

WAS THE
TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE WRITTEN
IN NEW ORLEANS?

or

B. Traven and Other Famous Creoles

The great American film director John Huston chose *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* as his second film following the success of his directorial debut in *The Maltese Falcon*. Warner Brothers bought the rights to the book in 1941 but the war years intervened and it wasn't until 1948 that the public would first see Bogart's interpretation of the Traven character Fred C. Dobbs. Or hear Alfonzo Bedoya say: "I don't have to show you no stinkin' badges!"

It is significant that this eminently American film maker should choose a Traven vehicle to direct immediately after bringing *The Maltese Falcon* to the screen, as it helps to place Traven in the tradition of hard boiled American writing and the movie as film noir. In the 1940s Bogart defined those genres on film, giving performances from books by Dashiell Hammett, Hemingway, Raymond Chandler and B. Traven in quick succession. William Faulkner contributed to the screenplays of both the Hemingway and Chandler productions.

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre won three Academy Awards and is considered one of the great movies of all time. The film is in so many ways quintessentially American and yet today, over sixty years later, no one knows anything certain about the author of the original novel. We don't know his real name, what country he was born in or when, or what language he spoke.

Between 1925 and 1940 a dozen or so novels and books of short stories were

published under the pen name of Traven. Twenty five to thirty million copies have sold in over two hundred different editions. The author of these books from the very beginning declared that he would divulge no details of his private life. The books belonged to the public, but his personal life belonged to him alone.

And when Warners insisted that there must be a complete valid signature on the legal contract of the sale of the book's rights... they had to make do with the simple name: *B. Traven*.

The man who wrote under this assumed name never wanted publicity of any sort. The reasons he gave are cogent and reasonable enough and actually not all that unusual. J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon come to mind as recent examples of other writers who have wished to maintain a measure of privacy.

One imagines that Traven was pleased with the prospect of having one of his books made into a film starring Hollywood's top actor and directed by a celebrated film maker. But, as he wrote Huston, "There is no greater joy and satisfaction for me as to be unknown as a writer. Only this way can I be myself and have no obligation to act up. Only this way I can say what I really wish to say without being reminded by some high-stuffed or high-brow that a writer of such a great reputation shouldn't talk so silly."

Traven first published his works in Germany in 1925 where he was immensely popular. He wrote about vagabond workers stuck out somewhere in a foreign country, or about the travails of sailors stranded in Europe without their passports. Later he wrote about the oppressed workers and the machinations of Big Capitalism, curiously from the point of view of an insider.

Traven found a ready audience especially among the organized Socialist workers in Germany. As the political climate changed his books were burned by the Nazis and his

millions of German readers were thereafter denied access to his work as Traven lost his largest audience.

Much has been made of the fact that Traven first published in Germany, and his admiring readers there naturally wished to claim him as one of their own. This fact forms one of the basic arguments that Traven was actually a German or Austrian.

However, Ernest Hemingway, when he was having difficulty finding a publisher elsewhere, also published some early works in Germany, in the magazine *Der Querschnitt*. In a passage in 'The Green Hills of Africa' he admits to being the Hemingway published in Germany when asked by a German ex patriot, and a long and beautiful discussion ensues about the problems of writing in America.

After selling the film rights for *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* to Warners, Traven realized that his desire for privacy would be seriously threatened in the wake of a major Hollywood publicity campaign. Even more so as the film was to star Hollywood's biggest box office draw Humphrey Bogart. If he wished to continue to maintain his privacy Traven knew that he would have to devise a plan. To keep the publicity hounds off his trail he presented the world with a classic red herring in the form of a man called Hal Croves.

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The world first hears of Hal Croves when he shows up one morning in film director Huston's hotel room in Mexico City with a letter from Traven authorizing him as Traven's representative in all matters pertaining to the filming of the book *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

Anyone wishing to discover the true authorship of *The Treasure* and other Traven works must first deal with John Huston. He is one of the Twentieth Century's Titans and

certainly the most important person involved with the controversy surrounding Traven. Huston was an old Mexican hand, traveling there for the first time at the tender age of nineteen. He was an astute judge of character and an artist of exceptionally fine sensibilities.

Huston was impressed that Croves was very familiar with Traven's books and hired him as an adviser on the film at a small weekly salary. Soon the film crew became suspicious that this man was actually the mysterious author himself. With every denial and protest that he was merely the representative of the author, the crew members became more convinced that Croves himself was the man who wrote *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. It is, by the way, to his lasting credit, that for his entire life, and under all kinds of pressures to admit otherwise, Hal Croves would consistently deny to be the author of those books.

Huston didn't care if he was the writer or not. But as time went on he came to the decision that this little, humble, poorly dressed writer's agent was exactly what he claimed to be. For Huston, Traven was a man of bigger and grander sensibilities. A raconteur who lived life large, not a shy closed mouth reticent man like Croves.

John Huston was well experienced at taking the measure of a man. He had enjoyed an extensive correspondence with Traven during the long interval from 1941, when Warner Brothers purchased the book rights, until the filming began when he first meets Hal Croves.

In his autobiography, *An Open Book* he writes: "Croves gave an impression quite unlike the one I had formed of Traven from reading his scripts and correspondence. Croves was very tight and guarded in his manner of speaking. He was nothing at all as I had imagined Traven, and after two meetings I decided that this surely was not he."

Huston maintained an active interest in the question of Traven's identity for the remainder of his life but never wavered in his belief that he was not Croves.

In 1969, after Croves' death, a great deal was written supposedly proving beyond a doubt that he was Traven. Huston, not wishing to create a scandal by challenging Croves' widow as a liar, refrained from too many public expressions of his doubts. By this time the Traven estate was worth a considerable amount of money as there had developed an enormous resurgence of interest in Traven among the young rebels and radicals of the 1960s.

Amusingly, Huston returns to the question of Traven's identity some hundred pages later in his autobiography when he is writing about working with Ray Bradbury on the film Moby Dick:

"Ray was the best argument I know of for those who believe that Hal Croves was B. Traven. Highly original in his writing, from the idea itself to the very turn of a sentence, in casual intercourse Ray spoke entirely in clichés and platitudes. This man, who sent people on exploratory flights to the distant stars, was terrified of airplanes. You could hardly coax him into a car."

In other words, **anything** is possible but for Huston at least, Traven was an altogether different sort of a man. A man, in fact, exactly like a certain Frans Blom.

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Blom was an extraordinary man as the following letter illustrates. It was written by William Gates, the first director of the Middle American Research Institute to the President of Tulane University Albert Dinwiddie regarding the hiring of the thirty two year old Blom as an assistant :

"He is a gentleman born. Old Danish family; five languages; King's messenger in the

war; was slated for high position in Denmark; left against father's opposition (did not want to sit at a desk and run a factory); had all sorts of rough times; sold gasoline at a street stand in Mexico etc. - all to get into Middle American archaeology. Now has made good and has it on his father... Blom counts his friends in the Legations crowd; always stays with Archie Roosevelt at Oyster Bay. Knows young Frick well, and reports him as very keen on our subjects."

In this single letter we can find all of the astonishing contrasts inherent in both Frans Blom and the author who wrote under the name of B. Traven. What sort of man could on the one hand be friends of a member of the Frick family, one of America's wealthiest; speak five languages; stay in Oyster Bay, one of the countries grandest mansion strewn swaths of real estate on Long Island with Archie Roosevelt, a World War 1 hero and son of President Theodore Roosevelt; and yet also be having "all sorts of rough times" and be selling gasoline on a street corner in Mexico? Surely the life of Frans Blom is worth our further interest.

This paper is about how I rather innocently stumbled on the true identity of the author of the Traven books while planning for a nostalgic trip to the ancient Mayan cities of Yucatan and Chiapas.

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Eighty five years have passed since Traven was first published. There have been countless newspaper articles, books and doctoral theses purporting to identify the true author of the books. Croves, as the seemingly most obvious candidate has received an extraordinary amount of scrutiny. Virtually all of the "experts" believe him to be the mysterious author. Croves himself has a delightfully mysterious past and although he also chose to

divulge nothing about **his** life an astonishing amount of conjecture have come about which with time and repetition has metamorphosed into **truth**.

The general consensus is that Traven/Croves was a German leftist radical agitator who fled for his life to Mexico in 1922, changing his name on more than one occasion, where he lived until his death in 1969. It is also believed that while Croves was still in Europe he called himself Ret Marut.

For much of his life, Croves is supposed to have lived on the edge of Acapulco in a strange, run down sort of compound which functioned variously as an eatery and lodging house and was called by the rather bizarre name of Parque Cashu (*Cashew Park*).

He later marries a Mexican woman R. E. Lujan divorced from a wealthy businessman and lives happily ever after in Mexico City basking in the glow of his ever increasing fame as the 'Mysterious Author B. Traven' something which to his everlasting credit he denied to the end of his days, but which his proud wife encouraged. After Croves' death the copyrights of the books passed to his wife.

Naturally it will be rather difficult for these various 'experts' among them a number of academics from universities and others prominent in diverse fields of endeavor to admit of the possibility that the author of the Traven books lived the life of a wealthy bon vivant in the French Quarter, and that *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* probably was written sitting on a gallery facing Jackson Square while sipping a Sazerac!

Huston would have been delighted!

I admit that the idea of Traven being wealthy while writing of the outcast and the oppressed; and living in the French Quarter in high style while writing of Mexican jungles, will seem too incongruous for the legions of Traven admirers to bear. The following relevant anecdote is stranger yet and makes our little

story seem quite possible by comparison.

Years ago I came across a large statue of Benito Juarez near St. Louis Cemetery No.1 on the middle ground of Basin Street in New Orleans. As a lover of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca where Juarez is from I was intrigued by its presence in the Crescent City. The result of my investigation was that Juarez, who is a great national hero in Mexico, lived in exile in New Orleans, supporting himself working in a cigar factory.

My friend Josephine was working at the time in a gallery on Royal St. and with their cooperation we mounted a successful fund raiser and were able to restore the monument.

But what is less well known is that there were other famous Mexican leaders in the city with him and that together they planned a revolution, wrote the *Plan de Ayutla*, and worked on the laws of the "Reforma." In other words what these men accomplished while in exile had a major impact on Mexican history.

All of which shows the very deep connection between the great city of New Orleans and Mexico. Jean Lafitte is also rumored to have ended his days there!

