



## Consider the Lilies

*Iain Crichton Smith , Isobel Murray (Introduction)*

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### **Consider the Lilies** Iain Crichton Smith , Isobel Murray (Introduction)

The Highland Clearances, the eviction of crofters from their homes between 1792 and the 1850s, was one of the cruellest episodes in Scotland's history. In *Consider the Lilies*, Iain Crichton Smith captures its impact through the thoughts and memories of an old woman who has lived all her life within the narrow confines of her community. Alone and bewildered by the demands of the factor, Patrick Sellar, she approaches the minister for help, only to have her faith shattered by his hypocrisy. She finds comfort, however, from a surprising source: Donald Macleod, an imaginative and self-educated man who has been ostracised by his neighbours, not least by Mrs Scott herself, on account of his atheism. Through him and through the circumstances forced upon her, the old woman achieves new strength.

Written with compassion, in spare, simple prose, *Consider the Lilies* is a moving testament to the enduring qualities which enable the oppressed to triumph in defeat.

### **Consider the Lilies Details**

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Author : Iain Crichton Smith , Isobel Murray (Introduction)

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## From Reader Review Consider the Lilies for online ebook

### Teri Peterson says

Beautiful and desolate.

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### Cindy Stallard says

Interesting foray into hardships of Scottish peasants during the Highland Clearances...VERY harsh.

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### Malcolm Brown says

Good story, strong sense of place, with a well-conveyed central character and intriguing use of symbolism. The author states that it is not an historical novel and that he has taken liberties, but those liberties are sometimes sometimes jarring, as if he either neglected to do the historical research, or as if he just didn't care.

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### Oscar To says

A novella that flows from beginning to end, Crichton Smith provides a compelling narrative of a simple village life untarnished by the world.

The narrative follows an old woman, Mrs Scott, in the third person, occasionally switching to the viewpoints of other characters. The novella has a loose structure simultaneously following two narratives; one in the present, the other in the past. These allow us to see the main character's backstory and how she became the woman of the present.

Fundamentally, the story is about the corruption of the lives of people from a world that they have no comprehension of. Mrs Scott is painted as a simple god-fearing woman, suspicious of all hints of the modern world until it is violently thrust upon her. As she reflects on her life, she is forced to confront her prejudices and her beliefs which leads to her changing her ways.

Overall, the novel is a solidly written, although I found some of the switches in character viewpoints difficult to follow at times. However, Crichton Smith makes good use of language to keep things flowing, and gives a convincing narrative from the head of a rambling old woman. Whilst other novels fulfil this slightly better (such as 'Elizabeth is missing'), this work is filled with symbolism and is a solid critique of the Highland clearances, as well as issues such as corruption and the idea of modernity.

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### Tamara Zann says

The plot was obvious let's state that here. The writing style was simple to an aggravating degree. Mr Smith did that on purpose as he writes himself but it doesn't make the reading experience better. The subject matter

is one I have a particular interest in, however, so I enjoyed the book still.

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### **Stephen says**

Rarely if ever have I been so uninterested in the social commentary (the sheer cruelty of the Clearances and the blistering anger at the sins of the Kirk) when compared with my fascination and affection for the central character. Usually the opposite is true and the only value I place in characters is in their role as vassals for a political purpose.

But Mrs. Scott is a rare protagonist. First of all she's an old woman (a rare enough thing in itself); secondly, she's uneducated; thirdly, she's one of the most compulsively sympathetic literary characters I've ever come across. She's a simple woman, insular and unworldly, and yet the impressively restrained narrative voice never feels condescending. Even where Mrs. Scott displays ignorant, intolerant views (mainly towards the villages' resident atheist) it never for a moment masks Crichton Smith's genuine affection for his protagonist. It's a story told with a beautiful, poetic simplicity and a thoroughly wonderful book.

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### **Anne says**

This is a wonderful little book - the 50th Anniversary edition of a modern Scottish classic.

It is a short read, only 144 pages, describing the Highland clearances in Scotland with the story being told by Mrs Scott a 70 year old widow, who has been told to leave the house where she was born and has lived all her life.

The book highlights the plight of those who faced eviction from their homes and the effect it had on the communities.

I would recommend this little book.

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### **Laura says**

This was a nice little book I read at home after beginning to read it in class. It was an old book with thick pages and a distinctive "bookish" smell. I certainly learned more about the highland clearances, especially from a closer perspective.

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### **Iain says**

A simply told poetic tale of a 70 year old woman facing eviction from the only home she has ever known, in a small highland village in Scotland. In "Consider the Lilies" Iain Crichton Smith portrays the inhumanity of the wealthy towards the poor and the role religion plays in the responsibility towards others in a community.. Although not to be read as history, due to its anachronisms, it gives a powerfully tragic voice to the people who suffered the Highland Clearances by highlighting the plight of one of its weakest members.

The coming threat of eviction throws Mrs. Scott into a crisis of religion as she seeks guidance from members of her pious community. The minister, the elder, and many others disappoint her but the person who does not

is the most unexpected, Donald Macleod, the village atheist. Mrs. Scott asks herself, "who did Donald Macleod think he was, with that invalid wife of his, with his news from Edinburgh, and his books? A man who didn't go to church wasn't a respectable man, no matter what way you looked at it." This was before she actually got to know him and his family who provide her with protection and comfort.

