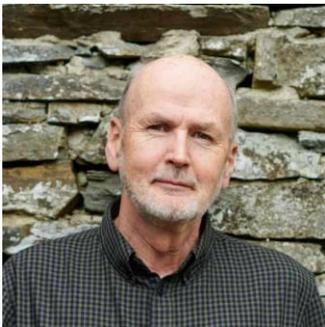


## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Born in Dublin in 1958, Niall Williams studied English and French Literature at University College, Dublin. He moved to New York in 1980 where he married Christine Breen, whom he had met while she was also a student at UCD. His first job in New York was opening boxes of books in Fox & Sutherland's Bookshop in Mount Kisco. In 1985, he and Chris left America to attempt to make lives as writers in Ireland. On April 1st they moved to the cottage in west Clare that Chris's grandfather had left eighty years before. They have two adult children, a dog named Finn and a cat called Thanks.

Niall's first novel was *Four Letters of Love*. Published in 1997, it went on to become an international bestseller and has since been published in over twenty countries. It was re-issued in 2016 as a Picador Modern Classic. Niall's newest novel is *This Is Happiness*. It was nominated for The Irish Books Award, The Walter Scott Prize, and was one of the Washington Post's Books of the Year.

Niallwilliams.com

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The title of the book is *This is Happiness*. Why do you think the author choose that title, and in the context of the story what does the title mean?
2. Since 2014, Williams has begun writing novels set in a fictional village in the west of Ireland called Faha. How well does the author create a sense of place? How important is the setting to this story? Give an example.
3. The weather seems to hold a symbolic place in the story. What does it symbolize and how did that add to the story?
4. What did you think of Noe's views on love as a young man? Do you think that this view is colored by the fact that this book is told from his point-of-view as an older man who has lived nearly eight decades and has made many mistakes during his lifetime?
5. "I may be wrong here, but in my thinking hardships had been part of history for so long it had become a condition of life. There was no expectation things could be otherwise. You got on with it, and through faith, family, and character accommodated as best you could whatever suffering and misfortune was yours." (84) Discuss this quote. Do you agree or disagree?

6. *This is Happiness* is a work of fiction that is written like a memoir. Discuss the author's choice to write in this style.
7. What does the loss of faith mean? How is faith addressed in the book and what role did it play?
8. The character of Christy is someone who, "carried with him the prodigious mythology of himself" (82). What is the role that Christy plays in the story, and what does his character bring to the narrative?
9. What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
10. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

Now an old man, Noel Crowe reflects on the spring when the eternal, infernal rains stopped pouring on the tiny hamlet of Faha and when the sun beat down with an undiscerning assurance. Along with the weather's good tidings came the Irish government's long-awaited promise of electrical service to this lone outpost. Christy is the man utility has charged with ushering the Fahaeans into the ways of the twentieth century. Noel was 17 then, mourning the death of his mother and living with his grandparents while pondering his fate of joining the priesthood. When Christy becomes their lodger, his presence not only heralds the vast changes that are in store for the villagers, he also provides a tutorial for Noel in the ways of the heart. It turns out that Christy is in Faha to do more than sign up new customers: he's there to atone to Annie Mooney, the woman he left at the altar some 50 years before. With a beckoning gentleness that belies the deeper philosophies at play, superb Irish author Williams (*History of the Rain*, 2014) offers a lilting, magical homage to time and redemption, and a stirring, sentimental journey into the mysteries of love and the possibilities of friendship. -- Carol Haggas (Reviewed 10/1/2019) (Booklist, vol 116, number 3, p26)