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New Orleans has known countless delightful adventurers, writers, rogues and colorful characters in her long and eventful history. One of these fascinating but unheralded denizens of the French Quarter lived in the Lower Pontalba facing Jackson Square at 511 St. Anne St. during the fabulous 1920's and 30's.

Like many inhabitants of the French Quarter, Frans Blom hailed from other parts. The handsome young Danish explorer of Mayan cities had landed the job as the Director of the recently established Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University at the tender age of thirty two.

In his bachelor days he turned the heads of the Uptown ladies. When, in 1932, he married a pretty and wealthy heiress half his age, the couple, driving about town in their fabulous maroon Isotta Frachini, became the toast of the city.

Blom was the intimate and neighbor of a large, eclectic group of bohemians and artists. Some were already famous like his neighbor in the Pontalbas, Sherwood Anderson; others were like the unknown William Faulkner who would leave the French Quarter after a short stay, well on his way to becoming a great and famous writer.

The French Quarter of New Orleans is like an expat community in a foreign country. In the 1920s it was called “the poor man’s Paris” or “Greenwich Village South” and a bunch of writers from all over gathered there. The core group attracted others which at times included Carl Van Doren, Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Pasos, and Carl Sandburg.

The little magazine started by this group was called the Double Dealer and it had the amazing honor of publishing the first works of two future Nobel Laureates, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway.

As a celebrated character in his own right, Blom was included in that Blue Book of French Quarter Bohemians, ‘Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles’ published as a sort of private joke by Faulkner and his friend Bill Spratling in 1926.

There was a ubiquitous Mexican connection during this time in New Orleans. Spratling’s future destiny would be completely tied to Mexico. Sherwood Anderson’s wife Elizabeth and two of the others included as ‘famous creoles’ moved there as well and the title of their little book ‘Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles’ was itself a spoof of a book by Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias called ‘The Prince of Wales and Other Famous

Americans’

Blom is pictured in this thin tome in a caricature peering into a native hut with a magnifying glass nearby, while an unclad native flees in terror. The caption: ‘Tulane’s Champollion’ alludes to the famous Egyptologist who deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs just as Blom was attempting to do with the Mayan glyphs.

During Frans Blom’s tenure as the head of Tulane’s Middle American Research Institute he would lead five expeditions to explore Mayan cities in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.

His expedition team from New Orleans to the Mayan city of Uxmal included the sculptor Enrique Alferez who was famous for his WPA sculptures in City Park and other parts of New Orleans. (Alferez is one of several people to appear in this saga whom I had the good fortune of meeting personally: Frans and Trudy Blom, Alferez and Evelyn Keyes).

Under Blom’s auspices part of the Mayan city of Uxmal was reproduced for the Chicago World’s Fair. But his dream of reproducing the great Mayan pyramid from Chichen Itza on the Tulane campus was never realized due to lack of funding during the Depression.

Although Blom was to head M.A.R.I. for some fifteen years he was fired from the University at the end of 1941, a disgraced and apparently abject alcoholic barred even from retrieving his effects from his office.

In his younger days Blom had been considered the boy genius of Mayan archaeology and after leaving Tulane he would once more become a respected, even revered figure in Mexico as a defender of the Lacandon Indians in the southern state of Chiapas.

This fall Tulane is celebrating the 85th anniversary of M.A.R.I. and is once more acknowledging the former department head as a significant part of its history, celebrating Blom as their very own ‘Indiana Jones’. The

newly renovated Dinwiddie Hall, together with its collection of artifacts will be opened to the public amid much fanfare.

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My friend and fellow artist Josephine Wallis, with whom I have been traveling for some thirty years, accepted my invitation to accompany me on a Sentimental Journey. This particular adventure was an attempt to replicate my first trip to Mexico in 1961, exactly fifty years ago. On that marvelous and life changing trip with my family we visited the famous ruins of the Yucatan, Chiapas, and Oaxaca in southern Mexico.

Josephine and I had been living on a ranch on the Central Coast of California and decided to take full advantage of the Inter-Library Loan system and surround ourselves with books in preparation for the trip. These included various guide books but also some by that author who for me at least, always seemed to speak with the truest voice of Mexico, the mysterious B. Traven.

And since my family vacation of 1961 had also taken us to the mountain town of San Cristobal and to the home of that famous defender of the Lacandon Indians, Frans Blom, I ordered a few books by Blom, and a short biography as well.

At the time of my 1961 family visit to Chiapas, I had never been to New Orleans and had no idea that this old explorer of Mayan ruins had any connection to that city. Even today, in San Cristobal, the Director of Blom's home of Na Bolom was unaware of any of Tulane University plans to celebrate him in this fall's opening of their renovated Dinwiddie Hall.

So it was that I found myself reading books by Traven and Blom simultaneously. It was in the Blom biography that I read a short story, included as an appendix, called: 'Tata, a

Prince of an Indian' that first made me think that Blom was the author behind the Traven works. There were similarities in style and humor and so I sat back and, reading at my leisure, began to compare the two authors.

What I found astounded me. There seemed to be whole passages from the two writers which were very similar. Then I found an entire chapter in a book by Blom which corresponded closely to a Traven short story. Things were getting more exciting.

I wondered, in fact I said to Josephine: "Could I have stumbled on the answer to the *mystery of B. Traven?*"

Reading, in fact studying, Blom's biography was illuminating. Viewing it with the idea that he may actually be Traven led me to begin to confuse the two, so exactly did they seem to be one and the same person.

That's when I ordered from the library a number of the books which have dealt with problem of Traven's true identity, what is usually referred to as 'The Mystery of B. Traven'. I familiarized myself with their theories and conjectures and suppositions and abundant evidence. Occasionally I felt intimidated by these books as some were written by professors from important universities and occasionally I feared that Blom did not quite fit all the available dates and places necessary to have been Traven.

But when I took into consideration the extraordinary help that Traven's agent Croves performed for him, such as the prolific correspondence with his European publishers, then my conclusion is that Blom did write those books which today we accept as the works of Traven.

I word my sentence this way because there seems to be concrete evidence that Croves actually used the name Traven at a certain point in his life, so we can't just say that Blom was Traven, but rather that he **authored** the books written under that name.

I do not think that the author of those books ever in a million years thought that the world would be so crazy as to delve so deeply into the question of their authorship and so he and Croves were content to call the author by the name which Croves also had once used. That of Traven.

Traven's major works were written between 1925 and 1940. These dates are important as their author presumably arrived in Mexico in time to have had the requisite experiences, to write the stories, and have them published, by 1925.

We are lucky in Frans because he is a more or less a known entity, complete with biography and he passes the test.

It poses a problem for those authors who think that Croves wrote the Traven books as there is very little certain about Marut/Croves. But apparently he did not arrive in Mexico in time to have had the experiences written about in the first books. This inconvenient fact has begat a number of rather far-fetched (but possible) solutions which, if interested, can be found in their various books.

Blom on the other hand arrived in Mexico in 1919 where he lived continuously for forty months, mostly living deep in the jungles of Tabasco and Chiapas employed by an oil company. All of which is contained in that remarkable letter from Gates to the President of Tulane.

Blom continued to visit these jungles, the very area written of by Traven, as the head of some eight expeditions, both for the Mexican government and for Tulane and totaling about an additional year and a half in the field. Thus Blom spent a total of over five years in the Mexican bush and the Mayan jungles between 1919 and 1940, the same years the books were written.

Upon his leaving Tulane in December 1941, Blom does not go to live in Acapulco or Mexico City as did Croves but he continues to

lead expeditions to the Mayan jungles as frequently as possible and in 1951 he manages to purchase a remarkable former seminary in San Cristobal in the Chiapas highlands and live there the remainder of his days.

Having divorced his first wife, the young heiress, Blom remarries to an extraordinary woman. Gertrud Duby, a leftist who had escaped the Nazis, a world famous photographer and a true comrade for Blom whether in the jungles of the Maya, or by the fire in their library where they hosted teams of people interested in all that their world could offer.

Blom's first major work Tribes and Temples is 500 pages long. The book, written by Blom, is taken from his field notes and those of his assistant Oliver LaFarge. Neither name is included on the title page as Blom did not feel the author's names were important, only the work was important. These are of course the exact sentiments which Traven was expressing at the very same time.

There is a rather strange synchronicity between the opening lines of Tribes and Temples and those of Traven's The Death Ship both of which were published the same year.

The Death Ship: "We had brought in the holds of the S.S. Tuscaloosa, a full cargo of cotton from New Orleans to Antwerp. The Tuscaloosa was a fine ship, an excellent ship, true and honest down to the bilge. First-rate freighter. Not a tramp. Made in the United States of America. Home port New Orleans. Oh, good old New Orleans, with your golden sun above you and your merry laughter within you! So unlike the frosty towns of the Puritans with their sour faces of string-savers."

Tribes and Temples: "New Orleans was cheering the first Mardi Gras parade of the year 1925 when the steamer Copan, on the 19th of February, went down the river carrying the writer..."

In both quotes we find a ship, New

Orleans and allusions to its inherent gaiety and fun.

In the books dealing with the identity of Traven, I have found not one which recognizes the New Orleans connection. Instead Gales is always referred to only as an “American sailor.”

The Death Ship is subtitled “Song Of An American Sailor” and is about an American sailor Gerard Gales. On the first page of the book we read the song: “Now stop that crying, honey dear, The Jackson Square remains still here/In sunny New Orleans/In lovely Louisiana. She thinks me buried in the sea, No longer does she wait for me/In sunny New Orleans In lovely Louisiana./The death ship is it I am in/All I have lost, nothing to win/So far off sunny New Orleans/So far off lovely Louisiana.”

I found nineteen mentions of New Orleans in the first half of The Death Ship. Mostly they are rather superficial mentions of Jackson Square and the levee: “But you said you shipped in New Orleans?” or “In New Orleans, on the other hand, there are several thousand people who speak only French and very little if any English” or “Look up this name please, Gerard Gales, last residence New Orleans, sailor, Tuscaloosa” or “Rotterdam is a beautiful city. If you have money. If you haven’t any, you are better off in New Orleans. Besides, New Orleans is just as pretty, and more interesting.”

I believe that the references are superficial because Blom didn’t really know the city well as yet. Blom had only recently moved to New Orleans and immediately went on his first expedition for Tulane. He had also passed through the city once before on his first trip to Mexico in 1919.

In the second half of The Death Ship, a second protagonist is introduced. This man is a Pole who has been shipwrecked and just as happened to Gales in book one, he has no identification.

