

BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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B. TRAVEN

A Collection of 21 B. Traven Letters to Ruth Ford, with Related Material Including Three Books
\$125,000

A magnificent archive consisting of 21 Typed Letters Initialed (as either "H." or "H.C.") from the elusive and fiercely private B. Traven, nearly all of the letters to the actress Ruth Ford, for whom he professes great love in many of the letters. Accompanied by three books, including Ford's copy of the first American edition of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. All of the letters Initialed as "H.C" or "H." for Hal Croves, one of several aliases used by Traven in order to present himself as a literary agent, and used mostly in his interaction with legendary film director John Huston throughout the development and filming of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. The letters start in early 1947 and end in 1961, but the majority of them were written during 1947 and correspond with the production of the classic film. Many include references to day-to-day events of the film's production. These are dense letters, nearly all being single space typed. The letters average more than 500 words each, and one letter is over 2000 words. All of the letters have folds from mailing but are otherwise fine with about half of them accompanied by the original postmarked envelopes.

The name B. Traven was itself a pseudonym of the mysterious author, best known for *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *The Death Ship*, and *The Bridge in the Jungle*, all of which first appeared in German. He was known by various aliases but no one is sure of his origin or true cultural identity. Some

speculate he was at different times a seaman, an actor/director, or even the illegitimate son of Kaiser Wilhelm II, but most likely he was the editor of an anarchist journal who fled Germany to avoid incarceration.

What is known is that he eventually settled in Mexico, where many of his books take place, and that he surfaced as Croves during the film production of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Traven's

work as a novelist continues to stand on its own merit to this day, but it is further enhanced by the timelessness of John Huston's classic 1948 film version of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Huston both directed and wrote the particularly faithful screenplay adaptation, and won an Academy Award for both efforts. Humphrey Bogart provides one of his most famous performances, opposite the director's father, Walter Huston, who also won an Oscar. The film routinely ranks high among surveys of classics of American cinema.

Ruth Ford was a beautiful model and actress, first in Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre, and later in films and theater, notably starring on Broadway in Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit* in 1946, under the direction of John Huston (the last of the five Broadway plays he directed). Her

apartment in the Dakota became a salon for authors such as Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Terrence McNally, and Truman Capote. A chance encounter between Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents in her Manhattan living room led to their collaboration, with her Dakota-neighbor Leonard Bernstein, on *West Side Story*. Similarly, she brought together Kay Thompson and Hilary Knight to create the celebrated stories of Eloise, the little girl who lived at the Plaza.

Traven met and fell in love with Ruth Ford some time before the making of the film. While the two corresponded with one another throughout 1947 their relationship waned over the years. Croves continued to deny that he was Traven until his death in 1969, though most suspected otherwise. On the set of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* he would

sometimes state B. Traven's intentions in the first person and then correct himself and switch to the third person, a ruse Huston, Humphrey Bogart, and others found both odd and comical. In 1990 his widow, Rosa Lujan, told *The New York Times* that Croves confessed that he was indeed B. Traven and had feared extradition to Germany stemming from an event during the 1919 Munich uprising.

Highlights include:

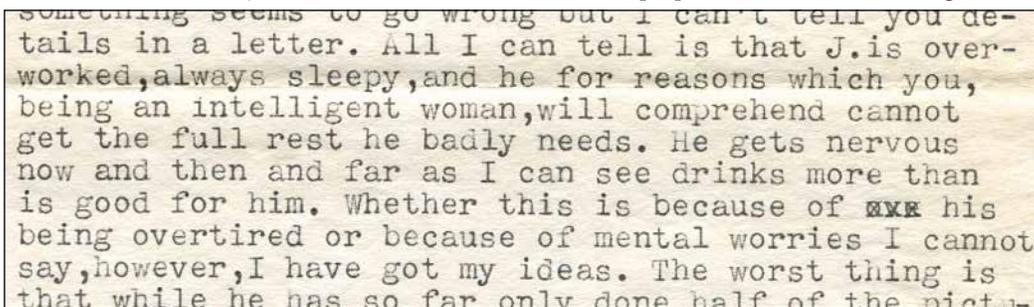
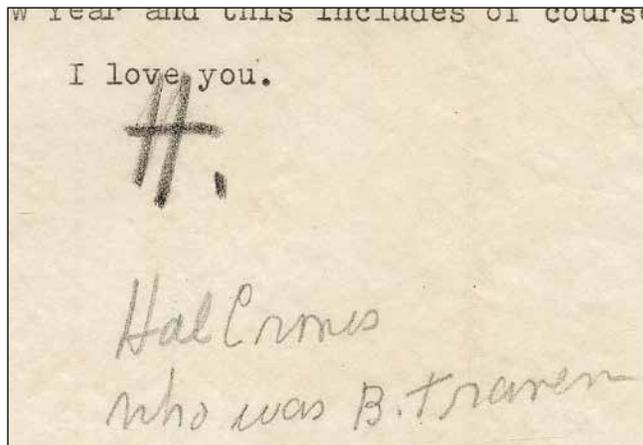
- March 10, 1947 – Traven relates his desire to see Ford again, having his

"mind on the picture [*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*] we're about to do and there are still a few items not settled as to proper locations," and a telling comment about a large pile of

mail, considering his shadowy background: "You know sometimes the best thing you can do to keep your mind at ease is discarding certain letters in a way as though they and the person who wrote them never

existed in real life."

