

Erich von Stroheim,
Los Angeles, Calif.

FROM BEN WE

1827 GARFIELD

HE 4230

T H E C R U C I B L E

by

ERICH VON STROHEIM

ERICH VON STROHEIM — *THE CRUCIBLE* (1925)

**Original Typewritten Treatment and Associated
Production Documents**

The Manhattan Rare Book Company, ABAA, ILAB

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Original Typewritten Treatment and Associated Production Documents

This rare group of documents preserves an unproduced 1925 film project by Erich von Stroheim, created during the same intensely productive and contentious period as *Greed* (1924) and *The Merry Widow* (1925). *The Crucible* is documented in specialist scholarship on Stroheim's written work—notably in Fanny Lignon's *L'Œuvre écrite d'Erich von Stroheim* (Université Lyon 1)—where it is identified as a film treatment submitted unsuccessfully to MGM. While the project itself is therefore known to scholars, surviving primary materials relating to *The Crucible* are exceptionally rare.

At the center of the group is a 22-page original typewritten treatment outlining the narrative, characters, and thematic structure of the project. The story—a wartime melodrama of love, vengeance, and moral conflict—follows a Belgian woman who marries a German military doctor responsible for her sister's death, only to discover that his actions were constrained by an inescapable military law. The treatment's moral ambiguity, fixation on guilt and obedience, and bleak emotional logic align closely with Stroheim's authorial concerns during the mid-1920s. The document survives in its original light-blue legal-sized wraps, staple-bound, and bears a contemporary inscription ("FROM BEN WESTLAND / 1826 GARFIELD PLACE / HE 4236"), firmly situating it within Stroheim's Los Angeles professional circle.

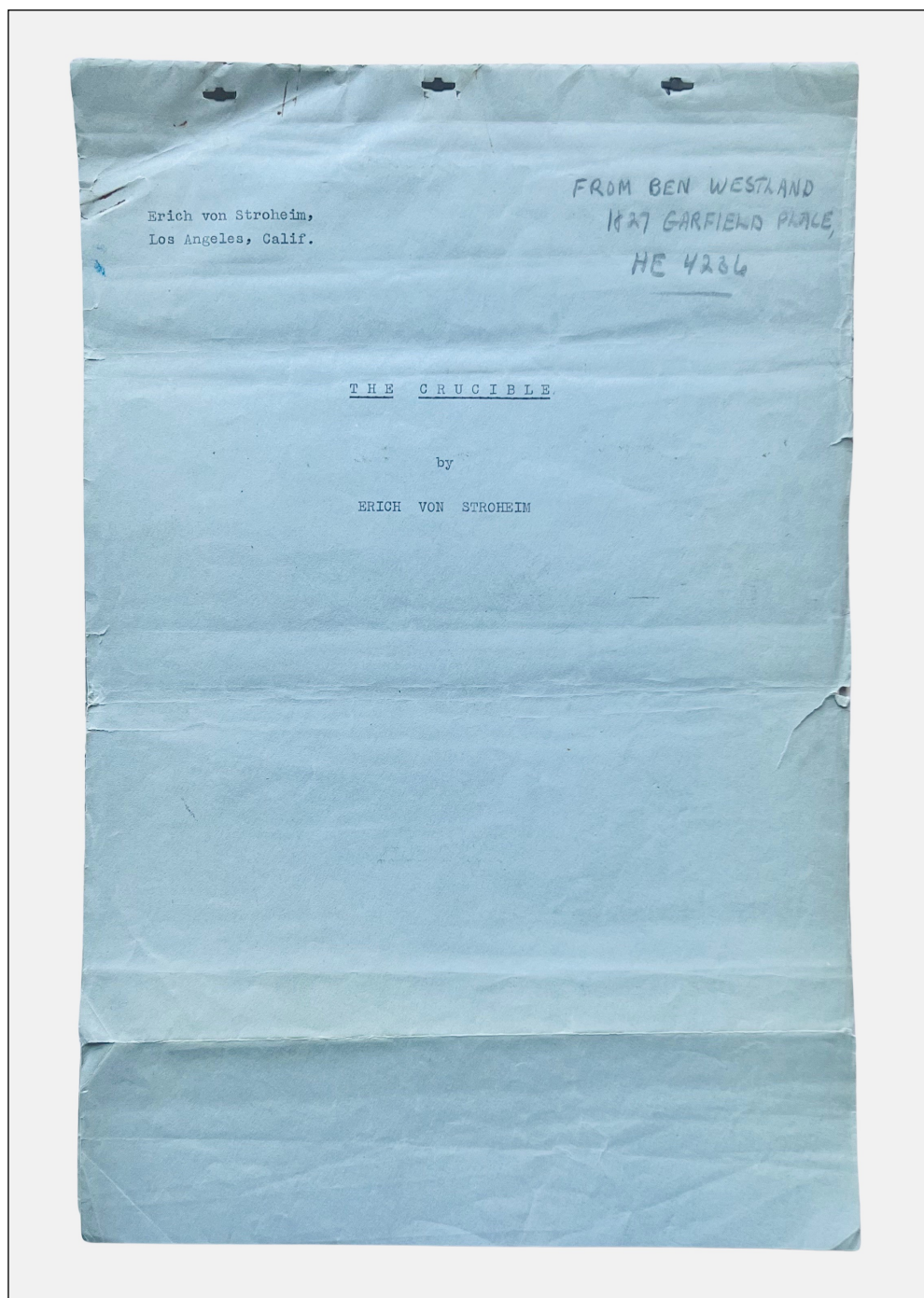
The treatment is accompanied by three contemporaneous documents that materially anchor the project in its historical context: a State of California Department of State registration certificate dated May 13, 1925, with embossed seal and official signatures; the original carbon-copy filing receipt stamped "PAID," documenting the project's formal registration; and a handwritten notepad sheet bearing contact information for critic William H. Mooring, connecting the project to contemporary Hollywood press and critical networks and suggesting early development or promotional discussions.

