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AUGUST 2008

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Humphrey Bogart*

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Here's
Looking
at You,

Bogie

A Humphrey Bogart Signature Study

By Tricia Eaton

WE KNOW HIM AS THE SUAVE, NO-NONSENSE Rick Blaine from *Casablanca*, but Humphrey Bogart was not as tough in person to approach for an autograph. Rarely signing through the mail, Bogart's autograph is one of the most desired from classic Hollywood. Consequently, forgeries and secretarials are much more common than the genuine article. I collected and scrutinized more than 100 authentic examples of Bogie's autograph to learn the tricks to identifying his authentic signature. The good news is that his autograph is as hard to imitate as Bogart himself.

Many are unaware of Humphrey Bogart's affluent upbringing, which was so unlike the famously uncouth characters he played on-screen. Humphrey DeForest Bogart was born on Christmas Day, 1899 in New York City, to a famous magazine illustrator mother and successful surgeon father. Although Bogart was raised in one of New York's wealthiest neighborhoods, and spent summers in a waterfront mansion at New York's Canandaigua Lake, his life was by no means perfect. Both his parents were somewhat negligent to his needs and left his two sisters and him in the care of abusive servants. His mother, Maud, a workaholic and an advocate for women's suffrage, rarely showed her children any form of motherly compassion. His father, Belmont DeForest Bogart, was a withdrawn figure in his life, secretly addicted to morphine.

The parental complacency Bogart experienced may have led to his academic problems. Bogart was educated at Trinity School in New York City, and then Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, to study medicine in preparation for Yale. But inconsistent grades and an incident with a faculty member got him expelled at 18.

After being reprimanded by his parents, Bogart enlisted in the Navy in 1918, at the close of World War I. If he was searching for a place out of sight from the disapproving glare of his folks, he certainly found it. The Navy was where Bogart gained his characteristic snarl and lisp. One story is that a flying splinter of wood caused it when it hit him in the lower lip during the shelling of his ship, the USS Leviathan. But another story claims that the facial wound occurred in Boston's South Station, when Bogart was escorting a prisoner who hit him in the mouth with his handcuffed hands to escape.

A Behind the Scenes Man

Following his honorable discharge, Bogart stumbled through several odd jobs he found through his family's connections. After a particularly mundane day working as a stock runner for one of New York's largest firms, he decided to get a job on his own terms. He asked Bill Brady Sr., the father of a friend, for an opportunity to be employed by his theater

All images courtesy R&R Enterprises unless otherwise noted.



company, World Films.

Despite what one may imagine, Bogart did not hit the New York City stage as an actor. His first job in Brady's company was as a lowly office boy. Soon enough he moved up to stage manager and eventually took stabs at writing and directing.

Bogie discovered his true talent and passion by chance as he filled in for actors and read their lines. He was hooked. In 1921 he made his stage debut in *Drifting* as a Japanese butler with one line of dialogue. He appeared in at least 17 Broadway productions between 1922 and 1935. The beginning of his acting career received less than stellar reviews. In 1922 critic Alexander Woollcott said that Bogart's acting was "what is usually and mercifully described as inadequate."

The stock market crash of 1929 brought few opportunities on Broadway, and like many photogenic actors, Bogart headed for Hollywood. Fox Film Corporation recognized his talent and signed him in 1930 to a two-year contract.

