

ANALYSIS

He Sent Forth a Raven (1935)

Elizabeth Madox Roberts

(1886-1941)

"If *The Great Meadow* is Elizabeth Roberts's most completely wrought and thoroughly satisfying novel, the much more difficult *He Sent Forth a Raven* (which, as Grant Knight has pointed out, was influenced by her admiration for *Wuthering Heights*), is larger in conception and reveals more of her spirit. The characters, too, have a larger purchase upon the imagination.

When Stoner Drake's second wife dies, he vows never to set his foot upon God's earth again. This vow is kept. He runs his large farm from the chimney corner, from his bedroom, and from a bridge connecting the house with the other farm buildings. Here he blows upon his great horn, summoning his family and the farm workers to obey his will.

His daughter Martha he breaks and destroys by a cruel and unjustified accusation of harlotry flung in her face and in that of the lover who comes to woo her. But his granddaughter Jocelle is not so easily broken. For her, when she is outraged, Stoner Drake renews his vows, but neither outrage nor tyranny can crush her spirit. When the curtain falls at last, 'She had drawn life out of Wolflick where a lonely tomb closed over, had closed over Drake years ago.'

About these three the minor figures are grouped: Johnny Briggs, an eccentric itinerant preacher, mumbling eternal blessings he only half understands; the half-mad Dickon, author of a jumbled *Cosmography* in which the whole mystery of creation is explained; Walter, who is consumed with rage when World War I breaks into his life, who violates Jocelle in his agony, then rushes off to die in battle; and, finally, the conscientious objector, Jocelle's love, Logan Treer, the man of the future. 'I was at the very heart of the age, at the beginning of what's to come after.'

The theme of this puzzling book is clearly the agony of our time. 'We are still waiting for the waters to dry and the dove to find a foothold, a resten place for the sole of her foot.' Jocelle is the raven whom Stoner Drake, unknowing, sends forth into the flood of war, and it is Jocelle, aided by Logan, who finds dry land at last. Walter's rape of Jocelle is, of course, the violence done by war to life itself--'Wiped his dirty filth on my body'--and Miss Roberts does not gloss over its horror. To Dickon mankind is 'an atomic stench,' and Jocelle herself, at the height of her agony, hears the cackling hen 'screaming over the monstrous awfulness of the thing she had done; she had continued life.' But in the greatest of her spirit the girl refuses to accept this point of view, refuses even to turn in disgust from sex itself: 'she would not see Walter again until she had known her own lover; she would have her own; she would be vindicated.' Neither does she, like Martha, hate her violator. Along with the rest, he was, as Logan finally helps her to see, 'the *unknowing* soldier...out to kill and get killed to make fifty rich men richer.' The book closes with the old promise of new life: 'Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'

Elizabeth Madox Roberts's 'poetic' insight and method were at once her greatest gift as a novelist and her sharpest limitation. She wrote about what interested her: even *The Great Meadow* is less concerned with the Dark and Bloody Ground than with its reflection in Diony's mind. For this reason she is quite capable of passing over a crucial event in half an easily-overlooked sentence, embedded in the middle of a long paragraph--Martha's whole life is wrecked in a brief passage at the end of Chapter III in *He Sent Forth a Raven*--and then of lingering for many pages over the elucidation of a mental state."

Edward Wagenknecht
Cavalcade of the American Novel
(Holt 1952) 392-94

"In her sixth novel, *He Sent Forth a Raven* [1930], Miss Roberts returned to the epic scale on which her earlier successes were framed. *He Sent Forth a Raven* is her most ambitious novel, written at the height of her creative power, embodying the heroic sweep of *The Great Meadow* and the torturously introspective frankness of *My Heart and My Flesh*. It is unique in Miss Roberts' work, in that it combines both ways of viewing the universe; it reflects life from the seeing point of the inmost soul of a man, and it rises to the outer edges of the cosmos to peer down at the vast harmony of past, present, and future, of which the long struggle of mankind to progress is but one small aspect.

Its symbolic referents suggest the grandest themes in the heritage of western thought--the Prometheus legend of Greek myth, the Biblical flood and the covenant, the blazing prophecy of the Redeemer, and 'the hideous and intolerable allegory' of *Moby-Dick*. It projects into the reader's experience the widest range of fully fleshed characters which Miss Roberts was ever to achieve in a novel, without sacrificing the immediacy of character revelation inherent in her mode of subjective narrative focus. It stands as Elizabeth Madox Roberts' noblest attempt to realize the high aspirations for which she labored as an artist: 'to increase one's hold on all the out-lying spaces which are little realized in the come and go of every day.'

To find a vehicle of sufficient flexibility for this novel, Miss Roberts was forced to revise her characteristic techniques. She retained the device of the episodic development of her heroine, used so successfully in *The Time of Man* and *The Great Meadow*, to it she added the tone of fierce anger which we saw used so effectively in the inward vision of *My Heart and My Flesh*. Then, instead of developing her heroine on a wandering odyssey, she placed Jocelle Drake in a small, isolated community which could be treated as a microcosm, a kind of landlocked *Pequod*. And in the first sentence of the novel--the statement of Stoner Drake's first vow--she establishes a fairytale atmosphere within which her poetic symbols are all but freed of prosaic restraints, and she is able to create characters larger than life who can walk with ease on the level of universal meanings.

Since the novel attempts to do more than any other work of Miss Roberts, and since it has been the source of much confusion in critical interpretation, I shall try to make clear the three main lines of action in the novel, how they interrelate, and how they fuse. When this is completed, I think we shall be able to recognize in this novel the culminating achievement of Miss Roberts' developing thought and artistry, and the justness of the perception by the late Professor Grant Knight: '*He Sent Forth a Raven* reveals more of Elizabeth Roberts than does any other of her novels, more of her exquisite sense of reality, her bewilderment with things as they are, her lyric anger, her slight vein of madness, her faith in man's redemption.'

The Prologue begins with the dramatic statement of Stoner Drake's vow: '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.' The major theme of the novel--man in passionate defiance against the immutable laws of nature--thus explodes in the very first sentence. Stoner Drake defies God to exercise his fickle power over life and death, and when Joan dies, he reiterates this vow.... The remainder of Chapter I is a kind of introductory *dramatis personae*, moving backward and forward in time, and presented through the selective vision of the heroine, Jocelle.

This chapter is much more effectively welded to the body of the novel than is the Prologue in *My Heart and My Flesh*. The perceiving mind is the protagonist's and the material touched upon is germane to the action of the novel. The description of the fourteen-room mansion in which Stoner Drake has voluntarily isolated himself, the reminiscent glimpse of Joan Drake with her passionate vitality, the introduction of Martha the Curfew, and the entry of the young Jocelle into the life at Wolflick thrust the reader into the environment in which the action will unfold, and establish the symbolic connotations of the place and the characters. The isolated old house with its nautical bridge is like a ship in a desolate ocean....

And to this is added the lonely figure of Stoner Drake.... This figure, 'housed within walls, blowing wild notes on a conch-horn,' bears an unmistakable resemblance to Melville's Ahab. The final section of Chapter I introduces the eight-year-old Jocelle, with her childish but sensitive imagination. She describes to her grandfather 'The Place,' which she has invented out of her geography book, and he repictures it for her.... But when Jocelle, carried away by the miraculous vision which they have created together, tries to solidify

that vision, saying 'God is there,' Stoner Drake destroys 'The Place' out of his bitter disillusionment.... The major characters are thus established at Wolflick in their characteristic positions: Martha, raking the coals of the fire, as in 'some useless and imperative ceremony'; Stoner Drake, bitterly powerful in his cynical withdrawal into himself, and Jocelle, bewilderedly attempting to piece together some order out of the strange house in which she has come to live.

Chapter II moves in time back to 1903 when Jocelle is seven years old, and the remainder of the novel is a chronological account of life at Wolflick until the birth of Jocelle's daughter in 1920. The first level of action has a twofold direction, the first being the odyssey of Jocelle, and the second, the epic story of Stoner Drake's challenge to the gods, with Jocelle serving as his Ishmael. Jocelle's story, on this level, is similar to the stories of Ellen Chesser and Diony Hall. Jocelle continually thrusts her growing personality into the crucible of experience, accepting all the vagaries of life, the good and the evil, the true and the false--growing along the principles of harmonious development in a manner we have become accustomed to in Miss Roberts's work.

From her earliest recollections in Anneville to her final self-realization in the last pages of the novel, Jocelle moves lightly within the chaos of conflicting passions and dread finalities of chance and circumstance, imposing the order of her being in a positive affirmation of the life force. Her life is a moving document of Miss Roberts' 'life is from within' principle, and she takes her high place as one of Miss Roberts' steady, integrative creators of order.

The ordeal of Jocelle's early childhood is suggested in a few swiftly drawn scenes, such as the following poignant portrayal of the terrors of growth.... But after her mother thrusts her, unannounced and uninvited, into Wolflick, she grows into the pattern of its life, awed but unafraid. The account of Jocelle's childhood and early adolescence is one of Miss Roberts' attempts to present with the immediacy of the actual perception the growth of a living personality; this growth is shaped from without, as in the influence of Jocelle's environment on her concept of what truth is, but it also shapes from within, as in the sudden uninfluenced vision of truth itself. As a little girl she is fond of telling lies in order to protect herself from punishment or to increase her sense of importance; but suddenly, in an irrational, intuitive way, truth, and a desire for truth, become basic to her....

