



it

By Inger Christensen

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Inger Christensen's masterpiece *it*, translated brilliantly by Susanna Nied, and with an illuminating introduction by Anne Carson.

it is the masterwork by Danish poet Inger Christensen ("a true singer of the syllables," said C. D. Wright), often cited as a Nobel contender and one of Europe's most revered poets. On its publication in 1969, it took Denmark by storm, winning critical praise and becoming a huge popular favorite. Translated into many languages, *it* won international acclaim and is now a classic of modern Scandinavian poetry.

it is both a collection of poems and a single poetic epic, forming a philosophical statement on the nature of language, perception, and reality. The subject matter, though, is down to earth: amoebas, stones, and factories; fear, sea urchins, and mental institutions; sand, sexuality, and song. The words and images of *it* recur in ways reminiscent of Christensen's other works, but here is a younger poetry, wilder, and crackling with energy. The marvelous and complex use of mathematical structure in *it* is faithfully captured in Susanna Nied's English translation, which won a 2005 PEN Translation Fund Award.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Christensen's sprawling, cosmically ambitious, book-length poem became a national hit in Denmark soon after its 1969 publication, and it's not hard to see why. The segments' diverse shapes—prose litany, chiming quatrains, stuttering free verse, telegram, prose diary—show mastery enough for almost any taste, while the overarching ideology—liberation for the whole human person from institutions, laws, mere forms—perfectly fit the late '60s' radical mood. Christensen begins by describing the creation of the whole world, narrows her focus to modern Danish society, then imagines recreating it, first in lyrical fragments ("A happy machine/ A wild imagination/ A fantastic din") and then through extended parables in which patients from an insane asylum learn to love one another and orchestrate social protests involving mass nudity. Drawing on Nietzsche, quoting Blake and Novalis, Christensen promises "crowns of gold for the holy/ fables for the freedom of matter," and argues that "the completely unreasonable activity is in reality reasonable, because it ends in a vision." Nied (who also translated Christensen's *Alphabet*) duplicates the Danish poem's mathematical schemes while also conveying its freshness and sense of freedom. Poet and classicist Anne Carson contributes a helpful introduction. (Nov.)

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About the Author

Inger Christensen (1935–2009), whose work is a cornerstone of modern Scandinavian poetry, was the recipient of many international awards, among them the Nordic Authors' Prize, bestowed by the Swedish Academy and known as the "Little Nobel." Her books include the masterpiece *it*; *alphabet*; *Butterfly Valley*; and *Light, Grass, and Letter in April*.

Susanna Nied's work has appeared in various literary journals and anthologies. Her translation of *alphabet* won the 1982 ASF/PEN Translation Prize for Poetry, awarded by the American-Scandinavian Foundation and *Scandinavian Review*.

Anne Carson was born in Canada and teaches ancient Greek for a living at New York University. Her awards and honors include the Lannan Award, the Pushcart Prize, the Griffin Trust Award for Excellence in Poetry, a Guggenheim fellowship, and the MacArthur "Genius" Award. She is the author of *Nox*; *Glass, Irony and God*; *The Autobiography of Red*; *The Beauty of the Husband*; *Decreation*; *Economy of the Unlost*; *Eros the Bittersweet*; *Grief Lessons*; *If Not, Winter*; *Men in the Off Hours*; and *Plainwater*.

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