

Another stands at the prow, signalling to the ship as best he can. At the stern, the woman, almost dead and half out of the canoe, trails her hands in the water. Two other men are lying in the canoe. 'Landscape.—the sun is about to set. All the left of the horizon is ablaze—the ship is close to the sun, standing out black against the sky—' Meryon goes on to give details of the sea and birds, and expresses his wish to emphasize the isolation of the canoe in a deserted ocean.

The works of Delacroix reveal a longstanding interest in scenes similar to this, ranging from *La Barque de Dante* (Dante's Barque, 1822) to *Naufrage à la côte* (Shipwreck on the coast, 1862), with *Des Naufragés* (People abandoned in a row-boat, 1847 Salon) close not only to the spirit but also to the composition and situation of Meryon's plan. Of Delacroix, Guy Brett has written that 'The image of an open boat in a green and evil sea was one he often used to suggest man's struggle with the elemental forces of destruction—a pessimistic vision often redeemed by the presence of a heroic individual . . .'<sup>24</sup> Even more marked similarities with Meryon's plan are however offered by Géricault's *Radeau de la Méduse* (Raft of the *Méduse*) exhibited in 1819, and acquired by the Louvre in 1825. In each work, the vessel (canoe or raft) is turned obliquely away from the viewer, upwards and to the right in Géricault's painting, presumably to the left in Meryon's plan (the sun is setting to the left of the picture and the ship is near the sun). Géricault's ship appears, minute, on the horizon. Men on the raft strain upwards to signal to it. On the left, bodies trail in the water, while other survivors lie despondent and exhausted. It is impossible to deduce the time of day and the direction of the sun in Géricault's painting. Although Meryon's projected work contained no political intentions as did Géricault's, the picture of suffering and despair, suddenly stirred by the hope of rescue—each artist has chosen to portray the same moment, from the point of view of the survivors—is fundamentally the same.

It should cause no surprise to realize how fully Meryon shared the preoccupations and the spirit of the progressive art of his day. He was young and adventurous, alert and interested in the world about him. His life was that of a minor romantic hero, and when—seeking his way as an artist, and thinking it lay in painting—he found, or seems to have found, models in the works of his illustrious contemporaries, he was acting in a perfectly logical and comprehensible manner. But the exhibition of *L'Assassinat du Capitaine Marion du Frêne* . . . at the 1848 Salon attracted the attention of the etcher Eugène Bléry, into whose home and studio Meryon was soon welcomed. His abortive career as a conventional, minor romantic painter was over, and the projects so carefully devised were never executed; his career as a highly