



# Apology

*Jon Pineda*

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When nine-year-old Tom Serafino's twin sister Teagan suffers a debilitating brain injury, a police investigation implicates his playmate Mario's uncle—an immigrant, transient worker known as Shoe. Innocent of the crime but burdened by his own childhood tragedy, Shoe takes the blame for what is in fact an accident caused by his young nephew, ensuring Mario's chance at a future publicly unscarred.

The lines between innocence and guilt, evasions and half-truths, love and duty are blurred. Can a lie born from resignation, fear, and love transform tragedy into hope? And is the life of one man worth the price of that lie?

Told in vivid scenes alive with imagery and with thematic echoes of John Burnham Schwartz's *Reservation Road* and *Northwest Corner*, *Apology* explores how the decisions we make in an instant reverberate in the years to come. *Apology* further paints a portrait of sacrifice within two immigrant families raising first-generation Americans. It explores the measure of duty we have toward one another, and the extent to which abandoning the wreckage of family and the past often leads to unexpected consequences.

Deeply empathetic and beautifully written, *Apology* marks the novelistic debut of a critically acclaimed Asian American writer.

## Apology Details

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Author : Jon Pineda

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## From Reader Review Apology for online ebook

Mia Searles (The Muses Circle) says

4.5 Star Rating

**\*GIVEAWAY ALERT\*** Enter to win 1 of 3 paperback copies of *APOLOGY* by Jon Pineda. US Giveaway only! Ends 8/31. [ENTER HERE](#)

**My Review:** It's hard to believe that Jon Pineda's novel, *APOLOGY*, barely hits the 200 page mark. Why? Because as I sat back and went through my notes to prepare this review, I was pretty much stunned at all of the themes and thought provoking, philosophical questions that I had written in the margins, not to mention the span of years that is covered within the story. I'm not even going to lie-- I tend to like my novels 300+ pages. Maybe it's because it gives me that false sense of getting my money's worth. Or maybe it is just hard to wrap my brain around the idea of an author being able to write a story with depth in under 200 pgs. Whatever the case may be, I admire an author who can shatter my illusions as to what makes a truly memorable novel.

Here is what I liked about *APOLOGY*. The structure of the novel is broken into 8 parts, each part containing short, concise paragraphs (sort of like snapshots) that alternates between present day and flashbacks. This format and writing style makes for a very quick read. But don't let that fool you into thinking the story is poorly written. Pineda has an almost poetic-like style to his writing and there are many times I found myself reading a line and stopping to appreciate it. One such part is when Shoe finds his nephew's ball by the little girl:

*"The ball lay hidden in the grass like some kind of giant egg. He picked it up, as if he were being watched, and slipped the ball under his flannel shirt. He hunched to hide this held object. Pressed to his side, it felt like a tumor that had moved on its own, out of his body and into a strange kind of freedom that was never meant to be. No, it was a stolen egg from long ago."*

I also enjoyed the third person narration and was pleasantly surprised at the many different perspectives we see the story told through. You may think at first that some of these characters are unimportant to the story, such as the woman who comes forward and confesses to seeing Shoe leave the construction site that fateful morning. Why do we need to see things through her eyes? Who cares? I will get to its importance shortly.

One of the most interesting aspects of *APOLOGY* is Pineda's ability to create such a dynamic character in such a short amount of time. At the heart of the story is a man known as Shoe. He lives temporarily with his brother Paul and at the beginning of *APOLOGY* he has just found a job working construction. His brother's wife looks at him with disdain, and he is ridiculed at work, not only because he is an immigrant, but because of an old injury that causes him to drag his foot/leg, hence his nickname "Shoe". He has always felt like an outsider, plagued with hardship after hardship and because of this, has lived in a constant state of anxiety, waiting for more bad things to happen. He is an interesting, complex character because it's almost as if he is one man split in 2. On the one hand he is this introverted, deformed man that everyone, including his brother's wife, believes is this creepy, unintelligent outsider. But as the story progresses, you learn that underneath that rough exterior is a man with a heart of gold, a man whose real name is Exequiel. This is a man who refused to raise his voice during heated arguments with the only woman he ever loved because he had enough insight to know those were the type of men she was used to being with and he refused to fit that mold. He raised another man's child as if he were his own. And maybe the most amazing, self-sacrificing thing he has done of all, is taking the blame for a tragic accident caused by his nephew, Mario, which results in years of prison time.

