

Kristin Sarah Leahy and Isabelle Vanderschelden.  
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Kristin Sarah Leahy and Isabelle Vanderschelden's *Screenwriters in French Cinema* is the first ever English-language study of French screenwriters. Arranging the chapters principally in chronological order, the authors have produced an alternative historiography of French cinema that emphasizes multiple aspects of the film production process. Chapter One, "Charles Spaak: dramaturge and *mauvais esprit*," examines the narrative myths that began when classic French cinema established itself and the role played by Spaak in developing them. In Chapter Two, "Jacques Prévert: from reluctant author to screenwriter as myth," Leahy and Vanderschelden characterize Prévert as the "poet" in comparison to Spaak as the "dramaturge" and contend that while Prévert is viewed as the auteur of his films, he shied away from this role as he wanted credit to be given to the directors, actors, designers, and composers for being an integral part of the process. The focal point of Chapter Three, "Henri Jeanson: spectacular dialogue," is on the dialogue's *mise en scène*, specifically on the fact that language is the means by which a relationship is formed amongst the audience, actors, and writer.

By drawing on archival material, in Chapter Four, "Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost: writing the 'tradition of quality,'" Leahy and Vanderschelden are able to center their analysis of literary adaptation and narrative structure by appraising Aurenche and Bost's professional relationship with Autant-Lara and their 1947 triumph, *Le Diable au corps/The Devil in the Flesh*. In so doing, Leahy and Vanderschelden address the concerns of the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics who denounced *Le Diable au corps/The Devil in the Flesh* as *cinéma de papa*. Chapter Five, "The screenwriter sacrificed? The 'screenplays' of the New Wave auteurs," probes into the transition from the "golden age" of screenwriters to the advent of the New Wave's director-as-auteur via the examination of Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups/The 400 Blows* (1959), Agnès Varda's *La Pointe courte* (1954) and *Cléo de 5 à 7/Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), and Eric Rohmer's *Six contes moraux/Six Moral Tales*. Leahy and Vanderschelden scrutinize the process by which New Wave trends took precedence over previous screenwriter procedures so that the director was at the front and center of the writing process. In Chapter Six, "*Le cinéma du samedi soir*: Michel Audiard's

screenplays and cult dialogue,” Leahy and Vanderschelden show how, in direct contrast to the emergence of New Wave cinema, Michel Audiard’s career as a screenwriter and dialogue writer, which stretched over more than thirty years, serves as a pillar of support for the popularity of mainstream *cinéma du samedi soir*, despite the implication that these films are easy to consume and not intellectually stimulating. Furthermore, Leahy and Vanderschelden underscore the significance of Audiard’s serving as part of a production team.

As a huge fan of Veber’s *Le Diner de cons/The Dinner Game* (1977), this reviewer was particularly interested in Chapter Seven, “Screenwriting trends in popular comedy,” specifically the manner in which the analysis of *Le Diner de cons/The Dinner Game* focused on how this comedy was influenced by French popular tradition. For instance, Leahy and Vanderschelden explain:

In the adaptation process of the play, entire scenes were cut, especially from the second act, with the result that some of the information that had originally been conveyed in the dialogue became more elliptical. This principle of condensation is central to Veber’s screenwriting priority of achieving a “high concept” by sharpening the dialogue and toning down the theatrical effects. For example, in the film, Villeret does not project his voice as much in the telephone call scenes, which contain major comic moments caused by verbal misunderstandings, gaffes and double entendres. This change is a direct consequence of the “reduced distance” process and performance style used for cinema to increase identification with characters. (240)

The analysis of *Le Diner de cons/The Dinner Game* is followed by that of subversive cult comedies that arose out of the *café-théâtre* revival. The three subversive cult comedies analyzed are *Les Bronzés/French Vacation* (Leconte, 1978), *Le Père Noël est une ordure/Father Christmas is a Jerk* (Poiré, 1981), and *Gazon maudit/French Twist* (Balasko, 1995).

Chapter Eight, “Dialogue writing in multicultural France since 2000: exploring the words of young people,” reviews the projects of Abdellatif Kechiche and Laurent Cantet, independent screeningwriting directors, who step aside from the traditional auteur-director role to film young nonprofessional actors as a means of highlighting a multicultural and urban France. Chapter Nine, “*Realisa(c)trices* screenwriting the self: Noémie Lvovsky, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Maïwenn,” examines writing the self and how it connects screenwriting, directing, and performing in the works of Lvovsky, Bruni Tedeschi, and Maïwenn. Special attention is given to how Lvovsky and Bruni Tedeschi collaborate, often casting each other in their respective films, and to Maïwenn’s more solitary approach to writing.

In conclusion, given its comprehensive and chronological approach, *Screenwriters in French Cinema* will appeal to students and researchers alike. Its strength lies in its use

of case studies, its efforts to highlight figures that have previously not received the attention they deserve, and its approach to tackling the tricky questions of film authorship.