. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, p. 71.

in He Sent Forth A Raven only a very careful reader will be aware that Jocelle has been raped on the day of her cousins's departure for war, until later when her feelings are described and finally when she tells her aunt Martha about it. Occasionally some of the sensations of sex are mentioned, but this is not often.

She began to dream. Jasper was in her own body and in her mind, was but more of herself. She sank slowly down to the stone and to the leaves lying upon the stone, and the great bulk of the rock arose to take her.³⁶

She had felt the buttons on his coat dig into her thin old dress and his broad chest spread out before her slim body and his drunk arms trying to catch her closer. She had hated him and despised him, despised his whisky and dirt smells, but a slim thread like a silver serpent had rushed through her flesh, straight through her trunk, when Screw held her.³⁷

There is always a desire for education and knowledge. In connection with Theodosia and her violin playing it is said that small talents are treason. There is also some concern given over to what the neighbors think, although the individual's thoughts are of the greatest

36. The Time of Man, p. 223.

37. Ibid., p. 35.

importance. There is some slight indication of this in all of the novels, but it is manifested chiefly in the last novel, particularly upon the arrival of Dena to the village after she has run away from it. At last the day comes that Dena must make her first trip to the village store.

'What will they ask me? What will they say?' she asked the asking lips that rounded with her words. The chin was sloping to a point against the rough bough that filled in the hollows about the throat. The face seemed quiet, as if it could not now remember the hard words and the angry eyes, her own, it could frame within its outline. 'There she goes.' they will say no more than that, she concluded. 'There she goes. There she goes.'

'She is going by. She.'

'She looks the same. . .'

'She looks different . . .'

'She is thin. She is hollow. . .'

'Is she now?'

'Maybe she will get a brat out of it. . .'

'I heard it said yes.'

'I heard it said no.'³⁸

Miss Roberts had not failed to include the Bible and religion in all of her novels. Even two of them, My Heart and My Flesh and He Sent Forth A Raven, have their titles derived from scripture. There is but little reference to religion in The Time of Man. Much more is

³⁸. Black Is My Truelove's Hair, p. 49.

made of religion in The Great Meadow. Early in the story when the sisters are revelling in fancied travels, they are sure to include a visit to a fine church. The steady work and toil at Five Oaks is stopped only to observe the Sabbath. They are strict in the keeping of this practice. The banns of marriage are published before Diony and Berk are married, this in keeping with the laws of Virginia. Church services are held within the fort whenever this observance is possible. Throughout the book Diony is consistent in her faith. Theodosia in My Heart and My Flesh is given to frequent musings about the soul.

The question arose again and again. The soul, where and what was it? She observed that the preachers in the churches had souls for their commerce, and that there one learned that all souls were of equal value.³⁹

As she cares for her grandfather during his illness she also worries about his soul. Philly Blair is undecided as to whether or not she should invite the preacher to their celebration. She says,

"Old Hez, he'll turn the surprise party into a chance to pray and preach. Maybe we better not invite Hez. We won't. Church is the place to preach and pray in, but the

39. The Great Meadow, p. 87.

churches won't let old Hez in to preach,
hardly to pray even."⁴⁰

After the party Philly says to Andy,

"Ten minutes more, Andy Blair, and
would'a' repented in Hez Turner's way
and joined Hez Turner's religion, and
that's a religion where you give up all
you've got. I see you beat the air with
your fists and say, 'I know I'm a sinful
man,' and Turner stands over you and tells
you what to do to get shed of what's binden
you. It's a religion that's swallowed down
a many's the small little pocketbook before
now, and it's not apt to stand back before
a kettle of gold, neither."⁴¹

Of course He Sent Forth A Raven is full of references
to religion and to the Bible. The chief spokesman
here is the redeemed preacher who visits the farm
often in the hope that he can make Stoner Drake repent.
Jocelle as a young girl recognizes the omnipotence of
God. She wonders about the sanity of a man in the
town who does not believe in heaven or hell. Drake is
not an unbeliever, but until the end he refuses to
alter any of his ways of life. The major characters
in Black Is My Truelove's Hair are deeply religious,
professing the Catholic faith and being faithful in
receiving its sacraments and in ardently professing

40. A Buried Treasure, p. 27.

41. Ibid., p. 235.

belief in its prayers and litanies. The old philosopher here recommends to Dena that adherence to her religious beliefs is the best way out of her difficulties. Personal satisfaction in life and a search for unity, for meaning, in life conclude her observations about people and about life in general.

