

Scottish Set Texts

The Short Stories of Iain Crichton Smith

National 5
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The Telegram

From "The Red Door" by Iain Crichton Smith
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two of the villagers, it is likely every villager is watching the elder and hoping it is not their door he is heading for.

As it turns out, this telegram is not for any of the villagers.

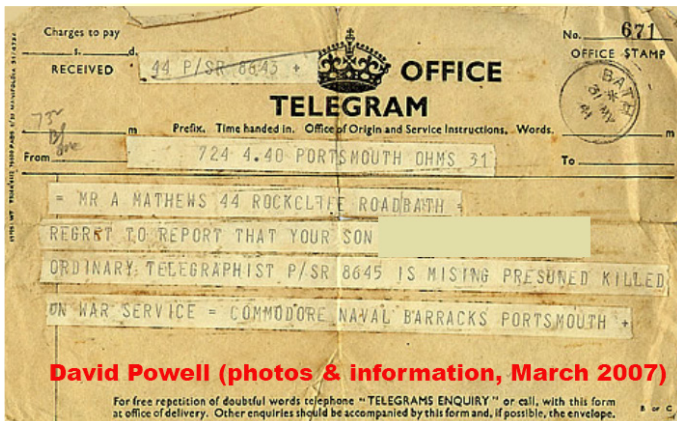
The Community:-



Although Iain Crichton Smith was born in Glasgow, he moved to the island of Lewis at the age of two. There he spent much of his time in the crofting village of Bayble. The village in the story is unnamed, however it is likely to have some resemblance to Bayble. Above is a modern image of the view from upper Bayble, where Iain Crichton Smith lived. That said, this image has little resemblance to how this village would have looked in the 1940's when the story takes place.

We do know some things about this village. It had a road, referred to as a "*street*" **P. 212**, that went right through the middle of the village. It would be similar to what we see here and on either sides of this "*street*" would be the houses. As the story suggests it would be quite easy, from any location, to see any traffic moving up or down the street.

The village is described as a "*bare village with little colour.*" **P. 212**, It would not be a highly populated village. The story only describes six houses on this "*street*." The first is Bessie's house. **P. 213**. Next is the Smith's house. **P. 214** Then there is the Stewart's house. **P. 215** Between the Stewart's house and the Murray's house is an unnamed house. **P. 215** Next is the Murray's house. **P. 215** After that comes Sarah's house. **P.**



Telegrams:-

This short story, which is set during World War Two, is entitled "*The Telegram.*" A telegram was a message sent by telegraph and then delivered in written or printed form. Although there were a variety of colours for such documents, the military used yellow paper for their telegrams. That is why, on **P. 212** - when the women see the yellow piece of paper Macleod is carrying - they know he is carrying a telegram for one of the villagers. And therefore they know someone's son or husband has been killed. Above is an example of such a telegram and because it is a real telegram I have blocked out the name of the sailor. Although, like this telegram, it is not stated that the sailor is dead (but only presumed dead) the receipt of such a document usually confirmed to the family that their son or father was indeed dead.

Summary of Story:-

The story probably takes place around late May or early June of 1941. We learn that one of villager's son had died during the pursuit of the "*Bismarck.*" **P. 211** The sinking of the "*Bismarck*" took place on May 27th 1941. Three days earlier the "*Bismarck*" had sunk HMS Hood. It is likely that the son reported killed on **P. 211** was one of the sailors from HMS Hood.

The story describes, what the villagers believe, is the journey of the church elder Macleod to deliver such a telegram to one of the families in the village. Although we only see the development of the story through the eyes of

216 And last is the house of the Thin woman.**P. 216**

That said, there are three other villagers mentioned. There is Malcolm Mackay **P. 214**, who it is suggested brings contraband meat into the village. There is the church elder Macleod **P. 212**, who takes it upon himself to deliver the telegrams, and finally there is the minister **P. 215**. Therefore there ought to be houses for them. So this village would likely have somewhere around ten to twelve houses in it.

One thing the story makes clear is that this is a very close knit community. They all know each other and their families. That is why, as the elder Macleod makes his way up the village, the two women know whose house he has passed and, therefore which son has, or has not, been killed. Nothing is a secret in this village. Although Malcolm Mackay only crashed his car the night before **P. 214** - and this is the morning of the next day - Sarah already knows what has happened and that Malcolm Mackay has already been charged by the police.

Gossip appears to be a central occupation for the women of this village. Gossip had become an important aspect of village life because, as Sarah reflected to herself *"what else was there to do."* **P. 214** That said, gossip had an importance within the Village. It is clear that in the eyes of many in the village if something is rumored it must also have a foundation in fact. One of the common devices used by the villagers to describe rumors is the use of the collective pronoun. *"They"* or *"They say"* or *"Everybody said"* to suggest that the basis of the rumor is something much more substantial. This device is used five times throughout the story. [**P. 212 213, 213, 214, 215**] The emphasis being placed on the pronoun *"they"* or *"everybody"*. Although the word is deliberately vague in defining exactly who is being referenced, it still suggests and reinforces the idea that many in the community are in agreement with this particular idea - whatever that idea may be.

The use of *"they"* or *"everybody"* implies that the idea has authority because it is not just view of any one individual but the view of a collective. An example of this happens after elder Macleod has passed the Murrays' house and therefore Sarah's house is next. Sarah - at that point - turns to the Thin woman and informs her that *"they say his wife had one of her fits again."* **P. 215** Rumours about the elder's wife have probably

arisen because he is a very solitary figure who keeps himself to himself. Quite likely enforced by the Elder Macleod himself, because of the duty he has voluntarily placed upon himself to deliver these telegrams to the members of the village. The Elder Macleod clearly does not mix with the others in the community. The exact phrase is *"he didn't mix with people."* **P. 215** The use of the word *"people"* suggests, that in the eyes of the village, he feels himself aloof from others in the community. This is added to by the fact that Macleod takes it upon himself to carry the ministers Bible into the pulpit. Whether it is the pressure of knowing her house is next or not, Sarah clearly takes pleasure in spreading this rumour. She is described as saying this *"viciously."* **P. 215**

The community and village look differently upon members who are incomers into the village as opposed to those who have been born and bred in the village. The Thin woman is an incomer. She came to settle in the village from another village. *"She was an incomer from another village and had only been in this one for thirty years or so."* **P. 212**

Authors narrative compared to character narrative:-

Throughout the story there is a blending of authors narrative and character narrative. The difference is that where the author is narrating the point then the point can be considered factual within the story, and is likely to be the view of the whole village. However when a character is narrating, the point may or not be accurate and correct because it is only the view of that character.

The above point about the Thin woman being an incomer is author's narrative and not character comment. Therefore the remark has an authority that a character comment does not have. It does not matter that the Thin woman has been in the village for thirty years (quite likely longer than some who were born in the village) she is still not considered a full member of the village. When she dies, she is likely to still be seen as an incomer.

In a sense the Thin woman is a second rate member of the village. It is interesting, and indeed appropriate, that her house is the last one before you leave the village. There is no mention in the story whether she is, or is not, the only incomer. But the suggestion is that she is the only one. Although this will be discussed

further when we come to her character, it is clear that the community are less engaged and supportive to the incomers. There is no indication, within the story, of other villagers who are friendly and communicate with her. It would appear both her status within the village, as well as her geographical position, suggest that she is literally - as well as figuratively - on the edge of the community as opposed to the others in the village.

Another feature of how this incomer is treated is that we not know her name. We know that the "fat woman" is called Sarah because the Thin woman addresses her by her name. **P. 212** However we do not know the "Thin woman's" name and that is because Sarah never uses her name. Not once, throughout the entire story, does Sarah address the "Thin woman" by her name even though she is bound to know her name. And therefore within this story the "Thin woman" has no identity aside from her physical appearance. Everyone else in the village is named and with some we even know the names of their sons. However the "Thin woman" woman has no identity aside from her physical appearance.

Another feature of this village and community is the dislike of members within the community for others who attempt to better themselves or their family. One reason the Thin woman is disliked is because she "was ambitious: she had sent her son to university though she only had a widow's pension of ten shillings a week." **P. 212** Like the above point, this is authors narrative, and not a character comment. There is a clear feeling in the comment of "how dare she!"

Although the use of the adjective "ambitious" is usually a positive word when used, here it has clear negative connotations. It is clear that such an idea is censured by the rest of the village. It is further exacerbated by the fact that the "Thin woman" has done this even though she only had a pension of ten shillings a week. Her action therefore reflects on the rest of the village because she is poorer than they are. She has climbed a metaphorical ladder, she should not have, and has positioned herself, in the eyes of the village, above them. Although it was a selfless act to help her son and, for which she made considerable sacrifice, that is not recognized. Being different - like having your son educated - is a clear taboo: and especially if you are an incomer to the village.

The Two Central Characters:-

The most important element and aspect of this story are the two central characters. They live next door to each other at the outer edge of the village. The Thin woman's house is the very last house before you leave the village. Although they dislike each other intensely it is interesting that they often meet for morning tea. However, if this meeting representative of the other meetings, these meetings do not take place in Sarah's house, but in the Thin woman's house.

The Thin woman:-

Aside from being described as "thin" **P. 211** the woman is described as "more aquiline, more gaunt, or, to be precise, more like a buzzard." **P. 211** The use of "aquiline" suggests that her nose was curved like an eagle's beak: that it was hooked. The use of the noun "gaunt" makes clear that she was thin and underfed. The reference to a "buzzard" refers not just to her physical appearance, but also her constant hunger.

Unlike Sarah, the Thin woman had worked for a living. Prior to coming to the island she had worked in service. **P. 215** While there she was impressed by how the clientele drank their tea and had copied their mannerism for herself.

"The Thin woman drank her tea very delicately.....She sipped her tea, her little finger elegantly curled in an irritating way." **P. 214-5**

As the phrase "irritating way" suggested others on the island, including Sarah, were upset by this mannerism. It was seen as a gesture of being aloof from the others on the island. Although, like Sarah, the Thin woman, had also married, it was her husband who was an island native not the Thin Woman. Sometime after her marriage she bore a son, Iain **P. 213**, and it was sometime later that her husband died. **P. 216**

Unlike Sarah, the Thin woman seldom involves herself in scandal and criticism of others. The one exception is when she is roused, by a comment from Sarah. Sarah is beginning to feel the telegram may be for one of them and fears, because her son is not an officer, the telegram is for her.

"And then she added without thinking, 'It's different for the officers.'"

"Why is it different for the officers?" said the Thin woman in an even voice without taking her eyes from the black figure.

"Well, I just thought they're better off," said

the fat woman in a confused tone, 'they get better food and they get better conditions.'

'They're still on the ship,' said the Thin woman who was thinking that the fat woman was very stupid. But then most of them were: they were large, fat and lazy. Most of them could have better afforded to send their sons and daughters to university but they didn't want to be thought of as snobbish." **P. 212**

To be fair to Sarah, as indicated above, she has not thought through what she wanted to say. Fear that the telegram could be for her is what has driven her to say this. Indeed once into the conversation, as the verb "confused" suggests, Sarah realises she cannot answer the question "why is it different for officers?" She probably wishes she had not said anything at all.

That said, Sarah has raised an important issue. Maybe it is because of the moment and the concern for whom the telegram is for, or maybe because as an incomer the Thin woman feels it unwise to make the comment out loud. Either way she keeps the observation to herself.

In making such a comment Sarah has betrayed just how stupid she can sometimes be. However at the heart of this observation is the education of the Thin woman's son. The Thin woman understands that two issues are behind this. **First** the rest of the women are too lazy to educate their own sons. **Second**, even if the other mothers wanted to have their sons educated, they were more concerned about being seen as snobbish if they had done so. The Thin woman is aware of the hypocrisy underlying Sarah and the village criticizing her for having her son educated, while they were in a far better position educate their own sons. The Thin woman knew the rest of the village were too scared of what others in the village would think of them were they to educate their sons.

The education of her son is a sore point with the Thin woman. It is something she is very proud of even though it has caused her considerable grief. She was prompted by Iain's teacher to send her son to university. *"Send your son to university," he said to me. "He's got a good head on him."* **P. 213** She is very honest and says that, until that moment, she had not thought about educating Iain. On **P. 213** she describes some of the sacrifices she makes to afford sending him to university, including knitting trousers. Strange though the idea is, there is a tradition in Arran and other islands that some islanders did indeed knit trousers.

The Thin woman points out that this was all done on ten shillings a week. Just like she does not like to gossip, the Thin woman also does not like boasting. The real details of the sacrifices she made to get Iain educated are described by Sarah during the period it appears that the telegram might be about Iain.

"And at that moment the fat woman saw. She saw the years of discipline, she remembered how thin and unfed and pale the Thin woman had always looked, how sometimes she had had to borrow money, even a shilling to buy food. She saw what it must have been like to be a widow bringing up a son in a village not her own. She saw it so clearly that she was astounded. It was as if she had an extra vision, as if the air itself brought the past with all its details nearer. The number of times the Thin woman had been ill and people had said that she was weak and useless. She looked down at the Thin woman's arm. It was so shrivelled, and dry."

P. 216

Sarah talks about the Thin woman's "discipline." That is a major characteristic of the Thin woman. She has physically sacrificed her own health to be able to provide the money for her son to attend university. At times she has even borrowed money.

One of the beauties of Iain Crichton Smith's writing is that he includes details in the story and just leaves them there for the reader to pick up. The Thin woman is in no doubt what the others in the village think of her. It is no accident she lives on the edge of the village: she is both physically and socially an outsider. She is also an outsider who makes no attempt to apologise or to accommodate the village's views. However, at times, she has had to go to these very same people to beg and borrow money for her son's education. That must have been a very difficult moment and must have hurt her pride.

This effort, to keep her son at university, has also undermined her health because we are told there were occasions when she was ill in bed. There is no reference that other villagers came to her help. All we are told is that when the other villagers heard about these bouts of illness - which must have been reported by Sarah since she knew about them - the villagers criticised the Thin woman for being "weak and useless."

Although this memory does not change Sarah's opinion of the Thin woman, it clearly allows her, and through her also the reader, to appreciate

the difficulty that life had been for the Thin woman. It is through the use of repetition, that Iain Crichton Smith underscores the extent of Sarah's understanding. Throughout this passage there is a repetition of the phrase *"She saw/looked"*. The idea of a sudden revelation is contained within a superb piece of description:

"It was as if she had an extra vision, as if the air itself brought the past with all its details nearer."

The phrase *"extra vision"* is the critical phrase. It is not an *"extra"* vision in the sense that her perception has suddenly been improved. During this intensely emotional moment, when the Thin woman is coming to terms with the belief that the telegram may be about her son Iain, Sarah suddenly has some compassion for her neighbour and remembers aspects of the Thin woman's life that previously she given no thought for.

One irony of the Thin woman's sacrifice for her son, is her fear that her son may marry outside the island and not support her. We are told Iain has met a girl at a dance the previous Christmas. **P. 213** The Thin woman learns that this girl is the daughter of a mayor and she realises - that by comparison - she is just a poor island mother. As she comments *"he might not give me anything after all I've done for him."* **P. 214** Her sacrifice was never about what she would get in return, but she is older now and is still desperately poor.

The section ends with a humorous moment. After hearing about the extent of the Thin woman's sacrifices, Sarah comments that everyone has had to make sacrifices *"We have to make sacrifices."* **P. 213** The Thin woman reflects to herself

"It was difficult to know what she was thinking of – the whale meat or the saccharines? Or the lack of clothes? Her mind was vague and diffused except when she was thinking about herself." **P. 213**

Like previous examples, this is a thought and not something spoken out loud. The use of the question marks make clear that the Thin woman believes there were no sacrifices made in these areas. Indeed through the use of the verb *"diffused"* it is made clear that although Sarah's mind might be confused and disorganised on many issues, when it came to herself she was organised and single minded.

In the past the Thin woman's life has been made even more difficult by her clothes being eaten by Sarah's cow.

"The fat woman's cow used to eat the Thin woman's washing and she was looking out for it but she couldn't see it." **P. 212**

The suggestion, made by this point is that the Thin woman believes that this act, by Sarah, was deliberate. It is assumed that the Thin woman has informed Sarah about it, yet it has still continued. The problem, and Sarah would have known this, is that the Thin woman will have had to replace some of these clothes and her money was already stretched keeping Iain at university.

Sarah is well aware of the hardship this has caused the Thin woman. When Sarah sees the elder getting close to her house she begins to believe the telegram may be for her, and she apologises to the Thin woman about her cow eating the Thin woman's washing. This apology comes right out of the blue and suggests that this is something that has been on Sarah's mind for some time. Although this issue will be addressed later in these notes, there is a change in the relationship between the two women in this story as a consequence of this moment when Sarah believed the telegram was for her.

There are three moments when there is a clear indication that the Thin woman shows empathy with Sarah. The first takes place very early in the story. Sarah has just noticed Macleod begin his journey through the village. Both women are clearly affected by the sight. The narrator describes the situation thus.

"And so they watched him and as they watched him they spoke feverishly as if by speaking continually and watching his every move they would be able to keep from themselves whatever plague he was bringing." **P. 212**

The adverb *"feverishly"* does not just describe their manner of speaking but it also highlights the intensity of their feelings at seeing Macleod begin another journey through the village. It is at that point that the Thin woman attempts to comfort Sarah by saying *"Don't worry, Sarah, it won't be for you. Donald only left home last week."* **P. 212**

It is a realistic point. If Donald has just gone back to sea, it is likely he may not actually be in any danger yet. Unfortunately Sarah does not recognize the comment for what it is. And her response leads to the conversation and argument described on **P 212 - 213**.

There is a far more significant moment a little later. Macleod has just passed the "*Smiths*" house **P. 214** which means there are only two houses before Sarah's house.

Describing Sarah's condition the narrator states

"she drank her tea her heart was beating and she was frightened and she didn't know what to talk about and yet she wanted to talk." **P. 214**

For someone who eternally gossips, this sudden silence tells the Thin woman everything. It is true that in the previous paragraph Sarah has just apologized about her cow eating the Thin woman's washing, but that is unlikely to be the reason for her sudden silence.

Between the moment - when Sarah apologized - and this point in the story, the Thin woman has suddenly moved her position to now be seated next to Sarah. There is only one reason for the Thin woman to change her seated position. Seeing Sarah frightened into silence, because Sarah believes that this time the telegram is for her, has clearly evoked sympathy within the Thin woman for her neighbor. Although Sarah does not directly respond to this surprising support she has just been given, it does have an immediate affect. Sarah is able to begin gossiping again and tells the Thin woman about Malcolm Mackay's drunken accident. **P. 214**

When Macleod passes the "*Murrays*" house **P. 215** Sarah is convinced that the telegram must now be for her and that her son Donald has been drowned at sea. Sarah gets so upset that she ends up reciting "*O God save my son*" **P. 215** over and over. Suddenly she feels the Thin woman's arm around her. However what is even more important is the love and tenderness in this touch. The only time Sarah had been touched in this way was when her husband Murdo had taken her hand one night coming back from a dance. All Sarah hears is the Thin woman saying "*He has passed your house.*" **P. 216** It is an astonishing moment. It was not that the Thin woman had reached out and touched Sarah, it was the feeling that was conveyed through her touch.

Sarah:-

In the first paragraph Sarah is described as a "*fat domestic bird.*" **P. 211** She contrasts directly with the Thin woman in two ways. **First** she is described as being "*fat.*" Unlike the Thin woman she has more money, though how much we are not informed. The Thin woman is aware of Sarah's taste for whale meat and all things sweet "*saccharines*" **P. 213** hence her size and weight. As the Thin woman points it is not just food that Sarah has not deprived herself of, she also did not deprive herself of new clothes.

Second unlike the Thin woman, Sarah is a "*domestic Bird.*" After marrying Murdo, **P. 216** she has only been a housewife. She appears never to have worked for a living. Whether as a wife or as a widow she appears to have always remained in the house.

What Sarah and the Thin woman do have in common is that, in the eyes of the islanders, they are described in terms of their physical features. One is referred to as "*fat*" the other "*thin.*" Together they were also both likened to birds.

Unlike the Thin woman, Sarah is not an incomer: she was born and bred in the village. That gives her an acceptance in the village that is denied to the Thin woman. However although Sarah knows the other villagers and may well be on talking terms with them there is a suggestion that she may well not be altogether welcomed. There is no evidence that Sarah visits anyone else's house as frequently as she does the Thin woman's house. **P. 212**

It is made clear that although neither woman likes the other, yet they regularly meet in the Thin woman's house. Although she dislikes Sarah, the Thin woman has no friends in the village and therefore that is likely to be one of the reasons she allows Sarah into her house. It is less clear why Sarah does not invited the Thin woman into her house. A possible explanation is that Sarah fears how the others in the village would respond to her inviting an incomer into her house.

Another reason Sarah has difficulty in the thin woman's company is because, in Sarah's eyes, the Thin woman insists on putting on airs. One example is the way she drinks her tea, another is her reporting that her potential daughter in law's father is a mayor. "*She was always putting on airs. Mayor indeed.*" **P. 213** Actually the thin

woman never boasted about this. The topic comes up only because the Thin woman is concerned that after all she has done for Iain, he might not help her.