Together, these materials form a coherent and unusually well-preserved production dossier for an unproduced Stroheim project—precisely the category of work most often

lost through studio indifference, censorship, or archival destruction. Stroheim's influence on the development of modern cinema far exceeds the number of films that survive in their intended form, making his written and unrealized projects an essential component of his artistic legacy. While *The Crucible* is acknowledged in the scholarly literature, no other primary materials relating to the project are traceable in public auction records. The survival of an original treatment accompanied by official registration documents and contemporary contextual ephemera therefore significantly enriches the material record of Stroheim's creative activity during a pivotal moment in his career, offering rare insight into his working methods, thematic preoccupations, and unrealized ambitions.

Provenance and Context

The survival of *The Crucible* treatment is closely tied to the professional orbit of Ben Westland, a working industry figure embedded in the studio system rather than a personal associate of Erich von Stroheim. Trade sources identify Westland in the early 1920s as a Universal publicity and exchange official, placing him within the studio's distribution and promotion apparatus at a moment when Stroheim was among Universal's most scrutinized and commercially significant directors. By the mid-1920s, Westland is documented in a production-administrative role, described contemporaneously as "production manager of the unit," with responsibility for the logistical handling and circulation of development materials. This relationship is materially reflected in the present archive: the *Crucible* treatment survives in its original blue wraps bearing the handwritten notation "FROM BEN WESTLAND," strongly suggesting that Westland acted as a custodian or intermediary for Stroheim's project documents during the submission phase. Together with the contemporaneous California registration materials, this provenance situates the present group firmly within Stroheim's working environment and explains its survival as an active development dossier rather than a retrospective assemblage.



Original Cover Page and Provenance Inscription

Original light-blue legal-size wrapper bearing the title *The Crucible*, credited to Erich von Stroheim, with contemporary provenance inscription ("FROM BEN WESTLAND / 1827 GARFIELD PLACE / HE 4236"). The survival of the original wrapper and address inscription firmly situates the document within Stroheim's Los Angeles professional milieu of the mid-1920s.

THE CRUCIBLE.

THEME.

