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For Those in Peril on the Sea : The motivations of nineteenth century European artists to create shipwreck paintings

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For Those in Peril on the Sea:

The Motivations of Nineteenth Century European Artists to Create Shipwreck Paintings

by

Calvin Liepins

A thesis submitted in conformity

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For Those in Peril on the Sea:

The Motivations of Nineteenth Century European Artists to Create Shipwreck Paintings

By: Calvin Liepins

This thesis will be an examination of the motivations of nineteenth century European artists to create paintings portraying shipwrecks. I have identified four main motivations, Nature over Man, Man over Nature, Political Position, and Personal Upheaval, and will analyze various works in order to view how each motivation relates to the other. Each work analyzed falls into one or more of these categories and by studying them side by side I hope to gain a better understanding of these works unique place in art history. Additionally I will be taking a look at how depictions of shipwrecks were politicized by the public after their completion even if the artist likely had no intention of their work being political, as well as examining a work that very nearly falls into all four motivational categories simultaneously. In the end, I aim to show that works in this unique subcategory of art hold just as much meaning and importance as those in other, more studied artistic categories.

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Introduction

“They had said that the wind would not be contrary, or that there would be none. But as we approached the land, the wind arose, and threw up waves eight cubits high. As for me, I seized a piece of wood; but those who were in the vessel perished, without one remaining.”¹ So begins the tale of “The Shipwrecked Sailor.” Dated circa 2200 B.C., towards the end of the Egyptian Old Kingdom, it is believed to be the oldest artistic references to a shipwreck. In the four millennia that followed, depictions of shipwrecks would make their way into art, music, literature, and various genres therein. In the last two hundred years alone, writers like Herman Melville and Jack London crafted exquisite narratives of men versus the sea; Gordon Lightfoot warbled about the loss of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* on Lake Superior; Damien Hirst inspired the imagination with *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* at the 2017 Venice Biennale; and for over a decade the highest grossing movie in the world was an epic depiction of one of the most famous shipwrecks of all time. All the while, painters set about turning wrecks both real and imagined into great canvases, elevating a niche subject into high art.

Shipwreck paintings have the unique position of being a subgenre of painting that straddles multiple rungs on the genre hierarchy ladder. During the nineteenth century, the generally accepted order began with history painting, followed by portraiture, genre painting, landscape, and finally still life. Shipwreck paintings are largely considered seascapes, which is itself a subgenre of landscape art. However, when creating a piece

¹ “Tales of Ancient Egypt: The Shipwrecked Sailor, c. 2200 BCE,” Ancient History Sourcebook, Fordham University, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/2200shipwreck.asp>.

depicting an actual shipwreck, the work then becomes a history painting and shipwrecks move from a low genre to a high genre. This fluidity is likely what attracted so many artists to creating shipwreck paintings during the nineteenth century as its mobility in the genre hierarchy allowed for more artistic freedom. In European art, paintings of shipwrecks began to take on more impactful narratives during this period and became a key tool for artists to communicate these themes to a quickly changing world. The motivations behind the narratives typically fell into four distinct categories: Nature over Man, Man over Nature, Political Position, and Personal Upheaval. Nature over Man and Man over Nature, function as two sides of the same coin. The first embodies the concept that nature has destroyed or is in the process of destroying something that man has created; the latter depicts when man has managed, at least for the moment, to overcome nature's tests and emerge triumphant. Political Position and Man over Nature have a connection as political depictions of shipwrecks frequently involved the safe rescue or gallant behavior of those aboard a sinking vessel, appealing to social conventions of the day. Finally, Personal Upheaval most frequently relates to Nature over Man as both subjects share similar themes of tragedy and loss. Such connections meant that artists would often draw from two or more of these motivations when creating a work of shipwreck painting, although one motivation would almost always overshadow the rest.

Before discussing these motivations, it is important to set clear guidelines for what exactly is and is not considered a shipwreck painting in the context of this discussion. First and foremost, the work must have some depiction of either a ship being wrecked or wreckage in the aftermath of the event. The wreck does not have to be the main focus of the painting, but it must at least play a significant role in the composition.

