



What Belongs to You: A Novel

By Garth Greenwell

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Longlisted for the National Book Award in Fiction • A Finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction • A Finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction • A Finalist for the James Taite Black Prize for Fiction • A Finalist the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize • A Finalist for the Green Carnation Prize • A *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice • A *Los Angeles Times* Bestseller

Named One of the Best Books of the Year by More Than Fifty Publications, Including: *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The New York Times* (selected by Dwight Garner), *GQ*, *The Washington Post*, *Esquire*, NPR, *Slate*, *Vulture*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Guardian* (London), *The Telegraph* (London), *The Evening Standard* (London), *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Millions*, *BuzzFeed*, *The New Republic* (Best Debuts of the Year), *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Publishers Weekly* (One of the Ten Best Books of the Year)

"Garth Greenwell's *What Belongs to You* appeared in early 2016, and is a short first novel by a young writer; still, it was not easily surpassed by anything that appeared later in the year....It is not just first novelists who will be envious of Greenwell's achievement."?James Wood, *The New Yorker*

On an unseasonably warm autumn day, an American teacher enters a public bathroom beneath Sofia's National Palace of Culture. There he meets Mitko, a charismatic young hustler, and pays him for sex. He returns to Mitko again and again over the next few months, drawn by hunger and loneliness and risk, and finds himself ensnared in a relationship in which lust leads to mutual predation, and tenderness can transform into violence. As he struggles to reconcile his longing with the anguish it creates, he's forced to grapple with his own fraught history, the world of his southern childhood where to be queer was to be a pariah. There are unnerving similarities between his past and the foreign country he finds himself in, a country whose geography and griefs he discovers as he learns more of Mitko's own narrative, his private history of illness, exploitation, and want.

What Belongs to You is a stunning debut novel of desire and its consequences. With lyric intensity and startling eroticism, Garth Greenwell has created an

indelible story about the ways in which our pasts and cultures, our scars and shames can shape who we are and determine how we love.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A rich, important debut, an instant classic to be savored by all lovers of serious fiction because of, not despite, its subject: a gay man's endeavor to fathom his own heart."?Aaron Hamburger, *The New York Times Book Review*

"In an age of the sentence fetish, Greenwell thinks and writes, as Woolf or Sebald do, in larger units of comprehension....Brilliantly self-aware...Greenwell's novel impresses for many reasons, not least of which is how perfectly it fulfills its intentions. But it gains a different power from its uneasy atmosphere of psychic instability, of confession and penitence, of difficult forces acknowledged but barely mastered and beyond the conscious control of even this gifted novelist."?James Wood, *The New Yorker*

"The best first novel I've read in a generation."?Andrew Solomon, *The Guardian* (Best Books of the Year)

"*What Belongs to You* whispers like an incantation of desire....In Greenwell's poetic sentences, emotional fearlessness is mated with extraordinary sensitivity to the tremors of regret."?Ron Charles, *The Washington Post*

"*What Belongs to You* is the most stirring, understated book I read this year. Greenwell's voice is measured, built on careful observations and quiet gestures. He kinda writes like Virginia Woolf, actually."?GQ (Best Books of the Year)

"Exquisite...Breathtaking...It's hard to tell at times whether the narrator is the innocent abroad or an American abroad among innocents. Greenwell's insight is that the destruction of innocence is a process that never halts."?Christian Lorentzen, *New York* magazine

"In Garth Greenwell's incandescent first novel, *What Belongs to You*, an old tale is made new and made punishing....There's suppleness and mastery in his voice. He seems to have an inborn ability to cast a spell....A subtle observer of human interactions. He underscores the way expressions of love are nearly always, in part, performance."?Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*

"A tale of sexual obsession set to be a classic...An astonishing debut novel...*What Belongs to You* stands naturally alongside the great works of compromised sexual obsession such as Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* [and] Nabokov's *Lolita*....*What Belongs to You* is an essential work of our time."?Daily Telegraph (London)

"Full of insight and an arresting resistance to moral certainty...[Greenwell] imbues his prose with a bewitching combination of ethereal somnolence, luminosity, and brutal rumination....This command of form can also be felt in the larger structures of the novel: in the rhythm and tone of its paragraphs, and in the cumulative music of the book as a whole."?Matthew Adams, *The Times Literary Supplement*

"[*What Belongs to You*] is outstanding in just about every way a novel could be."?Drew Nellins Smith, *Los Angeles Times*