The astonishing thing is that in this half of the book I also counted nineteen references to Denmark or things Danish. As Blom of course was born in Denmark, these references are a bit more detailed: “They could get drunk like a Dane at the funeral of his mother-in-law.” “Here he stowed away on a Danish fishing schooner”, “...told everyone he was a Dane”, “Where is your Danish sailor’s paybook?”

There are references to a Danish meal, Funen Island where the hero Stanislav was shipwrecked and rescued by Danes, mentions of Danish newspapers, a Danish fishing schooner etc...

Much of the first part of The Death Ship is about the man Gerard Gales who is shunted back and forth across borders by police that don’t know, just like today, what to do with someone who has no documentation or, passport. The narrative therefore includes descriptions of various European cities.

Blom, when he first leaves his home in Denmark spends an extended period of “wanderlust” visiting those exact same cities. Here is Brunhouse, his biographer “Frans traveled through Belgium, Germany, France, and Italy. We may surmise that his wanderings from city to city in northern Europe appealed to youthful wanderlust.”

We must also remember that Blom spoke five languages fluently. According to Brunhouse: “Blom spoke a number of languages, English, French, German and Danish he acquired in his youth. Ongoing to Mexico in 1919 he quickly picked up Spanish... He could, moreover, move easily from Spanish to English, German, French, or Danish, two or three smoothly going at once.” Blom was then, **a veritable linguist!**

This question of language haunts the “mystery of Traven.” Did he originally write in English? In German? This extraordinary fluency shows us that Blom/Traven could write in several languages.

And did! Brunhouse mentions a diary of Frans' where he writes sixty pages in one language then switches to another. Or a conversation with Frans, Trudy and a number of European guests where they are all speaking various languages at the same time.

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After much delightful preparatory reading our trip finally began, and Josephine and I visited many places which Blom wrote of in his books. In the Yucatan we stayed in Valladolid, where the Maya began the War of the Castes. Izamal where Bishop Landa conducted his infamous auto de fe and burned all the last traces of Mayan history contained in the Codices. We went to Merida which the Maya called Tiho and was defended successfully against the Spaniards on three separate occasions. We saw Chichen Itza with the magnificent pyramid called the 'Castillo' which Blom tried unsuccessfully to be reproduced on the Tulane campus.

We saw the hotel behind the ruins of Chichen Itza which is a luxurious reconstruction of the old hacienda where Blom's first patron Sylvanus Morley lived when he directed the excavations there for the Carnegie Institute.

Then we went on to Uxmal, the older Mayan city where Blom worked with a team from Tulane and part of which was reproduced at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

And on we went to the even older and more beautiful Palenque where Blom spent his first "glorious day" an almost religious experience, in the realm of archaeology. Later in 1922-23 he would spend three months working amid the ruins, writing: "The first visit to Palenque is immensely impressive... When one has lived there for some time this ruined city becomes an obsession."

It is not quite clear what precipitated

Blom's fall from grace. But upon being expelled from the University at the end of 1941 Blom soon again found himself again in Chiapas, where he would live till his death in 1963.

Blom remarried, to a remarkable and talented Swiss adventurer/photographer and together they purchased an old seminary which they converted to a home, hotel, museum, library and research center and a foundation for the betterment of the Lacandon Jungle and its inhabitants.

Arriving in San Cristobal de las Casas after having passed through more of Blom and Traven country, Jo and I spent several days at the old Blom home of Na Bolom. Although neither Frans nor Trudi are still there we were able to pass many evenings by the fire place in the same wonderful library reading of Blom's adventures and more convinced than ever that this was also the home of that mysterious author known to the world as B. Traven.

PART TWO

San Cristobal de las Casas is a small city about seven thousand feet above sea level in the Chiapas Highlands which still preserves a great deal of its colonial charm. On the edge of the town is the old home of Frans Blom, and a greater contrast to his Pontalba apartment could not be had. Today, as in Blom's time, the old seminary houses a small museum, guest rooms, library and a foundation to help the Lacandon Indians and preserve the little which remains of the once enormous jungle.

On my family trip of 1961 my brothers and I were ready to quit by the time we had gotten to Villahermosa, Tabasco; the cultural shock as well as the intense summer heat and rain had become too much for us. At this point my father regaled us with stories of Frans and Trudy and horseback riding in cool mountain glades to boost our waning esprit de corps.

My father hired a small Cessna which flew us into Palenque and then and there everything changed for me, so beautiful was the site. By the time I sat by the fire in Na Bolom and listened to this marvelous old man tell his stories I had become convinced that an adventurous life was a real possibility for me. Still a boy of twelve years, and from Cleveland, Ohio, the trip had been an eye opener.

That first day of the trip in Merida in 1961, upon entering the hotel, I saw a delightful, patio restaurant. Under the arches there were ceiling fans and potted palms and in the very entrance a man selling Panama hats. I soon was wearing one, as well as one of those loose fitting white cotton shirts with the four pockets and pleats called Guayaberas.

I guess I had been programmed to this life even before the trip. My father had a film society back home where he showed classic movies and in this hotel restaurant I immediately recognized Rick's from Casablanca or perhaps Frenchy's from To Have

and Have Not. I had no idea those places really existed. I'm going to like this, I remember thinking.

Nevertheless, after seeing those enormous Olmec heads at La Venta, the heat and mosquitoes got the better of us, and we were happy to be high in the cool mountain town of San Cristobal de las Casas.

Two years later, my brothers and I returned to San Cristobal and spent the summer of 1963. I had been looking forward to more of Blom's fireside chats but he had died just prior to our arrival. Instead, I attached myself to a marimba band as a kind of roadie and went with them to all their fiestas. We also went to the Lagos de Monte Bello area at the border with Guatemala, and I still have a photo of my brothers and me sitting on an old Land Rover.

Years later my parents bought a house on the same block as Na Bolom where they lived for a few years and I was able to visit them.

On our trip this year Josephine and I enjoyed our stay immensely at Na Bolom and we got to meet the Director, Sr. Ricardo Hernandez Sanchez as well as talk to the head of the library, Sr. Ramon Santiz Gomez. We were also able to read several items in the library.

The house is an almost adolescent fantasy of what an adventurous couple of archaeologists should live like. The building itself is an old, rambling Mexican Colonial style mansion with several patios and gardens with arched porticos and marvelous rooms. The table in the dining room is twenty one feet long, if that gives you some sense of the dimensions of the place. The entire house is like a museum, with art and Indian artifacts and old photos of Frans and Trudy exploring Mayan ruins everywhere. They also have Frans and Trudy's old saddles, machetes and hats. And best of all, his typewriter, which just may be the one the Traven books were written on!

Although I was unable to look at Blom's

unpublished manuscript of some five hundred pages about the mahogany workers, I did get to see several other items which provided further evidence in my quest for Traven. Had Huston still been with us, he would perhaps want to make a film about the **real** B. Traven and this house, which is almost exactly as it was when I sat with the old man in 1961, is set dressed for a movie.

Once Blom had seen his first Mayan ruins, the direction of his life into the world of archaeology moved with amazing speed. First he worked for the Mexican government at Palenque but soon had impressed the most famous names in Mayan archaeology who together conspired to send their young protégé to Harvard to acquire some academic legitimacy.

Blom was a young, ambitious, and a bit unscrupulous man of thirty two years who had just spent over five years of exciting adventures in Mayan jungles, discovered archaeology, met all the big shots in the field, gotten a scholarship to Harvard and outmaneuvered his boss.... when he landed the Directorship of the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane!

If he had been more of an academic he would have lived happily ever after somewhere Uptown near the Tulane campus. But not our hero Blom. He hated academia. His biographer tells us: "...it is noteworthy that he avoided classroom instruction" or in a letter to Morley while he was at Harvard "Studying is alright, but, man, the sweetest music I know is the sound of the bell-mule at the head of the pack-train and the singing of the insects in the tropical night."

Again from Brunhouse: "The fall semester at Harvard was largely a chore, for it provided few pleasures and scant satisfactions for Blom"

It seems Frans had only taken the Tulane job in order to pursue Mayan studies in the field, where he proposed to President Dinwiddie that he should spend three quarters

of his time while using M.A.R.I. itself as a non-teaching research center.

Blom persevered, got the job he wanted at Tulane, and then moved to the French Quarter. This is something an academic shouldn't do because the place was largely an Italian low rent district, very close to the red light district and full of ne'er-do-wells of all stripes.

But worse, it was full of writers! Blom took an apartment at 511 Saint Anne in the legendary Pontalba buildings. This was the traditional civic and spiritual, as well as the literary/bohemian center of New Orleans.

The Pontalba apartments consist of two matching rows of red brick buildings facing each other and flanking Jackson Square with the levee and Saint Louis Cathedral closing the square on the two ends.

This park is shaded by ancient oaks and once served as the Plaza de Armas. The Cathedral itself is flanked by two imposing almost symmetrical buildings known as the Presbyterre and the Cabildo, where France turned over the Louisiana Territory to the Americans in 1803.

New Orleans has lived under French, Spanish, Confederate and American governments. The architecture of the Pontalbas reflects all of them. They are the oldest apartments in the United States, a stone's throw from the Café du Monde (and in Blom's time "The Morning Call"), French Market, and the Mississippi.

Blom's neighbor in the Pontalba building across the park was the author of 'Winesburg, Ohio' Sherwood Anderson, then at the height of his success. Living with him for a while was the future Nobel Laureate William Faulkner. Soon Faulkner left to share an apartment with a colleague of Blom's from Tulane, Bill Spratling just behind the Cathedral in Pirate's Alley.

Surrounded by writers, Blom began to

nurture fantasies of a great literary career for himself.

His friend Bill Spratling who taught architecture at Tulane was commissioned to go to Mexico to write a book, where he would become famous as the father of the hand crafted silver trade in Mexico. (Curiously, Warner Brothers made a film from Spratling's book. It came out in 1948, the same year as The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, and it was called The Man From New Orleans)

Even Oliver LaFarge, Blom's assistant on his first Tulane Expedition in 1925, and a man eight years his junior, was secretly writing. He soon published a prize winning short story which was followed by the Pulitzer Prize winning novel 'Laughing Boy' published in 1929. In 1934 it was made into a Hollywood movie starring Ramon Navarro.

