



## Highland Fling

*Nancy Mitford*

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The Scottish Highlands may never be the same after the Bright Young Things meet the Dull Old things on a long vacation at Dalloch. Jane Dacre finds painter Albert Gates irresistible, but the Old Regime is less enraptured, for Albert is an outrageous prankster.

## Highland Fling Details

Date : Published 1931 by Carroll & Graf Pub

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Author : Nancy Mitford

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## From Reader Review *Highland Fling* for online ebook

### Tony says

HIGHLAND FLING. (1931). Nancy Mitford. \*\*\*\*.

This was Ms. Mitford's first novel, and her style was already apparent. She manages to lampoon all of the titled English men and women as they existed between the two wars. At that time, the group earls, dukes, ladys, etc., were still around, but their money was mostly gone. If they had any income, they lived from quarter to quarter. Mostly, they ignored the bills that kept coming in, to the frustration of the various vendors. The setting for this novel was at a castle in Scotland. There was a shooting party scheduled there, but the owners of the castle and the adjacent pheasant moors were suddenly sent off to some small country to work in their foreign service office. They asked two young friends of theirs if they would please act as hosts at the hunt; it was too late to call off. The young man and woman had just been engaged and were wondering where the next check would be coming from. This was an opportunity to escape their creditors and to save money by living at the castle for a couple of months rent free. They asked along their friend Jane Dacre, who was at loose ends anyway, and also had an interest in one of the other guests who would be attending – Albert, a surrealist painter whom she had had her eye on. The rest of the group consisted of older members of the elite who held to the old ways and represented English eccentricity in almost every way. This was a delightful send up of British society set in a traditional activity, but satirized by the younger set of guests. Once you read this, you will be on the lookout for other books by Mitford to add to your reading list. Recommended.

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### Elizabeth says

Oh look, I've finished another Nancy Mitford book!

This is her first. It doesn't suffer for being her first, being just as full of sass and banter as any of the others, and possibly having even a bit more actual plot structure than some. And it's set in Scotland! What's not to like?

I finished this some time ago, then got hung up speed-reading for School Library Journal's *Battle of the Books*, for which I was a judge, and though I wrote copious freeform reviews for all of them, I deemed it politic not to post ANY since the ones I *didn't* like would end up conspicuous by their absence. And I am bored with negative reviews. Well. Anyway. The result is I don't remember many specifics about *Highland Fling*, but I do appear to have written the following Note to Self inside the front cover: "Chapter 7 – WONDERFUL Glorious Twelfth."

So there you are. If you want a splendid objective yet hilarious description of the opening day of the shooting season, check out Chapter 7 of *Highland Fling*.

"I have never been to Scotland... I am told that no cultured people ever go there now, so much is it *démodé*."  
- Albert, before the fun begins

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## **Celia Montgomery says**

Nancy Mitford's books are always funny, but they also have an interesting dark side. There's a lot of hidden content in this seemingly inconsequential book about "Bright Young Things" on a summer vacation in Scotland between the wars. Is creativity a condition of youth? Do you lose it with your innocence? Mitford keeps the plot humming in its absurd way. The best bit follows the main character as she experiences the misery and discomfort of a traditional English hunt.

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## **Pamela says**

I'm am profoundly happy that this was not the first novel I'd read by Mitford. Had it been I doubt I would have read any others. Her writing and observations are, at best, superficial. Her characters are one dimensional and unbelievably absurd. There are traces of the wit and brilliant commentary that I've come to expect from reading her other works, but those aspects are painfully underdeveloped in Highland Fling.

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## **Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says**

Very much of its time and place. Nothing dates faster than contemporary satire. Mitford intended to send up her own set and her parents', and from what we read she achieved that purpose. At the time it was found hysterically funny--not least because many of the characters were identifiable with real folks at the time. However, the time was 1931, so the majority of those references will fall rather flat unless the modern reader is steeped in fiction and biography of the period. I am, to a certain degree, but at this distance her intended waspish satire is gentled down to a few chuckles here and there.

