



The Next Chapter

How the nature of family inspired Scotiabank Giller Prize finalist Ian Williams' debut novel



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Ian Williams is the author of *Reproduction*. (Sinisa Jolic/CBC)

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Ian Williams is a poet, fiction writer and academic originally from Brampton, Ont. [Reproduction](#) is first novel, and it's on the shortlist for [the 2019 Scotiabank Giller Prize](#). The winner will be revealed on Nov. 18, 2019.

- [How to tune into the 2019 Scotiabank Giller Prize](#)

[Reproduction](#) is a love story revolving around race, class and identity, follows the connected lives of Felicia, a teen from an island nation, and Edgar, the lazy heir of a wealthy German family.

Williams is also the author of the Griffin Poetry Prize-nominated collection [Personals](#) and the short story collection *Not Anyone's Anything*.

Williams spoke with Shelagh Rogers about writing [Reproduction](#).

Family matters

"The idea of identity has always interested me. Family sometimes recedes to the background, sometimes it comes to the foreground. Sometimes our own personal identities take precedence over the matrix that we're formed from. In this case, families came to the forefront because it was at that nexus of leaving the family that you were born into and forming another family.

“At that intersection — between the families that we came from and the families that we form — this novel was born.”

- Ian Williams

"At that intersection — between the families that we came from and the families that we form — this novel was born. We feel it, where we're moving away from our parents. We're moving toward some other stranger with whom we can see forming a whole other life together. That's a really, really energized intersection."

- [Ian Williams explores race, class and identity in his debut novel, *Reproduction*](#)

From poetry to fiction

"The book before this was called [Personals](#). It's a poetry collection about finding connections and reaching out across digital platforms to find the person that we're meant to be with. I wrote it in my early 30s. It was a book of big desire and longing for another human.

"I started writing [Reproduction](#) when I was in my mid-30s and it represented the natural evolution of my concerns. We all follow a biological imperative or a life that runs parallel to our lives whether we're living it or not.

"The next progression of my concerns beyond [Personals](#) was actually reproduction and children. I think men think a lot about this. We don't often have the space to talk about it freely and without judgment. I followed that line that I think a lot of men my age were feeling in their 30s."

- [Why poetry matters to Ian Williams](#)

Connected by fate

"Felicia and Edgar are very different people. They come together by circumstance. With millions of people in Toronto or Vancouver, we still struggle to find the one. We're constantly brushing up against these lives that are full of history. It's about the moment when we dissolve that barrier or boundary of what a stranger is.

“We're constantly brushing up against these lives that are full of history.”

- Ian Williams

"That's what Felicia and Edgar do that night in the hospital room as their mothers are dying. They go from just being strangers to being confidants and being the only people in the universe experiencing this. There's a real intimacy that comes out of trauma."

Ian Williams's comments have been edited for length and clarity.

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