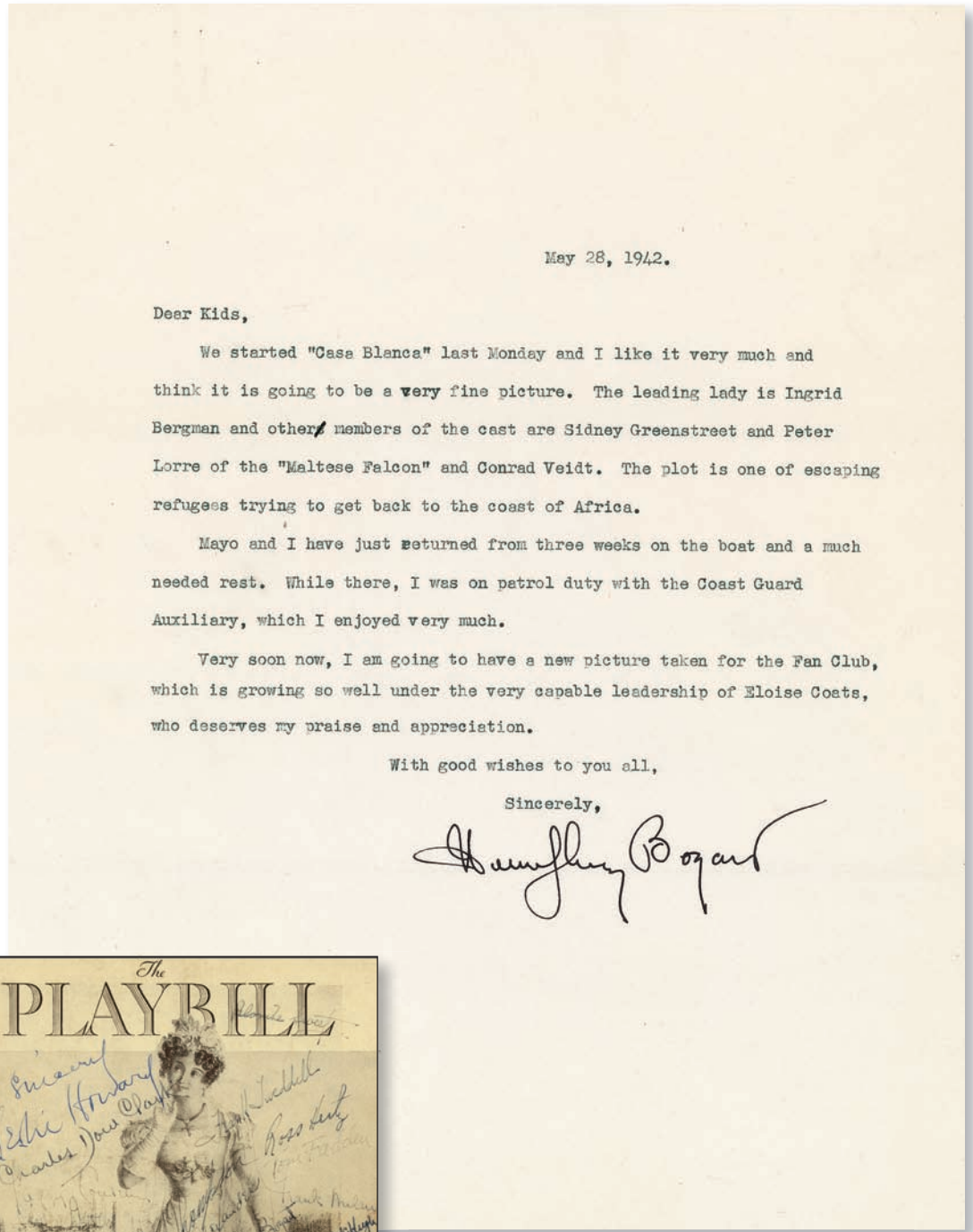
Duke Mantee

His big break came when friend and fellow actor Leslie Howard threatened to quit if Warner Brothers didn't cast Bogart as Duke Mantee (a role he had played on Broadway) in the 1935 film adaptation of *The Petrified Forest*. The studio bowed to Howard's threat, and after the movie was well received, Warner Brothers signed Bogart to a long-term contract.