"He met a girl at a dance and he found out later that her father was a mayor. I'm sure she smokes and drinks. And he might not give me anything after all I've done for him." P. 213 - 214

Through the comment that she may drink and smoke, it is clear that the Thin woman is already biased against her. For Sarah, the very fact the Thin woman mentioned that her daughter-in-law's father was a mayor is considered as an example of one-upmanship. Sarah sees the comment as an example that the Thin woman is attempting to demonstrate - to Sarah and the village - that she is more important.

Of the seven and a half pages to the story, approximately one and a half of those pages deals with the Thin woman's attempt to have her son educated. P. 212 - 214 Sarah is clearly upset that, because of his education, Iain is an officer and her son, Donald, must now salute him.

"Of course her son didn't salute the Thin woman's son if they were both home on leave at the same time. It had happened once they had been." P. 213

Seeing Donald once salute Iain on the island had so angered Sarah that Donald never made the mistake of saluting Iain a second time.

But the Thin woman's education of her son is an issue. The narrator observes that the other women, who were better off than the Thin woman and,

"could have better afforded to send their sons and daughters to university but they didn't want to be thought of as snobbish." P. 213

Appearing - by fellow villagers - to have placed oneself and family above others on the island was seen as a fault. Through the use of the word *"snobbish"* what is being suggested is that the Thin woman is considered to have pretensions and to rank herself above the ordinary islander. What has annoyed Sarah is not just the notion of appearing superior, it is that Iain has acquired benefits that her son has been denied. The narrator points out that *"one got more pay than the other, and wore better uniform."* P. 212 Sarah adds that Iain also got *"better food and they get better conditions."* P. 212

What appears to be a facet of island life is that the island community comes before family. To improve the education of a son, even though it involves considerable sacrifice, is seen to have declared to the others on the island that your son is better than their sons. Where all sons are serving together in the navy this could lead people like Sarah to believe that should the ship be sunk then the officers have a better chance of being saved than the ordinary seamen does.

Sarah enjoys gossiping. One reason she finds it difficult to talk with the Thin woman is because the Thin woman does not enjoy gossiping and seldom involves herself in the practise. Sarah however does enjoy gossiping. That said it was not much fun gossiping with the Thin woman since she hardly gossiped and Sarah *"liked talking, after all what else was there to do? But the Thin woman didn't gossip much."* P. 214 We learn a great deal about the village through Sarah's gossip - even though it is essentially all negative. It is through Sarah that we learn about Malcolm Mackay.

"'Did you hear,' said the fat woman, 'that Malcolm Mackay was up on a drunken charge? He smashed his car, so they say. It was in the black-out.'" P. 214

There is a suggestion because he was carrying meat in the van late at night that it might be contraband that he was carrying illicitly. One can discern a certain enjoyment that Sarah has in reporting this.

Although there is a certain amusement in this hapless incident, Sarah's other gossip is of a much more malicious kind - like the gossip about elder Macleod. *"They say his wife had one of her fits again,' said the fat woman viciously."* P. 215

The use of the phrase *"They say"* gives the report authority: it is not just Sarah who is reporting it, others are saying the same. However with the use of the phrase *"viciously"*, there is a clear implication that Sarah does not like the elders wife. Indeed there is a clear suggestion that she also does not like the elder himself.

"'He's proud of what he's doing,' said the fat woman suddenly. 'You'd think he was proud of it. Knowing before anyone else. And he himself was never in the war.'" P. 215

Sarah is clear in her mind that the reason Macleod carries the telegrams is because he wants to be the first to know who has died. A point that is compounded by the fact he has never fought in war. However we do learn what is likely to be the real reason there is such ill feeling towards him. Because of this duty, the elder has decided to be distant and discrete within the village.

"He was a stiff, quiet man who kept himself to himself, more than ever now." P. 215

In a village that thrives on gossip and learning the latest news, nothing can irritate more that withdrawing from the community and keeping one's distance.

An interesting contrast between the two women is how each deals with the thought the telegram might be for them. The central moment(s) in the short story are when the two women believe the telegram is actually for them. P. 215-216 How they react to this possibility illustrates essential elements of their character.

Sarah:-

As the narrator points out once elder Macleod has been noticed, both women are nervous and frightened.

"They were both frightened for he could be coming to their house. And so they watched him and as they watched him they spoke feverishly as if by speaking continually and watching his every move they would be able to keep from themselves whatever plague he was bringing." P. 212

By speaking "*feverishly*" Sarah is trying to suggest she is not concerned, when in fact she is.

After Macleod passes the Murray's house Sarah is convinced the telegram has to be for her. The section of the story that describes Sarah's reaction to this belief is a very moving passage. P. 215-216

Stunned that it could be her son that has been killed, at first she sat "*perfectly still*." Then she began to relive a dream she had often had. It is clear that at the back of her mind has always been the thought that Donald might drown at sea. However now that it appears to be a reality, Sarah cannot believe that he would drown at sea "*for no reason she could understand*." P. 215 When it dawns on her that the telegram must be for her, she sinks into a state where she constantly begs God to save her son. She is

aware that the Thin woman can see and hear her but that makes no difference.

What Sarah is totally unaware of is that the thin woman has clearly been affected by what she is seeing and actually gets out of her chair and walks across to her and puts her arm around her shoulder,

"and it was like first love, it was like the time Murdo had taken her hand in his when they were coming home from the dance, such an innocent gesture, such a spontaneous gesture. So unexpected, so strange, so much a gift. She was crying and she couldn't look..." P. 216

Sarah's grief and pain had reached into the Thin woman's being and led her to show love and compassion for her neighbor. The last time Sarah had received such love was from her late husband. As the narrator comments it was "*so much a gift*." And what makes this moment so astonishing, it was a gift from someone she had hated for years. It was from someone she knew was watching her distress and to cry in front of her would seem "*a weakness*." Yet at her moment of greatest weakness and distress it is the Thin woman who comes to her aid and comforts her.

The ellipsis makes clear that it takes a few minutes before Sarah can regain her composure and realize that the elder has passed her house and the telegram was actually not for her.

The Thin woman:-

Where Sarah had publicly displayed her anguish, when she thought the telegram was for her, the Thin woman is quite the opposite.

"The Thin woman was looking out at the elder, her lips pressed closely together, white and bloodless." P. 216

The control that she has over her feelings astonishes Sarah. Suddenly Sarah understands what is going on inside the Thin woman.

"She was looking out at something she had always dreaded but she wasn't going to cry or surrender or give herself away to anyone." P. 216

The sight of the thin woman's discipline allows Sarah, for the first time, to see what the thin woman's life had been like for her on the island. Where earlier Sarah had been critical of the thin woman's sacrifice to have her son educated, now Sarah fully understands what she has had to go

through to achieve it. Sarah even remembers the many times the Thin woman was ill and villagers said she was *"weak and useless."* **P. 216** It is likely Sarah was one of those people.

During this whole period *"the thin woman hadn't cried. She was steady and still, her lips still compressed, sitting upright in her chair."* **P. 216** Even when Macleod has passed her house she still says nothing.

Although the thin woman makes no demonstrations like Sarah, she is equally distressed. After telling Sarah *"He has passed your house,"* **P. 215** the thin woman does not speak another word. Her voice is described as *"distant"* **P. 215** because knowing that Macleod has passed Sarah's house means the telegram has to be for her. Although not described, the Thin woman returns to her chair and sits there composed and upright looking out the window. She appears to have composed herself and is now awaiting the knock on her door. Even, after it is clear that the telegram is not for her and Sarah says she is going back to her home, the Thin woman still says nothing but continues to sit looking out the window. She does not even look at her as Sarah leaves. Like Sarah, the Thin woman has been to a point where she was convinced her son had drowned at sea and was now coming to terms with the fact that he was still alive.

Creating tension in the story through Elder Macleod's delivery of the telegram:-

One of the features of *"The Telegram"* is how tension is created within the story. It is Elder Macleod's journey through the village with the telegram by which tension is created. Sarah and the Thin woman are unaware that Macleod believes the telegram he is holding is for him and that his son has been killed. As the elder progresses through the village, Sarah and the Thin woman become more and more convinced the telegram is for them and it is their reaction to the elder's journey that tension in the story is created.

As elder Macleod progresses up the village to deliver his telegram he is keenly watched by Sarah and the Thin woman. His progress has an affect on both women. When he is first spotted by Sarah both women are

"frightened for he could be coming to their house. And so they watched him and as they watched him they spoke feverishly as if by speaking continually and watching his every move they would be able to keep from themselves whatever plague he was bringing." **P. 212**

They are frightened because every telegram is danger: every telegram could be for them

When Macleod passes the first house - Bessie house - Sarah is aware that she had hoped the telegram might be for Bessie. *"For a terrible moment she realised that she had hoped that the elder would have turned in at Bessie's house. Not that she had anything against either Bessie or Roddy. But still one thought of one's own family first."* **P. 213** Sarah realises the thought was not because of any ill feeling she had towards Bessie, it was simply that Sarah wanted her son to be safe.

The passing of the next house - the Smith's house - points out how much nearer Macleod is coming to Sarah's house. *"There were only another three houses before he would reach her own."* **P. 214** The passing of the next house - the Stewart's house - emphasizes just how close he is coming to their house. *"He's passed the Stewarts,' said the fat woman. Two houses to go. They looked at each other wildly."* **P. 215** The use of the short sentence and the adverb *"wildly"* make clear the growing concern within both women that this telegram actually might be for them. The use of the adverb is the first time we read about a reaction from the Thin woman. She has been aware of Macleod's progress but, unlike Sarah, she has not shown any reaction. However with Macleod now only three houses from her house, the adverb points out her first visible sign of concern.

When Macleod passes the Murray's house - the house before Sarah's house - Sarah becomes certain the telegram has to be for her. **P. 215** Seeing Sarah in such acute distress the Thin woman does something quite extraordinary: she gets off her chair and physically touches and supports Sarah. Nor is it a casual touch: Sarah describes it as *"like first love."* It is brought about by her compassion for the distress that Sarah is undergoing. This joint fear that the telegram could be for them - quite unexpectedly - is also the source of the first genuine fellow feeling from each woman to the other.

When Macleod passes Sarah's house, the Thin woman is now convinced the telegram has to be for her. Where Sarah undergoes considerable public anguish when she thinks the telegram is for her, the Thin woman is reserved and controlled.

"The Thin woman was looking out at the elder, her lips pressed closely together, white and bloodless. Where had she learnt that self-control? She wasn't crying or shaking. She was looking out at something she had always dreaded but she wasn't going to cry or surrender or give herself away to anyone." **P. 216**

Although both women react in different ways - one in an emotional outburst and the other is a reserved calm - both are equally touched and alarmed at what news might be coming to their door. They just react to that news in different ways.

When elder Macleod passes both houses and continues on his way out of the village the tension is continued. Both women *"looked at each other. What did it all mean? Where was the elder going, clutching his telegram in his hand, walking like a man in a daze?"* **P. 217** It is only later that the two women and - by implication the rest of the village - learn what happened. Until that point the whole village has been mystified by why the elder did not deliver the telegram everyone knew had to be for one of them.

The elder's walking out of the village raises a point no one has thought about. Until this point it was always assumed that any telegram would be for one of the other members of the village. Nobody appears to have considered - and that includes the elder - that one day the telegram could be for the Elder himself. As can be seen by the elder's reaction to receiving, what he thinks is a telegram for him, he has also never considered this idea.

What is particularly horrifying about this telegram is that it has two victims. Unknown to the rest of the village elder Macleod has been led to believe his son has been killed. That is why he has walked through and out of the village. He was walking simply because he had no idea what to tell his wife, especially as she had been recently ill. However the telegram was not for him but for someone else in the village. When that mistake is corrected the elder is going to have to go back and inform a villager - who had previously thought their son was safe - that

actually their son is dead.

The metaphor of the telegram being likened to a missile:-

On page 211 the narrator comments that the villagers see these telegrams *"as a strange missile pointed at them from abroad."* The suggestion is that the war is not satisfied in killing their sons, it wants further satisfaction from the family at home. On the same page the narrator makes this comment. He likens these telegrams to *"a strange plague, taking their sons away and then killing them, meaninglessly, randomly."* **P. 211** The idea of the telegram being likened to the plague is very appropriate. Like any disease no one is immune. At some point in time all will succumb to its news and impact on their lives.

Although the journey of this telegram is seen through the eyes of Sarah and the Thin woman, actually a similar scene is being played out in all the houses of the village. Collectively, as a community, all undergo the reactions and distress we see with Sarah and the Thin woman.

A change in the relationship:-

The story ends with the suggestion that this relationship between these two women has undergone change. Although the women parted without saying a word to each other, there has been a change in Sarah. *"Once or twice the fat woman made as if to turn back as if she had something to say, some message to pass on, but she didn't."* **P. 217** That touch and support has clearly had a profound affect on her. The Thin woman she is also affected. She *"still sat at the window looking out."* **P. 217**

What happens with the relationship thereafter is impossible to say. But clearly Sarah is troubled by what happened and the Thin woman who, for the first time in her life, gave loving support to her neighbour, is now staring out the window.

An important marker in the relationship has been passed, but where it will lead to is not described.

The Telegram

Extract 1

The two women – one fat and one thin – sat at the window of the thin woman's house drinking tea and looking down the road which ran through the village. They were like two birds, one a fat domestic bird perhaps, the other more aquiline, more gaunt, or, to be precise, more like a buzzard.

It was wartime and though the village appeared quiet, much had gone on in it. Reverberations from a war fought far away had reached it: many of its young men had been killed, or rather drowned, since nearly all of them had joined the navy, and their ships had sunk in seas which they had never seen, except on maps which hung on the walls of the local school which they all had at one time or another unwillingly attended. One had been drowned on a destroyer after a leave during which he had told his family that he would never come back again. (Or at least that was the rumour in the village which was still, as it had always been, a superstitious place.) Another had been drowned during the pursuit of the Bismarck.

What the war had to do with them the people of the village did not know. It came on them as a strange plague, taking their sons away and then killing them, meaninglessly, randomly. They watched the road often for the telegrams.

The telegrams were brought to the houses by the local elder who, clad in black, would walk along the road and then stop at the house to which the telegram was directed. People began to think of the telegram as a strange missile pointed at them from abroad. They did not know what to associate it with, certainly not with God, but it was a weapon of some kind, it picked a door and entered it, and left desolation just like any other weapon.

The two women who watched the street were different, not only physically but socially. For the thin woman's son was a sub-lieutenant in the Navy while the fat woman's son was only an ordinary seaman. The fat woman's son had to salute the thin woman's son. One got more pay than the other, and wore better uniform. One had been at university and had therefore become an officer, the other had left school at the age of fourteen.

When they looked out the window they could see cows wandering lazily about, but little other movement. The fat woman's cow used to eat the thin woman's washing and she was looking out for it but she couldn't see it. The thin woman was not popular in the village. She was an incomer from another village and had only been in this one for thirty years or so. The fat woman had lived in the village all her days; she was a native. Also the thin woman was ambitious: she had sent her son to university though she only had a widow's pension of ten shillings a week.

As they watched they could see at the far end of the street the tall man in black clothes carrying in his hand a piece of yellow paper. This was a bare village with little colour and therefore the yellow was both strange and unnatural.

The fat woman said: 'It's Macleod again.'

'I wonder where he's going today.'

They were both frightened for he could be coming to their house. And so they watched him and as they watched him they spoke feverishly as if by speaking continually and watching his every move they would be able to keep from themselves whatever plague he was bringing. The thin woman said:

'Don't worry, Sarah, it won't be for you. Donald only left home last week.'

'You don't know,' said the fat woman, 'you don't know.'

And then she added without thinking, 'It's different for the officers.'

'Why is it different for the officers?' said the thin woman in an even voice without taking her eyes from the black figure.

'Well, I just thought they're better off,' said the fat woman in a confused tone, 'they get better food and they get better conditions.'

'They're still on the ship,' said the thin woman who was thinking that the fat woman was very stupid. But then most of them were: they were large, fat and lazy. Most of them could have better afforded to send their sons and daughters to university but they didn't want to be thought of as snobbish.

1 'They are that,' said the fat woman. 'But your son is educated,' she added irrelevantly, 'Of course her son
2 didn't salute the thin woman's son if they were both home on leave at the same time. It had happened once
3 they had been. But naturally there was the uneasiness.'

4 'I made sacrifices to have my son educated,' said the thin woman. 'I lived on a pension of ten shillings a
5 week. I was in nobody's debt. More tea?'

6 'No thank you,' said the fat woman. 'He's passed Bessie's house. That means it can't be Roddy. He's safe.'

7
8 For a terrible moment she realised that she had hoped that the elder would have turned in at Bessie's house.
9 Not that she had anything against either Bessie or Roddy. But still one thought of one's own family first.

10 The thin woman continued remorselessly as if she were pecking away at something she had pecked at for
11 many years. 'The teacher told me to send Iain to University. He came to see me. I had no thought of sending
12 him before he came. "Send your son to university," he said to me. "He's got a good head on him." And I'll tell
13 you, Sarah, I had to save every penny. Ten shillings isn't much. When did you see me with good clothes in the
14 church?'

15 'That's true,' said the fat woman absently, 'We have to make sacrifices.' It was difficult to know what she
16 was thinking of – the whale meat or the saccharines? Or the lack of clothes? Her mind was vague and diffused
17 except when she was thinking about herself.

The Telegram

Extract 1:- Question Set 1 - N 5

1. How does the writer's use of language, in **lines 7 to 13**, - on **page 13** - help to describe the affect war has had on the community.

4

Total (4)

2.

(a) Describe why the metaphor at the end of **line 14 P. 13** describes the consequence of war on the Home Front.2

(b) In what way is the metaphor used, on **line 19**, - compared to the metaphor on **line 14/15** - suggest a more direct intent in announcing death in war.

2

Total (4)

3.

With reference to **lines 33 to 45** show how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language demonstrates the thin woman's criticism of the fat woman as well as her sympathy for her.

4

Total (4)

4. By referring in detail to this story, as well as at least one other, show how Iain Crichton Smith creates real characters we can identify with.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. What is the difference between these two women as people and how they are treated by the community.

Even if the question is never faced, it is still an important question to have plotted out and reflected on. Because of her position in the community - as an outsider - the Thin Woman is very reserved and especially since she has broken a major taboo by having her son educated for University. This has major implications on her life and life style. She is also a very reserved person: gossip is something she does not involve herself in. Sarah is very different and takes great delight in gossiping. What is not clear - and might be worth thinking about - does she do it for malicious reasons or to help herself fit into the community.

Both women are terrified of getting the news that their sons have died, but they demonstrate that feeling differently. However, in addition, Sarah misses her husband. Certainly the Thin Woman is unaware of this, but it is also not clear how conscious Sarah of this feeling.

That said - and I leave this to you (though it is highlighted in the notes) - is there a difference in how the community treats both women?

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Iain Crichton Smith's rural stories describe how the views of the community impinge on the individual. With reference to this story, and others by the writer, discuss the effect of the community on the individual.

This is standard Iain Crichton Smith question. Indeed it is a question that may be asked in the exam in one form or another.

B. One of the features of rural life, described in the short stories of Iain Crichton Smith, is the need to gossip. With regard to this story - and others - how does the writer use this device to take forward the narrative?

*This is a fairly straightforward question. **One Hint:** with regard to this story it is the device that Iain Crichton Smith uses to make one distinction between the two women as people.*

The Telegram

Extract 1:- Question Set 2 - N 5

1. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language in **lines 33 to 48 page 13** help to describe:-

(a) the differences in the two women

2

(b) the tension between the two women.

2

Total (4)

2.

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language and word choice on **lines 3 to 6 - of page 14** - make it clear that Sarah has touched on a sensitive topic when she made the comment on **lines 39 - 40 of page 13**?

4

Total (4)

3. Throughout this extract, it is made clear that the thin woman is not highly thought of in the village. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language emphasise this with regard to:-

(a) where she lives.

2

(b) how she is treated in the village.

2

Total (4)

4. Although this story is not one of Iain Crichton Smith central war stories, war is still a significant aspect of this story. With regard to this story, as well as at least one other story, what does Iain Crichton Smith have to say about war and its effects.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. What evidence is there - within the story - that Sarah dislikes the Thin woman and/or is jealous of her?

*This is a fairly straight forward question. Examples are her gossiping about her, her cow eating her laundry etc. That said what is to made of the fact that she appears to constantly meet with the Thin woman in **her house**. If she really did dislike her would she want to be in her company so often? Further - assuming the content of the story represents reality - why does Sarah not have the Thin woman in her house?*

2. Why does Iain Crichton Smith not give a name to the Thin woman and what impact does that have on the story and the character.

I have used this as a question because it was something I curious about when writing the notes. Ignoring the point that we do not know her name because Iain Crichton Smith decided not to give her a name can we learn something about this absence of a name from what we have learnt about both characters. E.g. why does Sarah never use her name?

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In this story, as well as Iain Crichton Smith other rural stories, Iain Crichton Smith describes tensions between the native born villager compared to the incomer. How big a part in village life, from Iain Crichton Smith's perspective, does he consider and describe this to be?

This is a very basic Iain Crichton Smith question. It is fairly dormant in this story, whereas to a lessor degree in the "The Red Door" - it is much more prominent. It is clear such tension ranges from a very violent point to a reduced tension - as in this story. However - even in this story - it is still visual and apparent.

