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Tess in Icelandic

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Among the latest new additions to the Hardy Collection in the Colby College Library is a book that comes from my native Iceland: *Tess af D’Urberville-Aettinni*, an Icelandic translation of Hardy’s famous novel by Snaebjörn Jónsson (Reykjavik: Prentsmidjan Hólar, 1954; illustrated; 547 pages), with an introduction and notes by the translator. Having been forty years away from the island, I feel that my knowledge of Icelandic is sadly deteriorating; but I retain enough to be able to feel the thrill of reading some of *Tess* in the Icelandic and think I am acceptably accurate in my English version of the preface written by Snaebjörn Jónsson.

Some sentences in this preface will, I think, be of interest to Colby graduates and to Hardy enthusiasts in general. The Icelandic translator remarks:

It must be understood that no one can expect to translate the original text exactly and idiomatically. No one has, and no one ever will translate a story of Thomas Hardy without some loss. Because of this fact, those who are able to do so should read the original text. I advise them to read *Tess* in the Modern Library edition edited by Professor Carl J. Weber, because there the text has been handled with particular care and because Professor Weber explains the [Dorset] idioms which are difficult to understand. He has also written an excellent introduction to this edition. Dr. Weber is the acknowledged world-authority on Thomas Hardy. I particularly call to the attention of Icelandic readers Dr. Weber’s two works, *Hardy of Wessex* (1940) and *Hardy in America* (1946). From the former book I have taken the chronological table printed in my translation of *Tess*.

Mr. Jónsson explains that his translation was undertaken at the suggestion of the English poet, Lascelles Abercrombie, but by the time the exacting task has been completed Professor Abercrombie was dead. Mr. Jónsson states his own opinion of *Tess* in his preface: “In all the world’s literature I do not know a story that is more renowned.”