Again, as in the description of Jocelle's early childhood at Anneville, Miss Roberts sketches the late adolescence and education of Jocelle at the Seminary with swift, economical images. She is seen in classes, in games with other girls, in her first young love, as an unindividuated unit merged into a larger group, happy in the security of group anonymity. The cycle of growth here is quite similar to that which we observed in both Ellen Chesser and Theodosia Bell. Miss Roberts evidently believed that after the instinctive assertion of identity in childhood (compare Ellen Chesser's 'Here I am,' or Jocelle's lying), the adolescent needs to immerse himself into the life of the group, absorbing from the resultant sense of 'belongingness' the strength and confidence to emerge from the group as a realized personality. Here at the Seminary we find Jocelle 'one of the bright wool caps' on the campus.... And in the scene of the graduation dance there is a gentle irony and a penetrating perception in the description of Jocelle leaving her group and going forth into a new life.... There is something very similar to Diony's 'rebirth' in Jocelle's delicate emergence from his schoolmates.

The crisis in Jocelle's development, which corresponds to Ellen's desertion by her lover and to Diony's night in the wilderness, comes when she is raped by her cousin. Like Ellen, she is first stunned with anguish and then gripped by violent anger. When her grandfather asks her what war means, she replies: 'Violence.... Men mad at life because they're about to leave it....' But Jocelle overcomes and successfully absorbs her violation, withdrawing into herself to find the same source of power which enabled Miss Roberts' earlier heroines to survive.... Jocelle's immersion in nature, particularly as represented by her broods of white Plymouth Rocks, completes her inner rehabilitation, as the rural life of Spring Valley healed Theodosia. The scar seared on her spirit by Walter does not, of course, disappear, but her hatred of him is replaced by a compassion for the 'frantic, careless, frightened, fouled, war-shocked man' who could be atomized into such moral chaos. When news is received that he has been killed in France, she can honestly remind herself that 'she had not devised death for him.'

When Jocelle and Treer are married, they both realize that the war--the larger universal war of hatred, greed, and jealousy--is not over, but in their love for one another, they make a small advance toward peace: 'The war is it over? When will it be over?' 'We won't care, war or not, outside or in, if we love together.' This is a new birth, a further expansion in Jocelle's development; she has absorbed the senseless violence of Walter's act, and emerged stronger and richer out of her pain: 'having become a part now of the strangeness that had come to the farm, evil and good being mingled and opposed, being continually in opposition even while they were intertwined and entangled.' And with her marriage to John Logan Treer, she goes forward to create a new life on the foundation of her old one. Jocelle and Treer return to live at Wolflick, and with the birth of her child, Jocelle evaluates her life... 'She had drawn life out of Wolflick where a lonely tomb closed over, had close over Drake years ago. She had been somehow essential to his life and his days.' Like Ellen Chesser, Jocelle extracts her values out of the experience which life offers her, and courageously creates the life which she lives.

The second direction of the novel, certainly coequal in emphasis to Jocelle's plot, is Stoner Drake's story. What was probably Miss Roberts' earliest notation on *He Sent Forth a Raven* is as follows: 'Jarvis [Drake] is continually Man unrepenting, uncompromising...unwilling, hostile to his narrow fate. Outside are the people of the farms, in debt, patient, taxed beyond their power to pay. They are a great brown legion, unassembled, in unison in suffering but out of harmony. Unable to speak together.' At this time Miss Roberts evidently thought of the novel in terms of Stoner Drake's defiance of fate, a defiance which she meant to stand for the proud spirit of man in rebellion against the inhuman forces which limit him. Her initial concept seems to have been socially oriented, since the notation suggests that Drake was to be the articulate representative of all the inarticulate, socially oppressed masses of mankind. However, as the novel began to take form within her mind, the Promethean, or Ahabian, symbol becomes mixed with reverberations of *King Lear*, and the setting becomes less realistic and more poetic; thus, a later structural plan for the novel:

1. Progress in his vow.... At first a passionate rebellion against Deity for the loss of a woman....
2. A fierce rebellion but less personal.... Uncompromising pity for Man in his losses and his defeat, his aging body and enfebled [*sic*] mind. A total defiance of God and all the gods.
3. Pity for man that he would make such a vow. Infinite pity for all men, for all mental weakness.

However, by the time Stoner Drake makes his second vow after learning of Jocelle's rape, the contending archetypal elements in his characterization have become so intermixed, as we shall see, that the novel took a quite different turn in the writing. The third step in Miss Roberts' note is achieved not through Stoner Drake's self-realization, but by the pitiable spectacle he himself furnishes--a burnt-out old man, permanently bent in the defiant posture of revolt, unable to recall why or for whom he made such a vow.

On this first level, then, we have a realistic novel, written in the middle of the depression, chronicling the life of a farm family from the turn of the century to the middle of the 1920's. What has been called 'the agony of our time' is always in the background; the first World War, the 'boom,' the 'bust,' the ordeal of America's forcible change from an agrarian individualistically oriented nation to a world power in an intensively capitalistic, industrial world. The ideological struggle arising from this change forms one of the subthemes of the novel, which rejects both the 'rugged individualism' of Stoner Drake and the 'mob-mad' ideology voiced by John Thomas.

In terms of the novel, John Thomas' concept is obviously abhorrent, since it is based on a denial of the spiritual potential within every man. It substitutes authority and restraint for the free creation of individual life patterns. Stoner Drake's individualism, although incomparably more noble than this, is found to be impractical for the changing world, which is inexorable in its demands. Drake has no control over the wars, military and economic, which rage across the world's surface. There is no place where he can escape the violence from the outside world, and although he encloses himself in the remote security of Wolflick, the war follows him there, searing the inmates of his house with its hot breath and wresting his property out of his hands. In John Logan Treer's theory of 'fellowmanship,' the doctrine of 'the co-operative man,' Miss Roberts offers her solution to this major problem of our times. The cooperative man, for Miss Roberts, will

be able to be himself, different or like, strange or familiar, but his sense of communal responsibility will enable him to survive and build a society of free individuals. Treer's is the prophecy of the new man:

It's my belief we'll have a new man. Before another decade He'll begin... The upstanding, intelligent man. No bathos. No tears. We won't know where he was born. We'll know him for what he thinks. No man of sorrows. A man of sound sense. He'll stand up in his world. Old sculpture *pathetique* can go! Loose-jointed *ecce homo!* One protoplasm is like another protoplasm, and why all the stir about the birth? Like is what we want. Where's the life of the man? We'll ask.... We'll have a new man. Good sense and a just peace. No blubber. Able to pool his interests with his neighbor's. The co-operative man.'

The second line of action in the novel, the Biblical or cosmic line, parallels the first. Professor Knight suggests a skeletal synopsis: 'our of the flood (World War I), Noah (Stoner Drake) sent forth a raven (Jocelle) to go to and fro over the void (post-war society). Later...will come...'somewhere or somehow' the Redeemer.' This is in essence, I think, the allegorical meaning of the novel on this second level, but Professor Knight's comment can be both amplified and qualified. Stoner Drake is quite definitely, in part, a Noah figure, but where Noah was favored by God in being allowed to save himself in his ark, Noah acts in humility, acquiescing to God's inexplicable will because God is 'wholly other,' and man's faith is to obey; Stoner Drake is a Noah in rebellion--a Noah with vengeance in his heart against Him who sent the Flood. Indeed, Stoner Drake, like Ahab before him, is goaded past sanity by the fatal horn of the either/or dilemma; God must exist in humanly comprehensible terms (that is, Drake's terms) or he cannot be allowed to exist at all. Thus his monomania fluctuates between the poles of absolute nihilism and self-aggrandizing humanism. The figure of Drake, as mentioned before, seems to have absorbed such furious contrarities in the writing that a strict allegorical reading is not possible.

The 'raven' which is sent forth from the ark to make a first settlement in the wilderness beyond the ark is Jocelle. Like Boone in *The Great Meadow*, she is a herald to chaos, a hardy trailblazer who goes before, so that the dove may follow bringing peace. And the void over which she flies to and fro is not just 'post-World War I society,' but the total disorder of modern life. Jocelle is early identified with the raven of the title: 'She was unnoticed, about nine or ten years old, at a small table near the hall door. She would lift in mind through the air to hover at each man's shoulder when he spoke, a bird of strong wings and sharp beak, black and invisible, going to and fro above their heads, over their breasts, including them and herself to itself, in their voices, moving with their words, never at rest, a flutter of ruffled feathers with their querulous words, a croaking cry with their protests, a pulsing of quiet wings when they brooded long over some opinion.'