The theme of the story is that all the good and evil in our characters was stirred up by the Great Struggle and came to the surface. Those who stood the test of the purifying fires came forth stronger and finer than ever before and those too weak to stand the test were thrown out like slag.

It is our purpose to draw a parallel between our characters, with all their human qualities, good and bad, great and small, their subsequent passing through the white hot fires of suffering and sacrifice, their ultimate fulfillment of their destiny, and the three corresponding stages in the actual process of making steel -- the ore in its crudest form, being brought to the smelters, the ore being thrown into the crucible and being exposed to white heat, and the final separation of the pure metal from all its alloy.

Statement of Theme

Original typewritten thematic declaration outlining Stroheim's central metaphor of human character subjected to "the white hot fires of suffering and sacrifice," explicitly drawing a parallel between moral testing and the industrial process of refining steel. A rare articulation of Stroheim's authorial intent in his own words.

THE CRUCIBLE

CAST

Dr. Mortimer, An American physician
living in Belgium

Luceinne, a physician,) Mortimer's twin
Angela,) daughters

Raoul, Mortimer's son, a painter

Mimi Lefevre, an artist's model,
Raoul's sweetheart

Bartholome Jerome, a musician,
Angela's sweetheart

Pierre, Mimi's brother

Professor Dr. Ernst Kraft, lecturer on
applied surgery, of the medical
faculty at Heidelberg

Scarpel, editor of "Le Flambeau"
and "La Vois Populaire,"

Emile D'Armand, a journalist

Sarkoffski, a Pole

Count von Below, Lieut. 3rd Dragoon-
Guards German Army

Von Wedell, Major-General --th
Division German Army

Mme. Flaubert, owner of house where
Von Below is billeted

Marianne, her daughter

Mother Superior

Dr. Frank Rogers, an American philan-
thropist, Capt. M.C., U.S.M.C., A.E.F.

Father O'Brien, Capt. Chaplain, U.S.M.C., A.E.F.

The Little Knight Errant

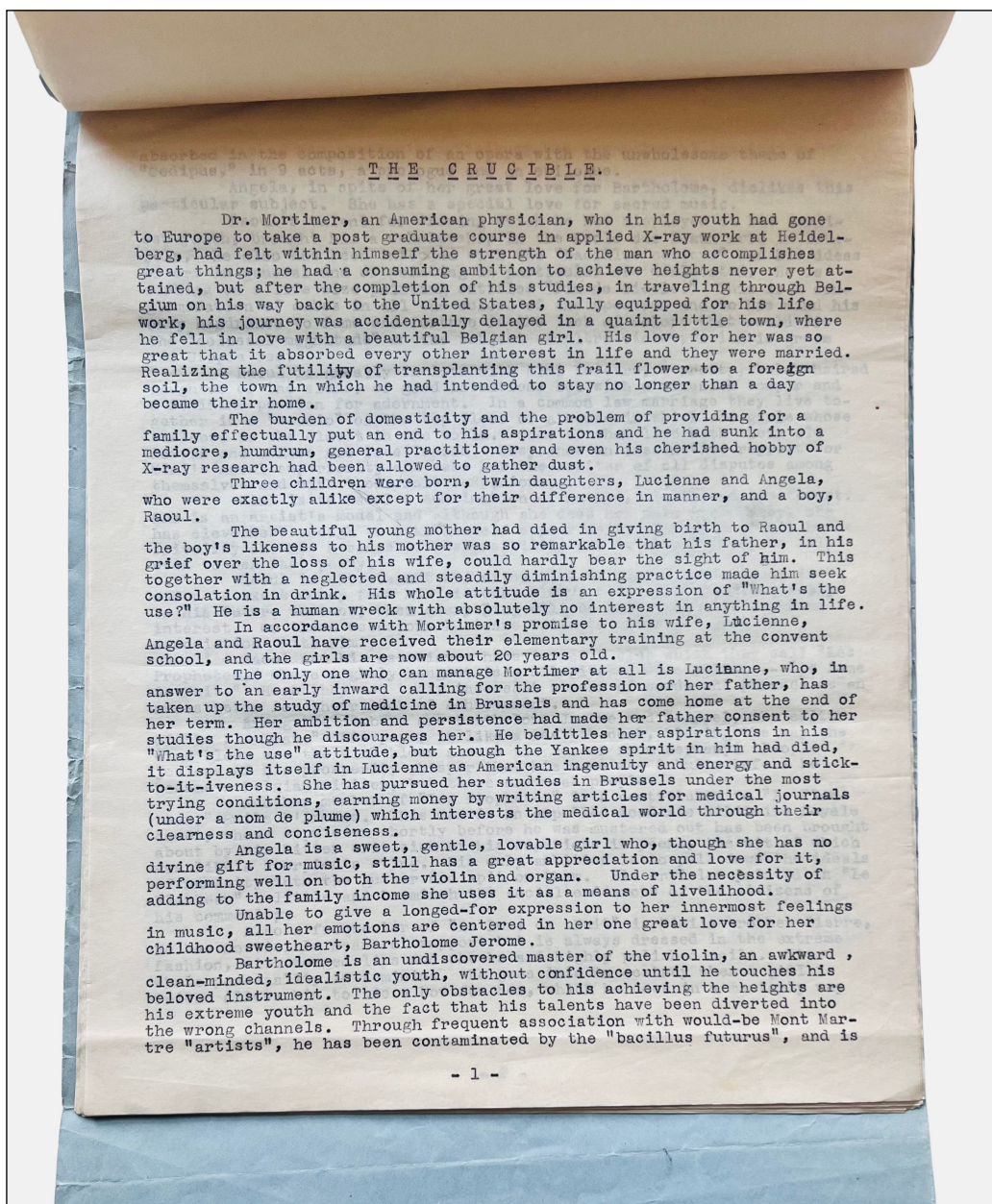
A Lieut. of Dragoons in charge of firing squad.