Therefore, ships being sunk as part of large battle scenes do not count as the wreck being depicted as it is not an active part of the piece but merely a consequence of the action. Nor are paintings where the ship in question is simply labeled as “in distress,” even if it is documented that the vessel later went down, as in the moment of the painting there is no wreck or wreckage.

I have always been fascinated by disaster, both natural and manmade. There is a brutal yet elegant construction to even the most devastating events, all culminating in scenes that will forever be remembered in public consciousness. I consider manmade disaster to be a great deal more interesting than natural disaster, due largely to its inherent avoidability. You cannot alter the path of a hurricane or a tornado, but so often you can circumvent a manmade disaster by avoiding hubris. Among the different manmade catastrophes, shipwrecks have always held a particular interest for me. Unlike a housefire or plane crash, shipwrecks are slow moving and highly dramatic events, prime fodder for artists to turn them into scenes of great triumph and desperate tragedy. By examining works from each of the four motivations side by side, we can get a sense of just what was so appealing about shipwrecks to artists of the period and better understand the importance of this unique artistic subgenre.

Chapter One: Nature over Man

To being talking about the motivations behind shipwreck paintings the best place to start is the theme of nature conquering man. A common theme before, during, and after this period, the idea of nature conquering man gained a new significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Beginning in 1750, the advancements of Industrial Revolution helped give rise to the preeminence of British exploration during this period.² The driving forces for this exploration remained chiefly the same as they had been for hundreds of years, gold, glory, and God, however the biggest two were certainly gold and glory and after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 Britain's control over the seas was unsurpassed. With this superiority came the added danger men and women faced at sea. Britain's colonization of India, first through the East India Company and then by more official means, granted them access to rich trading and great wealth and power for those in control. However, the trade routes that helped solidify Britain's economic and colonial power frequently passed through some of the most dangerous waters in the world and explorers were just as likely to disappear or be killed than return home in glory. It should come as no surprise then that stories and pictures of ships being wrecked were eagerly consumed by the public. Many of these accounts would serve both as thrilling narratives but also, among other things, a warning to those on land that even though Britain may have claimed dominion over the waves and was racing to claim dominion over the rest of the world, the ocean was still an incredibly dangerous and unforgiving environment. To demonstrate how artists represented this

² J. R. Ward, "The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, 1750-1850," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 47, no. 1 (February 1994): 44-46, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2598220>.

theme in painting, this chapter will examine three works that show three different stages of a wreck, the immediate event, the immediate aftermath, and the distant aftermath, and see how each of them represents the message of nature over man in the context of a shipwreck.

Wreck of a Transport Ship: The Immediate Event

J.M.W. Turner's (1775-1851) *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, completed in 1810, gives us the ideal starting point to look at how artists depicted the act of nature triumphing over man by showing a wreck already in progress (Figure 1). The painting is a clear depiction of a ship in her death throes, and all the abject chaos that that entails. Parts of the ship have been flung into the churning water, with the remains of her mast and sail being dashed on barely visible rocks, all the while passengers cling to any bit of wreckage they can find as two small boats futilely attempt rescue, though they themselves are already in grave danger. The crashing waves and hazy yet ominously looming rocks in the background tell the viewer this is not an accident caused by a foolish captain or poor charts, but by a powerful natural onslaught that is inevitable and inescapable. The title of the piece identifies the type of ship as a transport vessel, which would have been used to transport military personnel and materials. Even without the title, several stark red British military uniforms of the period can be seen amongst the survivors, identifying the type of ship going down to the viewer. While the painting of a military ship being wrecked is not surprising, as during this period Britain was almost

constantly at war,³ it is surprising to see the ship being depicted as being wrecked by the hand of God and not in battle. It is a blunt reminder that naval power is finite, natural power is not. Although the painting was first exhibited under the name *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, it was shortly after renamed *Wreck of the Minotaur*, likely while the piece was in the collection of Charles Pelham, the first Earl of Yarborough. The reason for the name change is that the year the painting was completed, the Royal Naval vessel HMS Minotaur was wrecked off the island of Texel in the Netherlands, an event that caused great scandal in Great Britain at the time. However, sketches done by Turner, now housed at the Tate (Figure 2), indicate he had been planning this composition since at least 1805 which means that the genesis of this painting has nothing to do with the wreck.⁴ In chapter 3, I will explore the action of politicizing paintings by using this work and *Scene of a Shipwreck* by Théodore Géricault as both paintings were politicized by the public after they were created.