Jocelle, then, is not only to go forth at the end--into postwar society--she is from the first the observer and coordinator of life at Wolflick. And Wolflick, the ark, is a microcosm where faith and atheism contend for the soul of Stoner Drake. Out of the fields comes Jack Briggs, a journeyman preacher who has been ordered in a revelation to go forth to the countryside, preaching *Genesis* viii.22 to all people. He is a simple, barefooted man with the odor of sheep about him, and his attachment to Wolflick is an antithetical balance to Dickon, the mechanical rationalist... Briggs has heard of Stoner Drake's vow and he determines to 'preach him back outen hell if he's so headed.' Significantly enough, Stoner Drake allows the preacher to remain at Wolflick. Dickon's book, *The Cosmograph*, is a 'confusion of myth and natural phenomena brought together in some scarcely evident coherence, and made to point to a thesis.' The thesis, in direct contrast to the divinely ordained unity of *Genesis*, is an infinite heterogeneity and heteromorphism, 'the everlasting otherness of kind building on kind.' In violent opposition to the description of the miraculous gift of the universe bestowed upon man in *Genesis*, Dickon summarizes *The Cosmograph* as follows:

'Thus we see that Man, the upstart, the prig of the universe, holds no place. Not even a cog among the wheels. The whole mechanism turns, grinding out forms to pitch them over as the engine goes humming along at a merry pace, and nothing in the whole panoply of phantasmagoria cares if he falls out or in, but you might hear a thundering guffaw on Mount Olympus when he tumbles headlong back into Chaos.'

Thus Stoner Drake, emblem of man in rebellion against the inscrutability of the workings of nature, is flanked by opposing extremists. One exhorts him to lay down his pride and accept the universe because it is good; the other argues that he should forget his pride and accept the universe because he is unimportant and his defiance is that of a spoiled child.

John Loan Treer, the country farm agent, enters Wolflick as a healer, and Jocelle pictures him in her mind as a centaur....'He was standing, feet drawn together, Chiron, the good centaur, chanting a line.... "Give me a spark of Nature's fire, / That's all the learning I desire." Chiron, renowned for his skill in medicine, is Jocelle's image of Treer, plausibly enough suggested by her first view of him, ministering to the sick animal. But Treer has as well a theoretical potion for the sickness of mankind, a possible cure for the virulent diseases of hatred, violence, and jealousy which have plagued the human race since its inception. In terms of Professor Knight's Biblical analogy, the dove which is to follow, 'somewhere or somehow,' the Redeemer, is symbolized in John Logan Treer, of whom Jocelle says: 'Came to me out of the foot-rot of the sheep.... Out of the sour old eye sick on the stable floor.' Treer, the healer, to that other leader of a spiritual revolution based on love, Christ....

On this level, the visionary level, we find a passionate faith in the redemption of man, a renewal of the covenant which insures the eternity of seedtimes and harvesttimes, pointing toward the ever-beckoning ideal of 'peace on earth, good will toward men.'

Jocelle, in the meantime, moves softly among all the antagonists, absorbing from all and contending with none. In her bureau she keeps both Dickon's *Cosmograph* and the closely written manuscripts which expound John Logan Treer's theories. Jack Briggs shaves his beard for her, since he has heard it said that 'hair is not pleasant to a young girl.' Stoner Drake adds to her repository of gifts and confidence by bestowing upon her an old family relic, an iron lantern, first fashioned and used in the original settlement of Fort Harrod by 'common men,' as Drake says, 'who did an uncommon thing.' Working side by side with Martha, or hurrying swiftly to answer Stoner Drake's call on the conch horn, Jocelle nurtures the growing love for Treer within her, and quietly keeps order in this divided house.

The conflict between Briggs and Dickon reaches its climax in the scene following Jocelle's wedding, when the argument turns into a physical struggle and Drake finally enters the battle to eject Dickon. But, though Briggs attempts to press his advantage by preaching salvation and projecting a picture of Wolflick in flames, Drake turns away. The field is left, then, to Jocelle and Treer, in whose marriage the life-creating principles of courage as the condition of individual existence and love as the salvation of society are united.

Preacher Briggs' prophesy of the burning of Wolflick is the final link in a chain of symbolic references to fire which runs through the entire novel, and may be in part a remnant of an earlier version in which Miss Roberts actually included the burning of Wolflick. The importance of the theme is pointed to by the presence of the 'Curfew' passage in the prologue. Its most explicit development is in the scene when the entire family, with Dickon and Briggs, is sitting around the dining table, and J. T. asks Stoner Drake the climactic question: 'What would you do if the house should catch fire? House burn down?' The question reverberates onto the cosmic plane, as Drake interprets it to be 'What will I [man] do when the whole world is drowned in a lake of fire?'

This restates the conflict between Dickon and Briggs over Stoner Drake, with Drake caught in an untenable middle position, acknowledging supernal purpose in his defiance of God, and unable to submit to that purpose because he judges it inhuman and unjust. J. T.'s question leads to Stoner Drake's examination of the meanings of fire and the reiteration of his outcry: 'There's a mort of unnecessary pain.... If God would but talk plain to mankind, say fact, quit mystery.' In Drake's inquiry into 'fire,' he who is given the Promethean nickname 'Firebrand' moves from the fire on the hearth to Empyrean fire, and from there to the fierce fire raging on the earth in the form of war and famine....

Fire, the ultimate destroyer and energizer of life, has a wealth of connotations, ranging from the warm hearthglow to the blinding explosion of gases in the solar system, which make it a fitting symbol for the manifestation of spirit in the material universe. One of its emanations is 'light' or 'enlightenment,' but no man can look steadily into the sun. Drake's investigations lead to no conclusion save bafflement, but the

existence of a fierce fire at Wolflick is pointed to in the concluding paragraph of the same chapter.... Martha the Curfew ('fire coverer') banks the fires each night, lest they rage in total destruction, but she banks them carefully, lest they be entirely extinguished by the surrounding flood.

The third line of action in *He Sent Forth a Raven* can be viewed almost as a sketch of the anatomy of the spiritual personality. The inhabitants of Wolflick can be interpreted not only as a microcosmic abstraction of the world, but as a macrocosm of the individual spirit. The isolation of Wolflick, intensified by Stoner Drake's adamant refusal to 'set a foot on God's green earth,' suggests the absolute isolation of the individual. Stoner Drake, 'the lonely Will, the wish, the desire of the heart, housed within walls, blowing wild notes on a conch-horn,' stands quite naturally, even in the rocklike solidity of his name, for that 'proud ghost,' the will within the total 'I.' He is the master of the soul, the giver of orders, the imposer of individuated personality. It is he who brings pride within the spirit, since he cannot bear contradiction or defeat. He is also the energizing flame, the volitive force which insists on life. His characteristic gesture is phallic and commanding: 'His fingers were ready to crumple into a fist leaving the index finger free to point, so that, since this gesture came frequently to his hands, Jocelle thought of it as being the man himself, as if his whole body and being focused to a sharp pointing finger.'

And he is flanked by Jack Briggs and Sol Dickon, both combatants for his attention. Briggs, with the smell of the beasts upon him, seems to represent simple faith. He is of the earth, without sophistication or logic; but he believes, and his belief is supported with the strength of his entire frame. He has been commissioned to preach *Genesis* viii.22, and this he does, scarcely understanding the words he has memorized; his influence is based on the brute power with which he believes. Dickon, the 'Beelzebub' of *The Cosmograph*, is Briggs' opposite number, reason. He is the carpenter, the advocate of scientific cause and effect. In Jocelle's early glimpse of his room in Anneville, she perceives his elemental nature: 'Plain unbelief settled about the remembered spareness of the room, about the clear lamp and the few sheets of unwritten paper. Dickon walked heavily through the emptiness he had devised.' He has sought for the cause behind the effect, and the cause behind that cause, until logic has 'proved' to him that there is no final cause, no ultimate purpose to anything. Significantly, after the ejection of Dickon, Stoner Drake still does not succumb to Briggs' exhortations. The inference is plain that the will must work with both faith and reason; neither is capable of supplying the other's function. They must be harmonized into effective action.

The figure of Martha is more difficult to interpret on this level, perhaps because it is not completely realized. Her salient characteristic seems to be suggested by her name, that of the sister of Lazarus who was 'cumbered about much serving' in contrast to Mary, who heard Jesus' word directly. Martha the Curfew is the housekeeper of Wolflick, the guardian of the fire who tends the fire, but possesses it only by reflection. Although she is cynical and withdrawn, she serves conscientiously, calling down from her room warnings to Jocelle, and it is she who reminds Briggs that he must preach love as well as obedience. In her bitter self-sacrifice, the steady impress of her strength should not be underestimated; although she is unable to restrain the will in any direct conflict, she does check its smoldering fires regularly, keeping the house safe from complete conflagration... There seems to me a strong suggestion of the quality of devoted service or duty....

John Logan Treer is the last to come within Wolflick, and at that, he is reluctantly given admittance. 'He was elusive...a scheme, a plan, an ideal.' It is difficult to assign him a name, but perhaps the one suggested by Miss Roberts, 'ideal,' will be as suitable as any other. He is a latecomer and the least understandable to the other faculties of the soul. He is not the kind of ideal projected by the will for its own aggrandizement; he is more that command ideal--the 'fellowmanship' which Miss Roberts felt to be common to all men--and as such, he comes unbidden and even resented by the soul: 'He was visionary, militant, melancholy in his concern for mankind and in his thought of himself as being mankind. He was elusive, not to be analyzed, to be comprehended in a mass rather, or left as the source of wonder and surprise.'

