



***419* by Will Ferguson**

About the author:

Travel writer and novelist Will Ferguson is the author of several award-winning memoirs, including *Beyond Belfast*, about a 560-mile walk across Northern Ireland in the rain; *Hitching Rides With Buddha*, about an end-to-end journey across Japan by thumb; and most recently the humour collection *Canadian Pie*, which includes his travels from Yukon to PEI.

Ferguson's novels include *Happiness*[™], a satire set in the world of self-help publishing, and *Spanish Fly*, a coming-of-age tale of con men and call girls set amid the jazz clubs of the Great Depression. His work, which has been published in more than twenty languages around the world, has been nominated for both an IMPAC Dublin Award and a Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and he is a three-time winner of the Leacock Medal.

Will Ferguson's *419* is the winner of the 2012 Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Source: Penguin Random House Canada (<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/>)

About this book:

From internationally bestselling travel writer Will Ferguson, author of *Happiness*[™] and *Spanish Fly*, comes a novel both epic in its sweep and intimate in its portrayal of human endurance.

A car tumbles through darkness down a snowy ravine.

A woman without a name walks out of a dust storm in sub-Saharan Africa.

April 2016



And in the seething heat of Lagos City, a criminal cartel scours the Internet, looking for victims.

Lives intersect. Worlds collide. And it all begins with a single email: "*Dear Sir, I am the daughter of a Nigerian diplomat, and I need your help...*"

Will Ferguson takes readers deep into the labyrinth of lies that is "419," the world's most insidious Internet scam.

When Laura Curtis, a lonely editor in a cold northern city, discovers that her father has died because of one such swindle, she sets out to track down—and corner—her father's killer. It is a dangerous game she's playing, however, and the stakes are higher than she can ever imagine.

Woven into Laura's journey is a mysterious woman from the African Sahel with scars etched into her skin and a young man who finds himself caught up in a web of violence and deceit.

And running through it, a dying father's final words: "*You, I love.*"

Source: Penguin Random House Canada (<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Instead of a standard linear plot structure, *419* skips back and forth in time and location, and follows a diverse cast of characters from very different cultural backgrounds. How does this structure create dramatic tension and propel the story forward? And how does it relate to Laura's work as a copy editor, which involves trying to impose a chronological timeline on overlapping events?

2. Many of the main characters in the novel willingly take part in some form of illegal activity and feel somewhat justified in doing so. Do you believe that any of the characters have good reasons for their actions? Did any characters cross a



moral line that changed your sympathy for them? And while all the characters felt somewhat justified in their actions, do you feel, at the end of the novel, that any of them got what they deserved?

3. Laura edits other people's lives. What is the significance of this, symbolically as well as practically, in the plot line?

4. We like to believe we inhabit a borderless, interconnected world. Laura lives online, works online, yet she is isolated and alone. Her experience of other cultures comes primarily in a food court. On balance, do you feel that technology brings people together or alienates them?

5. Which character's storyline did you find most interesting? What are your thoughts about that character's fate at the end of the book?

6. Nnamdi's journey from the oil-soaked Delta to his horrific death in Lagos is an incredible arc that dominates a considerable part of the novel. Why is his story so central to the book and to the lives of the other characters?

7. While Winston's 419 scam sets the whole story into motion, the author stops short of making him the villain in the story. What were your initial feelings toward the character, and did you develop any sympathy for him when Ironsi-Egobia and Laura closed in on him? How does the scene where Laura visits Winston's parents affect your sympathy for him?

8. What do you feel about Laura's quest for revenge against Winston in the latter half of the book? Do you believe that she is justified in doing so? Is it morally acceptable for her to use lies and fraud because she feels she's a victim? Do you think that she ultimately acquits herself by the way she helps Amina find a new life?

9. Discuss the ways in which the destructive nature of the oil industry and Western cultural influence in Africa affect the hearts and minds of characters such



as Winston and Nnamdi. To what extent do you think Western culture should be blamed for certain tragic conditions in Africa?

10. The novel offers a look at three families in three very different parts of the world—the Curtis family in Calgary, Winston’s family in Lagos, and Nnamdi’s family in the Delta. In light of the widely distant locations, what traits do these disparate families have in common, and what makes them different?

Source: Penguin Random House Canada (<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/>)

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- eBook