

*Français*. . . . The description of the first does not correspond to the work from the Beurdeley collection already described. Meryon's intention in this hypothetical work was to show one boat parallel to the picture-plane, another, further away, arriving at right angles to the first, and a third even more distant, hurrying to join the other two, with the mother ship following them all. The whale was to have part either of its head or tail out of the water, the action was to take place 'a few moments before sunset', and albatrosses were to be flying around. The Beurdeley-Brame drawing shows only two whale-boats, parallel to each other and moving away from the picture-plane towards the left. The whale appears to be lying on the surface. The lighting and sea birds do however correspond to those in the envisaged work. The manuscript contains no description of *Albatros sur un cadavre de baleine*, but it is interesting that the type of bird is again specified. Its fellows reappear in both of the *Pêche à la baleine* pictures, in several of the drawings in the British Library, and in the etching *Le Pont au Change*.<sup>22</sup> Seagulls are specified in the plan for *Un combat de pirogues Mahouries*, which was also to have been an evening scene. *Naufrage d'un des deux baleiniers Français*. . . ., another evening subject, was to show stormy weather and ragged clouds.

This recurrent interest in whales and whaling (further evidence appears in three etchings), is perhaps a nautical equivalent of Delacroix's lion hunts. Both represent exotic worlds far removed from everyday French experience, both show natural strength and human bravery in fierce conflict, both are capable of stirring the viewer's emotions. The difference is that Delacroix succeeded, and Meryon did not.

Meryon's equally constant interest in evening light also deserves special comment. As well as the works already mentioned, the literal version of *Providentia*. . . was to be an evening scene: 'the sun is about to set. All the left of the horizon is ablaze.' The poetic value of evening was doubtless enriched in Meryon's mind and eye by the dramatic possibilities of strong, slanting light, the contrasts of light and shade this can give, and by the potentially ominous implications of imminent nightfall.

*La baie des naufrages* and *Les Algues marines* are both undescribed. Seaweed seems an unlikely subject for a painter whose preference was for dramatic situations, but certain of Meryon's etchings are in fact still-life compositions, and looking back in time one can quote Anne Vallayer-Coster's *Nature morte de coquillages* (Still-life of shells, 1789) as an example of a different genre which he may have considered exploring.

In March 1844, Meryon had written from Akaroa to his father: 'I intend to study history, to pay some attention to politics and to carry