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Podcast Interview by Martha Nichols

A Novel Confronts the Wilderness of Identity

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Episode Notes: When I spoke with author David Santos Donaldson this past February, it happened to be Valentine's Day. We connected over Zoom in the Northeast—he in Brooklyn, I huddled in my Cambridge, Mass., home office recovering from COVID-19—far from the hyper-real wilderness of Greenland in his eponymous novel.



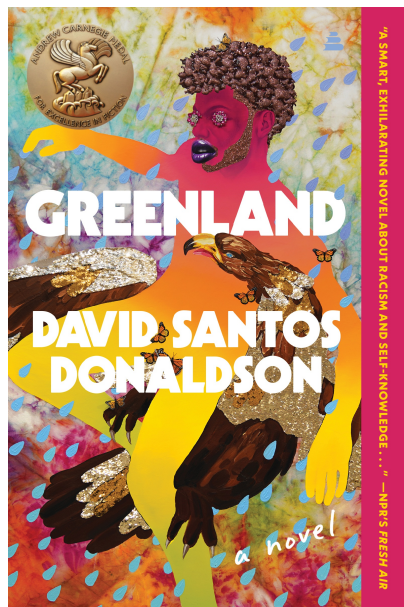
And yet, our wide-ranging discussion of identity, colonialism, and literary ancestors took us into the inner landscape of a transformative work of fiction. As David noted in the opening of our conversation, *Greenland's* story is hard to pin down in a sentence or two, in part because it ends up in such an unexpected place.

David Santos Donaldson grew up in Nassau, Bahamas, but has also lived in India, Spain, and the United States. He's

a playwright—his plays have been commissioned by the Public Theater in New York City—as well as a psychotherapist.

Greenland, his first novel, was published in 2022 by HarperCollins, shortlisted for the 2023 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, and a finalist for Publishing Triangle's 2023 Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction. Among many critical raves, Howard Rosenman, executive producer of *The Celluloid Closet*, puts it this way:

Greenland is a tour de force that delves deep into the complexities of romantic relationships and racial and sexual identity. Donaldson deftly combines classic literary references with modern magical realist elements. I was rooting for the hero all the way.



I rooted for protagonist Kip Starling, too. Kip's raging, ecstatic first-person voice animates much of *Greenland*, channeling Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and other African American authors. But the literary layers weave in White queer writers as well—in particular, E. M. Forster, whose closeted affair in Alexandria with the young Egyptian Mohammed el-Adl raises many a ghost. Cover artist Devan Shimoyama's captivating painting also evokes the inventive spirit of this novel.

The paperback edition of *Greenland* comes out in May 2023.

—Martha Nichols

Episode Information

- [Greenland](#) [9] by David Santos Donaldson (Amistad/HarperCollins, 2022).
- [David Santos Donaldson's website](#). [10]
- On E. M. Forster and Mohammed el-Adl: [A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E. M. Forster](#) [11] by Wendy Moffat (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).
- On “internalizing the oppressor”: [Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon](#). [12](Grove Press, 1967; originally published in French by Éditions du Seuil, 1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004; originally published in French by François Maspero [Ed.], 1961).
- Play: [Fairview by Jackie Sibblies Drury](#) [13] (winner of 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Drama).
- [Ruella Frank](#) [14] (therapist and founder of the Center for Somatic Studies).

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Cover art: "[Abduction of Ganymede](#) [15]" by Devan Shimoyama.

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- [8] <https://rss.com/podcasts/talkingwriting/949009/?listen-on=true>
- [9] <https://www.harpercollins.com/products/greenland-david-santos-donaldson?variant=40724352073762>
- [10] <https://davidsantosdonaldson.com/>
- [11] <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780312572891/agreatunrecordedhistory>
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