



Boston Authors Club

December 2017 News & Events

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Featured Author Interview: Jung Yun, Shelter



Shelter, a Julia Ward Howe Award Finalist, has been described as a gripping family saga, a thriller, and haunting page turner as well as “a sharp knife of a novel.” It’s an unforgettable read, all the more remarkable as a debut novel by Jung Jun. In this month’s feature interview, Jung talks about coming to grips with her book’s dark themes, finding a publisher, and her willingness to write (and discard) hundreds of pages to transform her characters into fully developed people.

Q> *Shelter* is your first published novel. Was there a particular catalyst that inspired you to write this book?

A> I'd been thinking about a character like Kyung for many years—someone unlikeable but understandably, maybe even justifiably, so. I just couldn't figure out the right story for him until 2007. I was living in Massachusetts at the time, and there was a highly publicized home invasion in Cheshire, Connecticut, which was about an hour-and-a-half away. A man survived a night of violence at the hands of two career criminals, but his wife and daughters were killed. Quite honestly, I didn't understand how someone could ever recover from losing his loved ones that way. I began to question how a family with a long history of violence might respond to being the victims of violence themselves, and over time, that seemed like a question that Kyung could answer.

Q> *Shelter* includes powerful, dark themes from violent home invasion to domestic abuse. Were there any scenes that were particularly difficult for you to write? How did you work your way through them?

A> One of the most challenging scenes to figure out how to write was the one in which Kyung learned what happened to his parents during the home invasion. It was absolutely necessary for him to know the details, but it seemed unlikely that he would hear those details from either of his parents. Over time, it made more and more sense for Connie, Kyung's father-in-law and a police officer, to intervene. By twice filtering the events of that day (from Kyung's parents to Connie, and then from Connie to Kyung), it allowed me to establish some necessary distance from the violence, and also create a more neutral quality of reportage to the details of the home invasion. This seemed in keeping with all of the characters' personalities, and it had the added benefit of making the writing of this particular section a little less grueling.

Q> There are multiple plot twists and character revelations, right up to the book's conclusion. Could you describe how you approached the plotting and writing? Did you outline the main threads of the plot and each character's behavior in advance, or did you start with characters and scenarios and let the story unfold as you wrote (or something in between)?

*A> My approach to writing is fairly unstructured. I'll start with a question that I want to answer, a character I'm interested in, and maybe a couple of key plot points, but not much more than that. Then I'll draft a large number of scenes that will probably never make it into the final manuscript. In **Shelter's** case, that added up to a couple hundred pages. I know that may seem like a waste of energy, but this process allowed Kyung to emerge as a person instead of a character, a creation. Once I began to hear myself say "Kyung wouldn't do that" or "Kyung would never say that," I had to revisit those early plot points and think critically about whether he'd really find himself in the situations that I'd originally imagined for him, or if he was going to lead me in some new directions. It turned out to be a little of both.*

Q> Once the writing was done, what was your experience in finding a publisher?

*A> My agent set up a phone conversation with Elizabeth Bruce from Picador, who had read my manuscript and wanted to talk about it. I remember we had such an easy, engaging discussion, and at one point, Elizabeth said something that made me pump my fist in the air: "Sometimes a darker story just feels more true." That's when I knew she'd be the right person to help guide this book into the market. It was just that instantaneous and intuitive, so when I hung up, I thought Oh please, please, please, let her be my editor. Elizabeth ended up making a pre-empt offer on **Shelter** a few days later, and I'm really happy to report that my initial instincts weren't wrong. She and her colleagues were never afraid of this novel's darker side. They could see the light in it that I did, and that was really important to me.*

Q> Were you expecting the book to be such a resounding success? Is there anything that has surprised you in post-publication reviews or in the response from the audience when you do book readings?

*A> Last night, while I was working on these questions, I asked my husband if I was a pessimist or a pragmatist during the lead-up to **Shelter's** publication. He laughed and refused to answer the question, which should give you a sense of how difficult I was to live with back then. I honestly expected the book to come out and fail to be noticed because lots of wonderful books have done the same for reasons that no one really understands. Of course, it was a shock when **Shelter** received a good amount of publicity and attention, and I'm grateful to Picador for drumming all that up on the book's behalf. I suppose the thing that surprised me most at public events was the fact that people showed up. I'd spent so much of my time writing this book in isolation, so it was a strange, almost surreal experience when total strangers came to talk about something that had been locked up in my head and my heart for such a long time.*

Q> Are you working on a new novel? If yes, could you tell us something about it and what stage you are at in the writing?