And Jocelle, finally, is the imagination, the integrative, creative imagination which coordinates the total activities of all the faculties of the spirit. She moves amidst the will, faith, reason, duty, and the elusive ideal, taking from each (Drake's iron lantern, the shaving of Briggs, *The Cosmograph*, the friendship of Martha, and Treer's theories and love) and producing, in turn, something which incorporates an essence of each one of them, but is at the same time something greater than the sum of all of them--new life, Roxanna:

'Sleeping, and waking, she [Jocelle] saw within the act of seeing, as if the brain itself were a prism, a crystal-clear design, a mathematical form, and as such common to all men....And thus, a clear design, the mind, common to all men, it pointed an index, to a common sharing which was religious, the sharing of the common mental pattern where individual traits merged. And therefore of fear and faith and praise. In it somewhere or somehow came the Redeemer. Under this again, under communal devotions and emotions, the lonely will, the wish, the desire...the underlying complexity reducible within itself and of itself to the one simple determinate, lonely among its fellows, aloof, arising now to a super-life, the will to believe, to live, to hate evil, to gather power out of emotion, to divide hate from love where the two are interlocked in one emotion, the will to love God the Creator.'

Thus, on this third line of symbolic action, there is an amazing parallel to what we have seen to be Miss Roberts' basic theme--the imposition of order on chaos. Just as the raven is sent forth from the Ark, like Boone blazing a Wilderness Road so that mankind can follow subduing nature and creating form where before there was void, so the intuitive imagination of man's soul integrates the incongruities and conflicts of his inmost spirit, creating a harmony and order within, without which he could not exist.

He Sent Forth a Raven is, I believe, a unique novel in twentieth-century American literature. Its universal cosmic scope and its intimate grappling with the most fundamental problems which face modern man give it a depth and breadth possessed by no other contemporary American novel that I know. Although it presses with penetrating honesty into topical problems, it does this in terms of the aesthetic experience, offering no glib solutions or pat dogmas. Its passionate intensity, its deep-lying optimistic faith in the creative potential of man, and its provocative and profound vision, stamp it with the ineluctable markings of exalted artistic inspiration. I believe that *He Sent Forth a Raven* is one of the finest achievements in modern American letters."

Earl H. Rovit

Herald to Chaos: The Novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts
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"*He Sent Forth a Raven* (1935)...is another allegorical novel, this time a dark one, with a World War I setting. Stoner Drake vows that he will never set foot on the soil if his second wife dies, and she does, and he executes his oath by staying indoors for the rest of his days. He gathers about him a group of loquacious characters who represent the folly of a mechanical world at war, who have lost their connections with simplicity, with nature, with God. The plot seems to offer diversions and possibilities: the crazy old Lear whose granddaughter, Jocelle, brutally raped by a cousin, at last finds peace and hope in marriage to the good, simple man who takes over the operation of Lear's farm; but it is very tediously worked out.

In the three years preceding publication of *He Sent Forth a Raven* Miss Roberts' health had been deteriorating, and in 1936 a specialist finally diagnosed her ailment as Hodgkin's disease. The remaining five years of her life were spent in a struggle with an enemy that she knew must win. It was in this shadow that she wrote *Black Is the Color of My Truelove's Hair* (1938), and her genius, no longer distracted by the irritants of modern society, went back again to work for her almost as effectively as in the beginning. Her last novel is a rich, ordered, beautiful symphonic piece of writing which gives a fine satisfaction to the careful reader, though at moments some of the vividness of the characterization may seem sacrificed to the symbolism."

Louis Auchincloss

Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists
(U Minnesota 1961, 1964, 1965) 132

"The two central characters of *He Sent Forth a Raven*, the externally presented Stoner Drake and the extensively analyzed Jocelle Drake, share the agonies of flesh and spirit undergone by Theodosia Bell. I do not find the consistent epic movement in this novel which Rovit does, but the book is conceived on a larger scale than *My Heart and My Flesh*. For me it is too haphazard in development to achieve the heroic dimensions of *The Great Meadow* or the timeless quality of *The Time of Man*.... Jocelle Drake at least has some of the qualities of the epical heroine. She attains Diony Jarvis' intellectual clarity and inner command

and Ellen Chesser's steadfast stoicism and equanimity as a result of a kindred sensitivity to all of nature's moods.

Given the symbolical intricacies of the book, moreover, we would have to agree with Miss Roberts that 'much is attempted' and that the book is, as she elsewhere said, 'one of my largest works in point of theme and matter.' In it she most fully exemplified her own preoccupation with the artist's role as philosopher: 'to increase one's hold on all the out-lying spaces which are little realized in the come and go of every day.' Incessantly she brooded over the relationships between body and mind, matter and spirit, society and individual, man and God, and reason and myth. The critics of the novel when it appeared were impatient with Miss Roberts' elusive rendition of her values and were unenthusiastic. The present-day student of her work will find more in 'the much abused and maligned Raven' than they did. As *Pierre* does for Melville, *He Sent Forth a Raven* tells us much about the writer without being an entire success in its own right.

The germ for Miss Roberts' novel was provided by an account in the *Springfield Sun* of one Basil Haydon who had sworn that he would never walk again on the earth if Lincoln were elected. In the novel Stoner Drake makes a similar vow when his young wife becomes mortally ill soon after his marriage to her. If she dies, it will be, he feels, the second young mate he has unfairly lost. After his wife's death he determines to be an exile from God's earth, and he is thereafter unreconciled to an arbitrary and inscrutable God. Stoner's daughter Martha at the beginning of the novel and his granddaughter Jocelle at the end identically regard Stoner as 'the lonely will, the wish, the desire of the heart.' Insofar as he may represent humanity's unreconciled heart, he speaks for all the members of his family at 'Wolflick': "He being themselves in essential acts and opinions, he being the outspoken act, calling defiance for all from the upper bridge.'

Stoner Drake is the inverse prophet figure, venting his wrath upon an unjust god rather than conveying God's wrath to an erring people. His scorn of wayward mankind is, however, that of an angry prophet; and he is also akin to the God who in Noah's time felt that he must destroy an earth grown corrupt and full of violence. As an obscure and arbitrary being, Stoner is like the god he condemns. He is surely god in his immediate family, holding the destinies of all under his omnipotent sway. If he is rude and capricious, he is at times the benign and affectionate patriarch when, for example, he serves at mealtime or invites the casual stranger, Preacher Briggs, to sit at the family board. Stoner displays an all too human pride and egotism which are perhaps at the source of his quarrel with a God who seems to him to be as egocentric as himself. Preacher Briggs correctly appraises Stoner as one who shuts his heart against mankind in his aloof and private altercation with God. Stoner does not recognize that he also must, like the rest of mankind, suffer and endure.

Evidence drawn from the images used in the novel would identify Stoner in part with Noah. His home 'Wolflick' lies in the center of rolling farm country, the landscape appearing like 'the swell of an active sea,' where 'bright water churned over high ocean stones and lay out laterally rising and falling, a bright flow, a tide.' The outside gallery of the house has the appearance of a bridge on a ship, and at the end of the gallery is a small room like a ship's cabin. The pigeons, too, look like gulls as they fly around 'the beaked prow of the house.' In the closing pages of the novel the concept of the house as an ark still worked on Miss Roberts' imagination when she saw it floating 'in its ocean of greenery' and when she had Jocelle declare her loyalty to Stoner: 'As long as the old tug floats, I'll stay aboard though.'

Stoner Drake has no high opinion of men. Humanity seems more than ever insignificant to him when he gazes at the stars and hears from a distance the motor car of the man who races at sixty-five miles an hour. The instigator of this noise becomes symbolic of the generality of men who obscure their aims by meaningless and erratic activity: 'the same God-forsaken, hurry-up, goen-nowhere, today and forever.' If Stoner cannot find purpose, he is unwilling to believe that those who protest most loudly have found it. His misanthropy is sadistic when he mocks the young Jocelle's vision of an ideal Place, which she lovingly fabricates from her romantic thoughts of geography and which he at first helps her devise. When Jocelle suggests that God may be there, Stoner once more recalls his quarrel and despairingly quotes Job: '...thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?'

His despair engenders rebelliousness, and he reviles God by reviling God's prime creation, man, and his aspirations: 'Pattern got by men. Out of his befuddled life. What's he? On one side he's a pulen, unknown brat. On the other he's a senile, slobberen, totteren, forgotten old man. Who wants to be such a crawlen thing?' In scorning Jocelle's vision he is, of course, upset by the same aspiration that he deems futile. He must deny the validity of a free and ranging spirituality with its implication that God, purpose, and pattern may exist if he is to preserve his own importance and, as he mistakenly thinks, his own identity. Rovit has shrewdly analyzed Stoner Drake as 'caught in an untenable middle position'; he acknowledges God's power by his very defiance of it, but he is unable to reconcile himself to that power because, by his own standards, it is 'inhuman and unjust.'

Stoner Drake is a man of extreme views and is uncompromising toward those who challenge his authority either by what they are or by what they say. He must keep such people in line, ignore them, or remove them from his presence. He tolerates Jocelle because she is for so long inarticulate; he disgraces Martha, unjustly accusing her of whoredom because she ventures to take a lover from the world outside; he scorns Jocelle's lover, John Logan Treer, for his progressive ideas on agriculture and for his visionary socialism, attempting to confute him not by intellectual proofs but by ridicule. Stoner thus emerges not only as a man who defies his God but as one who, like Melville's Ahab, contemptuously dismisses as unimportant all individuals less tormented than himself.