"Elegant...[Greenwell] describes with sensuous and often unflattering precision the union of shame and desire....beautifully wrought."?Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Exquisite...Stylistically, Greenwell owes more to Sebald than to Nabokov....One of the great pleasures of his prose is how profoundly thoughtful it is, even when considering physical needs and passions. This is emotion recollected in tranquillity, or rather in melancholy. There is an almost visceral disjuncture between places and actions that are grubby, even squalid, and the delicacy of the lens through which they're seen. Yet the effect, paradoxically, is one of almost pure emotion."?Damon Galgut, *The Nation*

"I had thought of Hollinghurst as I read *What Belongs to You*, Greenwell's astonishingly assured debut novel...[The] similarity lies in their ability to blend a lyrical prose?the prose of longing, missed connections, grasped pleasures?with an almost uncanny depth of observation....[The] middle section [is] a masterful study in alienation and escape...It is perhaps too soon to say precisely what Greenwell's own fictional territory will look like?but even this early on, the landscape looks too riveting to miss."?Alex Clark, *The Guardian*

"Daringly and convincingly composed, it's a book about desire's complexity, the painful intensity of youth and a commitment to careful seeing as a path to artistic revelation."?Minnesota Star Tribune

"This masterfully told story seems certain to find a permanent place on the shelf of modern American classics."?Jayne Moore Waldrop, *The Courier-Journal*

"With his debut novel, *What Belongs to You*, Garth Greenwell works in traditions forged by queer novelists both past and present....A major achievement."?Steven Cordoba, *Lambda Literary Review*

"The strength of this slim book is the vibrant, heartbreaking character Mr. Greenwell creates in Mitko: object of the unnamed narrator's desire, fear, obsession and, ultimately, pity....Mr. Greenwell offers a tender portrait of the longing for connection and acceptance that inhabits us all."?The Economist

"Garth Greenwell's *What Belongs to You* is the Great Gay Novel for our times....an astonishing debut."?Jeffrey Zuckerman, *The New Republic*

"Feelings of shame, humiliation, and embarrassment have rarely been as vividly described as they are in Garth Greenwell's debut....subversively exciting...it says things that need to be said."?Dan Callahan, *Brooklyn Magazine*

"If you care about gay culture and/or good writing, you need to read Garth Greenwell's debut, *What Belongs to You*."?Rich Juzwiak, *Gawker*

"Graceful and fearless...a haunting work."?Vanity Fair

"The various settings and transactions involved are described with a detached, carefully styled literary brutalism that feels very of the moment; however, the emotional geography of the story could have come straight from Proust....By the end of this short, intense novel it becomes clear that the collision between our hard-won new capacity for frankness and a deep-rooted sense of archaic guilt and grief is precisely Greenwell's subject."?Neil Bartlett, *The Guardian*

"A novel that can be called truly *great*....Plumbing the depths of sexuality and psychology, *What Belongs to You* is lingering and haunting."?Meredith Turits, *ELLE.com*

"An uncommonly sensitive, intelligent and poignant novel."?The Sunday Times

"Garth Greenwell's first novel is gilded with the kind of praise that debut writers might never dare to imagine for themselves....The praise is earned....Every utterance seems imbued with thought that is deep and beautiful in its clarity."?Arifa Akbar, *Independent* (London)

"Lushly written...Mitko is a singular creation: proud, violent, tender, pitiable and, in the end, unforgettable."?Tom Beer, *Newsday*

"We are given access to an interior radiance that's blazing and singular, and has much to say about language, about class, about heritage, about desire, about deceit.... You know a book has its grip on you if the world within it is so rich, so exquisitely tense, that you resent the real one for keeping you from it."?Christopher Frizzelle, *The Stranger*

"Equal parts sexy and painful (and more often than not blurring the lines between the two), the book dives deep into matters of cultural differences, shame, illness, and human relationships."?Anna Fitzpatrick, *NYLON*

"There is so much to praise in *What Belongs to You*.... Let us not view this as merely a great gay novel, though it is one. Let us include *What Belongs to You* among great novels period, novels of consciousness as diverse as *Austerlitz* and *As I Lay Dying*. That is where it belongs."?Micah Stack, *Fiction Advocate*

