



Jack Clark in his cab

## Biblio File

In September, one of Biblio File's operatives tracked down **Jack Clark**, who is perhaps the only member of the Society of Midland Authors who drives a cab for a living. Our operative rode down Fullerton Avenue on Chicago's North Side in Clark's cab, from which the author and former Chicago Reporter journalist long sold copies of his self-published novel, *Nobody's Angel*. Clark's mystery novel got wider attention after *Hard Case Crime*, via Dorchester Publishing Co., brought it out in May. Publishers Weekly called it a "sparse and heartbreaking novel." Booklist said, "The cynical, melancholy cabbie point of view is perfect for this kind of neon-lit, noir-tinged, saxophone-scored prose poem, and Clark hits all the right notes." The Washington Post called *Nobody's Angel* a "gem that doesn't contain a wasted word or a false note." But recently, the book hit a pothole: Dorchester Publishing, which printed and shipped the books, decided to get out of the mass-market book business, and the remaining 1,200 copies of the 11,500 first printing are locked in a warehouse. The good news: *Hard Case Crime* just signed with a new publisher, the U.K.'s Titan Publishing, which will buy all existing stock from Dorchester. ... The Society welcomes its new recording secretary, **Anastasia Royal**, author of *Undoing I Do*. Anastasia replaces **Stella Pevsner**. Over the years, Pevsner has served as the Society's recording secretary, board member and president when she wasn't moving to

Turn to Page 2

# There's plenty to fear, and not just fear itself

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Quirky museums gave Stephen Asma the idea for his book *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, the Columbia College Chicago philosophy professor said Oct. 12 at the Society of Midland Authors program at the Cliff Dwellers Club in Chicago.

While researching an earlier book, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (Oxford University Press, 2001), Asma noticed many of the museums – especially the quirky ones – displayed "would what historically were called monster specimens."

"I just discovered I had sort of a sick fascination with this stuff, and then it got me thinking about monsters as a general topic," Asma said.

"This book is sort of a fruition of my interest in natural history."

One of the things Asma learned is that the general perception of monsters has changed over the ages.

In ancient times, Asma said, monsters mostly were "other natural species," although sometimes exaggerated, as in a bizarre creature with three horns that is larger than elephant.

"But as you move into the medieval period, it changes rapidly. And now,

instead of the monsters being just very strange animals and living in exotic places, it's believed the monsters actually do God's will and have sort of a metaphysical, spiritual agenda."

By modern times, though, the concept of monsters had changed again.

"This is the sort of tradition that Freud has kind of bequeathed to us, not only are there beasties out there, but they are inside you as well," Asma said.

For example, if you peruse a daily newspaper, the word "monster" most likely will be

applied to a person who has committed a heinous crime.

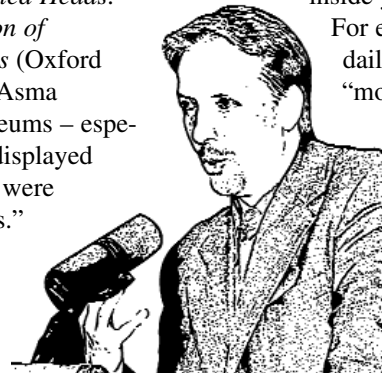
"The epithet 'monsters' in the 21st century is largely reserved for morally repugnant people," Asma said.

But in the future, the concept of monsters is likely to change again,

perhaps to refer to creatures of our own making, he said.

"What are the monsters that the new kinds of biotechnology are bringing to us? ... The old Frankenstein story everybody knows, but the sort of application of this Frankenstein syndrome today is something that I don't think any generation before has had any experience with. The fact that you can get into the genome and manipulate it in such incredible ways

Turn to FEAR, Page 2



Stephen Asma addresses the Society of Midland Authors on Oct. 12.

Literary Loudspeaker:  
Tom Ciesielka

PAGE 8

New  
Books

PAGES 4-5

Literary Life:  
Robert McClory

PAGE 6

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## Biblio File

Continued from Page 1

Colorado and back. Welcome, Anastasia.



Anastasia Royal

... When you watch Davis Guggenheim's documentary "Waiting for Superman," listen for SMA member **Edward Gordon's** prediction from his book *Winning the Global Talent Showdown* that if the American education-to-employment system

is not restructured, by the year 2020 there will be 124 million highly skilled, high-paying jobs but only 50 million Americans qualified to do them. Also, a taped interview with Ed on the implications of his research in *Winning the Global Talent Showdown* was scheduled to appear Oct. 14 on "Chicago Tonight" on WTTW. On Oct. 15, an article by Meribah Knight ran in the Chicago section of the New York Times in which Ed was quoted on the current job situation.