So assertive is Stoner, however, that he gathers to himself all that is vital on the farm, and he is at the vortex of its active existence, 'the focus of life that gathered to the barns and breeding pens and drew them more inwardly toward the house.' One form his energy takes is a ranging curiosity. He is scornful of Wayne, Martha's lover, for example, because the man is unable to discourse upon the comet he expects to see in the spring. Wayne has neither intellectual strength nor imaginative boldness. When, in turn, Stoner looks at the stars, at the galaxy for example, he is avid for 'origins and from-whiches...toward-whats and mathematical.' Thus, Prometheus-like, he would challenge the gods to let him know the secrets of the universe. Like Adam's curiosity at times in *Paradise Lost*, Stoner's extends to matters the full knowledge of which God denies to his limited creature, Man. Obsessed by the fact that God does not talk plainly to man, Stoner is unable to see that inscrutability is one of the prime characteristics of God and that there must also be limits to human pretensions. There is no Raphael to rebuke Stoner for his pride, although Preacher Briggs ineffectually tries at times to do so.

Stoner is fascinated by the outer reaches of the universe--Pollux, Cassiopeia and the Milky Way, and then by the Empyrean as that is inhabited by the sun. He resents the sun as a blinding light in the sky and cannot see why the American eagle alone may gaze upon it without being blinded. If the sun blinds man and paralyzes his reason, it still provides a veiled light for human eyes as the source of all knowledge: 'Two little suns in the head of a man made to take in the light of the sun and to turn it into sense. What would the eyes be without light?' Why the God who created light should also be a god who countenances destruction makes Stoner distraught. Stoner, like Prometheus, is scarcely successful when he challenges the gods and tries to probe into the origins of matter and of life; he can only appropriate for a while, for his own use, some of the fire at the center of creation.

As the fire of Stoner's own spirit flickers out, his defiance dwindles. He becomes a man worn out by his consuming hatred of God, a man who would continue to rage if he were still capable of physically expressing his vehemence. I find in Stoner little of the mellowness which Rovit, following Miss Roberts' expression of intent, sees in the later Stoner. As a girl, Jocelle had felt that her grandfather, even in his prime, was excited to no purpose; and he achieves nothing in the way of peace, harmony, or satisfaction through his denials: 'Asceticism lay about her without the cooling draft of prayers.'

Stoner, in essence, possesses an insight he is unable to act upon; he sees in life two opposing forces, 'a most unnecessary pain' and 'a life principle.' He is so obsessed by the first that the redemptive value of the second is lost to him. He is also unwilling to recognize the presence, or the survival, of the life principle in his own granddaughter until he is too feeble to assert his own unruly personality.

The book partly fails because Stoner Drake, as a character, was inadequately conceived and imperfectly projected. There is no sense of developing or, indeed, of sustained passion in Stoner; the only change in

him is negative (and this is not greatly marked) when his defiance fades into senile ineptitude. The spectral quality which he increasingly assumes with age is stated rather than demonstrated when, in making an inventory of his livestock, he is described as 'not of the earth which he numbered.' The change in Stoner is not that from a Prometheus to a Lear, for Stoner never achieves the magnitude of either of these characters, their dynamic passion, or their fullness of being. I would agree with Janney that Stoner is 'a static image' and in no sense a commanding or engaging figure.' Stoner's savage indignation is mostly sentimental since it so far exceeds its realized cause in the novel. The vow he makes is contrived, and it registers more as an idiosyncrasy of an egocentric man than as the vehemence of a large though embittered soul.

Stoner Drake is inconclusively analyzed, possible, because Jocelle stands at the center of the book--and this despite the fact that Stoner Drake's image initially set Miss Roberts' imagination working. He is absent from too many of the best sections of the novel to dominate it effectively. Perhaps, too, the episodic nature of the novel moves it away from Stoner as one main focus. Stoner becomes, therefore, a peripheral instead of a central character. Nor is he the brooding presence in the background to whom all else in the novel must inevitably relate, as are Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* or Sam Fathers in Faulkner's *The Bear*. He is not, like Ahab, a daring force, nor is he, like Heathcliff, an expansive conception in the mind.

Stoner Drake is not only a static character but not a very important one, his agony of spirit, unlike Jocelle's, is insufficiently related to the world of agony of World War I which hovers always in the distance. Stoner's image is energized by certain physical traits and mental quirks--halting steps through the house, resort to an upper gallery or 'bridge' (added to the house 'to thrust the man a little further out over nature'), preoccupation with the heavenly bodies, and recourse to a conch horn to summon his family and servants. As an eccentric he is mostly a caricature of a man at odds with the universe. Disastrously for his Promethean aspect, he is only sympathetic in the end of the novel when he appeals to our pity as a man defeated by senility and by life in Jocelle and her child. The broken man who even forgets the exact occasion of his former diatribes against God is a more interesting conception than the one-dimensional character who reviles destiny and who assumes that what has happened to him is a personal affront from God rather than a tragic destiny borne in some degree by all men.

The novel suffers because its center is divided. It begins as the saga of Stoner Drake and his relationships to God and to the members of his family at 'Wolflick'; it ends by being the story of Jocelle Drake whose conflicts are far more deeply felt than Drake's. In Jocelle's history we often discover the further ranges of significance which Miss Roberts apparently tried to reach in Stoner's story. If we regard the novel as a presentation of 'the agony of our time' as it is reflected in and through Jocelle, *He Sent Forth a Raven* is one of the most profound of Miss Roberts' books. Through Jocelle, Miss Roberts in *He Sent Forth a Raven* often went further in defining spiritual reality than she did in any of her other books. The book is so predominantly Jocelle's that only those persons to whom she is closest come alive: her aunt Martha, her cousin and violator Walter Drake, and her lover John Logan Treer. The remaining characters, at a remoter distance from her informing consciousness, are wraithlike: the materialist philosopher Dickon, the itinerant preacher Briggs, her cousin John Thomas, and Stoner Drake himself.

Structural line in this novel is also less clear than in Miss Roberts' other books. However, this amorphousness at times implements Miss Roberts' purpose in *He Sent Forth a Raven*. Granted that a fragmented approach diminishes the reality of peripheral characters, still such an elliptical, disconnected method intensifies our sense of outward chaos; it helps also to engender the dreamlike and nightmare aspects of the book--especially when Jocelle's quivering sensibility reacts to the disorder outside her in the nearer world of 'Wolflick' and in the farther one of Armageddon.

The Jocelle strand of the story is both realistic and symbolic. On one plane we have Jocelle's education, growth, and spiritual enlargement in a quasi-demonic environment where nature and her own sense of the fitting are stabilizing influences. On a deeper plane, Miss Roberts in tracing Jocelle's development through shattering tragedy to a full fruition, explored the intricate relationship between Jocelle's agony, which ends in a muted victory, and the larger agony of the outside world, caught in the throes of war, which ends in nominal victory for the Allies. This realistic tale of the life and inner history of a Kentucky girl therefore verges imperceptibly on the symbolical. From the various adjustments that Jocelle makes to her experiences, a metaphysically complex tale emerges in which she forges a vital philosophy from the

various pressures that surround her. Characters who are symbolical, often allegorical in purport, embody these conflicting attitudes; and Jocelle draws from each of them what she can use for herself.

The episodic method is most pronounced in Chapter I which goes back and forth in time. This chapter Miss Roberts related, predominantly, from an omniscient point of view. She juxtaposed abruptly with one another the subsections of this chapter and furnished separate titles for them. Even more than in the succeeding chapters, disjointed fragments form a larger whole. The materials elaborated--Stoner before and after his vow, and Jocelle and Martha at various times from the turn of the century until America's entry into the World War I--bear closely upon the unfolding narrative and clarify some of its implications.

After Chapter I, Miss Roberts developed her narrative chronologically, though she often presented the events in Jocelle's history abruptly and tenuously. This incoherence, as we have seen, does convey the impression of a chaotic world in which Jocelle, like all her contemporaries, must find her way. If Miss Roberts' method is episodic, it also allows her to reveal Jocelle through dramatic incident. With Stoner much less is dramatized than with Jocelle. Tenuousness of structure puts the inner consciousness of Jocelle further from us than that of any other Roberts' heroine. This looser method, however, permitted Miss Roberts to range further than in her previous works. Jocelle thus develops upon a larger canvas--a whole world in convulsion and chaos--than does any other Roberts protagonist.

Jocelle matures against the distant but ubiquitous cataclysm of the war. The earliest sequences in the novel--those which trace her life at Anneville with her mother, her girlhood at 'Wolflick' after her mother deserts her, and her education at the seminary--are given at excessive length for their inherent importance and for their significance in Jocelle's progress. As a result, more diffuseness than was perhaps necessary marks the first three chapters of the novel. In the sequences at the seminary, as Rovit points out, Miss Roberts wished to show that Jocelle can only reach full independence, first, by merging with a group and, second, by decisively emerging from it. It is not until Jocelle returns for good to 'Wolflick' that her story develops poignancy and symbolic depths.

