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BERKELEIAN IMPRESSIONISM IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS

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Much critical concern about Elizabeth Madox Roberts centers on whether her works can successfully transcend their southern regionalism to make a universally significant statement in the light of Berkeley's philosophical approach. Some critics even tend to be reserved about the general applicability of the philosopher's principles upon Roberts' literary production¹. Usually agreed upon, however, is Roberts' intention to express, through her main characters, individual progress toward identity and autonomy, that is toward selfhood, infused with berkeleian sensitivity. In so doing, the author must necessarily employ a traditional literary motif that, in being rooted in the archetypal pattern of the heroic quest for self, is inherently epic, romantic, and metaphysical.

With her first novel published at the age of forty-five, the major part of Roberts' philosophic sensitivity had already matured, and the succeeding fifteen years' experience of her life only chiselled and sublimed her already formed perceptions.

We all know that her philosophical idealism was probably stimulated in her youthful years by the fact that her father preferred Berkeley to all other philosophers, and that she used to read Bishop Berkeley's treatises in her youth. As it is, that idealism is constant throughout her thinking and works. Without the enlargement of her perspectives, Roberts would not have been able to bring her experiences into relation with what she gleaned from her father's books. She had learned that, until they are perceived by the mind, objects do not properly exist:

¹ See Lewis P. Simpson, "The Sexuality of History," *The Southern Review* 20.4 (Autumn 1984): 785.

My aim in art has always been to bring the physical world before the mind with a greater closeness—richer immediacy than before, so that mind rushed out to the very edge of sense, then mind turns about and sees itself mirrored within itself.²

That principle stems up from empiricism or positivism (a need for an acute insight in one's self) and assumes what one experiments. Existence derives from the mind. The Mind, on both human and divine levels, is creative. We, as human beings, create by actually perceiving and thinking, as Berkeley stated:

For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse est percipi aut percipere*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.³

Translated from Latin: "Their existence is in the being perceived", the sovereign self is the final reality in Roberts' philosophy as in Berkeley's. At the point of greatest harmony between the self and the world, an individual may experience a sudden illumination of his own nature. The instinctive force contained within the self is the source of inspiration and creativity. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell refers to the hero's triumph as "an expansion of consciousness and therewith of freedom"⁴; something which is exemplified in *The Great Meadow*, when the young Diony is described spinning her wool as she remembers some excerpts from *The Principles of Human Knowledge*:

She turned the thoughts of the words that the book used over and over with a pleasure in knowledge, restating all for her own delight; "They, these things, or any small part of the whole mighty frame of the world, are withouten any kind or sort or shape until somebody's mind is there to know. Consequently, all the ways you wouldn't know, all you forgot or never yet remembered mought have a place to be in Mind, in some Mind far off, and he calls this Eternal Spirit". Her thought leaped then beyond articulation and settled to a vast passion of mental desire (*The Great Meadow*, 24)

Of all Roberts' characters, Diony is the one that refers most to Berkeley's *Principles*; however, the pervasive influence of the philosopher is patent in Roberts' literary production.

² Elizabeth Madox Roberts papers, Library of Congress notes, unnumbered working notes. Thereafter abbreviated to EMRP.

³ George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* (III), *New Theory of Vision and Other Writings* (Everyman Edition) 114.

⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949) 246.

Thence, the aim of this study will be to examine the berkeleian motif that transcends Roberts' work first in the light of its poetic and romantic influence, then through the perception of a living nature that distinctively colors the artist's process, both converging in our last part toward spiritual activity so as to achieve self-realization for the communal sharing of mankind, common to Berkeley and Roberts:

We should propose to ourselves nobler views, such as to recreate and exalt the mind, with a prospect of the beauty, order, extent, and variety of natural things: hence, by proper inferences, to enlarge our notions of the grandeur, wisdom, and beneficence of the creator: and lastly, to make the several parts of the creation, so far as in us lies, subservient to the ends they were designed for, God's glory, and the sustentation and comfort of ourselves and fellow-creatures.⁵

Romantic Berkeleian Influence:

Roberts' aim, both personal and artistic, was to focus on those points where mind and matter, idea and sensation, vision and fact, intermingle, shape, and are shaped, and conjointly produce a flood of identity within the perceiving spirit, wherein the outer order is creatively absorbed and the world of the mind comprises a new universe. This, she believed, was the area where her art could operate most effectively, where the artistic symbol, itself a fusion of idea and thing, could communicate what could not be communicated by any other means.