In regard to society, or the community, Miss Roberts believes that life, the meaning of life, is not confined to one region, but that it spreads beyond and is given a timeless, spaceless quality. She believes that the outside world exists only in the mind of the perceiver. The world is permanent, and the people are only temporary. As Ellen Chesser says, "The world's little and you just set still in it and that's all there is."⁴² The city world is a remote society, while the emphasis is placed upon rural, smalltown life.

Miss Roberts evidently was greatly upset by the atrocities of the World War; and in He Sent Forth A Raven, she expresses her ideas about the futility of war as a means to settle any dispute. This idea is best explained by a description of the thoughts of Jocelle:

42. The Time of Man, p. 3.

With the passing of the days she entered a delirium in which she thought she would give birth to some further monstrosity of war, as if war would tear a Gargantuan, incestuous birth through her breast. War, clothed in flesh but horrible with cries of peace, with abstract amelioration, endless successions of war doubled upon war to make a child in the likeness of the father; violent and fearful, self-justifying, religious in preparation for battle, it forgave itself even while it worked tremendous ruin upon the earth.⁴³

It is in this book also that the author expresses herself in favor of some sort of collectivism. It is probable that this idea is a result of the recent financial depression since at that time she evidently saw the suffering of many of her farmer-friends and it is in the financial part of this question that she is most interested. The whole idea is expressed in this speech of John Logan Treer through whom Miss Roberts expresses these social ideas:

Man is a collective creature, a focus where many men, dead or living, come together. His tools come to him from many men, any tool you might name being built up of centuries of man-experience. A world of shared experience would at last lead up to a world of shared goods, shared comforts, shared security.⁴⁴

Holding all of these ideas about man, the individual, and the community together is her idea of the

43. He Sent Forth A Raven, p. 148.

44. Ibid., p. 148.

cosmos. She sees the cosmos as the pervading order holding everything together, and it fits in with her ideas in favor of general peace and organization in contrast to chaotic conditions. This is shown particularly well in The Time of Man, The Great Meadow, and Black Is My Truelove's Hair.

It is not an easy task to classify the fiction of Miss Roberts, dealing as she does with various forms of fiction, many ways of presenting her ideas, and many varied observations. A study of her interpretation of life, her form of writing, and her fiction indicates many characteristics of the regionalist writer, particularly in that she writes always of smalltown or rural folk and that it is such people in whom she is primarily interested. She emphasizes agrarianism and the village instead of industry and the metropolis. Her stories emphasize contentment, simplicity, reconciliation, kindness, marriage, family, goodness, edification, idealization of established values, and optimism. Throughout her fiction she emphasizes the fact that the human spirit is invaluable, another strong characteristic of the regionalist writer. A similar characteristic is her stress upon the indomitable will of the individual. It is not sufficient,

however, to say that Miss Roberts is a pure regionalist, for her work transcends such a narrow classification. "The characters are not viewed primarily as members of a certain race or class or as natives of a specific locality, but as figures in a universal pageant where race, color, nationality, and region are of secondary importance."⁴⁵

To a certain extent, her work possesses the philosophy and the style of the neo-romanticist. This is evidenced primarily in her stress upon the psychological, the emphasis placed upon the individual, and upon the necessity of beauty in life. Although her novels are naturalistic in a sense, Miss Roberts has infused beauty and loveliness throughout, thus eliminating many unpleasant aspects of the naturalist's outlook on life.

45. Janney, Op. Cit., p. 408.

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