

Landseer's Highlands: a Place of Fascination with the "Monarchs of Nature"



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Abstract

The English animal painter Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) first visited the Highlands in 1824 and, from that moment on, his artistic career was to be unavoidably marked by his profound fascination with the romantic sights he encountered there.

The artist's empathy with the wild animals that inhabited the Scottish landscape functioned as a pretext for him to travel to the Highlands annually along with his friend Charles Leslie (1794-1859), also a renowned painter, who introduced Landseer to one of his favourite writers, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), whose home at Abbotsford the artist began visiting regularly. Despite their growing attractiveness, these journeys also served a practical purpose. They contributed to developing methods for the accurate observation of animals *in loco* in order to capture their body language at particular moments of joy (*Highland Music*, 1829) and suffering (*Highland Nurses*, 1856), thereby demonstrating that their feelings and expressions are akin to ours. These empiricist observations also allowed Landseer to depict the struggle for survival of many species in danger of extinction through his studies of dead game and sporting scenes. Among these are some of his best known works such as *The Hunting of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826), *Stag at Bay* (1846) and *The Monarch of the Glen* (1851). We must highlight that during these visits to Scotland, the artist increased his circle of future clients among a new class of entrepreneurial collectors. Due to his reputation as the foremost animal painter of his time, Landseer soon became one of Queen Victoria's favourite artists. The Queen was captivated by his art and commissioned him to paint the royal family and their beloved pets on several occasions.

Thus, Edwin Landseer's finely detailed portrayals of Scottish culture show us a place of contrasts, where visual images of tragedy and death are entwined with those of a peaceful life in the fascinating Highlands.

Key-Words: Edwin Landseer, Walter Scott, Animal Painting, Highlands, Scotland, Fascination, Hunting.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse Sir Edwin Landseer's (1802-1873) fascination with life in the Highlands and the denizens of the wilds – Highlanders and fauna – which this Victorian animal painter portrayed in many of his works from the 1820s to the 1860s.

This fascination appears as the result of the influence of the romantic imagery of Scottish culture conveyed in Sir Walter Scott's (1771-1832) writing, which remained in the minds of 19th-century British society. Therefore, the intrinsic relationship between the artist's interest in the Highlands and the influence of Scott's literary works, as a mediator of this romantic image of Scotland as a place of spiritual tranquillity, functioned as the core impulses to Landseer's inspiration for his animal paintings.

Edwin Landseer started visiting the Highlands regularly in 1824. During these visits, the artist increased his circle of future clients among a new class of entrepreneurial collectors. Due to his reputation as the foremost animal painter of his time, Landseer soon became one of Queen Victoria's favourite artists. The Queen was captivated by his art and commissioned him to paint the Royal Family and their beloved pets on several occasions.

This paper will also focus on the practical purpose of these journeys as they contributed to the development of methods for the accurate observation of animals *in loco* in order to capture their body language at specific moments of suffering and their struggle for survival, demonstrating that their feelings and expressions are akin to ours.

1. Sir Walter Scott's Romantic Imagery of the Highlands and his Influence on Landseer's Artistic Works

In 1824 Edwin Landseer visited Scotland with his friend Charles Leslie (1794-1859), who introduced him to one of his favourite writers, Sir Walter Scott. The romantic imagery conveyed in his historical novels attracted most members of the upper classes as well as many artists in England and encouraged them to visit the Highlands, searching for the romantic way of life portrayed in Scott's writing.

The novelist showed his deep admiration for Landseer's paintings on several occasions, and soon the artist became a regular visitor at Abbotsford, his home. As a sign of their mutual appreciation, Edwin Landseer painted a portrait of Walter Scott, which is said to have been painted during that very first journey in 1824 before the latter's financial adversities.

The Scottish author felt a profound esteem for his beloved pets, which made him fear to lose them when he started having serious financial worries. During one of his regular visits to the Highlands, Edwin Landseer portrayed Sir Walter Scott's favourite dog, Maida, in *A Scene at Abbotsford* (1827). The painter observed Maida very closely in order to capture its expression in his mind and later depict it with the precision and similitude for which he was acknowledged. The dog was extremely ill at the time Landseer finished the painting, which touched the Scottish novelist's sensitivity even more.