Jocelle at first does not understand the situation when friends and family discuss 'the disturbed nations, the disordered histories of peoples.' Her role soon passes from that of spectator to involvement, though she is reluctant to recognize the reality of the war. The massive nature of the conflict comes home to her after Martha asserts that five million American men could be sent overseas. As she sews a dress, she sees these hordes of men as blades of grass before her; they then swarm over the landscape, bringing 'fire and terror, destruction, their path being a path of devastation.' The young men she knows--John Logan Treer, Walter Drake, and John Thomas (J.T.) Drake--provide her, she thinks, with her only protection against these marauders at the same time that these men pass beyond her to join the mob of soldiers. She realizes in a panic that she is unable to escape from so many men; and in spite of her desire to remain aloof, she cannot avoid contact with--and in the end contamination from--an event including so many. More than a hint of the horror that disables her after the rape by Walter suffuses this nightmare-like sequence.

Through the overwhelming heat of the last day at 'Wolflick,' before joining his military unit, her cousin Walter insists that Jocelle accompany him. He overpowers her just as the war likewise threatens to extinguish the identity of individual men and nations. Even at her most distraught, Jocelle senses that Walter's act is not only 'the despairing act of the departing soldier' but the war claiming dominion over her: 'the war had rolled its waves forward to include herself, to float her back into itself on the tides of her own spent and angry flesh.' Walter represents one side of the youth of his age, a man whose rootlessness, self-pity, fright and egotism herald the postwar 'lost generation.' In Walter's violent act Jocelle, moreover, sees what war really is: 'A man you hate drags you to a flat ledge and piles stones on you. Chokes your cry back in your throat. Struggle until your breath gives out. 'I'm on my way to battle,' he says. Your fingernails torn out by the roots. That's what it means. My tongue pulled out of my throat and thrown to the hound dogs behind the kitchen. A man with tusks that stick out of his jaw. On his way to battle, stopped to say good-by.... Wiped his filth on me. That's what war means.' Jocelle's turbulence and her disorder of mind find forceful expression in a vivid, somewhat incoherent rhetoric notable for its dynamic, discordant images and for its staccato, disjointed rhythms.

Only through violence, Jocelle feels, can an act of violence be expunged. She hopes, therefore, to rear out of her mind the memory of Walter's violation by recourse to primitive rites or a parody thereof. In a kind of propitiatory ritual to the gods, she hopes that the rains will remove the stain made by the fire, and she anticipates that late summer growth will again cover this spot of earth. Now even Logan's face seems distorted from her previous memory of it when she gazes up at him from below as she sits by the fire; seen in a different plane, his lips curl and snarl, his teeth seem long, and he seems identified with her Aunt Martha rather than with her.

Apathy and despair for a time descend upon her. Sex, which ought to be a joyous expression of the life urge, she finds revolting. Just as Theodosia Bell in recoil from anguish too great to bear visited her degraded half-sisters, so Jocelle for a time turns to the mulatto, Geril, and her obscene love. The whole thought of new life being engendered fills her with horror, since she now knows the degradation to which life may be subjected: 'In the barnyard behind the stable a hen was cackling, having laid an egg, screaming over the monstrous awfulness of the thing she had done; she had continued life.' Jocelle is also apprehensive that she may 'give birth to some further monstrosity of war, as if war would tear a Gargantuan, incestuous birth through her breast.' But after a time Geril's knowledge assures Jocelle that she will escape the indignity of an unwanted pregnancy. In the world outside 'Wolflick,' moreover, with its 'encampments, enlistments, embarkments, military jargon, war readiness, propaganda to enlist citizen action, she sense the same futility she now finds in her personal existence.

Jocelle is no more successful at allaying despair when she immerses herself in activities which once would have excited her. When she tries to make herself a new dress, her efforts seem devoid of purpose: 'the futile makeshift of man as he took the down of plants and tried thus to conceive a covering for his shrinking body and his trembling spirit.' Her disillusionment is most intense in the hallucinatory sequence which follows her attempt to view war, as her cousin J.T. does, in terms of 'objective and sector,' the men a part of it only as something incidental to the action. She sees in her imagination a house burning--the house of any human family, their own or another--and a frightened mankind burrowing in the ground as a sign of retrogression: 'Before the house were ditches that had been yielded to the enemy's fire. It was their house, any house. The air overhead was full of screaming. There was water in ditches, running or still. Man had crept back into the seams of the earth, wanting to be a rat, to be a snake, to be a mole. He died there of his own filth, and the rats ate the last of him. Overhead the air was on fire with the hell he had made.'

At the moment of greatest shock--after Walter leaves 'Wolflick' for the army--Jocelle has an intuition that she will be made whole again, though in the days which follow this confidence is much shaken. She will know her true lover John Logan Treer; and by the physical embracing of the man she loves, she resolves that she will obliterate her contamination by the man she loathes.

The first phase of her recovery comes unexpectedly. Immersing herself in part in the communal effort of war by raising white plymouth rock chickens, 'strangely gentle creatures, bred in abundance and security,' she finds that her pain eases because of her enthusiasm for the beauty of the flock and the control she achieves over it. By the end of the spring her being is renewed: 'she had become hearty, ripened with her delight in her fowl and with the warm sun.' Martha no longer taunts Jocelle as she had done when Jocelle revealed Walter's crime. Jocelle's newborn confidence makes her, in fact, immune to such attack. Martha now celebrates the revived beauty of her niece by identifying her with the classical goddesses: 'A deep-breasted, deep-hearted woman, Jocelle Drake, Juno when she stands against the mantel and holds the toasting fork, Aphrodite when she comes this way, toward me, with a twirling leaf in her fingers, her chariot drawn by white plymouth rocks for doves. The daughter of Dione...and...Zeus.' Like Aphrodite, Martha says, Jocelle wears the cincture and thus inspires love in all who gaze upon her.

Jocelle's rehabilitation is the more convincing since it does not take place all at once. First, she finds relief and satisfaction in her flock and her yearning for the true lover Logan: 'She wished for Logan to be near her that he might see her fowl, that he might see here the unified flock, the collective.' The war threatens to sear her a second time, not by thrusting an unwanted lover upon her but by taking the desired one away. When he comes, Logan is preoccupied with his visions of a redeemed mankind in society and with his disillusionment over the present debacle. He seems now so removed from the emotionally starved Jocelle that he is for her 'a gaunt negation.' The war cuts him off from her in spirit, just as it physically

takes him away from her when he is placed in a detention camp. At this point her flock loses power to engage her as the war spreads its tentacles to enclose her: 'About her lay a nothingness of distorted objects and wrong-headed purposes, the war in her own chicken pen gathering the war-chickens into crates to send them away.'

Jocelle now resolves to forget Logan lest his passivity become as traumatic for her as Walter's violence had been. Rather than risk her health or her newly won sense of well-being, she decides to force Logan from her mind. She will burn his manuscripts to be rid of his influence over her, just as she had destroyed her clothes as a last reminder of Walter. The idea of burning Logan's writings is so satisfying that she indefinitely postpones the act itself.

News of Walter's death upsets her more than she thinks it should. At first her hatred had dominated her; afterwards, when she gave herself to the life of the farm, she began to forget him. His demise brings him back vividly, in spite of her desire to rid herself of all memories of him. His death not only beclouds her emotional life but deepens her moral perceptions as well. She feels her delight in nature diminish at the same time that she perceives the moral implications of experience more truly than she did before: 'They [her chickens] having become a part now of the strangeness that had come to the farm, evil and good being mingled and opposed, being continually in opposition even while they were intertwined and entangled.' There is no clear light for her as yet in her own trouble and in a world torn by war. Though the Allies are massing at this time for all-out attack, this face has little relevance for her when even nature seems devoid of order as the crabgrass spreads wildly over the farm in wet weather.

Walter's death causes the likeness of Logan, the true lover, to grow still more dim in her mind. Her efforts to recall his image make Walter's the more vivid, her only salvation, she decides, in face of Logan's silence and neglect, is to look elsewhere. Rather than grieve over her disappointment, she hopes for a new beginning of sexual emotion with some other man. She is drawn to Bob Terry, a neighboring farmer, but only momentarily. Instead of destroying Logan's memory, Bob Terry's touch makes Logan far more real than he had been since he went away, just as Walter's death had obscured Logan to her mental vision. Now the absent Logan sums up for her the aspirations of her awakened being, those aspirations which she shares with all men: 'the ambitions or needs of a heart, a spirit within flesh crying out by the way of words and eyes and trusting devotions.'

When Logan returns, his physical presence finally eclipses Walter's image in her mind: 'the intolerable wrongs of the war past were not clearly remembered.' Hints of the unsettled postwar peace to come obtrude as Jocelle and Logan revel in their present happiness but look ahead to an uncertain future: 'She cried out suddenly that they would go away together and find some quiet, untroubled place, some place whose war story was not their own story, and he caught her more deeply to himself and agreed to this, but he said that such a place would be, for him, hard to find.'

