

Doré in the Highlands

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Gustave Doré's career as a painter has always been overshadowed by his prolific activity as an illustrator. His renown in his own time and after derives largely from the powerful and evocative images drawn to accompany the works of Milton, Dante, Coleridge, La Fontaine, Rabelais, and Shakespeare, as well as the satiric drawings that both chronicled and criticized contemporary society.¹ The "Doré Bible," certainly one of the most influential illustrated versions of the scriptures ever published, has appeared in hundreds of editions in several languages over the past century, achieving a global fame for an artist unrivaled until our own time.² It was indeed Biblical illustrations, *The Dream of Jacob* and *The Kiss of Judas*, that William T. Walters purchased as part of his collection of religious drawings from Doré, whose studio he visited in Paris twice in 1863 (figs. 1, 2).³

For Doré, however, illustration was secondary to painting: "I illustrate just to pay for my paint and brushes," he wrote.⁴ Yet the artist never achieved the recognition he desired as a "serious" painter, neither during his life nor subsequently. It is only recently that Doré's paintings have been studied without many of the biases that determined art criticism in his own day: his Alsatian heritage, the grand scale of his vision in many of his canvases, his estrangement from most contemporary artists and critics, a lack of academic training, and, perhaps most importantly, his immense popular and financial success.⁵

Doré's paintings often repeated or expanded subjects treated by him in graphic form. Many of these works were executed for the Doré Gallery in London,

a private exhibition space on New Bond Street (in the building now housing Sotheby's) where the public was admitted for a shilling fee.⁶ The size of the canvases was often immense: the *Christ Leaving the Praetorium* (private collection, Nassau, currently on loan to the Musée d'Art Moderne, Strasbourg), which one critic called "the most marvellous painting of our times," measures six by nine meters.⁷ But a considerable number of Doré's paintings were of more traditional size and not related to specific literary themes—portraits, genre scenes, allegories of personal invention, and landscapes. Of these, it is perhaps through the landscape paintings, devoid of both contemporary references and the continuing associations which the famous illustrations inevitably evoke, that Doré the painter can best be approached.

Doré's interest in the landscape was life-long, a natural extension of his enthusiasm for travel. Among his earliest commissions was a series of six Alpine views (1849–1851; Strasbourg, Musée d'Art Moderne), and through the 1850s and 60s Doré painted a variety of largely forest and mountain landscapes inspired by places visited in the course of his travels. But, it was not until the last decade of his life that landscape painting assumed a significant role in the artist's oeuvre. This change is clearly attributable to the journey Doré made to the Scottish Highlands in 1873. From 1874 to 1881, Doré produced an extraordinary group of Scottish landscapes, of which one of the most important (and evidently the largest) has recently been acquired by The Walters Art Gallery (fig. 3).⁸

The circumstances of Doré's visit to Scotland are



Fig. 1. Gustave Doré, *The Dream of Jacob*, wash drawing on paper with white highlights, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, no. 37.1319.

known from his early biographers. A London acquaintance of the artist, Colonel Christopher Teesdale (who served as Equerry to the Prince of Wales), invited Doré salmon fishing in Scotland in early 1873. The pair left by steamer for Aberdeen in April of that year and after a stormy crossing journeyed west along the River Dee.

However, angling soon yielded to sketching, as later reported by Teesdale: "The salmon fishing turned out to be a perfect failure; and after two or three attempts he [Doré] quite gave it up and occupied himself with his sketchbook." Doré similarly wrote upon his return to Paris: "I went [to Scotland] with a party of friends under the pretext of salmon fishing; but, unskilled as I am in that sport (which is not easy!), I caught, as you may suppose, very few fish, and soon devoted myself exclusively to the catching of landscapes."¹⁰ Doré's working method was noted by Teesdale:

His book, from one end to the other, was filled in an incredible short space of time, for as soon as we came home and had dined he would spend two or three hours in finishing the memoranda he had made



