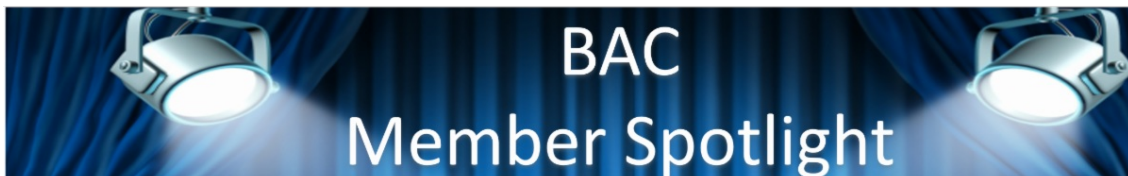




Boston Authors Club

November 2023 Newsletter

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This month's New Member Spotlight is on Virginia Pye and her just-published novel, *The Literary Undoing of Victoria Swann*.

Pye's short story collection, *Shelf Life of Happiness*, won the 2019 IPPY Gold Medal for Short Fiction. Her two post-colonial historical novels, *River of Dust* and *Dreams of the Red Phoenix* have also received literary awards. Virginia's essays have appeared in numerous periodicals and literary magazines. A graduate of Wesleyan University, she holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and has taught writing at New York University, the University of Pennsylvania, and, most recently, at GrubStreet's Muse and Marketplace Conference in Boston. She is Co-Fiction Editor for Pangyrus, a literary journal based in Cambridge, and a board member of the Women's National Book Association, Boston Chapter.

Q: Congratulations to your latest novel. In recognition of November as novel-writing month, can you share some of the major milestones (and challenges) in your own journey to becoming a successful novelist?

Writing is a profession that takes practice, persistence, and pivoting. I had my first literary agent when I was twenty-seven; five novels and three agents later, my "debut" novel was published when I was fifty-three. In the ten years since, I've published four books. All the years of writing have paid off and I'm delighted to share my most recent novel, *The Literary Undoing of Victoria Swann*.

Q: You describe *The Literary Undoing of Victoria Swann* as a "Gilded Age story of a successful author of popular romance and adventure novels who becomes a champion of women's rights as she takes on the Boston literary establishment..." What inspired this focus?

I grew up in the Boston area, moved away in my twenties, then came back to live in Cambridge eight years ago. On my return, I felt the long shadow cast by Boston's renowned gentlemen of letters. I noted the markers on the historic homes of Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, James, Du Bois, Frost, and others. If I felt the weight of the literary past today, I wondered how a Boston woman writer of an earlier time must have felt. I began to research women writers in Cambridge and Boston which led me to also study the lives of women readers—the so called "New Women" who came in from the farms to work in the factories, shops, offices, and as domestics. These young

women gobbled up the thin dime novels written by women writers. Hundreds of thousands of copies of the dime pamphlets sold to the newly independent young women, thereby helping publishing houses expand and transition from small family run businesses to the larger companies that we know today. In other words, the bond between women writers and readers helped create the changing world of the late 1800s.

Q: What did you enjoy most about creating the *Victoria Swann* character, and writing this novel?

I love my character of Victoria Swann. She's the only writer I've ever created. The one or two scenes in which she writes are among my favorites in my novel. Victoria loves writing. It makes her feel free. Her efforts to express herself are what guides her forward in life. That she ends up a spokeswoman for other women—her devoted readers—makes perfect sense to me, as finding one's voice is a way of helping others find theirs.

Q: Do any actual members of the Boston literary establishment make an appearance in *Victoria Swann* (either by name or by proxy)? Might BAC readers recognize any of our own early members?

Yes! Alice Longfellow has a part in Victoria's story. The philosopher and Harvard professor George Santayana has a walk-on part—quite literally on the paths in Harvard Yard. And I think there may be others I'm forgetting. But I also love creating historic settings, such as a bookshop inspired by the Harvard Bookstore, the Boston Athenaeum, and Longfellow's House on Brattle Street. Those places are so quintessentially Boston and Cambridge, and also so bookish!