One of the best-known stories about Turner is that he only painted what he saw. While it certainly is a romantic notion, it is difficult to imagine Turner witnessing firsthand such a calamitous event as this. Rather a visual analysis of the painting suggests that Turner was drawing inspiration from Dutch artists from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period considered to be one of the greatest for maritime art. In

³ In 1810 it would have been the seemingly never-ending Napoleonic Wars which followed the French Wars of Independence which followed the American Revolution which followed the Seven Years War and so on.

⁴ David Blayney Brown, “Study for ‘The Wreck of a Transport Ship’ c.1805–10 by Joseph Mallord William Turner”, catalogue entry, December 2005, in David Blayney Brown (ed.), *J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours*, Tate Research Publication, December 2012, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-study-for-the-wreck-of-a-transport-ship-r1139161>.

many ways, maritime painters of the nineteenth century owe a great deal to Dutch artists from this period, particularly British maritime painters. During a period which lasted roughly from the founding of the Dutch Republic through the end of the seventeenth century, art and science flourished in the Netherlands much as it did in Britain during the Industrial Revolution. The Dutch artists of the period, especially marine artists, heavily influenced later British artists like Turner as the superior trade and maritime power of the Dutch Republic helped support the Dutch art market. Once that maritime superiority shifted to Britain however, the arts and artistic traditions did follow. When Turner painted *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, he was still early in his career and during this early period, he embraced the Dutch traditions, especially regarding how to portray the relationship between man, vessel, and water. In fact, one of Turner's early large scale works, *Dutch Boats in a Gale* from 1801 was commissioned by the third Duke of Bridgewater to be a companion piece to his recently purchased painting *A Rising Gale* by the Dutch master Willem Van de Velde. Having grown up steps from the great River Thames in central London, Turner had a lifelong fascination with ships and their great power, as well as the destructive force of the sea. Upon visiting the Louvre in 1802, although he found himself supremely underwhelmed by Rembrandt (calling his work "miserably drawn and poor in expression"), he was very impressed with storm pictures by the Dutch artist Jacob van Ruisdael.⁵ It was the way Ruisdael painted the water that attracted Turner, his treatment of its darkness and its power, and this carried through to his own paintings.

⁵ G. Reynolds, "Turner and Dutch Marine Painting," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* Vol. 21 (1970): 383-385, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/43875650>.

What sets *Wreck of a Transport Ship* apart from other paintings by Turner from around this period, especially his more famous work *The Shipwreck* from 1805, is that with this painting Turner takes you directly into the action of the ship going down. While his other paintings depicting shipwrecks are brilliant and violent as one would expect from Turner, they are all almost totally after the fact of the wreck, or the action is taken off the wreck and put on to the survivors struggling to stay afloat in the rough water. *Wreck of a Transport Ship* excels at its job of depicting nature triumphing over man because it does not hesitate to show the actual event. In fact, this work and *The Shipwreck* signify a noticeable shift in Turners art from simply implying the potential for disaster to actually depicting disaster.⁶ What is more, Turner specifically names the type of ship being sunk. Not a merchant ship, not a pleasure craft, not a fishing boat, but a ship that is carrying Britain's finest military personnel, ostensibly to some foreign conflict. It would have given all those who first saw it a deep sense of foreboding. Here lies the Royal Navy, the most powerful in the world, made helpless at the hands of the very sea they have claimed to conquer.

