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# Writers: Freshmen standouts

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## Disparate group scripted diverse movies

By ADDIE MORFOOT

### Derek Cianfrance, Joey Curtis & Cami Delavigne *'Blue Valentine'*

In 1998 Derek Cianfrance wrote his second feature, "Blue Valentine." Twelve years and 66 drafts later, the writer-director's screenplay came to life.

"Over the years, (co-writers Joey Curtis and Cami Delavigne and actors Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams) helped me strip the layers off the film," Cianfrance says. "We took the artifice from it and tried with every draft to get it more honest, raw and real."

But once in production, Cianfrance decided to "throw the script out."

"I thought the danger of spending so many years working on it was that once I had the opportunity to make it," he says.



"So I told Ryan and Michelle to treat the script as our blueprint: 'Let's get the script, but if that's all we get, I think we are going to be very disappointed and bored.' "



### Jez and John-Henry Butterworth *'Fair Game'*

Although Jez and John-Henry Butterworth have worked on a "dozen" scripts together, "Fair Game" marks the brothers first produced screenplay as a duo.

While Jez has seen four of his screenplays (not including "Game") turned into films and most recently signed on to write a feature about the Clash entitled "London Calling," John-Henry has made a living as a screenwriter for years, but did not receive credit for work on projects including "Mr. and Mrs. Smith."

"With 'Fair Game,' we spent six months desperately trying to work out how to turn the 250-page behemoth script we had written into something you could tell in under a couple of hours," John-Henry says. "Then we had an epiphany and worked out what story we were trying to tell, which was much more focused on Joe and Valerie than all the ins and outs of the conspiracy. That's when the screenplay sprung to life."



### Robert Harris *'The Ghost Writer'*

After writing seven novels, bestselling British author Robert Harris decided to give screenwriting a try. Alongside Roman Polanski, the political-journalist-turned-novelist adapted his 2007 contemporary thriller, "The Ghost" for the big screen.

"I enjoyed the intellectual challenge of compressing the novel into a

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screenplay," says Harris, who had previously collaborated with Polanski on an adaptation of his tome "Pompeii," which fell through.

"Our method was to do a draft, which I would write based on the scenes and the structure of the book, and then we would go over it remorselessly. One of the curious effects of working with Roman is to feel one is writing the novel again, but getting it right this time around."



**Mark Heyman**  
*'Black Swan'*

Variations of "Black Swan" had been floating around the halls of Darren Aronofsky's production company, Protozoa Pictures, for years before the shingle's director of development, Mark Heyman, finally got his hands on the project.

Heyman, a co-producer on "The Wrestler," came in after co-writers Andrez Heinz and John McLaughlin.

"Darren asked me if I was interested in taking a crack at the script," he says.

Heyman's spin was to build the story completely around "Swan Lake" instead of making the ballet one element in the film: "I wrote an outline that showed what that could mean in terms of which character would be the real world equivalent of the 'Swan Lake' character and how the real-world story could mirror (the ballet).

"One of the most difficult aspects of writing this screenplay was not only telling a story about a production of the ballet, but also trying to tell an adaptation of 'Swan Lake' at the same time. It was a constant balancing act."



**Anne Rosellini**  
*'Winter's Bone'*

Although she had previously worked with Debra Granik on various scripts, "Winter's Bone" marks producer Anne Rosellini's first credited screenplay.

"It was a very organic move," says Rosellini, who also served as a producer on "Winter's Bone" and as well as Granik's 2004 indie hit, "Down to the Bone." "I've always been much more interested in the creative aspects of filmmaking."

Over the course of 2 1/2 years, the duo adapted Daniel Woodrell's novel of the same name. The script, which was initially 113 pages, was eventually cut to a 100-page shooting script after 11 drafts.

"We came to the project with a foundation, groundwork and an outline, so it was a relatively smooth adaptation process," says Rosellini, who alongside Granik, garnered the Sundance 2010 Waldo Salt Screenwriting award. "But having to whittle down Woodrell's beautiful dialogue to make it work in a cinematic format was very difficult."



**Chris Provenzano & C. Gaby Mitchell**  
*'Get Low'*

It's a little bit like I was the architect," "Get Low" co-writer Chris Provenzano says. "I laid out the floor plan and built the house. Then I went away, and some years later I came back and the house had been rearranged and redecorated."

Provenzano, a TV scribe who has worked on "Mad Men," wrote "Get Low" in 2001, the same year that his first script, "Thank You, Good Night" was independently produced.



Then in 2006 pic's director, Aaron Schneider hired "Blood Diamond" story scribe C. Gaby Mitchell to rework "Get Low." Alabama native Mitchell is known for his ability to put screenplays on track including "Seabiscuit" and "Cinderella Man."

"It can be very difficult to come in and (rework a script)," Mitchell says. "But



with this project, I felt it was deeply collaborative piece of work even though Chris and I weren't in the same room. He knew I really respected his writing and wasn't just changing parts of (the script) to change them. It was about further exploration."

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