

2023 AWP Outline

Category: Panel, Fiction Craft & Criticism

Title: “From Novel to Screen”

Moderator: tammy lynne stoner

Participants: Shawn Wong, Carter Sickels, Johanna Stoberock

Description

It’s the dream of most writers to see their work on the screen—be it silver or plasma. Luckily, as streaming expands, there’s a growing need for content, especially when connected to Intellectual Property like, you got it, a book! This panel includes novelists at all stages of bringing their book to the screen—from filming a “proof of concept” to optioning a novel to seeing it become a film. Join us to chat about agents vs. managers, approaches to adaptation, options, production, and premieres.

We’ll cover the book-to-film process with panelists all along the trajectory, including moderator tammy lynne stoner, who produced a short film of her novel to “shop” + Johanna Stoberock, who optioned her novel + Shawn Wong, screenwriting professor and NEA winner, whose novel, *Americanese*, was adapted into the feature film + and Carter Sickels, whose adapted novel, *The Evening Hour*, premiered at Sundance in 2021.

Participant Bios

Carter Sickels is the author of the novels *The Prettiest Star* and *The Evening Hour*. He is assistant professor of creating writing at Eastern Kentucky University.

Johanna Stoberock is the author of the novels *Pigs and City of Ghosts*. The 2019 recipient of the Artist Trust/Gar LaSalle Storyteller Award, 2016 Runner Up for the Italo Calvino Prize for Fiction, and a 2012 Jack Straw Fellow, her work has appeared in the *Best of the Net* anthology and elsewhere.

tammy lynne stoner is an award-winning screenwriter and author of the novel *Sugar Land* (Red Hen Press, 2018) who creates gritty, queer-centric stories. She is also the publisher of *Gertrude* journal, lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon with her three kids, four pets, and one ladyfriend, and is most often found in the tub.

Shawn Wong is the author of two novels, *Homebase* and *American Knees*, and the editor or coeditor of six anthologies of Asian American and American multicultural literature. He is professor of English and the Byron and Alice Lockwood Professor in the Humanities at the University of Washington.

Agenda

In the opening remarks, Tammy will focus on adapting her novel, entering contests, and how the director chose what moment to make into a short film. Johanna will discuss her book option and typical option timelines. Carter will focus on his experience selling his book, being invited on set, and film premieres. Shawn will speak about the adaptation and the making of his film.

Questions to be addressed will include:

- How long is a typical option? Johanna will talk about her experience—one year with different terms of payment each time it's been renewed, and perhaps Carter can weigh in
- What is the expected range of money for an option?
- Why was the choice made—or not made—to adapt your own work?
- What is the typical role of the writer in the writing process and on set, and how did your experience differ?
- What is the usual route for a film to take before it might be picked up for streaming or cable?

The last half hour will be an audience Q&A.

Opening remarks (tammy lynne stoner)

Thank you all for being here and spending the next seventy-five minutes discussing the pathways to seeing your book on the screen, moderated by me, your friendly neighborhood moderator, Tammy Lynne Stoner.

Twenty-five years ago I lived in LA and was interested in—of course—the film world. Back then it was a different game. There were no Zoom calls. It was dominated by lots of mansplaining and folks typically wrote specs rather than original works to get noticed. Specs are scripts you write based on already existing TV shows. Now, most managers and agents prefer seeing original material.

I was too young and too green and didn't understand that when people gave you detailed notes, they were helping, not telling you the work was terrible, so I didn't last long. And by then I was writing novels anyway, which made moving away from the film world easy.

Now, older and wiser and with IP—intellectual property, in this case the film rights to my novel—I'm getting back in, so I'm as interested as you all are to hear from our panelists! My path "in" is as the writer, the one adapting the work and ideally being attached to the project with a showrunner moving forward. To do that, I'm entering script contests attached to prominent festivals and reaching out to managers, agents, and production companies. So I am ground level.

Here we have folks who are further along the book-to-film trajectory to share their experiences.

Would you all please briefly introduce yourselves and talk about how your work was sold, what happened after the sale, and how much you have been involved. Then we will open for some Q&A. Thank you!

INTROS

Carter Sickels

My experience was possibly very different from other writers. The novel was optioned shortly after it came out, by an indie company and there was not really any money. An actor who'd read the novel was the catalyst, and really made this happen. They kept renewing the option or getting it extended, and the shoot didn't start until about 6 years after. I didn't have any input on the screenplay, but the screenwriter, the director, and actor kept me involved and I was invited to the set (in Harlan KY), which we can talk more about after the introductions.

Johanna Stoberock

I've had two different experiences with optioning books for films: my first novel was optioned for a year, which means they pay me not to sell the rights to anyone else for a year while they decide if they will move forward—then I didn't hear anything about it between the time I signed the contract and the time the year was over, and never heard anything else. With my second novel, several film makers reached out to me, but none of them wanted to offer any money. But then a production company that is particularly interested in projects that aim for social change contacted me. They'd clearly read the novel closely, and seemed really interested, and although the money they were offering wasn't huge, it was more than I'd had as an advance. They worked with a screenwriter on a treatment, but the treatment didn't quite capture what they'd loved so much about the book. So this fall, after they'd had the option for two years, they asked me to collaborate with them on a treatment. And that's where we are now: I'm trying to figure out how to think about my novel as a film rather than as a novel, which we can talk more about in a minute.

Shawn Wong

My novel-to-film experience was also probably different from many writers. The producer and director kept me involved from the very beginning and sought my advice through filming and brought me to all the film festivals even though they didn't have to. Also, the entire production team was Asian American so there was no difficulty in having to explain issues of race and ethnicity to crew and actors.

On to film trailers/excerpts and Q&A!