While there is no doubt Shoe has a good heart, there were times I had to stop and wonder who's really to blame for the way people view him. Society has a huge role to play, after all, we constantly stereotype, judge, and belittle immigrants. But could this possibly be Shoe's fault as well? I hate that I even had to come to that conclusion but I think that is one of the lessons Pineda tries to teach us. That no matter how many times society fails you, which in Shoe's case is all the time, you can't give up. Giving up means they win, they can get away with it. And that is not what you want to teach your children.

I know that many immigrants try to live under the radar and fear that any kind of spotlight could cause issues for them and their families. On that fateful morning, Shoe wakes up and arrives to work early, hoping to impress his boss and prove his ignorant co-workers wrong. But his moment of positivity is shattered when he sees the body of the little girl and his nephew's ball with his name on it lying next to her. Shoe is stricken with fear and hopelessness. He automatically assumes that no one would believe him if he came forward because he is so used to bad things happening to him. Shoe takes his nephew's ball with him and decides silence is better than taking the risk of being accused.

When Mario later confesses to him what happened, Shoe asks Mario why he didn't tell someone and he gave the same answer he told himself: he was afraid that no one would believe him. This troubles Shoe and he realizes the error of staying silent. What kind of example is he setting for his nephew? He could have been a hero which he later realizes when another man comes forward to take the credit for finding the little girl, but Shoe will never know because of his silence.

While immigration is one of the main ideas throughout the story, there are so many other thought-provoking themes this novel presents and here are just a few.

**: The concept of words coming back to haunt you.** Before the little girl, Teagan, is tragically injured, Tom, her twin brother, says in a moment of irritation that he wishes she would get out of his life. They are words that cause him to carry around guilt for a long time. And they are words that made me wince because I think everyone at least once in their life has said something to someone that they later regret.

**: Why bad things constantly happen to good people.** Shoe is a good man but the author gives us plenty of examples of the hardships thrown his way since he was a small boy.

**: The regrets of keeping silent VS. the consequences of coming forward and doing the right thing.**

Through Shoe and Mario's eyes we are shown the regret and guilt of keeping silent. But what I love about Pineda is that he never just gives us one way of looking at things. Earlier, I said that there was a woman that saw a man with a shovel and an odd gait that morning. Originally, the police thought the suspect was African American. The woman, who had just had a baby, battled with whether she should stay silent or come forward. She decided to come forward because **a)** she wanted to set a good example for her child and **b)** she didn't want the police to pin the incident on an African American man when she knew that the person who did it was not. You can't help but respect the woman for her bravery in coming forward because let's face it, sometimes doing the right thing is not always easy. But the consequence of her coming forward is Shoe being blamed.

**: How lives intertwine and how 1 action can set off a series of events.** I think the author sums it up nicely here in an abstract kind of way: *"...Tom touched a bright ring of color near one of the engines. It was just to see if it had dried all the way. His fingertip caught briefly in the track. He stared at the spot, his fresh red print. Lines ran parallel and others converged."*

The only issue I had with *APOLOGY* is how vague the author is with the nationality and ethnicity of his characters. I'm not sure if it was done on purpose or if Pineda assumed readers would be able to pick up on

the subtle hints he leaves here and there throughout the story.

**APOLOGY** is a powerful little novel that should not be overlooked. I can see this book being used in a Multi-cultural Literature or Sociology class. I can also see this story being further explored in a feature film. It somehow reminds me of the 2011 award winning movie **A Better Life**, starring Demian Bichir. And after viewing the book trailer, I think **APOLOGY** has a shot if the right people in Hollywood snatch it up.

Mia @ The Muses Circle

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### Mary says

This book had a very interesting premise. An accident causes Mario's uncle to take the blame for a debilitating brain injury he caused in his playmate. Should one life be valued above another?

The characters were very interesting and I enjoyed the varying viewpoints of the victims family and the accused. It made for interesting perspectives.

A very good debut story. As a reader, there were a few areas that I wanted to be fleshed out more and the ending could have used a bit more drama. But overall, a quick and interesting read.

Reader received a complimentary copy from Good Reads First Reads.

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### Shannon says

After an accident leaves nine year-old Teagan Serafino with a life-altering brain injury, both her family and the community demand answers. Though he is innocent, lifelong scapegoat Exequiel "Shoe" Guzman, takes blame for Teagan's injury in order to allow his young nephew Mario, who was present at the site, a chance at a better life.

I was in the middle of three other books when Apology came to me, so I needed to set it aside until I was finished with at least one. As the little book sat beside me for a few days, I grew more and more curious until I picked it up...just to read the first page. When I managed to stop myself, I was about halfway through the novel. It is completely engrossing.