This romantic equation, a tenet in Berkeley's works, merges Myself/the Self, the world, humanity, and Spirit into a world where "Myself/the Self" prevails.

Whereas Berkeley insists on the spiritual source of sensitive ideas, Roberts is more concerned in their romantic composition and human organizations. The creatively perceiving Spirit replaces God and pervades the world which becomes ideal for expansion, revelation, and creation. The total unity of the Creator becomes the total unity of Myself /the Self in *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, where Spirit

⁵ George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, N° 109, p. 308

is not a substance but the very meaning of the Self. For Roberts, meaning and Spirit are to be linked with subjectivity and reach true poetic activity:

Acute moment of consciousness in which the entire universe, time, space – all gathered into self – (myself). (EMRP).

The berkeleian assimilation between Spirit, Mind, and the Self is not introduced as being accomplished and natural, but as being idealistic. Thence, in Roberts' works, the infinite appears more subjective, as a craving for infinity. Speaking of man in general, she unites particularity to infinity and strives to incorporate infinity into uniqueness, as the following passage from *The Great Meadow* evokes:

The world reached straight, then, into infinity, laid out beyond the level of herself in a far-going horizontal, although report said of it that it bent to a round and made a globe. She was aware of infinity outward going and never returning." I, Diony", she said. (*The Great Meadow*, 4)

The spirit reaches within to always expanding depths of being, and the infinitudes of time and space converge upon it from without, to be absorbed. The following paragraph from *My Heart and My Flesh* clearly substantiates this idea:

It is the will to say, the power never being sufficient, the reach toward the last word – less than word, quarter-word, minimum of a word – that shrinks more inwardly and farthest toward its center when it is supplicated, that cries back, "come", or "here, here I am,". It is the act of looking when the mirror of the earth looks back into a creature [...]. It is the beauty of the thing itself welling up within itself continually in a constant rebirth, a resurrection. At any point, it partakes of the whole nature of itself (*My Heart and My Flesh*, 27)

That romantic code is one of expansion from the finite to the infinite. A new lifestyle sets out filled with contemplation and ethics that expands from a deep religious layer, but which tends to escape from it while thriving. The poetic path becomes a way of life, an unlimited reflection upon the human condition, and then the creation of a personal myth.

To a certain extent, Roberts' work possesses a neo-romantic philosophy and style. This is evidenced primarily in her stress upon the psychological, the emphasis placed upon the individual, and upon the necessity of beauty in life. The supremacy of mind, "this perceiving, active being...spirit, soul, MYSELF"

inevitably places her work on the side of the romantic poets, just like Blake, Shelley, or Wordsworth, who were also influenced by Berkeley⁶.

The basic miracle is life, and as we shall see, Roberts is automatically committed to all those elements which favor life: love, art, faith, knowledge against chaos, death and negation. In her papers, she notes about *The Time of Man*:

Life runs in form, design, alike for all instances. Ellen is the variant, the ego, the wonder, the asking unit –until she is drawn to a focus with Life, identified with behind and before, here and then and hereafter. Merged with all Life. Soul is in the merging. ... Soul, the inner inmost affirmation of being, the most individual I am of a creature. (EMRP, notes).

The passage flows from philosophy to poetry, from theory to experience, from the activity of the mind to poetic imagination: the world becomes a manifestation of the mind. The narrative focuses on the living mind of an omni-present character and then lets the drama of her story exfoliate from there. Far from representing various stories, her entire work weaves a dramatic texture of minds. The mind exists in a nucleus of ideas, and these ideas are transmitted by way of the senses, the passions, memory and the imagination, the novelist is prohibited from the plain realistic treatment of slices of life. She is strongly forced toward the bildungsroman kind of portrayal. She must, in order to capture her reader, show the creation of mind over a long period of time with its gradual aggregates of experience, realizations, and attitudes. Commenting on *The Time of Man*, Roberts writes in her notes: "The drama of the first part is the drama of the immediacy of the mind, the swift flow of impression" (EMRP).

