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### Book Review

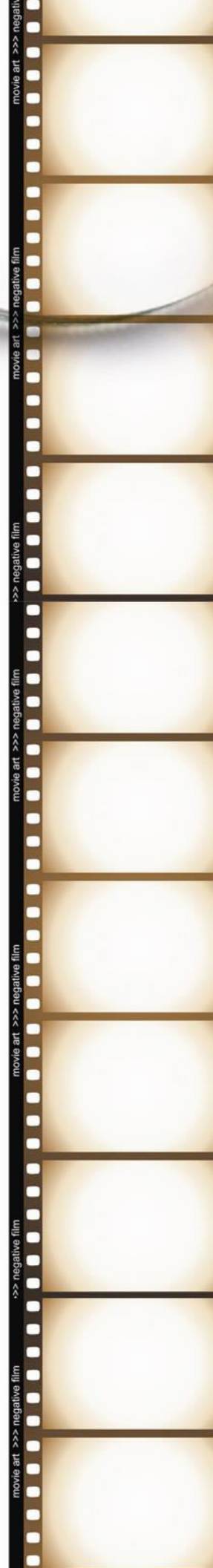
Gerstner, David A. and Julien Nahmias, *Christophe Honoré: A Critical Introduction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015. 320pp. 118 Illustrations. ISBN 9780814338636 eISBN 9780814338643, \$34.99 (pbk).



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## Review of Christophe Honoré

David Gerstner and Julien Nahmias's auteur study of Christophe Honoré focuses on three films (the "trilogy" of *Dans Paris* [2006], *Les chansons d'amour* [2007], and *La belle personne* [2008]), after a brief preface and very lengthy introduction (the intro is in fact longer than any of the chapters). As Gerstner and Nahmias acknowledge, these three films are by far Honoré's best known and most discussed works, but because their study is replete with biographical detail and contextual information (about specific productions, but also about Honoré's work as an author, film critic, screenwriter, and for the theater), the reader learns a great deal about the director's oeuvre as a whole. The extended interview (carried out on two separate dates) included in the book is of great interest and gives the reader direct access to Honoré's strong voice and own viewpoint about his body of work and position in French cinema culture, both in terms of his relationship to French film history (particularly the New Wave) and vis-à-vis the present day industry.

There is a distinct pleasure in reading Gerstner and Nahmias's analysis of the films of the trilogy. Ample illustration and ekphrastic detail give one the happy impression of rewatching the films with critical distance and leisure, gaining appreciation from the authors' insights throughout their close readings. Gerstner and Nahmias treat a great number of themes and *leitmotifs* specific to each film (and crossing over between the films): incest and the family (Gerstner and Nahmias borrow Honoré's own use of a familial metaphor for the French film industry, so this theme is examined both from inside of the films and from without), the role of music in cinema, the relationship of literature to cinema, tongues (linguistic and physical!), trees, beds, the representation and placement of bodies, illness/death, style of acting, configurations and representation of Parisian space. The readings are enlightening, and individual chapters could work

extremely well as accompanying texts for undergraduate or graduate courses—the writing is accessible enough for a non-specialist audience. Throughout the text French cultural historical information is adeptly glossed (including translator David Powell’s notes to the Honoré interview). Many sections would provide excellent modeling for students as well as allow for productive discussion of methodology and approach, as the readings do engage in significant dialogue with existing scholarship—Nick Rees-Roberts on gay identity/queer politics in French cinema, Phil Powrie on music, etc. Both formalist and psychoanalytically informed analyses are particularly effective.

The central thrust of the study is to assert that Honoré is a queer auteur—it seems primarily to that end that the introduction is so long. Although the authors insist that it is not their intention to valorize Honoré’s way of being a queer/gay filmmaker or his representations of queer sexualities over that of François Ozon or Jacques Martineau and Olivier Ducastel, their comparisons and counterpunctal sketches of other filmmakers’ work nevertheless seems drawn into that sort of logic in spite of themselves (this is perhaps an inevitable symptom of writing an auteur study): their *parti pris* for Honoré is evident. My only (slight) reservation about the work is that points made in the very lengthy introduction could perhaps have been more powerful if made initially (or reiterated and refined) in closer proximity to the readings of the films. Particularly because the study has no conclusion (other than the interview), I found myself wishing that the chapters (the later ones in particular) were more explicitly re-connected to the book’s central arguments. This is, however, but a minor weakness in what is overall an engaging and thought-provoking book that should be read by anyone with an interest in contemporary French studies, queer studies, and of course, cinema.

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