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Give us the credits we deserve, say film writers

Dalya Alberge, Arts Correspondent

Thousands of screenwriters around the world have signed a manifesto demanding greater respect for their work from producers and directors. When the credits roll, they want their names in bright lights, along with those of the actors.

Screenwriters feel so strongly about the issue that they are staging a debate at the International Screenwriters' Festival in Cheltenham, which runs from July 3 to 6.

William Nicholson, who scripted the Oscar-winning *Gladiator*, and Jeffrey Caine, nominated for an Oscar for *The Constant Gardener*, are among leading British writers who are calling for recognition of their rights over their films.

They claim that producers often employ production lines of writers. Nicholson was brought in on *Gladiator* after two writers had been sacked.

He told *The Times* yesterday: "The writers contribute to the end product, like the director, actors, cinematographers. But we writers are not asked for our own vision."

Caine is also dismayed by how low the screenwriter is regarded. He said: "You're invited on set on sufferance. If your lines are being shredded by an actor, you mention it to the director, who may or may not say something to the actor."

"Some actors don't even acknowledge that they worked from a script. To listen to their Oscar acceptance speeches you'd think they improvised the dialogue."

The manifesto, backed by guilds representing 9,000 writers, states that the screenwriter is a film's "primary creator". This is in conflict with Hollywood companies, which assert that the studios are the author and own the work.

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