

A Highland Romance
Jen Hadfield

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A Highland Romance
Victorian Views of Scottishness
Manchester Art Gallery



Arran (Across Kilbrannan Sound) 1894
Henry Moore 1831–95
Oil on canvas

Sealoch, with Nuclear Deterrent
Arran (Across Kilbrannan Sound), Henry Moore, 1894

'very rarely did he allow the intrusion of any 'subject' [...] he would scarcely tolerate a boat'

Moore's obituary in *The Times*, Monday 24th June, 1895

Moore, his trousers actually dripping from wading through that meadow thick with tufted vetch, installs himself on the Coulpport shore.

A creosote tone to the shallows; burden of knotty mountains, la note bleue. Typically he turns his back on the twisting road

and its sublet Victorian piles, the Vomit Comet (the local bus), also mudflats littered with cockle-shells, lugworm casts

(though he notes their impasto texture), spent lighters, the lacy membrane from a sanitary towel, and this

dilemma which has crept up on him, schmoozing into the loch's dead-end in silent running mode, its hull sopping up light.



The Stone-skipper, with Tornado Fly-past
The Seabirds' Domain, Peter Graham, 1902

A loch barely contained by the cliff, fed by the red burn at the eastern shore, draining to the sea in a frayed waterfall. Few fences. Who owns it then? Tirricks & gulls? Make it a kid who wades in. In the corner of his eye, the lake bed's treasure: ducats of schist glittering through strong, brown water. He's chosen a stone that'll flutter like a hawk-moth, even float a moment, before the lochan gulps it down. He tucks it between his finger and thumb, hunkers, neck twisted to an empty sky, then at djinny nothing still throwing its weight around. Cliffs receding. Still unblinking eye of the lochan. Rave

ns callin

g.



Ruined Croft, with Listening Station
On the Tilt, Perthshire, Edwin Henry Landseer, 1826

What goes into the composition?
The lintel and all that vintage bruck
in the corner: rusty-buttocked kettles
brooding on a nest of broken jampots.

Rabbits mine chunks of crockery
from their burrows. But keep it tight.
Crop out the long rustle of airspace,
the green dome of the listening

station, the old relay installations: all
those relics of the Cold War, fences belled
out by wind, cows crowding a generator,
licking salt from the crumbling walls. And

all the dear folk, in the wrong place at the
wrong angle in their outerwear. Louis
firing his nerf gun. You and me rough and
tumbling down the hill at the risk of crack

ing ribs. Mushrooms abundant in the close
-cropped grass. Gannets scudding over the
sea like a string of glittering piercings.



Autumn Leaves 1856
Sir John Everett Millais 1829–96
Oil on canvas

A Gloaming

Autumn Leaves, John Everett Millais, 1856

If I could just paint the long fetch of the last light
the delicate thorns of the telegraph posts

fencing upon Sannick Hill the sky's opalescence
mother of pearl with a slight golden flush

and clouds pale gongs homecoming smell of paets
and smouldering straw and the moon

a gash into the light beyond with a rime of scarlet
along her prow. My favourite neighbour

shelters where the burn falls
into white shell-sand.

And, recognising the knitting, says something to me like
ir dey mammy's gluffs? Yes

what's left of them, frail as spider-web,
and held together these seven years by a series

of scabby darns. Our autumn's brief,
subtle and very dear:

the sky worn thin,
Quink-blue shadows on the hill.

If I could even get the ground right, a nacre
of gleaming gesso on which to begin.



Craigmillar Castle (near Edinburgh) date unknown
Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston 1778–1840
Oil on canvas

The Thin Places

Craigmillar Castle, The Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston, prob early 19thC

this place these folk
what was on your doorstep

all along is only bared gradually,
as it could only be borne,

as the Clift Hills come clear through bright black
spiders' nests of fog

each death

the moult
of another thin layer.

You weren't prepared
for this you hadn't met

your nearest neighbour –
but each time you lost someone, folk

let you know them –
but fog poured over the Clift Hills

even as long low light
rediscovered the Neolithic wall.

But you found a message
on the answering machine –

it's just me –
wishin dee well.