Reacting to the major success of Bogie's spot-on, brooding portrayal of the psychopathic serial killer, Duke Mantee, the studio continued to cast him in shady roles. From 1936 to 1940 he starred in 28 films, usually as a unreserved, tough gangster or cowboy. This typecasting was extremely ironic, since Bogart was well educated and raised to be a gentleman, with a deep appreciation of classical music. And although he had been a poor student, he could quote Plato, Alexander Pope, Ralph Waldo Emerson and more than 1,000 lines of Shakespeare.

Despite the irony, Bogie seemed to understand the public's interest in his offbeat roles. He once said, "When the heavy, full of crime and bitterness, grabs his wounds and talks about death and taxes in a husky voice, the audience is his and his alone." Well, the world's cinematic audience certainly was, is and will always be his.

During Bogart's breakthrough acting year in 1941, starring in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, and his unforgettable performance as Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, he became an undeniable Hollywood star. Recognizing his star quality,



Opposite page: This 11x14 half-length signed photo of Bogie sold for \$4,430 in July 2006 • Above: A very significant TLS written May 28, 1942 to Bogart's fan club, mentioning *Casablanca*, sold for \$10,452 in December 2007 • Left: A Playbill for 1935's *Petrified Forrest* signed by 20 actors and crew from the play, including Bogart, who would go onto reprise his role as Duke Mantee in the film the following year. It sold for \$585 in June 2002.

Warner Brothers began to provide him with more lovable, though still rough-around-the-edges leading-man roles. He soon landed his most memorable role, as Rick Blaine in the 1942 classic film noir *Casablanca*. The film ranked No. 2 in AFI's 100 Greatest American Movies of All Time.



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A Desirable Autograph

It should come as no surprise that Bogie's autograph is one of the most sought after of all vintage entertainers. Depending on condition, inscription and pose, collectors will pay anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for a signed photo. A plain signature usually brings from \$500 to \$1,000, given the quality and matting possibilities. A rare handwritten and signed letter is worth about \$4,000, because Bogie was rarely known to write letters to anyone besides "Betty," his fourth wife, Lauren Bacall. One exception was a handwritten letter to a noted journalist, Bob Thomas, which sold for nearly \$5,000 this past January. With such large sums of money involved, a buyer must be confident that the item is authentic before making a purchase.

The marketplace is filled with blatant Bogart forgeries and secretaries: the authorized forgeries signed by his talented, yet dreaded, secretaries who

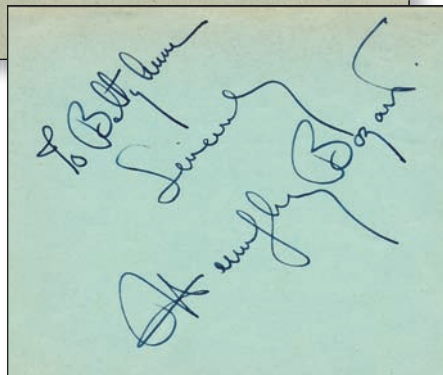
I can Bet
I agree me for not writing
some but I hate writing letters to
anyone but Betty
I will discuss your idea when
I get back
Picture is on schedule despite
numerous difficulties which I will tell
you about and should finish May 10
Whether its any good remains to be
seen
Regards
Bogie



fulfilled his fan mail autograph requests. But by studying his common letter formations, buyers can unmask the fakes. (See "10 Tips to Buying a Bona Fide Bogie" on page 55.)

Keep in mind that from time to time you may find the occasional genuine Bogie that's an exception to a tip or observation in this article.

As contradictory as it may sound, sometimes a few discrepancies from the accepted rules may signify a more authentically "flawed" example.