The theme of imagination, or rather the passage from imagination to perception, which is implicit in Berkeley's works, could isolate the artist in a secluded and closed world. However, the objective is not to shape up a specific world, but to create new relationships and perspectives through imagination. Roberts' romantic insight is attuned to the berkeleian immanent process where imagination, reason, and thought play a significant role. In *The Great Meadow*, Diony is reflecting upon her father's volumes of Berkeley and their meaningful phrases:

⁶ See E. Barnard, *Shelley's Religion*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1937; "Berkeleyan Elements in Wordsworth's thoughts" by Leyburn, E. D. in *Journal of English and German Philology*, XLVII, 1948, pp. 14-28

"It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind. ..." [...]

She would return to the words of the book and heed what they said, in substance: that all knowledge is of three sorts, that derived by way of the senses, that by way of the passions, and lastly, quoting now the words of the text, "ideas formed by help of memory and imagination."
(*The Great Meadow*, 21-22)

We are encouraged to elevate Roberts' main characters into symbols of the universal principles of self-discovery and self assertion at the core of both the human and aesthetic experience. The prose style always parallels the actual process of a mind perceiving sensations, and gradually transforming them into realized experience. And further, through the force of the text, the reader is drawn into the process, participating in the immediate experience, and ideally emerging, with a truly enlarged vision and an intense sense of life. In her paper "Four Novels", Dorothea Brande comments:

Roberts' prose is a kind of incantation; the meaning does not reach the reader through his intellect alone; Mind and emotion are equally engaged.⁷

Excerpted from *My Heart and My Flesh*, the poetic patterning of the following sentences is clearly designed to evoke emotional responses which deepen the reader's sense of the meaning. Theodosia is playing the violin:

Striving to divide her being, to set bounds upon parts, she would turn a half-whimsical gaze inward [...]. "Does the music come out of me really, out of some inner unit, myself, all mine? " She would question [...] She wanted to go past the bounding of blood in arteries and the throb of her pride...[...]. Or in the coming of Albert into her senses, her questioning thought would swim in a pool of inattention and semi-consciousness (*My Heart and My Flesh*, 88)

For Roberts, who followed Berkeley in a belief that only the perceived exists, the artifact of the artist would be meaningless without some poetic interpretation to respond to the design imbuing its very organism.

Berkeley's romantic influence is palpable when it comes to love as Roberts presents its: in her novels, the mystic ascendance of the word "love" is largely compensated by a cosmic sensitivity. Her love is

⁷ Dorothea Brande, "Four Novels" in *The Bookman*, LXXV (Dec 1932), p.828

corporal, neither flesh-like, nor an abstraction. It is a poetic thirst for the entire world. Humanity is just another word for Nature which is a muse, and aesthetically handled in terms of inspiration. Love is not only the outgoing desire which moves man to accept from, and share with, other men the unique self-ness which one has; but even more basically, the force itself which brings man to the point "where poetry touches life", where one's very self-ness emerges. The moments of union, the vital experiences of truth, of virtue, of beauty, which mark the successive spirals of growth for the individual spirit, are themselves created by love, as in the following passage from *The Time of Man*:

She began to dream. Jasper was in her own body and in her mind, but was 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. Dolomite stones shut over her and she was folded deeply into the inner being of the rock and she was strong with a strength to hold up mountains (*The Time of Man*, 293)

Nature definitely participates in the action of love, braided in sensations, emotions and thoughts, both in Berkeley's treatise and in Roberts' novels, which can be considered as agrarian because of their settings. Since one of the major areas where love can operate is in nature, both are closely interwoven.

Nature alive:

The rich organic connections between the life of man and the life of nature are clearly justified in the title Roberts gave to her third novel, *Jingling in the Wind*, where voice is given to the voiceless growth of the earth. However, all the main characters are conceived as children of the earth – incidentally the title of one of her stories. They are vividly imagined figures in a pastoral pageant and symbolize the melancholy procession of neglected peoples who roll the soil year after year, and seem like the trees about them, integral parts of the recurring pageant of day and night, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, growth and decay. In her papers, Roberts notes on *The Time of Man*:

The most that I care to do is to resent the sweet soil, the dirt of the ground, black earth, bitter and full of odor, full of worms, full of decay which is change, not evil – black earth, ground, soil.... Ad the other

one, white sun, light.... These two forever mingled and mystically braided together in life form, all life, which is Ellen (EMRP, notes).

