

ROBINSON JEFFERS NEWSLETTER

Number 13

Robinson Jeffers Committee
Occidental College
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Dear Members and Friends:

We had hoped to give you a definite date for the release of the Robinson Jeffers documentary film prepared by Mr. Caryl Coleman of KPIX-5 San Francisco for the Westinghouse Broadcasting Station. It may not be released for another month, but Mr. Coleman has generously offered to give members of the Robinson Jeffers Society a preview of the film of which we shall be advising you by card.

We are happy to share with you good news from Mrs. Ann Ridgeway: the Johns Hopkins University Press will publish her compilation of Jeffers' letters, so she will take a leave of absence for the spring term to complete work on it.

You will soon be receiving a prospectus from the Ward Ritchie Press announcing the September publication of The Stone Mason of Tor House, a biography of Jeffers, written by Melba Berry Bennett, with a foreword by Dr. Lawrence Clark Powell.

The following article by Kamil Bednář, Jeffers' Czechoslovakian translator, was written shortly after Jeffers' death. In other newsletters we have tried to keep you informed as to Mr. Bednář's subsequent translations, "Poems of Hawk Tower" (1964) and "The Women at Point Sur" (1965). The first edition of the latter was sold out almost immediately. Now Mr. Bednář is working in an advisory capacity with a Slovakian translator.

Best personal regards,

Melba Berry Bennett

ROBINSON JEFFERS in CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by

Kamil Bednář

It was in 1950, through his book Be Angry at the Sun, that I was first introduced to the poetry of the California poet Robinson Jeffers. I was deeply stirred by the depth of perception of this remarkable poet, by the beauty of his language, and by the moving descriptions of the Carmel landscape. I immediately began the translation, into Czech, of some of the shorter poems in the volume, and then began work on the fine narrative poem "Mara." There were many difficulties to be surmounted before publication, but in 1958 "Mara" appeared in book form in a beautifully illustrated edition of 7,000 copies.

The moment was propitious as it was just at the time when our Czech poetry was emerging from the crisis of so-called "schematic literature" and just when we desperately needed a fresh source of force. Robinson Jeffers supplied this.

The enthusiastic reception of my translation of "Mara" called for further translations of Jeffers' poetry, and in 1960 I published a book of the poet's short lyrics under the Czech title "Jestrabi krik." This was followed, in 1961, by my translation of "Roan Stallion" and "Hungerfield." By early 1962, when a 5,000-copy edition of Jeffers' "The Loving Shepherdess" was published, public interest had grown to such an extent that the entire edition was sold out in two days. Urged on by Jeffers himself, and by his biographer, Melba Berry Bennett, I began the translation of "Medea." This dramatic poem had its first performance in Praha, the capital city of Czechoslovakia, in April 1962---a memorable occasion for me, the translator, and for the devotees of Jeffers in our country.

Our critics have been as enthusiastic about Jeffers' poetry as the public. The weekly magazine "Literarni Noviny" wrote (5/21/60): "To read Jeffers we must in a certain degree make an extremely critical, dialectically strong effort of the mind. Only then shall we be able to embrace fully the touching note of this poetry which ignores any music other than a purely inner one. . . . We shall read Jeffers in our own way. Everything which is valuable in the treasury of universal culture ultimately belongs to the builders of tomorrow."

The weekly "Kultura" wrote: "Discovery of poetical America! . . . Jeffers is one of the greatest poetical personalities of this century."

I have great faith in Jeffers' lasting position in the field of poetry. Because he has based his poetry on the imperishable realities of the sea and the earth there is more hope that his poetry, too, will endure and have

influence even when, perhaps, time obliges his philosophy to retreat. Jeffers shows a poetical realism, free of sordidness or enforced metaphors, in the style of the ancient Greek poets. It is the realism of a great mind and of a great human being although Jeffers himself speaks so often of "in-humanism." In our country Jeffers' burdened criticism of civilization is not understood as escape being hopeless, but as courage to seek new roads into the future.

Translating Jeffers has brought me great happiness. My translations, before his death, were a dialogue---I had the feeling that I was at the other end of a transatlantic cable, hearing Jeffers' voice. But now they are only a monologue for I hear him no more. But to his work I intend to devote my future.

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