Place -- A Town in Belgium.

Time: 1913 - 1918

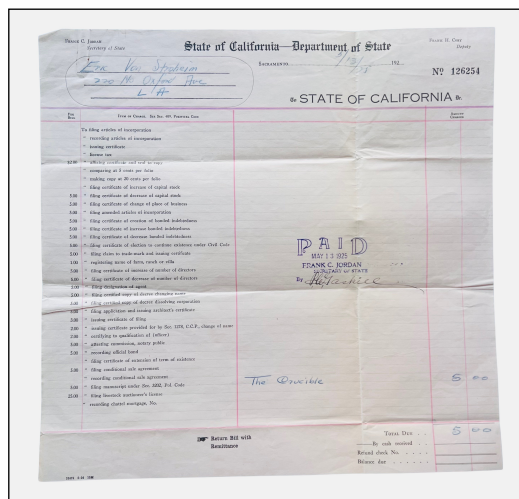
Cast List

Original typewritten cast breakdown from Erich von Stroheim's unproduced 1925 film project, listing principal characters, occupations, and relationships. The European wartime setting (Belgium, 1913-1918) situates the drama within the moral and social landscape that preoccupied Stroheim during the mid-1920s.



Opening Narrative Pages

The opening pages of the typewritten treatment, introducing Dr. Mortimer and the core familial and emotional conflicts of the story. These pages demonstrate Stroheim's characteristic psychological density and moral pessimism, closely aligned with his work during the *Greed* and *The Merry Widow* period.



Original filing receipt documenting the registration of *The Crucible* as a motion picture scenario with the California Department of State. The document records the payment of the statutory filing fee, bears the stamped notation “PAID,” and includes the handwritten title “*The Crucible*.”



Official registration certificate issued by the California Department of State, certifying that Erich von Stroheim filed a motion picture scenario entitled “*The Crucible*” on May 13, 1925, accompanied by his sworn affidavit of authorship. Signed by Secretary of State Frank C. Jordan and deputy, and embossed with the original gold seal.

Manuscript Notepad Leaf with Contact Information for William H. Mooring. Original handwritten notepad sheet bearing the name and address of William H. Mooring, a Los Angeles-based film critic and journalist active during the silent era.