The Wedding Road, with Free Bar

A Highland Wedding, copper plate printed on cotton

the single-track road
from Easthouse
her veil whirled up over the bride's head and suspended by a glittering wind.
Shadows like inkblots
bleed from her silk
high heels on
the rain-bright tarmac
and all our neat
little wedding
toes. The sea bright and tight,
the piper
highly fanciable. Down the road
to the Hall, its little
wind-turbine humming
rain coming on
a hundred tatties basted
with sea-salt olive oil
muckle soup-pans
heating on the stove.



Highland Wedding about 1785–99

Unknown designer and maker, probably English

Printed textile

After the painting in the collection of National Galleries Scotland:

Highland Wedding at Blair Atholl 1780

David Allan 1744–96

On loan from the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

Now –
a wedding can make you feel
far too single
single like a standing
stone
while the coupled world
romps along
two bairns
on the bouncy castle
two great
cardboard boxes full
of the bronzed
Roosters and Records
from the big ovens
at the Hall. Two caravans,
a scatter
of mad ewes.
But there are nips
and beers, bannocks and
tatties until bride and groom
on their friends' shoulders
are rushed together
and parted again as seas
beyond a headland until
the first right snog
of their married lives.
So you and I chum
each other ever slow
er up
the winding road
until we lie down
on its friend
ly tar, grasping our broken
dahlias,
while the constellations
park
themselves.



In Revolution Politics Become Nature
after Ian Hamilton Finlay

A SNEEZING SHERIFF TH
ROAT STACKED WITH C
HINS PELT SPOTTED WIT
H MAYORAL DAPPLES R
EPRESENTATIVE OF TH
E SILENT MAJORITY THE
DARK GREY NATION IN
THE KELPBEDS THE SHA
DOW CABINET OF SEALS



Morning, Loch Goil 1893
William Watson about 1840–1921
Oil on canvas

The Shetland Ponies

Morning, Loch Goil, William Watson

as if some god
having turned out another batch
of underdone horses, thin as leaves,
dappled like leaves, freed them on the hill
to flicker like a thicket of hornbeam
and willow; set down his cutter
and balled the waste dough.

Squashed it with his palm
while he got the kettle on for
a brew just stuck it in the oven
anyway not to be wasteful and
forgot all about it, until he
smelt smoke.

Thence

this bloodline
of blackened emoticons,
stubborn as plugs.

Ach well

—

slip em in some high
hazy place with escarpments
weirdly corbelled, rough
going underfoot.

There they can act up
all they like, roaring
like lions, picturesquely booting
each other on well-coopered
chests with their
little hooves.

Fluff them up
a bit if you must, and twist
the sun to the right to make
them glow like embers,
get the best of
the last light.



Craigmillar Castle (near Edinburgh) date unknown
Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston 1778–1840
Oil on canvas

A Restoration - The Docks and Castle at Scalloway

Craigmillar Castle, The Reverend John Thomson of Duddingston, prob early 19thC

or Julia

You can just make out two figures of indeterminate gender
in the paint's gloom – hovering dabs, could be denim –

a debatable beard, something sagging from a hand
at an awkward angle.

Underbelly of cumulus congestus –
the caried root of Black Patie's castle half-sunk

in ill-defined tussocks and cubist blocks of muddy pigment,
its daub and wattle of blood, egg and human hair, corbels

clinging like wasps' nests.

Gallows Hill behind, waxing clear. More mild spit. Two - no,
three - folk. Yes – denim – the guy

in combat breeks, a earflap cap.

Dawn of grey trackie-bums. She carries the brightening
plastic bag whose rustle you can almost hear

as the wind torques it about her wrist.

More spit. The overpaint yields the gooseberry friend
with her knitted sparkly purple hat.

And a bridge solidifies

like a rainbow. They rest on it, watching the world go by,
hens appearing as time-travellers

in a field, hastening

like paparazzi to the cock; the bag flacks
awkwardly against her breeks.

That glittering wind sets your teeth

on edge, keys the channel like a coarse file.

He's come a fine day but kind of raw. Pour

varnish in a cup and soothe what you can: mollassify

the light, put a drag on the wind and soften

the piled nets with a heaping ballast of shadow.

Fluff them up

a bit if you must, and twist

the sun to the right to make

them glow like embers,

get the best of

the last light.