

*Jeanne d'Arc au milieu de ses bourreaux* belongs to a widespread fashion for medieval historical subjects in French painting, which appeared in the last decades of the 18th century and survived beyond the middle of the 19th. Delacroix, for example, painted or exhibited *Le Roi Jean à la bataille de Poitiers* (King John at the Battle of Poitiers) in 1830, the *Bataille de Nancy, Mort du duc de Bourgogne, Charles le Téméraire, le 5 Janvier 1477* (Battle of Nancy, Death of the Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Fearless, 5 January 1477) in 1831, the *Bataille de Taillebourg gagnée par Saint Louis (21 Juillet 1242)* (Battle of Taillebourg won by Saint Louis, 21 July 1242) in 1837, the first version of the *Prise de Constantinople par les Croisés. 1204* (Capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders, 1204) in 1841 and the second in 1852, and *L'Assassinat de Jean sans Peur au Pont de Montereau* (The Murder of John the Fearless on the Montereau bridge) ca. 1856-60. G. Delaroche's *Les Enfants d'Edouard* (known in English as *The Princes in the Tower*) of 1830 is another well-known work in this same vein.

This interest in the Middle Ages was accompanied by the study of the more recent past as well, and Delacroix painted scenes from the French Revolution, as well as a major work inspired by the Revolution of 1830. In such company, neither *Jeanne d'Arc* . . . nor *L'Assassinat du Capitaine Marion du Frêne* . . . appears an eccentric subject.

*La Terre avant l'homme*, although plunging back in time far beyond any contemporary work I have located (for example Couture's *Romans of the Period of the Decline* of 1847, perhaps the most popularly successful French painting of the 19th century) can still be linked to this fascination with historical or semi-historical reconstructions. Nor must we forget that Meryon's correspondence with Foley in mid-1848 did at least touch on the possibility of scenes illustrating the first inhabitants of Gaul, even though Meryon was obviously not impressed by Foley's suggestion that the Maoris offered a number of useful analogies for handling this subject.

Allegorical subjects are legion in French painting of the 1840s and earlier. Thus Meryon's personification of *La Misère*, and the allegorical scheme for *Providentia, a Deo missa*, can be seen in relation to *La Liberté ou la Mort* (Liberty or Death, 1795) and *L'homme physique, l'homme moral et l'homme intellectuel* (Physical, moral and intellectual man, ca. 1810-15) by Jean-Baptiste Regnault, Prud'hon's *Crime Pursued by Vengeance and Justice* (1808), Delacroix's *Le 28 Juillet* (best known as *Liberty leading the people*, 1830) or Chassériau's fresco, *Peace* (1844-1848). These two projects also prefigure some of Meryon's more arcane etchings.

Three titles take up the theme of whaling, *La Pêche à la baleine*, *Albatros sur un cadavre de baleine* and *Naufrage d'un des deux baleiniers*