

better than I expected in the era of the compact disc. (Several *hundred* of Carlos Gardel's recordings are now available in this medium.) Will there ever be a last tango in Buenos Aires? Not while Buenos Aires is still there.

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B. Traven: A Vision of Mexico. By HEIDI ZOGBAUM. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992. Map. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xxiii, 255 pp. Cloth. \$24.95.

Heidi Zogbaum's study of B. Traven, the German novelist of Mexican life and customs best known for *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and his "jungle cycle" novels, is a unique and very interesting hybrid. Part biography of a writer and his books, part history of postrevolutionary Mexico, its sum is greater than its parts. Zogbaum demonstrates how certain events, experiences, and travels shaped Traven's evolving vision of Mexico, and how in turn Traven shaped (and distorted) the vision of Mexico held for decades by so many readers (myself included) around the world.

Zogbaum is primarily interested in determining Traven's political outlook and the accuracy of his portrayal of Mexico. In doing that, she solves the mystery of Traven himself, which is no small accomplishment given his determined efforts to disguise and erase his identity. Zogbaum is assisted by recent Traven scholarship, but she also breaks new ground as a result of her access to Traven's personal papers. We learn that Traven (a.k.a. Ret Marut, Hal Croves, and Traven Torsvan—his family name is unknown) was an "individual anarchist" who fled Germany after the suppression of the Munich Soviet Republic of 1919. He arrived in Tampico, Mexico, in 1924 and began writing revolutionary parables for German readers. At first he was smitten by the Mexican Revolution and Mexico's "labor president," Plutarco Elías Calles. Under the influence, Traven wrote several proletarian adventures and his only work of nonfiction, the never-translated "Land des Frühlings," which Zogbaum calls Traven's "ode to the Mexican Revolution." Zogbaum explains how certain events in Tampico and observations of Indian life in Chiapas filtered through Traven's romantic revolutionary hopes and dreams and led him to an inaccurate understanding (and description, in his writings) of Mexico's labor movement, the Calles government, and the country's disparate reform experiments in the 1920s.

Before his disillusionment with revolutionary Mexico, Traven discovered Chiapas. The result of this encounter was a series of six powerful novels about the mahogany lumber camps (*monterías*) and their labor practices in the tropical jungle of eastern Chiapas. Traven was soon alienated by what later became known as the "institutionalization of the revolution," and the jungle cycle novels reflect this shift. (He also disavowed his earlier naive and overly optimistic pronouncements regarding revolutionary Mexico and forbade the translation of *Land*

des Frühlings.) The novels of the jungle cycle romanticize the humane Indian character and Indians' "gentle form of indoctrinaire socialism and cooperativism" (p. 116), which contrasted starkly with the ruthless depravity of ladinos. By the end of the jungle cycle, Traven revealed his disappointment in the Indians and the Revolution itself. Traven's last "vision of Mexico" was that of "a wasteland where violence begets violence in an unchanging cycle" (p. 208). This deep despair led Traven to give up writing.

The jungle cycle novels have long been praised by some for their accurate depiction of the terrible labor practices of the *monterías*, and denounced by others for their exaggerations and lies. Zogbaum's careful research reveals what Traven got right and what he misconstrued, disregarded, or simply did not know. "Traven was, however," she writes, "the only traveler who made a serious effort to understand what he saw. Thus, that he failed in some details cannot be held against him . . ." (pp. 182–83). Zogbaum's examination of the development of the logging business, life and labor in the *monterías*, and the negligible effect of the Mexican Revolution on their operations is simply outstanding, the best account of this "unknown hell" in English. She explodes a number of myths about the *monterías* and provides a judicious, nuanced, and perhaps even apologetic history of this infamous but obscure industry.

Fans of Traven, friends of Chiapas, and students of postrevolutionary Mexico will enjoy this book and learn much. While Zogbaum occasionally gets a date or detail wrong regarding Mexican politics and the revolutionary history of Chiapas, such inaccuracies are few, and in any case relatively unimportant. When it comes to what matters, Zogbaum's vision of Mexico and of Traven's Mexico is clear and compelling.

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Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration. Edited by JAY A. LEVENSON. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991. Maps. Illustrations. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. 671 pp. Cloth. \$59.95.

This is the catalogue for the exhibition that marked the Quincentennial commemoration at the National Gallery of Art. The purpose of the exhibition and catalogue was to document the cultural activities of the Age of Exploration—the fifteenth century in Europe, the Mediterranean, eastern Asia, and the Americas—with more than five hundred objects, including paintings, sculpture, drawings, maps, scientific instruments, weapons, and decorative and religious items. This tremendous volume of more than six hundred pages contains hundreds of first-quality reproductions of art, maps, and drawings, along with explanatory texts and introductory essays. It is a treasure for scholars and interested readers alike and an ideal souvenir of the Quincentenary year.