... **Jane S. Smith's** *The Garden of Invention: Luther Burbank and the Business of Breeding Plants* has just been awarded the Caroline Bancroft History Prize for best book in Western American History. ... **Allen Salter** and **Mahmoud Saeed** report a joint SMA success as

Turn to Page 3

## Literary License

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# Can't make it to a program? Listen in on the Internet

BY ROBERT LOERZEL

If you can't make it in person to a Society of Midland Authors event, you can hear it later on the Internet. For the past year, Chicago Public Radio has been recording our events for a program called "Chicago Amplified."

All of the appearances by authors at the Cliff Dwellers Club during the 2009-10 season are posted at [www.chicagopublicradio.org/amplified](http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/amplified), along with our awards banquet from May. The easiest way to find a list of all the recordings of our events is to follow the link at the Society's own website — [www.midlandauthors.com](http://www.midlandauthors.com). The column on the right side of the home page includes a link to AUDIO.

We're not the only ones being recorded by Chicago Public Radio. The "Chicago Amplified" program also records other events around the city hosted by organizations including the Art Institute, the Chicago Architecture Foundation, the Chicago History Museum, the Chicago Humanities Festival, the Chicago Public Library, Alliance Française and many others. Recordings of all these events are posted on the WBEZ website, available for free listening. They can also be downloaded as mp3 files, in case you'd like to save them on your computer or iPod. Recordings are usually posted on the website a few weeks after the event — look for this fall's programs soon, including the fascinating talk



Robert Loerzel

Stephen Asma gave about monsters.

The website also features a calendar of upcoming events by the Society of Midland Authors and the other partners in "Chicago Amplified." And by the way, Chicago Public Radio performs this service at no charge to the Society. We're honored to be part of this valuable resource — and we're grateful to Chicago Public Radio for expanding our reach.



Since **Robert Remer** resigned last spring, the Society of Midland Authors has had a vacancy on its Board of Directors. If any members are interested in serving, please contact Board President Robert Loerzel at [loerzel@comcast.net](mailto:loerzel@comcast.net) or (773) 572-2402.

By serving on the board, you will help the Society to plan events such as the annual awards banquet, public programs at the Cliff Dwellers Club and Printers Row. Board members also nominate new members to join the Society, and we discuss other policy questions.

This is a volunteer role. Board members should be available to attend at least a fair number of meetings. The board meets eight times a year — at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month (with no meetings held in June, July, August and December). Meetings usually take place in Chicago or nearby suburbs, either at a restaurant or a board member's home.

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## Fear

Continued from Page 1

makes us very frightened about what kind of God-playing we might be doing."

Asma, who has lived and taught in Southeast Asia, also has written books about Buddhism.

"My writing career is sort of divided between two major topics ... and there is like no overlap between the audiences,"

said Asma, who has written seven books. "The people who are into this [monster] stuff think the Buddhism stuff is for tender-minded flakes, and the people who are into Buddhism have no interest in this kind of creepy natural history monster stuff at all."

*The Society of Midland Authors' 2010-2011 programs may be heard in their entirety at [www.chicagopublicradio.org/amplified](http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/amplified).*

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"All of this universe known to me in 1864 was bounded by the wooded hills of a little Wisconsin coulee, and its center was a cottage where my mother was living alone — my father was in the war." — *A Son of the Middle Border*, Hamlin Garland, 1920

# Author of new Capone book will speak at Nov. program

**J**onathan Eig, the author of the new book *Get Capone: The Secret Plot that Captured America's Most Wanted Gangster* will be the speaker at the Society of Midland Authors' Nov. 9 program.

Eig, a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, also is author of two New York Times best sellers: *Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig*, and *Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson's First Season*. He has appeared on NBC's "Today" show, CNN and NPR, and he lectures around the country.

According to Simon & Schuster, *Luckiest Man* won the Casey Award for best baseball book of 2005, and *Opening Day* was selected as one of the best books of 2007 by the Washington Post, Chicago Tribune and Sports Illustrated.

Al Capone left Brooklyn as a 21-year-old nobody but was one of the world's most famous men by the time he turned 28 in Chicago. After researching Capone and the government's efforts to put him away, Eig says the Prohibition-era gangster was nothing more than a scapegoat and that the famed G-man Elliot Ness had little if anything to do with sending Capone to prison.

Eig writes on his website that the book "chronicles the rise and fall of legendary gangster Al Capone. It's based on newly acquired documents and interviews with some of Capone's descendants. The book reveals a lot about Capone — how freely he spoke to reporters of his exploits, the time he shot himself in the groin ... and how venereal disease eventually robbed him of his health and sanity."