The Telegram

Extract 1:- Question Set 3 - Higher

1. Look closely at **lines 4 to 6** of **page 13**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith use both word choice and sentence structure to distinguish the difference in the two women? You should comment on both word choice as well as sentence structure in your answer. 4

Total (4)

2. Explain how the attempt - on **line 36** - by the thin woman to comfort the fat woman brings to the surface an established sore between the two women. 2

Total (2)

3.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language on **lines 33 to 35 page 13** emphasise the unease of both women. 4

Total (4)

4. In his stories, Iain Crichton Smith often deals with the consequence of living in rural highland villages. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, what we learn through Iain Crichton Smith's stories what it was like to live in such communities. 10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language highlight the difference between these two women as people and how they are treated by the community?

Again a basic question and very much a potential Higher question. The Thin woman is very much a reserved person. She does not gossip like Sarah, nor does she speak as much as Sarah. We do not gain direct access to her emotions though we are given Sarah's account of what she believes those emotions to be. However - especially looking at how Iain Crichton Smith describes her at particular moments - like when she believes her son may have died - his language tells us a great deal. Sarah is easier she makes very what she is feeling. And that difference is one of the differences between the women.

As regards how the village treats them Iain Crichton Smith seems to imply - that although village born - Sarah is treated differently (and she certainly thinks so) both live at the edge of the village and Sarah does visit other houses. There may be more in similarity than in difference.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Although distant from where the community live how does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language make the war live and present within the community?
This is dealt within the notes.

B. One of the great themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is the impact war has on both the individual as well as the community. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops this theme in his writing.

C. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

The Telegram

Extract 1:- Question Set 4 - Higher

1. In **lines 14 and 15, page 13** Iain Crichton Smith use of language identifies one of the themes of this story.

(a) what is the theme described? 1

(b) Show how this theme is developed throughout this extract. 3

Total (4)

2. In **lines 7 to 9 on page 14**, give one example of how his use of language emphasises the thinking process of the thin woman.

(a) language feature 1

(b) How the feature illustrates the thinking process 1

Total (2)

3. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of word choice and sentence structure - in **lines 3 to 6 on page 14** - emphasise the thin woman's sensitivity to having educated her son.

(a) Word Choice 2

(b) Sentence Structure 2

Total (4)

4. Iain Crichton Smith has the ability to create characters that the reader can feel sympathy for. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, demonstrate how successful he is in doing so. 10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. Both women have sons. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help to describe both son's as well as distinguish between them.

This is a fairly easy question and one that is dealt within the notes.

2. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help to build some of the other villagers as people?

Much of the evidence comes from Sarah's commentary on the Elder's progress up the village.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In his stories that are rural based, Iain Crichton Smith has demonstrated that some characters can be seen to be in exile even while living within a community. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss what techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop this paradox within his rural stories.

This is a theme that is well explored within the notes. In "The Telegram" I would suggest that the Thin woman is more obviously isolated. However, I would argue - and maybe in a more subtle way - Sarah is also isolated. The theme is also dealt with in "The Red Door" though somewhat more subtly.

B. A central theme within Iain Crichton Smith's prose is the struggle between the individual and the needs of the community. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops this theme in his writing.

There are a number of ways to approach this question. Probably most obvious is the conflict the Thin woman has when she wants her son educated. Self improvement is clearly a serious taboo that the Thin woman transgresses, however teaching herself another way to drink tea is also frowned on. "The Red Door" would be an excellent companion story for this question.

The Telegram

Extract 2

'Did you hear,' said the fat woman, 'that Malcolm Mackay was up on a drunken charge? He smashed his car, so they say. It was in the black-out.'

'I didn't hear that,' said the thin woman.

'It was coming home last night with the meat. He had it in the van and he smashed it at the burn. But they say he's all right. I don't know how they kept him out of the war. They said it was his heart but there was nothing wrong with his heart. Everyone knows it was influence. What's wrong with his heart if he can drink and smash a car?'

The thin woman drank her tea very delicately. She used to be away on service a long time before she was married and she had a dainty way of doing things. She sipped her tea, her little finger elegantly curled in an irritating way.

'Why do you keep your finger like that?' said the fat woman suddenly.

'Like what?'

The fat woman demonstrated.

'Oh, it was the way I saw the guests drinking tea in the hotels when I was on service. They always drank like that.'

'He's passed the Stewarts,' said the fat woman. Two houses to go. They looked at each other wildly. It must be one of them. Surely. They could see the elder quite clearly now, walking very stiff, very upright, wearing his black hat. He walked in a stately dignified manner, eyes straight ahead of him.

'He's proud of what he's doing,' said the fat woman suddenly. 'You'd think he was proud of it. Knowing before anyone else. And he himself was never in the war.'

'Yes,' said the thin woman, 'it gives him a position.' They watched him. They both knew him well. He was a stiff, quiet man who kept himself to himself, more than ever now. He didn't mix with people and he always carried the Bible into the pulpit for the minister.

'They say his wife had one of her fits again,' said the fat woman viciously. He had passed the Murrays. The next house was her own. She sat perfectly still. Oh, pray God it wasn't hers. And yet it must be hers. Surely it must be hers. She had dreamt of this happening, her son drowning in the Atlantic ocean, her own child whom she had reared, whom she had seen going to play football in his green jersey and white shorts, whom she had seen running home from school. She could see him drowning but she couldn't make out the name of the ship. She had never seen a really big ship and what she imagined was more like the mailboat than a cruiser. Her son couldn't drown out there for no reason that she could understand. God couldn't do that to people. It was impossible. God was kinder than that. God helped you in your sore trouble. She began to mutter a prayer over and over. She said it quickly like the Catholics, O God save my son O God save my son O God save my son. She was ashamed of prattling in that way as if she was counting beads but she couldn't stop herself, and on top of that she would soon cry. She knew it and she didn't want to cry in front of that woman, that foreigner. It would be weakness. She felt the arm of the thin woman around her shoulders, the thin arm, and it was like first love, it was like the time Murdo had taken her hand in his when they were coming home from the dance, such an innocent gesture, such a spontaneous gesture. So unexpected, so strange, so much a gift. She was crying and she couldn't look...

'He has passed your house,' said the thin woman in a distant firm voice, and she looked up. He was walking along and he had indeed passed her house. She wanted to stand up and dance all round the kitchen, all fifteen stone of her, and shout and cry and sing a song but then she stopped. She couldn't do that. How could she do that when it must be the thin woman's son? There was no other house. The thin woman was looking out at the elder, her lips pressed closely together, white and bloodless. Where had she learnt that self-control? She wasn't crying or shaking. She was looking out at something she had always dreaded but she wasn't going to cry or

1 And the elder walked on. A few yards now till he reached the plank. But the thin woman hadn't cried. She was
2 steady and still, her lips still compressed, sitting upright in her chair. And, miracle of miracles, the elder passed
3 the plank and walked straight on.

4 They looked at each other. What did it all mean? Where was the elder going, clutching his telegram in his
5 hand, walking like a man in a daze? There were no other houses so where was he going? They drank their tea
6 in silence, turning away from each other. The fat woman said, 'I must be going.' They parted for the moment
7 without speaking. The thin woman still sat at the window looking out. Once or twice the fat woman made as if
8 to turn back as if she had something to say, some message to pass on, but she didn't. She walked away.

9 It wasn't till later that night that they discovered what had happened. The elder had a telegram directed
10 to himself, to tell him of the drowning of his own son. He should never have seen it just like that, but there had
11 been a mistake at the post office, owing to the fact that there were two boys in the village with the same name.
12 His walk through the village was a somnambulistic wandering. He didn't want to go home and tell his wife what
13 had happened. He was walking along not knowing where he was going when later he was stopped half way to
14 the next village. Perhaps he was going in search of his son. Altogether he had walked six miles. The telegram
15 was crushed in his fingers and so sweaty that they could hardly make out the writing.

The Telegram

Extract 2 Question Set 1 - N 5

1. Look at **lines 17 to 19** on **page 19**.

(a) On **line 17** Iain Crichton Smith says - of the two women - *"They looked at each other wildly."* What contribution to the meaning of the line does the adverb make? 1

(b) What contribution does the single word sentence on **line 18 - page 19** - make to how the ladies are reacting? 1

(c) How does the description of the Elder - **lines 18 and 19** - appear to confirm the women's fears? 1

Total (3)

2. One of Sarah's weaknesses is a need to gossip.

Look at **lines 4, 7, 8 and 25** on **page 19**

(a) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of the personal pronoun allow Sarah to give authority to her gossip? 3

Total (3)

3. Look at **lines 25 to 38** of **page 19**.

a) How does Sarah react when she believes the telegram may be for her? 1

b) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help in describing Sarah's reactions at this point? 3

Total (4)

4.

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language - **lines 34 to 38** of **page 19** - help to describe the shock and impact of what the thin woman does? 2

Total (2)

5. Throughout this passage how does Iain Crichton Smith's use language to describe and define the difference between the two women? 8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. Look at **lines 46 - 51** on **page 19**. How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language help us understand what Sarah - for the first time - realises about the Thin woman's life and about her own life?

This is the second character revelation brought about by the Thin woman fearing her son - "Iain" L. 4 P. 4 - has been killed at sea. the character who receives the revelation is Sarah. Iain Crichton Smith uses a number of devices to underline Sarah's new understanding about her neighbour. Repetition of the phrase "She saw", highlighting the impact of her realisation. The use of the noun "discipline" which highlights just what struggle the Thin woman's life has been. Lines 46 - 48 highlight examples of what life had been for the Thin woman. The fact that Sarah can describe this indicates that she had always known this but had not been concerned. The line 48 - 49 highlights the impact of this of this revelation on Sarah. Lines 49 - 51 highlights highlights Sarah's understanding of her past unjust criticisms of the Thin Woman.

2. Specifically with reference to **lines 4 - 8** on **page 20** - [as well as elsewhere in the passage]:-

i) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language indicate a change in the relationship between these two women?

This is a point that struck me after reading the story.

First:- When the Thin woman touches Sarah to inform her that MacLeod has passed her house. It is prompted by Sarah's outburst on **lines 25-38 page 20**. It is clear that the Thin Woman is moved by Sarah's grief. In addition there is the moment described above when Sarah realises she has misunderstood the Thin woman.

Second:- **Lines 7 to 8** on **page 20**. Something is urging Sarah to return to the Thin woman.

Neither of these are definitive proof but the story implies that this moment has been a profound shock to both woman and suggests that the relationship hereafter will be different.

ii) and specifically what language features help to demonstrate this

I'll leave that for you to detect.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Iain Crichton Smith craft as a short story teller does not waste time on unnecessary detail. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith choice of significant detail to increase the reader's understanding of the writer's plot and theme. *A fairly straight forward question.*

The Telegram

Extract 2 Question Set 2 - N 5

1. Focus on **lines 25 to 38 and 46** of **page 19** to **line 3** of **page 20**.

(a) What do both women learn about the other? 3

(b) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help to describe these differences? 3

Total (6)

2.

What does Iain Crichton Smith achieve by describing the Elder's walk through the village as "*sommuambulistic*." **L. 12**
page. 20. 2

Total (2)

3. Look at **lines 25 to 38** of **page 19**.

a) How does Iain Crichton Smith describe the thin woman when she believes the telegram may be for her? 2

b) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help in describing the thin woman's reactions at this point? 2

Total (4)

4. With reference to **line 39** on **page 19** to **line 9** on **page 20** it is clear that both women have an epiphany about the other.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use language to suggest that the relationship between the two woman may have undergone a change? 8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. The third character of importance in this short story is Macleod the elder.

i) Assuming (and you can disagree with this assumption if you wish) Sarah's views of Macleod are those of the village, what does the village think about the elder? You may need to refer to both extracts.

This part is reasonably easy and does not need much comment.

ii) The final lines - 9 to 15 on page 20 - we know what happened to Macleod and why he walk right through the village.

Indicate how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language hints in the story - as a whole - that Macleod is different this day.

There are a number of references to Macleod. Lines 18-19 on Page 19 + Lines 22-23 P. 19 + 4-5 Page 20. With subtle references Iain Crichton Smith highlights how different Macleod is this day and the emotions going through him.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. A good short story has credible characters who are in situations that are moving and illuminate both character and theme. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to create such characters and theme.

Again a fairly straightforward question. In this story we have the early conversations which highlight the history and tension between these two woman. Then we have those two dramatic moments when each woman sees the other in a new light. Through both of these aspects of the story the reality of the impact of the war on those living at home.

B. How Iain Crichton Smith's first appearance of a major character is important. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how effectively Iain Crichton Smith introduction of a character has prepared the reader for the role of the character in the remainder of the story.

Sometimes - like in this story - we get a short summary introduction which is filled out as the story continues. In the story "The Red Door" we get a detailed narrative introduction to the character. So there are a variety of ways Iain Crichton Smith introduces his characters.

The Telegram

Extract 2 Question Set 3 - Higher

1. Look at lines **25 to 38 on page 19**. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language effectively create the emotions that the fat woman undergoes when she feels the telegram is for her. 4

Total (4)

2. Look at lines **10 to 17 on page 20**.

What language features does Iain Crichton Smith employ to describe the emotional state of the Elder. 2

Total (2)

3. Look at lines **46 to 51 of page 19**. How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language describe emphasise what Sarah learns at that moment.

(a) Language feature. 1

(b) How the feature emphasises what is learnt? 3

Total (4)

4. One of the themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is character contrast. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, examine the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to contrast his characters. 10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. One of Iain Crichton Smith's literary techniques is the use of the short sentence.

i) Choose four examples and explain how the use of the short sentence enhances Iain Crichton Smith's meaning within the story.

This is quite a straight forward but important question. It is well worth plotting out how a particular technique - in this case the short sentence - helps to drive the narrative and writer's theme. It is well worth have some technical notes on such techniques.

2. Look at **lines 25 - 38 on page 19** and **line 39 on page 19** and **lines 1 to 3 on page 20**. Specifically - and exclusively - demonstrate how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language describes how each woman reacts when they believe the letter is actually for them.

This is detailed in the notes and has already been addressed in a previous question. But it is a good question to be on top of. It is not just what we learn about both women but how do the words that Iain Crichton Smith uses make us appreciate the ideas.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Two of Iain Crichton Smith's techniques in this - and other stories - is his use of repetition and the short sentence. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith's use of these techniques helps to deliver his themes.

Again an important and basic question. Repetition and the short sentence are among Iain Crichton Smith's most utilised techniques. Higher is all about not just what have we learnt but how the manner in which the author writes allows the reader to appreciate his/her meaning.

B. Iain Crichton Smith's stories are said to be about gossip, betrayals and epiphanies of village life. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe to what extent you agree with that description of Iain Crichton Smith's village stories.

I cannot remember where I found this quote, however I felt it was a worthy issue to address. Answering it is a bit more challenging however. Gossip is one of the central themes of village life. Those who do not indulge in gossip are invariably outsiders. Although not openly stated, it appears gossip is considered to be normal village behaviour. Of course gossip is always a means to be critical of fellow villagers. Although not a village story betrayal is clearly a theme in "In Church." For a village story "The Painter" is probably the best example of betrayal. Regarding epiphany "The Red Door" is clearly the best story. And so, although it may not be obvious at first. actually Iain Crichton Smith's stories are indeed about these elements of village life.

The Telegram

Extract 2 Question Set 4 - Higher

1. Look at **lines 42 to 45** on **page 19**. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language effectively create the emotions that the thin woman undergoes when she feels the telegram is for her.

4
Total (4)

2. Look at **lines 7 and 8** on **page 20**.

What point is Iain Crichton Smith making through the difference in the sentence structure.

I am asking whether Sarah's indecision about whether to go back may suggest that a change is taking place in this relationship.

2
Total (2)

3. Look at **lines 35 to 38** on **page 19**. How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language describe emphasise the effect of Sarah's grief on the thin woman?

(a) Language feature.

1

(b) How the feature emphasises what is learnt?

3

Total (4)

4. One of the themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is the difference between villagers incoming into a village and those born within the village. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss the impact on his characters from this difference.

10
Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. Comment on Iain Crichton Smith's use of the long and extended sentence to take forward his themes and purpose. This question is the colliery to the question on the impact of the short sentence.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe to what extent Iain Crichton Smith's shorter prose is about the nature of identity and freedom.

Again a question that seemed attractive when I saw it. Identity is closely associated with community and the impact on the individual. A good example is Murdo from "The Red Door." In this story maybe the Thin woman is the best example. Her identity is defined by who she is: someone who is not village born. Freedom might best be explored through the characters of William - from "The Painter" and Murdo from "The Red Door."

B. It has been said that Iain Crichton Smith brings to his prose his poetic gift of colour and imagery. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops and employs this literary technique in his shorter prose.

Yet another question that seemed interesting until you have to answer it. I really wanted to link Iain Crichton Smith's poetry with his prose: not so much directly as indirectly.

The use of imagery is so pronounced that it does not me to highlight examples for you.

Colour is more difficult. Obviously there is the colour of the telegram. In this short it is used as an identifier: not just what is it but what has happened and the consequence that has for a member of the community. Actually - in truth - the telegram has consequence for all the community; they all suffer praying this telegram is not for them.

There is William in "The Painter." His paintings are precarious and depend on the mood and feelings of the community. Images and colours that are prized one moment can be outlawed destroyed at another moment.

There is Murdo in "The Red Door." Here colour is used as community element of control.

"

Home

"The Red Door" Published by Birlinn Ltd; 2001

There is likely to have been a very heated discussion the day Mr. Jamiesons informed his wife that he wanted to take a holiday and visit Glasgow and the tenement where he lived and indeed where he had met and married his wife. Throughout the story, Mrs Jamiesons makes clear that she is extremely unhappy to be here. It appears certain that she was very critical of taking such a holiday.

To take trip from Africa to Glasgow in the 1970's will have been very expensive and possibly the journey might have taken some time. What is quite surprising is that since both had worked and lived in the area and therefore both had first hand knowledge of how difficult life had been there, Mr. Jamiesons would decide to use his own large expensive car to visit this very poor area and Mrs Jamiesons would decide to arrive clothed in a rich fur coat. Both would have been well aware of the problems these issues would cause to the locals.

Life as a twenty something:-

Although Mr. Jamiesons had left the area to live in Africa around thirty five years ago, the lady who lived in the flat below him and his wife – still lived in her flat – and clearly remembered him, even though he did not recognise her. **P. 117.**

The best description of in this twenty something comes from her. At this point Jamiesons is clearly married and his wife now lives with him in the flat above.

"She remembered them but took no pleasure in the memory. The Jamiesons had lived above them and were, of course, Protestant. Not that at that level you could distinguish Catholic from Protestant except that the former went to chapel and the latter didn't." **P. 117**

The use of the parenthesis *"of course"* suggests that the kinds of behaviour he took part – and pleasure – in she associated with Protestants. The comment that *"she took no pleasure in the memory"* suggests she may well be Catholic. When she does reply to him all she says is *"I remember."* Though Jamieson tries to engage her in conversation she refuses to do so. Therefore, as she explained, you could not tell by where someone lived what religion they were. She is a Catholic who lived in the flat below a very bigoted and violent Protestant.

To herself she admits she remembered the Jamiesons – and particularly him. To herself she also makes it very clear she did not like them at all: *"She remembered Jamieson all right."* When she does reply to him she simply says *"I remember"* but the use of the phrase *"all right"* makes clear that even now she has not changed her opinion of them.

She remembered Mr. Jamiesons as an intolerant and violent young man who took pleasure in beating people up, especially if they were Catholic.

"Every Friday night he would dress up in his best blue suit, neat as a ray or razor, and would wave to his wife who was following his progress to the road from an open window, her scarf tight round her head. He would go off to the pub and pick a fight with a Catholic, or more likely three Catholics." **P. 117.**

Beating up people, especially Catholics, was a ritual for Mr. Jamiesons. Each and every *"Friday"* he would do so. He took such pride in this ritual that he would *"dress up"* in his *"best blue suit"* before he set off. Although everyone else might dress up before going out on a Friday night Mr. Jamiesons purpose was not the drink – which he certainly consumed – but to *"pick a fight with a Catholic."* He did not get into a fight: he went out of his way *"to pick a fight."* It is clear that although drink was an aspect of his Friday night, it was not the principle part.

As his downstairs neighbour recollected it was at *"midnight he would come home covered with blood, his face bruised a fine Protestant blue, his clothes dirty and brown. He would walk like a victorious gladiator up the stair and then start a fight with his wife, uprooting chairs and wardrobes till the silence of exhaustion settled over the flats at about one in the morning. The next day his wife would descend the stair, her eyes black and blue, and say that she had stumbled at the sink. Her repertoire of invention was endless."*

With the phrase *"his face bruised a fine Protestant blue, his clothes dirty and brown"* it is clear that whoever it was that Mr. Jamiesons fought with, Mr. Jamiesons received as good as he gave. The phrase *"a fine Protestant blue"* – which equates with the colour we know as *"Royal Blue"* – makes clear that although Mr. Jamiesons may not have been cut, he certainly was deeply bruised all over. The phrase is also an example of his downstairs neighbour's sarcasm towards Mr. Jamiesons. The adjective *"fine"* may help define the colour, however it certainly also describes his neighbours opinion of Jamiesons - and it is a detrimental opinion.