Fig. 2. Gustave Doré, *The Kiss of Judas (Christ Taken Prisoner in the Garden)*, pen and ink wash, and gouache, on paper, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, no. 37.1387.

during the day, with water-colours, ink or anything that came under his hand. I once saw him take his coffee and pour it over a page to produce a tone that he fancied. He worked with anything. The end of a pen, his finger, a thumb nail, anything seemed to do; and yet from these rapid sketches he subsequently produced some of his best and most finished work with wonderful fidelity.¹¹

The artist himself remarked, "I took a good many notes and jottings in water colour—the first time I have tried that medium. I have employed it solely in obtaining qualities of *intention* or *impression*."¹² A particularly fine example of such a watercolor is in the Louvre (fig. 4). Signed and dated April 1873, the drawing is inscribed "Loch Müke," a reasonable phonetic transcription of Loch Muick, south of Ballater. Doré rapidly records the scene in a succession of brown washes—one wonders whether coffee is among them—placing the proud ruins of a castle in the middleground before the distant lake, swiftly drawn with a few strokes of gouache. Though completely without activity, the scene is turbulent, as the undulat-

ing foreground hills and broad mountainsides forcefully frame the central focus—a compositional preference Doré would elaborate in the *Landscape in Scotland*.

A tranquil view at nearby Braemar (fig. 5), now in the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, is a more highly finished work that also presages the Walters canvas, not only in the similar employment of a prominent introductory foreground at right, but also in the inclusion of a group of deer that face away from the viewer to observe the landscape beyond.

Doré wrote his mother from Scotland, describing scenes not dissimilar to those evoked in these watercolors and in *Landscape in Scotland*:

People are wrong to say that I am visiting Scotland at an unfavourable time of year. True, it is cold; but one discovers so many landscape effects in this season amongst these grand transparent forests variegated with a somber green, certainly as fine as any pines in summer time. One of the most beautiful and curious things that we see at this moment is a herd of stags which has descended from the hills to the valleys. As this is not the stalking season, they are not very timid. I shall have my memory pretty

well filled with an ample number of landscapes, which seem to me more suitable to my London Exhibition than Swiss Alpine scenes.¹³

Upon his return to Paris, Doré wrote, “Henceforth, when I paint landscapes, I believe that five out of every six will be reminiscences of the Highlands; of Aberdeenshire, Braemar, Balmoral, Ballater, etc. I hope to go back there again and again.”¹⁴ But Doré evidently visited only once more, in 1874, although his prediction to go on painting Scottish “reminiscences” proved to be quite accurate. In his studio on the Rue Bayard in Paris, Doré recreated the Highlands as perhaps the Highlands never existed, using his notes and watercolors as starting points in the fashioning of grand, majestic visions. From 1874 to 1881, the artist painted several such landscapes. Two of the earliest and most impressive, both dated 1875, have long been in American museums: *Loch Lomond* (fig. 6) in the St. Louis Art Museum and *The Scottish Highlands* (fig. 7) in The Toledo Museum of Art.¹⁵ Others in public collections include the ponderous *Un lac en Ecosse après l'orage* (fig. 8) at Grenoble, the somewhat more placid *Paysage d'Ecosse* in Caen, and *Glen Massan* in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (fig. 9).¹⁶ These are all



Fig. 3. Gustave Doré, *Landscape in Scotland*, oil on canvas, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, no. 37.2625.



Fig. 4. Gustave Doré, *View at Loch Muick (Paysage montagneux)*, watercolor with white highlights, Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 5. Gustave Doré, *View at Braemar (Paysage montagneux aux cerfs)*, watercolor, pen and ink, chalk, and gouache, Paris, Petit Palais.

large canvases of a heroic scale, but Doré did paint as well smaller, more intimate views of Scottish scenery. Two very similar examples of this type are the *Torrent in the Highlands* in the Indianapolis Museum of Art (fig. 10) and *Highland Trout Stream* in a private Maryland collection (fig. 11).¹⁷