According to Wikipedia, on Jan. 12 the Chicago Police Department reopened the 1939 murder case of Edward O'Hare to set the record straight about the role O'Hare played in Capone's conviction based on documents uncovered by Eig

**November 9, 2010, program**

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

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

**Free - donations accepted**

and detailed in *Get Capone*.

Eig has taught writing at Columbia College Chicago and lectures at Northwestern. He has spoken to audiences on various topics in the United States, including as the keynote speaker at the 2005 Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

In a New York Times review of *Get Capone*, **James McManus** wrote: "Eig's is a welcome, even necessary, update. He stretched similarly spacious canvases for his well-received portraits of Lou Gehrig (*Luckiest Man*) and Jackie Robinson (*Opening Day*).

For his third book, he sketches fresh profiles of scores of Italian, Irish and Polish mobsters, and of three presidents, three Chicago mayors and dozens of minor officials. And he dramatically details the game-changing impact of Gen. John Thompson's light submachine gun, a 'trench broom' designed — about a year too late — to mow down the Germans. Panoramic yet sharply focused, *Get Capone* is as much a dark history of urban America between the world wars as it is another mobster's life story. ... [It is] both a gore-spattered thriller and a more nuanced upgrade over previous take-downs and hagiographies."

Eig, a former staff writer for the Wall Street Journal who was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Monsey, N.Y., lives in Chicago with his wife and children.



**Jonathan Eig**

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 2

recipients of the 2010 Syracuse University Press and University of Arkansas King Fahd MEST Center Arabic Literature Translation Award. The honor was given for Salter's translation and editing of Saeed's novel *The World Through the Eyes of Angels*, to be published by Syracuse University Press in December. Salter revised already-translated fragments of the novel, translated the remaining portion and produced a finished version which Saeed submitted for consideration. The novel is a fictionalized account of Saeed's childhood in Mosul, Iraq, in the 1940s. Saeed has published more than 20 novels in Arabic and received numerous awards but has seen only one previous work appear in English translation. Salter says he's "thrilled to be able to help this world-class novelist reach a larger audience." ... **Kevin Davis** is heading to Northwestern University to earn an MFA in creative writing. ... Just in time for Halloween, here's Biblio File's ghost-sighting report: **Milton Nieuwsma** ghost wrote a book called *They Will be Victors* for Robert Wollack that came out in May, and he's finishing one now called *Earth Angels* for Peter Vanden Bosch due out in July 2011. ...

**Gerry Souter** has been appointed by the Village of Arlington Heights to the committee that will conduct a year-long celebration of the village's 125th anniversary in 2012. Souter and his wife **Janet** are authors of

*Arlington Heights, Illinois: Downtown Renaissance* in the Images of America Series from Arcadia Publishing, 2001

(reprinted in 2004). ... **Craig Sautter, Dick**

**Simpson** and **Rich Lindberg** offered insights into the past, present and future of Chicago Democratic Machine to **Steve Edwards** (emcee of the 2010 SMA May



**Gerry Souter**

**Turn to Page 4**

"'Fieldwork,' Claude used to say, 'is to anthropology what the blood of martyrs is to the church.' At any gathering of anthropologists, this is the main question: *Where did you do your fieldwork?*" — *Snakewoman of Little Egypt*, **Robert Hellenga**

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 3

dinner) during a Sept. 9 interview with WBEZ at the famous “Smoke Filled Room” – Room 914 – of the Blackstone Hotel, where Warren Harding was anointed the compromise candidate of the Republican Party during the 1920 Republican National Convention in Chicago. There was no smoke in the room for the program, though, just an elegantly appointed space that costs an overnight guest several thousand dollars. ... The SMA’s Jan. 11 program has a new topic: the upcoming Chicago mayoral election. ... **Taylor Pensoneau** (See New Books, Page 5) was one of the Illinois authors honored Sept. 28 at the annual convention of the Illinois Library Association at Chicago’s Navy Pier. ... Someone recently gave **Jim Bowman** a 1930 Chicago Daily News style book. ... In a review for the July-August American Judicature Society of *Meeting Justice Stevens John Paul Stevens: An Independent Life* by **Bill Barnhart** and Gene Schlickman, Nancy S. Marder, a professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law, who clerked for Justice Stevens at the Supreme Court in 1990-1992, wrote: “When Justice Stevens, the subject of Bill Barnhart and Gene Schlickman’s new biography, says that he has learned facts from this book that he had been unaware of, this is a sure sign that the reader – whether a layperson or a lawyer – also will learn a great deal about Justice Stevens.” Also, the University of Georgia Law school called *John Paul Stevens: An Independent Life* an “impeccably researched book” and a “vibrant biography.” ... **Scott Turow’s Innocent** was one of five books on the short list for the 16th annual Exclusive Books Boeke Prize in South Africa, which selects a work that is “unputdownable.” ... **Libby Fischer Hellmann, Stephanie Kuehnert** and **Shane Gericke** were among the panelists appearing at Centuries & Sleuths bookstore in Forest Park to help celebrate its 20th anniversary. Shane also was scheduled to be at the Aurora Public Library’s first “Catch a Bunch of Authors” day Sept. 18. ... **Jeffrey Zaslow**, was this year’s scholar in residence at Park City (Utah) High School Sept. 2-3. He also gave some 70 to 80 speeches last year.

