

Iain Crichton Smith

The first Selected since 1985 and the poet's death, this looks afresh at the work of one of Scotland's best loved writers and one of the original Penguin Modern Poets.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. It has captured the imagination of commentators, preachers and writers. Alison M. Jack explores the reconfiguring of the character of the Prodigal Son and his family in literature in English. She considers diverse literary periods and genres in which the paradigm is particularly prevalent, such as Elizabethan literature, the work of Shakespeare, the novels of female Victorian writers, the American short story tradition, novels focused on the lives of ordained ministers, and the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and Iain Crichton Smith. Drawing on scholarship from biblical and literary studies, this study demonstrates the remarkable potency of the parable in generating new, and at times contradictory, meanings in different contexts. Historical and literary criticism are brought into dialogue to explore this remarkably resilient and nimble character as he dances through drama, novels and poetry across the centuries.

Although best known as one of Scotland's greatest modern poets, Iain Crichton Smith was also prolific as a writer of short stories. These pieces form a central part of his oeuvre, demonstrating the full range and versatility of his literary talent. From humor to tragedy, from inner monologues to extrovert surrealism, the diversity of his writing indicates the extraordinary range of his own reading and vivid mental world. Crichton Smith wrote short stories throughout his life. Some are vignettes, others novellas, and the best of them show him to be an author of unique sensitivity and intelligence. This book is part of a two-volume collection, comprising the

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complete English stories, including a large number that have never previously been published in book form, as well as others that have been out of print for many years, thus making it possible to judge Crichton Smith's achievement as a writer in full

This edition focuses on the work of Gaelic/English writer Iain Crichton Smith, to coincide with the choice of 12 of his poems for the Higher English syllabus. It contains new poetry and fiction by Crichton Smith, an in-depth interview with the author, and a detailed study of the 12 poems by critic Colin Nicholson.

'Iain Crichton Smith writes like a poet, with strong natural rhythm and precise observation' - The Times In the summer of 1870, a seventeen-year-old crofter's son turned his back on his apprenticeship with the Royal Clan and Tartan Warehouse in Inverness and signed up as a private in Queen Victoria's army. He joined the Gordons - the 92nd Highlanders - whose reputation was second to none as the fearsome cutting-edge of the British Army. Posted to India, Afghanistan, South Africa and the Sudan, he became a formidable soldier, rising up through the ranks to become the glorified and much-decorated Major-General Sir Hector Macdonald or, more commonly, 'Fighting Mac', the true hero of Omdurman. Then, in 1903, at the peak of his remarkable career, he was accused of homosexuality. Ordered to face court martial and unable to bear the disgrace, he ended his life. From this true story, with a poet's insight and precision, Iain Crichton Smith has crafted an exquisite novel: a tale of honour and elitism, equivocation and hierocracy, victory and despair.

Ralph Simmons, a writer, struggles to survive a nervous breakdown that leaves him anxious, suspicious, and frightened. In the Middle of the Wood is considered by many to be Iain Crichton Smith's most remarkable achievement in prose. Like Waugh's The

Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, it derives directly from a phase of paranoia, which in Crichton Smith's case actually led to a spell in a mental hospital.

These short stories by the renowned Scottish author demonstrate the powerful imagination that became “the wonder of literary Scotland” (Sorley MacLean, author of *Eimhir*). Growing up on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland’s Outer Hebrides, Iain Crichton Smith was raised speaking Gaelic. When he went to school in Stornoway, he spoke English. Like many islanders before and since, his culture was divided. In *After the Dance*, he explores that tumultuous divide and its effects on the small communities he knew so well. The stories in this volume prove that big themes—love, history, power, submission, death—can be addressed without the foil of irony. Instead, Smith reveals their resonance by rooting them in place, and giving them a voice that risks pure, humane, impassioned speech. This updated edition includes the story ‘Home.’