The Ninth Wave: The Immediate Aftermath

It would be difficult to discuss shipwreck art of the nineteenth century without talking about one of the period's greatest maritime painters, Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900). Born in Crimea, modern day Ukraine, on the Black Sea, Aivazovsky achieved

⁶ Leo Costello, "'Tearing and Desolating': The Dissolution and Decomposition in *Wreck of a Transport Ship*," in *Turner and the Sea*, ed. Christine Riding and Richard Johns (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2013), 196 – 200.

great success and renown throughout Europe and America.⁷ Arguably his most famous work, *The Ninth Wave* (1850) is an ideal example of the artist using a shipwreck to display his take on nature over man (Figure 3). Unlike Turner's *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, the shipwreck in *The Ninth Wave* has already happened and, since the painting shows the sun beginning to break up the storm clouds, it has been over for some time, leaving only a slight bit of wreckage floating on the churning green water. A second look reveals the truly unsettling thing about the scene Aivazovsky has created, the shipwreck has survivors. Clinging to this broken bit of mast, bobbing helplessly in the still rough waves, these four figures are all but certainly doomed to drown. Their only hope of rescue is the viewer, and we are powerless to help.⁸ While the fading storm clouds and tint of the sea give a hint as to what might have happened, the event of the wreck itself is unimportant (which is something that I admit feels somewhat counterintuitive when looking at this as a shipwreck painting), but rather it is this final act of nature slowly swallowing these men that makes it both a fascinating and terrifying depiction of a shipwreck. It is this unique blend of beauty and fear that makes the work ideal for discussing the idea of nature over man. Aivazovsky painted roughly 6000 paintings over the course of his career, many of them maritime or shipwreck paintings.⁹ Yet none of them come as close to being as brilliant or as troubling as this work.

⁷ Ararat Aghasyan, "Enchanted by the Sea: Ivan (Hovhannes) Aivazovsky," *Journal of Armenian Studies*, no. 2 (2017): 121-139, ISSN 1829-4073.

⁸ As a point of reference, the painting itself is quite literally massive, measuring 87 by 131 inches (or 7.25 feet by nearly 11 feet). This serves a dual purpose of making the scene feel even more vast while at the same time making the figures feel even smaller than they already are.

⁹ Aghasyan, "Enchanted by the Sea," 121-139.

The title of the work refers to an ancient bit of sailing folklore that states that the ninth wave is always the biggest and most deadly before the cycle starts all over again. This folklore serves to give the name of the work multiple meanings. One, the titular ninth wave is the wave that took down whatever ship the wreckage comes from and this is the result, men close to death in open water with no hope in sight. Two, the ninth wave is the one we see rearing up on the survivors, ready to finally take them out completely. Three, as the principle painter of the Russian Navy, Aivazovsky traveled with naval fleets and was witness to many military exercises and so the painting then represents Aivazovsky's take on the never-ending cycle of war and the inevitable rising and falling of empires. Four, the work is a Christian allegory for salvation with the mast taking the place of a cross, the sun taking the place of the holy spirit, and the men representing the penitent using their faith as a life raft to bring them to salvation from earthly sin. So then which of these meanings is the one that best ascribes what is happening in the painting? If we say that the painting only represented option one, the aftermath of a ship sunk by a ninth wave, then we are missing most of the evidence of the wreck. What we currently have is a single mast which, if the first option is to be believed, is not enough to justify the title. The second option, that the titular wave is one in the painting, on the surface makes sense, as the scene is awash with various threatening looking waves. But this reason lacks an excuse for the men on the mast to be there. They did not just simply drop into the ocean from the sky, some kind of event had to have put them there that is not acknowledged by just saying the title refers to their immediate surroundings. The third option, an analogy to the military, makes sense if you know who Aivazovsky is and what his subjects tended to be, details his initial audience surely would have known. But then

why not paint something more physically powerful? A battle, a parade, a defeat, all of these were known subjects of Aivazovsky and so he could have painted any one of them to better get his point across. The final option, religious symbolism, runs into the same problems. If Aivazovsky wanted to ascribe only this meaning to the work, then the subject matter and setting of the piece just do not provide enough structure to make his view clear. Rather it is likely the answer can be found in all four scenarios, combining them to make a scene that is both stirring and spiritual in the face of nature triumphing over man at sea.

