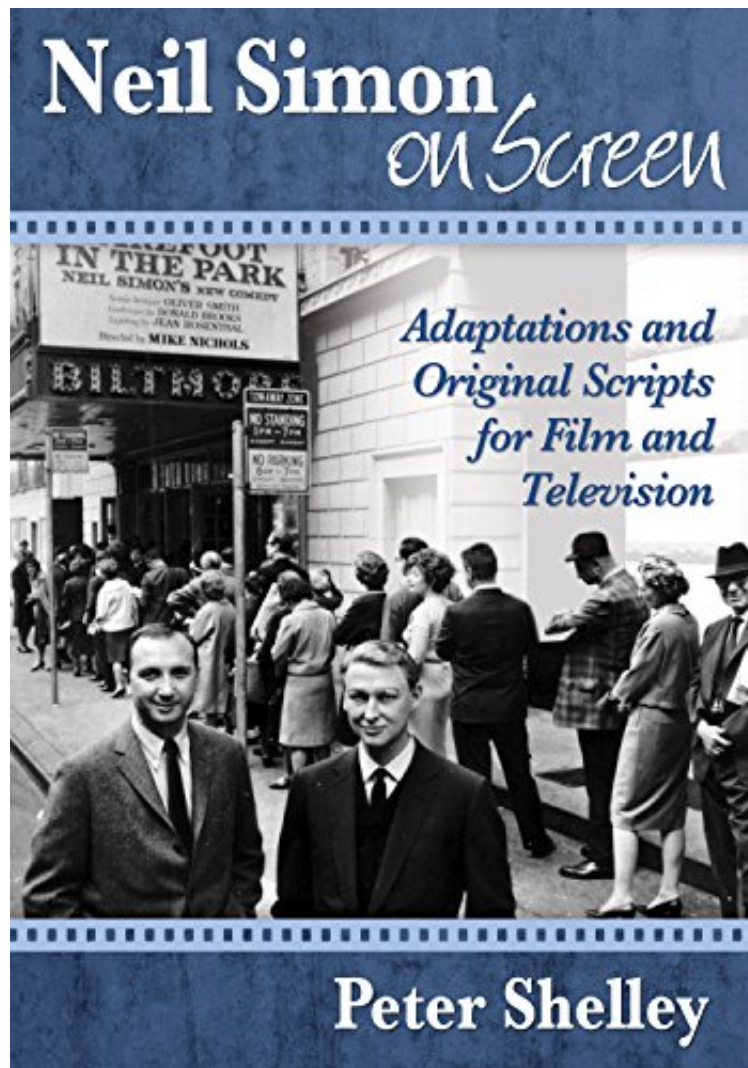


## Neil Simon on Screen: Adaptations and Original Scripts for Film and Television

Peter Shelley

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**Peter Shelley : Neil Simon on Screen: Adaptations and Original Scripts for Film and Television** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Neil Simon on Screen: Adaptations and Original Scripts for Film and Television:

5 of 9 people found the following review helpful. ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT FROM MCFARLANDBy Charles GrippoFull Disclosure: I'm probably the world's number one Neil Simon fan. Fifty years ago this month I saw the original Broadway production of THE ODD COUPLE, starring Walter Matthau and Art Carney. I laughed so hard I immediately saw Simon's other hit show, then in its first Broadway production, BAREFOOT IN THE PARK. I was hooked. Since that time I have seen God knows how many productions of his shows --- on Broadway, touring

