

## Biblio File

**Rob Christopher** writes to say, "Twenty years ago I wrote and directed a feature film. Some college friends and I shot 'Pause of the Clock' in 1995 and 1996 on film, in 16mm, in Colorado and Chicago – particularly pre-gentrified Logan Square. Now it's 2015, and after more than a year's work, the editing of the movie is nearly complete. Local bands Kill Hannah and Royale are featured on the soundtrack. Check out background on the project, as well as clips of the film, at my Kickstarter page: <http://kck.st/14DP69L>."

... **Emily Thornton Calvo** writes to say her new book (See New Books, Page 4) is "a project that's been on my bucket list, and two cancer diagnoses inspired me get off my butt and do it. A grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events helped pay for it." Also, Emily is scheduled on Feb. 8 to perform at "My 2nd Act: Survivor Stories from the Stage," Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N Southport Ave, Chicago. ... The Lawrence (Kan.) Public Library in January selected **Blue Balliett's** *Chasing Vermeer* as its children's selection for its annual Read Across Lawrence series. ... In October, **Chris Abani** received the United States Artists 2014 Ford Fellowship for literature. ... **Theresa Amato** co-authored a Jan. 15 Los Angeles Times essay headlined: "What your bank owes you: clarity." ... The South County (Mo.) Times on Jan. 23 reported on **Janice A. Petterchak's** new book *The Soldier's General: Omar Bradley and the United States Military in Peace and War*. ... A dance involving **Roger Bonair-Agard's** poem "Love What I Love" was performed Jan. 17 by IU Contemporary Dance at Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind. ... **Richard Cahan** on Jan. 22 gave a talk titled "Photographer Vivian Maier: In Evanston and In the World" at the Evanston (Ill.) History Center. Referring

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## Turow: Why digital age is not a friend to authors

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Authors face several major challenges in the age of the Internet and ebooks, **Scott Turow** said at the Society of Midland Authors' Jan. 13 program.

Speaking at the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago, Turow said he believes books will always exist and that the Internet age has brought incredible benefits to readers.

But for authors? That's another story.

"The reality is that authors' income streams are being rapidly depleted in the digital era, and basically the digital revolution has sort of set off a free-for-all in which virtually every player seems to think they can enhance their economic position at the expense of authors," Turow said.

Among those players are traditional publishers, search engines, book pirates and even libraries and other writers, he said.

One threat authors face is ebook piracy. Readers can download free ebooks stripped of their encryption by offshore businesses operating beyond the reach of the law. The businesses get revenue from advertising, but the authors get nothing.

Another threat is that ebooks "have set off a not terribly fair fight between authors and their publishers in which publishers, which admittedly have not been having robust times, have [lowered] the amount that they pay authors," he said.

A third threat is that big corporations have successfully lobbied for laws that undermine authors' intellectual property rights, he said.

"The vision of the Constitution was that there would be an intellectual property rights holder called an author, and that

author would be given a limited monopoly over his or her work, and from the reading public that author would gain support," Turow said. "Not the government. Not patrons of the arts, not universities, not big mega corporations.

"What has happened in this era is ... people with other intellectual property, specifically the people who have invented the Kindle or the iPad or the Google search instrument ... are using that leverage to exercise domination over authors and, increasingly, publishers. Amazon is

engaged in an all-out effort to put traditional publishing in the graveyard just as they basically already have done with bookstores.

"The power of these IT corporations, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, is enormous, and it became intensified because of the way our political system operates. They are rich, really, really rich, and we have a

political system that depends on campaign contributions, and so these companies have enormous influence in the halls of Congress, which they are starting to use to shape the intellectual property laws for their benefit."

Turow pointed out authors and inventors are two of a very few number of professions named in the Constitution.

"The idea that mega-corporations are shaping the laws for their benefit really flies in the face of some of the grounding vision in this country," he said.

As if those threats weren't enough, there is another from people who want for their own benefit to diminish or altogether abolish copyrights and make books avail-



Scott Turow

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to his more recent collection of Maier's work, *Eye to Eye: Photographs by Vivian Maier*, Rich said, "The big challenge about the book was to understand who she was because she was quite the mystery." ... The Portland Oregonian ran a Q&A with **Ingrid Wendt** on Jan. 6. ... **Margaret McMullan** (See New Books, Page 3) is planning several Chicago readings and signing events in May and June. ... **Linda Neme Foster** was invited by George Heartwell, mayor of Grand Rapids, Mich., to give a poetry reading as part of his State of the City Address on Jan 17. Recently, she's also given other readings and presentations at Aquinas College, Michigan State University, and Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. On Feb. 15, her poetry from the chapbook, "Contemplating the Heavens," will be performed by the jazz ensemble, Nonet, under the direction of composer Steve Talaga. This fusion of poetry and music is sponsored by Blue Lake Public Radio and will take place at LaFontsee Gallery in Grand Rapids. For more info, go to [www.adventuremusic.org](http://www.adventuremusic.org).