A fast, light read for evening time. Mitford would be very annoyed by my shelving this as "Mostly Harmless"--so I think I will.

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## **Fiona MacDonald says**

Another Nancy Mitford that I adored. She's wonderful. I think alternating between her and Barbara Pym should be used to treat depression because both will have you laughing numerous times. 'Highland Fling' follows four people, Alfred, Jane, Sally and Walter (who have just recently got married) who are invited to spend time in a grand castle in Scotland by Sally's kindly relatives. Once there, there are arguments, disappearing picnic baskets, fires, drunken singsongs and general madness. Oh, and a love affair blossoms that has the potential to make or break the holiday.

Nancy Mitford is someone whom I would've loved to have known, I find myself so in sync with her humour that it makes me sad how little she wrote.

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## **David says**

Her first novel, not her best, but still a must for any Nancy Mitford fan (and let's face it, if you are not a

Nancy Mitford fan, you are missing out). Certainly beats the heck out of a lot of other first novels I've read, and I think she was already really good, right out of the gate.

I bought this in the B&N store in Santa Monica -- that is a really good store, I was really impressed with what I found poking around in there. Anyway, at the very last minute I thought, oh let's just see if they have any Nancy Mitford -- they had almost all of it, including this book which I never see, and the one other book of hers I have not yet read. I almost bought that one, too, but if I read that one, there's no more. Too sad! So I left it there. Meanwhile, I can happily re-read the others over and over, so I can just keep that one in reserve for a while longer.

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### **Claire says**

Laugh out loud funny!

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### **Alvin says**

This witty, lighthearted frolic of a novel deftly (if gently) lampoons the British aristocracy of its day – both the stodgy, persnickety old guard and the vapid Bright Young Things. The aesthete protagonist, Albert, is particularly hilarious. It's rather like Wodehouse with a bit more bite and substance. Really, quite a treat.

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### **Nigeyb says**

Highland Fling was Nancy Mitford's first novel. It was published in 1931. I have recently bought all of Nancy Mitford's novels, and intend to read all eight.

It was interesting and informative for me, as someone who is working through each of Nancy Mitford's novels chronologically, to note that Jane Smiley, here in *The Los Angeles Review of Books* differentiates between Nancy Mitford's four pre-war novels, and her four post-war novels

*But there is no real sense, in the pre-war works, of the grandeur and sophistication Mitford would achieve in the last four. There is, in fact, considerable evidence, especially in *Wigs on the Green* and *Pigeon Pie*, that Mitford's world view — compounded of knowing frivolity and evenhanded acceptance of the various political forces that are about to clash so tragically — is overwhelmed by her material. She can organise her story, more or less, and she can give her characters vivid life, but she can't acknowledge the meaning of their opinions or their actions. Her characters are imprisoned in a world where consequences are muffled by privilege and where all eccentricities are merely amusing. The clue to the narrowness of this world is Mitford's failure to introduce it systematically or to depict it with much detail. She writes from the centre of that world, for an audience who knows what she is talking about, for whom more explanation would retard the pace of the jokes.*

The whole article is well worth a read, and it has whet my appetite for all of Nancy Mitford's work. I am encouraged to learn that her books should get progressively better and better.

Good comedic writing is notoriously difficult to do well. The sublime P.G. Wodehouse and early Evelyn Waugh, can reduce me to tears of laughter. *Highland Fling*, which provided the odd chuckle, suggests that Nancy Mitford might also have this talent.

*Highland Fling* is undeniably a pleasant read. The slight story has some great characters. Like P.G. Wodehouse, albeit on this occasion without the guaranteed hearty guffaws, what Nancy Mitford achieves in her first novel, is a window into the English aristocracy in the first half of the twentieth century. Nancy Mitford's nuanced descriptions of the personalities that populate *Highland Fling* highlight the acute intergenerational conflicts between the Bright Young Things and "the grown ups", many of whom are traditional, austere, stereotypically aristocratic Victorian characters. These figures are brought to life with clarity and wit. Nancy Mitford also manages to incorporate universal themes: relationships, family, love etc.