At the end of the novel Jocelle's intuitions and her clear wisdom unite the social passion of her husband with the forceful individualism she had inherited from her grandfather. At that time she sees an illuminated pattern which is 'common to all men,' 'a crystal-clear design, a mathematical form...the mind.' Such a design, wrought from the generic experience of mankind, is 'a communal sharing which was religious, the sharing of the common mental pattern where individual traits merged.' As the necessary complement to these shared aspirations, affirmations, and uncertainties for which Logan is the eloquent spokesman, Jocelle values Stoner's individuality: 'the underlying complexity reducible within itself and of itself to the one simple determinate, lonely among its fellows, aloof, arising now to a super-life, the will to believe, to live, to hate evil, to gather power out of emotion, to divide hate from love where the two are interlocked in one emotion, the will to love God the Creator.' The paradoxical nature of the soul as at once the most individual and the most typical part of man's being. Miss Roberts even more succinctly stated in her journal: 'It is some, a, the inner inmost affirmation of being, the most individual I am of a creature but in that it is the most inner and most present, the most common, it is something held in common. Being common to all men, it is common, held in common, or shared.'

In the explication of Miss Roberts' universe in this novel, the character next in importance to Jocelle is her lover John Logan Treer. Like Jocelle, he is a natural force in his own right, a source of life and renewal.

The animal images associated with him indicate something of this vitality. The star Betelgeuse, for example, reminds Jocelle of Logan; she sees him as 'a fine mythical beast, going wherever it willed.' Martha describes him as a 'good animal,' but Jocelle at the time is unable to make anything of this since she associates 'animal' with verminous creatures like the polecat. Possibly she does not yet know her lover well enough to see the largeness of his nature, his animal energy as well as his spiritual and social passion. Because of his self-sufficiency she does identify him with the proud cock in the barnyard 'in the slow free lift of his proud feather.' He has for Jocelle, moreover, something of the sinuous life of the snake, a man whose ideas are vital at the same time that his involvement with them suggests a fanaticism that could make for evil. He has come to her directly out of nature's life, from among the sheep he was doctoring; in healing the flock, he has curative powers that seem talismanic if not magical. He has some of St. Francis' affinity with brute creation, and some of the centaur Chiron's inspired knowledge of medicine and other skills. To Jocelle he is swift in his motions, as if he were actually a centaur, 'riding, unshod, on swift horse limbs, little feet, thin shanks, strong thighs, his hair thrown up in a wind...Chiron, the good centaur.'

Logan translates his natural force into an idealism which is often arresting but sometimes ineffective. A rebel against abuses, he envisions a cooperative society for the future instead of the present competitive one. In relation to our present social organism, he says that the unknown soldier is in reality the unknowing one, 'out to kill and get killed to make fifty rich men richer.' Logan wishes also to renovate outworn acres by new scientific methods of farming. In him there is less bitterness against capitalism than an inspiring vision of 'the new man' of the future. Not the 'mod-man' who is descended from the 'cabin-man,' whom the robber barons swindled in return for his vote, but the upstanding, intelligent man is the one with whom Logan would work for a different future. The evolution of the new order is tied up with the war, for it is just possible that, after the war, a man may be able to pool his interests with his neighbor's. Some of the same selflessness that allows 'the Brush Grove farmer to fight in his heart for the Serbian peasant or the cattleman in Russia may lead to a different society at home, a society resting upon a sense of 'a man's oneness with his fellowmen, his fellowmen-ship.' He also hopes that the spurious prosperity resulting from the war may not disable the farmer in his struggle for recognition during the unsettled conditions that are bound to follow a military victory.

Logan is a symbolic figure, too--a prophet of a coming race who appears before his time and is spurned by the majority; a man 'visionary, militant, melancholy in his concern for mankind and in his thought of himself as being mankind.' His sufferings herald those which the race must endure before a better social order can evolve. He has been scorned and has suffered 'humiliations and degradations,' but he is far more central to the real destiny of his age than his opponents will admit: 'I was inside. I was at the very heart of the age, at the beginning of what's to come after.' His isolation, his endurance of persecution, his moral idealism, and his visionary fervor are Christlike in essence, and something of a divine or saintly presence is suggested, too, by the golden light which, like a halo, glances from his hair. In spite of the opposition to him and his teachings, he is a harmonizing and reconciling force. At the end of the novel, for example, Stoner, Briggs, and Dickon strive to define their attitudes more clearly as Logan enters, and they do so in a common deference to his wisdom and the greatness of his perceptions.

'A Manifold Mental State': Symbolism

Miss Roberts became impatient with the early critics of the novel who, she thought, mistook her intention by trying to assign the 'he' and the 'raven' of the title to definite characters: 'The Raven of 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 story of the flood, until the waters subsided. But he was defeated in the end by God's weapon of senility; and in spite of him, God's other weapon, Life, went on functioning in Jocelle and her child.' The spirit of the Raven--courage, independence, moral strength--operates to excess in Stoner and perhaps also in preacher Briggs and in the philosopher Dickon; it operates more flexibly in Jocelle, perhaps also in Martha and John Logan Treer.

The late Professor Grant C. Knight maintained that his interpretation of the symbolism in *He Sent Forth a Raven* had Miss Roberts' sanction. Knight would identify Stoner Drake with Noah who sends forth a raven, Jocelle, 'to go to and fro over the void (postwar society). In this scheme Jocelle is the central figure as she is in the completed novel; she has the raven's strength to weather--without faltering--isolation, outer

degradation, and inner darkness. In Knight's interpretation Jocelle resembles Miss Roberts' Daniel Boone. Like Boone, Jocelle is never lost, and she is creative by virtue of hearkening to her inmost self.

Miss Roberts further emphasized the independence and the self-reliance of the 'Raven' in a letter to Mr. Best: 'The Raven being the will of man, the desire of his heart, and as such, the raven of the cosmos still going to and fro, not crying with the dove, 'I find no resting place for the sole of my foot.' In another letter to Mr. Best, Miss Roberts said that the 'raven' was that moral courage which Jocelle, in fact, most often displays in the novel: 'The little beast that did not come whimpering back to the ark, that went to and fro on its own account in the void. This is my theme.' At least once in the novel Jocelle is explicitly seen as the raven, when she is nine or ten and when Stoner is quarreling with the materialist philosopher Dickon: 'She would lift in mind through the air to hover at each man's shoulder when he spoke, a bird of strong wings and sharp beak, black and invisible, going to and fro above their heads, over their breasts, including them and herself to itself, in their voices, moving with their words, never at rest, a flutter of ruffled feathers with their querulous words, a croaking cry with their protests, a pulsing of quiet wings when they brooded long over some opinion.'

In the symbolism elaborated above, Miss Roberts favored the raven over the dove. But the dove is like the Diony Jarvis of *The Great Meadow*; he follows the raven (the pioneer like Daniel Boone) to help consolidate his conquests. In *He Sent Forth the Raven* John Logan Treer, as the man of social imagination and charity, is the 'dove' to Jocelle's 'raven.' Treer as the dove may lack Jocelle's self-sufficiency and grandeur of nature, but he has perhaps a superior persistence, endurance, and tenacity in asserting his own vision. As a man of good will and peace, he is the dove that brings back the olive branch the second time it goes forth; and, as reformer, he is the dove that does not return the third time it flies out of the ark and that deserts 'the old world for the new...a new world begun, a new day of man on the earth.' The linking of Treer to the dove may also mean that he is to be seen in part as Christian divinity. The strength of his aspiration suggests the working within him of the Holy Ghost; as the prophet reviled by his contemporaries, as the healer of the sick, as the forerunner of a new time based upon a selfless ethic, and as 'the Redeemer' who will save a materialistic age from its false gods, he suggests the Son.

Even before her violation by Walter, Jocelle feels that she is 'a manifold mental state' gliding through many identities, responsive always to the people and situations which surround her and gaining from all of them a richness of knowledge basic to her own mature wisdom: '...Jocelle kept a manifold mental state that was assembled of the bright weather of early summer, the forgotten and absented preacher [Briggs], the secret manuscripts [Logan's] that lay above the secret Cosmograph (Dickon's) in her lower drawer, of her pleasure in a new hair-dressing she had devised and in the summer cotton frocks she had sewed and fitted, of the sadness of Martha's lingering illness, of the touch of strong rough fingers [Logan's] on her throat to forbid her report of what was written and entrusted to her hiding, of the slow anaest of the horn [Stoner's] that called her.'

Jocelle thus embodies Coleridge's concept of the imagination as 'a shaping or modifying power' which harmonizes into a new unity the disparate elements of experience. Through her conception of Jocelle as a mediating influence, Miss Roberts was able to abandon her original plan for ending the novel melodramatically by having Stoner perish in the burning of 'Wolflick' farm house. She was relieved to turn to a quieter, more philosophically conceived conclusion: 'It was always my intention to close the book on notes of repose and restraint. There was much violence all through the middle of it. I wanted the end to move in a swift repose, tranquil but suggestive of things going on and forward after the pattern now established. Trusting that there was enough vitality in Jocelle and Logan to carry along the fixed disasters, I left all to carry forward what was suggested in the last few lines of action and contemplation.' Despite Miss Roberts' plan for all the strands of the book to meet in Jocelle's radiant being, the intention is only partially realized because Jocelle's nature, as it is developed in the novel, is not capacious enough for the task assigned her. The book, as a result, is not quite the unified work of art Miss Roberts had hoped for; and even at the end, where Jocelle's sensibility is most vibrant, *He Sent Forth a Raven* generates less an impression of sustained unity than of fragmentation.