"Above was the world that would not believe him. Above was the world that would not think it was possible that he of all people would have shown up to work early."

Jon Pineda develops his characters in snapshots; short, sometimes half-page thoughts or quick childhood flashbacks, while keeping the novel's main timeline in place. Spanning decades in 200 pages while fully realizing a plot is a difficult task, but it serves to show the full connections between Pineda's characters.

And the delicacies of those connections are where Apology shines. By telling the story of the Serafino family while also following Shoe and Mario, the novel allows readers to trace the impact of each decision without ever drawing one character as a villain. With a careful, poetic tone, Jon Pineda has written a story rich with humanity.

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## Clifford says

A lyrical tragedy about two families

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## Gina-Therese says

\*I received this book free through Goodreads Firstreads. ^^

To start off, I received this book on June 4th. I began reading it late at night after I had forgotten to grab the mail.

Once I started reading the book, I liked it. Especially the beginning. Good transitions, well-paced, nice introduction of the characters, and good suspense. The beginning perfectly set the ball in motion with the already expected accident of Tom Serafino's twin sister.

So far, the beginning was a check plus for me.

However, when it came to the story in the middle, I became confused. I didn't understand all the extra stories the author included in the book. Either in the past of one of the characters--like Exequiel--or just a side character that anyone might have met. For example, the little girl Tom's father met in the hospital who could only communicate with sign language. I kind of understood how she felt, but I had no idea how that little section about her contributed to the story.

Several times I encountered this problem. Stories were being told, but I couldn't make it fit together like a puzzle. I was so frustrated reading this book that I had to push myself to finish reading it. (That's why I took so long to write a review.) None of the story inbetween made sense. Things were only being said and there seemed to be no meaning to them at all.

At one point, I realized there were many characters the author was bringing in. Telling their story and describing them. Not a very good idea. The author elaborated too much on other people, making them seem significant somehow when, in the end, the two families from the beginning was what mattered most. (Don't hoard too many people into the story!)

I think all the side characters brought in during the story was meant to somehow contribute to the growth of the main characters, but I have no idea. There was little progress on the character development and even then, I didn't understand how they became what they became.

The only character that did seem to somewhat fit into the story was Rachel--the mother of Tom's son--at the end. If that were not her given role, I would deem her useless like the other characters. I don't even understand how she and Tom became a couple. Yes, it did mention their first encounter, but where's the development in their relationship? How did they get where they are? All I know is that Tom got her pregnant and BAM!--she was a part of the family.

Details that were supposed to be more developed were only briefly touched; compared to further in depth details that didn't seem to make a difference to the story.

There doesn't seem to be much emotional connection at all. No ties. Just like the other characters in the book. Just story; no meaning, no impact.

Another thing that bothered me was the transitioning in this book. The sudden changes in point of view from

one paragraph to another confused me. For example, when the book would describe how Tom's mother felt by just referring to her as "the mother." Then, in the next paragraph, it would continue on with her point of view by instead using her name "Elinor." I had no idea that was her first name. Not even in the beginning. The fact the author throws in these random details had me backtracking a whole lot.

One thing I wonder, is Jon Pineda Filipino? The first hint I actually got that he might be Filipino was when he mentioned the Philippine capitol language Tagalog. As I kept on reading, I found a few other phrases or words. At first I thought it was nice, because he had explained what they were. For example, when the author mentioned "aswang," or evil spirits, I got quite excited. Filipino people are pretty superstitious. And the fact the author actually mentioned aswang means to me that either, he grew up there, or someone told him the stories. I'm only part Filipino (from my mother's side), so I don't have much of a say. But I can state that my father, being Chinese but having grown up in the Philippines, told me several stories about aswang. Otherwise I'd be clueless.

I didn't have a problem with the words or phrases until I started encountering spots where the author did not explain what they meant. No explanation really drops the importance it has to the story; even if it's only minor. If I did not actually understand some Tagalog, I would have no idea what the characters were saying. I would suggest adding a sort of glossary at the end of this book; because, even as a reader, I don't feel obligated to go and look up the meaning of these terms. Also, the titles should be explained. Like how Lolo means grandfather, or Mano means brother. This is important and actually should be explained if it is to mean anything.

As for the ending, that's where I started to "feel something." A little...empathy. Mario's guilt of being responsible for Teagan and possibly being responsible for Tom's son as well. I liked that bit. It actually made the ending good. Other than that, I was left with so many gaping holes in my head. I feel all the meaning, emotion, and etc, that was supposed to be established, was lost.