companies, dinner theater, even high school. I have the scripts for all of those shows and most of his movie screenplays. I own copies of his movies. Of course I've read his two books of memoirs. I own videos of his early television work. I'm probably one of the few people who has seen his television special *THE TROUBLE WITH PEOPLE*, which has long thought to have been lost. I've produced and directed some of his plays. Hell, I've even met the great man on several occasions. I have friends who know him quite well. I'm giving you all my background with Neil Simon because I wanted to like -- to really like - Peter Shelley's book *NEIL SIMON ON SCREEN: ADAPTIONS AND ORIGINAL SCRIPTS FOR FILM AND TELEVISION*. When I first heard McFarland was publishing it, I thought, "What a great idea! It's about time someone devoted a book to Simon's substantial body of film and television work." I was like a kid at Christmas, expecting that awesome new bicycle, the best one in the store. So, when the package arrived from , I couldn't wait to read it. That's when I realized I'd gotten a second hand bicycle, with a bent frame, flat tires, and broken handlebars. Oh, what a disappointment! The tip off that this book is going to be a disappointment comes immediately in the first lines of Shelley's introduction in which he admits he has seen only three of Simon's plays on stage. Well, he spends a good chunk of his book comparing the screen adaptations to the stage plays. How can you compare a movie to its stage version if you haven't even seen the stage version? By holding the stage script in your hand while watching the film? That's like reviewing a fine restaurant by reading its menu, rather than actually eating a meal there. A script, as any first year drama student will tell you, is merely the blueprint for the show. You have to actually see it realized on the stage to fully understand it. If you're going to write a book comparing the movie to the stage play, you better see the play on the stage at least once, if not several times. That's like comparing the old Classics Illustrated comic books to the subject novel. Simon's plays are done so frequently on stages all over the world that there's no excuse not to see them, especially when they form an important part of your book. He makes the same mistakes Laura Wagner did in her horrible biography of *ANNE FRANCIS* (see my review elsewhere), also published by McFarland. Wagner's book is the equivalent of a college student writing a thesis by cutting and pasting newspaper clippings. Although Shelley doesn't sink to Wagner's depths (few authors would dare), nevertheless he relies too much on previously published material --- such as Simon's memoirs *REWRITES* and *THE PLAY GOES ON*. Why should we spend money on his book when we can just read Simon's books themselves? What does Shelley contribute that we can't get elsewhere? My complaint with Wagner was that she failed to interview people who knew or who had worked with Ms. Francis. Shelley also has not done first hand interviews with people who have worked on Simon's films and television shows; many of them are still alive. I'm sure they could provide valuable insights into Simon's screen work. These people aren't hard to contact. Hell, I could get interviews with most of them. Shelley's book gives us the cast and credits of each movie/television film --- all information we can get for free from the Internet Movie Database. In an appendix he also gives us the cast and credits of Simon's stage plays --- again all available for free from sources like Playbill Vault on line. Some of his opinions are jaw dropping. "Nathan Lane is funnier than Sid Caesar in *YOUR SHOW OF SHOWS*." I think even Lane would do a spit take on that one. Lane is a great performer, but Caesar was an original, whose work on that show (for which Simon was one of his dream team of writers) still holds up sixty years later. It's like saying that Robert Downey, Jr., in *CHAPLIN* was funnier than Chaplin himself. Shelley summarizes the reactions from professional critics to Simon's films and television scripts. Some of his choices, like Pauline Kael, are questionable. It's well known that Kael hated Simon personally and reflected her feelings in her reviews. She only gave *THE HEARTBREAK KID* a rave review because she adored Elaine May, who had directed it. Neil Simon has been one of our most prolific and beloved writers. His screenplays (adaptations and originals) have been the basis for many popular movies and television shows. (The TV series *THE ODD COUPLE* was of course based on his play, but Simon had no input - or for that matter, financial interest - in it.) His influence over a whole generation of writers has been profound. Before him, playwrights/screenwriters wrote silly sex farces with cartoon characters. Simon changed all of that. He wrote "funny," while exploring dark, deep themes. His characters are "people," involved in identifiable, often painful situations, usually involving family - i.e. *LOST IN YONKERS* and *BROADWAY BOUND*. Some of our greatest actors have been attracted to his scripts. His screenplays reflect truths about us all -- sometimes truths so uncomfortable, we don't want to face them - i.e. *BILOXI BLUES*. Simon's adaptations and original screenplays certainly deserve critical study. Too bad this book fails so miserably in that regard. NOTE TO MCFARLAND: Please stop publishing cut and paste books. Insist that your authors conduct first hand interviews, in those cases in which people are still alive. We want fresh insights and we don't want to pay for material which has been recycled from other sources.

Neil Simon is the most successful American playwright on Broadway, and the winner of many awards including the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Mark Twain Prize for Humor, and a Kennedy Center Honor for Lifetime Achievement. Many of his plays have been adapted into films and made-for-television movies, and he has written original screenplays and television specials. This book provides a catalogue of Simon's screen work with cast and crew information, synopses, release dates, reviews, awards and DVD availability. Notes on each film cover his narrative subjects and themes as well as adaptation, direction and performance.

About the Author Playwright Peter Shelley is the author of several books on film history. He lives in Sydney, Australia.