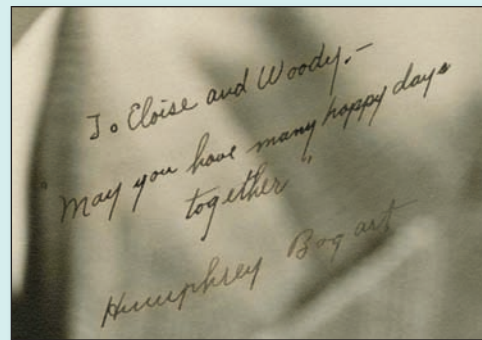


Clockwise from left: One of the earliest known examples of Bogie's signature, a signed photo made out to fellow Fox Studios actress, Roxanne Curtis, circa 1930-31, sold for \$1,353 in October 2001. • A scarce handwritten letter signed "Bogie" circa 1950, written to noted journalist and author Bob Thomas, sold for \$2,765 in January 2008 [handwriting darkened for this article]. • A pristine Bogart signature obtained in person brought in \$928 in January 2002.

Bogie's Talented Secretaries

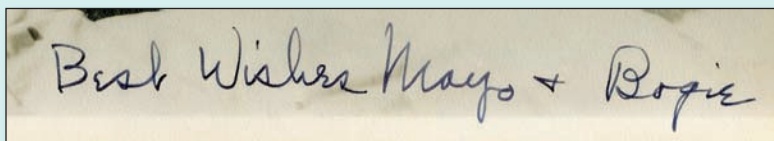
It is fairly common knowledge among autograph dealers and collectors that Bogart did not sign through the mail. For this reason, it's necessary to be able to identify the tricky proxy signatures that his secretaries signed in his stead. As a rule of thumb, when attempting to weed out the authentic from the secretarial signature, you must have an idea of what the celebrity-in-question's handwriting looks like. Focusing on inscriptions are important when attempting to identify a secretary, because they focused more on replicating the signature, usually forgetting to mask their own handwriting tendencies in the personalization.

Compare the close-up of an authentic Bogart inscription to the handwriting of the secretaries. Once you have proper reference points, you don't have to be an expert to notice the difference between the real Bogies and the copycats.

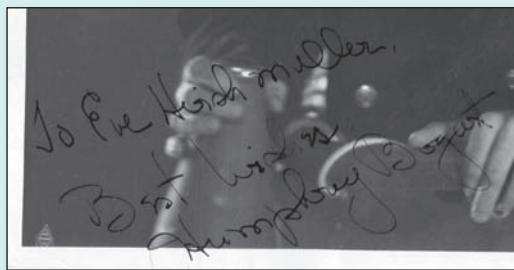


Signed by Gale Beatty, circa 1937-38.

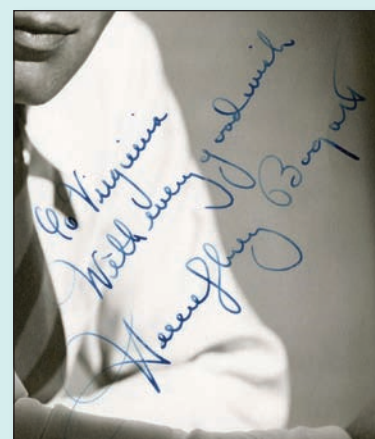
This secretary is very easy to spot. Not only is her handwriting extremely small in comparison to Bogart's, she doesn't even come close to properly imitating his signature.



Signed by Sunny Sloan, circa 1940-41. Compare the *e* in *Bogie* to in this secretarial to the handwritten letter on the opposite page. When Bogie signed with his nickname, it always had a lowercase *e*. Sloan's capital *Es* completely give it away!



Signed in 1943 by Sunny Sloan's wife, Kathie Sloan, who took over for Sunny as Bogart's personal secretary. Kathie was his employee for 10 years, from 1941-1951. Take a look at the *T* in *To*: it is completely different from Bogie's and begins in the opposite direction. Overall, Kathie's handwriting is very spaced out compared to his and the letter formations are all wrong.



Unknown secretary, circa 1940. Beware! This was by far Bogie's most talented secretary.