Whatever the outcome of the Friday night fights, when returning home he considered himself as a *"victorious gladiator."* A gladiator is a man who is trained to fight, in an arena, with weapons against other men or wild animals. In addition these fights were not a group event joined into by fellow Protestants. These fights only involved Mr. Jamiesons and those Catholics he fought with: *"his lone battle with the Catholics."* P. 124. It is not clear whether Mr. Jamiesons considered his opponents as men or wild animals. It may just be hyperbole on his neighbours part to refer to Mr. Jamiesons as a *"gladiator"* – since gladiators were trained fighters – however she may have known something about her neighbour that has not been disclosed. Whatever the answer, one thing is certain each and every Friday Jamiesons always returned home victorious.

And – each and every Friday night – on returning home he would beat up his wife so badly that it was impossible for her to disguise the wounds she received. Nor was this weekly beating something that took place over a short period of time. It continued until *"the silence of exhaustion settled over the flats at about one in the morning."* The phrase *"the silence of exhaustion settled over the flats"* and especially the noun *"exhaustion"* inform us that it is only when he is exhausted, does he stop. What distinguishes this fight with his wife from the fights he had earlier that evening, in the earlier fights he was not exhausted. He returns home to his flat jubilant. However the beating of his wife continues until he is unable to go on anymore.

And one other point. The beating of Mrs. Jamiesons is fully in the hearing of everyone else in the flats. We have no information who else lives in the flat, but we do know that no one is prepared to intervene in the fight on behalf of Mrs. Jamiesons. Therefore all have to listen to the beating until around *"one in the morning"* when an exhausted Mr. Jamiesons stops. The beating of Mrs. Jamiesons every Friday night is therefore not a private affair: it a public one.

The neighbour comments that *"the next day his wife would descend the stair, her eyes black and blue, and say that she had stumbled at the sink. Her repertoire of invention was endless."* What is extraordinary is that when Mrs. Jamiesons does appear, the following day, she would make some excuse to explain why she looks the way she does. Aside from the point that she must have been aware everyone heard the fight, at no point does she blame her husband. His neighbour comments that when these fights occurred there would be *"uprooting chairs and wardrobes."* We do know a little bit more about this furniture. After Mrs. Jamiesons returns to the car, Mr. Jamiesons decides to see what their old flat is now like. Although he sees that

the *"Rafferty's"* he does not ask to see inside. Outside the door to his old flat he does reflect on the furniture that was there in his day. He remembers *"the huge Victorian wardrobe (which was too big for the bedroom) and the huge Victorian dresser."* P. 121. It is these pieces of furniture that his downstairs neighbour hears being upturned. The fact that such pieces of furniture could be upturned during the beating is a testament to the ferocity of the beatings his wife received from her husband.

The Courting and Marriage to Mrs Jamiesons:-

The relationship between Mr and Mrs Jamiesons was a changing one. Where it is certain that while in Glasgow he had the upper hand and was the dominant partner, when in Africa there is reason to believe that she was dominant partner.

Although when they met she worked in a *"factory"* P. 120 it was at the local dance when he acquired the courage to ask her to dance with him. P. 120. He reminds her of that night. *"Do you mind that night?" he asked contritely. "You were standing by the wall and I went up to you and I said, "Could I have the honour?""* Because she was *"standing by the wall"* it suggests she was not a confident person. However, be that as it may be, Mr. Jamiesons clearly is interested in her and changes his mode of speech to ask *"Could I have the honour?"* We never see that kind of curtesy anywhere else in the story, nor are there reports of it at other times in their lives – such as when in Africa. This expression is quite unique of the Glasgow Mr. Jamiesons. That said there is good reason to believe, especially when Mrs. Jamiesons reminds her husband of the *"Bruces"*, P. 120 that the African Mr. Jamiesons was a much more circumspect man than the Glasgow Mr. Jamiesons.

The evidence that Mr. Jamiesons was determined to win the affections of Mrs. Jamiesons can be seen in the fact that when they returned home he took her – and she agreed to go – *"down lovers' lane, where they had all the seats and the statues."* P. 120. On its own that may not appear strong evidence that Mr. Jamiesons was wanting to gain Mrs. Jamiesons affections. Indeed it could be argued this action only demonstrates Mr. Jamiesons lusty intentions. However it is what he does while there that suggests his desire to make Mrs. Jamiesons like him. She reminds him that while they were down the lane he had: *"made a clown of yourself," she said unforgivingly. "Yes, didn't I just?" remembering how he had climbed the statue in the moonlight to show off."* P. 120.

She is described as replying *"unforgivingly,"* The use of the adverb to describe her reaction – thirty five years after the event – makes clear that she was unhappy with what he did that night. The adverb identifies a difference between the two. Unlike him, Mrs. Jamiesons is unhappy with such showy demonstrations and has still not forgotten or forgiven such a demonstration of affection.

To demonstrate his affections Mr. Jamiesons had *"climbed the statue."* This had clearly frightened and embarrassed her. Earlier she had reminded Mr. Jamiesons about the *"Bruces"* **P. 120** – doctor friends they had left behind in Africa when they decided to visit Glasgow. By reminding her husband about this doctor - who was certainly an important friend - she reminds Mr. Jamiesons that he too would have been unimpressed by Jamiesons making such a spectacle of himself. That said, the reason we know where the story is set is precisely because he climbed that statue and glimpsed the shipbuilding on the Clyde.

Mr. Jamiesons desire to *"to show off"* to his girlfriend distinguishes the character of each. **P. 120** This kind of behaviour is alien to Mrs. Jamiesons. Unlike her husband, his wife is a more reserved person. We see that displayed when she is taunted by the youths who congregate around their car. She looks steadily ahead and refuses to make eye contact. Her constant criticisms of her husband force him to respond *"Shut up. you didn't even have proper table manners when I met you"* **P. 121** The idea that Mr. Jamiesons had better table manners than his wife is a point that is difficult to accept. However whether it is true or not, thirty five years later he still enjoys reminding his wife of this point.

One thing that is clear is that Mr. Jamiesons is fond of the memories of their early days and how they had to struggle together. In moments like this it is evident that he is still fond of his wife. *"And remember the flicks?" he said. 'We used tae get in wi jam jars. And do you mind the man who used to come down the passage at the interval spraying us with disinfectant?'* **P. 120** In those days they would save their change in *"jam jars."* Their poverty was something they shared and when they had saved enough money they would use it to treat themselves to a film in the local cinema. Because of where they lived, the owners of the cinema believed these kinds of people carried disease and germs and so the cinema would spray that area of the cinema – where they were seated - in order to ensure that the other patrons did not come into contact with what it was the owners of the cinema believed that these kinds of people carried.

When the couple lived in Glasgow Mrs. Jamiesons was well aware her husband was idle. *"You were lazy, that was what was wrong with you. You'd go out ferreting when you were here. You liked being with the boys."* **P. 121** In the eyes of his wife, for him pleasure was clearly more important than providing for his family. Being *"with the boys"* drinking and ferret hunting his wife knew were her husband's true priorities. In his wife's eyes that was why she considered him to be lazy.

However the Africa Mr. Jamiesons was a very different person from the Glasgow Mr. Jamiesons. The story makes clear that when in Africa Mr. Jamiesons became an industrious person. The primary reason for this change was because while in Africa Mrs. Jamiesons had also changed. and it was she who drove him to succeed in life. *"Remember it was me who drove you to the top."* **P. 120.** It is clear that his job as a Government administrator was achieved through her endeavours. The use of the verb *"drove"* **P. 120** points out that left to himself he would not have risen to such heights. He considers that being a Government administrator is a more impressive position than being – like Mr. Bruce – a doctor. That said, Mr. Jamiesons clearly respected the doctor and was close friends with him. However when riled by his wife, Mr. Jamiesons arrogance takes over and he retorts that he, being a Government administrator, held a far more important position than his friend Mr. Bruce who was only a doctor.

It is clear that the two are still very fond of each other. *"His own wife put her hand in his as they got out of the car."* **P. 124** Although the two have argued and his wife has been critical regarding why they came here at all, by voluntarily placing *"her hand in his"* she is signalling that a loving relationship has returned. Leaving the car to enter the hotel he notes that his wife *"walked with a certain exaggerated delicacy. It looked as if it might be a good evening after all"* **P. 124** Mr. Jamiesons realises that a full physical relationship between them will return that night. Their relationship has been turbulent one and has – at times - resorted to physical abuse by Mr. Jamiesons towards his wife. However from that first evening when he met her at the local dance to this visit to their old flat there have always been moments when their old antagonisms have died away and love and friendship has taken its place.

Two incidents and Mr. Jamiesons memories of the area.

One of the two incidents is recreated through memory whereas the other is an incident that takes place during their visit. Both have one thing in common, after each event Mr. Jamiesons reflects on what he should have done and said compared to what actually took place.

Incident 1:- the meeting with the Factor

'Do you mind the day I went to the factor?' he said. The factor had been a small, buttoned-up, black-suited lawyer. In those days of poverty he himself had been frightened to visit him in his wee office with the dim glass door. He imagined what he would do to that factor now.

He had gone there after coming home from the office, and the wee lawyer in the undertaker's suit had said to him over his shoulder, 'What do you want?'

'I want to report the rain coming through the roof.'

'How much do you pay Jackson?'

'Fifteen shillings a week.'

'And what do you expect for fifteen shillings a week?' said the factor, as if even giving words away were an agony of the spirit. In a corner of the office an umbrella dripped what seemed to be black rain 'I was hoping that the house would be dry anyway.' 'I'll send someone round tomorrow,' and the factor had bent down to study a ledger with a rusty red cover.

'You said that a week ago.'

'And I'm saying it again. I'm a busy man. I've got a lot to do.' At that moment he had been filled with a terrible reckless anger and was about to raise his fist when the factor looked up. His mouth opened slightly showing one gold tooth in the middle of the bottom row of teeth, and he said carefully, 'Next week.'

So he had walked out past the dispirited receptionist in the glass cage - the one with the limp and the ageing mother - and then home. P. 119

The incident is introduced with a piece of reflection. *The factor had been a small, buttoned-up, black-suited lawyer. In those days of poverty he himself had been frightened to visit him in his wee office with the dim glass door. He imagined what he would do to that factor now.*

Mr. Jamiesons begins by admitting that thirty five years ago he had been "frightened" of the Factor. He continues by imagining what he would do now, now that he was a man of importance. Whereas this incident is reported through memory, the incident with the youths on the estate happens that day. The difference is that with both incidents Mr. Jamiesons does nothing and later reflects on what it is he should have done. With regard to the Factor had the man been still alive he realises "he could show

him his bank balance. The wee nyaff." P. 119. Whether showing the Factor his bank balance would have made a difference is questionable. What is extraordinary is the Mr. Jamiesons has actually brought his "bank balance" with him in order to show people.

He had gone there after coming home from the office, and the wee lawyer in the undertaker's suit had said to him over his shoulder,

'What do you want?'

'I want to report the rain coming through the roof.'

'How much do you pay Jackson?'

'Fifteen shillings a week.'

'And what do you expect for fifteen shillings a week?' said the factor, as if even giving words away were an agony of the spirit.

It is not clear what "office" Mr. Jamiesons worked in while living in Glasgow at that time. What is interesting is that the Factor was not seated facing his tenants and therefore he always talked over his shoulder. The critical point, for the Factor, was not the description of the complaint but the amount of rent paid by the tenant. The Jamiesons pay "Fifteen shillings a week" and clearly such a rent gave the tenant few rights to expect that repairs will be undertaken as and when requested. These flats appear to be on a "take-it" or "leave-it" basis.

And what do you expect for fifteen shillings a week?' said the factor, as if even giving words away were an agony of the spirit.

The expression "as if even giving words away were an agony of the spirit" and especially the phrase "an agony of the spirit" highlight that the Factor is not used to discussion. There is an implied idea from Mr. Jamiesons that whatever the rent the tenant should expect everything to be repaired.

The Factor volunteers to have someone look at the problem the next day. When Mr. Jamiesons points out that not only did he report problem a week ago, the Factor said exactly the same thing last week. The Factor immediately responds "And I'm saying it again. I'm a busy man. I've got a lot to do." P. 119. Through the use of the short sentence, the Factor underlines the point that he will get round to it in his own good time.

It is not clear whether at any point of the conversation the Factor has turned to face Mr. Jamiesons. The suggestion is that the Factor has not turned and still has his back to him throughout the conversation. One of the characteristics of Mr. Jamiesons is that he has a short temper and can be easily roused. As a consequence of not being given an immediate response, Mr. Jamiesons begins to prepare to be violent. It is at that point that the Factor looks

directly at Mr. Jamiesons. The Factor is clearly angry and *"said carefully."* The use of the adverb underlines that the Factor's irritation that Mr. Jamiesons is challenging him. The Factor informs Mr. Jamiesons that it will be dealt with *"next week."* **P. 119.**

The price for challenging the Factor now means that the fault will now not be looked at for a week, instead of the next day. Mr. Jamiesons arrogance in challenging the factor - as viewed by the Factor - has now delayed the repair by week if not by much longer.

Mr. Jamiesons reflecting on the whole episode believes that the Factor treated him *"like a black."* **P. 119.** It is not clear how Mr. Jamiesons can conclude through the use of the simile that the Factor treated him *"like a black."* Taking the Factor at his word - and Mr. Jamiesons has produced evidence that the Factor cannot be taken at his word - the Factor has agreed to have the fault dealt with the next day. What changes that situation is the physical threat that Mr. Jamiesons makes towards the Factor. If Mr. Jamiesons contention that he has been treated *"like a black"* is because the repair will now not be attended to for a week, then he only has himself to blame.

Incident 2:- Confronting the estate youths

He rushed out. 'Hey,' he said, 'don't scratch my car.' 'Whit is it?' a hard voice shouted from above.

He looked up. 'Nothing,' he said, 'I was just telling them not to scratch my car.'

'Why have you goat it there anyway?'

The woman was thin and stringy and wore a cheap bracelet round her throat. A bit like Mrs Jamieson but less self-effacing. 'I was just paying a visit,' he said. 'I used to live here.'

'They're no daeing anything to your caur,' said the voice which was like a saw that would cut through steel forever.

'It's an expensive car,' he said, watching his wife who was sitting in it like a graven image, lips firmly pressed together.

Another window opened. 'Hey, you there! I'm on night shift. Let's get a bit of sleep. Right?'

A pair of hairy hands slammed the window down again.

Two tall youngsters chewing gum approached.

'Hey, mister, whit are you on about?' They stared at him, legs crossed, delicate narrow toes.

'Nice bus,' said the one with the long curving moustache.

'Nice bus, eh Charley?'

They moved forward in concert, a ballet.

'Look,' he began, 'I was just visiting.' Then he stopped. Should he tell them that he was a rich man who had made good? It might not be advisable. One of them absently kicked one of the front tyres and then suddenly said to his wife, 'Peek

a boo' She showed no sign that she had seen him. They reminded him of some Africans he had seen, insolent young toughs, town-bred.

'All right, boys,' he said in an ingratiating voice. 'We're going anyway. We've seen all we want.'

'Did you hear that, Micky? He's seen all he wants to see. Would you say that was an insult?' Micky gazed benevolently at him through a lot of hair.

'Depends. What have you seen, daddy?'

'I used to live here,' he said jovially. 'In the old days. The best years of my life.' The words rang hollow between them.

'Hear that?' said Micky. 'Hear him. He's left us. Daddy's left us.'

He came up close and said quietly,

'Get out of here, daddy, before we cut you up, and take your camera and your bus with you. And your bag too. Right?'

The one with the curving moustache spat and said quietly,

'Tourist.' P. 122-123

'They're no daeing anything to your caur,' said the voice which was like a saw that would cut through steel forever.

'It's an expensive car,' he said, watching his wife who was sitting in it like a graven image, lips firmly pressed together.

This conversation mirrors one between Mr. Jamiesons and his wife. She suggest he locks the car, and he responds that no one will steal it. And now he comes racing towards the youths demanding they do not scratch it. As the woman comments *"They're no daeing anything to your caur."* and he points out that it is an expensive car. A man who is working nights and has been woken up asks *"Why have you goat it there anyway?"* That is the question and it is interesting that Mr. Jamiesons does not reply. However we know why he cannot reply. It is because he has brought his car in order to show off how well he has done. It is only because his car is an expensive car, and one unlikely to have to have been seen on the estate very often, that it has now drawn the attention of the local youths.

Put simply, all the youths are doing is to "wind-up" Mrs. Jamiesons who is studiously ignoring them. They, in turn, are finding that a source of amusement. In order to irritate Mrs. Jamiesons one kicks one of the tyres and shouts *"Peek a boo."* One has to admire Mrs. Jamiesons self control because she *"showed no sign that she had seen him"* even though she was well aware what he had done and said. So when Mr. Jamiesons runs back to the car demanding they don't *"scratch"* his car, he has totally misunderstood the situation.

One of the youths refers to his car as "a nice bus." Like his thinking about what he would have done had the Factor still been alive Mr. Jamiesons wonders whether it would be a good idea to inform them he was a rich man. More than once he has considered that by informing others that he was now wealthy he has wondered whether that would play to his advantage. It is not clear whether this is a ploy that has worked in Africa. Nor is it clear whether by proving he was wealthy he believed he would be left alone.

Taken to its conclusion, Jamiesons is arguing that there is one rule for the rich and one rule for everyone else. And proving he was rich would be sufficient for the group to leave him alone. Had he - in his youth - been one of this group there is no evidence that had the person proved they were rich, he would have left that person alone. Evidence suggests it would have only exasperated the young Mr. Jamiesons.

Essentially the youths are just winding him up - they do not intend him any harm. That said, teasing is something Mr. Jamiesons cannot cope with. Although there is an implied threat when the leader says "Get out of here, daddy, before we cut you up, and take your camera and your bus with you. And your bag too. Right?" it is implied that the youth is just mouthing off. However calling his car a "bus" and his wife a "bag" the youth is out to insult.

The demand by the youth to "Get out of here, daddy, before we cut you up" is the turning point in the story. It not only ends the narrative of the Jamiesons visit to the estate it ends the intent on the part of Mr. Jamiesons to introduce himself to the community and demonstrate how he has improved himself since he left.

The important point is the intolerance Mr. Jamiesons has for confrontation. Had this happened to him in Africa all he had to do - and what he would have done - "By God, if they were in Africa they would be sorted out. A word in the ear of the Chief Inspector over a cigar and that would be it. By God, they knew how to deal with punks where he came from." It is implied that the "Chief Inspector" would have them in prison. From the perspective of Mr. Jamiesons people do not challenge people like the Jamiesons and never insult them in the way this group has. His clear warning is that should anyone attempt to confront Mr. Jamiesons, then the police will be alerted and punishment will meted out. He even wonders where the young Mr. Jamiesons is now. "By God, he would have sorted them out." Maybe so, but the elderly Mr. Jamiesons is unable to do so: he is too frightened now. Even in Africa he would not face them down and deal with them himself. He would get others - the Police - to sort out his problems. And implied in this point, the

punishment served would not be in proportion: it would be out of all proportions to the incident suffered.

Why does Mr. Jamiesons want to visit the area he once lived in thirty five years ago?

This is a question raised by this story. Why thirty five years later does Mr. Jamiesons decide to visit Glasgow and his old flat and area? Yes Mr. Jamiesons makes clear that he wants to show everyone how successful he has now become. Throughout those thirty five years, he has been in Africa, it appears Mr. Jamiesons has never forgotten the opinion this old town had of him and this opinion has clearly pained him.

He has clearly used his own car - it is not a hired car - and he may well have driven himself and his wife - wherever possible - from Africa to Glasgow. He has also chosen to visit his old home at New Year's time. This means he has left Africa before Christmas. He will have chosen to leave all his friends in Africa during this festive time in order to visit Glasgow. Such a journey in the 1970's will have been extremely long and time consuming.

Although only one person - his downstairs neighbour - remembers him (and she profoundly dislikes him) no one else knows him or is interested in him. So why does he travel over seven thousand miles from Africa to Glasgow. The clue is a comment he feels he should have made to the youths who surround his car: "This is my home too. More than yours. You're just passing through." P. 123. The noun "home" is repeated nine times in the story: 118, 119, 119, 120, 123, 123, 124, 125, 125. There is evidence to support the idea that - rather than Africa - Mr. Jamiesons considers Glasgow as his real home. He remembers Hannah ("an old woman who leaning out her window and talking to passers-by." P. 119); he remembers the death of Manson in his flat which was close to the Jamiesons flat P. 121; he remembers Hannah singing and dancing to "Knees up Mother Brown" in the local restaurant - something he remembers his wife also did P. 121; he remembered the times he and his wife used the bus to go to the neighbouring town P. 124. And so there are reasons to believe that Mr. Jamiesons did consider Glasgow his real home. However it is not as clear cut as that. In the final lines of the story he says he is grateful to know and appreciate one's real home - and that home is in Africa.

In the end we have no idea why in the dead of winter and at one of the busiest times in Scotland Mr. Jamiesons decides to travel from Africa to Glasgow. Throughout the story Mr. Jamiesons calls Africa as well Glasgow his home. Though it

is clear which one Mrs. Jamiesons prefers, it is not at all clear which he prefers just as it is not at all clear why he decides to drive from Africa to Glasgow. He just does. At the end we are none the wiser what is it about this estate that has driven him, to travel thousands of miles during Christmas and New year to visit a place where the people there thought very little of him.