All these writers attracted more writers. As Spratling tells it:

"There were casual parties with wonderful conversation and with plenty of grand, or later to be grand, people. Ben Huebsch would be down from New York to visit his writer Sherwood Anderson, and Horace Liveright and Carl Van Doren and Carl Sandburg and John Dos Pasos and many others were there from time to time and there was a constant stimulation of ideas."

I think all of this literary and cinematic activity had a profound impact on Blom. We know he was a prolific writer and his biographer lists over two hundred items at the back of his book which he ascribes to Blom. The great majority of these are specialized papers and monographs dealing with the Maya.

Apart from the following books written under the name of Frans Blom, I think he began to write his great fiction under the pseudonym of B. Traven.

Of the Blom works I have read the two volumes of Tribes and Temples, The Conquest of Yucatan, Monteador, and, unable to read

Danish, I have only been able to look at his book I de Skore Stove.

Tribes and Temples is quite a book totaling some five hundred pages. As it was written by Blom from his and LaFarge's field notes he attempts an explanation of this unusual compilation in the Preface: "The style used by the writers is distinct, as is the also the material they present..." Blom was supposed to write the technical sections while it was LaFarge who was responsible for the descriptions of the natives and their customs.

To my mind the distinction is never a clear or obvious one. Basic to this study of Traven and Blom is the comparison of the writings of the two men. Many of these quotes from Tribes and Temples are in fact descriptions of natives and their world.

This led me to wonder if LaFarge could be Traven or perhaps that Blom was plagiarizing his assistant. Neither of these turned out to be the case as we can easily follow LaFarge's future career and a comparison between the passages in Tribes and Temples with LaFarge's other work belie any similarities.

Here then, is a typically lovely passage from Tribes and Temples: "The women dress in gaudy colored striped skirts held up by finely woven white belts. Shoulders and breasts are naked, and as they are well built they certainly give a pleasant impression, especially the young women when they passed by our hut on their way to the river, walking straight and willowy with a large earthen jar or basket of corn on their heads."

Compare with Traven in The White Rose: "Far beyond the huts he saw women coming up the hill with jars on their heads, carrying water home from the stream. The women went barefoot, with their black hair, freshly washed in the river, hanging loose. They were wearing long red-and-green striped dresses twisted round their slender hips..."

The only difference I can see is Blom

describes the women on their way to the river while Traven describes them coming back!

*

My hope is that by now the reader is sympathetic to the possibility that the Traven material was written by Blom. So then, what about all the other thousands of pages written on the subject of Traven's identity? Could they all have been misled?

Yes and no. A tremendous amount of investigation has centered on the life of Hal Croves. Although nothing is absolutely certain, he seems to have been a German itinerant actor and anarchist pamphleteer named Ret Marut. His activities in Europe caused him to be at odds with the law and he escaped to Mexico.

Yet, in the Traven oeuvre, there are so many disparaging remarks about Germans that it seems unlikely to me that the writer himself could have been a German. The Death Ship includes a number of such passages: "Now listen, do you want to go to Germany? Gales replies "No, I don't like Germans. The cop then says "Neither do I. All right Germany is out"

The Belgians ask him: "What do you think of Germany?... I don't care for Germans....why, Germany is a fine country... No, I don't like the Germans. They often go out of their minds without any warning."

"There must be something wrong somewhere, the police of all the countries I have been in want to ship me off to Germany."

"I still wonder what the Germans do with their left-overs. I suppose they can them And store them away for the next war."

When Traven writes about Mexico, the tone becomes more anti-German. This from his book, General From the Jungle:

"No, I don't want to go to Soconusco.

There are Germans there. They own the coffee plantations. They're crueller than animals in the forest and treat one like a dog. That's impossible. If I went to work on the coffee plantations, I'd kill some German with my machete if I saw him mistreating one of us."

From Traven's 'Rebellion of the Hanged': "To Soconusco with Germans? But fellow, there's no question of the coffee plantations. Those people who don't know how to pay, and behave like brutes. They're always carrying a whip in their hands and landing it on the backs of the poor Indians who die in order to earn a few miserable pennies."

How all the authors of those books on Traven can continue to blithely assume that the writer of his works is a German, in light of such attitudes expressed by the protagonists of his books, I don't know.

But let's see what Blom thinks about Germans. His biographer quotes him, "I am rather rabid on the subject of being anti-German."

Blom's second wife Gertrude DUBY Blom had been "intensely interrogated" by the Nazis. Later she helped people who were persecuted by them. When the Nazis invaded Denmark, Blom feared for the safety of family members there. And of course, Traven's works were banned and burned.

In Blom's book Monteador, written just prior to his death, he compares the condition of the workers in pre-revolutionary Mexico to the Nazis: "From old Manuel and other old men the story of mahogany hell came gradually and grew to a dantesque inferno. The stories of brutality that came out of Nazi concentration camps were more "refined" in technique because the Nazis had added mental cruelty. In the lumber camps it was just ordinary common cruelty with such little specialization as to throw a man whose back has been opened from the lash, on the top of an ant heap to die in the flaming pain of millions and millions of

ant bites.”

And this: “During the peonage days this was different. The story has been told so sinister and resembles in so many ways what was going on in Nazi Europe during the war, that it bears repeating.”

*

If one reads Blom’s works with the thought that they could have been written by the same person as the Traven books, endless similarities and comparisons stand out. First, it becomes clear that Blom was having the exact same experiences which we read of in Traven. Secondly, Blom’s descriptions of these experiences in his own works, are often extremely close to Traven’s.

Here are some other examples from Traven and Blom: Traven in Treasure of The Sierra Madre: “All those living and working in the port at that time were concerned with oil and nothing else. Whatever you did had in some way or other to do with oil. Even when eating your dinner or drinking your coffee the smell of oil was about you.”

Blom in Tribes and Temples: “Tampico is the heart of the oil region running along the Mexican Gulf towards Vera Cruz. The river bank is crowded with refineries. Everything is oil- large islands of it float on the river, even the air is saturated with its stench”

The Treasure of The Sierra Madre: “On the hills that formed the banks of the river to the east was the residential section of the Port. Here in beautiful modern bungalows, American style, The American, English, and Dutch who were employed by the oil companies lived with their families. The city was very low only a few feet above sea level, and suffocating hot, for it was seldom reached by the sea breeze coming in from the sea. The colonies of the well-to-do foreigners on these hills along the river-banks had the cool sea

breeze all afternoon and during the night.”

Blom as quoted in his biography: “The place bristled with oil tanks, pipes running in all directions, boiler houses, and pumping stations. Some distance away on higher ground stood the company town of one-story brick houses, where he had a comfortable room and bath with cross ventilation. He had become paymaster for 3,000 native workers and 200 engineers and office employees.”

*

After John Huston, there is another person of considerable renown who tells a curious story of Traven and Blom. Gabriel Figueroa is Mexico’s most famous cinematographer and cameraman. During his long career he worked with Huston on his filming of the novel Under The Volcano as well as the filming of the Traven book, ‘The Rebellion of the Hanged’ among many others.

This story was first told by Figueroa while giving a speech in Arizona but has since been published in several well-known Mexican periodicals.

Figueroa had become quite close to Hal Croves over the years never doubting, in spite of Croves’ never failing denials, that he was in fact Traven. Figueroa and Croves made a trip to Chiapas to search for location sites for a future movie production of a Traven story. At a certain point they arrive in San Cristobal de las Casas at Na Bolom, the home of Frans Blom and his wife Trudy.

In front of the house they are greeted by Mrs. Blom who was a known person in Mexico. As Roy Pateman writes in his book on Traven: “Gertrud DUBY Blom (born 1901) was one of the most interesting foreigners to devote much of her life to Mexico. She was a journalist and socialist activist in Switzerland and other parts of Europe until 1940 when she was imprisoned by the Nazis before being

allowed to leave for Mexico. She became a distinguished photographer and first rate archaeologist making San Cristobal her home in 1950.”

At the entrance to the house, Croves held back while Figueroa entered along with his eminent colleague. Trudy then pulled Figueroa off to the side and when they were quite alone, told him that her husband Frans was actually the real B. Traven!

Naturally, Figueroa thought it was a peculiar thing to say, certain as he was that his good friend Croves was in fact Traven. On leaving, he then remarked with a smile to Croves that he should re-enter the house and meet the real Traven. Croves said nothing, and here the story ended.

I imagine that on occasion Frans and especially Trudy felt the need to unburden themselves of the truth and set the matter straight. Trudy was very proud of her husband and naturally at times would like to be able to share their secret with the world. But Blom's secret had by then gone on for so long and had been so successful that this was a unique event.

I have already credited Croves with immense efforts of his own on behalf of Blom/Traven. Blom led another life completely and never would have been able to maintain the secret career of Traven on his own.

I think that Blom had met Croves in Europe when he was still known as Ret Marut. I also believe that Marut introduced Blom to leftist political and anarchist thinking.

Blom had been raised in a wealthy, cultured home of merchants. Here is an excerpt from a letter from Traven to Paul Kohner, included in Huston's autobiography, expressing ideas about making a future film with Huston.

The familiarity with classical music would indicate the education of the scion of a wealthy family like Blom's but would seem to be highly

unusual from a poor radical pamphleteer such as Ret Marut:

“In music this has been done, or at least tried, since Haydn. It is left to great directors in Hollywood to do the same in pictures what was done long ago by Beethoven and Mozart, and also by Verdi and Rossini.”

But in another letter of the same period, Traven does an about face and pretends to be another sort of person entirely: “please cut out that goddamn mysterious if you mention my name...I am such a plain mug that any time a captain of a tramp will sign me on as a stoker, and never even think I have the intelligence to be a fair A.B.” (able bodied seaman)

There is another phrase which occurs in both Traven and Blom which indicates a cultured background. We would not expect the term *Sturm und Drang* to show up in a book of adventure stories about itinerant workers in Mexico.

The term refers to a late eighteenth century literary movement which was a precursor to the Romantics. Yet we find it in Traven's first book, The Cotton Pickers, when Gales is talking about Mexican trade unions in the early 1920s: “They had the explosive power of a young *Sturm und Drang* movement.”

Blom uses the same phrase when speaking of his former assistant Oliver La Farge: “He is shining like a new sun, and is very happy. I think he has passed the *Sturm und Drang* period.”

It is likely that during Blom's wanderings in Europe he encountered many people professing the radical ideas so prevalent during those years. These ideas become a main stay of Blom's later life when he became a staunch defender of the oppressed Indians of Southern Mexico.