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## Digital age

Continued from Page 1

able on an open access model on a vast digital library, he said.

"I will never [deny] any author's right to give away his or her work if that is what she or he decides they want to do," he said, "but the problem is that these authors who want to give away their works ... are trying to impose that model on everybody else."

The final threat is that some libraries are at war with some authors groups over the right to lend books online without paying author royalties, he said

"All of these problems really do not hit very hard at those of us who are fortunate enough to refer to ourselves as best-selling authors," Turow said. "The truth of the matter is that virtually all of the changes that have taken place in the publishing and bookselling industry since I first started out in 1977, when book discounting was virtually unknown, all of those changes have benefitted best-selling authors, and I am richly aware of that and very grateful.

"But since I spent a long period of time being an unpublished author, I am always concerned about what is happening to my colleagues – the people who are midlist authors, people who are just startling out – those are the people who are most greatly disadvantaged by the changes that I am talking about."

Last year, so much attention was focused on the war between Amazon and Hachette that "we tend to ignore the fact that the traditional publishers have also behaved badly," Turow said.

How? Ebooks are much less expensive for publishers to produce. They don't require paper, printing presses, warehouses or physical distribution. On top of that, there is no chance an unsold ebook will be returned to the publisher for full credit, as happens with printed volumes.

But those savings go to the publisher, not the author, Turow said. Publishers all have "rigidly insisted" on clauses limiting ebook royalties to 25 percent of the net receipts.

"When you do the arithmetic on this, it turns out that there has been a de facto cut to authors' share of the proceeds. A 15 percent royalty on hardcover books amounts to about 50 percent of what the publisher will net on that book. So reduc-

*“Reducing from 50 percent to 25 percent of the net has fattened the bottom lines of publishers. ... This cannot go on.”* ”

ing from 50 percent to 25 percent of the net has fattened the bottom lines of publishers. ... This cannot go on."

Despite his criticisms, Turow recognizes publishers are struggling, too.

"One of the reasons that publishers are not usually the best business people of their era is because they value books, and they have gone into the publishing business not simply to enrich the bottom line but also to have something to do with the transmission of culture," he said.

Search engines hurt authors by pointing online readers to pirate sites that otherwise would be hard to find, he said.

"There is a safe harbor provision in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act which allows search engines to pass people on knowingly to pirate sites with no penalty to them."

But the real Darth Vader of the digital age, as far as authors are concerned, is Amazon, Turow said.

"People are not really aware of how vast and dominant this company has already become," he said.

Even though Amazon didn't invent the ebook, it now dominates the market because it has sold ebooks for less than it pays publishers, he said.

"What they did by selling at a loss was they prevented anybody else from entering the ebook space," he said.

That also hurt bookstores, which couldn't afford to sell ebooks on their own if it meant taking a loss.

"Bookstores could not possibly enter a market where they were going to lose \$3, \$4, \$5 every time they engage in a sale," he said.

# Chicago, Illinois corruption gets comprehensive analysis

Just in time for Chicago municipal elections, the Society of Midland Authors is hosting the official book launch for *Corrupt Illinois: Patronage, Cronyism and Criminality* (February, University of Illinois Press) by **Thomas J. Gradel** and **Dick Simpson**.

In the book, the authors describe the history of political corruption in Illinois, starting with vote rigging in 1833, when Chicago was incorporated. The stats are astounding: four of the last nine Illinois governors convicted, a \$53 million embezzlement by a Downstate official, and the convictions of 33 Chicago aldermen.

"I think what is really important about the book is that we took all the stories and incidents and put them in one book," said Gradel, a former political media consultant. "The news media does a good job of covering scandal by scandal. No one looks back and says: Why does this keep happening? I think that is what the book does."

Simpson, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, a former Chicago alderman and a former candidate for Congress, said Chicago and Illinois have seen multiple patterns of corruption.

"I think maybe some of the more striking points that come through in the book are that Chicago is the most corrupt city in the nation, Illinois is the third most corrupt state, and the cost of corruption is at least \$500 million a year," Simpson said.

As for the timing?

"What we hope to do is make sure the issue of corruption, not only in Chicago elections but also through much of state, is one of the key issues," Simpson said.

In the forward, former Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar wrote: "*Corrupt Illinois* is the most comprehensive account of corruption ever published in our state. It proposes cures, which will take decades to implement fully, but which deserve our attention now. We can only move forward by understanding our past and the culture of corruption that too often pervaded our state."

But voting for candidates who tout

**Feb. 10, 2015, program**

**Cliff Dwellers**  
**200 S. Michigan Avenue**  
**22nd floor**

**6 p.m. - Social Hour**  
**7 p.m. - Program**

**Free - donations accepted**

themselves as reformers isn't always necessarily the answer, Gradel said.