Catalogues of the Doré Gallery—as well as Jerrold, Edwards, and Roosevelt, the artist's early biographers—give titles of other Highland subjects: *Souvenir of Loch Leven* (1878), *Scotch Landscape* (1878), *Loch Ech*, *Souvenir of Loch Corron* (exhibited at the Salon of 1880), *Dhu Loch*, *The Trossachs*, *Falls of the Garry*, *Perthshire* (1880), and *Remembrance of Aberdeenshire*.¹⁸ These remain unlocatable or unidentified today, although by its size and signature it is possible that the Walters

Landscape in Scotland (fig. 3) may prove to be the same picture as the *Remembrance of Aberdeenshire* exhibited at the Doré Gallery in 1882.¹⁹ Writing in 1891, Jerrold assigned the date of 1878 to the evidently undated *Remembrance of Aberdeenshire*, which would certainly accord well with the style and handling of the Baltimore picture.²⁰

Whether to be identified with the “Aberdeenshire” picture or not, *Landscape in Scotland* is certainly one of Doré's most impressive landscape compositions. The image is grandiose but involving. Clouds roll down mountainsides to a loch brilliantly illuminated as a broad white stroke of reflected light. A pine grove at the right center frames and partly obscures the lake and the distant shore. With the



Fig. 6. Gustave Doré, *Loch Lomond*, oil on canvas, St. Louis, St. Louis Art Museum, no. 88:13.



Fig. 7. Gustave Doré, *The Scottish Highlands*, oil on canvas, Toledo, The Toledo Museum of Art, no. 22.108. Gift of Arthur J. Secor.

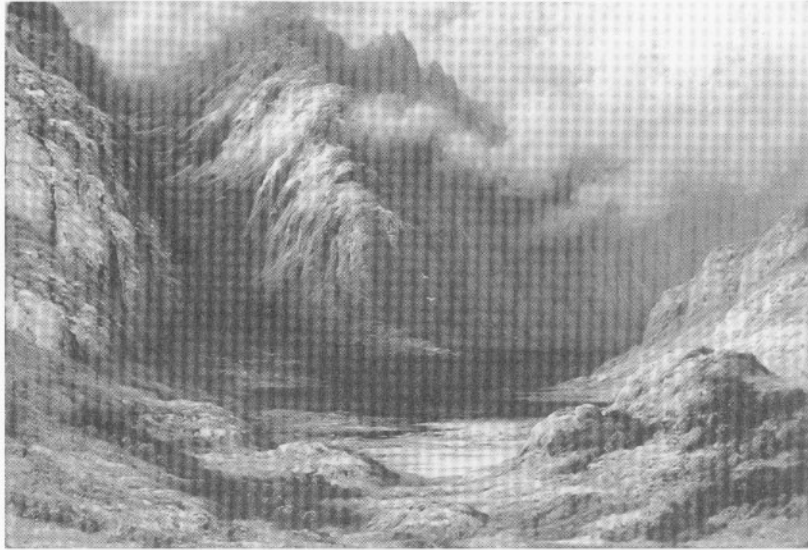


Fig. 8. Gustave Doré, *Un lac en Ecosse après l'orage*, oil on canvas, Grenoble, Musée de Grenoble, no. MG711.

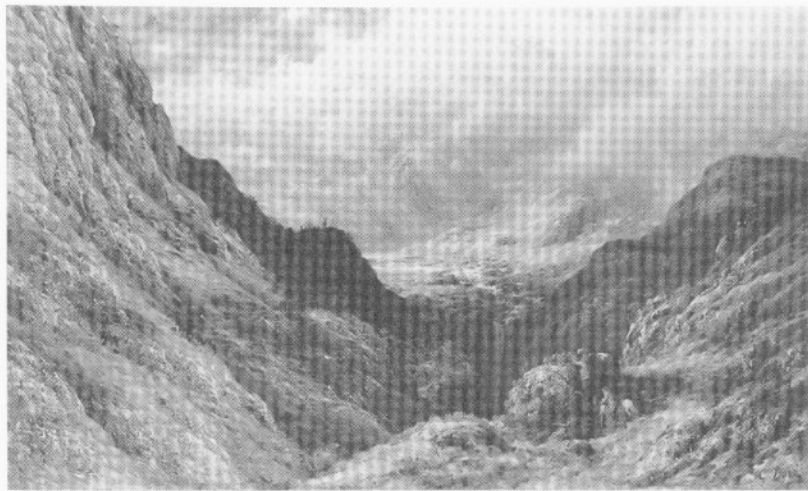


Fig. 9. Gustave Doré, *Glen Massan*, oil on canvas, Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, no. 3352.