But I think that these radical ideas of his conflicted with other important aspects of his life which prevented him from expressing them openly. Only as Blom grows older did they

begin to dominate his thinking and writing.

I believe that Blom and Marut, or Croves, as he later called himself, were very good friends as evidenced in the letter Croves presented to Huston. They formed a partnership of some kind with an equitable distribution of the money which was forthcoming from the European publishers. I think it was decided to not publish the books in America to help maintain the separation of the Traven identity as distinct from Blom's. Only when the immense market in Germany dries up with the rise of Nazism do they begin to publish the books in English.

Blom was living a double or triple life. On one hand he was a departmental director of a major university acquiring the stature of a renowned academic in Mayan studies.

On the other hand, writing under the name Traven, he wrote stories of itinerant vagabonds and oppressed Indians. And thirdly he had among his close associates either as friends or mentors, a number of important people who would be seriously disturbed if they had known that he was writing "radical proletarian" literature.

First among these was Samuel Zemurray the head of the Cuyamel Fruit Company. Zemurray was a well-known business man and philanthropist in New Orleans who went on to become head of United Fruit.

The United Fruit Company based first in Boston and later in New Orleans was a notorious prototype of today's transnational businesses.

A famous whipping boy of the leftists, this company earned its reputation through infamous misdeeds and crimes. It could be said without exaggeration that the idea of regime change was invented by this famous company. Certainly it was United Fruit who created the image of the "Banana Republic" which became the face of so many Central American nations which the company controlled.

It is not within the scope of this article to delve too deeply into the history of United Fruit but only to establish Blom's close association with both Zemurray and the company.

This is from the Epilogue of Tribes and Temples: "Foremost thanks must be given to the anonymous benefactor who created the Department of Middle American Research and who so liberally financed the expedition and the publication of its results."

Now here is Brunhouse: "...induced Samuel Zemurray, President of the Cuyamel Fruit Company, to ... provide an endowment of \$300,000 to support a new Department of Middle American Research in the university, and supply money for an archaeological expedition." Zemurray, it appears was Blom's anonymous benefactor.

Again we quote from the Epilogue of Tribes and Temples: "The Cuyamel Fruit Company and the United Fruit Company and the International Railways of Guatemala furnished free transportation on their lines. The International Oil Company and the "Aguila" Oil Company of Mexico placed much data at our disposal, and we shall never forget the hospitality we received in the camps of these companies."

Brunhouse tells us: "It appears that Blom had cordial relations with Zemurray as the years passed..." The life of Sam "the Banana Man" Zemurray was hardly a secret and was written about in fictionalized form by his niece Lillian Hellman, as well as such popular books as Dinner At Antoine's by Frances Parkinson Keyes.

Brunhouse writes that Blom insisted everyone at his work address him as Don Pancho, with "the only exception being Doris Stone, daughter of Samuel Zemurray who endowed the department." He was a major benefactor of Tulane and gifted his Uptown mansion to the school as a suitable residence

for University Presidents.

Another of Blom's closest associates was the Mayan scholar Sylvanus G. Morley, one of Blom's earliest mentors. Soon after Frans' initial meeting with him in Mexico City, Morley became an enthusiastic supporter of the younger man. He first hired Blom to work with the Carnegie Institute of Washington at the ruins of Uaxactun and then conspired with others for him to attend Harvard on a tuition scholarship. If Blom were to become a Mayanist he would need a certain amount of academic credibility.

As much as we are indebted to Brunhouse for his biography of Blom, we now extend our thanks, for the indefatigable Mayan scholar also wrote a biography of Morley. The fourth chapter of his book, "Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Maya," is titled "Secret Agent" and describes Morley's World War I work for the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Long before the O.S.S. of WWII fame, the ONI was America's primary source for international espionage. There have been more recent accounts of Morley, and they all describe the bespectacled archaeologist as an exemplary spy. Morley logged over 10,000 pages for the government as well as creating a spy ring which included other famous scholars such as Herbert Spinden. All of these men were connected to prestigious American institutions.

The object of their labors was to identify what influence the Germans had in Central America and whether, as feared, the Germans had established naval bases along the Central American coasts.

Morley was also a super patriot and spied on foreign companies which were competing with such American firms as United Fruit and International Harvester. Brunhouse explains that Morley like many other Americans had a great deal to be thankful to his country for and thought that American business was ethical

and just. When he heard stories to the contrary from the likes of Louisiana mercenary "General" Christmas Lee, he found them incomprehensible.

After World War I was over in 1919, Morley was denounced in the magazine *The Nation* as a spy thus ending his career for the government.

The anthropologist Franz Boas wrote: "A person, however, who uses science for a cover for political spying, who demeans himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classified as a scientist."

Here we must note that Frans Blom arrived in Mexico the same year that Morley was publicly chastised. We must also remember that the business of Blom's family, the H. C. Peterson Company was the importation and sale of machinery for International Harvester.

Brunhouse believes that Blom's "years of carefree life ended when he went away to Mexico to find himself and make his own way" Or: "In Mexico Frans started at the bottom and moved up without the aid of his family."

Here is a very telling line from *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*: "...he was hailed by the manager of an American agency for agricultural machinery. They were unloading machinery and he was asked if he wanted to lend a hand for a day or two. He accepted and was offered four pesos a day."

Clearly we can easily see the long arm of International Harvester coming to the young man's aid.

Brunhouse tells us: "The way Blom launched his career within a period of little over a year is one of the most curious episodes in the story of Maya archaeology."

Brunhouse, thinks Blom came innocently to Mexico in 1919 looking for work and not

until three years later, while working in the jungles for an oil company did he decide to pursue archaeology. That is when he first saw Palenque and appeared to have an epiphany.

And yet Brunhouse notes: “Already well read in Maya archaeology, he spent an exciting day at the site...” Or: “On arriving in the capital, he made friends easily...he made the most of his leisure time. A few days after arriving, he bought a copy of T.A. Joyce’s Mexican Archaeology.” And then: “...with some boldness he wrote a note to Mrs. Zelia Nuttall, the well-known archaeologist and ... she responded with an invitation to tea.”

Clearly Blom did not go to Mexico on a lark, to “make good”, or to find himself.

Rather, I think, the young Frans went to Mexico with the knowledge and assistance of his family, to help Morley in his work with International Harvester and United Fruit, and to pursue as both a cover, as well as in interesting vocation, that of Mayan archaeology.

Once more we take a look at Sylvanus Morley. This is in Brunhouse’s biography of Morley: “(he) enjoyed passes on the United Fruit Company steamers between New Orleans and Yucatan for years.”

He also worked at the Mayan ruins of Quirigua “located on a large tract that the company had just acquired for banana plantations.”

At Quirigua, “United Fruit had erected a \$300,000 hospital which ‘Vay’ (as his friends called Morley) had marveled at since 1914, and now formed a golf course within walking distance.”

United Fruit had in its employ a certain Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud. Bernays is known as the man who started the field of public relations. It was his belief that in order to maintain a democratic way of life it was necessary to learn how to sway public opinion.

Unfortunately his work was not always so idealistic as he famously worked for the tobacco industry to popularize cigarette smoking among women. His book Propaganda was studied by Joseph Goebels

Bernays was long associated with United Fruit. When the ruins at Quirigua were discovered, it was Bernays who saw an opportunity to gain beneficial publicity for the company by promoting archaeology and help to counteract some of the adverse relations for which it had become famous.

Edward Bernays also invented the term “Middle America” as he thought it sounded better to the ear of the middle class American public than Central America. Lastly, it seems, it was also Bernays who in the 1950s, while Blom was living just across the Mexican border, orchestrated the overthrow of the legitimate Jacobo Arbenz presidency precipitating the devastating civil war in Guatemala.

The role of American business in the world is still hotly debated. There is no doubt that these companies with which Blom was associated in his earlier years invested heavily in the infrastructures of their host nations and were reluctant to see those investments jeopardized. Nevertheless, the ideas and actions of these companies are diametrically opposed to the sentiments in the Traven books. I see this double life as possibly being the source of his alcoholism.

It seems incredible to me, even now, to think that the Blom who I met in San Cristobal, famed as an explorer and defender of the oppressed Mayan Indians of Chiapas should be in league with these notorious agents of the very capitalist companies which themselves were doing the oppressing.

And of course if Blom in fact wrote the Traven books then we need to find an answer to this apparent dichotomy. Yet the evidence of Blom’s involvement with these people is incontrovertible.

With such a long sustained relationship between Blom and Sam Zemurray, it is of note that he never wrote anything about the banana business, nor did Traven. And yet, of all the companies working in Central Americas, United Fruit is by far the best known as are their misdeeds. Major South American authors did tackle the “Pulpo” (Octopus) as it was known including Pablo Neruda.

Traven does write a scathing indictment of the oil business, a business Blom worked in for years and knew well, both in the field and through his friends who were heavily connected to both government and Big Business. Especially that other man mentioned in that letter to Albert Dinwiddie, President of Tulane: Archie Roosevelt.

Roosevelt’s connection to Big Oil was deep as was his friendship with Blom, and these reasons provided Blom with more than ample reason to write about his friend using an alias.

Although that letter mentions “young Frick” he was never that close to Blom who was always courting wealthy people to woo as sponsors and donors for his projects. He cast his net wide and the names Rockefeller, Morgan, Carnegie and others are mentioned, but none were as close to Blom as Morley, Zemurray, and especially Archie Roosevelt.

Archie Roosevelt was the fifth son of President Theodore Roosevelt, the famed hero of the Rough Riders who stormed San Juan Hill in the Spanish American War.

The younger Roosevelt was himself a hero, wounded in both World Wars and recipient of many medals including the Croix de Guerre.

Archie was also devoting himself to reactionary political causes by the year 1932 when he acted as Best Man at Frans’ wedding to the wealthy heiress Mary Thomas. From the letter of 1925 it is clear that Blom was already paying frequent visits to the Roosevelt home and so his friendship clearly was quite close

and spanned a significant number of years.

Blom’s friend Roosevelt joined a reactionary group in 1932 called National Economy League which wanted to cut benefits to Vets and precipitated the infamous events surrounding the Bonus Marchers.

Some of these right wing sentiments were already present in Blom or rubbed off on him: “He had grave doubts about government aid to the poor, asserting that many ‘loafers’ flourished without working.”

This friendship plays an important part in identifying the true author of the Traven books. The Traven novel The White Rose is substantially different from the other books. It contains detailed descriptions of the inner workings of the capitalist system as only an insider could write it.