Turn to Page 5

## New Books

### THE COUNTESS: A NOVEL

**Rebecca Johns’** new book, *The Countess: A Novel* came out Oct. 12 from Crown. Publishers Weekly called it “creepily enticing second novel.” The



Rebecca Johns

book is a fictionalization of the life of Elizabeth Bathory, the “Blood Countess.”

Johns’ first novel, *Icebergs*, was a finalist for the 2007 Hemingway

Foundation/PEN Award for first fiction and a recipient of the

Michener-Copernicus Award.

Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, the *Harvard Review*, the *Mississippi Review*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Mademoiselle*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Self*, and *Seventeen*, among others. A graduate of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and the Missouri School of Journalism, she teaches in the English Department at DePaul University in Chicago.

### WHEN THE GAME CHANGED: AN ORAL HISTORY OF BASEBALL’S TRUE GOLDEN AGE 1969-79

George Castle’s 10th published book since 1998, published by Lyons Press, is out. Castle frames his own memories



George Castle

watching games as a fan at Wrigley Field and three departed ballparks – old Comiskey Park, County Stadium in Milwaukee and the second Busch Stadium in St. Louis – around the oral history of a wide range of baseball personalities, ranging

from Hall of Famers to one of the first female ushers at Wrigley Field.

The author picked the 1970s because it

### YOUNG MR. OBAMA

**Ted McClelland’s** new book *Young Mr. Obama* tells how the rough-and-tumble reality of Chicago taught a young African-American politician the lessons that launched him on the road to history.

McClelland’s earlier books are *The Third Coast* and *Horseplayers: Life at the Track*.

Kirkus Review wrote, “[McClelland] makes the convincing case that President Obama’s experiences in his adopted city shaped him profoundly and helped make him the seasoned and formidable politician that he is today.”

The publisher, Bloomsbury Press, wrote: “Edward McClelland, a veteran Chicago journalist, tells the real story of the first black president’s political education in the capital of the African American political community. Obama’s touch wasn’t always golden, and the unflappable and charismatic campaigner we know today nearly derailed his political career with a disastrous run for Congress in 2000. ... Obama learned from his mistakes, and rebuilt his public persona. *Young Mr. Obama* is a masterpiece of political reporting.”

was a transformative decade for baseball, changing the game into what we witness now. The decade saw the advent of free agency, the designated hitter, Tommy John surgery, the five-man rotation, bullpen specialization and the first African-American manager. The ’70s also may have been the most talent-laden decade in history. Some future 20 Hall of Famers were on the rosters of the teams at the 1971 All-Star Game in Detroit, but nine other eventual Cooperstown enshrinees did not even make the teams.

Castle reprints two of his historic scorecards from wild Cubs-Phillies games at Wrigley in 1976 and 1979. He describes his photo as a 19-year-old copyboy in the Tribune’s wire room in 1975 as “a hoot.”

## New Books

Continued from Page 4

### DAPPER & DEADLY: THE TRUE STORY OF BLACK CHARLIE HARRIS

The last of the big-name desperadoes coming out of Downstate Illinois starting in the Roaring 20s and extending to the 1950s is the subject of **Taylor Pensoneau's** new book. Taylor reports the book already is in its second printing.

Downstatepublications.com wrote "[Taylor] Pensoneau leaves no stone unturned in a complete portrait of the man credited for the downfall of the Sheltons, the legendary gangster brothers from Southern Illinois. And using FBI files, he covers from start to finish the sensational double murder that landed Harris on the FBI's 'Ten Most



Taylor  
Pensoneau

Wanted' list before his conviction and imprisonment for the crime. Harris rose from an obscure farm boy to a holy terror in a lifetime of crime that made him a fixture as front page news. The chapters of his intriguing life are revealed in a detailed and fast-moving narrative that leaves readers wishing the saga never came to an end."

