



Robert J. Flaherty: A Biography

Paul Rotha

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Producer of *Nanook of the North*, *Moana*, *Man of Aran*, and other pioneering documentaries between 1920 and 1940, Robert J. Flaherty was America's first independent film artist. Popular conceptions of Flaherty have led many either to worship his work and regard him in mythical terms or to debunk him as a fraud and castigate him for lack of a social consciousness. Rarely has the attempt been made to understand him in the context of his times. This captivating study presents Flaherty through the eyes of someone who knew him personally—the brilliant British filmmaker and scholar Paul Rotha. A colleague and close friend of Flaherty, Rotha gives us a powerfully written biography that is a balanced and intimate look at the life and work of an American genius.

Editor Jay Ruby has restored the Rotha biography, including a wealth of anecdotes, letters, and memoirs that begin to bring Robert Flaherty the man into focus. An especially valuable dimension of this work is the appraisal of Flaherty the filmmaker from the viewpoint of a major figure of the British industry. He summarizes in detail the critical response to Flaherty of his contemporaries, about which only sketchy information has previously been available.

Flaherty regarded himself as an explorer as well as a filmmaker. The exciting story of this biography takes us from the Arctic, where Flaherty spent years filming *Nanook*, to the South Pacific, England, the Aran Islands, and finally the United States. His courage and overarching vision resulted in an unprecedented recording of the human struggle and in documentary films that reached a wider audience than ever before.

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