ForeWord Reviews

BIOGRAPHY

Frank Capra: Authorship and the Studio System
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Film Director Frank Capra worked for the young Columbia Pictures Studio from 1928 through 1939. His work at Columbia was a favorite of Depression era audiences. Critics have, in general, been less impressed, faulting the optimistic populism of his best known works: It Happened One Night, You Can't Take it With You, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, and It's a Wonderful Life.

The nine essays in the book comprise three broad categories: history, cultural analysis and cinematic analysis. The history of Columbia Studios - and Capra's part in its rise - is fascinating and clearly and convincingly drawn. Of particular interest is the relationship between the artist as creator and the environment of compromise in which movies are made. The prime thesis of the book is that Capra responded to the compromises pushed on him by Columbia President Harry Cohn by creating better movies. The essays on cultural analysis emphasize the relationship between the era in which the films were made and social history (the New Deal, Great Depression, Hays Code, etc.) of which they were a part. This historic perspective deepens and darkens the conventional views of both Capra and the movies. The analysis of the thematic threads which make up Capra's work in the 1930s sheds light on both familiar and unfamiliar works, allowing significant insights into both the movies and the director.

The essays in this book are revealing and rich in insight into one of cinemas most important early directors and the economic entity which brought his work into being. Anyone interested in film history will find this to be a very readable and illuminating work.

Peter Terry