The Springfield (Ill.) Journal-Register wrote: "Pensoneau spent two years researching *Black Charlie Harris*, including interviews with the dwindling number of people who knew Harris. The result is a fascinating look at a period of Southern Illinois history that, as Pensoneau writes, 'approaches the realm of myth.'"

Pensoneau worked 16 years as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Illinois political correspondent and has written several histories about Illinois, including *Brothers Notorious: The Sheltons*, an account of the best-known gangster brothers to come out of Southern Illinois that is in its sixth printing. He also has written biographies, including one of former Illinois Gov. Dan Walker, *The Glory and the Tragedy*.

### SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE

*Set the Night on Fire* by **Libby Fischer Hellman** is coming in December from Allium Press (see Page 7).

The plot: Someone is trying to kill Lila Hilliard. During the Christmas holidays she returns from running errands to find her family home in flames, her father and brother trapped inside. Later, she is attacked by a mysterious man on a motorcycle ... and the threats don't end there.

As Lila desperately tries to piece together who is after her and why, she uncovers information about her father's past in Chicago during the volatile days of the late 1960s ... information he never shared with her, but now threatens to destroy her.

Part thriller, part historical novel, and part love story, *Set the Night on Fire* paints an unforgettable portrait of Chicago during a turbulent time: the riots at the Democratic Convention ... the struggle for power between the Black Panthers and SDS ... and a group of young idealists who tried to change the world.

### DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

Here's what Publishers Weekly said about **Charlene Ann Baumbich's** new book: "Josie Brooks is not interested in disruption. Everything in her life is organized, minimal, and efficient. A successful business consultant in Chicago with a type-A personality, she ruthlessly identifies and slashes any source of economic wastefulness with complete disregard for the employees themselves. Soon, everyone at Diamond Mutual calls her 'the Dragon' as she orders the termination of decent, hardworking people for the sake of profit. Josie's rigid life, however, mysteriously begins to unravel when a strangely alluring snow globe appears at her apartment. Soon afterward, Josie is forced to confront her own flaws and fears, beginning an emotional journey toward love, friendship, mourning, and new beginnings. A wide range of characters flesh out this latest installment of Baumbich's Snow Globe series."

## Biblio File

Continued from Page 4

Meanwhile, he's working on a new book set in a bridal shop that's been in the middle of a tiny Michigan town since 1934, run by four generations of women in the same family. The room where brides try on dresses is called "the magic room," so the book tentatively is called *The Magic Room: A Story About the Love We Wish for our Daughters*. ... **Laura Caldwell** tweeted Sept. 14 to say she liked the first Amazon review of her new book, *Long Way Home: A Young Man Lost in the System and the Two Women Who Found Him*: "The book itself is pretty gripping, and walks the tightrope between legal thriller and a picture of a helpless man caught in hell." The Oct. 24 New York Times Book Review said, "Caldwell's account of the trial is riveting." ... As **Charlene Ann Baumbich** was setting up hotel reservations last month for an upcoming book tour and getting excited about nearing her next book's deadline, she had this advice for the rest of us: "Writing is an act of trust. Trust that the story is smarter than you are. It knows." ... On Thursday, Oct. 7, Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, Conn., was scheduled to hear Pulitzer Prize-winning author, science writer and professor of journalism **Deborah Blum** discuss *Spiritualism and Psychological Research: Theodate's Circle*. ... The Sept. 5 Chicago Sun-Times profiled **Deborah C. Brod**. ... On Nov. 9, **John Presta** will be in Flossmoor, Ill., addressing an active political group called "Team Obama" with another author, Ytasha Womack, who wrote a book called *Post Black*. ... Brock Clarke, a finalist for the 2008 SMA Adult Fiction Award for *An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England*, has a new novel out: *Exley*. The Sept. 30 New York Times said Clarke "created an elaborate mixture of truth, deception and self-deception." ... **Jim Schwab** e-mailed to say, "This is a new one on me — Amazon trying to sell my own book back to me. I guess that's a good sign, right? I've been wondering where I could buy this thing." ... The Chicago Daily News Alumni Newsletter reprinted this thought from former SMA member Henry Kisor's blog:

Turn to Page 6

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## Biblio File

Continued from Page 5

“Many if not most self-published books are hopeless messes. ... But I’m seeing more and more self-published books that are worth many readers’ trouble. ... Listen to the pros. Rewrite, and rewrite again. Never, ever publish your first draft.” ...