In many of Scott's novels and poems the virtues of the dog are highlighted and the animal is described as a loyal character and very attached to its owner. These qualities are embodied in the figure of the dog who is, most of the time, the only companion of the Highlander or the ghillie in the immense solitary landscapes of Scotland. Landseer also drew an initial scene from *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1818), one of Walter Scott's most famous novels. The illustration, with the same title as the novel, shows Lucy Ashton and her father, Sir William Ashton, after having suffered an attack by a wild bull. Behind them, one sees the brave Master of Ravenswood, who shot the bull to save his lover, Lucy. The

animal's attention was apparently caught by the scarlet mantle described in detail in the book.

The painter's fascination with wild cattle made him immediately choose this scene when the Scottish novelist asked him for an illustration for the engraved frontispiece to the Waverley edition of his works in forty-eight volumes.¹

Even though the three characters are essential to this picture, the dead bull is cleverly depicted to avoid a more shocking image of death. Here, the animal functions both as a tragic element and as the main cause of the romantic encounter that allowed Lucy's father to regard the Master of Ravenswood with gratitude.

The romantic spirit of life in the country, where the malice of actions could easily be forgotten or even pass unnoticed, permeated not only all of Scott's novels and poems but also other authors' works. The "Ballad of Chevy Chase" published by Thomas Percy in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) from a medieval manuscript inspired Edwin Landseer to paint two of his most renowned historical works: *The Hunting of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826) and its sequel, *The Battle of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826).

Both pictures illustrate the battle between two families, one English and one Scottish, as represented by their leaders, the Earl of Northumberland and the Earl Douglas, respectively. According to this ballad, the "Earl of Northumberland [...] intended to hunt across land claimed by Douglas" (Ormond, 2009: 64). The former was ambushed on the border between England and Scotland and in the ensuing battle both leaders and their men were killed. Once again, this painting depicted the romantic imagery of Sir Walter Scott's novels, and even though the historic figures are extremely important in this scene, it is the animals which are the artist's central focus in this composition. The body language, making it look as if the dogs and stags are in motion, reflects Landseer's accurate anatomical

knowledge at such an early age. Although later critics were vaguer as regards *The Hunting of Chevy Chase*, the periodicals in the 19th century commented on it with profound interest and passion. For example, *The Examiner* described it as “an approximation to perfection” (Ormond 68).

As far as *The Battle of Chevy Chase* is concerned, this picture illustrates the last stanzas of the same ballad that describe the moments after the conflict when the almost static widow grieves for her husband and relatives killed during the battle: “Next day did many widows come,/ Their husbands to bewail;/ They washed their wounds in brinish tears,/ But all would not prevail./ Their bodies, bathed in purple blood,/ They bore with them away:/ They kissed them dead a thousand times,/ Ere they were clad in clay” (Ormond 68).

These two scenes of the ballad represent contrasting emotions towards this combat. The first painting embodies the life and vigour of its characters in the middle of a battle while the second symbolises death and the sorrow associated with the end of an armed conflict.

2. Landseer's journeys to Scotland: Hunting and Looking at Interiors

Landseer was frequently invited to visit many of the richest houses in Scotland as he was often commissioned to portray these new entrepreneurs, who soon became regular clients and admirers of his animal paintings.

His almost annual journeys also contributed to him having an inside view not only of the countryside, which he had read so much about in Scott's works, but also and more importantly of the natural habitats he wished to discover and where he was certain to find very different and unique animal species that could not be observed in such a cosmopolitan and modern city as London was during the 19th century.

Sketch in the Highlands (1837) (Picture 1) and *Tethered Rams* (1839) (Picture 2) are two representations of a tradition that belonged to the romantic

imagery of this locale. The former depicts the calm surrounding the shepherd, who watches over his flock of sheep attentively, with the dog reflecting the same concern as his master.



Picture 1 - Edwin Landseer, *Sketch in the Highlands*, oil on millboard, 26.1 x 35.6 cm, 1837, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

As regards the second painting, the two dogs show their dutiful attitude towards the flock as if they are prepared to chase after a sheep that may distance itself from the rest at any moment. One of the dogs is lying down and it is curious to notice that both stay near the tethered rams possibly because they feel these two animals are the most valuable within the flock and so must be constantly protected. In addition, the position of the ears highlights the watchful attitude of the two guards, as they have to watch the flock and also their master.

The couple is left to a secondary level because, in this case, the artist was in fact more interested in studying the behaviour and attitudes of the animals in loco, albeit the importance of the human characters to interact with them and convey the bond between men and animals cannot be ignored.