Blom’s intimate friendship with Roosevelt gave him a front row seat on an unfolding scandal which was to become in its day as well-known as Watergate in ours. The full disclosure of the Teapot Dome scandal as it is presented by Traven in his novel The White Rose is dealt with in detail later in this essay.

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There are extraordinary similarities between the works of Traven and Blom. But as the man most generally thought to be Traven, there has been an amazing amount of research into Croves’ life. It is doubtful that there has ever been so much study of a writer’s agent in all of history!

It is probable that he actually was the man Ret Marut in Germany.

Marut did some writing and some of his stories have been published as authored by Marut/Traven. To my mind the rather far-fetched comparisons in style and subject between Traven and Ret Marut are non-existent. Certainly they do not come even close to the similarities between Blom and Traven

presented in this essay. Most obviously the Marut works all take place in Europe and seem more Mittel-European than Middle American.

A humorous story regarding Trudy and Hal Croves' wife R. E. Lujan comes after the death of both Croves and Blom. Sometime after Croves' death in 1969, his widow, Rosa Elena Trujan, wishing to shore up her claim that Croves was Traven, hires a young writer from the States to stay with her in Mexico City and write a book about Croves.

The author Jonah Raskin ([My Search For B. Traven](#)) is instructed at some point in his research to leave the big city and go to "Traven Country" and off he goes to Chiapas, eventually receiving an interview with Blom's widow who he finds out is referred to there as "The First Lady of Chiapas."

It is easy to imagine that Trudy and Senora Lujan felt a bit competitive. And Rosa Elena tells Raskin before he leaves for Chiapas that Blom's widow knows nothing about Traven.

For her part, Trudy, who I have met and can attest to her character, was famously imperial in her manner, tells Raskin: So, you are writing the biography of B. Traven, well, good luck to you young man"

Then she slyly tells Raskin, that Traven was a homosexual!! She continues in a delightfully mischievous tirade: "Don't look so shockedWith a man like Traven you have to look between the lines...I've read Traven's novels, young man, and I can see that love between men is the only love that B Traven understands Why do you think he waited until he was over seventy to get married-and then pick a woman who was more of a daughter than a wife? Why? Can you answer me that? Do you think he had a normal, healthy relationship with Mrs. Lujan?"

Poor Jonah Raskin reeling from her revelation immediately rises to Traven's defense: "He always had lovers... I've read his correspondence. He had friends in L.A., San

Antonio; taxi dancers, prostitutes, lonely widows. In the letters they'd address him as 'Dear Viking' and ...my Norse Lover."

This must have really delighted Trudy as Frans fit that description perfectly and no one would ever dream of addressing little Croves like that. Here is Brunhouse on Frans:

"Blom was a strikingly handsome man. Blond hair, sometimes flowing back over his head, and penetrating blue eyes reflected his Nordic origin..... He gave the impression of being wiry and athletic, which suggested his remarkable physical endurance. During the years he worked at Tulane University he was a dashing man about town, already bearing the reputation of a romantic Viking explorer as a result of the expedition of 1925 which was widely reported in the newspapers."

Here is Huston: "Croves was a small thin man with a long nose. His eyes were quite blue and close together, and he had graying blond hair...All in all, he looked as though he were country born and-bred, unfamiliar with the ways of the city."

Now that Trudy had successfully sent the latest Traven biographer in a totally unexpected new direction (Raskin subsequently devoted several pages to the question of Traven's sexual preference) she springs to her feet and as a parting shot says "Do send me a copy of the biography of Traven, I'd like to read it so very much."

I think that for Blom, his secret identity as author of the Traven books was but one facet of a truly unusual life. His life was much greater than just "the secret life of B. Traven." Whereas for Croves, his essential work on behalf of the Traven saga regarding every detail of correspondence with publishers and so forth, was truly a highlight in an otherwise less eventful life. Curiously the house he lived in with R.E. Lujan was on a street in Mexico City called the "calle Rio Mississippi."

In this quote from Raskin he compares the

difference in the homes of Croves and Na Bolom, the home of Trudy and Frans. In this simple comparison we see the immense difference in the lives of the two friends. A difference guessed at by both Huston and his actress wife Evelyn Keyes when they met Croves many years earlier:

“It was still raining when I returned to Na Bolom. I waited for Gertrud Duby in the library, an immense room with a stone fireplace that seemed more appropriate for a baronial mansion in Central Europe than a provincial town in Chiapas. I felt like I was back in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or on a Hollywood movie set for ‘Prisoner of Zenda’. Na Bolom made the house on Rio Mississippi seem like a crude construction of the nouveau riche.”

And yet that house on Rio Mississippi, was far and away the nicest place Croves had ever lived in!

This house which Blom called Na Bolom, or House of the Jaguar, Blom first saw on his Tulane Expedition in 1925. This is the house which helps restore his spirits later when his life was falling apart. Once again we are indebted to Brunhouse, talking about Blom and his friend McBride: “In San Cristobal Frans took his friend to the Penagos house on the edge of town, which he decided to buy as soon as he had the money. ‘He ran his hands over the beautifully carved door, and was really enraptured. I think that house, as much as anything else, helped to revive him’ A decade later the house became his home.”

Just how this house became Frans’ home is also pertinent to the “Mystery of Traven” Brunhouse: “He acquired the home through a peculiar turn of events. When his mother died in Denmark in 1933, she left him a legacy of \$2,200. For unknown reasons he failed to receive the money until late in 1949. Then Blom bought the Casa de Penagos in San Cristobal...”

I find this story hard to accept. Throughout this period, Brunhouse admits to not understanding Blom’s finances whatsoever: “How he supported himself, at least until 1947, is not quite clear. The grants he secured for expeditions could hardly have netted him more than the expenses of each trip.”

And yet in 1946 we hear that: “The Bloms were able to contribute 1000 pesos toward the 12,00 which the expedition cost.”

The rights to the film, Treasure of the Sierra Madre, were one source. The other was the war work he and Trudy did for the U.S. government.

An article published in the American Scholar details the history of the script for Treasure. Written by Robert Emmett Ginna Jr. In Search of The Treasure of the Sierra Madre is a delightful frolic into the mystery, not of Traven, but of the strange events surrounding just the script itself:

“Warner’s lawyers insisted that only Traven’s full and valid name on the contract would satisfy them. But it remained B. Traven when Kohner, with Traven’s power of Attorney, signed a contract calling for three option payments of \$500 each and a final payment of \$5000 (issued on September 4, 1942).”

Brunhouse had expressed wonderment for Frans when the whole world believed Blom to be finished, a degenerate drunk canned from his job at Tulane: “Instead of facing reality, he imagined that some high paying job was about to come his way.” Blom was trying to reassure his friends without being able to tell them about his secret life.

“He assured inquirers that everything would come out alright... he indicated that no one ever had to help him and that by his own will he could accomplish the impossible.”

Despite these reassurances to his friends, Brunhouse concludes “Blom had fallen as low as a man can go”

It is only now, in my view, that the two or three aspects of Blom's personality and life begin to merge into a coherent whole.

Although Blom did have a drinking problem, I think he was exaggerating it to get out of his job at Tulane and back to Chiapas. It seems to me that his alcohol consumption was but a minor failing considering the pressures of such a complex life that Frans was leading.

After his divorce in 1938 from Mary, Frans found living on a university salary after years of the high life to be untenable and boring. He wasn't getting to the jungles he loved with sufficient frequency and some of his grander projects at Tulane were not materializing for lack of funding.

Foremost of these was the replicating of the Mayan Temple from Chichen Itza. In 1938, the same year of his divorce, "Frans enlarged the plans so that the 'Castillo' would contain eight floors in an air-conditioned, windowless building. The cost had risen to 2 million" (the Depression notwithstanding).

Blom received university approval for fund raising: "Samuel Zemurray gave money to launch the campaign and acted as general manager of the campaign committee." Still sufficient funds were not forthcoming.

Blom's secret Traven persona had not been entirely lost behind his façade of glamour. At his job on the Tulane campus, Blom dressed in the simple white homespun of a Mexican peasant, with a red sash around his waist.

In 1937 Blom wrote a book for tourists called In the Shadow of Volcanoes "The manuscript was written, but at first United Fruit Company, one of the sponsors of the project, delayed publication..."

And until 1940 he was still writing (as Traven) the final volumes of the 'Jungle Books' about the mahogany workers. Yet these attempts at shoring up his life, which he now found boring were insufficient. He wanted out. And he wanted adventure back in his life, not

just the writing of it in fictionalized accounts.

After being fired from Tulane, Brunhouse tells us he tried to find a job. The United States had just entered the war. Blom spoke five languages impeccably and without accent and he was strongly anti-Nazi. "In fact, one of his friends in government service arranged a job for him in the Office of Naval Intelligence in Mexico."

Although Brunhouse indicates he was not hired, the facts would suggest otherwise.

Spying is never something to be publicly announced. Blom's former mentor Morley had worked for ONI in the First World War and at least one member of the ring which he had formed, Samuel Lothrop, again worked for the agency in WWII. And lest we forget, Blom's buddy Archie Roosevelt was active in the war, was very connected and his brother had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

Blom had served in World War I, we remember, in the Danish Navy. It is also likely Blom had worked for Morley in the capacity of industrial espionage as well.

Blom stated, according to his biographer, "but I feel I have no right to spend my time on things of the distant past, when my familiarity with Latin America should be of present usefulness" (a reference to the war).

Blom married the very actively anti-Nazi, Gertrud Duby in Mexico when the war had just begun in Europe, and it is unthinkable they did not become involved in the war effort in some capacity. Brunhouse tells us in 1943 Blom "received a grant (from unknown sources) to search Chiapas for supplies of rubber for the United States government, because the supply of that vital item had been cut off from the East Indies."

Blom in his book Monteador written in the last years of his life goes into great length about the products of the jungle he knew so well and their use during World War II: "The soldiers on all fronts wanted their chewing

gum...the jeeps had to have rubber tires and the airplanes chewed up rubber. There was a breathless rush to get those materials, process them and ship them to the front.” Blom continues to detail all the products and their importance in the war effort. “They all originate in the same region, in the great forests of the states of Chiapas, Campeche, and Quintana Roo of Mexico... Here lie the great forests that produce so many of our present needs.”

As one reads more and more of Traven and Blom, endless similarities continue to become apparent. The following one Josephine came upon in her search, and it is just this sort of thing which one stumbles upon.