**Thomas Frisbie** was among the Chicago Sun-Times editorial writers who won the 2010 Sarah Brown Boyden award from the Chicago Journalists Association for editorial writing. ... Typical author nightmare: Here’s what **Keir Graff** reports about his experiences last month in promoting *The Price of Liberty*. “Copies of the book suddenly became scarcer than a well-reasoned argument on cable television. The first shipment had sold out, and the second shipment was in the hold of a freighter crossing the Atlantic. By the time those books finally cleared customs, more orders had come in, and there still weren’t enough books to meet demand. So the entire first printing has sold out. The back order list is growing, but the book won’t go to a second printing until some secret number is reached.” ...

SMA’s **Neil Shubin** and **Sean Carroll** were on a “Nova” episode titled “What Darwin Didn’t Know.” ... **Marcus Sakey** tweeted Oct. 20 to say, “Saw the jacket for *The Two Deaths of Daniel Hayes* today, and it rocks. ... Former SMA member Andrew Greeley’s book *Chicago Catholics and the Struggles with Their Church*, is out. ... In the Author’s Guild summer 2010 bulletin (yes, they publish only four times a year, just can’t keep up with Literary License’s publishing schedule), new Guild president **Scott Turow** wrote about the good side of e-books. He’ll detail the e-book headaches for authors in the next issue. ... **Augie Aleksy** told the (Oak Park, Ill.) Oak Leaves his favorite “Twain character is probably Joan of Arc. But for God’s sake, she is a ‘saint.’ So I can’t identify with her, however, Hank Morgan in *The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* is someone I can identify with.” ... A free mini-conference on Nov. 20 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Turn to Page 7

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# There’s an apse for that: Writing about the church

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

**P**anic, says Robert McClory, is all part of the writing process. For example, “I panicked about getting a publisher,” he says about his latest book. “But then, I didn’t panic about the doing the writing of it. ... Toward the end, though, I kind of panicked – at first they indicated they were not clear when they wanted it, then they wanted the complete manuscript by early December of last year. I had thought I had until February or March.”

McClory had good reason to panic at some points. At the beginning of the process, he almost had a deal with HarperCollins for his new book. But when he showed up for a meeting, he was told the company wouldn’t publish it after all.

“This is not a good time to get published,” McClory said. “Most publishers have laid off a lot of people.”

Fortunately, it turned out Lawrence Hill Books, an imprint of Chicago Review Press, was very interested, and *Radical Disciple: Father Pflieger, St. Sabina Church, and the Fight for Social Justice*.

came out this month. It is McClory’s seventh book.

Four of his earlier books have to do with Catholic Church issues, one is about racism in America and one was a book about Renault Robinson, a former police officer and chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority who sued the city and won a huge victory.

“All the people I wrote about were vindicated,” McClory said. “They were people going up against rather long odds and coming out ahead. I would include [Rev. Michael] Pflieger in that group.”

Pflieger, the topic of McClory’s latest book, took over a Chicago parish that appeared destined to go nowhere and turned it into one of the largest and cer-

tainly the most lively black Catholic church in the country.

“My goal was: Can you tell the story of what he did and why he did it without completely overwhelming the reader with details?” McClory said. “It is not extensive or extremely long. I tried to cover the major achievements.”

To get a better look at the man behind the Chicago newspaper headlines, McClory made repeated pilgrimages to the South Side Chicago St. Sabina parish, where Pflieger has been stationed since 1975 and pastor since 1984.

“He would allow me to see him only one hour at a time,” said McClory, a retired Northwestern University associate journalism professor who lives in Evanston. “I was out there to St. Sabina 30 or 40 times. I told people I could have driven up to Alaska and back in the amount of time I spent driving there.”

McClory, a former priest who by coincidence served at St. Sabina’s before Pflieger arrived, said Pflieger has been a success on many counts but also has his detractors.

“By wheeling and dealing and getting the city and the state and the federal government to put up money for various projects, he is resented,” McClory said. “A lot of priests are jealous, saying he is too aggressive in his ministry.”

After leaving the priesthood, McClory became a reporter for the Chicago Defender.

“It was the greatest education you can imagine,” said McClory. “I thought I would stay only a short time. I am white, and the staff was black, writing for the black community. But I got to do everything – cover Mayor [Richard J.] Daley, the Board of Education, the big issues, neighborhood change, overcrowded schools, and everything that was going on in those days.”

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Literary  
Life

Robert  
McClory



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“The Alvarezes concluded right away that the iridium must have been of extraterrestrial origin. They thought of a supernova, the explosion of a star that could shower Earth with its elemental guts.” – *Remarkable Creatures*, **Sean B. Carroll**

# Publisher has big plans for small Chicago-themed press

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Emily Clark Victorson has the usual excuse for becoming the proprietor of a new small publishing house that has yet to pay her a salary.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," she says.