"Right from its heady, lusty outset, Garth Greenwell's ravishing debut novel, *What Belongs to You*, whirls into a storm both erotically and psychologically charged.... *What Belongs to You* is as deliciously unpredictable as the object of the narrator's affection. At once tense, introspective, vexing and erotic, it easily entwines itself with a willing reader, and lingers."?Dave Wheeler, *Shelf Awareness*

"At just about two hundred pages, *What Belongs to You* feels at once expansive and instantaneous, and its lyrical use of time is one of its most striking and immersive elements. In any given section, every moment of the book is present.... the novel recalls works like Rachel Cusk's *Outline*, Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels, and Teju Cole's *Open City*; and, of course, it descends stylistically from Sebald.... *What Belongs to You* is a haunting, gorgeous, and fierce debut, capturing desire in every sentence?holding the space of what we long for and what can never truly be ours."?Alex Madison, *The Rumpus*

"A meticulous stylist...Greenwell's lines tease and tear at the soul."?The Millions, (Most Anticipated preview)

"This is a luminous, important, wonderful book that came out in 2016! 2016 has been bad enough, people. Don't forget that it gave us this book."?Emily Temple, *LitHub*

"I was beginning to think the literary world had given up on sincerity. Too often these days, love, desire, lust, and obsession are treated with eye-rolls of cynicism or comedy. The fallen stock in genuine emotion makes Garth Greenwell's debut novel, *What Belongs to You*, that much more of a triumph.... Greenwell's gorgeous, roaming prose untangles questions of transaction, identity, cruelty, and just how much of knowing a stranger is willful invention. Along the way, certain observations...strike so deep, they bleed."?Christopher Bollen, *Interview*

"[*What Belongs to You* is] the first great novel of 2016.... The book is brilliantly structured.... Greenwell's ability to parse the complex emotional push-and-pull between the two men is incredible.... His images are spot-on.... And in Mitko, Greenwell has created one of the best characters in recent years.... Greenwell is a great writer. I'll be reading whatever he writes next."?Gabe Habash, *Publishers Weekly* (Staff Pick)

"I don't usually like to say these things, but Garth Greenwell is a remarkable new talent."?Amie Barrodale, *VICE*

"Sexually frank, deeply felt, and admirably constructed... This provocative tale rests on the theme?to which we can all respond?of the human need for possession."?Brad Hooper, *Booklist*

“There is a sense in which two people with their clothes off in a room bring everything in their lives in with them, but I’ve never before found a writer who is able to convey it as well as Greenwell can, in elegant, formal sentences. He is the new voice I’m most excited about for 2016, the writer whose style feels the most like he’s made up a new way of speaking....The precision of its psychology is almost like nothing I’ve ever read.”?Valerie Stivers, *An Anthology of Clouds*

“Garth Greenwell takes us deep inside a specific Bulgarian subculture to examine the universal: the disparity between the uninhibited lives we desire and the bearable lives we choose. I began reading *What Belongs to You* in admiration; I ended in tears. An exquisite debut.”?Jamie Quatro, author of *I Want to Show You More*

“With *What Belongs to You*, American literature is richer by one masterpiece.” ?Edmund White, author of *Jack Holmes and His Friend*

“*What Belongs to You* is a rich and sensually detailed exploration of love and obsession. A haunting, beautiful novel.”?Rabih Alameddine, author of *An Unnecessary Woman*

“Garth Greenwell is a unique, and uniquely welcome, voice in American letters....*What Belongs to You* very much seems to me not only a great novel but the first installment in a great body of work.”?Kevin Brockmeier, author of *The Illumination*

“I am in awe of this book. So intimate, so honest, so exquisitely crafted, it broke my heart and left me in tears. It showed me a Bulgaria both familiar and entirely novel, rendered with candor and deep affection, and characters whose plight and desires seemed at first foreign yet, before long, so dear. Garth Greenwell has written a marvelous book, an important book?one whose impact is as much artistic as it is cultural. *What Belongs to You* expands not simply the world of letters but also our collective knowledge of what it means to be human.” ?Miroslav Penkov

About the Author

GARTH GREENWELL is the author of *Mitko*, which won the 2010 Miami University Press Novella Prize and was a finalist for the Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction Award and a Lambda Award. A native of Louisville, Kentucky, he holds graduate degrees from Harvard University and the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, where he was an Arts Fellow. His short fiction has appeared in *The Paris Review* and *A Public Space*. *What Belongs to You* is his first novel.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kenneth Wallace:

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