"There are a lot of people who intend to be reformers, and when they get in they are not really reformers," he said. "The other problem is the powers that be are almost like white cells attacking an infection. They have ways of thwarting the intentions or good plans of reformers. They stave off public opinion from getting a real head of steam by making small

reforms." But even small reforms can be subverted.

reforms."

But even small reforms can be subverted.

"One of the things I have noticed over time is in some reforms there are a thousand loopholes," he said. "The people who want to exploit the loopholes are always a step ahead of the game."



Upcoming programs

**Tuesday, March 10**, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago:

**Patrick T. McBriarty** discusses his book, *Chicago River Bridges* – the untold history and development of Chicago's iconic bridges, from the first wood footbridge built by a tavern owner in 1832 to the fantastic marvels of steel, concrete and machinery of today.

**Tuesday, April 14**, 6 p.m. social hour, 7 p.m. talk, at Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago: Poet **Roger Bonair-Agard**, winner of the Society of Midland Authors Award for his 2013 book *Bury My Clothes*.

## Literary Landscape

## New Books

CAFE DEUX MONDES

NOW WE CAN ALL  
GO HOME

**Catherine Browder** has a new E-book, *Cafe Deux Mondes*, (a Kindle Single, Oct 2014) from Ploughshares Solos (\$1.99), also available for B&N's Nook. It's a cross-cultural Kansas City story about two women from totally different backgrounds who decide, against all odds, to open a restaurant. (It is soon to be an Audio-book as well).

Browder also has new collection, *Now We Can All Go Home*, three novellas in homage to Chekhov (BkMk Press, November, 2014). The book envisions a future for the principal characters in three of Anton Chekhov's plays ("The Seagull," "Uncle Vanya," and "The Three Sisters"), all set in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

AFTERMATH LOUNGE

EVERY FATHER'S DAUGHTER

**Margaret McMullan** has two books coming out in April.

*Aftermath Lounge* (Calypso Editions) is a novel in stories about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina set in a Mississippi gulf coast town. 2015 is the tenth anniversary of Katrina.

McMullan received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to complete the collection, her eighth book of fiction.

*Every Father's Daughter* (v) is a collection of essays by women writing about their fathers, with an introduction by Phillip Lopate and a preface by McMullan. The twenty-two contributors

## New Books

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include Pulitzer Prize winners and one Nobel Prize winner -- Jane Smiley, Alice Munro, Jill McCorkle, Lee Smith and others.

McMullan started the collection after her father died two years ago. While she spent a year caring for him, she read to him, and their relationship through books was the genesis of this book.

Kirkus Reviews wrote: "Editor and novelist McMullan presents 24 ways of 'knowing' one's father by accomplished, independent daughters, each with a folksy introduction to help situate the relationship in place and time. ... [SMA member] **Barbara Shoup** describes her father's vanishing into alcoholism in her excruciating essay 'Waiting for My Father.'"

Foreword Reviews wrote, "Without shying away from the painful parts of life, this anthology celebrates the role of fathers in their daughters' lives.

"*Every Father's Daughter: Twenty-Five Women Writers Remember Their Fathers*, selected and presented by novelist

Margaret McMullan, is a heartfelt, honest look at the father-daughter relationship.

"The book is full of fondness, beginning with McMullan's experiences, but disappointment and hurt are inherent in all relationships, and that seems especially true with fathers and daughters. Yet, on the whole, this collection is compassionate and eschews bitterness. It doesn't shy away from the painful parts of life and the failures of fathers. Overall, it is a celebration of the role of fatherhood and a celebration of self -- we are who we are, the authors seem to echo, because of our fathers: who they were and who they weren't."

### LENDING COLOR TO THE OTHERWISE ABSURD

**Emily Thornton Calvo's** new book has 90-plus pages of colorful paintings and poetry that portray universal truths found in events that shape our lives.

In the book, Calvo demonstrates that humor and artful creativity can be as valuable a path to better health as diet

and exercise. Both thrive in community, which engages and is proving crucial for a healthy lifestyle.

Be it single parenthood, beating cancer, learning to love all that makes dad gay, raising kids then railing against empty nesting, Calvo interprets absurdities with color and words that make sense out of absurdity and the disagreeable amusing.

### AIRPLANES TAKE OFF AND LAND

**Patrick McBriarty's** *Airplanes Take Off and Land* will be published in April by PTM Werks Series.

The PTM Werks Series is designed to introduce kids to STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) topics by answering the "why" questions they often have about how machines all around us work, that most adults struggle to completely answer.

The series is illustrated by Johanna H. Kim, published by CurlyQ Press, and distributed by Applewood Books.

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Society of Midland Authors

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