

U of M acquires Robert Bly archives

- Literary legacy will “pay off ... for the university for generations to come.”

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Robert Bly, internationally known poet, translator, social critic and moral force, has sold his archives to the University of Minnesota Libraries for \$775,000. It is the university's largest such acquisition.

While other organizations, including the Library of Congress, expressed interest in the collection, fundraisers said it was Bly's wish to house his life's work in his home state.

A combination of university funds and private donations was used toward the purchase — which includes more than 80,000 pages of handwritten manuscripts; a journal spanning nearly 50 years; notebooks of his “morning poems”; drafts of translations; hundreds of audio and videotapes, and correspondence with such writers as James Wright, Donald Hall, James Dickey and many others.

Bly continues: About 70 private donors contributed to the purchase. **A8 ▶**



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Robert Bly read from “The Night Abraham Called to the Stars” after winning the Minnesota Book Award for poetry in 2002. His archives, including manuscripts and correspondence, were purchased for \$775,000.

A8 • STAR TRIBUNE • FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2006 **

IF YOU GO

Robert Bly will read at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the University of Minnesota Willey Hall Auditorium, 225 19th Av. S., Minneapolis. Garrison Keillor will introduce him. Tickets: \$10; reserve by calling 612-624-9339. Sponsored by the Friends of the University Libraries.

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◀ BLY FROM A1

The agreement also gives the university the right to acquire Bly's future creative output. "It's a bargain, in my humble opinion," said Rob Rulon-Miller, an antiquarian-books dealer in St. Paul and member of a small committee that helped raise money for the acquisition. "And it's going to pay off enormously for the university

for generations to come." By comparison, the papers of poet Allen Ginsberg were sold to Stanford University for \$1 million in 1994. In addition to \$300,000 from the university, about 70 private donors contributed toward the Bly archives. Gifts of \$50,000 or more came from the Ruth Easton Fund of the Edelstein Family Foundation (based in Minneapolis); St. Paul radio host and writer Garrison

Keillor, and his wife, Jenny Nilsson; the Lentestey Family Foundation of Minneapolis; Harold and Myra Shapiro, of New York City, and Ellen Sturgis, of Minneapolis. The archives, available for all to see, will be housed in the special collections department of the Elmer L. Andersen Library — in the company of Pulitzer Prize-winning poets James Wright and John Berryman.

Bly, 79, of Minneapolis, was raised on a farm near Madison, Minn., and attended St. Olaf College, Harvard University and the University of Iowa. He is the author of more than 30 collections of poems, including "The Light Around the Body" (1967), which sought to expose the horrors of the Vietnam War, and, more recently, "My Sentence Was a Thousand Years of Joy," a book that experiments with the ancient Persian form of ghazals. It's the work, he writes, of "a farm boy/ Who follows tracks that

lead away from the tractor" through earthy images of animals, places, and music, history and literature, to pointed aphorisms and instructions: "Tell me why it is we don't lift our voices these days/ and cry over what is happening." **Also a translator** That same farm boy also brought the world's poets to us, translating into English such luminaries as Pablo Neruda, Tomas Tranströmer, Rainer Maria Rilke, Antonio Machado, Federico Garcia Lorca, Rumi and Kabir — to name a few. He took on perceived social ills in two works of nonfiction. "Iron John" (1990), a best-selling book on masculinity, generated both a men's movement and widespread criticism, even ridicule. In "The Sibling Society" (1996), Bly argued that North Americans were in a state of perpetual adolescence. Throughout, he has remained a passionate opponent of war. In 1966, he helped establish Writers and Artists Against the Vietnam War. When he won the National Book Award in 1968, he handed over the prize money to war protesters. In January 2004, he self-published "The Insanity of Empire: A Book of Poems Against the Iraq War" in order to bypass the delays of conventional publishing. His social, cultural and historical legacy is inestimable, said Jim Lentestey, a donor and co-chair of the fundraising committee. "Robert is the greatest living international [literary] asset in the United States," he said. "And he brought it all home to Minnesota. It's absolutely right that the collection be in Minnesota ... and it's right that the University of Minnesota recognized that right away and helped make it happen." Said Christopher James, a spokesman for the library: "It's an extraordinary purchase. He really is one of the greatest writers alive, and to have his collection here is monumental"

Sarah T. Williams is the Star Tribune Books editor.



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