The house was extraordinarily peaceful as if by an act of will I had banished all the fertile ghosts. It had an unearthly calm as if I were floating on a dumb sea of solitude. I found myself humming to myself as if I had come to the silence of myself. I went to the bookcase and took out a book and began to read. Strangely enough I didn't realise at first what book it was. Then I saw that it was the Bible. I turned to the New Testament and began to read, 'In the beginning was the Word...' - The Hermit **ALTHOUGH BEST KNOWN** as one of Scotland's greatest modern poets, Iain Crichton Smith was also prolific as a writer of short stories. These pieces form a central part of his oeuvre,

demonstrating the full range and versatility of his literary talent. From humour to tragedy, from inner monologues to extrovert surrealism, the diversity of his writing indicates the extraordinary range of his own reading and mental world. Crichton Smith wrote short stories throughout his life. Some are fragments, others almost novellas, and the best of them all show him to be an author of unique sensitivity and intelligence. These two collections, comprising the complete English stories, include over 45 stories never before published in book form, as well as others that have been out of print for many years, thus making it possible to judge Crichton Smith's achievement as a writer in full. Incorporates stories from *The Hermit*, *Murdo*, *Mr Trill in Hades* and *Selected Stories*.

The Leaf and the Marble is an extended love poem. Beginning with a holiday in Italy, the poetry is transformed by passion and place into a meditation on the founding legends of the Classical world. Dido and Aeneas play a central role, the world of nature and the world of man are sharply contrasted. Rome and its empire were founded on the denial of love: the poet's task is to write love back.

The narrative and dramatic poem *My Canadian Uncle* is much earlier than *A Country for Old Men* and represents the poet's ambitious experiments with forms, especially those forms which seem to bridge the gap between the poetic, prose narrative and drama.

When the breathing got worse he went into the adjacent room and got the copy of Dante. All

that night and the night before he had been watching the dying...When a mirror was required to be brought she looked at it, moving her head restlessly this way and that. He knew that the swelling was a portent of some kind, a message from the outer darkness, an omen. - The Dying ALTHOUGH BEST KNOWN as one of Scotland's greatest modern poets, Iain Crichton Smith was also prolific as a writer of short stories. These pieces form a central part of his oeuvre, demonstrating the full range and versatility of his literary talent. From humour to tragedy, from inner monologues to extrovert surrealism, the diversity of his writing indicates the extraordinary range of his own reading and mental world. Crichton Smith wrote short stories throughout his life. Some are fragments, others almost novellas, and the best of them all show him to be an author of unique sensitivity and intelligence. These two collections, comprising the complete English stories, include over 45 stories never before published in book form, as well as others that have been out of print for many years, thus making it possible to judge Crichton Smith's achievement as a writer in full. Incorporates stories from *Survival Without Error*, *The Black and the Red* and *The Village*.

Murdo Macrae is one of the most extraordinary and fascinating of Iain Crichton Smith's literary creations. Dismissed from his job as a bank teller, Murdo tries to write, but cannot get beyond the first sentence. Murdo has a wild and fertile imagination, and, much to the incomprehension of his long-suffering wife, Janet, sets out to convert all he meets to his bizarre philosophy and unique vision of the world. Murdo's surreal and often hilarious antics, however, mask much deeper questions about his inadequacy in the face of social convention and his own spiritual turmoil. It is this juxtaposition of tragicomic elements, together with the fact that Murdo is in so many ways the alter ego of his creator, that brings real poignancy to these stories and confirms

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Iain Crichton Smith as one of Scotland's most versatile literary talents of modern times. This volume contains the two publications, *Murdo and Other Stories* and *Thoughts of Murdo*. It also includes another substantial piece, the autobiographical *Life of Murdo*, which is published in book form here for the first time.

Dismissed from his job as a bank clerk Murdo sets out to convert all he meets to his extraordinary philosophy and unique vision of the world. As part of his antics he creates the even more extraordinary figure of Sam Spaid of Portree - the religious private detective. Charting the development of his poetry over the last 40 years, this book offers insights into the work of the Scottish poet, Iain Crichton Smith.