gnarled branch in the foreground and the diminutive trees on a hillock in the middleground, the pines help create a dynamic spatial recession that is continued by the mountains dissolving into the clouds above. The strong diagonal elements in the landscape, stabilized by the horizontal expanse of the loch, are set against tumultuous clouds and streaming rays of light. The violent, almost cataclysmic, activity of the sky, which is contrasted with the lambent solidity of the landscape, is without human participation or observation; only two stags in the right foreground witness this view of nature in its cosmic and spiritual overtones.

The absence of man from Doré's painting reflects an aspect of the nineteenth-century discovery of Scotland—discovery in that only in the early 1800s

did the Highlands become easily accessible to English and continental visitors. A corollary myth beloved of both travelers and artist at the time was that many of the newly visitable locales had no previous human association and that even if one were not the first to view a particular place, he was at least a rare interloper in an unspoiled corner of the world. "Again and again one hears, on the lips of travellers in remote parts of the Highlands, echoes of the Ancient Mariner's astonished cry, 'We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea.'"²¹

By the time Doré painted *Landscape in Scotland*, the fiction of the artist's being the first to enter and record the primeval landscape was surely past. But the vitality of the image had clearly not lost its appeal,

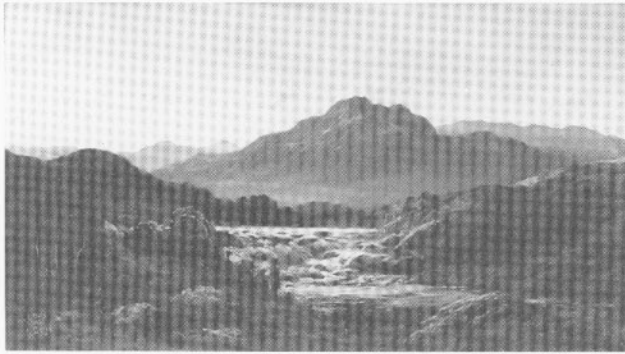


Fig. 10. Gustave Doré, *Torrent in the Highlands*, oil on canvas, Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, no. 72.17. Gift of the Shaw-Burckhardt-Brenner Foundation, Inc.

particularly since the vehicles for the discovery of the Scottish landscape in the first half of the century—the train, coach, and steamboat—had in the latter half become the greatest threats to its appreciation.

By its subject *Landscape in Scotland* may be seen as a direct successor to Romantic views of the early and mid-century, but philosophically and pictorially the work is decidedly more modern. This is a landscape neither tamed by man nor at one with him. The observer remains without, humbled by the spectacle yet drawn into its encompassing world. Doré's vision of a majestic but turbulent nature, expressed through a painting style specific in description and broadly imagistic in effect, questions man's existence more than welcomes his presence. Yet in the brilliantly pure horizontal of the loch and the rays of light that shine through the cyclonic clouds, there seems an indication of divine order and, perhaps, hope.

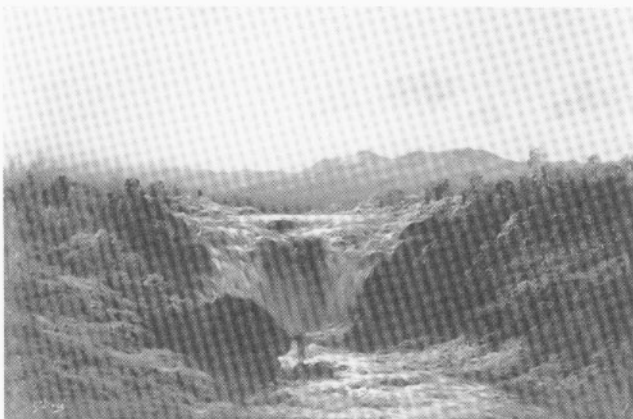


Fig. 11. Gustave Doré, *Highland Trout Stream*, oil on canvas, Bethesda, Maryland, private collection.