The Red Door

"The Red Door" Published by Birlinn Ltd; 2001

Brief Summary of the Story:-

"The Red Door" is a love story and a lovely one at that. One Halloween night someone very lovingly paints Murdo's door a brilliant deep red. Murdo is shocked when he first sees the door. At first he even questions whether it is his door and even wonders whether it is even his house. After the initial shock the change in the door's colour makes Murdo reflect on his life and what is important to him.

The Title:-

The title "The Red Door" is not simply the description of a particular shade and colour that Murdo's door has been painted. What initially alarms Murdo is the connotations of that colour and what that might represent in the minds of the village including the consequences, that they might have for the individual. But, red is also Mary's favourite colour. To the village this colour is an abomination that Murdo will be expected to do something about. However to Murdo, it is a colour that is calling deep inside him for an aspect of his life he has long abandoned.

The Door:-

Prior to it being painted, that Halloween night, Murdo's door was green. However the morning after he found his door had been painted red. Nor was the change in colour the only point that puzzled him. The door is not just red, it is a very bright red. The expression "*as red as the winter sun he saw in the sky*" P. 410 makes that clear. However by comparing his door to the "*winter sun*" Murdo is aware of how much his door will now stand out in the village: and, as a consequence, so will he. Nor is this any casual act of vandalism. Looking at this door he sees

"the door had been painted very lovingly so that it shone with a deep inward shine such as one might find in pictures. And indeed it looked like a picture against the rest of the house which wasn't at all modern but on the contrary was old and intertwined with all sorts of rusty pipes like snakes." P. 412

The expression "*painted very lovingly*" and especially the adverb "*lovingly*" makes clear that care and thought had gone into the act. But the act has also pointed Murdo's focus on another aspect of the door. The painting of the door created a "*deep inward shine*." The adjective "*deep*" suggests that this act of painting had highlighted and brought out the hidden character and nature of the door. There is even the suggestion that this character of the door also reflected a deeper character in Murdo himself.

When Murdo first sees his door the village is not yet "*stirring*" P. 410 however it soon will be. And there lies the problem. "*Never in the history of the village had there been a red door before.*" P. 412 It is the phrase "*Never in the history of the village*" and especially the adverb "*never*" that points out that at no time or moment and on no occasion had this ever happened in the village before. This is underlined by the position of the adverb. Placed at the beginning of the sentence, this adverb underlines the importance of this act. However it raises an even more important point. "*What would the neighbours say about it, he wondered.*" P. 412 A villager's door standing out in the village meant the owner also stood out. And to stand out in the village was a fault.

The Village:-

Like the stories "*The Telegram*" and "*Mother and Son*" this story is set in a village. There are references to "*porridge*" P. 410, the "*sea*" P. 411, the "*Daily Record*" P. 411 and "*peats*" P. 413, which suggest that this is likely a small Scottish coastal village.

Throughout his writing Iain Crichton Smith makes clear, including in this story, that the village community has a massive influence to ensure that members of the community accord with the thinking of the village. That is why Murdo's door being painted red is no small issue. Not only does his house stand out from the rest of the village, as owner of the house, he now stands out. To be seen to be different from the rest of the village made you the focus of everyone's attention.

Murdo's entire life had been focused on following the rules of the village. Indeed he is aware that he had *"never in his life done anything unusual."* P. 411 Again it is the adverb *"never"* that is important in pointing out throughout his life that he had made it a principle not to stray from what was expected of him as a member of the village. At the heart of this point is the belief that individualism is of less importance than agreeing with the collective opinion of the community. Therefore, whatever the idea or principle is, community comes before the individual. To be a member of a village community, such as this village, means *"never"* to stray from what is considered proper. It is interesting that the word *"never"*, or its variant, is used eleven times in the story.

In the story *"The Telegram"* it appears that gossip was an accepted behavior in that village. One reason the thin woman is unpopular is because she refuses to involve herself in gossiping about others. However there appears an ambiguity about the subject in this village. One reason Murdo is popular is because *"he didn't offend anyone by gossiping"* P. 410 The reference to the idea of offending, appears to be the reason that the male population are encouraged not to gossip. It appears that the male population in the village are encouraged to refrain from gossiping and those who co-operate, appear to gain village popularity and respect.

However the same cannot be said for the women of the village. One reason Mary is not popular is because she *"never gossiped."* P. 410 True, although like Murdo, because she also did not gossip the suggestion is that this, in her, was a negative characteristic. The suggestion is that other women did gossip and it was expected of Mary to do the same thing. Her attitude probably did not help matters. To the rest of the village she appeared to say to them *"You can take me or leave me."* P. 414

That said, the story does appear to suggest that whereby it was acceptable for women to gossip it was not so for the men. Therefore, although both Murdo and Mary both do not gossip, for Murdo this is seen as a positive characteristic but for Mary it is a negative characteristic.

The village also imposed specific modes of behaviour on their inhabitants. On certain mornings Murdo would have been quite happy to sleep in.

"After all, I have nothing to get up for really. I could if I liked stay in bed all day and all night and none would notice the difference. I used to do this when I was a child. Why can't I do it now?" P. 411

It is a reasonable point *"I have nothing to get up for really"*, therefore why should the person not stay in bed. He observes that as a child he could lie in bed all day, but as an adult he is expected to rise from his bed. The answer to his question is because the village expect him to be up. In the eyes of the village what is acceptable for a child is not acceptable for an adult.

The influence of the village on personal behaviour did not start and end with when you got up out of bed. It was expected that you would show a positive outlook on life, whether or not you felt it. Murdo is aware that he is not always happy yet the village expected that he *"had to keep a perpetually smiling face to the world."* P.413 Keeping a *"perpetually smiling face to the world"* meant you would not complain however you felt. The adverb *"perpetually"* means always. Murdo is aware that he can sometimes be irritated by fellow villagers P. 413 however the village expected his perpetual smile, however it may actually feel.

Murdo is aware that the village can be a cruel place. He has never forgotten his lisp and how once he miss pronounced *"Thee, an aeroplane"* P. 411 which had been used by others to highlight his stupidity.

Being different was a serious problem in the village, which comes back to the door. Murdo is aware of the seriousness of this change of colour. He is perfectly aware that the villagers could *"make fun of it and therefore also him."* P. 414 Irrespective of how the new colour came about, he is the one that would be blamed. Just like his lisp, it would provide an opportunity for the others in the village to belittle him. The phrase *"make fun of it"* points out that having a different coloured door, allowed other villagers ridicule - not just the door - but also the person owning the door. He is also aware of just how serious this could get. If the villagers wished it, he is aware they could *"hunt him out of the village"* P. 414 The painting of his door, whatever the reason for it, had brought to a head something he had been aware of for some time but which he had avoided. For all his life he had agreed with what others expected from him P. 414 but now he was being forced to face the reality of village life - and he was aware that he had repressed many

of his feelings about living in the village in order not to be singled out.

Murdo:-

It is acknowledged that Murdo is Iain Crichton Smith's alter ego and the character is to be found in a number of his stories. In this set of six stories, this is not the only story Murdo appears in. He is also named as Sarah's late husband in *"The Telegram"* P. 216

One consequence of his door being painted red is that it has forced Murdo to confront who he is, how he feels about living in the village and what it is that he wants from life. At this point in his life he is forty six years old. P. 414 The village did detect a difference between Murdo and his parents who *"dreamed their way towards death."* P. 411 Through the use of the verb *"dreamed"* it is implied that although both parents had grand ideas, these ideas were not rooted in reality.

By comparison Murdo had worked all his life, first as a cook on board a ship P. 411 and then later as a farmer. As a farmer he showed considerable skill. When scything grass we learn *"the sunlight sparkling from the blade while he himself, squat and dull, swung it remorselessly."* P. 411 The blade *"sparkling"* demonstrated the condition he kept the scythe in and the quality of the stroke is described as swinging it *"remorselessly."* The adverb, which means here continuing without stopping, points out that he continued with the work until it was complete.

However at the age of forty six he was still a bachelor. And at this point in his life, with no suggestion that he was ever going to marry, he felt it best to be as like the other villagers as possible. P. 411 In his life he had had two romances: one to a spinster in the village and the other to Mary. P. 412 There is a suggestion that he positively courted the spinster. The term that is used is that he *"had made overtures."* P. 411 In this context the verb *"overtures"* means to make a suggestion or proposal. Had the lady not cooked him a meal that made him violently ill, Murdo may well have married her.

There were a number of differences between the two women. We are never told what the spinster's name is, whereas we are informed of Mary's name from the beginning. The spinster was stout, whereas Mary was not. Mary, who often dressed in red, was well read and an artist, whereas the spinster was not particularly educated. The spinster was one who adapted

to the conditions of the village, whereas Mary flouted them. P. 412 Although these are important differences there was an even more important difference: Murdo had real feelings for Mary that he did not have for the spinster. He describes his feelings for Mary as being *"certain feelings too tenuous to be called love towards her."* P. 412

On the surface that suggests his feelings have not seriously developed. However he knows more about Mary, than he does of any other villager. And it may be that the reason the relationship has gone no further is because he feels Mary is out of his reach. He describes her thus: *"Murdo thought that anybody who read a lot of books and wrote poetry must be very clever."* P. 412 By comparison he had been poor at Maths and left school without achieving anything. P. 410 Even more important he describes Mary in the following way. *"Now Mary had elegance. Though she was a bit odd, she had elegance."* P. 414 Through the use of the noun *"elegance"* Murdo makes clear he thinks Mary has grace and taste. Though he describes her as *"odd"* Murdo means that Mary is different from the others in the village. Indeed he points out she is odd to the villagers only because they do not understand her.

Each Halloween Mary made Halloween masks for the children who thereafter visit Murdo. Murdo always prepares for these children's visit. P. 410 When the children arrive at his door this Halloween Murdo *"gazed in amazement at the mask of senility on one face, at the mask of a wildcat on another and at the mask of a spaceman on the face of a little boy whom he could swear he knew."* P. 410 Murdo is so captivated by the artistic achievement of these masks Mary has made, he does not reflect on their meaning. When describing someone as a wildcat it suggests they have spirit and a temper. That is something about Mary that Murdo is well aware of. P. 414 Although senility can refer to someone being ill, it also describes someone being in old age. At forty six Murdo is much older than Mary. Murdo is certain that the child who wears the spaceman's mask is a boy he recognizes. However Iain Crichton Smith's writing leaves open the possibility that it may not be a boy at all, which may be why Murdo is sure he recognizes the person but cannot place them.

What Iain Crichton Smith may be suggesting is that this Halloween's visit is very different from previous visits. This night Mary arrives at his door in the Spaceman's mask. This, after all, is the night Mary lovingly paints Murdo's door red. In doing that she has made Murdo's house, and consequently himself, now very visible to the rest of the community. Murdo is now faced with a dilemma and a decision to make.

A magic door out of the village:-

Iain Crichton Smith's story makes it very clear that the painting of Murdo's door was a deliberate act. However, he points out it was also an act that was *"very lovingly"* P. 412 carried out. This was no act of vandalism. There was a purpose and reason to the painting of this door. Although the story makes no comment on what that reason might be, it does point out the consequence that the painting of the door has for Murdo. Looking at the door Murdo is aware that its colour *"certainly singled him out."* P. 410 To be visible in the village was serious problem. Being *"unusual"* P. 411 was an even more serious position to be in. Murdo is aware that if the village chose they *"could hunt him out of the village."* P. 414 The verb *"hunt"* underlines just how serious it is to be unusual in the village and the extent of any punishment could be if the village so chose.

The painting of Murdo's door red therefore has placed Murdo in a position where he now has to decide whether he wants to conform to the ideals of the village or not.

Looking at the door Murdo reflects that one of the aspects of living within the village, and conforming to expectations, is that sometimes he felt that there had to be *"more to life than that."* P. 411 The use of the phrase *"more to life than that"* and especially the relative pronoun *"that"* highlight the restrictions that complying with the village expectations can impose. To live in such a village is an act of choice. Because Murdo was a bachelor he had chosen *"that he should be as like the other villagers as possible."* P. 411 Being *"like the other villagers"* requires that he submerged elements of his own identity.

Though Murdo has long been aware of the sacrifice required for village citizenship P. 411 he had never needed to confront it till now. He openly acknowledges that *"I have always sought to hide among other people. I agree to whatever anybody tells me to do."* P. 413 To *"hide"* is not just a means to protect his citizenship within

the village, it also is a means of submerging his own individuality. Until now it is not something he has been too concerned about.

However looking at the painting of the door has forced him to face a fundamental truth about his life: *"I have never had the courage to wear what I wanted to wear, for example a coloured waistcoat and a coloured jacket."* P. 413 Through the phrase *"never had the courage"* Murdo acknowledges the cost of living in the village. He recognizes that an inanimate object like a door has more courage than him.

In the end Murdo asks himself a fundamental question. *"But really was he happy? That was the question. When he considered it carefully he knew that he wasn't."* P. 413 There was only one conclusion to that question.

The story does not say whether he actually leaves the village or not, but the door is still a *"magic door out of the village."* P. 414 Whether he leaves the village or not, metaphorically he will be leaving the village and therefore it is still a *"magic door"* The reason the door is still magic is because what he now does will be decided by what Murdo wants and not the influences of the collective village.

The Ending of the Story:-

The story ends with Murdo traveling to Mary's house to ask her to marry him. The morning's frost is described as *"virginal."* P. 415 The term also describes Murdo himself. He is leaving behind all the compromises of the past and setting out on a new life. The story implies that Mary will agree to marry him. As he knocks on the door he says to himself *"Please let me live my own life."* P. 415 His life will now be driven by what he wants and not what others want for or from him.

Characters Studies

Murdo:-

As a farmer **P. 411** and at the age of forty six **P. 414** Murdo had lived most of his life in the village - aside from the short time he had spent being a cook on board a ship. **P. 411**

Throughout his life he had made a point of complying with the needs and views of the village. **P. 411** The interests of the village and the community came before himself. Since it was expected that people would not waste time lying in bed in the morning, he would always rise early even though as a child he had often been late rising. **P. 411**

It was expected that people did not moan or complain. It was expected, whatever the situation, villagers were always expected to show a happy face. **P. 413**

Throughout his life Murdo had always worked for his living. This was in contrast to his parents who had not been as conscientious as himself. **P. 411** As a farmer he was considerably skilled. His work tools were kept in perfect condition and he showed real ability when using them. **P. 411**

Essentially Murdo is a shy person who has wanted love and affection. Although he did have a romance with a spinster in the village he did not pursue it. **P. 411** The reason he gives is that her cooking upset him. However, the real reason is that he was not in love with her. The story makes clear that his heart belonged to Mary. **P. 412** His shyness prohibited him from approaching Mary. Even more important he saw Mary as being beyond his reach. As he admitted to himself, "*Mary had elegance.*" **P. 414**

Throughout his life Murdo was aware that he was not truly happy submerging his needs in order to comply with those of the village. He admits that he has never had the courage to be himself. **P. 413** This might have continued had Mary not painted his door. He knows from the beginning it was Mary who did it. There were too many signs for him to miss. The door was red and Mary often wore red. **P. 412** The door had been lovingly painted. **P. 412** The colour of the door blended in with the rust pipes of the house and shone like a picture. **P. 412** That is why he was not angry. Why he was puzzled **P. 410** was because he had been unaware of

Mary's feelings towards him. The fact that he very quickly goes to her house, makes clear that his feelings for her have never changed. **P. 414**

At the heart of the story is the determination Murdo makes to change a life long decision, which is to place his needs before those of the village and community. **P. 415** Not only is he going to marry the one he loves, he is going to marry someone who the village feels is not only "odd" but who has painted his front door in a colour that is so unacceptable to the village that, as a consequence, Murdo might even be hunted out of the village.

Mary:-

We are not informed how long Mary has lived in the village, but it is assumed it has been all her life. **P. 412** Unlike Murdo, she appears to have flouted the expectations of the community. Although it is a favourite colour of hers, she will not have been unaware of the feelings of others to her wearing red. In addition, Mary was also a well read and well educated woman. **P. 412**

Murdo is of the opinion that others in the village were wary of her because she was educated. **P. 414** However, even if true, Mary was quite prepared to inform villagers that their opinion of her was not of any great importance to her. **P. 414**

To these sins was added another. Mary did not go out of her way to mix with others. Indeed, the general opinion was that she was proud and reclusive. **P. 414**

Compared to others in the village, Mary appears to be relatively well off. **P. 414** And, whether deliberate or not, she appears to have underlined this by always paying on time for anything she bought. **P. 414**

What Murdo has not been aware of is Mary's feelings towards him. He is aware that Mary has been walking on her own at night and on occasion would give vent to "*bursts of rage.*" **P. 414** He has put this down to her spirited character. What is important about these outbursts is that they are not made during the daytime they are private and at night. **P. 414** That these outbursts could be examples of her impatience with Murdo in not making the first move, never appears to have entered his mind.

Themes

Iain Crichton Smith deliberately leaves ambiguous who the third visitor to Murdo that Halloween is. Murdo cannot see the face, but he is sure that he knows the person. The fact that the person, he believes to be a boy, does not mean Mary could not have fooled him there. The mask on one child depicting a "wildcat" **P. 410** would be fully in keeping with her character. As, indeed, would the mask of **P. 410** be in keeping with his character.

What appears clear, knowing what happens later that night, is that these masks are not abstract. Mary has had good reason to construct them and, although Murdo does not know it at the time, they are clearly a message to him. Murdo is not unaware that there is something very different about these masks, because he is amazed at the three masks. **P. 410**

The importance of Mary's choice of which colour to paint Murdo's door cannot be overstated. Mary will have been very aware that to paint Murdo's door red would really upset the village and place Murdo in serious trouble. She will have been very aware of the various connotations that can be ascribed to that colour. She will have known that in the eyes of some if Murdo does not remove that colour he could be removed from the village. In painting this door red, Mary is well aware of the problems she is confronting Murdo with.

What takes him a little time to work out, is the new problem that she is deliberately presenting him with by painting his door. Red is Mary's colour. By choosing red she is deliberately choosing to highlight herself. In addition, by painting Murdo's door red, she is forcing him into a position where he now has to make a choice. The painting of the door is her proposal to him. What Murdo does about this door, will tell her what his feeling towards her are.

The Village and the Individual:-

As with the stories "*The Telegram*", and "*Mother and Son*" this story is set in a village. Iain Crichton Smith's stories set in such communities all reflect on the tensions that living in such communities have for the individual. Conforming to the principles of the community is certainly important but even more important - to these communities - the individual must be seen to conform.

Within this story we are shown two individuals: Murdo and Mary. Murdo desires acceptance by the community. He is prepared to submerge his own desires in order to gain acceptance. He is aware that serious disobedience, of the collective will of the village, could lead to a person being expelled out of the village. Nor is this punishment theoretical, Murdo knows of those who have left the village. So that Murdo, like all other villagers, is faced with a decision: are the conditions of citizenship sufficient to still want to be a member of the village.

Mary is different. Although she does not seriously challenge the principles of the village she does flout minor ones. For that she is marginalised by the members of the village. Unlike Murdo, for Mary personal happiness and integrity comes first. She is unable to comply in the way that Murdo does. She knows who and what she is and is, in a sense, indifferent to what others think. Hence her comment "*you can take me or leave me.*" **P. 414**

Since the village is a smaller version of society at large the story indicates therefore that Murdo's situation applies in a wider context. We are shown, through this story, the kinds of struggles we are all faced with through needing to be accepted by our peers and, at the same time being true to our basic principles of living life.

The Red Door

Extract 1

When Murdo woke up after Hallowe'en and went out into the cold air to see whether anything was stirring in the world around him, he discovered that his door which had formerly been painted green was now painted red. He stared at it for a long time, scratching his head slowly as if at first he didn't believe that it was his own door. In fact he went into the house again and had a look at his frugally prepared breakfast - porridge, scones and tea - and even studied the damp patch on the wall before he convinced himself that it was his own house.

Now Murdo was a bachelor who had never brought himself to propose marriage to anyone. He lived by himself, prepared his own food, darned his own socks, washed his own clothes and cultivated his own small piece of ground. He was liked by everybody since he didn't offend anyone by gossiping and maintained a long silence unless he had something of importance to say.

The previous night children had knocked on his door and sung songs to him. He had given them apples, oranges, and nuts which he had bought specially from a shop. He had gazed in amazement at the mask of senility on one face, at the mask of a wildcat on another and at the mask of a spaceman on the face of a little boy whom he could swear he knew.

Having made sure that he was in his own house again he went out and studied the door for a second time. When he touched the red paint he found that it was quite dry. He had no feeling of anger at all, only puzzlement. After all, no one in his experience had had a red door in the village before. Green doors, yellow doors, and even blue doors, but never a red door. It certainly singled him out. The door was as red as the winter sun he saw in the sky.

Murdo had never in his life done anything unusual. Indeed because he was a bachelor he felt it necessary that he should be as like the other villagers as possible. He read the Daily Record as they did, after dinner he slept by the fire as they did, he would converse with his neighbour while hammering a post into the ground. He would even play draughts with one of them sometimes.