*Highland Fling* is a bit uneven, but I enjoyed it, and I look forward to reading more of her work. I am going to try to resist the temptation to read her second novel, *Christmas Pudding* (1932), before December 2013, so to better appreciate the novel's Christmas setting, but I may have to give in to the temptation to start reading it sooner.

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## **Kim says**

If I'd never read any of Nancy Mitford's other novels, then reading this, her first novel, wouldn't have encouraged me to do so. Not that it doesn't have its good points. For example, you can't fault Mitford for writing what she knew about; that is, the lifestyle of the English upper class and the goings on of Bright Young Things in the 1920s. And the novel has some genuinely funny moments, such as a description of proceedings in the House of Lords. But overall, the characters are superficial, the action dull and the writing pedestrian. It reads like a story written by an enthusiastic school girl with rather less writing talent than she thought she had. I finished it because that's what I do, but it was hard to whip up much interest in either the Bright Young Things or the Dull Old Things who populate the novel.

However, for all I'm underwhelmed by Mitford's first attempt at a novel, I'm glad that she continued to write. I very much enjoyed *The Pursuit of Love* when I read it a few months ago and I seem to recall reading and loving *Love in a Cold Climate* when I was in my teens. In any event, I plan to read more of her work and, at some point, a Mitford biography. This book, though, I won't be reading again.

That said, I may remember more about it than I really want to. A scene towards the end comes to mind in that regard. A trio of young men in disguise appear at the door of one of the main characters. They're going to see a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. Why the disguise? As one of the young men says:

It is one thing to see a Gilbert and Sullivan, and quite another to be seen at one. We have our unborn children to consider, not to mention our careers.

The scene made me chuckle, but as I've generally enjoyed the G&S I've seen, I clearly would have been a failure as a 1920s Bright Young Thing.

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## **Good Books Good Friends says**

Plutôt un 3,5.

Une jolie découverte de Nancy Mitford, qui est de bon augure pour la suite. J'ai aimé la malice teintée de tendresse qui se dégage de son roman.

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## **Donna LaValley says**

Having enjoyed *Love I A Cold Climate*, I found 2 more of her short satires, this and *Pigeon Pie*. In *Highland Fling*, her theme of British aristocratic snobbery centers on the snobbery of the younger vs. the older generation. It takes place mostly in a Scottish Castle during a "shooting party."

The elders, most of whom are Peers in the House of Lords (or Generals of WWI), come off as dinosaurs in thought and deed, while the younger come off as asinine "aesthetes" who feel they own the world of art and good taste. The two sets amaze one another, but they remain almost outwardly civil, as one does to prove one's place in the upper class.

There is a hilarious spoof on Scottish clan history, with attendant legends and warring clans. One character discusses with stultifying minutia the origins of any piece of antiquity, whether it's a plaid variation or a line from a mostly unintelligible poem. Point taken.

A romance blooms in the younger set, and the ups and downs of that are very funny.

It's a quick and enjoyable read for anyone who likes this kind of satire – which takes place between World Wars.

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## **Kthxbai! says**

Definitely not one of Mitford's best. This one lacks the really remarkable humor that I've come to expect from Nancy Mitford books. Also, the characters were curiously dull -- a far cry from the endearingly perverse Radletts and Dougdales -- and I was disappointed to find myself simply not caring about them at all. Not an unpleasant read with which to while away a few summer hours, but overall unsatisfying.

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## **Aurélia says**

Nancy Mitford a le chic de croquer les relations dans l'aristocratie britannique de l'entre-deux guerres d'une façon terriblement ironique et caustique. C'est assez plaisant, de la voir décrire cet univers d'oisiveté choquant, où l'argent est dilapidé puisque "c'est plus économique" de faire ainsi. J'ai beaucoup aimé les passages où Albert s'exprime par rapport à la guerre et sur le projet des Etats-Unis d'Europe, on y retrouve les opinions de l'autrice et cela ancre encore plus le récit dans le réel... tout en lui conférant une extrême

modernité.

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