In the Traven short story “When the Priest Is Not At Home” the priest of a small village must leave for a conference in the state capital. In his absence he instructs “the full blooded Indian sacristan” in a series of tasks to be done before he returns. He specifically asks for the saints to be touched up with some paint. “You clean them well, all of them. Where the paint has peeled off put on some new.” Traven writes of the sacristan “Though he was no expert in using paint... he felt sure he could do a satisfactory job.”

Blom on his 1928 Tulane expedition has a similar experience. Two students from Tulane went on the expedition. The student Louis Bristow was much impressed with all the various things Blom does to please the natives, thus winning for the Tulane team a great deal of help from what might otherwise have been hostile inhabitants of the region.

Bristow writes “after several days of ‘good works’ they continue on their way.” One of those good works bears note: Once Bristow was startled when he found Blom “kneeling before the saint. At first I thought he was working some kind of hokum to get something, but he was only doing a little request painting on the saint where the paint had peeled off.”

Here both Blom and Traven refer to “rich American universities.”

Traven wrote the following to his German editors dated July 21, 1925: “It would make for another interesting story to inform your readers of the hardships one must endure to write a manuscript in the jungle, particularly if the writer does not enjoy the expensive amenities which rich American universities or rich German patrons would supply.”

This is from Blom quoted in Brunhouse’s biography. He is speaking about a Mexican colleague and writing in his diary for May 16, 1928: “Yesterday evening he gave me a lecture on my organizing of the expedition.... Americans were so rich, and from rich universities, so we ought to travel with more comfort and luxury...” We should note that Blom was in the field on both dates.

There are many long and beautiful passages from the two which are quite lovely. This one is from Tribes and Temples: “The little house only half walled and small... was always neat, its dirt floor swept clean, each small possession in its place. There was the faint smell of wood-smoke and earth, with scent of the rich jungle drifting in, the sound of the low voiced talk, wind in the grass, or the grind and thump of the metates, now and then the laughter...”

And now Traven from The White Rose: “From the huts the smoke of the ovens drifted out through the ever open gaps in the walls. In front of several huts women were kneeling before the metate and grinding corn. The pigs, chickens, turkeys, burros, birds, and animals of the woods and jungle that were domesticated and accustomed to the house, small deer, racoons, dogs, and cats, ran around the patio and pressed against a woman who was squatting before a metate. When she straightened up a bit to wipe the sweat from her brow, she would throw a bit of cornmeal among the hungry guests in the yard. As they

began a wild battle over it, the woman laughed.”

Here is Traven in the short story “Night Visitor”: “He had been buried with the utmost care, and in a way which told better than any tombstone in what high esteem. He must have been loved by his friends and kin... Next to him there had been a few vessels made of clay which originally might have contained some food and drink to be used by him on his journey to the beyond.”

This is from Tribes and Temples: “It is possible that the man laid to rest was one of these. He was a person of high rank, otherwise he would not have been buried in the top of the principal mound of the city, together with a large collection of precious clay vessels for his food on his journey to another world.”

The great number of similar passages goes on and on and I am afraid will burden this narrative. But if these proofs are accepted as sufficient evidence, then it changes the course of eighty five years of unresolved, contentious research into the identity of the author of these books.

I fully realize that this is perhaps not of earth shaking significance, or as my brother told me recently “Pete! Does anyone care who Traven was, anymore?” Also, as I have worked on this paper and queried many people, very few of them have even **heard** of Traven, and the youth are beginning to be interested in movies other than The Treasure of the Sierra Madre and some, I confess aren’t completely sure even who Bogart was! Imagine such things!

Yet, as recently as 2005 a UCLA Professor Emeritus Roy Pateman wrote a book on Traven, The Man Nobody Knows. And a new biography (Leifer et al. 2002) on Blom was published in Danish. And now Tulane is touting him as their own “Indiana Jones.”

Apparently there is still interest in both Blom and Traven. The director of the Blom

foundation Na Bolom also tells me that the Danish government has recently decided to use Blom as a sort of symbol of ecological development for Denmark.

I am also quite sure that the city of New Orleans with such a rich literary tradition would be delighted to add a Traven Festival to their Tennessee Williams and William Faulkner Festivals, should the world agree with my conclusions expressed herein. So, for those of you who are still with me I will soldier on.

In fact speaking of Pateman, I picked up another curious detail. According to him Traven had five major influences as an author, most of them are well known, but he goes on to tell us about a **Danish** novelist Herman Bang. Pateman writes that he had “a significant influence on Traven; in his novel, De Uden Faederland-Denied a Country (1906) Bang says that ‘a man without a country is a free man’ This is one of the main themes running through Traven’s first and probably best regarded book The Death Ship.”

It is appropriate to add here that Traven had experience at sea, and Croves/Marut had none that we know of other than his ship board passage from Europe to Mexico. Here is Brunhouse: “Sometime during the First World War Blom fulfilled his compulsory military service in the Danish navy. His reason for choosing this branch of the service is not clear.” But he maintained a “lifelong habit of tying ropes with a peculiar knot he learned on shipboard.”

In fact every one of the experiences written about in the Traven books seemed to have been lived by Blom and there is ample testimony to prove it. All of the experiences were likewise lived in plenty of time for Blom to have had them, written about them and have them published in order for them to correspond with those related experiences published in the Traven books.

Two of Traven’s books contain poignant

scenes involving a death by drowning. Blom also was involved with a very similar experience. This is from 'The Treasure':

"It was a poor adobe hut that they entered. A *petate* mat was spread over the only table in the house, and on this mat the boy lay... All the people assembled in the house seemed to expect a miracle such as raising the dead by sheer command...The old man tried artificial respiration, something these Indians had never seen before... Howard, examining the boy again after fifteen minutes of this work, was sure he showed slight signs of life."

Here's Blom in Tribes and Temples: "When we arrived his corpse was being dragged ashore. He was blue in the face with froth out of mouth and nose. We worked with him giving him artificial respiration for two hours without result. Then he was laid on a board and carried up to the carpenter's shop to be laid out in state as is customary here and candles appropriately set in empty bottles were placed around him. While all this was going on his partner was sitting on a rock by the river crying hysterically."

Traven's Bridge In the Jungle: "Several women had hurried to the hut before Manuel and all the others. These women had brought candles, put them into beer bottles loaned by the pump master, and set them on boxes which had also been obtained from the maestro maquinista. Owing to these preparations, the hut had a solemn aspect which when Garcia entered and observed it, caused her to break out crying again."

I really should not keep apologizing for so many inserted quotations. They form the crucial basis of my proof that Traven's work was written by Blom and besides, the writing is so beautiful.

The White Rose contains passages that no person who lived his life in the Mexican hinterlands, as did Croves during all the years covering 1925 to 1940 when the books were

being written, could possibly have been able to write.

The White Rose was Traven's book written about a corrupt oil company and it's avaricious attempt to gain ownership of an oil rich piece of land in Mexico owned by a traditional family of small proprietors. It is full of references to big business of a very intimate nature such as only an insider could write.

It is always instructive to look at where an author gets the fictionalized names for a book. Often, they are close at hand. The name of the corrupt and intriguing oil company in The White Rose, which stops at nothing, even murder, to take possession of the small Indian owned hacienda, is the "Condor Oil Company." Blom was employed by the "Eagle Oil Company" for over four years.

The head of this fictional company Traven calls Mr. Collins.

Blom writing in Tribes and Temples: "The one universal tool and weapon is the machete, varying in form from tribe to tribe, but always by Collins & Co. of Hartford—part of one of the most amazing industries in the world."

Another prominent person in the book is called Ayres. Blom's wife was an heiress to a fortune created by the Harriet Hubbard Ayers cosmetic company.

The White Rose deals with the crimes and folly of Big Oil in the United States and goes into the contemporary Tea Pot Dome scandal, which along with Watergate ranks as the worst political scandal of the twentieth century.

Blom's wedding to the cosmetic heiress took place on her family estate, *Sefton Manor* on "Millionaire Row" on Long Island. His best-man was Archie Roosevelt. The presiding prelate was an Episcopalian bishop.

By the time of his marriage in 1932 Blom had long been Roosevelt's close friend.

Archie was an executive of the Sinclair Consolidated Oil Co. and his brother was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. When the

scandal broke in 1922, Blom had been working for the Eagle Oil Co. for some three years. All of Blom's friends had their hands full to avoid censure and even prison during the scandal. Frans Blom as it turned out had a ringside seat!

Here is The White Rose: "This spared them the storms which the great oil scandal, the so-called Teapot Dome Scandal, gave rise to a few years later. These storms thoroughly rattled American capitalism and supplied dynamite to the socialists. The storms so upset the President of the Republic, Mr. Harding, that he took ill, lay down, and died, so conveniently that he could not be audited-to speak no ill of the dead- to discover how many millions he had made with Mr. Sinclair at the nation's expense while his heir apparent, Mr. Coolidge, lost his voice and has been known as 'Silent Cal'."

More from The White Rose in the same vein: "Mr. Collins was so clever that he avoided such maneuvers as entangled a Harry Sinclair, the most powerful oil magnate, in one of the largest and smelliest capitalistic scandals the American people have seen in recent years...That scandal seriously undermined the foundation of the capitalistic system, to an extent communist propaganda will never accomplish ... Mr. Sinclair is not condemned, but admired, because he was smart enough to purchase the nation's military reserves and turn them into oil and dollars. For years lawyers cudged their brains to discover which paragraph in the American statutes could properly be used to pursue Mr. Sinclair and his accomplices right up to the Presidency."

There is no indication that either Ret Marut, the itinerant European actor and radical, or Hal Croves living on the outskirts of Acapulco when it was still a sleepy port, could have written that.

Only a truly remarkable person could have been able to move in all these extraordinarily diverse circles.. As Blom's biographer tells us:

"With ease and confidence he associated with all kinds of people. He had friends in the New York social set, and he was equally at home with the Indians of Mexico and Guatemala."

There is quite enough material in this new quest for the true identity of Traven for a book. I will leave that to future academics, as I lack both the desire and the discipline.

Nevertheless, there are still a few areas which need to be elucidated if the patient reader will forgive me. Frans Blom wrote I de Skore Stove (1923) a book of adventure stories supposedly for kids in Denmark covering his years in the jungles of Mexico from 1919 to 1922. I was able to look at a copy in the Na Bolom library, and even though it is in Danish, it was obvious that this book contains much of the missing clues to Traven's mystery.