Man Proposes God Disposes: The Distant Aftermath

While both *Wreck of a Transport Ship* and *The Ninth Wave* were painted by artists who have a long history of maritime painting, the final piece discussed in this chapter was created by an artist who is instead best known for his paintings of animals. *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, was painted by the English artist Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) in 1864 (Figure 4). At first, this work may not seem like it belongs in a discussion of shipwreck art. Much like *The Ninth Wave*, there is no actual shipwreck occurring, in fact when put against the outline I am using to distinguish what is and is not considered a shipwreck painting, it seems to come up short. Typically a scene of the Arctic that includes some pieces of wreckage would not count as a shipwreck painting much as a depiction of naval warfare does not count because the focus of the work is not the wreck or the immediate aftermath. Scenes of the arctic usually focus more on the expansive and brutal nature of the land, with the wreckage used as a means to drive the point along than as any relevant story. The major difference with this piece is that it directly references a specific wreck. In this case, Landseer is painting his take on wreckage from the HMS

Erebus, one of two ships that made up Captain Sir John Franklins doomed exhibition to locate the Northwest Passage in 1845.

The Northwest Passage was the subject of many explorations during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Since the discovery of the New World, European powers had searched for a more expeditious way to reach India and Asia. At the time of Franklins expedition, the only ways to reach India were a long, arduous land journey through every climate and terrain imaginable, or voyaging around either Cape Horn through the Strait of Magellan at the southern tip of modern Chile, or the Cape of Good Hope at the base of modern South Africa, routes that are considered some of the most dangerous in the world even today. Therefore, an accessible oceanic passage through the waters north of Canada was considered a navigational goldmine, as it had the potential to be far quicker and safer than any of the previous options. This passage is what Franklin sought. Not only would a successful expedition surely bring him great fortune but would also renew his reputation and bring him glory as the man who conquered the Arctic.¹⁰ And so on May 19, 1845, Franklin and 128 fellow sailors set off for the Arctic aboard two ships, the HMS Erebus and the HMS Terror. None of them would ever see England again. It would not be until 1854 that the first remnants of the expedition would be found by explorer John Rae.¹¹ Rae's discoveries painted a horrifying picture of starvation, hypothermia, and cannibalism. A letter now known as the "Victory Point Note" was discovered written by at least two crewmen and provided some background. The ships had become icebound,

¹⁰ It would not be until 60 years later that a Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, would traverse the Northwest Passage completely by sea and would later go on to be the first person to reach the South Pole.

¹¹ Owen Beattie and John Geiger, *Frozen in Time: The Fate of the Franklin Expedition* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2017), 136.

trapping them fast and all but dooming the expedition as food stores depleted. Franklin himself was reported to have died on June 11, 1847 and the remaining survivors set off for the mainland two weeks later under the command of the captain of the Erebus, James Fitzjames.¹²

It would, however, be the highly successful book *The Voyage of the Fox*, published in 1859, which detailed further attempts to locate Franklins body by Francis McClintock that influenced Landseer the most and helps us to best understand *Man Proposes*. One of the most significant finds, other than Franklins body, was the discovery of a whaling boat that McClintock identified as having come from the Erebus with the remains of two men inside. It would be this scene that Landseer depicted. Not the actual wrecks of the Erebus or the Terror, but this scattering of wreckage that had been set upon by wild animals on the desolate King William Island. Interestingly, the subject matter can be considered unusual for an artist like Landseer. While towards the end of his life some of his paintings started to take on a darker theme (Landseer died October 1, 1873 and a contemporary biography states that in the last years of his life he suffered from “attacks of depression and distress, and it was sometimes feared that his reason would give way.”¹³), for the majority of his career he mostly painted animal scenes. However even then it was mostly domestic animals such as horses, dogs, or cats. When he did paint wildlife, he mostly painted them in their natural habitats, free from man. Here, the polar bears are right on top of the wreckage, with Landseer going so far as to have one feasting on the ribs of the dead sailor. This blending of the two, animal and tragedy, is Landseer’s

¹² “A Very Special Piece of Paper,” Canadian Museum of History Blog, last modified August 16, 2018, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/a-very-special-piece-of-paper/>.

