

In December 1920, the ninth sale of the A. Beurdeley Collection contained a coloured drawing by Meryon, *La Pêche à la baleine* (Whaling).¹¹ According to Jean Ducros, it was bought by Hector Brame, who had written the preface for the auction catalogue; the price was 1350 francs.¹² Its present location is unknown. It was undated, and perhaps the nearest we can come to situating it within Meryon's work is through a passage in a letter to Folej of 2 December 1848.¹³ 'Whaling, which you recommend to me, is an excellent subject which is not without nobility; but to do it well it would have to be painted.'

This drawing is also a large work, 51cm x 1m 23cm, and could readily inspire a narrative description, shorter and less complex than that Meryon wrote for the *Assassinat* . . . , but in the same spirit. The auction catalogue does in fact quote a lengthy caption: 'Even into the vast solitudes of the Ocean, adventurous men, thirsting for action and profit pursue relentlessly the giants of the wave which they kill and strip, finally to abandon gigantic carcasses to the waves.' The rather inflated language of this text is perhaps an attempt to capture the nobility of the subject. This caption does in fact anticipate, and also generalize, the action, for the work shows two whale-boats, each crewed by six men, moving from the right foreground towards a whale spouting on the horizon at the extreme left. This physical movement from right to left recalls the movement the eye is led to make in *L'Assassinat* . . . , from the essential action in the right, to the left background. The horizon is just below the centre of each work.

Whaling is also possibly the subject of the drawing *Surprise et Capture* (sic), shown in the Burlington Fine Arts Club's exhibition of Meryon's work in 1879. This drawing has not been located.

Whales and whalers were frequently encountered by the *Rhin* during its cruise. On May 19, 1844, the American whaler *Gideon* took a whale in Akaroa Harbour, and the *Rhin's* journal notes the arrivals and departures of many whaling vessels, of many nationalities. Moreover, it is recorded that while at Akaroa Meryon made a scale model in plaster-of-paris, of a whale which was washed up in the bay.¹⁴

Two years after *La Pêche à la baleine* disappeared from view, a major pastel, also coloured, appeared at auction. Ducros says it is unsigned; Paul Jamot writing in 1923 says it is signed C.M.¹⁵ Named variously as *Le Vaisseau fantôme* (The Ghost Ship) by Geffroy, *Marine* (Seascape) by Bénézit, and *Voilier sur une mer houleuse* (Sailing ship on a surging sea) by Ducros,¹⁶ it was purchased by the Louvre for 1,500 francs at the third sale of the Ch. Haviland collection on December 7, 1922. Jean Ducros tentatively dates it to 1857, basing this on a letter by Meryon in the Cabinet des Dessins of the Louvre. This places the work very distant in time from the other major works we are discussing, and—