The scenery mirrors the quietness and immensity of the landscape. The water is very still and one cannot see where the hills end even if one tries to look further. The animal painter's aim was to depict the romantic Highlands that fascinated him so profoundly.



Picture 2 - Edwin Landseer, *Tethered Rams*, oil on panel, 45.7 x 58.4 cm, 1839, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Apart from being a hunter and sporting man, Landseer was fascinated with the simplicity of life in the country. Moreover, during the second half of the 1820s, the Duchess of Bedford ordered several huts to be built in the valley of Glenfeshie, one of the painter's favourite locations to stay in communion with nature, and reserved one of them for his use. Despite its humble conditions and

extremely precarious nature, it was placed very close to other shelters belonging to renowned sportsmen, who were also his personal friends. The artist welcomed the idea of staying closer to nature with profound enthusiasm as it allowed him to observe the animals and the environments where he would then hunt along with the other sportsmen.

One of the most prominent sportsmen was the Earl of Aberdeen, who was depicted by Sir Edwin Landseer in *The Otter Speared, Portrait of the Earl of Aberdeen*, also called *The Otter Hunt* (1844).

Despite the brutality of otter spearing, this practice was still quite common in Scotland in the 19th century. The landscape is most probably Aberdeenshire and it represents the exact moment before the otter's carcass is thrown to the hounds, who are eagerly waiting for it. The hunter poses heroically, lifting up the otter that has been twisted with the spear to guarantee it is impaled. Nowadays, the violence associated with spearing otters still causes controversy and this painting has been chosen on several occasions to illustrate the cruelty implied in such sporting scenes.²

2.1. Royal Hunters

The Royal Family shared a profound curiosity about and enthusiasm for life in the country, and from the 1840s on the Queen and her family started visiting the Highlands to hunt and to feel the tranquillity in the wilderness. For the Victorian mentality, Prince Albert was the archetype of the educated British gentleman and sportsman and even though he was often absent on stag and deer hunts, the great pride felt by the Queen and their children was visible whenever he returned.

In the autumn of 1847, the Royal Family was invited by the Marquess and Marchioness of Abercorn to stay for a few days with them at Ardvreike Lodge on Loch Laggan. Shortly afterwards, the Queen requested Sir Edwin Landseer's

presence and on 16th September 1847 the painter arrived at Ardvreike. On this occasion, the artist was commissioned to paint Queen Victoria and her two eldest children, the Princess Royal and the Prince of Wales, accompanied by one of their many beloved dogs in a picture called *Queen Victoria Sketching at Loch Laggan* (1847).

Notwithstanding Prince Albert's absence, who was deliberately not painted in this scene, the Prince of Wales points at his father in profound joy. Landseer's aim was to illustrate the image of a united and close Victorian family in which the admiration for the father's virtues and the recognition of the mother's affection and devotion to her family function also as a symbol of a cohesive and strong country.

In addition, the ghillie with his dog and the pony bearing a dead stag, probably shot by Prince Albert, convey a message of Queen Victoria's attachment to the Highlanders, in particular, and to Scotland in general, by her allowing her children to have direct contact with poorer ways of life and encouraging this proximity with Scottish denizens.

Another important painting was *Royal Sports on Hill and Loch* (1850-72). This picture took more than twenty years to complete due to the constant inclusion of more animals and more picturesque characters to inhabit the scene in which the surroundings also became tamer.

In this picture, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (holding her hand) are the central figures although the monarch's intention is to capture the spirit of the Highlands. Once again, the action takes place after the hunt, as shown by the dead stags shot by the Prince and laid at the Queen's feet as trophies. It is interesting to highlight the attentive and compassionate expression in the pony's eyes, looking at the anguished faces of the dead game, as if animals and men were endowed with identical emotions.

2.2. Looking at Interiors

Edwin Landseer bore in mind the imagery of simplicity described by Walter Scott on his journeys to Scotland, and his fascination with what he saw steadily grew as he entered the Highlanders' homes and learnt more about the lives they lead, their activities and the need to find resources (some illicit) to survive in these severe conditions.

As we shall analyse below, Sir Edwin depicted this romantic way of life and the places he used to read about in Scott's novels and poems but which in fact corresponded to the environments he visited during his regular journeys through the Highlands.

Despite the coming of the railways and the increase in tourism, Scotland suffered considerable changes in the daily routines and occupations of its inhabitants. Many Highlanders were forced to seek illegal means of earning their livelihood and whisky distilling and poaching soon flourished within Scottish society which regarded these illicit activities with sympathetic indulgence.

