

Time of the Child

by Niall Williams



About the Book

From the author of THIS IS HAPPINESS comes a compassionate, life-affirming novel about the Christmas season that transforms the small Irish town of Faha.

Doctor Jack Troy was born and raised in Faha, but his responsibilities for the sick and his care for the dying mean that he has always been set apart from the town. His eldest daughter, Ronnie, has grown up in her father's shadow and remains there, having missed one chance at love --- and passed up another offer of marriage from an unsuitable man.

But in the Advent season of 1962, as the town readies itself for Christmas, Ronnie and Doctor Troy's lives are turned upside down when a baby is left in their care. As the winter passes, father and daughter's lives, the understanding of their family and their role in their community are changed forever.

Set over the course of one December in the same village as Williams' beloved THIS IS HAPPINESS, TIME OF THE CHILD is a tender return to Faha for readers who know its charms, and a heartwarming welcome to new readers entering for the very first time.

Discussion Guide

Please note: Some of these questions contain spoilers.

1. Why did the doctor wait to attend to the priest at the beginning of the story when Father Tom was struggling to remember whose birthday the church was celebrating that December? Do you think it was the right thing to do --- to wait? Do you understand his hesitancy?
2. Why was the doctor unable to tell Annie Mooney about his feelings for her? What was it that stopped him from telling

her how he felt while she was alive? Do you think she returned his feelings? Does it matter if she did or didn't?

3. Many characters suffer from illness throughout the novel, from alcoholism to dementia to cancer. How do the different family members deal with their loved ones' pain?

4. What does this passage mean to you?: "Although invisible to Church and State, it was women who knitted the country together, and in Faha, on Sunday morning after Mass, you could see the needles." Do you think this has changed since 1962, when the novel took place?

5. The night the child arrives, there is a significant change in the relationship between Doctor Troy and Ronnie. How did the child change the connection between Ronnie and her father?

6. Why do you think Ronnie felt she had done something wrong that first night when the child didn't immediately take her bottle? Why did she feel that there was some "primal failure and inadequacy in her"? Have you ever felt this way when caring for someone?

7. Then Doctor Troy thinks, "It had to be his fault that she always found fault in herself.... Her first instinct was always failure." Do you agree with Doctor Troy that it's his fault? What makes people, particularly women, default to failure in this way?

8. Williams writes: "It was a man dancing in a kitchen with a baby, a step, and another, an over and back that repeated and made a pattern that declared its otherness from the ordinary by the fact that human beings move towards purpose." Can dancing have a purpose of its own? How did the passage with Doctor Troy dancing with the baby make you feel?

9. What do you think it meant when Aine Crowe (Doody) did not let go of Doctor Troy's hand after he told her of his plan? Do you think she understood the doctor's plan?

10. How do you think the doctor's profession informed his personality, and similarly, how did his personality inform his profession? Do you think that Doctor Troy was a good doctor?

11. The familial relationships between characters are central to this novel. How would you describe Ronnie's relationship with her father?

12. In the final chapter, as Noelle is being passed from parishioner to parishioner, the whole congregation comes together to help quiet her cries. Why does this moment become famous in the town? What does this scene represent for you?

Author Bio

Niall Williams was born in Dublin. He is the author of such novels as HISTORY OF THE RAIN, which was longlisted for the Booker Prize, and FOUR LETTERS OF LOVE, which will soon be a major motion picture starring Pierce Brosnan, Helena Bonham Carter and Gabriel Byrne. His most recent novel, THIS IS HAPPINESS, was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards Book of the Year and longlisted for The Walter Scott Prize. He lives in Kiltumper in County Clare, Ireland.

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