Jocelle derives some valuable insights from Briggs and Dickon, but she feels less than complete identification with either one of them. Sympathizing with Briggs's celebration of the energies of earth as a

primary facet in human life, she nevertheless finds his sexual advances loathsome when he shaves his beard to make himself attractive to her. As to Dickon, she grants him carpentry but nothing more and seldom looks at him; at another point she sardonically thinks of him as 'the old devil...Beelzebub'; and she associates with him her sense of outrage at Walter's violation of her, when Dickon's tangled eyebrows recall the tangled vegetation of the creek which now covers the burnt spot where she had destroyed her clothes. Briggs embodies a more active principle, since his enthusiasm for Christianity implies some recognition of the Raven principle and of the freedom of the will; Dickon in his emphasis on all-powerful, impersonal natural law embodies a passive and cynical attitude ('What's mankind but one atomic stench in the multiplied system'). Briggs represents the 'Hebraic relation of man to his God'; Dickon is the Greek materialist philosopher for whom, as for Ovid and Lucretius, all creatures of Nature reduce themselves to interacting atoms of matter.

Briggs and Dickon, both somewhat fantastic figures out of folklore, have that limited kind of reality. But they are too shadowy and undeveloped to fasten upon the imagination as Journeyman does in *Black Is My Truelove's Hair*. As philosophers their messages do not carry weight, in contrast to John Logan Treer's. Dickon and Briggs are less well elaborated than Logan because they are much farther away from Jocelle's animating personality. If at a realistic plane they are not altogether convincing as abstract philosophers and religionists, they are also too rigidly and obtrusively allegorical to be persuasive symbolic forces.

Dickon talks eloquently in defense of his ideas and impresses Stoner and Jocelle more than they might perhaps wish to be impressed. Yet Stoner surely rejects the ideas of Dickon when he intervenes in the fight between Dickon and Briggs after Dickon takes cruel advantage of his rival to injure his bare feet. Stoner, who shuts Dickon out of the house, says he wants to hear no more of 'void space'--by implication, of Greek materialism. In this scene Miss Roberts had Stoner choose primitive Christianity as morally superior to sophisticated paganism. In his cruelty to Briggs, Dickon embodies a rationalism uninformed by humanity.

As to the imagery in *He Sent Forth a Raven*, I have already mentioned in passing the most important strand--that connected with fire. In Miss Roberts' complex universe these images often connote both spiritual light and destructive force. Stoner, the chief Prometheus figure in the novel, 'Firebrand' as J.T. and Walter denominate him, is obsessed with fire and its various manifestations. He perceives that the sun can both nourish and quench life, but he fails to see that the light in his own spirit is more negative than positive. He is obsessed with the idea of annihilation by fire, or the 'general conflagration' promised in the Bible; and he has none of Jocelle's faith in the Light promised mankind in the Redeemer, Jesus. There is no 'insurance,' he says, against 'the general conflagration'; rather, at some appointed time the fiendish spirit of God will engulf all things with 'hail and fire mingled with blood.' Nothing will then avail as protection against God's 'lake of fire' which is promised as a preliminary to the Last Judgment. Stoner's terrifying vision is to be linked with Walter's hysterical envisioning of battle as 'liquid fire' and with his swaggering farewell assertion that he'll see all of those at 'Wolflick' in Hell. Parallel to Stoner's discussion of an all-powerful sun in the Empyrean is Dickon's celebration of Helios, the Greek god of the sun who provided light for gods and men.

Stoner also celebrates Prometheus who formed the first men out of clay, who stole fire for them, and who instructed mankind in the civilized arts. Though Stoner is to be identified with Prometheus in his defiance, Logan is in many ways a more authentic Prometheus since he instructs men in crafts and since he has their welfare more closely at heart. It is no accident, then, that in Logan's impassioned moments 'his eyes began to sparkle and snap their fire.' In a carefree moment, Logan sings a snatch whose words are more relevant to him as a Promethean figure than he might realize: 'Give me a spark of Nature's fire / That's all the learning I desire.'

When all else seems unreal after Walter's assault and when even Logan is unable to move her out of her apathy, Jocelle finds reality in the hearth-fire: 'She shrank toward the hearth and joined mentally the pure blaze that arose from the burning coals...clinging mentally to the certainty of the fire.' As the spiritual center of the novel, Jocelle gathers about her personality and activity many of these fire images. Stoner, for example, bestows upon her his spirit's light when he gives her the antique lantern far along in the book. Symbolically, too, she keeps a blaze going in Stoner's room at the end of the novel. Martha, who had tended the house fires over the years, is too ill to do so any longer; so Jocelle now tends the hearth in

Martha's room. Before her lover Logan comes for her after his discharge from the detention camp, she builds the fire for him in the east room of 'Wolflick'; and when he gets there, the flames reflected in the mesh of her dress indicate that she is, indeed, the source of truest light in the novel.

At a number of points Miss Roberts intended to convey with the mention of blazing houses the notion that fire is a destroyer as well as a purifier. The first mention of the possible destruction of 'Wolflick' by fire occurs when J.T. brashly asks Stoner what he would do, in view of his vow not to step on the earth, if the house should burn down. This question leads Stoner into the extended discussion with Jocelle about the nature of fire. Viewing the war impersonally as J.T. sees it, Jocelle, we remember, sees it translated into a house wrecked or burning, their house or any house. Martha, moreover, has harbored active resentment against Stoner over the years for his cruelty to her in driving away her lover. She tells Jocelle how she had never been reconciled and had burned down the house over Stoner day after day.

Toward the end of the novel Preacher Briggs censures Stoner for his pride by envisioning for him a catastrophe which may one day come upon him if the house should burn. As we have noted, Miss Roberts had earlier intended to immolate Stoner in the burning of 'Wolflick,' but she decided against this device because it was melodramatic and not realistic enough for a novel purporting to deal, in part, with Kentucky life. In a letter of December 5, 1934, to Mr. Best she declared: 'I may manage the solution in one chapter less than I have said. The chief difference is that I will establish this unyielding will-without-reason and not have the house burn in actual fact. Farmers, since the middle of the last century can no longer build country mansions, and the destruction of the house would not be a perfect retribution since it would work an ill upon the whole family. I have a good scheme however.'

In a letter of December 19, she presented her second thoughts as they were actually embodied in the novel: 'The last was re-contrived, the burning of the house put into the preacher's oracle and operates as a spiritual threat rather than as a physical fact.' If 'Wolflick' should burn down, the preacher says that Stoner, in his pride, would not consent to be saved though one part of his being might long to leave the fire. As long as he refuses to mollify the Lord, he will perish at some future time, Briggs thus insists, in the flames of his own recalcitrant spirit. Whether it is the preacher's vivid prophesy or the result of his own preoccupation with fire and destruction, Stoner at the end of the novel tries to recall the details of a nearby burning house, but he is unable to do so because senile amnesia overpowers him.

One of the most effective scenes in the novel is the butchering of a hog at night in the reflected glow of the bonfires immediately before Martha's lover comes to visit 'Wolflick.' The scene is imagined with a starkness and immediacy that recall the most vivid pages of Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence.... If the novel is somewhat too loosely organized for entire aesthetic satisfaction, its strength lies in such wonderfully conceived and realized separate episodes as this one. The scene not only registers with complete authority upon the imagination and makes an effaceless impression, but it also comments upon the beauty and cruelty of human life, it develops the complex symbolism of fire as a destructive and life-giving force, it conveys a sense of order underlying apparently bloody and sinister rites, and it foreshadows the sacrifice of Martha by Stoner and the meaningless cruelty of the fate of one who is to be, like the butchered animal, another ritual victim.

If *He Sent Forth a Raven* misses greatness, we would have to agree with Grant C. Knight that its complexity of substance makes it an important novel. Knight finds it the most useful of Miss Roberts' books for understanding the novelist and her universe; for, more than any other, it reveals 'her exquisite sense of reality, her bewilderment with things as they are, her lyric anger, her slight vein of madness, her faith in man's redemption'."

Frederick P. W. McDowell
Elizabeth Madox Roberts
(Twayne 1963) 128-50

"In *He Sent Forth a Raven* (1935) Roberts offers a World War I fragment of what would have been another part of the Book of Luce. Stoner Drake's blasphemous vow that he will 'never set foot on earth again while time lasts' unleashes a torturous conflict in which Drake, who takes fate as a personal affront, and a mechanistic carpenter, Sol Dickon, are arrayed against Jonnie Briggs, who preaches the inevitability

of the seasons and the wrath of God, and Logan Treer, the young visionary and life force who preaches the collective man. The disorder represented by the war crowds in upon Wolflick. The raven of the title is the dauntless spirit of man trying to go it alone--the Ahab-like Drake, worn out by hatred; his niece Jocelle; and also Treer. After being raped, Jocelle, like Persephone, finds life again, among her hens, in what appears to be a middle way of 'communal sharing' and in 'the lonely will...to believe...to divide hate from love...to love God the Creator'."

William H. Slavick
"Elizabeth Madox Roberts"
Fifty Southern Writers after 1900
eds. Joseph M. Flora and Robert Bain
(Greenwood 1987) 417

Michael Hollister (2021)