In Diana Donald's words, the Victorian painter had certainly witnessed "the depopulation of the Highlands caused by the clearances and enforced emigration, and by the subsequent tendency for deer forests to replace sheep farming, which could have left the old man isolated" (Donald 337). As a result of this awareness, Sir Edwin Landseer sketched several interior scenes in order to illustrate the contrasting ways of life, symbolised in the pictures of these modest crofts, between a modern and industrial England and a romantic yet extremely deprived Scotland.

Although Sir Edwin stayed in many of the richest lodges in Scotland and sketched many of them, the artist was also interested in depicting the conditions of the poorest families he came across during these journeys.

Most of these paintings illustrate some of the traditions associated to the Highlands as in *Highland Music* (1829). The painter shows us a bagpiper along

with his dogs who listen very attentively to him playing. Three of the four dogs are looking at their master. The spectator is offered the opportunity to take a look at this particular moment as if it were caught in time, and thus Landseer invites us to create a certain narrative around this episode.

One of Landseer's most famous interior scenes is *A Highland Breakfast* (1834) (Picture 3), where a mother breastfeeds her child while the dogs gather around a large wooden tub to eat their breakfast as well. We notice that one of the dogs is also feeding her puppies in perfect similitude with her mistress. As in the previous painting, this interior shows us very simple and humble conditions where there is only the necessary furniture and almost no accessories on the walls.



Picture 3 - Edwin Landseer, *A Highland Breakfast*, oil on panel, 50.8 x 66 cm, 1834, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

We must point out that in both paintings there are several dogs depicted to show the deep affection Highlanders felt for their pets. In these interior scenes the dogs are portrayed in harmony with each other and with their masters. Despite the small size of these bothies, it is curious to notice that the Highlanders always found space to have a generous wooden tub to feed their pets.

The dogs depicted in both these interior scenes are full of character and show Landseer's deep sympathy for these creatures who were closely associated to the subject so as to cause an emotional effect. In other words, Sir Edwin's aim was to highlight the bond between man and animals, expressing the true affection of the Highlanders for their pets and the loyalty and gratefulness of the animals towards their masters. At the same time, these poor, harsh interiors show us the difficult conditions in which this local population lived in contrast to the opulent lives of the upper classes who travelled to Scotland almost every autumn to go deer or stag hunting and to escape the rush of their sophisticated lives in England.

3. Edwin Landseer's Fascination with the "Monarchs of Nature"

Landseer studied animal anatomy and performed numerous anatomical dissections to acquire more accurate knowledge of animals, both inside and out. During the 19th century, many painters felt the urge to combine their artistic studies with scientific ones due to the fact that most of them depicted animals in their canvasses and so the muscles, skeleton and texture of fur and feathers had to be extremely precise.

Moreover, the Victorian painter wanted to endow the animals with quasi-human emotions and sensibilities. Landseer's aim was to transmit the idea, accepted in 19th-century scientific circles, that men and animals have very similar

responses in extreme circumstances. In order to accomplish this purpose, he created narrative situations for his animal subjects.

Although Sir Walter Scott played an important role in giving Landseer a true image of the romantic Highlands, his subsequent journeys to Scotland allowed him not only to study the wild animals *in loco* but also to leave this important influence behind and follow his own path to explore and analyse the emotions and expressions of various domestic species in the imminence of death, such as dogs which were often associated with a primitive virtue and integrity.

Attachment (1829) and *The Faithful Hound* (1830) are two examples of the bond created between dogs and their masters which remains even in the latter's death. The first picture reflects the dog's incomprehension of death, albeit he feels the certainty that something is lost forever. The collie rests its paws on the dead body of the chieftain as if it is trying to see an expression of life in the man's face, or simply to understand what has happened to him.

The second painting's title is quite meaningful as the artist directs one's attention to the core figure: the faithful hound. In this case, the expression of the dog howling in deep sorrow at the death of his master and his horse while raising its head to the sky is almost like a cry for help from the solitary animal in the immense landscape of the Highlands.

The theme of death was also depicted in two other famous paintings, *The Shepherd's Grave* (1829) and *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (1837) (Picture 4), with the particular detail that in both cases the masters are absent, contrary to the previous pictures, and here the dogs are the only mourners left.

The former depicts another loyal companion, probably the only one, standing beside his master's grave. The unfinished inscription on the tombstone might be connected to the absence of other relatives or friends apart from the

shepherd's dog. Its body language is once again noteworthy, particularly the lowered tail and the ears in the attentive pose of a vigilant watcher.