### Publisher's Weekly

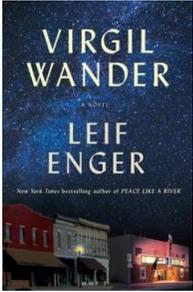
In glorious and lyrical prose, Williams (*History of the Rain*) spins the tale of one 1958 season in the village of Faha, County Kerry, where young "Noe" Crowe, only 17 and already departed from the seminary, has washed up with his grandparents. The story opens on the Wednesday of Holy Week with the cessation of an almost constant rain, relieving the villagers of their life "under a fall of watery pitchforks." To add to this wonder, the electricity is finally coming to Faha and with it a lodger at Ganga and Doady Crowe's house. Christy McMahon is a man of broad experience who seems "as if it was he who told the world the joke of himself" and a perfect companion to Noe. During that late spring and early summer, Noe assists Christy in signing up the locals for electric service, and they spend their evenings on a quest for music at countryside pubs. Most important for Christy is his attempt to gain forgiveness from Annie Mooney, now Annie Gaffney, widow of the village chemist, a woman that Christy left at the altar decades before. Meanwhile, love springs on Noe unawares as he comes under the thrall, in succession, of each of the lovely Troy sisters, daughters of Faha's doctor, whose attention Noe needs after an accident. Noe's reminiscences of that period are full of beauty and hard-won wisdom. This novel is a delight. (Dec.) --Staff (Reviewed 09/23/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 38)

## Kirkus Reviews

The heart-expanding extremes of life—first love and last rites—are experienced by an unsettled young Dubliner spending one exceptional spring in a small Irish village. Christy McMahon "walked this line between the comic and the poignant," and so does Williams (*History of the Rain*, 2014, etc.) in his latest novel, another long, affectionate, meandering story, this one devoted to the small rural community of Faha, which is about to change forever with the coming of electricity to the parish. Delighting in the eccentricities of speech, behavior, and attitude of the local characters, Williams spins a tale of life lessons and loves new and old, as observed from the perspective of Noel Crowe, 17 when the book's events take place, some six decades older as he narrates them. Noel's home is in Dublin, where he was training to become a Catholic priest, but he's lost his faith and retreated to the home of his grandparents Doady and Ganga in Faha. Easter is coming, and the weather—normally infinite varieties of rain—turns sunny as electrical workers cover the countryside, erecting poles and connecting wires. Christy, a member of the electrical workforce, comes to lodge alongside Noel in Doady and Ganga's garret but has another motive: He's here to find and seek forgiveness from the woman he abandoned at the altar 50 years earlier. While tracing this quest, Williams sets Noel on his own love trajectory as he falls first for one, then all of the daughters of the local doctor. These interactions are framed against a portrait of village life—the church, the Gaelic football, the music, the alcohol—and its personalities. Warm and whimsical, sometimes sorrowful, but always expressed in curlicues of Irish lyricism, this charming book makes varied use of its electrical metaphor, not least to express the flickering pulse of humanity. A story both little and large and one that pulls out all the Irish stops. (Kirkus Reviews, October 1, 2019)

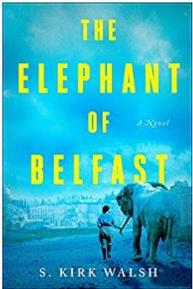
## READALIKES

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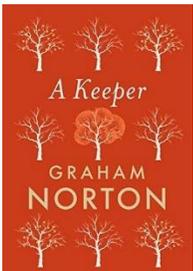
### ***Virgil Wander* by Leif Enger**

Emerging from an accident with damaged memories and compromised language skills, a movie-house owner from a small Midwestern town pieces together his story against a backdrop of community history, which is shaped by a prodigal son's return.



### ***The Elephant of Belfast* by S. Kirk Walsh**

In a story inspired by true events, a young woman zookeeper is compelled to protect an elephant during the German blitz of Belfast during World War II.



### ***A Keeper* by Graham Norton**

When Elizabeth Keane returns to Ireland after her mother's death, she's focused only on saying goodbye to that dark and dismal part of her life. Her childhood home is packed solid with useless junk, her mother's presence already fading. But within this mess, she discovers a small stash of letters—and ultimately, the truth.