¹³ M.F. Sweetser, *Landseer* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Company, 1879) 131.

way of commenting both on the brutal and unmatched power of nature over man and the danger of what happens when man invades territory in which they do not belong.¹⁴ The historical background of the piece coupled with the unique composition, for Landseer, makes it the ideal work to showcase the triumph of nature over man in the context of a shipwreck long after the wreck has taken place.

Compare this to another work that this piece was likely influenced by, *The Icebergs* by Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) (Figure 5). Like *Man Proposes*, this work was also inspired by an account of an expedition to find Franklin and his party. Both had similar sources of inspiration, both were heavily researched, and both works caused stirs when exhibited in England (although Church because the work was seen as a tribute to Franklin and Landseer because Lady Franklin refused to see the painting). However, Landseer's was the result of reading extensively and even borrowing the skull of a polar bear from noted Scottish paleontologist Sir Hugh Falconer.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Church actually visited the arctic in 1859 and was a friend of several explorers, and only added the wreckage to the piece before showing it in London.¹⁶ The different methods of research for the two works as well as the two differing treatments of the wreckage shows a clear difference between an arctic scene with a shipwreck and a scene of a shipwreck in the arctic. While the symbolism is the same, the might of the arctic versus the futility of

¹⁴ In Christian mythology, the bear is a symbol of death and cruelty.

¹⁵ Andrew Moore, "Sir Edwin Landseer's 'Man Proposes, God Disposes': And the fate of Franklin," *The British Art Journal* 9, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 35, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41614838>.

¹⁶ "The Icebergs," Dallas Museum of Art, accessed July 30, 2020, <https://collections.dma.org/artwork/4171219>.

man, Church pushes the suggested wreck to the side of the picture, almost disguising it as rock, while Landseer keeps the attention of the viewer squarely on the wreckage.

Chapter Two: Man over Nature

The idea that a painting of a shipwreck presents an act of man triumphing over nature seems counterintuitive. As described in the previous chapter, painting shipwrecks during the nineteenth century was most frequently an act associated with natural forces crushing those who thought themselves impervious and served as a warning to those who would try next. Because of this, a painting that depicts man triumphing over nature must exist only within a certain set of variables. First and foremost, the work must depict some kind of survival, whether it be literal survivors of the wreck finding safety or the use of the shipwreck in some way to aid in peoples' survival. The second variable is one that is harder to define, an element of hope. More specifically, a sense that there is a tangible chance of immediate survival, no matter how slim or ambiguous, in the moment that is being depicted. The absence of this second element is why the previously discussed works of *Wreck of a Transport Ship* and *The Ninth Wave* do not qualify, even though there are survivors in both paintings. The people in both scenes, in the moment that is being painted, have no hope of rescue. Land, calm waters, or another ship are nowhere to be found in either work. Even if we take *Wreck of a Transport Ship* to be the depiction of the wreck of the HMS Minotaur, a wreck that we know conclusively had survivors, the scene still does not fit the criteria as in the moment being depicted in the painting, all hope of the ships survival is lost. The need for hope in these pictures means that paintings depicting man overcoming nature are more driven by emotion than paintings of nature overcoming man, which instead are driven by dramatic intent or cautionary nature. It is my belief that this sense of hope is what turns a painting from depicting nature conquering man to one of man conquering nature, and indeed many works that fall under

this classification depict a moment of *peripetia*, better known as a reversal of fortune. The third and final variable is the human aspect. Unlike the other three categories, nature overcoming man, political position, and personal upheaval, depictions of man overcoming nature place a greater emphasis on the human figure and how they interact with the world around them. In the other motivations, man is not a necessary requirement so much as the wreck or wreckage itself. However, to convey a believable sense that man has triumphed, man must be physically present in the work. Because of the importance on an emotional connection for this motivation, the most beneficial way to analyze the works in this chapter will be an in-depth visual analysis rather than the more historical analysis of the last chapter. Much like the previous chapter though, the three works I will be analyzing in this section each take place at a different point in the process of man overcoming nature, the first glimmer of hope, reaching safety, and then the use of the wreck to forward survival.