Q: Finally, do you have one piece of advice for authors who are currently working to complete their first novel?

Stick with it. Revise carefully until your manuscript is the best you can make it. These days it's so hard to get anything published, it's good to put forward only your best work. And yet, don't hold onto a manuscript for too long. Assume you're a writer who will write many books, not just the one you're working on. Then sit down, put fingers to keyboard or pen to paper, and enjoy it!

Interview by Mary Cronin



Virginia Pye has a number of upcoming book talks and programs scheduled to publicize the launch of *The Literary Undoing of Victoria Swann*, including presentations at **Andover Bookstore on November 2** at 7pm, and a **Duxbury Literary Tea** on November 8.

She is particularly excited to be moderating a panel of authors at the **Cambridge Public Library on November 6**, where she will be joined by Gish Jen, Claire Messud, and Laura Zigman to discuss **Cambridge as Inspiration: Cambridge Women Authors, Past and Present** at a program that is co-hosted by History Cambridge and Porter Square Books.

Reading Right Now

Sara Stanton is a member of the BAC Board, Agency Assistant at the Storm Literary Agency, and a freelance editor. She earned her BA in Creative Writing at Lesley University.

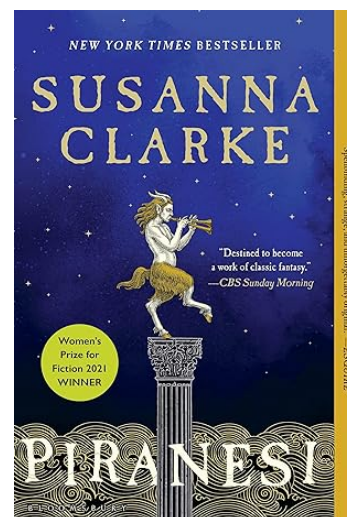
In honor of Novel-Writing Month, Sara recommends *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke, a prize-winning fantasy novel, and *A Ghost in the Throat* by Doireann Ní Ghríofa, an evocative and lyrical combination of memoir, poetry, memory, and fiction

Q: What motivated you to read *Piranesi*?

A: I found this book in my local bookstore and felt captured by the cover and the description. With the promise of a giant marble labyrinth, endless exploration, and a sinister mystery, I was hooked.

Q: Would you recommend it to friends? Why or why not?

A: I actually have already recommended "Piranesi" to friends- that's how much I loved it. The worldbuilding is so encompassing and vivid, and the labyrinth is so unique. The aspect I liked most, though, was that I, as the reader, seemed to be learning about this world and the mystery behind it at the same time as the main character. It was my discovery as well as theirs. Truly, every expectation I first had for what this book would be about was entirely ripped away once I started reading and was replaced with something even better.



Q: What motivated you to pick up *A Ghost in the Throat*?

A: It was a book I found while visiting a friend in Ireland last year. When I went into the bookstore, I was excited to pick up something by an Irish author, and this one really stuck out to me. It has a beautiful cover, a fantastic title, and the back description just drew me in. Not to mention all the awards it's won.

Q: Would you recommend it to friends? Why or why not?

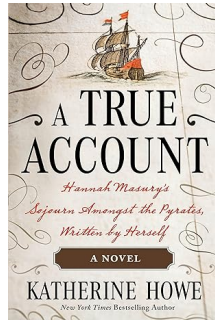
A: At this time, I'm only about halfway through, but I would definitely recommend this to friends. This book is truly like nothing I've ever read before, and I don't say that lightly. It is technically non-fiction, but it reads like a novel, appears like a memoir, and has prose so beautiful it sometimes seems like a poem. Doireann Ní Ghríofa starts off the book saying, "This is a female text," and continues on to share all the hardships and sacrifices and truths about life as a mother all while connecting it to a beloved 18th century poem that she has been obsessed with for many years. The end of the book actually concludes with a side-by-side translation of this original Irish poem, which I cannot wait to read.