This “universal language of nature” is maintained and defined by a Divine activity; Natural and Divine matters merge and recall a romantic religiosity that will later be used poetically as means of creation. In the subjective approach to nature, the assimilation of natural phenomena by the mind before their objective existence can be established is already obvious, as Berkeley writes:

The like may be said of all the clockwork of nature, great part whereof is so wonderfully fine and subtle, as scarce to be discerned by the best microscope ... They produce those perceivable effects which, in truth, cannot be ascribed to anything but Spirit.⁸

Since Roberts' novels are all narrated through an active, imagining consciousness, they are, with the exception of *A Buried Treasure* a very elaborate single metaphor of the experience of their heroines. The mind perceives by blending past and present images and memories, and thus sound is given shape and color, or shape is rendered in terms of non physical description. The chaos of sensation is continually being repressed back into order by the imaginative capacities of the protagonists, and the rhetorical device which expresses the order is the metaphorical texture, unvarying, reserved, however animated at the edge of the reader's consciousness. Consider the following passage, completely related to Ellen:

... The mountain grew more definite as she looked back to them, their shapes coming upon her mind as shapes dimly remembered and recognized, as contours burnt forever into memory, into all memory. With the first recognition of their fixity, came a faint recognition of those structures which seemed everlasting and undiminished within herself, recurring memories, feelings, responses, wonder, worship, all gathered into one final inner motion which might have been called Spirit; this gathered with another, an acquired structure, fashioned out of her experience of the past years, out of her passions and the marks put upon her by the passions of others, this structure built up now to its high maturity (*The Time of Man*, 226-227) .

The prose style matches the process of the mind, slowly converting sensations into realized experience. The mountains only serve to expose Ellen's feelings as she experiences this specific moment. She is part of the whole world, and this is rendered through the metaphorical quality of the sentences with the

⁸ George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, N°60-61, O.1., p.261-262.

transition from the description of the mountains to her capacity for integrating her sharp sensations into herself, and the long cadences that merge one into the other with gradations of significance.

In *The Great Meadow*, when Thomas Hall, finally gives his consent to his daughter Diony on her going west, he talks of Rhea, an aboriginal deity who symbolizes "succession" and who is apparently synonymous with "the Divine Mind" or "The Great Mover and Author of Nature" of Berkeley. Thus Diony Hall becomes the hand of God in her odyssey. As new landscapes unroll on her way westward, her eyes convey the information to her mind that subsequently recreates the world unfolding before her; a new world gradually comes into existence for her, like "mist taking shape" as Mark van Doren puts it⁹.

Nature becomes the heroines' way of seeing and feeling and it moves them imperceptibly. Through her relationship with nature, in *The Time of Man*, Ellen becomes an emblem of the whole time of man. The bond that she establishes between man and earth is multi-dimensional. It embraces sweat, toil, and love; it is the sacramental and symbolic representation of spirit; it is man's participation in the past through remembrance of earth as the great constant. It is, particularly with Ellen, the almost neurasthenic interpenetration of outer and inner worlds when, for example, one summer evening:

She liked to sit in the white clover by the road, away from the after supper noises of the cabin, a white clover of thought playing over her mind and spreading sweetness through her flesh, while another, less than thought, lapped folds of being around her. Gentle, inclusive folds of being lay across her shoulder, included her, covered her with vaporous arms, completed her and gathered her into an undefined sheath (*The Time of Man*, 64)

Her acute sensitivity to everything around her, an imagination that thrusts itself into others' minds and reaches across the span of time, represents her "expanding consciousness"¹⁰, as Rovit terms it. Ellen Chesser personifies Roberts' holistic view of life. One of Roberts' personal notes mentions:

[...]The total mind, not thinking or reason, but the instincts and emotions of all memories, imaginings, sensations of the whole being – body and mind in one. (EMRP, journals, notes on *The Time of Man*).

⁹ Mark Van Doren, "EMR", *English Journal* XXI, (Sept 1932): 527.

¹⁰ Earl Herbert Rovit, *Herald to Chaos, The Novels of EMR* (U of Kentucky Press, 1960) 154.