Nevertheless there were times when he felt that there was more to life than that. He would feel this especially on summer nights when the harvest moon was in the sky - the moon that ripened the barley - and the earth was painted with an unearthly glow and the sea was like a strange volume which none could read except by means of the imagination.

At times too he would find it difficult to get up in the morning but would lie in a pleasant half dream looking up at the ceiling. He would say to himself, 'After all, I have nothing to get up for really. I could if I liked stay in bed all day and all night and none would notice the difference. I used to do this when I was a child. Why can't I do it now?'

For he had been a very serious child who found it difficult to talk to children even of his own age. Only once had he shown enthusiasm and that was when in a school playground he had seen in the sky an aeroplane and had lisped excitedly, 'Thee, an aeroplane', a rather ambiguous not to say almost unintelligible exclamation which had been repeated as a sign of his foolishness. He had never taken part in the school sports because he was rather clumsy: and his accomplishments in mathematics were meagre. When he became an adolescent he had taken a job as cook on board a fishing boat but had lost the job because he had put sugar instead of salt into the soup thus causing much diarrhoea.

Most of the time - while his father and mother dreamed their way towards death - he spent working on the land in a dull concentrated manner. In summer and autumn he would be seen with a scythe in the fields, the sunlight sparkling from the blade while he himself, squat and dull, swung it remorselessly. There had in fact been one romance in his life. He had made overtures - if such tentative motions might even be called that - to a spinster in the village who lived with her grossly religious mother in the house opposite him and who was very stout. However he had ceased to visit her when once she had provided him with cocoa and salt herring for his supper, a diet so ferocious that even he could not look forward to its repetition with tranquillity.

There was another spinster in the village who wrote poetry and who lived by herself and he had certain feelings too tenuous to be called love towards her. Her name was Mary and she had inherited from her mother a large number of books in brown leather covers. She dressed in red clothes and was seen pottering vaguely about during the day and sometimes during the night as well. But she was more good looking than the first though she neglected herself in the service of books and poetry and was considered slightly odd by the villagers. Murdo thought that anybody who read a lot of books and wrote poetry must be very clever.

1 As he stared at the door he felt strange flutterings within him. First of all the door had been painted very lovingly so
2 that it shone with a deep inward shine such as one might find in pictures. And indeed it looked like a picture against the
3 rest of the house which wasn't at all modern but on the contrary was old and intertwined with all sorts of rusty pipes like
4 snakes.

5 He went back from the door and looked at it from a distance as people in art galleries have to do when studying an
6 oil painting. The more he regarded it the more he liked it. It certainly stood out against the drab landscape as if it were a
7 work of art. On the other hand the more he looked at it the more it seemed to express something in himself which had
8 been deeply buried for years. After a while there was something boring about green and as for blue it wouldn't have
9 suited the door at all. Blue would have been too blatant in a cold way. And anyway the sky was already blue.

10 But mixed with his satisfaction he felt what could only be described as puzzlement, a slight deviation from the normal
11 as if his head were spinning and he were going round in circles. What would the neighbours say about it, he wondered.
12 Never in the history of the village had there been a red door before. For that matter he couldn't remember seeing even
13 a blue door himself, though he had heard of the existence of one.

The Red Door

Extract 1 Question Set 1 - N 5

1. Look at **lines 13 to 15 on page 38**

What does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language and imagery tell us about the metaphors of the children's masks and what they may represent?

4

Total (4)2. Look at **lines 20 to 23 on page 38.**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help to describe Murdo's attempt to integrate into village society?

4

Total (4)3. "He went back from the door and looked at it from a distance as people in art galleries have to do when studying an oil painting." **L. 5 & 6 page 39**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language help us understand what Murdo is trying to think through?

4

Total (4)

4. In his stories, Iain Crichton Smith often deals with the consequence of living in rural highland villages. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, what we learn through Iain Crichton Smith's stories what it was like to live in such communities.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1. "Nevertheless there were times when he felt that there was more to life than that. He would feel this especially on summer nights when the harvest moon was in the sky – the moon that ripened the barley – and the earth was painted with an unearthly glow and the sea was like a strange volume which none could read except by means of the imagination." **L. 24-26 P. 38.**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language focus attention on the contrast between Murdo and the other villagers and how does he develop this idea within the story?

In these lines the comparison is implied through the descriptions of what Murdo feels on these occasions. The phrase that "he felt that there was more to life than that" refers back to lines 20 - 23.

The difference is in the use of language. The other villagers are represented in lines 20 - 23 and in those lines there is no imagery and indeed poetry. In those lines the qualities of the villagers are described in a sequential list. In lines 24 - 26 we have metaphors, similes, alliteration, and the linking of the simile "sea was like a strange volume" which is explained through the metaphor "read except by means of the imagination." Murdo's world - just like Mary's world - is one of the imagination. The world of the villagers is a mundane world. The painting of his door awakens Murdo to the difference and to the reality that - until now - he has been submerging his imagination in order to fit in.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton

A. In his prose Iain Crichton Smith contrasts character differences and feelings through his use of language skills. Referring to the character(s) in this, and at least one other short story, show how through:-

a) Sentence structure; b) Word Choice; c) Narrative Voice; d) Dialogue and e) Imagery

Iain Crichton Smith creates character difference and feeling.

I believe what distinguishes a good answer from an excellent answer is the ability not just to understand the themes and issues but to demonstrate how language promotes these themes and ideas. It is well worth plotting down ideas to show how character in Iain Crichton Smith stories is driven by his use of language.

B. A central theme within Iain Crichton Smith's prose is the struggle between the individual and the needs of the community. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops this theme in his writing.

This is one of the traditional themes in Iain Crichton Smith's prose. It has been - and will be in the future - a question asked by the SQA. Good idea to plot out some ideas.

The Red Door

Extract 1 Question Set 2 - N 5

1. Look at lines **24 to 26 on page 38**.

How effective is Iain Crichton Smith use of language and sentence structure here in describing the character of Murdo?

(a) use of Language:-

2

(b) Sentence Structure:-

2

Total (4)

2. Look at lines **30 to 33 on page 38**.

What do we learn about Murdo's fellow pupils, from Iain Crichton Smith's use of language in these lines ?

3

Total (3)

3. Look at lines **36 to 38 on page 38**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language distinguish between Murdo and his father.

3

Total (3)

4. "As he stared at the door he felt strange flutterings within him." **L 1 page 39**.

What does Iain Crichton Smith mean by the term "strange flutterings", and how does he develop this idea in the remainder of the paragraph.

2

Total (2)

5. Iain Crichton Smith has the ability to create characters that the reader can feel sympathy for. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, demonstrate how successful he is in doing so.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language suggest that the one consequence of the painting of his door has been to force Murdo to reflect on his life.

This question has begun to be answered on the previous question set. In addition, lines such as 27 - 29 help. These reinforce the regimentation by the community on the individual. Thoughts, until he had his door painted to never questioned. Lines 20 - 23 reinforce this point. And together these ideas made Murdo reflect on the two women in the village that he had - and has - feelings for.

2) How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language distinguish between the spinster and Mary. **L. 38-49 P. 38**

A fairly easy question.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In some of Iain Crichton Smith stories, on occasions, he makes the central character have an epiphany. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss how the author encourages the character to see a truth about their own life, another's life or life in general.

I liked this point when I first read it. Clearly - in "The Red Door" Mary's painting Murdo's door is for him an epiphany. However there are other critical moments in the other stories. The narrator - in "The Painter" - seeing William painting the reality of the communities faces as they watch two men attempt to kill the other - is another such moment. The impact of this moment - on William - is to end his position as village painter. In "The Telegram" the moment when both women - display to the other - their true feelings when each believes her son has died at sea - is such a moment. As I point out I believe this moment may be the beginning of a change in the relationship between the two women. In "Mother and Son" the ending may well indicate that the mother's continual taunting may have created a change in John. There is such ambiguity in that ending it is not possible to say more than that. In "The Crater" finding that Fred has actually died it could be argued that creates an epiphany in Robert when he decides (irrespective of the danger in standing up and walking back to his trench with the body of Fred) he decides to stand up and walk back.

So looking through these stories it is possible to suggest that there are moments of clarity and change for the characters in the stories.

B. A central theme in Iain Crichton Smith's writing is the conflict between the individual and the community. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss how the author develops the theme of the interests of the individual compared to the interests of the community.

A basic Iain Crichton Smith question.

The Red Door

Extract 1 Question Set 3 - Higher

1. Look at **lines 13 to 15 on page 38**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language and imagery contribute to our understanding of the characters? 2

Total (2)

2. Look at **lines 20 to 21 on page 38**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language suggest that the consequence of painting of Murdo's door has forced Murdo to reflect on his life. 4

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 38 to 42 on page 38** and **lines 44 to 47 on page 38**.

Comment on Iain Crichton Smith use of language to distinguish between the two women in the village.

a) The Spinster:- 2

b) Mary:- 2

Total (4)

4. In his stories, Iain Crichton Smith often deals with the consequence of living in rural highland villages. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, what we learn through Iain Crichton Smith's stories what it was like to live in such communities. 10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Explain how Iain Crichton Smith's narrative implies that in painting Murdo's door - **lines 1 - 4 on page 39** - Mary has also painted her own character into her painting.

There are a number of clues:-

a) Painted lovingly.

b) Shone with a deep inward shine.

c) The shine that one might find in pictures

d) It looked like a picture.

e) Was not modern.

2) What are the language and thematic elements of the first paragraph that make it a suitable beginning to the story?

There are a number of interesting ideas that continue throughout the story:

a) It happened on Halloween's night, the same night that the children in masks visited him. Masks that were created by Mary.

b) The confusion that this change of colour created in Murdo. He had to look at it twice to be sure it was his door. The same confusion that made him finally realise who he was and what he wanted.

c) He had gone out of the house - initially - see if anything (in the village) was stirring. One of the central themes is the consequence on village residents like him when the village are indeed stirred into action.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In a number of Iain Crichton Smith's village stories the protagonist is often faced with a dilemma, to accept village convention without question and thereby remain in the safety of conformity and unquestioned acceptance village convention rather than pursue the path of individualism with dangers that contains. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss how important that theme is in Iain Crichton Smith rural stories.

This theme of the individual contrasted with the community is at the heart of this story. For Murdo it is a choice between the safety and security - along with the restriction imposed by village life - or his own individual desires and wants (even though until now he had submerged them. The same challenge faces William in "The Painter", however there he has no support (aside from his mother). In both stories there is the threat of retribution by the community for disobedience - which in William's case is carried out. In Murdo's case it is a threat which he avoids by marrying Mary. In "The Telegram" the power of the community is demonstrated in where the "Thin woman" is allowed to live and that Sarah can have her cows destroy her washing with impunity.

B. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

A fairly straight forward question.

The Red Door

Extract 1 Question Set 4 - Higher

1. Look at **lines 1 to 4 on page 39**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language and sentence structure not only suggests who was responsible for painting the door but make clear how Murdo feels about this?

(a) Sentence Structure:-

2

(b) Use of Language:-

2

Total (4)

2. Look at **lines 1 to 19 on page 39**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith use language help to describe both Murdo's puzzlement as well as his satisfaction at what has happened to his door?

(a) Satisfaction:-

2

(b) Puzzlement:-

2

Total (4)

3.

One of Iain Crichton Smith's theme's is orthodoxy in community life.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use language in **lines 10 to 13 on page 39** helps to focus the reader's attention on this issue?

2

Total (2)

4. Iain Crichton Smith has the ability to create characters that the reader can feel sympathy for. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, demonstrate how successful he is in doing so.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Through his use of language - and other techniques - how does Iain Crichton Smith distinguish between Murdo and his father? **L. 36-38 P. 38**

This is a fairly straight forward question.

2) In what way does Iain Crichton Smith use the children's mask as a metaphor? **L. 13-15 P. 39**

I was always curious about these masks and this visit that Halloween night. Each Halloween Mary makes Halloween masks for the children who thereafter visit Murdo. Murdo always prepares for these children's visit. (L 13 P. 39) When the children arrive at his door this Halloween Murdo "gazed in amazement at the mask of senility on one face, at the mask of a wildcat on another and at the mask of a spaceman on the face of a little boy whom he could swear he knew." (L. 14-15 P. 39) Murdo is so captivated by the artistic achievement of these masks Mary has made, he does not reflect on their meaning. When describing someone as a wildcat it suggests they have spirit and a temper. That is something about Mary that Murdo is well aware of. (L 31-32 P. 44) Although senility can refer to someone being ill, it also describes someone being in old age. At forty six Murdo is much older than Mary. Murdo is certain that the child who wears the spaceman's mask is a boy he recognizes. However Iain Crichton Smith's writing leaves open the possible that it may not a boy at all, which may be why Murdo is sure he recognizes the person but cannot place them.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In some of Iain Crichton Smith stories, on occasions, he makes the central character have an epiphany. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss how the author encourages the character to see a truth about their own life, another's life or life in general.

I know this is a repeat of a question in question set 2. However I feel it may be worthwhile what additional points could be added to the previous answer from a Higher perspective.

The Red Door

Extract 2

The morning was breaking all over the village as he looked. Blue smoke was ascending from chimneys, a cock was crowing, belligerent and heraldic, its red claws sunk into the earth, its metallic breast oriental and strange. There was a dew all about him and lying on the fences ahead of him. He recognised that the village would wake to a new morning, for the red door would gather attention to itself.

And he thought to himself, 'I have always sought to hide among other people. I agree to whatever anybody tells me to do. If they think I should go to church, I go to church. If they want me to cut peats for them, I do. I have never,' he thought with wonder, 'been myself.' He looked down at his grey fisherman's jersey and his wellingtons and he thought, 'I have always worn these things because everybody else does. I have never had the courage to wear what I wanted to wear, for example a coloured waistcoat and a coloured jacket.'

The red door stood out against the whiteness of the frost and the glimmerings of snow. It seemed to be saying something to him, to be asking him a question. Perhaps it was pleading with him not to destroy it. Perhaps it was saying, 'I don't want to be green. There must be a place somewhere for me as myself. I wish to be red. What is wrong with red anyway?' The door seemed to him to have its own courage.

Wine of course was red and so was blood. He drank none of the former and only saw the latter when he cut himself while repairing a fence or working with wood when a nail would prick his finger.

But really was he happy? That was the question. When he considered it carefully he knew that he wasn't. He didn't like eating, he didn't like sitting in the house alone, he didn't like having none who belonged to him, to whom he could tell his secret thoughts, for example that such and such was a mean devil and that that other one was an ungrateful rat.

He had to keep a perpetually smiling face to the world, that was his trouble. But the red door didn't do that. It was foreign and confident. It seemed to be saying what it was, not what it thought others expected it to say. On the other hand, he didn't like wellingtons and a fisherman's jersey. He hated them in fact: they had no elegance.

Now Mary had elegance. Though she was a bit odd, she had elegance. It was true that the villagers didn't understand her but that was because she read many books, her father having been a teacher. And on the other hand she made no concessions to anybody. She seemed to be saying, 'You can take me or leave me.' She never gossiped. She was proud and distant. She had a world of her own. She paid for everything on the nail. She was quite well off. But her world was her own, depending on none.

She was very fond of children and used to make up masks for them at Hallowe'en. As well as this she would walk by herself at night, which argued that she was romantic. And it was said that she had sudden bursts of rage which too might be the sign of a spirit without servility. One couldn't marry a clod.

Murdo stared at the door and as he looked at it he seemed to be drawn inside it into its deep caves with all sorts of veins and passages. It was like a magic door out of the village but at the same time it pulsed with a deep red light which made it appear alive. It was all very odd and very puzzling, to think that a red door could make such a difference to house and moors and streams.

Solid and heavy he stood in front of it in his wellingtons, scratching his head. But the red door was not a mirror and he couldn't see himself in it. Rather he was sucked into it as if it were a place of heat and colour and reality. But it was different and it was his.

It was true that the villagers when they woke would see it and perhaps make fun of it, and would advise him to repaint it. They might not even want him in the village if he insisted on having a red door. Still they could all have red doors if they wanted to. Or they could hunt him out of the village.

Hunt him out of the village? He paused for a moment, stunned by the thought. It had never occurred to him that he could leave the village, especially at his age, forty-six. But then other people had left the village and some had prospered though it was true that many had failed. As for himself, he could work hard, he had always done so. And perhaps he had never really belonged to the village. Perhaps his belonging had been like the Hallowe'en mask. If he were a true villager would he like the door so much? Other villagers would have been angry if their door had been painted red in the night, their anger reflected in the red door, but he didn't feel at all angry, in fact he felt admiration that someone should actually have thought of this, should actually have seen the possibility of a red door, in a green and black landscape.

- 1 He felt a certain childlikeness stirring within him as if he were on Christmas day stealing barefooted over the cold red
2 linoleum to the stocking hanging at the chimney, to see if Santa Claus had come in the night while he slept.
- 3 Having studied the door for a while and having had a long look round the village which was rousing itself to a new day,
4 repetitive as all the previous ones, he turned into the house. He ate his breakfast and thinking carefully and joyously and
5 having washed the dishes he set off to see Mary though in fact it was still early.
- 6 His wellingtons creaked among the sparkling frost. Its virginal new diamonds glittered around him, millions of them.
7 Before he knocked on her door he looked at his own door from a distance. It shone bravely against the frost and the drab
8 patches without frost or snow. There was pride and spirit about it. It had emerged out of the old and the habitual, brightly
9 and vulnerably. It said, 'Please let me live my own life.' He knocked on the door.

The Red Door

Extract 2 Question Set 1 - N 5

1. Look at **lines 8 to 12 on page 44**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language techniques AND sentence structure help to describe the conditions under which Murdo - and others - require to accept in order to live in the village?

(a) Language techniques:- 2

AND

(b) Sentence structure:- 2

Total (4)

2. *"The red door stood out against the whiteness of the frost and the glimmerings of snow."* **L13 Page 44**

Explain how Iain Crichton Smith's use of ambiguity also reflects on the relationship between Mary and Murdo.2

Total (2)

3. *"But really was he happy? That was the question. When he considered it carefully he knew that he wasn't. He didn't like eating, he didn't like sitting in the house alone, he didn't like having none who belonged to him, to whom he could tell his secret thoughts, for example that such and such was a mean devil and that that other one was an ungrateful rat."*
How does Iain Crichton Smith use of sentence structure, repetition, and other language features help to emphasise Murdo's confusion?

(a) Sentence Structure:- 2

(b) Repetition:- 2

(c) Language features 2

Total (6)

4.

One of the themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is character contrast. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, examine the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to contrast his characters.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Though **lines 4-7 on P. 44** can be viewed as a functional paragraph to describe the coming of morning, how does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language turn it into a metaphor for the coming changes in Murdo's life?

I was thinking that the "cock" was also a metaphor for Mary and what she has done to Murdo's door. The warmth of the red door is contrasted with the "blue" smoke of the other villagers fires. The crowing of the crow could metaphorically be Mary hoping that Murdo will understand the message contained within the painting of his door.

2) *"The red door stood out against the whiteness of the frost and the glimmerings of snow."* **Line 13 P. 44** is both literal and metaphorical. Explain how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language has this sentence function on both levels.

Fairly clear question to understand.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

A constantly repeated question and one that is at the heart of understanding Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

B. In Iain Crichton Smith's prose the narrative is often driven by the contribution of a narrator. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the impact of the narrator in the development of plot and theme.

Five of the stories have an authorial narrator, however "The Painter" has a character narrator. In the case of "The Painter" - even though we know the real narrator is Iain Crichton Smith - within the story the narrator is Red Roderick's neighbour. I feel the reader needs to be conscious that this narrator may well have a bias towards the village and his neighbour. The excuses that he constantly gives for Red Roderick's behaviour seems to make clear his real intention.

With regard to the other stories the narrator does not appear to intrude into the narrative in the way he does in "The Painter."

The Red Door

Extract 2 Question Set 2 - N 5

1. Look at **lines 25 to 29 on page 44**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language not only describes Mary, but also highlights why Murdo is attracted to her?

a) Describing Mary

2

b) Why Murdo is attracted to her.

2

Total (4)

2. Look at **lines 40 to 42 on page 44** and **lines 43 to 49 on page 44**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language reflect on the realities of living in a rural village.

4

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 6 to 9 on page 45**.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use language reflect the tensions within Murdo as he prepares to knock on the door.

4

Total (4)

4. In his stories, Iain Crichton Smith often deals with the consequence of living in rural highland villages. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, what we learn through Iain Crichton Smith's stories what it was like to live in such communities.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Look at **lines 25 - 29 P. 44**. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language establish the character and independence of Mary?

By being described as "odd" it is clear Mary is not the same as the others. The use of "elegance" makes clear that how she comports herself is different from the others. Being educated and having a father who was a teacher distances her from everyone else. Unlike many in the village she did not "gossip." And finally she was not concerned what others thought about her "You can take me or leave me."

2) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language - on **lines 40-42 on P. 44** and **lines 43 - 44 on page 44** - highlight the dangers of challenging the community?

Fairly easy question.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. All short stories have titles. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss the part the title of the story plays in the develop of the story's theme and narrative.

When I included the question I wondered if there was a metaphorical implication for Iain Crichton Smith's titles. The titles certainly highlight theme and narrative but having thought about it I am coming to the opinion that essentially Iain Crichton Smith's titles are essentially functionally.