Interview by Mary J Cronin

Author! Author!



There will be a launch event for Daniel Tobin's latest poetry book, *The Mansions* (Four Way Books) at the Brookline Booksmith with Marc Vincenz on November 16th.



Katherine Howe's latest book, *A True Account: Hannah Masury's Sojourn Amongst the Pirates, Written by Herself* (Henry Holt) is coming out in November. She will celebrate with a launch event at Harvard Books on 11/21, with a conversation with bestselling literary scholar Kevin Birmingham.



Congratulations to Eric Jay Dolin, whose *Rebels at Sea: Privateering in the American Revolution* recently received the Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Naval Literature. The prize is presented to the American author "who by his published writings has made a substantial contribution to the preservation of the history, heritage and traditions of the United States Sea Services -- The Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and U.S. Flag Merchant Marine."

The More Than Words Bookstore is hosting a monthly Author Talk series that will feature several BAC authors during November and December.

More Than Words mtwyouth.org is a nonprofit social enterprise, operating as a job training program for system-involved young people ages 16-24. Liz Saul, Associate Director of Events at MTW, welcomes our readers to the following programs at their Boston location at 242 E. Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02118 and would be happy to hear from more BAC authors about scheduling talks in 2024.

Upcoming Events:

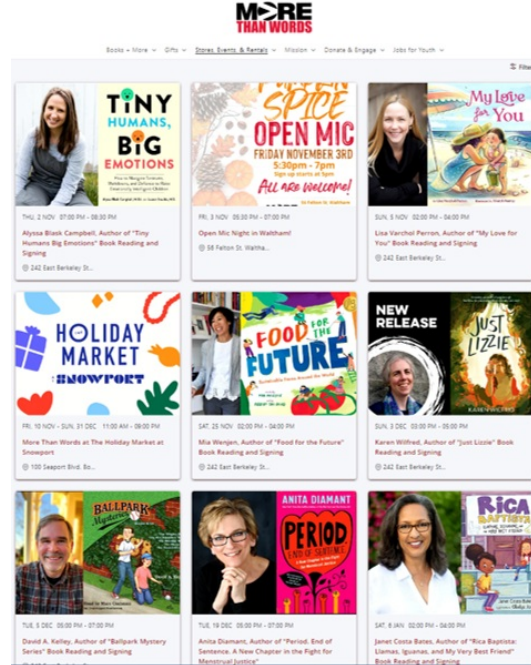
November 5th with Lisa Varchol Perron at 2pm; she will be reading her kids book *My Love for You* and *Tell Me About Space*, and there will be a craft activity.

November 25th with Mia Wenjen at 2pm, reading her book *Food for the Future* with a craft for kids.

December 3rd with Karen Wilfred reading her book *Just Lizzie* at 3pm.

December 5th with David A. Kelley reading from his *Ballpark Mystery Series* books at 5pm

December 19th Anita Diamant will be visiting at 5pm, for a discussion of *Period. End of Sentence*



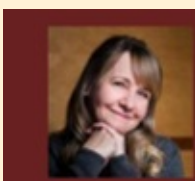
Submit Your 2023 Book to the Julia Ward Howe Award Competition

Calling all authors who live within 100 miles of Boston! If your 2023 book is eligible for a Julia Ward Howe Award, be sure to ask your publisher to submit it before the deadline of January 31, 2024. Prizes are awarded in Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry, and two Young Reader Categories. Authors are also welcome to submit their books directly.

To enter the competition, publishers (or authors) must submit two copies of each eligible title, along with a fee of \$35 dollars per title. See the BAC website for eligibility guidelines.

Make checks payable to the Boston Authors Club and send with your books to the address below. You may also pay online and check eligibility guidelines at this BAC website page: <https://bostonauthorsclub.org/jwh-submission-fee>

Please send 2 copies of your book to: Boston Authors Club, Attn. Julie Dobrow, 103 Conant Road, Lincoln, MA, 01773.