The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner (Picture 4) shows us the interior of a Highland bothy where the collie guards the coffin and rests his head on it, perhaps in the same position as he once would have remained in when his master was still alive.



Picture 4 - Edwin Landseer, *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner*, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 61 cm, 1837, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Apart from his studies of the emotions of domestic animals, Landseer's aim with these regular journeys to Scotland was to learn more about the species he could not find in London such as some birds and, more importantly, stags and deer.

As far as birds are concerned, the artist's fascination with ptarmigans is reflected in the various sporting pictures he painted after his expedition in

September 1833 from Doune to Glenfeshie where ptarmigans could be frequently seen.

It is interesting to note that Landseer's fascination with this particular species was due to the variations in the colour of its plumage, which turns white in winter but which is normally brown throughout summer and spring. This is indubitably related to the overriding need for camouflage to hide themselves from all the menaces these birds might encounter during the harsh snowy Scottish winter.

Ptarmigan (1833) and *The Ptarmigan Hill* (1869) are two examples of his interest in this most eye-catching species of game bird. The first painting portrays the majesty of the bird that guards its nest despite its mate's injuries, which were probably caused by the unexpected attack of some animal. The grandeur of the wounded protagonist, accentuated by its head twisted in agony and at the same time the white plumage, contrasts with the harshness of the rocky hilltops.

The scenery in the second picture is very similar to that in the previous example. Again, the alert male ptarmigan stands by its nest guarding it not only against the two Gordon Setters but, above all, against the approaching threatening eagle.

The menace this predator represents to such beautiful and apparently harmless birds is highlighted in another series of studies of the struggle for survival in the Highlands.

The Swannery Invaded by Eagles (1869) illustrates a brutal attack in which the swans did not give in without fighting. Landseer divided the scene into four smaller fights in different perspectives and on different scales, not forgetting a mourner bird that rests its head on the neck of another swan, perhaps the mother, who was incapable of resisting any longer. One must highlight the accuracy of the portrayal of the eagles' beaks in an aggressive position, ready to

attack the undulating necks of the swans, the main defensive part of their bodies.

The romantic fascination with these predators was further conveyed in an 1833 painting entitled *The Eagle's Nest* (Picture 5), where the dark, high, rocky mountains shelter the nest and the baby eagles. The vigilant and threatening mother emits an intimidating cry into the grey Highland skies, addressing other eagles that might try to attack them. As the father moves away in the sky, the vulnerable mother is aware of her duty as the guardian of the nest.



Picture 5 - Edwin Landseer, *The Eagle's Nest*, oil on millboard, 25.4 x 35.6 cm, 1833, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Another subject related to birds is the sport of hunting with hawks or falcons, very common in Scotland in the 19th century. *Hawking* (1832) represents this practice in a violent way, with the heron and the falcon fighting for survival. The artist endowed this scene with such complexity that the spectator needs to

look very carefully in order to be able to distinguish the two birds in the central entwinement on the picture.

On the whole, the falcon seems to be much more aggressive with its talons hooked into the splendid though delicate heron. The hunter, probably a nobleman, watches the violent scene, waiting for the prey to be captured at last by the dominant falcon.

Landseer's fascination with birds comes from the popularity of Ornithology from the late 18th century onwards. Many renowned painters such as Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1881) dedicated themselves to the study of birds and considerably changed the way scientific illustrations were presented during the 18th century. Turner, for instance, demonstrated the need to represent the natural habitats of the animal species he made illustrations of. It became quite common to make collages and include real feathers left by the birds when they died or whenever they flew in these scientific illustrations.

As regards Sir Edwin Landseer's stag and deer studies, one must divide them into three main themes: the struggle for survival, death and the supremacy of these creatures in the Highlands.

The examples of the first are the following: *None but the Brave Deserve the Fair* (1838) and *Stag at Bay* (1846). The title of the 1838 painting was taken from the chorus of "Alexander's Feast" (1697),³ a poem by John Dryden, also entitled "Alexander's Feast; Or, the Power of Music": "The lovely Thais, by this side,/ Sate like a blooming Eastern bride/ In flow'r of youth and beauty's pride./ Happy, happy, happy pair!/ None but the brave,/ None but the brave,/ None but the brave deserves the fair" (Ormond 169). The artist's aim is to show another characteristic of the stag because here they are presented as the hunters and not the prey of sportsmen. These animals fight among themselves in order to survive and assume a position of control in their own territories.