In the spring of 2009, Victorson co-founded Allium Press of Chicago after she was laid off from History Works, a purveyor of corporate and big family histories. With skills she'd picked up producing and designing books and earlier working as a librarian at the Chicago History Museum, she thought she'd take advantage of the new print-on-demand model (translation: no big upfront capital investment) to go into the publishing business.

"There aren't really jobs in my previous fields anymore," Victorson says.

She decided Allium's niche would be books related to Chicago and Chicago history. It's a niche similar to that occupied by Chicago's Lake Claremont Press, but Lake Claremont focuses on nonfiction.

Allium's first book was written by Society of Midland Authors member **Frances McNamara**, whose debut novel – an Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award semifinalist – was *Death at the Fair* (Publishers Weekly: "well-written and without major flaws"). Allium (the company is named for *Allium tricoccum*, the wild onion that gave Chicago its name) also published McNamara's sequel, *Death at Hull House* (Booklist: "a rich historical framework"). The publisher's third book was the historical novel *Beautiful Dreamer* by Joan Naper, a semifinalist for the 2008 Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award. Publishers Weekly called it "A delightful coming-of-age story about a young Irish woman finding her way in Chicago in 1900."

Victorson prints her books through Lightning Source in La Vergne, Tenn., whose parent company is Ingram, the large book distribution company. The

Ingram connection helps get Allium's books distributed. Victorson also cultivates relationships with independent bookstores and libraries and makes use of the Internet.

"With the Internet, it's possible to reach people with a more narrowly focused book," Victorson says.

For her fourth book, Victorson selected *Set the Night on Fire*, a thriller set in late 1960s Chicago by established author and SMA member **Libby Fischer Hellmann**. And McNamara's fourth book, set during Chicago's Pullman strike, will be out in February.

"I think the world of Emily, and I'm thrilled to be part of her inventory" Hellman e-mailed Literary License. "She knows what she's doing, and I expect Allium Press to be much respected and admired in the coming years."

Victorson says her press is piquing the interest of even established authors who are not finding it easy to interest other publishers in their new books.

"The publishing industry as we know it is falling apart," Victorson says. "I'm trying to do a different model."

As an experiment, for example, she is simultaneously publishing in hardcover, softcover and e-book formats.

"Libraries will prefer to have hardcover books, and some people will buy hardcovers because they are more collectible. People who just want a quick read will buy the e-book, and the ones sort of it between will buy the paperback. It doesn't cost anything more to produce; it's the same digital file for all of them."

Using print on demand, Victorson doesn't have to do a print run. That way, she doesn't need a warehouse. She buys a case or two of the books to send out for reviews and to have on hand.

Meanwhile, she just keeps looking for good manuscripts and hoping for the happy ending, i.e., a salary.

"I'll stick it out as long as I can," she says.



Emily Clark Victorson

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## Biblio File

Continued from Page 6

at the Vernon Area Public Library District, 300 Olde Half Day Rd. in Lincolnshire will feature authors Raymond Benson, **Michael Allen Dymmo**, **Shane Gericke**, and **Libby Fischer Hellmann**. ... **Fran Baker**, author of *Romeo Romeo* and other books, was scheduled to speak about romance this month at the Missouri Center for the Book's annual Celebration of the Book on Saturday at Stephens College. ... **Nami Mun** was scheduled to do a reading Oct. 14 for the University of Cincinnati's Emerging Fiction Writers Festival. ... **Elsa Marston** was scheduled to leave this month for Palestine, where she'll give writing workshops and talks. Also, her book, *Santa Claus in Baghdad and Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World* was designated an "outstanding title" by the AAUP University Press Books for Public and Secondary Libraries, and silver medal in multicultural fiction (youth) by Independent Publisher. Plus, Marston's article "The Arab World in Children's Books: Finding Palestine" appeared in *Bookbird* (January 2010) and her story "The Olive Tree" is included in an innovative new English reader published in India. Her article "Palestinians in Fiction for Young People" appeared in the December 2009 issue of *Wasafiri: The Magazine of International Contemporary Writing*.

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## Letters to the Editor

I read the SMA newsletter cover to cover and learn so much. I particularly liked the section from the archives you ran last year. Just the facts brought back whole times.

Catherine Kenney

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## SMA Contributors

The Society extends its thanks for donations from **Michael Williams**, **Fern Brown**, **Merv Block**, **Barbara Polikoff**, **Arnie Bernstein**, **Elizabeth Gray** and **Gary Moore**.