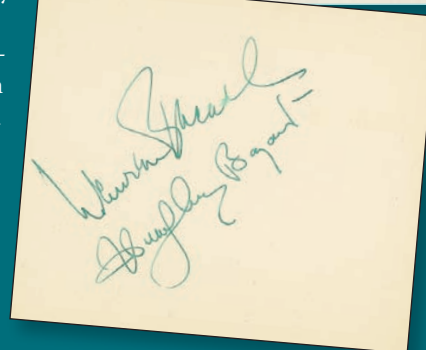
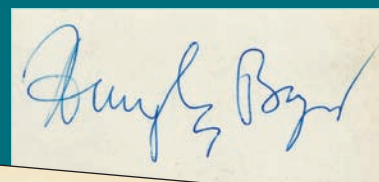
Even well respected auction houses have mistakenly sold these as genuine. Focusing on the wispy and sharply angled nature of the *H* in *Humphrey*, you can easily tell that this isn't him. Another easy give-away is the *T* in *To*, because it is looped at the top, somewhat resembling a 6. Bogart's *T* was not as rounded. This secretary's handwriting is quite feminine in nature.

Bogie's In-Person Autographs

Bogie rarely, if ever, signed through the mail, but he was an approachable signer in person. His signature is often present in fan autograph albums from the '40s and '50s, not only in the Los Angeles area, but in New York City as well. Upon first glance, these rushed in-person examples may look questionable. In fact, the most convincing thing about them seems to be that they are in a book with other authentic autographs.

Once these albums are cut up and the autographs sold, it becomes more difficult to authenticate the individual signatures. But there are some factors, similar to those noted in "10 Tips to Buying a Bona Fide Bogie," that do not differ from his more carefully signed autographs. One of the consistencies in both cases would be the second *h* in *Humphrey* always being longer than the preceding *p*.

Another noteworthy trait present in both his in-person and by-mail autographs is his similar formation of the *B* in *Bogart*. Overall, his in-person autograph letter formations are more vague than normal, flowingly looped together, and rarely inscribed for the fan. Many authentic in-person examples from the early '50s were signed on the same page as Lauren Bacall. For some reason he usually signed his name below hers. Examples such as these sell for a bit more than his solo autographs, usually between \$700-\$1,000.



A Franc Analysis

One peculiar aspect of Bogie's signing habits was his occasional odd choice of medium. Auction houses and dealers occasionally offer his authentic autograph signed on foreign currency. This unconventional format is available because Bogie was a USO Camp Show regular during the early to mid-1940s, when the Screen Actor's Guild made an agreement to loan out stars to entertain the troops during WWII. These authentic examples show up on a few types of European currency, including Francs, Lira and even Allied military currency.

Sometimes Bogie's third wife, actress Mayo Methot, signed along with him at USO shows. During their tumultuous marriage, the heavy drinking, quarreling couple were known in the papers as "The Battling Bogarts." It's a little known fact, hushed up in the papers at the time, that Mayo was such a jealous and violent wife that she actually stabbed Bogart once, and sometimes threatened him with a gun. As a direct result of the Bogarts' rowdiness on the USO entertainment circuit, the Army will no longer allow couples to tour together.

Signature examples found in this unusually historical format generally sell for around \$500-\$1000. Although Bogart signed money during his USO stint, practically all of the USO cards were signed by his secretaries. Unfortunately, these USO cards are frequently sold as authentic.



This Bogart-signed Franc, also signed by Bogart's third wife, Mayo Methot and his agent Don Cummings, sold for \$526 in December 2004. It was most likely signed during the early to mid-1940s when Bogie and Mayo made appearances in Europe to entertain the WWII troops.



Bogie's Uniquely formed H and B


Bogart's special form of the capital *H* in Humphrey stands out when compared to imitations. Beginning with a wide circular hook at the top of the first vertical line, he brings the line straight down, pauses and flows right, diagonally, to the top of the second vertical line. After forming a small loop, his pen goes straight down to finish forming the second line of the *H*. He continues without picking up the pen, looping back to the left, far past the first vertical line of the letter to form the horizontal line in the middle of the *H*. To finish the first letter of his name, which he usually keeps separate from the rest, he loops back to the right, forming a line directly under the previously formed horizontal line.

