

## Elliot Ackerman - Former Soldier, Current Novelist

Katie Pearce

The final round of authors for our festival has arrived and one man stands out for his distinctive awards: the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with Valor, and the Purple Heart. Elliot Ackerman is a former Marine and White House Fellow who served five tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ackerman's writings have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, and *The Atlantic*, in addition to other publications. His stories have also appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*. Ackerman's career as a novelist has been just as decorated as his time of service. *Green on Blue* was his critically acclaimed debut novel and now his second novel, *Dark at the Crossing*, is a National Book Award Finalist and has been called "One of the Best Books Of The Year" by *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Military Times*, *Vogue*, and *Bloomberg*.

*Dark at the Crossing* provides a tale of war and honor in which a man, who gained US citizenship by translating for the Americans during the Iraq War, turns to the Syrian-Turkey border in hopes of supporting the rebel army but instead finds his parallel in a married woman seeking out the fate of her daughter. Their tale is one of the failed Syrian Civil War and the unexpectedness of life, the parts that can't be planned, and the lives that go unfulfilled. The striking point of *Dark at the Crossing* is its voice and plot, the frustrating tale of diverted plans and walled in expectations that are all too familiar in life and all too heartbreaking in war.

My first reading of Ackerman's novel left me with an abiding sense of worldly disillusionment and disappointment. It is a masterpiece that picks at the scabs of a world living in constant war, where actions are left continually unfinished, and it is all blown away in the dust of uncertainty, obscured by questions that won't be answered. The novel, with its blunt prose and lines such as, "He took a few steps from the Tugcan's marble front and wandered onto the frozen sidewalk, where he stood like a broken piece of furniture set out in the street," stuck in my head. The simile is striking for its perfect representation of a human who has lost purpose and function and has been laid aside by all of mankind. This horrifying and stunning novel is the only one of this season's books that left me with tears in my eyes. The multiple facets of war, futility and idealism, are put on stark display through the talent of an author who has lived through it.

Elliot Ackerman will be teaching one of the final Master Classes of the 2018 season this Thursday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 4pm in Suntrust Auditorium. During this session, he will critique the participating intern's short fiction submissions, helping them develop as writers, while providing informative writing advice to the audience. Later that evening, he will perform a Joint Reading with Lisa Ko at 7:30pm in Bush Auditorium, after which there will be a Q&A session and a signing. We are honored to be hosting a writer, and person, of his caliber and look forward to your attendance at this Winter With the Writers 2018 finale.