I don't mean to be so harsh or critical in this review, but I feel how I feel about the book. I'm confused. I really can't put together what I just read. Everything was...vague. (I know my review's pretty vague too, but I don't want to write a novel... about a novel.) I don't think this book should be published just yet. I would consider re-writing, honestly.

However, I do think this book has a whole lot going for it. It just... hasn't reached that golden peak. A lot of potential is being missed, and I don't know if it's my fault for not seeing what people saw this book as, but I wouldn't recommend it.

I apologize ahead of time if I've offended anyone, and also for my terribly put review. I've probably repeated myself too many times, and my organization and transitions must be funky, but did this take a long time to type and a lot of pondering. So please take this review more as constructive criticism than one-sided opinions, thank you.

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## **Terra says**

Quick read, keeps you turning the pages faster than you can think about what might happen next!

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## Sam Sattler says

The man they called "Shoe" was in way over his head. Having been chosen from a group of immigrant day workers standing around a mall parking lot, he showed up at the construction site without the steel-toed boots he needed to protect himself. Now, he was so deep inside a slippery, muddy trench that he could barely make his way back to solid ground after the foreman grew frustrated with his work. Instead of helping him, the rest of the crew laughed at Shoe's efforts to get out of the hole he stood in. But Shoe was used to it. That was pretty much the story of his life.

Jon Pineda's Apology is the story of a simple man with a tragic childhood who is still hoping to make a better life for himself in the United States. For someone who started life the way Shoe did, that should not be all that difficult, but all these years later he is still struggling to find his place in his new country. He is grateful that his brother has taken him for the moment, but he knows he is in the way and that his sister-in-law will be happy to see him go. Shoe will miss his brother and his nephew Mario - even his sister-in-law - but he understands why she feels that way.

Things will change sooner than any of them expect.

Tom and Teagan, nine-year-old twins, are part of Mario's neighborhood crowd. After Teagan suffers a devastating brain injury that forever traps her inside her childhood, she is unable to tell investigators what happened. The few clues available to investigators, however, all point toward Shoe, and rather than admit to police that his young nephew was somehow involved in the incident, Shoe chooses silence – and a long prison term. Scarred by his own childhood, he wants to make sure that Mario gets off to a better start than he managed for himself.

Apology, because it uses a rapid-fire series of scenes and flashbacks to tell Shoe's story, has a cinematic feel that makes a vivid impression on the reader. This debut novel is filled with the kind of questions that do not have black or white answers. Readers will have to decide for themselves if Shoe's decision to sacrifice his own future on his nephew's behalf was the right one - or whether it was even necessary. Did it really change anything for Mario? Was it, perhaps, the only thing Shoe could have ever done to transform his own life into a success story? Was it worth it?

Bottom line: Jon Pineda packs a lot into what is a relatively short debut novel. Apology might be a tragedy, but it is likely leave the reader feeling a little better about the human condition.

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## Paulette says

A story about the implications of decisions, happenstance, and how they can affect the lives of many people.

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## Michael Estey says

Apology written by Jon Pineda

Let me start off by saying I love the structure of this novel. Short little spurts of information, in neat little paragraphs, in eight neat chapters. It makes for a quick read.

About a man nick-name Shoe, with bad foot. It's never addressed except he limps and drags his foot behind him when he walks. No one likes him. He lands a job on a construction site.

His real name is Exequiel.

He takes the blame for his nephew Mario, over an unfortunate accident and is sent to prison then gets out. This turns into a very complicated story, with moral issues from different viewpoints. But to my dismay, it lacked emotion. The only thing emotional was me. I respected Exequiel but hated him. Why I could not tell you. The same with Mario, I felt the emotion, and hated him also, for letting someone else take blame. No one tells us how they feel even though you do get a sense of doom and gloom throughout the whole book.

I found I was re reading many lines forgetting who was talking, or even who was being talked too.

I enjoyed the beginning, but soon lost interest, and struggled to the end.

I'd give it a three star rating \*\*\*

Michael Estey

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### **Sheila Read says**

I read this book I don't like it that it cusses a lot. I did like the story of the little boy and his life. He had went through a lot when he got hit with the baseball at the end of book. It was a good thing that the kid rescued the kid by picking him up when he got hit in the chest by the ball.

Every person has their own opinion on this book but I did enjoy it that's why I plan on sharing it with other people.

This is a book that I will donate to the cancer center.