NOTES

1. For Doré's graphic work, see *inter alia*, H. Leblanc, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre complet de Gustave Doré* (Paris, 1931) (hereafter, Leblanc, *Catalogue*); and G. Forbert, ed., *Gustave Doré: Das graphische Werk* (Munich, 1975), with bibliography. I am grateful to William R. Johnston and Eric M. Zafran for their suggestions and encouragement in the writing of this article.
2. On Doré's Bible illustrations, first published by Mame in Tours in 1866, see Leblanc, *Catalogue*, 47, 51; and *Gustave Doré: 1832–1883* (Strasbourg, 1983), 252–253 (exhibition catalogue) (hereafter, *Doré*, Strasbourg). Leblanc states that Doré made 312 drawings for the Bible, of which 306 were engraved.
3. Mr. Walters visited the studio on June 23 and December 7, 1863 with his friend and agent, George Lucas, through whom on August 23, 1864 he acquired a drawing by Doré on wood of *Christ Preaching on the Mount*. Then acting for Mr. Walters, Lucas ordered these two drawings, as well as a large *Moses in the Bulrushes*, on January 21, 1865; these were probably the works received by him on February 21, 1865. See L. M. C. Randall, *The Diary of George A. Lucas: an American Agent in Paris*, I, (Princeton, 1979), 157, 165–166, 182–183, 192, 194. *The Dream of Jacob* (ink wash heightened with white on paper, no. 37.1319) measures 247 x 191 mm; *The Kiss of Judas* (pen and ink, wash and gouache, no. 37.1387) measures 242 x 186 mm. Both of these compositions (with *The Kiss of Judas* reversed) appeared engraved in the "Doré Bible," but whether these drawings were actually the artist's preliminary studies or elaborated versions of them is difficult to say. For references to these, see Shepherd Gallery, *Christian Imagery in French Nineteenth Century Art, 1789–1906* (New York, 1980), 337–339 (exhibition catalogue); and the more recent monograph, A. Renonciat, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Gustave Doré* (Paris 1983), 168–169 (hereafter, Renonciat, *Doré*). A *Moses in the Bulrushes* (oil on canvas, 91.5 x 130 cm) was sold at Sotheby's, New York, May 23, 1989, lot 60. This picture had belonged to the Blencoe family, Thurllestaine House, Cheltenham prior to its sale in a 1988 country auction. When the Blencoe family acquired the painting and whether it was in fact the work Mr. Walters ordered is not at present known.
4. J. Richardson, *Gustave Doré, A Biography* (London, 1980), 78.
5. On Doré's critical fortunes, see S. Clapp in *Gustave Doré: 1832–1883*, (London, 1983), 19–20 (exhibition catalogue) (hereafter, *Doré*, London); and W. H. Herendeen, "The Doré Controversy: Doré, Ruskin and Victorian Taste," *Victorian Studies*, 25, 2 (Spring 1982), 305–327. Recent study of Doré's career is reflected in two centenary exhibitions held in 1983—that in London (above) and the more extensive exhibition in Strasbourg, for which see *Doré*, Strasbourg.
6. The Doré Gallery was founded in 1868 by Messrs. Fairless and Beeforth at the German Gallery, 169 New Bond Street; the following year the Gallery moved to 35 New Bond Street, where it resided until 1892. The remaining pictures then began an American tour; "The Doré Collection" was exhibited at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1892 and in other cities during the following four years. When the promoters of the tour went bankrupt and the unsold paintings were placed in storage is not clear. Forgotten for many years, fifty lots of paintings, drawings, prints, and memorabilia of Doré "stored under the name of U.S. Art Import Co." were eventually sold at auction at the Manhattan Storage & Warehouse Company in New York on October 28, 1947 (catalogue kindly supplied by Diana Dewe).
7. Renonciat, *Doré*, 173.
8. The Walters Art Gallery, no. 37.2625, oil on canvas, 131 x 196