Scrutinizing Bogie's formation of the *B* in Bogart can also help differentiate the real from the fake. He started the letter by beginning at the top and making a straight line down, then he curved to the left and up to form the first vertical line. The remainder of the letter resembles a sideways, bubble-like "M." He concludes the first letter of his last name by curling the bottom right base in and up, almost touching the rest of the letter. Upon inspection of dozens of authentic examples, I discovered that as a general rule, the *B* in Bogart is left open at the bottom.

A striking vintage signed photo showing Bogart's characteristic *H*'s and *B*'s, sold for \$3,333 in January 2008.

Stick With Authentic Bogies, Not Phonies

Although Bogart passed away in 1957, he was named the number one actor of the 20th century by the American Film Institute in 1999. His life was cut short at only 57 years old, but a mere 27 years on the silver screen was more than enough to secure him a place in our hearts.

Bogie had a signature as unique as his persona—easily impersonated but never truly duplicated. It plays to our advantage that his autograph generally changed little over time. Studying the pictures here should make it easy for you to tell the real from the fake—and Bogie hated phonies! Keep this article nearby if you decide to splurge on a piece of this Hollywood icon's history. 



Bogart rarely signed movie stills, like this one from *The African Queen*. The big giveaway on this forgery, besides that it is on a still, is that the signer chose to write in a dark space, making mistakes harder to detect. The autograph and inscription are at the wrong slant, and overall very pointy and large in appearance.

10 Tips to Buying a Bona Fide Bogie

1 Looking at *Humphrey*, the second *h* is almost always taller than the preceding *p*.

2 Sometime after 1935 the *g* in Bogart changed from a conventionally formed circular top of the letter to something looking more like a cursive "z."

3 Bogart usually separated his last name into three parts. The *B*, *og* and *art* usually have spaces in between them. However, when signing in person, it was not uncommon for him to connect these parts of his name.

4 The *y* in Humphrey was usually spread out wide and on a lower line than the rest of his name.

5 The formation of Bogie's *um* in *Humphrey* looked more like two consecutive *w*'s.

6 The *k*'s were uniquely formed. They resemble something more like a loosely formed capital *R*.

7 The lower case *r*'s almost never had a flat top to them. However, the majority of lowercase *r*'s in the rest of his penmanship were formed with flat tops.

8 Bogart's usual sentiments were *Many thanks*, *Good Luck* and *Best wishes*. When signing in person he usually wrote *Sincerely*.

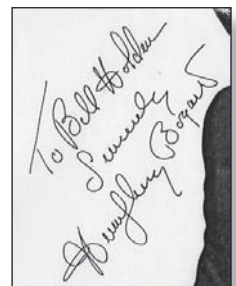
9 The ending *rt* in Bogart *w* were melded together and looked either like a widespread *v* or a sideways triangle pointing toward the left.

10 Bogart tended to sign photos at an almost perfectly upward 45 degree slant.



When Bogart did sign movie stills, he almost always inscribed them. Taking into account what something is signed on is very helpful in determining a forgery. Bogart usually signed matte-finish publicity photos. Forgers often use movie stills as a signing surface because they are cheap and easy to obtain. This signature is on a movie still and is not inscribed: two dead giveaways. What's more, the letter sizes and slants are completely off in this one, just look at the *B* in Bogart!

This is a decent forgery, but the improperly formed *H*'s are a big warning sign. This forgery simply has the wrong feel to it, almost too uniform. Also, the *g* in Bogart is rounded, but at this point in his career, Bogie's *g*'s looked like cursive *z*'s.



Tricia Eaton is the Auction Processing Manager and Signature Archivist of R&R Enterprises. She has been involved with autographs since a very young age and began studying as an authenticator-in-training for R&R, beginning in 2003. Tricia can be contacted at Tricia@rrauction.com.