

branch of Bertelsmann, Germany's biggest empire—ready to book a studio and to start shooting.

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**F.D.R.'s Moviemaker: memoirs and scripts**

PAUL LORENTZ, 1992

University of Nevada Press

pp. 243, \$29.95

Some memoirs and autobiographies of creative people require a sympathetic reading. Paul Lorentz's memoirs do not. The book entertains, recreates an era, and informs us about Paul Lorentz and John Steinbeck. *F.D.R.'s Moviemaker* includes complete scripts of Lorentz's classic New Deal propaganda films *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937). Useful to the scholars of documentary film are Lorentz's scripts for *The Fight for Life* (1939) and his unreleased film *Ecce Homo: Behold the Man* (1938). Lorentz claims that *The Fight for Life* seldom shows up in scholarly studies of documentary films because he hired a few professional actors for minor roles. *Fight* and *Ecce* both deal with the social problems that the New Deal was interested in solving. *Fight* dealt with the drama of an inner-city hospital while *Ecce* depicted the achievement and challenges of American workers. Each script appears within a narrative context, justifying a philosophy of social reform and the aesthetic values which define Lorentz's work.

Unlike most Hollywood memoirs, *F.D.R.'s Moviemaker* avoids 'kiss and tell'. Yet this book is not an academic work in tone or purpose. The very personal correspondence between John Steinbeck and Lorentz tracks their collaboration in studying and depicting the dustbowl migrants as well as visits with Charlie Chaplin. Such previously unpublished letters are important in literary history.

Lorentz admits to lying his way into a job, drinking heavily, abandoning a friend with a sprained ankle to go drinking all night with her husband, and pulling every string to make his way through life and government. The memoir reveals a gifted, egotistical artist who kept most but not all promises, who was loyal to his muse, much of the time, and who supported his friends and his family whenever it was not too costly. For those who expect artists to embody superhuman virtue Paul Lorentz's memoir will prove a disappointment.

The New Deal and the ills it sought to cure informed Lorentz's artistic vision. When America entered World War II, Lorentz's moment as an artist capable of expressing the national spirit also passed. This memoir is most valuable for its complete scripts; it succeeds in telling us why Lorentz figured prominently only in the 1930s, though this was not the author's purpose.

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