

THE EXISTENCE OF THE HERMIT

Iain Crichton Smith

Plot Summary

A “hermit” arrives at the edge of a Highland village. He keeps to himself, refuses church, and avoids social expectations. The villagers become suspicious, then hostile, as they cannot tolerate difference. Their fear of non-conformity escalates to oppressive behaviour; the hermit becomes a symbol of individuality crushed by society.

[\[quizlet.com\]](#), [\[quizlet.com\]](#)

Themes

Individual vs Society

The hermit represents uniqueness; the villagers represent conformity.

[\[quizlet.com\]](#)

Misunderstanding & Intolerance

They “could not forgive him his difference.”

[\[quizlet.com\]](#)

Abuse of Power

“They were determined to make him speak.”

[\[quizlet.com\]](#)

Fear of the Unknown

The villagers gossip constantly because they cannot tolerate mystery.

Symbols

- **The outskirts** — physical representation of social exclusion.
- **The hermit’s silence** — resistance, autonomy.