- April 18, 1947 – The first letter written by Traven on location with the cast and crew of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a production that he stayed with throughout its entirety while in Mexico: "We are here now almost three weeks doing the picture I told you about. It is slow work owing to so many difficulties as you usually are bound to meet with outdoors and in a foreign county too. Of course everybody tries to co-operate, but anyway it is not the same as if you were doing a picture at the studio." He also apologizes to Ford for not saying hello to Huston, who had just directed her in *No Exit* several months before, because Huston's then wife, Evelyn Keyes, was



present and Traven was wary “it might cause some unwelcomed comment or a sour gesture, at least from one party.”

- April 27, 1947 – Traven’s thoughts on *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and Huston: “He is a great director, believe me, not only by himself, but that he not only listens to suggestions coming

from me or others, and he not only listens to them any time no matter how busy he is, but

executes them if he is convinced that they will make the picture better still.” The letter ends with Traven asking Ford, “Did I ever tell you that I think I might love you? No? Never mind, Ruth.”

- May 1, 1947 – The longest letter, four pages, with a lengthy discussion of jealousy, both Ford’s and Traven’s own, a meditation on money and happiness, and his lengthiest comments about *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which include being eight days behind schedule, a reference to something bad that happened on set (but which he can’t say in a letter), and Huston’s excessive, in his opinion, drinking and lack of sleep. Despite it all, Traven expresses his highest confidence in the director: “Whether he will get the Oscar of this I am not sure, but most certainly he will be a very close-up runner on this I’ll bet my love for you.”

- May 2, 1947 - A gushing love letter to Ford written on a day when filming had been cut short: “When I said *Glorious Woman* I meant it and still mean it, because

that’s exactly what you are. And believe me, Ruth, I yearn to see you, hear your voice, see your

eyes when you talk of Shelly [her daughter], and watch your movements which are so very graceful and which impressed me more than anything else the first the time I saw you.”

- October 14, 1947 – Traven describes a surprise visit to New York where he missed seeing Ford due to her work in a new play in Boston, where he had just been, and a reference to an intimate moment from their past that found her in tears and

crying on his shoulder.

- December 8, 1947 - An interesting letter concerning a Mexican boy that Huston and his wife adopted after location shooting had ended. While the official story is that Huston took a shine to the boy who hung around the set and showed up in

California with him, much to his wife’s surprise. Traven says the adoption was a planned publicity stunt to promote both their latest movies, and an argument he

had with Huston that occurred when he try to intervene.

- December 21, 1950 – A nice but somewhat somber letter saying that Traven hasn’t heard from Ford in a very long time and had tried to visit, but was prevented from leaving by the Mexican government due to some bureaucratic nonsense. He says she is to expect some holiday sweets in the mail for Christmas and that “I have been thinking about you all the time and I cannot tell you how much I would like to sit by you and talk to you or listen to what you have to tell me ... I love you.” A note from an unknown hand (likely Ford’s) reads, “Hal Croves who was B. Traven.” One of several such notes found in the letters.

- November 15, 1951 - A lengthy letter saying Traven would love to visit Ford in New York, and that he has been scouting locations for a Mexican-based film for which he has written a screenplay. It also includes a long discussion about a play he would like to write for her and the type of character she might play: “you may have been married, have been divorced, have perhaps aborted, may have fallen to gambling, in consequence of which you may have temporarily been a prostitute, a drunkard and served a stretch in the pen.”

While any fresh material that offers insight into B. Traven, the 20th Century’s most enigmatic and obstinately pseudonymous major

author, is desirable, anything signed by this fiercely private individual is of the utmost scarcity. This archive, combining both these elements in a wealth of unpublished writing by him about both his personal life and the filming of his most famous novel, provides an excellent foundation for additional scholarship and publication. A detailed list is available upon request. [BTC#320723]

... you get probably no time even to take a deep breath. J.wants to make the greatest picture that ever was and I do whatever I can to encourage him. He accepts most of the suggestions I make and he thinks some of them extremely good. You see, Ruth, I really want him to make an outstanding picture and see his name on top. The Mexican crew adores him and give him so much extra time that they are



To Ruth Ford
from
Compliments of
H. Croves

... trip my letters take before reaching you. But when I said *Glorious Woman* I meant it and still mean it, because that’s exactly what you are. And believe me, Ruth, I yearn to see you, hear your voice, see your eyes when you talk of Shelley, and watch your movements which are so very graceful and which impressed me more than anything else first time I saw you. Your movements are so very much your own spontaneous



beautiful girls, not believing it true.

Now, Ruth, don't you worry about your correspondence. You write me only if you feel like, and if you don't feel like writing a letter, just send me a thought I surely will feel it in my mind, even perhaps in my heart and I will be happy in the idea that now and then you are thinking of me, wishing that I would sit by your side, talking nonsense and wisdom all at the same time.

Love

H. C.

you know.

Did I ever tell you, that I think you are lovely and that I think I might love you? No? Never mind, Ruth.

H. C.