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## Book Signings

**Rosina Neginsky** has been in Europe this month on a book tour for her poetry book *Juggler*. When she gets back, she'll have a poetry reading from the book Oct. 29 at 1 p.m., at the University of Chicago Bookstore, (773) 702-7712, 970 East 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637, Friends and colleagues welcome. ... **Rebecca Johns** has been doing Midwestern events to support her new book *The Countess: A Novel*. She was scheduled to be at Chicago's Sulzer Regional Library Oct. 12, and at the Boswell Book Co. in Milwaukee Oct. 16. On Dec. 3 at 7 p.m. she'll be at Prairie Lights Books, 15 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City, Iowa. ... **Ted McClelland** is doing signings for his new book, *Young Mr. Obama: Chicago and the Making of a Black President*, which came out Oct.



**Lisa Holton**

12. See Ted Oct. 21, 7 p.m., at the Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago; Oct. 23, Noon-2 p.m., Everybody Reads, 2019 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing, Mich.; Oct. 24, 2 p.m., Southfield Public Library, 26300 Evergreen Road, Southfield, Mich.; Nov. 14, 4 p.m., Visible Voice Books, 1023 Kenilworth Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. ... Here's **Libby Fischer Hellmann's** signing schedule for *Set the Night on Fire*: Dec. 2, launch party, Women and Children First, Chicago, 7 p.m.; Dec. 4, Centuries and Sleuths, Forest Park, Ill., 2 p.m., Dec. 12, The Book Stall, Winnetka, Ill., 2 p.m. ... **Robert McClory** will sign *Radical Disciple* from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Oct. 29 at the Border's in Evanston, Ill., 1700 Maple Ave.; from 2 to 4 p.m. Oct. 30, Borders, 2210 W. 95th St., Chicago; from 7 to 9 p.m. Nov. 18 at Barbara's Bookstore, 1218 S. Halsted, Chicago; 1:30 to 4 p.m., Dec. 5 St. Sabina's, 1210 W. 78th Pl., Chicago; from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Jan. 26, Loyola University, 25 E. Pearson (at Wabash), Chicago, 15th floor. ... **Lisa Holton** will sign *For Members Only* at noon Oct. 28 at Border's, 150 N. State Street, Chicago.

# Dare's more than one way to get Internet book publicity

**H**ow many times has someone persuaded you to do something you were unsure of doing, just by saying "I dare you"?

Remember – big ideas can bring big rewards. We dare you to ...

### Set up a microsite

Creating a website is no small task. And even though "microsite" technically means "small site," the payoff of creating one can have a big impact. A microsite is a unique web page (or pages) that highlights a particular event, issue, publicity campaign, new book launch – basically anything you want to draw specific attention to. It's a customized page with a unique URL that is separate from your main author home page and can stand alone for parties interested in just one specific issue. It

gives you the opportunity to have a control center for all news and information related to a specific issue, which can make it easier for your readers and friends to find the info they are looking

for. Consider the recent Domino's Pizza campaign – "Show Us Your Pizza." It has a unique Web page that is clearly intertwined with the Domino's brand, but focuses on only one of the company's many campaigns and offerings.

### Get in front of the video camera

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth double that. Capturing video during events, presentations, demonstrations and even day-to-day activities can bring your reputation to the next level and provide a memorable and visual link to your business and brand. Quality matters when it comes to video, so depending on the purpose of the video, investing in either reliable equipment or an experienced videographer can ensure that your videos are viewed – and viewed frequently. For example, if you want to capture footage from an event, having a durable hand-held video camera with a

“If you're looking to take your book to the next level, try one of these tactics.”

good zoom feature should suffice. But if you'd like to create a video for your website that includes reader testimonials and requires advanced editing, it would be wise to hire a professional. Either way, utilizing video and the Internet (sites such as YouTube or Vimeo) will benefit your brand-building efforts.

### Utilize the mobiles

Next time you're on the train, count how many people are using their mobile phones. I'd bet that at least one person is. With all the smart phones out there nowa-

days, there is a high demand for mobile applications and mobile web browsing. Mobile marketing is the next step in the grand marketing scheme of things. We've gone from delivering messages

in print, radio, television, Internet, billboards and now, you can disperse your brand message directly to cellular phones. You can effectively utilize mobiles by making sure your website is mobile-friendly so anyone can easily and conveniently access it on the road. You can also use or create mobile applications and send text messages to personalize your connection and send quick updates with vital information, "from the trenches" event updates or special deals for your readers. How much closer can you get to potential readers than being inside their pockets and purses?

If you're looking to take your book to the next level and push the reputation management envelope, try one of these tactics. Dare we say it? Oh yes. We dare you. We double-dog dare you.

E-mail Tom Ciesielka at [tc@tcpr.net](mailto:tc@tcpr.net) or call (312) 422-1333.

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*Literary Loudspeaker*  
**Tom Ciesielka**

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