A sad novel, but a good read.

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### **Hayley says**

Despite currently studying the clearances and the particular context under which this takes places, it has been the first book in a long I was sad to finish. The ending was unexpected and with reading it as ebook I was today unaware I had reached the end until no more pages appeared!

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### **Alesa says**

I got this book because I wanted to learn about the Highland Clearances in Scotland between 1790 and 1850, in which untold numbers of crofters were displaced from the land. This, according to web reviews, was the definitive novel on the period. I found it to be fascinating, both as history and as literature.

The book is told by a 70-year-old widow who is being forced from her home, where she was born, and generations before her had been born. The voice is a simple one, at times confused and rambling. At first, I was put off by the extreme negativity of her character, and her general bitterness towards life (even before the notification of being displaced). She had led a really hard life.

As the introduction to the book points out, however, the fact of her joylessness is really one of the main points of the book. For the author is writing about the effect of religion on the Scots people just as much as about the Clearances. He paints a picture of a church that has warped the souls of the people, making them live in guilt and fear of hell, begrudging them even the simplest of pleasures such as a little music on a Saturday night. The greedy landlords and their agents are certainly portrayed as villains. But an even greater villain is the church, which actually goes so far as to say that the people are being evicted as punishment from God for their sinfulness.

What makes this a memorable book is the gradual change of heart in the old woman, where she sees how she was at fault in many of the tragedies in her family relationships -- yet was a victim in other circumstances, which previously she had taken for granted. This gives the book a richness and depth, rather than being just a social commentary. We see a poorly educated woman gaining clarity on a social situation, and shifting her prior attitudes -- a wonderful sign of growth despite the dire circumstances she is in.

Upon concluding the book, you can't help but ask similar questions about our current times. How are we victims of, or passive witnesses to, terrible iniquities in our own era? And how have we been blinded to ways in which our own attitudes have led to the demise of valued relationships?

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### **Steve says**

I think there's no kind of book I love more than a short, perfect novel, and this is certainly one. The slow,

quiet development of the central character, Mrs Scott, is stunning as her small, steady life is buffeted by forces of change initially beyond her understanding. Nothing is overstated but everything matters here, with images, gestures, and subtleties doing so much. This, for instance, when Mrs Scott's rigid faith has been shaken and she has come to doubt the self she has been for so long:

The moon seemed to be slowly moving away and she couldn't stop it. It was going off and leaving her. She didn't want this to happen, but she couldn't stop it. It had looked her full in the eyes and was now departing as if it had seen enough.

I know this is a book I'll reread and reread, and I already look forward to it. (And great thanks to the wonderful Hitchhiker's Guide to Scottish Literature for the introduction.)

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### **Joanne Davidson says**

This book focuses on the subject of the highland clearances, and it is a deeply honest and often understated work that attempts to capture the character of the people and a way of life, that was on the point of disappearing, in the single subject of the life of a 70 year old woman.

Mrs Scott lives alone with her daily habits and minor prejudices until the day she is visited by 'the man on the white horse'. We feel in the small details of incomprehension and misunderstanding the clash of two worlds - the modernising world of land ownership and the world of the land workers, which seems as timeless as it is cyclical. The gentle irony of the book is that such an independent and self contained woman, who has endured so much loss, seems powerless to digest the reality that she can and will be put out of her own house; the very last thing that is hers.

Self contained, pious and stubbornly silent, we follow Mrs Scott as the reality of the news slowly sinks in and compels a process of examination and reevaluation. Crichton Smith has a close eye for character and weaves many of the elements of what was a revolutionary change across the highlands into this one quietly contemplated fact, the loss of house and home, and how this one woman will face up to it. In the end Mrs Scott cannot stop the change that is overturning her world, but she has a choice to make over the terms of acceptance. To be powerless is not to be without humanity, Crichton Smith tells us, or the judgment to know right from wrong.

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### **David Gilchrist says**

Quite a moving story about the Scottish clearances. I did like the getting to know the old lady and can only guess at the outcome.

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### **Haider Hussain says**

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Highland Clearances (from the Wikipedia): The Highland Clearances was the forced displacement during the

18th and 19th centuries of a significant number of people from traditional land tenancies in the Scottish Highlands, where they had practiced small-scale agriculture. It resulted from enclosures of common lands and a change from farming to sheep raising. The clearances are particularly notorious as a result of the brutality of many evictions at short notice.

Mrs. Scott, a 70 years old God fearing widow was about to evicted from her land by the Duke. Battered by the haunting memories of her parents, her husband who never returned from the war, and her only son who left her and emigrated to Canada. She tried to find help in religion only to face the hypocrisy of clergyman. Walls were closing in and there was no hope in sight for the old lady until luck brought her to the doors of Mr. McLeod, an atheist neighbor she always disapproved of and never talked to before. From him, she gets a new courage to confront the odds and find solace.

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