About the Author

• Birth—1976
• Where—Thunder Bay, Ontario
• Education—University of British Columbia
• Currently—Victoria, British Columbia

MICHAEL CHRISTIE is the author of the novel If I Fall, If I Die, which was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, the Kirkus Prize, was selected as a New York Times Editors’ Choice Pick, and was on numerous best-of 2015 lists. His linked collection of stories, The Beggar’s Garden, was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, shortlisted for the Writers’ Trust Prize for Fiction, and won the Vancouver Book Award. His essays and book reviews have appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Globe & Mail.

Greenwood, his most recent novel, was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Rights have been sold in seven countries.
A former carpenter and homeless shelter worker, he lives with his two children in Victoria, British Columbia, the unceded territory of the Lkwungen speaking people, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEC First Nations.

(From http://www.michaelchristie.net/)

About the Book

In 2038, scientist Jake Greenwood is working as an overqualified tour guide to ultra-rich eco-tourists in one of the world’s last remaining forests. As the rest of humanity chokes on the dust storms that follow the environmental collapse known as the Great Withering, Jake finds temporary refuge on Greenwood Island, a place whose connection to her own family name she had thought just a coincidence -- until someone from her past reappears with a journal that might give Jake the family story she’s long craved. As we move backward in time from the Great Withering to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, and then forward into the future again, we meet an injured carpenter facing the possibility of his own death, an eco-warrior trying to atone for the sins of her father’s rapacious timber empire, a blind tycoon with a secret he will pay a terrible price to protect, and a Depression-era drifter who saves an abandoned infant from certain death, only to find himself the subject of a country-wide manhunt. At the very centre of the book is a tragedy that will bind the fates of two boys together, setting in motion events whose reverberations will be felt for over a century.

A magnificent novel of inheritance, sacrifice, nature, and love that takes its structure from the nested growth rings of a tree, Greenwood spans generations to tell the story of a family living and dying in the shadows cast by its own secrets. With this breathtaking feat of storytelling, Michael Christie masterfully reveals the tangled knot of lies, omissions, and half-truths that exists at the root of every family’s origin story.

(From http://www.michaelchristie.net/ )
Discussion Questions

1. Greenwood is part of a new genre of novels known as CliFi (climate fiction). What makes it fall under that category? Do any of the novel’s environmental themes resonate with you?

2. At its heart, Greenwood is a family saga. How did the boyhoods of brothers Everett and Harris make them into the men they became? How do you think Willow’s nomadic life affected her son Liam? How did Jake’s orphaning influence the person she became?

3. The Great Withering began with the trees—“the wave of fungal blights and insect infestations, to which old growth was particularly defenseless.” What environmental stresses do you see in your life today? How do you personally address these issues?

4. “The best sacrifices, Willow knows, are always made in solitude, with not a camera in sight.” Characters make many sacrifices in Greenwood—Everett for his brother during the war, Temple for the downtrodden, Feeney out of love for his principles. What other sacrifices did you notice in the novel? Which character’s sacrifice moved you most and why?

5. How did you feel about Meena’s reaction to Liam’s painstakingly created gift, a homemade viola that replicated the Stradivarius Meena so loved? Were her actions necessary? Cruel? What did her reaction say about their relationship?
6. The word “roots” has many meanings in Greenwood—a tree’s stability, a family’s ancestry, a person’s connection to place. Which meaning resonated most with you and why?

7. “Time, Liam has learned, is not an arrow.” Greenwood travels back and forth through time—deepening characters and their backstories, connecting characters in unforeseen ways, twisting the plot like roots. In fact, the book’s timeline, starting and ending with the most recent years, and with the earliest events tucked into the middle, is structured like the rings of a tree. How did this structure affect your reading experience? How would the reading experience have changed if the story was told linearly?

8. Why do you think author Michael Christie chose to write the center section—1908—in the voice of a Greek chorus of townspeople? How does this perspective enhance our understanding of the Greenwood boys’ upbringing?

9. Christie writes that nature has taught Temple “things she’d never speak in polite conversation. Like the fact that Mother Nature’s true aim is to convert us people back into the dust we came from, just as quick as possible.” Like Temple, people tend to view Mother Nature as either the great destroyer (earthquakes, floods, the Dust Bowl), or the great nurturer (providing food, shelter, oxygen, and more). Which view did each character take? Which do you lean toward? Do you think both can be true? Why or why not?

10. What do you think of Jake’s final actions at the end of the book? Did she make the right decisions? How would you have handled the revelations?

(Questions issued by the publisher.)