

**From Oz to E.T. Wally Worsley's Half-Century in Hollywood: a memoir in collaboration with Sue Dwiggins Worsley**

SUE DWIGGINS WORSLEY, edited by CHARLES ZIARKO, 1997

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This 'memoir' consists for the most part of the words of Wallace ('Wally') Worsley Jnr, assembled posthumously from his production diaries by his widow and subsequently edited by Charles Ziarko. It is in essence a posthumous autobiography that records the experiences of a humble studio worker ascending the Hollywood career ladder from office boy in MGM's Culver City studios to become production manager of Spielberg's *ET*.

While this work offers some fascinating insights into the production process, remarks in the early parts of the book are frequently limited to a mere sentence or two. For example, in recalling the first film set he visited (on which his father, Wallace Worsley Snr, was employed as director) Worsley Jnr records—all too briefly—that 50 Pinkerton detectives were employed as extras because prostitutes and pickpockets, also employed as extras, were intent on carrying on their usual trades during the Universal production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1922).

We also learn that 'some early silent pictures were so extemporaneous that when stories intended as melodramas were not working out well as shooting progressed, the subtitles were altered and they were released, successfully, as comedies' (p. 6) but no specific examples are given, no titles cited. While shooting television advertisements in New York in the 1960s, we are told that paying off policemen (with a tariff according to rank, from \$50 for a patrolman to \$150 for a precinct captain) was an essential part of the budget.

Worsley records details of his working life, including his earnings and the hours per week he was expected to put in as an office boy; however, he is less forthcoming with such details as his career progresses from office boy to script clerk to production manager. Interestingly, we learn that, in 1942, Worsley along with other male 'script clerks' who had not enlisted, is reclassified as 'second assistant director', leaving the term 'script clerk' to denote females carrying out the job, which appears to have then involved aspects of roles now designated wardrobe, continuity and props.

After a period in Asia and Europe, including 3 months in Paris in which he survived solely on winnings at the racetrack, Worsley returned to Hollywood in 1960 where he found employment as first assistant director in MCA's newly expanding television production. He recalls how the news of John F. Kennedy's assassination coming through on the radio caused production of the film he was working on at the time (assistant director on MGM's *Signpost to Murder*) to be 'shut down for the day, as [were] all the other companies in Hollywood, something unprecedented in Hollywood, I think' (p. 78). Film and social historians will undoubtedly be aware that Valentino's funeral had brought Hollywood to a standstill a generation earlier.

Later parts of the book do offer more developed discussions of, for example, Arthur Freed's productions for MGM in the 1940s and the shooting—or, rather, stories which read like the mixed-company versions of bar-room anecdotes relating to the shooting—of films including *Topaz*, *Deliverance* and *The Coal Miner's Daughter*. For example, five pages are spent detailing the hotel arrangements and subsequent billing fiasco in Nashville while shooting *The Coal Miner's Daughter*, similarly, considerable space is given to the continual bickering over *Shogun*, a Japanese-American coproduction made, apparently, in spite of the differences in working practices and cultures between Japanese and American production workers.

While the work is fascinating, it is idiosyncratic. While it is presented as a 'memoir', it is a celebration of Worsley's career assembled by his widow with the assistance-cum-editorship of a close friend. It is less a critical account of the transition from studio system to current working practices than a fond tribute to one of the 'old guard'.

For the student of film wishing to learn about the budgeting, schedules, on-set procedures and the difficulties of juggling egos, all part and parcel of the film making process, this book will tell them nothing that cannot be found in more detail in a range of other texts (Rudy Behimer's *The Making Of...* for example or Peter van Gelder's *Offscreen Onscreen* reveal more about the production of *The Wizard of Oz* than script clerk Worsley's memoir). However, it does have the charm of being written by one who 'was there' which gives it a claim to authenticity which, as we move further from the Golden Age of Hollywood, is a claim fewer and fewer can make. Fascinating as it is, however, Worsley's memoir is probably a safer bet for a present for an aunt with an interest in Hollywood than an essential text for a film historian. In his afterword, Charles Ziarko remarks, 'I'm sure I heard only a small fraction of the marvellous stories he had to tell' (p. 189). Ziarko's words provide an apposite phrase to sum up Worsley's memoir.