Stag at Bay portrays a victorious animal that has successfully defended its territory from those who wanted to hunt him for their own sporting zest. Despite its dominant figure, the stag looks exhausted owing to the constant and unexpected threats which always surround it, and one sees an eagle approaching in the sky.

The nobility of these wild creatures is also highlighted in the second theme: the death scenes. *A Random Shot* (1848) and *Highland Nurses* (1856) convey the pathos of death as symbolised by the mourners gathered around the wounded or dead animals. Moreover, the former represents the stag as a victim of human enthusiasm for hunting and unjustified violence. The deafening silence the spectator can feel in such a moment of desolation is echoed by the snowy mountaintop while at the same time the fawn effortlessly searches for nourishment.

*Highland Nurses*⁴ also emphasises the woe of the fawns that remain by the adult stag while the ptarmigans have found a safe haven in this place. The large body contrasts with the fragility of the younger animals, foreseeing their lack of hope of survival. It is not very clear whether the adult animal was shot or not despite the obvious look of hopelessness in all the fawns' inconsolable eyes.

The third theme concerning the stag and deer studies - the supremacy of these denizens of the Highlands - was illustrated in two of Landseer's most famous paintings: *The Monarch of the Glen* (1851) and *The Sanctuary* (1842).

The Monarch of the Glen represents the same attitude of the majestic stag, the indubitable monarch as is described in the title, endowed with a mystic power that fascinates the other animal species as well as educated sportsmen and Highlanders in general. Its communion with the untamed wilderness is virtually unshakable and sacred. As regards the scenery, the forests of Glenorchay belonging to the Marquess of Breadalbane, Richard Ormond reminds us that

when the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, the catalogue entry was accompanied by a poem identified as "Legends of Glenorchay": "When first the day-star's clear cool light,/ Chasing night's shadow grey,/ With silver touched each rocky height/ That girded wild Glen-Strae/ Uprose the Monarch of the Glen/ Majestic from his lair,/ Surveyed the scene with piercing ken,/ And snuffed the fragrant air" (Ormond 174).

The spirit of the Highlands and the artist's fascination with these wild animals are perfectly captured in *The Sanctuary*,⁵ whose title embodies the notion of a paradise associated with this locale. The poetic image of the stag, owner of this famous lake (Loch Maree), harmonises with the group of ducks that flies overhead almost drawing a rainbow in the golden skies. In general, this picture represents the serenity Sir Edwin Landseer looked for in every journey to the fascinating Highlands.

Brief Conclusions

His regular visits to Scotland, escaping the rush of his life in London, were extremely profitable for Sir Edwin Landseer as he soon became well-known among the aristocratic families living or spending their holidays in the Highlands. This new entrepreneurial class of sportsmen, fascinated with these romantic landscapes, brought hunting enthusiasm to threaten untamed nature.

This Victorian artist spent many years studying the animals in loco with an immense passion which is conveyed in his many scenes of life in the country, and he portrayed its denizens with accurate exactitude and authenticity in which they could see themselves mirrored.

In his Highlands paintings, Sir Edwin Landseer showed his divided feelings as a hunter and as an artist, but in all of them he captured the sense of infinite freedom and tranquillity associated with this fascinating place.

Notes

¹ This edition was quite important to help Scott pay his debts and, in this case, the illustrations were regarded as essential to publicise the edition and, eventually, sell it. For this purpose, the novelist requested contributions from various renowned painters, who were also some of his closest friends, including Edwin Landseer, David Wilkie (1785-1841), Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), Charles Robert Leslie and Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-1828). As for Landseer's contribution, he illustrated four frontispieces and three vignettes in total. The artists were asked to choose the novels and the scenes they wished to illustrate, leaving the choices to be discussed between themselves and the publisher, Robert Cadell.

² This painting was recently chosen to go on display as the centrepiece of an exhibition at *The Bowes Museum* in Durham, England. The main subject of the exhibition was the celebration of hunting and sport. The curators thought long and hard about whether they should include a note warning visitors about the violence portrayed in this picture, but in the end they decided against doing so.

³ This Ode was written to celebrate St. Cecilia's Day, the patron saint of all musicians and poets.

⁴ Edwin Landseer chose this title for the painting as a dedication to Florence Nightingale.

⁵ This painting was commissioned by Queen Victoria as one of her many surprise gifts for Prince Albert.

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