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## Books love short shorts

by Cheryl Taylor

**May. 11, 2004:** Judith Keenan knows what a film adaptation can do for a novel. "Not that I'm comparing us to *Lord of the Rings*," laughs the founder and executive producer of BookShorts, a multimedia project dedicated to creating short films based on new Canadian novels, "but the power of film is very, very strong."

The aim of BookShorts is not very different from that of *LotR* director Peter Jackson: take the spirit and message of a book, and create a film. Instead of finding their way into the multiplex though, the completed Bookshorts, about five minutes long, will be broadcast over the Internet and on television. Keenan also hopes to show them at film festivals and at bookstores.

A preview of the first BookShort, based on Susan Swan's upcoming novel, *What Casanova Told Me* (Knopf Canada), will take place May 14 at the Pioneering Content launch, which is part of Digifest, at The Design Exchange in Toronto. The film will also be screened at Swan's reading during next month's BookExpo.

BookShorts is one of six cross-media projects to emerge from the Ontario Media Development Corporation's Pioneering Content program. Each of the projects received a \$70,000 grant and had at least two partners from different cultural industries; BookShorts was a collaboration between Trapeze Media, Book TV,

Judith Keenan Communications, Random House of Canada, and Veni Vidi Vici motion pictures. The goal was to generate new revenue, prototypes, and audiences for cultural products.

The six-minute film, directed by Ed Gass-Donnelly and Marco Pecota, was adapted from the book's 400-page manuscript, in collaboration with playwright Judith Thompson. Keenan says they've created a film that stands on its own, as well as supporting a book.

"It's very purposefully a short film," she says, "not a trailer, not a music video, not a commercial." On this last point she's very adamant. "The publishing industry does not have the money to broadcast commercials," she says. Instead, she envisions broadcasters using the films as programming content.

The film's official debut is scheduled to coincide with the launch of Swan's book on Sept. 18. On that same day, the BookShorts interactive player will be made available online, where the film can be viewed, along with author interviews, and tour dates. The film will also appear on BookTV, and will be released as a limited edition DVD.

Keenan says she's in talks with Thomas Allen Publishers and House of Anansi Press about working with them on future BookShorts, but she has no firm plans for now.