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The Mystery of B. Traven by Judy Stone (review)

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would be improved, as its editors note, if it contained something by Texas' best sf writer, Donald Barthelme.

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The Mystery of B. Traven. By Judy Stone. (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1977. 128 pages, \$6.95.)

Alex Haley may turn out to be this century's most famous author with roots to his progenitors; conversely B. Traven may well be the most famous rootless author. Judy Stone, journalist and film reviewer, attempts to unearth some of the roots of the anonymous author, B. Traven — best known in this country for the novel, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

Judy Stone's *The Mystery of B. Traven* reveals that *she*, in 1966, conducted a series of interviews (published in *Ramparts*) with Hal Croves in Mexico City. According to Miss Stone, Hal Croves was B. Traven; he also was Ret Marut, Richard Maurhut, Berick Traven Torsvan and quite possibly even the illegitimate son of Kaiser Wilhelm II! Judy Stone's assertions are old ones made by many other searchers for the "real" B. Traven. As such her book does little to solve the "mystery" of B. Traven. These hypothetical roots come close, but are they really connected to the author? There are still many elements of conjecture, even though the Hal Croves, who died in Mexico on March 26, 1969, was cremated as Traven Torsvan and his ashes were scattered over the mountains of B. Traven's beloved Chiapas, Mexico — near a town now known as "Ocosingo de Traven."

Questions about the Germanic flavor of Traven's English, the American content and perspective of his novels, the philosophical-anarchism and its possible sources in the prose must still be raised after reading Judy Stone's book. She "has left many stones unturned" in her *The Mystery of B. Traven*.

Nevertheless, the book has its valuable aspects. It consists of short bite-sized chapters that reveal Miss Stone's knowledge of the formation of the 1918 Bavarian Republic and Ret Marut's political actions at that time. It also presents in a fine anecdotal tone Judy Stone's progressive interviews with Hal Croves in Mexico. Finally, it portrays the hypothetical B. Traven (Hal Croves) as a man who was complex, enigmatic, secretive, defensive, knowledgeable about the literature of B. Traven and sincere in his desire for privacy. The interplay of two intrinsically interesting human beings, Miss Stone and Hal Croves, gives life and zest to *The Mystery of B. Traven*. This makes for interesting reading.

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