The inner journey in the novel is not only psychological and moral, but philosophical and spiritual as well; it is a journey toward a search for unity, oneness that the heroines are bound to find out, the meeting point between inner and outer world.

Roberts' writings parallel Berkeley's conception of nature and she would probably subscribe to the philosopher's thoughts that:

Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude that the proper objects of vision constitute the universal language of nature, whereby we are instructed to regulate our actions, in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies...¹¹

We have seen that the first reality for Roberts is the psyche which molds the senses and the conscious mind. The psyche is no static entity acting within fixed dimensions, according to fixed principles; rather it is fluid, contracting or expanding with the activity of the senses or the conscious mind. When stimuli or ideas impinge upon it, the consciousness opens inwardly to hint at infinite vistas and a reality at once inescapable, elusive, and intangible. In moments of sharpened perception, which verge on ecstasy, Ellen Chesser and Diony Jarvis know these dissolving internal expanses; and Jeremy, the poet in *Jingling in the Wind*, is fascinated as his tingling senses send currents of feelings into ever-receding depths of his spirit:

The outer tentacles of his being had touched the rain and the coolness of the morning, had touched the day, and they spread now as a nebula, as a fog of stellar matter around an inner nucleus. Here, in the core, an aggregate, as guardian, this waited in attendance upon the inner nucleole, upon the fine interior and most continually present integer from which, opening again and more inwardly, another nebula funneled wide (*Jingling in the Wind*, 4)

Spiritual activity:

In the novels, natural mythopoeism prevails, with the characters, either projected in other characters' bodies or minds, or in nature itself, in a pantheistic movement. For Roberts, the Spiritual Order and the

¹¹ George Berkeley, *Works: Towards a New Theory of Vision* I, 103, section 147.

World are not opposed. On the epistemological level, they are alike for her and for Berkeley, but apprehended differently:

The existence of God is far more evidently perceived than the existence of men; because the effects of nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable than those ascribed to human agents. There is not any one mark that denotes a man, or effect produced by him, which doth not more strongly evince the being of that Spirit who is the Author of Nature.¹²

For the philosopher, physical matters are turned into Spiritual Order, whereas Roberts turns the spiritual order in physical and sensuous terms. In her metaphorical style, the interpenetration of abstract and concrete terms in which abstract expressions are dressed with concrete qualities, and concrete terms are covered with a deeper meaning while associated with abstract expressions.

The perception of God in Berkeley's works becomes poetic imagination for Roberts. Idealized by the poetic activity, the human mind acknowledges the cosmic task allocated to God. The Berkeleian principles show the way in giving man the power to shape things to organize the world around, using sensitive and heterogeneous impressions, where the frame of human activity is later rehabilitated within eternity.

The immediate world is made of sensitive heterogeneous impressions. The human spirit himself becomes a poet when he first uses language to compose complex objects: thus for example, a certain colour, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing.¹³

The Eternal Spirit, "The Great Mover and Author of Nature", uses an active process of creation, by bringing to actuality what has been latent within its vast body. Diony's mind slips to her father's books, and:

She divided the several processes of willing, imagining, and remembering, and placed the supreme act in one governing Spirit where all unimagined and unwilled and unremembered acts are kept before they are called into being (*The Great Meadow*, 75)

¹² George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, chapter 147, p.348

¹³ George Berkeley, *Works* I, p.156, section 1

Memorably set forth in *Jingling in the Wind*, the inmost consciousness becomes a quest for spiritual certitude:

In the midst of confusion, there is always a flow of harmony, a quiet water that is not troubled by the weathers, which are those winds of the world that blow about the earth (*Jingling in the Wind*, 248)

When reaching the ultimate harmony between the self and the world, an individual may experience a sudden illumination of his whole nature. At such moments of revelation and spiritual fruition, one's awareness of a transcendent power increases:

Flowing out of him forever is the imperative need, the "desire" for some good way, and some harmonious plan by which to live. And thus the argument leads back to God (EMRP).

The illuminated soul responds to, or expresses itself, as design. In religion we recognize design as the ordering presence of God "who spreads his light around him". In art, it is the ordering element of form.