The world, in Iain Crichton Smith's vision is a field full of folk; and one Scottish village is its microcosm. Here, the Minister wrestles with his loss of faith, and his cancer, concealing them even from his wife, but she had divined them. Mrs Berry cultivates her garden assiduously, and when Jehovah's Witnesses come quoting their texts, she tells them that the hill at the end of the village can be climbed by many paths. Old Annie has no doubts about her path: she has no use for Christianity ('Protestants and Catholics, nothing but guns and fighting') and finds her answer in the East. On more mundane levels, Morag Bheag worries about her son serving in Northern Ireland, and Chrissie Murray shocks the village by leaving her husband and making for Glasgow - taking only a radio with her, that's what shocks most. Murdo Macfarlane vehemently urges his puritanical views - about, for instance, the use of the church hall for a young people's dance - and David Collins nurses his hatred of Germans, but cannot insult them when they come as tourists. In short, it's a village much like any other, with its prejudices and certainties and kindness and heartbreak: the whole and the small part. As the Minister

sees in his visionary moment at the annual sports, when the petty disputes over the wheelbarrow race and the tragic news of young Bheag's death come together in his realisation that it's all a part of 'this supremely imperfect and perfect earth.' Mr Crichton Smith's novels never carry any superfluous weight: they're as spare as sprinters. He writes with a poet's concentration, and never more precisely, or more movingly, than here, in what amounts to a gentle, compassionate meditation on life and death, with a warm, affirmative conclusion. Although the number of Gaelic speakers has declined during the twentieth century, the last forty years have seen an astonishing flowering of Scottish Gaelic poetry, much of it in the modern idiom. This bilingual anthology provides a selection of the best work of poets who have contributed most to that revival—Sorely Maclean, George Campbell Hay, Derick Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith, and Donald MacAulay.

This classic novel by the acclaimed author and poet examines a cruel episode of Scottish history through the intimate thoughts of an elderly woman. First published in 1968, *Consider the Lilies* is widely celebrated as one of the finest achievements in contemporary Scottish literature. Set in the time of the Highland Clearances—the mass eviction of tenant farmers that began in the mid 18th century—it tells the tale of a solitary woman whose home is razed in the name of “agricultural improvement.” Having lived her whole life among her rural Highland community, she is suddenly told that she will be forced from her home, which will then be burned to the ground. The shattering pronouncement leaves her shocked and disoriented as her thoughts shift between despair for her future and memories of the life that will soon be gone.

The tenement has its being, its almost independent being, in a small Scottish town. Built of grey granite, more than a century ago, it stands four-square in space and time, the one fixed point in the febrile lives of the transient human beings whom it shelters. At the time of which Iain Crichton Smith writes, there are married couples in three of the flat; two widows and a widower occupy the others. All of them are living anxious lives of quiet desperation, which Mr Smith anatomises with cool and delicate understanding. The Masons, Linda and John, are the youngest and perhaps the happiest house-hold, who can still look to the future with hope: he has quite a well-paid job in a freezer shop, she is expecting a child. Mr Cooper's role in life is humbler: he is a lavatory attendant, but can take an off pride in his work. The Camerons provide drama: the husbands, once a long distance lorry driver who was sacked for heavy drinking and now a casual labourer, is consumed with unreasoning hate of Catholics, and when drunk becomes a raging brute who batters and terrifies his wife. Trevor Porter, an ex-teacher who like to think of himself as a poet (unpublished), is destroying his marriage by his self-absorption, though after his wife has surprised him by dying of cancer he feel guilt-ridden. Mrs Floss is the tenement's most colourful inhabitant: the widow of a local hotel owner, she still has money and can indulge in holiday cruises and foreign lovers. Mrs Miller, up on the top floor, is odd-woman-out even in this company of loners: since her husband was killed by lightening, crucified on the telephone wires he was repairing, she has become a slatternly recluse, who finds occasional drinking companions among the

town's down-and-outs. The course of several of these lives reaches a startling crisis during the little party to celebrate the birth of the Masons' child. But Iain Crichton Smith declines any easy resolution of events. His fascinatingly ill-assorted group of characters, brought together only by grey granite, are left to struggle on, with their own strengths and weaknesses.

Collected poems first published in Great Britain in 1992 by Carcanet Press.

Ends and Beginnings is Iain Crichton Smith's most ambitious collection for years. It begins in elegy, with the exiles and deaths about which he writes so memorably, and progresses through place, history and positive change. After a trip to the Golan Heights, he conceived a major poem on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, using an unaccustomed Biblical idiom. He considers the isolated people of his native Lewis, and those isolated in a wider culture—scholars, writers, lovers, the old—whose need for communion is thwarted by estranging disciplines or by the depredations of history.

John Blackburn's SCOTNOTE study guide analyses the religious, political and historical themes and patterns of Crichton Smith's work, and is a suitable guide for senior school pupils and students at all levels.

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