*A> I'm in the early stages of writing my second novel, which is set in North Dakota, the state where I grew up. I've always wanted to set a work of fiction in that landscape, and while the plot is still evolving, my intention is to explore themes like otherness and the American Dream, which are also present in **Shelter**.*

Citizen Read Program for 2018

ArtsEmerson and American Repertory Theater invite individuals and groups from Boston, Cambridge, and beyond to join us in a dynamic project exploring the construction of race and identity in America.

Citizen Read will include facilitated conversations of Rankine's 2014 New York Times bestselling book of poetry **Citizen: An American Lyric** in book clubs throughout Boston and Cambridge, a public dialogue featuring Claudia Rankine and book club participants, and an opportunity to attend the world premiere of Rankine's new play, **The White Card**.

**Citizen
Read**

JANUARY - MARCH 2018
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A dynamic series of events
activating public dialogue on
race and identity in America.

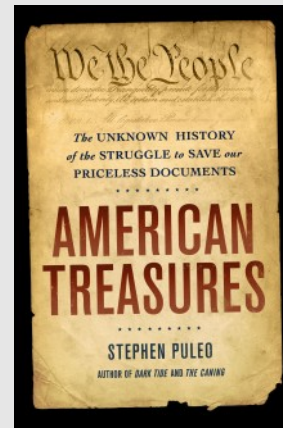
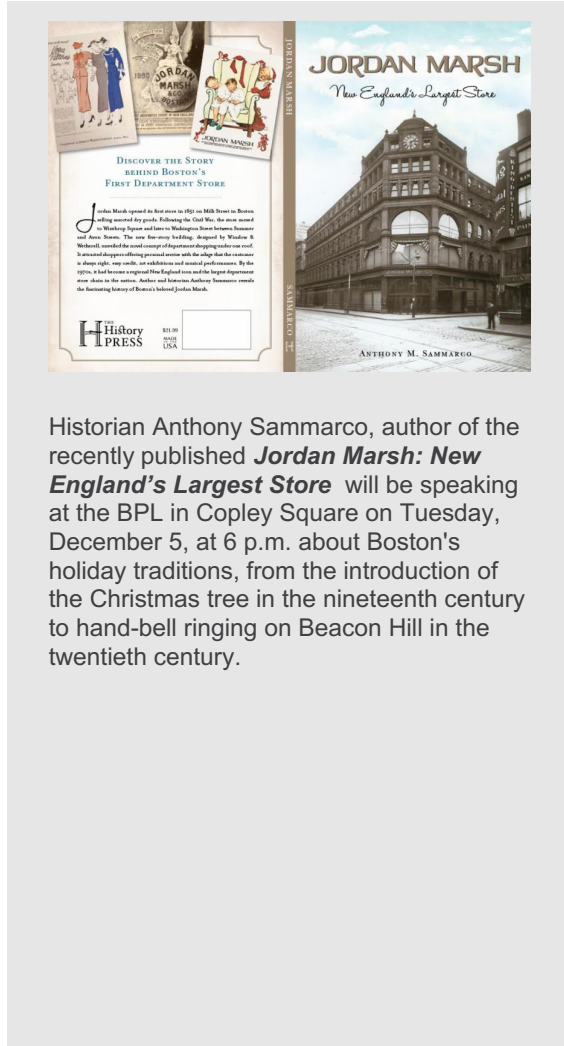
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For questions, call [\(617\) 824-3005](tel:(617)824-3005) or email citizenreadproject@gmail.com

BAC Member News

The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month. Please send news about your activities, speaking, and new books (along with related pictures) to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by December 27 for publication in the JANUARY 2018 newsletter.



January 16
Dark Tide
Loring Greenough House
12 South Street
Jamaica Plain MA
7:00 p.m.
(This is a ticketed event, so please contact organization in advance.)

January 25
American Treasures
Abington (MA) Public Library
600 Gliniewicz Way
Abington MA
7:00 p.m.

Join the Club! Or Renew Your Membership Now for 2018

The BAC is planning more programs and more book awards for 2018 . We hope you will join us! Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to **Boston Authors Club** and mail it to the following address:

Nancy Tupper Ling
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