PRESIDENTS MUSINGS

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Remember those Scholastic Book Fairs when you were in elementary school? I certainly do! The colorful flyer went home a couple of weeks before the event. You could look through it, see all the books you wanted to read, and try to convince your parents to send you into school with enough money to cover the cost. And then the day of the book fair! You wandered around the library or cafeteria, wherever the fair was set up, gleefully found some of the titles you'd previously identified, but then found others that seemed equally interesting, or maybe more so. You'd have to do the math in your head to figure out if you swapped out one title for another, would you still be able to pay for them? You'd come home with a pile of shiny paperbacks and excitedly dive in, that very day.

Part of the joy of the Scholastic Book Fair came from discovering new books. And part of it came from a sense of agency, a belief that, armed with funds provided by parents but not directly overseen by them, you could make your own decisions about what you wanted to read. It was exciting, but more than that, it was an important piece of learning – both about all the kinds of books that might be out there in the world,

and also about the joy that we can have in discovering them.

So it was dismaying and disheartening when, earlier this fall, Scholastic announced that they were going to segregate books about race and gender from their other books. The company clearly did this in response to right-wing book banning and censorship efforts, though they initially claimed that the separation didn't separate *all* books on race and gender issues, it focused on books on topics that are being targeted by active or pending book ban legislation, specifically, "mostly LGBTQIA+ titles and books that engage with the presence of racism in our country." Scholastic added that because kids buy their books independently at the book fairs, they felt that individual district's rules could place teachers, librarians and even PTO volunteers at risk of prosecution.

Of course, this position made little sense, and the backlash was swift and intense. PEN America urged Scholastic to find different solutions, pointing out that they weren't the only company to risk the wrath of those who'd like to ban books. They accused Scholastic of a kind of de-facto censorship.

And PEN America wasn't the only organization to speak out against Scholastic's physical separation of books. A group of liberal moms called Red Wine and Blue started a petition drive urging Scholastic to remove this separate "collection" and put these titles, which included biographies of Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and Congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis, back among all the other books at their book fairs.

These collective protests worked. Last week, Scholastic announced that they would halt this controversial practice to which librarians, teachers, parents and authors had so vociferously objected. Ellie Berger, president of Scholastic's trade division issued a statement saying, "We pledge to stand with you as we redouble our efforts to combat the laws restricting children's access to books."

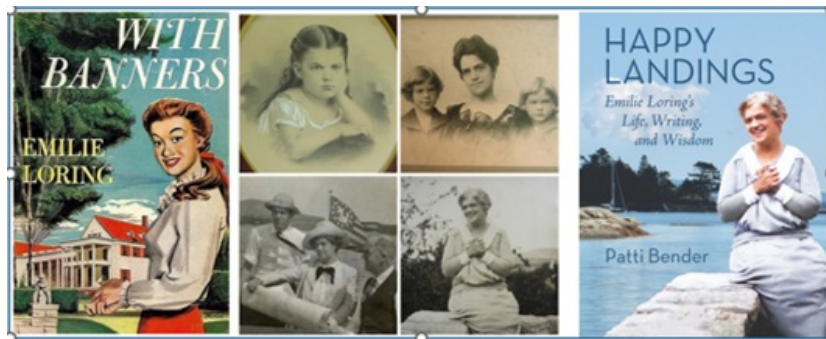
The culture wars over book banning will no doubt continue. But score one for the proponents of access to books, regardless of their content. And as someone who so clearly recalls the heady feeling of making my own decisions about which Scholastic books to bring home, I have to say, I'm happy about this.

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

YESTER YEAR

Emilie Loring, A Perennial Best Selling Novelist

Emilie Baker Loring (1866-1951) was elected to the Boston Authors Club in May 1919. She was 53 years old at the time, but it was still early in her career as a prolific, best-selling novelist.