Many phrases jumped off the pages: "Colt 45", "Remington riffler 30 30", and there are photos of a young Blom with armed revolutionaries, in one of which Blom himself appears to carry a rifle with an ammunition belt strapped across his chest. An English translation would probably yield many clues to the Traven mystery.

Traven's combined output for the entire 1930s was a series of novels collectively known as The Jungle Books. They are frequently referred to as his magnum opus. They are basically a consistent narrative about two Chamula Indians who have through trickery and bad luck fallen prey to labor agents and gone to work as lumberjacks in the mahogany camps of Chiapas.

Traven sets the time in and around the Revolution although he well knew that the poor treatment of the workers remained a contemporary issue, though the worst abuses had ceased. As it turns out, Blom also wrote a long 500 page work about these same workers in the camps. The following quotations illustrate Blom's familiarity with and concern for, these same people.

Brunhouse on Blom: "...he made plans to write a book about the mountain men of Chiapas, such as the chicle gatherers and the mahogany loggers." Blom "lashed out against another group 'All the mahogany and chicle operators, Spanish or of Spanish descent ...are a bunch of ruthless thieves' ... 'The right to collect any Indian for labor has been so abused'."

Here I show that Blom was very close to the Chamula and very aware of the abuses perpetrated against the mahogany workers. "He was particularly fond of the Indians of Chamula, with whom he kept up close friendly relations year after year. He knew many of them by name and took an active interest in all their problems"

Blom writes "The Chiapas ladino is a thoroughly despicable person, of narrow mind, superstitious, dishonest, fanatic..."

"The lazy and arrogant set of ladinos doesn't care a damn, and spends their time talking about how lazy Indians are....and make their money robbing them at every turn."

Traven, here from Rebellion of the Hanged: "What's your job Chamula?" he asked Candido, whose place of origin he recognized by his hat."

In Tribes and Temples, Blom indicates he knows all about those hats: "Their heads were bound with white kerchiefs, flowing behind, and some wore the stiff brimmed hats with their close fitting crowns, decked with ribbons." When I was in the area around San Cristobal in the early 1960s it was very easy to distinguish the men of different ethnic groups by their clothing.

In Rebellion of the Hanged: "For a whole week Celso sacrificed hours each day to help Candido to produce his four tons the same as the others...'Aren't we both from the same village? ... That's true, we're both Chamulas and we're neighbors'."

Blom had plenty of opportunities to learn

all about the old days from people he met on his expeditions. Here are a few examples from Tribes and Temples: "After the sun disappeared behind the mountains we listened to Don Pedro's tales of the last revolution."

"As we rode back towards La Florida, Virgil entertained us with fantastic stories about his experiences during the last revolution." And: "The evenings we shall especially remember when we sat outside the hut and listened to Don Aureo's tales of the Indians."

And then this strange entry from The Rebellion of the Hanged which again makes us think of Blom writing from his porch overlooking Jackson Square: "If the Tsotsils had been asked the reason for their preference, they might have replied like the old Louisiana Negress who had been a slave before the Civil War..." Here is another passage mentioning Louisiana from Traven's book Trozás: "Good pillows were made of cambric and stuffed with especially selected Louisiana moss known as Musgo."

There are other entries about New Orleans. These are from Traven's first book, the adventure stories of vagabond workers in Mexico called The Cotton Pickers: "Then there was Abraham, the little Negro from New Orleans." Abraham is an important person to the group of men hunting for work, as he always has an ample supply of eggs to feed them. "In Louisiana we know how to handle hens," he says.

And just as in Traven's next book, The Death Ship with its numerous mentions of New Orleans, we come across a Dane as well! "The master baker is a Dane, a ships cook who jumped ship. He knows nothing about baking, either. His worry is that someday, someone who really knows something about baking will get a job there. That would be the end of the Dane and his master baking."

I may also have found the solution to one

of the most written about parts of the Traven mystery, the true identity of Gerard Gales. Gales is the protagonist of the first book, The Cotton Pickers as well as The Death Ship. Both constitute the earliest of the adventures in the “Traven saga.”

Here is our introduction to this most written about of all Traven characters: “Then last in line there was Gerard Gales—that’s my name. There’s not much to say about me. In dress I was indistinguishable from the others, and I was picking cotton...” And, in The Death Ship as we have seen, he is a sailor from New Orleans! But Blom also had a friend from the early days named Gerald Jones!

Blom wrote a short vignette about his native Indian guide on the Tulane Expedition of 1928. His name was Lazaro Hernandez, but because Blom and LaFarge became so fond of him, they called him by the Indian honorific of *Tata* (they actually brought him to New Orleans).

“Tata A Prince of An Indian” mentions a man named Gerald Jones, “a friend who formerly worked in Tabasco...” The story continues: “He came up to me and said simply: “Senor, you are a friend of my friend Mister Gerald Jones. You say I should work for you. I will do so.”

The two names are obviously very similar, Jones was a friend of Blom’s from his most adventurous early period and he is my candidate as the source for the original Gerard Gales!

Another major part of the Traven mystery concerns the Traven aversion to publicity as expressed famously in this statement: “I would like to state very clearly: the biography of a creative person is absolutely unimportant. If that person is not recognized in his work, then either he is worth nothing or his work is worth nothing. The creative person should have no other biography than his works.” These feelings he continued to voice all his life.

Blom’s aversion to publicity equals that of Traven. We first encountered it when he neglected to list the authors’ names in Tribes and Temples. This was but one of many such examples of this unusual trait over the years. His biographer writes that in the 1950s Blom was asked to do some writing for Life Magazine: “He accepted on the condition that his name never be used.” Later: “He disclaimed any desire for publicity.” When someone visited his home to “write a book about my checkered career,” he stated: “I frankly hate publicity and I always have.”

Admittedly, with all of these untold similarities between the two authors, I am amazed that it has been left to me to tell this story. I am also admittedly, very pleased as well, for I always harbored the notion that Frans Blom was “B. Traven.”

My parents had raised my brothers and me reading such books as My Name Is Aram by William Saroyan and the works of Hemingway and Traven. Well, I remember the way one Traven title looked on the book shelf, the title on the book’s spine was split and read: “The Rebel Lion of the Hanged”, and for a long time that is what I thought the book was called!

From that first rainy afternoon in San Cristobal when I sat by the fire and listened to the master story teller back in 1961, I always thought: “Who else could he be?”

By coincidence, Josephine and I have also lived on a number of different occasions in New Orleans, always within shouting distance of Jackson Square. So, I guess I’m about the best person as any to unravel this tale.

Way back in the beginning of this essay I bragged about discovering a Traven short story and a chapter from Blom which matched perfectly. It is true except that we must take a few pages from the previous chapter in the case of Blom. Both Traven and Blom occasionally wrote accounts of the Mexican period of history about Spain’s conquest of the Indians,

using famous writer/soldiers as Bernal Diaz as source material. Traven's short story from *The Night Visitor* is called "A New God Was Born" and the Blom chapter from the *Conquest of Yucatan* is titled "The Divine Horse."

Here we have Cortés passing through Oaxaca and Chiapas on a difficult expedition to a distant province. En route, the Spaniards leave an injured horse in the hands of a group of friendly natives. Part of the story of the *Conquest* revolves around the fact that the Indians had no draft animals and had never seen a horse, not to mention one of these enormous war horses the Spaniards preferred.

Here is Traven: "A few years after Hernando Cortez had conquered Mexico, he formed an expedition with the idea of discovering a seaway, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Cortez's expedition marched south with the hope of coming upon a strait connecting the two great oceans."

Here is Blom's version: "Cortez was the leader in power and plotting, and in the desire to extend explorations...A party...was sent... to the Gulf Coast... One of the duties was to investigate the possibility of a ship canal to connect the Gulf of Mexico with the Pacific via the Tehuantepec Isthmus."

Traven: "The Cortez army was suffering from hunger and from all kinds of tropical diseases...the expedition was considered a total loss."

Blom: "It was a continuous fight against rivers, bogs, and starvation... hunger took many men...the men were all starving. Many of them died...utterly exhausted, starving, and with their clothes worn to rags."

Finally, the remnants of the army come to a lake with friendly natives.

Traven: "on the islands of that lake and along the shores, the expedition found many villages inhabited by Indians of the most hospitable and peaceful nature."

Blom: "The army followed the shore of the

lake and soon was joined by its chief, [Cortés] who gave orders that his black horse, by name Morcillo, should be left in the care of Caneck, as it was sick."

Traven: "Because the exotic animal seemed related not only to the white men but also to the fire and thunder of canons and muskets the natives looked at the horse in constant awe. Soon they made it a god."

Blom: "Scarcely had the Spaniards disappeared from view when the Indians led the sick horse to one of their temples. Never had they seen such a formidable beast before, and the great red faced chief who with his guns could create thunder and lightning and death, so the inhabitants of Tayasal, the island city, immediately worshipped the horse as the God of Thunder."

Traven: "They brought it the most beautiful flowers and the choicest fruit for gifts, just as they had brought offerings of flowers and fruits to the gods in their temples."

Blom: "They brought the new god offerings of choice fruits and meats and flowers and honey. Whereupon the sick horse soon died."

Traven: "The poor natives by now couldn't think of anything to do to make the horse happy. It dawned on them that this divine creature was sinking fast, and their gloom turned to terror...the horse finally could do nothing but lie down and die miserably..."

Blom: "Terrified at this and fearing the wrath of Cortes, they built an image of the horse out of stone and mortar and held it in great veneration."

We have come to the end of our little story which I hope was both entertaining and convincing, but here, as they say down in New Orleans, is a little *lagniappe*. This is from Josephine. Back on the ranch we both had gotten into hunting for Traven clues as we read all our books into the wee hours of the night.

Josephine was looking at Karl S. Guthkes'

book on Traven when something got her attention and she called me over. I went over to see what she had found, and she said: “**I got it!**” She pointed to a copy of a hand written letter in between pages 242 and 243 of the text. The letter is marked “Tamaulipas”.

The thing was small and difficult to read, but she handed me the magnifying glass and I could make this out: “Arrived 7:30. In the forenoon with Mr. B. A look after the land. Told me about his plans. Seem to be good ones. B. said he was expecting my coming. In the afternoon B. came. Coffee. Talk. Showed off.”

“That’s it!” she said. There’s the other half of the name. Don’t you see it? The B. there is Blom! They named the writer of the books after their own partnership: “**Blom Traven**”!

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