B. All story's have a beginning. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss how the content of the beginning of the story establishes the themes and issues that are to be developed in the story itself.

A standard prose question and one well worth plotting out an answer for.

The Red Door

Extract 2 Question Set 3 - Higher

1. Look at **lines 8 to 16 on page 44**.

One of the great themes in the Iain Crichton Smith's short stories is the conflict between the individual. Highlight how Iain Crichton Smith's employs his writer's technique to explore the conflict between the community and the individual.

(a) The Community:-

2

(b) The Individual:-

2

Total (4)

2. *"It was true that the villagers when they woke would see it and perhaps make fun of it, and would advise him to repaint it. They might not even want him in the village if he insisted on having a red door. Still they could all have red doors if they wanted to. Or they could hunt him out of the village."* **L 40-42 Page 44**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language describe the scope of the community's response to an individual's transgression. While at the same highlighting alternative possibilities.

2

Total (2)

3. *"It was like a magic door out of the village but at the same time it pulsed with a deep red light which made it appear alive."* **L 34-35 Page 44**

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language techniques and word choice in this sentence help to clarify one of the stories main themes?

(a) Language techniques:-

2

(b) Word Choice:-

2

Total (4)

4. One of the themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is character contrast. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, examine the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to contrast his characters.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) On **line 25 p. 44** Murdo comments that *"Mary had elegance."* How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language explain in what way Murdo believes Mary had *"elegance"*?

See answer to the previous question for further help.

2) How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language on **lines 37 - 39 Page 44** become a metaphor for Murdo's condition and situation?

The reference to "solid and heavy" is clearly a pointer to Murdo himself. The reference is not just physical but more emotional and intellectual. The painting of the door is an act on an intellectual level that Murdo has difficulty understanding hence the need to scratch his head. In addition Mary's intellectual depth described in the act to paint Murdo's door is something that is beyond Murdo. Initially he is unable to see what it is about "unable to see himself in it." As Mary had intended, Murdo is attracted to this change to his door and - as described - is "sucked into it."

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Iain Crichton Smith is an acknowledged story teller. However behind all his stories is his astonishing use of language to craft characters, themes and landscapes. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss Iain Crichton Smith's use of language to craft his stories.

Hint:- I am looking here at his use of such devices as: the short sentence; repetition; elipsis; the question; metaphor; parenthesis, etc. What this question asks you to focus on are not just his ideas but how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language has created these ideas.

The Red Door

Extract 2 Question Set 4 - Higher

1. "Having studied the door for a while and having had a long look round the village which was rousing itself to a new day, repetitive as all the previous ones, he turned into the house." **L.3 to 4 on page 45**

How does Ian Crichton Smith use of word choice and punctuation describe the decision that Murdo comes to.

- a) Word Choice:- 2
b) Punctuation:- 2

Total (4)

2. Eleven times in this extract are the phrases "Red door" or the "door" expressed. It is clear that as well as describing an object the phrases also function as metaphors. **Lines 13, 22, 34, 35, 37, 41, 41, 47, 48 Page 44**

Choose two instances and explain the contribution of the metaphor within the story and how it contributes to Ian Crichton Smith's overall theme.

- a) Instance 1:- 2
b) Instance 2:- 2

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 6 to 9 on page 45.**

Demonstrate how Ian Crichton Smith's use language reflects the tensions within Murdo as he prepares to knock on the door.

2

Total (2)

4. In his stories, Ian Crichton Smith often deals with the consequence of living in rural highland villages. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, what we learn through Ian Crichton Smith's stories what it was like to live in such communities.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) On **line 46-47 P. 44** Murdo reflects "Perhaps his belonging had been like the Hallowe'en mask." How does Ian Crichton Smith's use of language in this passage highlight Murdo's new understanding of who he really is.

Masks are temporary just used on specific occasions. I feel that this notion of temporariness is what is behind this point. In other words the power of the community can impact on an individual at any time. The consequence of Mary painting his door has shown him that - although he had felt he would remain obedient all his life - the door has awoken feelings he did not know he had.

2) On **line 34 p. 44** Murdo considers the door to be "like a magic door out of the village." How does Ian Crichton Smith develop this idea within the story?

This is a subject that is dealt with in the notes. It is a lovely metaphor that Ian Crichton Smith has created. Marriage and Mary being likened to a "magic door" is a superb image.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Ian Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In a number of his short stories, Ian Crichton Smith includes an artistic character within the village. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, discuss what these stories tell us about the position of the artist within such an environment.

This is an interesting point. William and Mary make clear that these villages are unhappy with the use and impact of the imagination. In the case of William, the art they prefer is art that is non threatening and does not highlight reality. Unlike William, Mary has intelligence and is able to not cross the line in the way William. She is able to declare her disinterest in what others think of her. She is seen - by the village - as "a bit odd." However had her art been as confrontational as William, there is little doubt that the village would have confronted her.

It appears that Ian Crichton Smith is saying that the artist is tolerated provided they do not confront the community with reality as opposed to the communities agreed vision of itself.

Mother and Son

"The Red Door" Published by Birlinn Ltd; 2001

Summary of Story:-

The story is about the relationship between a mother and her son. This is a relationship that has deteriorated as a consequence of the mother's illness that has made her bedridden for over ten years. During that time her husband has died leaving her son John to care for her. However the mother is incapable of saying anything sympathetic to her son. The plot of the story revolves around a single evening when John returns from work and describes the friction between these two characters.

It is possible to see the inclement weather outside, which drenches John before he enters the house, serve as a warning for what is awaiting him inside the house. **P. 497** Where the outside rain thoroughly drenches his body and clothes, his mother's constant biting criticism "*would strike his confidence dead with her hateful words.*" **P. 500** However there is a difference. Where the weather outside happens to be a consequence for the time of year, the mother's constant criticism is deliberate and, like the rain that night, is just as persistent. Where the weather just happens to be inclement in this area, his mother's criticisms are consistent, deliberate, directed, hateful and aimed at undermining her son's confidence in himself.

Once John has entered the house, even the most mundane of tasks appears to conspire against him. For example when he enters the house and tries to light the lamp it appears that even the matches are determined to work against him and not light. There is an interesting contrast between the description of the match becoming spent and John's frustration when his matches resist him. The match is described as expending with an "*apologetic cough*" whereas "*he cursed weakly*" **P. 497** Both matches and John appear to be worn out. Through personification we see matches, damp from the weather, appear to apologise that they are no longer able to light the fire. Whereas John, weary from the affects of the weather outside, is only able to curse weakly.

During this process of attempting to light the lamp we are given a glimpse of John's face. His face is described as being "*petulant*" and appeared to have "*something childish*" about it. **P. 497** To be petulant suggests that the person is prone to peevish impatience or to show irritability. There is even the suggestion that being petulant implies something childish about his character. Although we are not informed how old John is, it is suggested that he is well into adulthood. Therefore these suggest a negative characteristic on his part. The story makes clear that his independence has been restricted by having had to look after his bedridden mother for the last ten years. **P. 500**

The point is further clarified when we meet the mother. When John enters the house his mother is asleep in her bed. **P. 498** She is described as sleeping with "*her mouth tightly shut and prim and anaemic.*" **P. 498** Her mouth being referred to as "*prim*" suggests the mother is an excessively formal or precise person, what might be referred to as a prig. Her mouth being described "*anaemic*" can suggest that she is lacking in vigor or strength. True the mother has been bedridden for ten years, which would suggest she is weak. However the story makes clear that when awake, mentally she is anything but "*anaemic.*" The story makes clear that she may be the invalid, but she is also the one in control. Her son appears helpless when pitted against her.

Although still asleep, the mother is described as having a "*bitter*" smile on her lips. In this sense the adjective probably means obnoxious or irritating. And that she certainly is shown to be throughout the story. It is interesting that throughout the story the phrase "*bitter smile*" is used three times in the story **P. 498 + 501**: twice for the mother and once for her son. The adjective itself is used seven times to describe the mother. **P. 498, 499, 501, 501** and three times in the final two sentences. The very last use of the adjective is applied to John and not his mother. It is clear that the adjective is one of the key descriptions of the mother. To be bitter is to display considerable animosity. It is not clear why she feels that way towards her son, however the story makes clear that whether awake or asleep she has no fellow motherly towards her

son. Her first words when she realises the figure to enter the home is John is to observe *"its only you"* P. 498 Although when she awakes she is *"startled"* P. 498 when she realises it is her son she utters this disappointed comment.

The mother is utterly dependent on her son for everything, yet throughout the story there is not one kind word from her towards him. There is an interesting description that John observes. Looking at her lying asleep, he comments that she looked *"as if the woman were wrestling with some terrible witch's idea in dreams."* P. 498 The idea of her devising new and horrible ideas to confront her son with, is in keeping with what we learn about her. When she does wake up, her effective first words to her son are, *"Well, what's the matter with you!"* P. 498 She demands why John is not already preparing her tea. It has been a difficult day and he is soaked to the skin and he has only just got in and lit the lamp and got the fire lit, yet the mother (who has just woken up) is already criticizing him.

It is clear from the story that the mother often compares her son to her father. *"I sometimes don't know why we christened you John' – with a sigh. 'My father was never like you. He was a man who knew his business."* P. 498 It is clear that she now regrets using her father's name to christen him because her son now reminds her of her father. And when reminded of her father she sees the difference between them. However the criticism is even more pointed than that. Through this comparison the mother is making clear that her father was a skilled and productive worker whereas her son is not. Nor is this the first time she has made such a comparison: it is clear this is a constant jibe that she levels at him and one that he is irritated by. He is described as replying *"despairingly."* P. 498 In using that adverb, it is clear that John is aware that this constant belittling of him and his family is something that it is hopeless and that the mother will never change.

The mother even renounces her son. She explains that he was his father's son, not hers. As far as she is concerned, the way he is, was inherited from his father. It certainly was not inherited from her. *"Your father's people had something wrong with their heads, it was in your family but not in ours. (She had always looked upon him as her husband's son, not as her own: and all his faults she attributed to hereditary weaknesses on his father's side.)"* P. 499 Nor is her criticism leveled only at her husband. Through

parenthesis Iain Crichton Smith makes clear that, for the mother, her husband's entire family were at fault.

Even when he prepares and brings her evening meal she still finds reason to criticise. When her tea is brought to her first words are criticism about the tray. *"Why didn't you wash this tray? Can't you see it's all dirty round the edges?"* P. 501 There is no *"thank you"* for preparing the meal or bringing it to her. There is an implied expectation that her son will always cater for her needs, but by the same token she sees no need to acknowledge his having done so.

John describes her speech as a *"sibilant noise."* P. 499 Sibilant means to be hissing. This suggests that John likens his mother to a snake. This is in keeping with the description of her attacks which are described to *"burst venomously"* on him. P. 499 Like a snake her bites - her responses to him - are poisonous. They appear to be intentionally directed to strike at the heart of his position. In order to survive, at times he pretends that her constant criticisms have no affect on him. P. 499 However most often they do sting him. Indeed he likens the affect of her constant criticism to weapons: *"arrows."* P. 499 The consequence of this incessant barrage of criticism is that it is impossible for John not to ascribe an ulterior motive to anything his mother says. P. 499

The story makes clear that this constant disagreement between mother and son also has an impact on John's friends and situation. For example many of John's childhood friends, like Roddy Mason, have been employed to help with the caring of his mother. P. 499 However, for reasons that are not clear they, like Roddy, quickly leave and find another job. The desertion of Roddy Mason has come as something of a shock. *"I did think Roddy Mason would help. But he doesn't seem to have much use for me now."* P. 499 Roddy appears to have been someone who John had expected would not abandon him so soon. Roddy joining the others and now laughing at him was particularly hurtful. We are informed that *"his childish blue eyes brimmed with tears."* P. 499 The story leaves open the idea that the mother may have driven them away. P. 499 Certainly she has no pity for him. *"Of course Roddy doesn't want to help you. He's got enough to do as it is. Anyway he's got his day's work to do and you haven't."* P. 500 It is not just that his mother is not concerned, there is a tone of contempt in her voice. The desertion of Roddy has visibly hurt John and, was quite likely engineered

by the mother, because she is taking a certain enjoyment at witnessing this affect on her son.

Behind this discussion is the *"old interminable argument."* **P. 500** Because his mother has been bed ridden for the last ten years, this has made it impossible for John to get a job. And because he has not got a job, his mother always taunts him for not having a job. He is effectively in a "Catch 22" situation and his Mother knows that. She plays on this knowledge. His mother knows he will not leave, nor does she does not want him to get a job. This allows her to undermine him when he sometimes suggests he might get a job by criticising him for not getting a job. **P. 500**

The impact of this *"old interminable argument."* has been to thoroughly undermine John. He is aware that now he is very *"timid."* **P. 500** He no longer has the confidence he once had, As he points out he once used to do Norman Slater's *"lessons for"* him. **P. 500** In a wonderful passage John describes the affect of this constant argument on his courage. He is aware that *"his cowardice still lay there waiting for him, particularly in the dark nights of his mind when the shadow lay as if by a road, watching him, tripping behind him, changing its shape."* **P. 500** Although John ascribes this problem to his lack of confidence to do anything without making a mistake he does not see that this description perfectly describes his mother. Just like his *"cowardice"*, that he believes lies in wait, so does his mother. She watches on the sidelines to everything he does and every mistake he makes. And rather than support him she deliberately undermines him, pointing out that he is not *"a mechanic. You can't do anything with your hands. Why don't you hurry up with that tea? Look at you. Fat good you'd be at a job."* **P. 501** The malice within her reply is quite striking. Her implication is that how could he imagine he could keep a job when he is incapable of getting her tea.

One reason that John was able to assist Norman Slater with his homework was that he was intellectually more clever. However as an adult that has not served him well. In this village mechanical skills are valued above intellectual skills. **P. 501** The mechanical world is something for which he has no understanding. He had no *"interest in lorries and aeroplanes and mechanisms."* **P. 501** Through the use of wonderful metaphor John describes his situation which he suggests had *"hardened into a wall beyond which he could not go through*

– paradise lay yonder." **P. 501** He is aware the problem of being jobless is a little more complicated: his skills are intellectual and not manual. However the job opportunities in the village are for manual jobs. Therefore his chances of getting a job here are much more limited. He needs to be away from the village to have a chance of getting a job, and there is no way his mother will agree to that. His metaphorical description of the fire *"leaping about it as if it were a soul in hell"* **P. 501** perfectly describes his own situation. There is no way out of his present situation and his situation is untenable.

The impact of these years of criticism from his mother are likened by John feeling as though he was in *"a dark cave from which there was never to be any escape."* **P. 501** To be able to escape he first requires to stand up to his mother. Although he wants to, he knows he is incapable of doing so. He is aware that sometimes *"words came to him to silence her, but between the words leaving his mind and leaving his lips they had changed: they had lost their import, their impact, and their usefulness."* **P. 502** He knows he is incapable of standing up to her. The words changed because he changed. It was one thing to think up what needs to be said, but saying it quite different. The words don't change: he changes. He loses the courage to say what he thought up and what he knew he ought to have said. His present predicament is perfectly described. Outside his house *"he heard a bus roaring past the window, splashing over the puddles. That would be the boys going to the town to enjoy themselves."* **P. 502** Inside his house is his mother who, for as long as she is in this condition, will stop him advancing himself. In addition she will constantly belittle him and criticize him for failing to make more of his life and provide for her. While outside his house friends, he once knew, are free to enjoy themselves. There is no *"bus"* to take him anywhere while his mother is bedridden.

There is ambiguity in the ending. It is clear that within his mind John has thought about murdering his mother. **P. 503** However it has never been a serious thought. His mother's last words, before she falls asleep is to remind him to clean the tray for the next day. The implication is that he will obey and clean the tray for the next day. The final three sentences in the story describe his mother and him. She is *"asleep, curled up in the warmth with the bitter, bitter smile upon her face. He stood there for a long moment while an equally bitter smile curled up the edge of his lips. Then he walked to the door,*

opened it, and stood listening to the rain." P. 503

The application of the adjective "*bitter*", being applied to John for the first and only time to describe the smile on his face, suggests that as the story ends there is a hint that a new and sharper edge and strength may be developing within John. However this is countered by the point that the story begins and ends with the rain. This cyclical aspect to the story however suggests that nothing will change. John will be downtrodden the following day, just as he has been today. Therefore the story ends on a note of ambiguity: it is not clear how John will react the next and following days.

Mother and Son

Extract 1

His clothes were dripping as he came in. The water was streaming down his cheeks, a little reddened by the wind and the rain. He shook back his long hair and threw his jacket on the bed post, then abruptly remembering, he looked through the pockets for a box of matches. The house was in partial darkness, for, though the evening was not dark, the daylight was hooded by thick yellow curtains which were drawn across the width of the window. He shivered slightly as he lit the match: it had been a cold, dismal afternoon in the fields. The weather was extraordinarily bad for the time of year and gathering the sheaves into stacks was both monotonous and uncomfortable. He held the match cupped within his hands to warm them and to light his way to the box where he kept the peats. The flickering light showed a handsome face. The forehead was smooth and tanned, the nose thin though not incisive, the mouth curved and petulant, and the chin small and round. It was a good-looking face, though it was a face which had something childish about it. The childishness could be seen by a closer look, a look into the wide blue eyes which were rather stolid and netted by little red lines which divided them up like a graph. These eyes were deep and unquestioning as a child's, but they gave an unaccountable impression that they could be as dangerous and irresponsible as a child's. As the match flickered and went out with an apologetic cough, he cursed weakly and searched his pockets. Then he remembered he had left the box on the table, reached out for it impatiently, and lit another match. This he carried over to the lamp which lay on the table. The light clung to the wick, and he put the clean globe gently inside the brackets. "When the lamp was lit, it showed a moderately sized kitchen, the walls of which were painted a dull yellow. The dresser was surmounted by numerous shelves which held numerous dishes, some whole, some broken. A little china dog looked over the edge as if searching for crumbs: but the floor was clean and spotless, though the green linoleum looked a bit worn. Along one wall of the room was a four-poster bed with soiled pillows and a coverlet of some dark, rough material. In the bed was a woman. She was sleeping, her mouth tightly shut and prim and anaemic. There was a bitter smile on her lips as if fixed there; just as you sometimes see the insurance man coming to the door with the same smile each day, the same brilliant smile which never falls away till he's gone into the anonymity of the streets. The forehead was not very high and not low, though its wrinkles gave it an expression of concentration as if the woman were wrestling with some terrible witch's idea in dreams. The man looked at her for a moment, then fumbled for his matches again and began to light a fire. The sticks fell out of place and he cursed vindictively and helplessly. For a moment he sat squatting on his haunches staring into the fire, as if he were thinking of some state of innocence, some state to which he could not return: a reminiscent smile dimpled his cheeks and showed in eyes which immediately became still and dangerous again. The clock struck five wheezingly and, at the first chime, the woman woke up. She started as she saw the figure crouched over the fire and then subsided: 'It's only you.' There was relief in the voice, but there was a curious hint of contempt or acceptance. He still sat staring into the fire and answered dully: 'Yes, it's only me!' He couldn't be said to speak the words: they fell away from him as sometimes happens when one is in a deep reverie where every question is met by its answer almost instinctively.

'Well, what's the matter with you!' she snapped pettishly, 'sitting there moping with the tea to be made. I sometimes don't know why we christened you John' – with a sigh. 'My father was never like you. He was a man who knew his business.'

'All right, all right,' he said despairingly. 'Can't you get a new record for your gramophone. I've heard all that before,' as if he were conscious of the inadequacy of this familiar retort – he added: 'hundreds of times.' But she wasn't to be stopped.

'I can't understand what has come over you lately. You keep mooning about the house, pacing up and down with your hands in your pockets. Do you know what's going to happen to you, you'll be taken to the asylum. That's where you'll go. Your father's people had something wrong with their heads, it was in your family but not in ours.' (She had always looked upon him as her husband's son, not as her own: and all his faults she attributed to hereditary weaknesses on his father's side.)

1 He potted about, putting water in the kettle, waiting desperately for the sibilant noise to stop. But no, it took
2 a long time to stop. He moved about inside this sea of sound trying to keep detached, trying to force himself
3 from listening. Sometimes, at rarer and rarer intervals, he could halt and watch her out of a clear, cold mind as
4 if she didn't matter, as if her chatter which eddied round and round, then burst venomously towards him, had
5 no meaning for him, could not touch him. At these times her little bitter barbs passed over him or through him to
6 come out on the other side. Most often however they stung him and stood quivering in his flesh, and he would
7 say something angrily with the reflex of the wound. But she always cornered him. She had so much patience,
8 and then again she enjoyed pricking him with her subtle arrows. He had now become so sensitive that he
9 usually read some devilish meaning into her smallest utterance.

11 'Have you stacked all the sheaves now?' she was asking. He swung round on his eddying island as if he had
12 seen that the seas were relenting, drawing back. At such moments he became deferential.

13 'Yes,' he said joyously. 'I've stacked them all. And I've done it all alone too. I did think Roddy Mason would
14 help. But he doesn't seem to have much use for me now. He's gone the way the rest of the boys go. They all
15 take a job. Then they get together and laugh at me.' His weakness was pitiful: his childish blue eyes brimmed
16 with tears. Into the grimace by which he sought to tauten his face, he put a murderous determination: but
17 though the lines of his face were hard, the eyes had no steadiness: the last dominance had long faded and lost
18 itself in the little red lines which crossed and recrossed like a graph.