Loring's first two novels, *For the Comfort of the Family: A Vacation Experiment* (1914) and *The Mother in the Home* (1917), were published under the pen name Josephine Story. She adopted a pen name to maintain her privacy when she started writing book reviews and feature articles in the *Boston Herald* in 1911. Her reviews were cast as letters to a friend recommending books for different purposes: gifts for family members, making money at home, gardening, etc.

Both Loring's father, George Melville Baker, and her grandfather, Albert Baker, were in the book trade, so it is not unexpected that Loring would consider writing as a career possibility. Both men were publishers and bookstore owners. George Baker worked at Lee & Shepard where he was responsible for producing the first American edition of *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Saw*. While at Lee & Shepard, he added a new specialty to the firm's catalog: children's books.

From Emilie Loring's perspective, the prospect of publishing under her own name and becoming a full-time author at a time when turning fifty typically marked the onset of old age was daunting. Loring turned to her friend Agnes Edwards Pratt (who wrote under the pen name Agnes Rothery) for advice. Pratt

responded emphatically, “If you honestly want to write and think that you can, stop dreaming about it and go to work.” Her pragmatic recipe for success was simple, “Write two hours a day, and read two hours a day, and do it every single solitary day for three years, and then you will have made a start.” (Patti Bender, *Happy Landings: Emilie Loring’s Life, Writing, and Wisdom*, p. 210)

Perhaps it was following this advice, combined with her BAC membership, that inspired Loring to begin using her own name for future novels. Joining the BAC certainly coincided with an enduring burst of productivity. Starting in 1922, Loring wrote and published a novel every year, attracting a large and loyal readership. The thirty novels she authored in this period had sold over a million copies at the time of her death. Her re-issued novels are still in print (and selling briskly) today.

We know about how Loring’s BAC activities paralleled her successful literary career thanks to Patti Bender’s marvelous biography of Loring, *Happy Landings: Emilie Loring’s Life, Writing, and Wisdom* (City Point Press, 2023). Bender made extensive use of the Boston Authors Club archives at the BPL while doing research for the book. In fact, Chapter 20 in *Happy Landings* is titled simply “Boston Authors Club.” Here and in the following chapters, Bender documents the importance of the BAC to Loring as a source of friendship, fun, and literary identity. Her official roles in the Club included serving on the Prose Committee and chairing the Club-Room Committee. The BAC Club Room in that era was located at 8 Newbury Street and as the chair Loring was responsible for organizing regular social events and meetings. On at least one occasion, she hosted an elaborate tea party for over 100 BAC members at her house in Wellesley Hills.

Quoting from the March 1951 BAC newsletter, Bender notes that, “From [the time she joined] ...no Club meeting seemed important unless she (Loring) was sitting near the front of the room with her two intimate friends, Clara Endicott Sears and Sara Ware Bassett.” We’ll save the story of this trio for a possible future column.

Today’s booksellers characterize Emilie Loring’s novels as “classic, heart-warming romances” and Loring as “one of the most iconic romance authors of all time.” If this doesn’t conjure up memories from days of reading past, November’s celebration of novel-writing might be a good time to become more familiar with her work.

You can explore more details about Loring’s life and her many novels at Patti Bender’s *Emilie Loring Collection* website, which includes a blog, book excerpts, and links to Loring-related events: <https://pattibender.com/>

Emilie Baker Loring’s papers are housed in the special collections of Boston University.

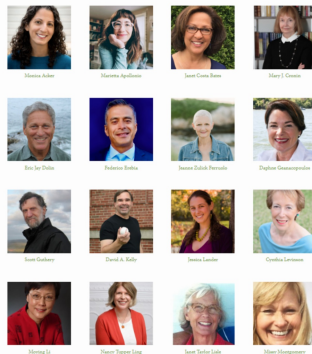
By Scott B Guthery



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