Although evidence of Protestantism (Baptist and Methodist churches) and Catholicism sparsely appear in her works, Roberts' organized her knowledge to better communicate her vision of the world.

In describing the creative process for *The Great Meadow*, she confessed that she was under compulsion to express her knowledge in terms of an emerging, encompassing design:

There is finally and at first the aesthetic requirement, the design to be completed. Beyond theses and plots, beyond history and the daily real, is a thematic design – the final satisfaction to be met. The mind requires its fulfillment. One cannot avoid the demand. Some ulterior and fit design beyond all the uses of the mind, some necessity inherent in human works [...]. It is the message from beyond life. The hand of God writing on the walls of the Cosmos (EMRP).

In that novel, she insists on Berkeley's principles, with spiritual illumination pervading Diony while she is spinning wool and is thinking of her father's books:

And beside all that, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering.... This perceiving, active being is what I call mind, spirit, soul, MYSELF (*The Great Meadow*, 23)

Roberts' universe is soul-centered: all components make sense and become assembled into an order after being regulated into a pattern by the Creatively Perceiving Spirit. In the light of the philosopher, the

onomastic code becomes patent first in the name "Berk" Jarvis (for Berkeley?) given to Diony's husband then in the name Daniel Berkley in "The House Torn Down" (EMRP, unpublished draft, box 6), and in the name Theodosia, which means "the gift of God" in Greek. The true intuition of the hidden life of the world is bound to its spiritual perception.

Seemingly, it is interesting to note that the real theme of *A Buried Treasure* is that the human spirit is the buried treasure "par excellence". The unswerving conviction that "the sovereign part of any man" is Mind or the Human Spirit is revealed to the reader near the end of the story as Philly Blair is reflecting on life and events of the last few days.

The meaning given to "God" for Berkeley and Roberts is decisive, and it is also at the core of romanticism. In the final pages of *He Sent Forth a Raven*, Jocelle Drake significantly expresses an outward-going love for the Creator:

And thus, a clear design, the mind, common to all men, it pointed an index, to a communal sharing which was religious, the sharing of the common mental pattern where individual traits merged. ... In it somewhere or somehow came the Redeemer. ...the will to love God the Creator (*He Sent Forth a Raven*, 252-253)

For Berkeley, God is a "total Spirit, an understanding, and the world is a Divine one"¹⁴. Roberts' main characters could have uttered the following sentences:

No reason can be drawn, why the history of nature should not still be studied, and observations and experiments made, [...] which is the result [...] of God's goodness and kindness to men in the administration of the world. ¹⁵

¹⁴ George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, N° 94, 204

¹⁵ George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, N° 107, 306

Conclusion:

Roberts had a deep faith in man and a strong conviction that all is chaos until it is perceived and reordered by the mind that is by the spiritual imagination. Her whole being was deeply immersed in the literary tradition of artistic transcendentalism from her soul down to her fibre and bones, so thoroughly as to be caught up not by an influence, but by a way of life. That belief indubitably makes her a steady and strong affirmative voice in American Letters.

In her novels infused with berkeleian influence, her primal concern was with the problem of identity; from Ellen Chesser to Dena Janes each of her heroines is sent on an odyssey to self-discovery to learn that there is a self in the process of creation. The self that is created is the self that creates; the two are one, the maker and the made. The novels become adequate distillations of Roberts' own experience.

By projecting her own search for self upon her heroines, and by casting her heroines in situations as distant from autobiography as literary characters can be, Roberts maintains a symbolic device of expanding consciousness with which both writer and the reader can identify. And since the final knowledge which Roberts' heroines get is the necessity of love in order for the self to live, a love which is based on what man possesses most fundamentally, the reader is given a way to identification, recognition, and empathy with the main character. We have seen again and again that the basic truth of life for Roberts lies in the simple likeness of creation and knowledge. For Berkeley, and by extension for Roberts, to know one-self and to create oneself are the same. Both processes of realization entail a design upon the chaos of experience, desperately limited by the incurable truths of experience but paradoxically, liberated by the freer truths of the integrating imagination. Concerned with an effort and endeavour to realize the self, Roberts calls directly to the moral imagination of the reader. The latter is not allowed any distance from what he or she is reading but is bound to participate, and to fully enter into the life of the books, merge in a unique experience of life, love, and creation.

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