

WARREN ADLER

When moviegoers watched Oliver and Barbara Rose's marriage descend into a maelstrom of malice, spite, divorce papers and dog paté in the 1989 film, *The War of the Roses*, they were seeing the twisted but funny work of Wyoming author Warren Adler.



Warren Adler on the set of the movie, "War of the Roses."

“It is strictly a crap shoot and a minor miracle to see one’s book made into a major film.”



Author Warren Adler divides his time between Jackson, Wyoming and New York City.

Adler's body of work goes far beyond the dark humor of *Roses*, spanning multiple genres and topics. From a six-volume mystery series dealing with murder in high places to *Cult*, a book on brainwashing (and a cautionary tale in an age of terrorism), Adler writes, as his website says, "tales of human conflict and desire." He has no favorite book from his works, just as he has no favorite child. He loved writing each one but has never reread any of them.

"It's true that I write about human relationships," Adler said, "but what writer doesn't? If I have a commercial failing it is that I do not write the same book over and over again as many of my colleagues do who are consistently best sellers. My books are different. They follow no set formulae. My characters are explorers, trying to understand the meaning of their destiny"

Writing is not a choice for Adler – it is a calling. "I never had any other ambition than to be a writer, to tell

stories and write works of the imagination," he said. "The work itself has always been the rapture, the process, the ecstasy." Publication, which once felt like validation to Adler, is now but a pleasant byproduct of the true reward – writing.

Adler has sold or optioned 10 books to the movies. Hollywood buys film rights to thousands of books each year, but only a handful, perhaps 35, are adapted and released as movies.

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crap shoot and a minor miracle to see one's book made into a major film," Adler explained. "The process itself is bizarre as the book gets moved from hand to hand from agent, to actor, to director, to studio, to screenwriter, a never ending dance of the egos. Everyone wants to put their creative fingerprints on the project. In most cases, the adage that too many cooks spoil the broth becomes a truism."

Two of his books have gone to the big screen as major motion pictures: *The War of the Roses*, starring Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner, and *Random Hearts*, starring Harrison Ford and Kristin Scott Thomas. Three of his short stories from *The Sunset Gang* were televised by PBS, an adaptation he described as "extraordinarily brilliant."

"I was particularly lucky with *The War of the Roses*, which somehow hit a universal gong," Adler said. "The title and subject matter has entered the language to describe a nasty divorce. Since it kept close to the characters and story, I con-

sider it a successful adaptation.

"Most important, however, was that the movie makers retained the title," he continued. "Without a retained title, the book's author will obtain very little benefit from the many millions expended in the movie promotion."

Adler was less pleased with the adaptation of *Random Hearts*. "The moviemakers fiddled with the story and made too many bad judgments," he said. It's an opinion he also expressed in the pages of the *New York Times*. In general, "There are so many pieces that have to be put together to get a book to the screen that it is rare that the essence of the book is fully achieved in an adaptation. There are no norms, no well trodden paths and no magic formulas. In the end, as they say in Hollywood, it is up to the Movie Gods."

All of Adler's books have been published in e-book format, as well as hardback and paperback. He now owns the rights to 23 of his backlist titles; they are available through Stonehouse Press, named after his home in Jackson, Wyoming. Adler set up this company five years ago so he could continue publication of all his back listed books in all formats. "I am arguably one of the few, if not the only, author who has gotten the rights back and republished my books with emphasis on marketing them through cyberspace."

Adler's first novel, *Options*, was published in 1974. He made his living with his words for years before that, so he has seen many changes in the industry. "In nearly forty years of being a cog in the publishing machine, the major change has been the total destruction of the individual or so-called gentlemen publisher," Adler said. "Today, publishing and distribution is controlled by major corporations whose only criteria is a good bottom line showing every three months. It has become, like the movie business, a hit driven model.

"Nevertheless, I am still optimistic that the emerging small publishers and the visionaries – or crackpots like myself – who believe that one day cyber-

space will be the principal way books will be sold and read, will prevail. I am convinced that, while I might be years ahead of the curve, that the future of book publishing lies in cyberspace. But it will only emerge when user friendly technology comes up with the magic formulae to challenge the paper book.”

Like many writers, Adler is “addicted to reading,” a love he inherited from his mother. “I have never throughout my life ever been without a book to read,” he said. His tastes run to novels and American history (he is a dedicated hero worshipper of George Washington). He dips into the classics often, particularly the Victorians and Russians. Ever since his college days as a literature major, he has made time to read and reread the great canon of English literature and the great European classics.

“I could fill this space with authors I reread and love – Twain, Simenon, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, etc. etc.” Current reading includes Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America*, Ron Chernow’s *Alexander Hamilton* and Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. Not surprisingly, he “haunted” the library as a child.

“There was a children’s library on Stone Avenue in Brooklyn that was literally – no pun intended – my hang-out,” Adler said. Unable to afford books as a child, he took full advantage of this great library. Later, when he lived in Washington D.C., he again haunted the shelves of another great library, the Library of Congress, to research his novels.

“I am a passionately addicted, celebrator of libraries,” Adler said. “They are the most important public service ever devised, for which we must thank Ben Franklin. They are the life’s blood of any community. A community without a library is an intellectual desert.”

Adler came to Wyoming by accident. On a safari in Africa, he and his wife met and befriended the late Mary Meade. In the late 1980s, she invited them to see Jackson Hole, and the Adlers promptly fell in love with it: the

beauty, the openness of the people and the opportunity for the physical outdoor life. They chose to make it their home.

Newly transplanted, both Adlers “joined in the community with a

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vengeance.” Adler served as Chairman of the Teton County Library Board “during the crucial days of its transition from a small log house library to a major facility.” He said it is now, “a jewel of library. I am proud to have been associated with it.”

Adler was also instrumental in creating the Jackson Hole Writers Conference, and in recent years established the Warren Adler Fiction Award. Unfortunately, neither has lived up to Adler’s hopes for them, and he believes both need “serious retooling.”

Adler still enjoys the beauty of northwest Wyoming, but is disturbed by the increasing air of separation by class and money he sees. These changes were the subject of his book of short stories, *Jackson Hole, Uneasy Eden*. “Sad to say, Jackson Hole is getting increasingly uneasy,” Warren added.

Recently, the National Endowment for the Arts did a study showing a decline in literary reading in the United States. Although its title warned *Reading at Risk*, Adler is not so sure reading is imperiled. “It is a one-on-one communication system that, in my opinion, has far more impact than any system yet devised, including the moving image.

“Libraries are an essential tool to foster and continue to develop the habit of reading, particularly for our young people,” he continued, “far more

important than they are perceived by politicians who are forever cutting down library funds. A library is an unparalleled storehouse of knowledge and the public library is an absolutely fundamental ingredient in community life.”

Adler is a proponent of the idea that publishing will increasingly switch to electronic formats, and that libraries will play a significant role. “Libraries will always have a future, but it will change with technology advances,” he said. “The paper book still has a long way to go, but there will be a creative transformation as more and more books go online and the academy continues to attract potential librarians dedicated to spreading the word, and offering insight and knowledge to the reading public. Reading is the key to the enrichment of life and libraries will never abdicate their role and will continue to be useful and enhance the life of the mind.”

Never without a novel to read, Adler is also never without a novel to write. With *Children of the Roses* on bookstore shelves, he continues to keep his daily schedule of writing, already at work on the next project.

“I know no other way of life and can attest that the creative process is the most fulfilling and satisfying way to spend one’s time on earth.”

Warren Adler’s website at www.warrenadler.com describes his books, life and career. He also publishes a monthly newsletter on various subjects through the site.