Advanced uncorrected copy - Published date June 2013

Won from Goodreads First Read

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### **Dale says**

(The GoodReads synopsis says it better than I could...): "When nine-year-old Tom Serafino's twin sister Teagan suffers a debilitating brain injury, a police investigation implicates his playmate Mario's uncle—an immigrant, transient worker known as Shoe. Innocent of the crime but burdened by his own childhood tragedy, Shoe takes the blame for what is in fact an accident caused by his young nephew, ensuring Mario's chance at a future publicly unscarred...The lines between innocence and guilt, evasions and half-truths, love and duty are blurred." Possibly, because this was a Kindle read, it was a bit hard to follow...but follow I did because I couldn't believe how someone's lie could (1.) remain hidden, (2.) cause so much catastrophe to Shoe. While a times I struggled with who was doing what, there wasn't a chance of me putting it down. Am thinking if I had read the 'hand held' version, it would have been easier to follow. A Milkweed Editions Fiction Prize winner; 208 pgs. (I read the Kindle Edition while on the VIA Canada Rail vacation); read Jun. 2014/#43

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### **Andrea says**

Beautiful book of small actions with big consequences told in my adopted hometown of Norfolk, VA. Jon

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Pineda is a triple threat as a poet, essayist, and now novelist.

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## **Paul says**

Review at asianamlitfans.

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## **Michelle Despres says**

I received an advance reading copy of Apology as part of First Reads. I will not summarize the plot, as it has been summarized elsewhere.

I have always been attracted to stories that demonstrate the total upheaval of a life in a single minute, in a single gesture. I also enjoy reading stories that capture the wide and lasting impact a single decision can have.

The ideas captured in this book and described on the back cover are interesting and compelling. Do we owe each other the truth? Is it right to value the potential of one man over the freedom of another? How do we decide what a life is worth?

This is a complicated story with complex moral situations. I didn't feel that complexity echoed in the story, and the moral dilemmas weren't really explored to my satisfaction (others may be ok with that). We have to make a lot of assumptions. When Mario tells his parents his secret, how do they react? Do they struggle with their decision, or are they content to ignore the moral implications? We have to guess. In several situations, we are led to the struggle only to have it bypassed, and then we are presented with the conclusion. We know what Mario's parents did, but how did they get there?

I like the different viewpoints in the story. I like seeing the situation from the perspective of both the victim's family and the family of the accused. I like some of the back stories that attempt to give these characters dimension. I don't think those stories are always successful, and they sometimes seemed superfluous. At other times, I wanted to story to go on, and it was stopped abruptly. Even the ending felt abrupt and unsatisfactory. I don't think you have to abandon telling this story in snapshots; I would just pick better pictures.

In its current state, the book feels like a draft. I want the author to go a level deeper into the story to get at that complexity and cull some of the stories that aren't so relevant. I want the characters to become dimensional. The mission of Milkweed Editions is, in part, to publish "transformative literature." This story has that potential, but I witnessed little transformation and felt none of its power.

Transformation, while liberating, is often exhausting. Take me on that journey with these characters. Don't just tell me what happens. Imagine spending a majority of your life hating the wrong person. What happens when you learn the truth? Do you feel tricked? Angry? Do you eventually understand (hence, one of the transformations)? In your mind as a victim, does it matter who paid the price or does it matter simply that someone paid the price? How do you feel that you never had a say in the decision? Shoe's family got to decide what justice would look like, and you were the victim. Suppose you're on the other side. Can a positive transformation occur under the weight of so heavy a lie, so heavy a burden?

Additionally, the transitions are awkward at times, and I think the story would have been better served with

the sections being reorganized and with a better architecture. The text uses major and minor section breaks that need significant improvement in their application. They are useful guides to the reader and convey meaning themselves. When they fail, it's confusing. (I would have to go back to verify, but I swear in one part, the time of day was incorrect based on the section before. Even if it wasn't, it was still confusing to me as a reader.)

Also, pronouns were relied upon too often. When a section begins with a pronoun, one reasonably assumes the referent is in the previous section. Several sentences in, you find out that's not the case. Also, in one section we read about "Tom's father," but in the next it's "Manny." These minor inconsistencies could be easily cleaned up, and the story would read better.

I think some readers will be satisfied with the story in its current state. I encourage you to compare our shared ratings. We may be different kinds of readers.

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### **Nicholas Montemarano says**

Pineda explores the long half-life of regret in this quietly powerful debut novel. *APOLOGY*, told in minimalist vignettes that jump forward and back in time, is a heartbreaking story in which one moment, one critical decision, changes two families permanently.

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