cm; signed lower left, "G. Doré." Provenance: Sale (property of "Baronne G."), Paris, Palais Galliera, Commissaire-priseur Laurin, June 23, 1964, lot 75. Huntington Hartford Collection, New York (1965–1983; on loan 1965–1969 to the Gallery of Modern Art, New York where no. 65.1). Huntington Hartford sale, Sotheby's, New York, May 26, 1983, lot 59B. Private collection, New York (1983–1985), from which acquired by The Walters Art Gallery through the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund.

9. Teesdale, in a letter of July 13, 1883 to B. Jerrold, published in B. Jerrold, *Life of Gustave Doré* (London, 1891), 338 (hereafter, Jerrold, *Doré*).

10. Doré, in a letter of 1873 to Amelia Edwards; Jerrold, *Doré*, 313. See as well, A. B. Edwards, "Gustave Doré: Personal Recollections of the Artist and His Works," *The Art Journal* (1883), 339 (hereafter, Edwards, *Doré*).

11. Teesdale, in a letter of July 13, 1883 to B. Jerrold; Jerrold, *Doré*, 338–9.

12. Edwards, *Doré*, 339. Clapp, in *Doré*, London, 49, notes that here Doré must mean pure watercolor as opposed to mixed media, which he had employed for many years (cf. figs. 1, 2).

13. B. Roosevelt, *Life and Reminiscences of Gustave Doré* (New York, 1885), 388.

14. Doré, in a letter to Edwards; Jerrold, *Doré*, 338–339.

15. *Loch Lomond*, 1875, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 190.5 cm, St. Louis Art Museum, no. 88.13. *The Scottish Highlands*, 1875, oil on canvas, 108.6 x 183.2 cm, The Toledo Museum of Art, no. 22.108.

16. *Un lac en Ecosse après l'orage*, undated, oil on canvas, 90 x 130 cm, Grenoble, Musée de Grenoble, MG711; *Paysage d'Ecosse*, 1881, oil on canvas, 82 x 165 cm, Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts; *Glen Massan*, undated, oil on canvas, 112.7 x 184.8 cm, Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum no. 3352.

17. *Torrent in the Highlands*, 1881, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 90.2 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art no. 72.17. *Highland Trout Stream*, oil on canvas, 52.3 x 78.7 cm, private collection, Bethesda, Maryland.

18. There is at present no accurate catalogue raisonné of Doré's works; see L. Dezé, *Gustave Doré: Bibliographie et Catalogue complete de l'oeuvre* (Paris, 1930); and Leblanc, *Catalogue* for an unfortunately brief listing of Doré's paintings. *The Souvenir of Loch Corron*, exhibited in the Salon of 1880 (no. 12) and later in the Whittier Gallery, Boston, was sold at Sotheby's, New York, February 29, 1984, lot 44.

19. F. R. Conder, *The Doré Gallery: Descriptive Catalogue* (London, 1882), no. 17; the catalogue notes that the painting was signed in black and measured 47 x 78 in.

20. Jerrold, *Doré*, 409.

21. J. Holloway and L. Errington, *The Discovery of Scotland; The Appreciation of Scottish Scenery through Two Centuries of Painting* (Edinburgh, 1978), 111.

Photographs: Figs. 1–3, The Walters Art Gallery. Fig. 4, Reunion des Musées nationaux. Fig. 5, Petit Palais, Paris, photo Bulloz. Fig. 6, St. Louis Art Museum. Fig. 7, The Toledo Museum of Art. Fig. 8, Musée de Grenoble. Fig. 9, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum. Fig. 10, Indianapolis Museum of Art.