Mother and Son

Extract 1 Question Set 1 - N 5

1. Look at **lines 4 to 34 on page 54.**

As Iain Crichton Smith describes John's endeavours to light the fire, what do we learn about the character of the son through Iain Crichton Smith's use of language.

4

Total (4)

2. "*He moved about inside this sea of sound....*" **L 47 page 54**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of imagery here, describe the situation John finds himself with his mother.

4

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 4 to 9 on page 54.**

Give an example of Iain Crichton Smith's use of language to describe the contradictory nature of the son.

2

Total (2)

4. The mother has been described as narcissistic.

Give an example of Iain Crichton Smith's use of language that supports this description of the mother.

2

Total (2)

5. Iain Crichton Smith ends the story with the metaphor of John opening the front door. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, comment on the importance doors play in Iain Crichton Smith's short stories.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) '*It's only you.*' There was relief in the voice, but there was a curious hint of contempt or acceptance. **L. 31 - 32 P. 54**
How does Iain Crichton Smith's literary techniques develop this conflicting emotions within the mother?

This is a fairly easy question. The point I making is the mother understanding that while she has contempt for her son she is also conscious that she is reliant on him. Iain Crichton Smith often uses techniques like the short sentence, the question mark and the exclamation mark

2) Look at **lines 22 - 26 P. 54.** What does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language and other techniques tell us about the character of the mother?

Iain Crichton Smith uses a wide variety of techniques here. Here are a couple of ideas, on l. 23 there is the use of the adjective "bitter" to describe her smile along with the verb "fixed" to make clear this was a permanent feature. There is the use of the semi colon to introduce the image and emphasise the quality of the smile. With the final clause in the sentence - introduced by the comma - Iain Crichton Smith makes clear that the mother's smile is not sincere.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Many of Iain Crichton Smith's short stories end with a twist in the story or a climax. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how effective you find such endings.

Aside from being a classic SQA question, it highlights the deliberate ambiguity that Iain Crichton Smith used to end this story. In doing so he forces the reader to attempt to fathom just what is happening when John opens the door. Is he leaving or what. And the answer is bound up with the reader's interpretation of the story and the character of the son.

Mother and Son

Extract 1 Question Set 2 - N 5

1. Throughout this extract the son is often likened to a child.

Demonstrate how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language is able to describe this element in the character of the son?

4

Total (4)

2. Three times in this extract Iain Crichton Smith employs the exclamation mark. **Lines 33 and 35 on page 54 and 16 on page 55.**

What does the use of the exclamation add to our understanding of the characters.

4

Total (4)

3. *"His weakness was pitiful."* **L.6 page 55**

Highlight how Iain Crichton Smith's use of language highlights this aspect of John's character.

2

Total (2)

4.

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use language to highlight the importance of John's unemployment in this story.

2

Total (2)

5. In a number of Iain Crichton Smith's stories characters are seen to be in conflict with each other. Referring closely to this story and, at least one other story, show what Iain Crichton Smith's stories have to say character conflict.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Although a sympathetic character - in this extract - Iain Crichton Smith makes it clear he, John, is a character of contrasts and contradictions. What are these contrasts and contradictions.

There is a number of contrasts and contradictions in John's character. Iain Crichton Smith makes clear that - although an adult - there is still something of the child in him; there is a childish aspect to him when he gets petulant and argumentative; his unhappiness is partly blamed on the conditions with his mother, but it is also his awareness that he is not making progress in his life; he is living in a home that has no warmth; there is the suggestion that even though he is constantly criticised by his mother John still seeks approval from her - and many other examples.

2) One of the themes of this story is the cost on the individual in having to care for a dependant relative. How does Iain Crichton Smith explore this idea within the text?

This is a fairly straight forward question.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe to what extent Iain Crichton Smith's shorter prose is about the nature of identity and freedom.

This is certainly true of his rural stories and is bound up with conflict the individual and the community. For example, in stories like "The Red Door" the importance of identity is a major theme. In "The Telegram" who you are in the village has an impact on how you are treated. In "The Painter" being an individual and expressing individuality has consequences on the individual.

Mother and Son

Extract 1 Question Set 3 - Higher

1. "These eyes were deep and unquestioning as a child's, but they gave an unaccountable impression that they could be as dangerous and irresponsible as a child's." **L 14 - 15 page 54**

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language - in this extract - emphasise John's dangerous potential? 4

Total (4)

2. "There was relief in the voice, but there was a curious hint of contempt or acceptance." **L. 32 page 54**

How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language - within this passage - sketch these twin natures of the mother: need and contempt. 4

Total (4)

3. "He potted about, putting water in the kettle, waiting desperately for the sibilant noise to stop." **L. 46 page 54**

What evidence is there in the passage to support this description of the manner the mother speaks to her son? 2

Total (2)

4. Iain Crichton Smith ends the story with the metaphor of John opening the front door. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, comment on the importance doors play in Iain Crichton Smith's short stories. 10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Look at the following lines. "He potted about, putting water in the kettle, waiting desperately for the sibilant noise to stop. But no, it took a long time to stop. He moved about inside this sea of sound trying to keep detached, trying to force himself from listening. Sometimes, at rarer and rarer intervals, he could halt and watch her out of a clear, cold mind as if she didn't matter, as if her chatter which eddied round and round, then burst venomously towards him, had no meaning for him, could not touch him." **L. 46 - 50 P. 54** How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of language - in these lines - help to develop the character of John?

There are a number of techniques used here. There is the use of the short sentence. There is the use of repetition. There is the use of the conjunction "But" to link the first two sentences. There is phrasal repetition to emphasise John's difficulty in controlling events and just so many other techniques. You could write an essay on Iain Crichton Smith's use of techniques to create character.

2) Look at **lines 4 - 9 on P. 55**. How does Iain Crichton Smith's use of sentence structure help to make clear this argument?

A similar question type as the one above. It is worth not just understanding the meaning of a story but also being aware of the techniques used by the writer in order to create that idea and moment.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. In his shorter prose Iain Crichton Smith creates characters who find themselves trapped within a situation. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe Iain Crichton Smith use of literary to create such situations. *A basic and standard SQA thematic type of question but one that is well worth having notes on.*

B. Many of Iain Crichton Smith's short stories end with a twist in the story or a climax. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how effective you find such endings.

This is clearly a question that is appropriate to this story. There is the story "In Church" or the story "The Painter" or the story "The Red Door" all of which end with a twist. I feel what makes this ending different is the ambiguity in the twist at the end.

Mother and Son

Extract 1 Question Set 4 - Higher

1. Look at **lines 4 to 34 on page 54**.

During these lines, Iain Crichton Smith describes John's endeavour's to light the fire. What do we learn, from Iain Crichton Smith's use of language, about the character of mother and son.

(a) Mother:-

3

(b) Son:-

3

Total (6)

2. "She had so much patience, and then again she enjoyed pricking him with her subtle arrows." **L. 52 page 54**

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language illustrate this aspect of the mother's character?

2

Total (2)

3. "The old interminable argument was beginning again:" **L 12 page 55**

How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language illustrate "the old interminable argument"?

2

Total (2)

4. In a number of Iain Crichton Smith's stories characters are seen to be in conflict with each other. Referring closely to this story and, at least one other story, show what Iain Crichton Smith's stories have to say character conflict.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Look at **lines 46 page 54 to line 1 page 55**. Through this section Iain Crichton Smith uses a variety of literary techniques to highlight the ideas in this section of the story. Identify some of these techniques and indicate why they are effective.

I have asked this type of question before. I feel - at Higher - focus on writer's techniques is important for success.

2) How - in this story - does Iain Crichton Smith highlight the limitations and destructive nature of some family relationships?

Although an obvious question it is still an important question as it focuses attention directly at the mother and son relationship.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

Although a standard type of Higher question, it is area of the short stories to have plotted out some ideas.

Mother and Son

Extract 2

'Why, you'd be no good in a job. The manager would always be coming to show you what you had done wrong, and you'd get confused with all those strange faces and they'd laugh at you.' Every time she spoke these words the same brutal pain stabbed him. His babyish eyes would be smitten by a hellish despair, would lose all their hope, and cloud over with the pain of the mute, suffering animal. Time and time again he would say to her when she was feeling better and in a relatively humane mood: 'I'm going to get a job where the other fellows are!' and time and time again, with the unfathomable and unknowable cunning of the woman, she would strike his confidence dead with her hateful words. Yes, he was timid. He admitted it to himself, he hated himself for it, but his cowardice still lay there waiting for him, particularly in the dark nights of his mind when the shadow lay as if by a road, watching him, tripping behind him, changing its shape, till the sun came to shine on it and bring its plausible explanations. He spoke again, passing his hand wearily over his brow as if he were asking for her pity.

'Why should anybody laugh at me? They don't laugh at the other chaps. Everybody makes mistakes. I could learn as quickly as any of them. "Why, I used to do his lessons for. Norman Slater.' He looked up eagerly at her as if he wanted her to corroborate. But she only looked at him impatiently, that bitter smile still upon her face.

'Lessons aren't everything. You aren't a mechanic. You can't do anything with your hands. "Why don't you hurry up with that tea? Look at you. Fat good you'd be at a job.'

He still sat despairingly leaning near the fire, his head on his hands. He didn't even hear the last part of her words. True, he wasn't a mechanic. He never could understand how things worked. This ignorance and inaptitude of his puzzled himself. It was not that he wasn't intelligent: it was as if something had gone wrong in his childhood, some lack of interest in lorries and aeroplanes and mechanisms, which hardened into a wall beyond which he could not go through – paradise lay yonder.

He reached up for the tea absent-mindedly and poured hot water into the tea-pot. He watched it for a while with a sad look on his face, watched the fire leaping about it as if it were a soul in hell. The cups were white and undistinguished and he felt a faint nausea as he poured the tea into them. He reached out for the tray, put the tea-cup and a plate with bread and jam on it, and took it over to the bed. His mother sat up and took the tray from him, settling herself laboriously back against the pillows. She looked at it and said:

'Why didn't you wash this tray? Can't you see it's all dirty round the edges?' He stood there stolidly for a moment, not listening, watching her frail, white-clad body, and her spiteful, – bitter face. He ate little but drank three cups of tea. Then he took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one nervously and self-consciously.

'Cigarettes again? Don't you know that there's very little money coming into the house. If it weren't for your father's pension where would you be... you who's never done a day's work in your life? Answer me!' she screamed. 'Why are you sitting there like a dummy, you silly fool!' He took no notice, but puffed at his cigarette. There was a terrible weariness in his eyes. Nowadays he seldom felt his body tired: it was always his mind. This voice of hers, these pettinesses of hers, were always attacking his mind, burrowing beneath it, till he felt himself in a dark cave from which there was never to be any escape. Sometimes words came to him to silence her, but between the words leaving his mind and leaving his lips they had changed: they had lost their import, their impact, and their usefulness.

His mind now seemed gradually to be clearing up, and he was beginning to judge his own actions and hers. Everything was clearing up: it was one of his moments. He turned round on his chair from a sudden impulse and looked at her intensely. He had done this very often before, had tried to cow her into submission: but she had always laughed at him. Now however he was looking at her as if he had never seen her before. Her mouth was open and there were little crumbs upon her lower lip. Her face had sharpened itself into a birdlike quickness: she seemed to be pecking at the bread with a sharp beak in the same way as she pecked cruelly at his defences. He found himself considering her as if she were some kind of animal. Detachedly he thought: how can this thing make my life a hell for me? "What is she anyway? She's been ill for ten years: that doesn't excuse her. She's

1 *breaking me up so that even if she dies I won't be any good for anyone. But what if she's pretending? "What if*
2 *there is nothing wrong with her? At this a rage shook him so great that he flung his half-consumed cigarette in*
3 *the direction of the fire in an abrupt, savage gesture. Out of the silence he heard a bus roaring past the window,*
4 *splashing over the puddles. That would be the boys going to the town to enjoy themselves. He shivered inside*
5 *his loneliness and then rage took hold of him again. How he hated her! This time his gaze concentrated itself*
6 *on her scraggy neck, rising like a hen's out of her plain white nightgown. He watched her chin wagging up and*
7 *down: it was stained with jam and flecked with one or two crumbs. His sense of loneliness closed round him,*
8 *so that he felt as if he were on a boat on the limitless ocean, just as his house was on a limitless moorland.*
9 *There was a calm, unspeaking silence, while the rain beat like a benediction on the roof. He walked over to the*
10 *bed, took the tray from her as she held it out to him. He had gone in answer to words which he hadn't heard,*
11 *so hedged was he in his own thoughts.*

Mother and Son

Extract 2 Question Set 1 - N 5

1. On **lines 33 and 34 for the mother and lines 8 and 50 for the son page 60**, Iain Crichton Smith employs the explanation mark. How does the use of this device aid character description?

(a) Mother:-

2

(b) Son:-

2

Total (4)

2. On **lines 18, 29, 32 and 33 for the mother and lines 14, 45, 46 and 47 for the son page 60**, Iain Crichton Smith employs the Question mark. How does the use of this device aid character description?

(a) Mother:-

2

(b) Son:-

2

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 10 - 12 on page 60**.

Comment on how effective this paragraph is as an ending to the story.

4

Total (4)

4. In his character descriptions, Iain Crichton Smith has an ability to portray characters who demonstrate a variety of emotions. Referring closely to this story and, at least one other story, discuss how the author explores his character's emotions.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) Look at **lines 7 to 9 on page 60**. In these lines Iain Crichton Smith highlights the heart of the conflict between mother and son. In what way does Iain Crichton Smith's technique help make this section more clear?

There are a variety of devices Iain Crichton Smith uses here are some.

a) Word repetition.

b) Phrase repetition

c) comma parenthesis

d) repetition of prefix "un"

2) Look at **lines 14 16 on page 60** How does Iain Crichton Smith use of language demonstrate differences between mother and son?

There are a variety of devices Iain Crichton Smith uses here are some.

a) Repetition of the interjection "Why".

b) The use of the short sentence.

c) complementing and contrast with the pronouns "He" and "She."

d) Questions asked by John and mother's "smile" response.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

to this story, and at least one other short story, describe Iain Crichton Smith use of literary to create such situations.

In Iain Crichton Smith's prose the personal setting is very important. In this story the personal setting is being trapped as a result of a personal obligation. The notion of being trapped is amplified by the both the sacrifices made to carry out the obligation and that the object of the sacrifice - the mother - shows no gratitude for what has been done for her. In "The Red Door" the notion of trapped is a psychological one where the hero is unable - indeed may not want - to leave the restrictions and confines of the community.

B. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

Fairly straightforward question and one already commented on.

Mother and Son

Extract 2 Question Set 2 - N 5

1. On **lines 17-18, 29, 32 on page 60** John's mother asks three questions.

What do these three questions tell us about the relationship between mother and son?

6

Total (6)

2. Look at **lines 43-44 on page 60**. Why is the imagery John employs appropriate?

4

Total (4)

3. What does the repetition of "**bitter**" in **lines 17 and 31 on page 60** add to our understanding of the characters?

2

Total (2)

4. All short stories have titles. With reference to this story and, at least one other story, comment on the contribution the title makes to the story.

8

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) "*This ignorance and inaptitude of his puzzled himself.*" **L. 20-21 P. 60.**

In what way is this a perfect description of John?

Although the quote refers to John's admission that he is not mechanically minded, the quote has a wider application. The term "ignorance" could easily apply to his relations with his mother. His character has not got the means to take her own. She tramples over every endeavour of his. The ambiguity of the final lines hints that John could have taken a physical solution to his situation. Although a poor interpretation of these lines, it is the only way that he has to defeat her. The mother's mind and devices are way above his own. And that is why the description "inaptitude" is also a valid description. John does not have the mental means to take on and defeat his mother.

2) "*Her face had sharpened itself into a birdlike quickness: she seemed to be pecking at the bread with a sharp beak in the same way as she pecked cruelly at his defences. He found himself considering her as if she were some kind of animal. Detachedly he thought: how can this thing make my life a hell for me?*" **Lines 43 - 45 P. 60** This is not the first time Iain Crichton Smith has compared women to birds. What do we learn - through Iain Crichton Smith's use of language - about the mother and her conflict with her son?

A fairly easily understood image. Phrases like "pecking at the bread with a sharp beak" is a wonderful metaphor for how the mother systematically dismantles his defences. The use of the noun "animal" is an excellent point made. The mother appears - in places - to be devoid of that it is to be human. As pointed out above, John has no defences strong enough to defend himself.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Development of character is one of the great strengths of Iain Crichton Smith's prose. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to develop characters.

A question already asked and addressed.

Mother and Son

Extract 2 Question Set 3 - Higher

1. On **lines 33 and 34** for the mother and **lines 6 and 50 Page 60** for the son, Iain Crichton Smith employs the explanation mark. How does the use of this device aid character description?

(a) Mother:-

2

(b) Son:-

2

Total (4)

2. On **lines 18, 29, 32 and 33** for the mother and **lines 14, 45, 46 and 47 P. 60** for the son, Iain Crichton Smith employs the Question mark. How does the use of this device aid character description?

(a) Mother:-

2

(b) Son:-

2

Total (4)

3. Look at **lines 9 - 11 on page 61**.

Comment on how effective this paragraph is as an ending to the story.

2

Total (2)

4. In his character descriptions, Iain Crichton Smith has an ability to portray characters who demonstrate a variety of emotions. Referring closely to this story and, at least one other story, discuss how the author explores his character's emotions.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) "This voice of hers, these pettinesses of hers, were always attacking his mind, burrowing beneath it, till he felt himself in a dark cave from which there was never to be any escape. Sometimes words came to him to silence her, but between the words leaving his mind and leaving his lips they had changed: they had lost their import, their impact, and their usefulness." **Lines 35 - 38 P. 60** What do we learn - through Iain Crichton Smith's use of language - about John and his dispute with his mother?

In a sense this is another example of the lines 20-21 - commented on above. This is just another example of the inability of John to stand up to the stratagems invented by his mother. One point in this example is the suggestion that John actually does have responses but somehow they vanish when he attempts to express them.

2) Whatever his failings John is clearly a dutiful son. However what has Iain Crichton Smith to say about the personal cost of such care on the individual concerned?

The only way to answer this question is to import what we learn of the character John as representing Iain Crichton Smith's views. Here some suggestions.

a) Unable to find employment because of the demands of caring.

b) Loss of friends.

c) the emotional cost.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe to what extent Iain Crichton Smith's shorter prose is about the nature of identity and freedom.

Yes a repeat of an already asked question, however these are issues at the heart of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

B. It has been said that Iain Crichton Smith brings to his prose his poetic gift of colour and imagery. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops and employs this literary technique in his shorter prose.

I liked this point when I read it and felt it would be an interesting question - until I had to address it.

Taking the word "colour" in its widest sense an answer is easier.

a) You have breadth and depth of character. Iain Crichton Smith does not create one-dimensional characters

b) You have the scope of situation. E.g. Basically "Mother and Son" is about a son looking over his mother but through the dialogue and description we are introduced to a wider canvas.

c) You have Iain Crichton Smith's use of language. His range of sentence type, imagery; repetition; word choice and punctuation are all devices that add colour to his narrative.

Mother and Son

Extract 2 Question Set 4 - Higher

1. *"This ignorance and inaptitude of his puzzled himself."* **Lines 20-21 Page 60**

What is the point that Iain Crichton Smith is saying about John?

2

Total (2)

2. Four times in the passage the adjective "bitter" is used to describe the mother. **Lines 16, 30 Page 60**
and **Line 10 on Page 61.**

Including the use of the double adjective, what does this repetition add to the character of the mother.

4

Total (4)

3. The final paragraph in the story is deliberately ambiguous. Comment on the contribution that Iain Crichton Smith's writer's technique makes to your understanding of the paragraph's ambiguity.

4

Total (4)

4. One of the themes of Iain Crichton Smith's short prose is character contrast. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, examine the techniques Iain Crichton Smith employs to contrast his characters.

10

Total (20)

Questions of Focus

These questions focus on issues and themes I feel are of interest with the individual stories

1) This is one of Iain Crichton Smith rural stories. What has Iain Crichton Smith to say about rural life in this story?
A fairly straight forward question.

2) Look at **lines 10 - 12 on Page 61**. In what ways are these lines a good - or poor - ending to this story?

This is clearly an open-ended question. However Iain Crichton Smith's use of ambiguity within this ending encourages discussion and debate as to exactly John is up to. There is more ambiguity in this ending than there is in "The Red Door." In a sense this ending is on a par with "The Telegram" where there is a hint that there may be a change in the relationship between the two women - but only a hint.

Challenging Questions

Challenging Questions, as the term suggests, offers questions more detailed than what is expected at this level. The purpose of these questions is to offer the opportunity to further explore - in greater depth - the short story, its ideas and literary techniques. It is hoped that in doing so the individual will acquire a more detailed understanding of Iain Crichton Smith's prose.

A. It has been said that Iain Crichton Smith brings to his prose his poetic gift of colour and imagery. Referring to this story, and at least one other short story, describe how Iain Crichton Smith develops and employs this literary technique in his shorter prose.

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Undated black and white portrait of Poet Norman MacCaig (middle) with Edwin Morgan (left) and Iain Crichton Smith.

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