

Garth Greenwell and Style: Intern Journal

By Cameron Ochse

Rollins College is lucky to have award-winning author Garth Greenwell visit the campus for its third week of the Winter With the Writers Literary Festival. While visiting Rollins, Greenwell will be teaching a short course on style and how to explore this concept. He will also be hosting a master class on February 15th at 2 pm and perform a reading from his award-winning book *What Belongs to You*, followed by a Q&A at 7:30 pm that same day.

Born in the city of Louisville, Kentucky, Greenwell faced discrimination for his sexuality throughout his early life. While his decision to teach English in Bulgaria did not place him in a more tolerant environment, Greenwell is unashamed of his sexuality, and reflects this in his work. Greenwell takes a deep look into gay life in his novel, *What Belongs to You*, and in an interview with *The Guardian*, he stated that he's not looking to create the squeaky-clean image of gay life that many cultural movements impose. Greenwell wishes to bring attention to the different possibilities of gay life and does this through his extensive discussion of a LGBTQ lifestyle that does not fit the perfect mold.

Greenwell's novel developed after he created the novella *Mitko*, which explores the narrative of the only named character in *What Belongs to You*. Throughout his novel, Greenwell's seamless prose and winding narrative take the reader on a journey of self-reflection and lust, following the unnamed American narrator throughout Bulgaria. Greenwell creates a strong setting, making you feel as if you're walking beside the narrator in Sofia, listening to his life-story with eagerness and attention, or cruising the public restrooms of the city, looking for another loveless hook-up. The ease at which the story flows from the narrator will make it impossible to set down the book as the delicate experiences that shaped his life are unveiled.

Personally, I was very excited to start Greenwell's novel. With all the recognition and praise it had received, I knew I would be reading something unique and fantastic. I was not disappointed; Greenwell's novel was bold in the face of hardship and laid out the issues of an LGBTQ lifestyle unflinchingly. While the narrator remains nameless throughout the novel, I could not help but feel I knew everything about him as he underwent his experiencing of Mitko. This novel is not afraid to stray from the prettied-up portrayal of an LGBTQ life, creating a completely new story in the process.

What Belongs to You has won the British Book Award for Debut of the Year, was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and was longlisted for the National Book Award. The *New Republic* described Greenwell's novel as, "the great gay novel for our times", and we at Winter With the Writers could not agree more. Take advantage of Greenwell's visit to Rollins by attending his master class and reading on February 15th, and learn more about the intricate process of exploring your style.