Scene of a Shipwreck: The First Glimmer of Hope

Perhaps one of the most recognizable paintings of the era, Théodore Géricault's (1791-1824) *Scene of a Shipwreck* from 1819 is widely considered to be one of the finest examples of Romanticism (Figure 6). Renamed *Raft of the Medusa* after it was first exhibited, the work earned both great praise and severe condemnation upon its exhibition and became inextricably linked with the scandal surrounding the wreck of the French naval frigate *Medusa* and its subsequent political repercussions. However, much like with *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, I will be taking a closer look at the politics of the work in the following chapter. Here, the focus will be on why I think this work best represents an image depicting man overcoming nature.

While I plan to delve deeper into the political circumstances surrounding the work later on, it must be noted that to divorce completely the painting from the politics of this piece is almost impossible. There is no doubt that Géricault was well and truly aware of what he was painting and that the scene was meant to depict the survivors of the French frigate *Medusa* (*Méduse*) after she was wrecked off the coast of modern-day Mauretania in 1816.¹⁷ Like many of his fellow countrymen, the wreck fascinated Géricault who then spent considerable effort to research the exact details of the events. He read a firsthand account of the disaster written by two prominent survivors and then interviewed the authors for more detail. He sought out the ship's carpenter, who had survived the wreck and the famous aftermath, to build him a scale model of the raft. He even had models pose as splayed bodies and painted recognizable portraits of survivors into the final work.¹⁸ Even without political implications or leanings, Géricault first and foremost set out to paint a scene of the aftermath of the wreck of the *Medusa*. However, we know from his sketches and studies that Géricault struggled to settle on exactly what scene from the disaster and the aftermath on the raft to depict (Figures 7 and 8), with the survivor's time on the raft spanning nearly two weeks and including cannibalism, bouts of mutiny, and the initial survival of only roughly one tenth of the rafts original 146 occupants. He experimented with different moments from the disaster and different

¹⁷ Jean Baptiste Henri Savigny and Alexandre Corréard, *Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal in 1816: Undertaken by Order of the French Government, Comprising an Account of the Shipwreck of the Medusa, the Sufferings of the Crew, and the Various Occurrences on Board the Raft, in the Desert of Zaara, at St. Louis, and at the Camp of Daccard : to which are Subjoined Observations Respecting the Agriculture of the Western Coast of Africa, from Cape Blanco to the Mouth of the Gambia* (London: Schulze and Dean, 1818), 33.

¹⁸ Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), 126.

constructions of bodies, before landing on the final scene. During their ordeal, the survivors on the raft witnessed their rescue ship, the Argus, two times. Both times were on their thirteenth day on the raft, first when they witnessed the ship on the horizon for half an hour before disappearing (during this half hour the survivors were described as being “suspended between hope and fear” before the ship disappeared again¹⁹), and then again two hours later when the Argus appeared seemingly out of nowhere close at hand to the raft.²⁰

It is this first sighting that Géricault paints, the survivor’s initial moment of *peripeteia*. At first look this feels like it would be the weaker scene for the argument of this being a work that depicts man overcoming nature. But when factoring in the feeling of hope, the narrative of the two events changes. An important factor in romantic painting was to emphasize inspiration in the work, in this case an inspiration of hope. The depiction of weary survivors waving and shouting jubilantly at a nearly invisible sign of salvation, all the while lit by a dawning sun, inspires more hope than a depiction of the same survivors being picked up by the ship, a scene in which hope is not required as salvation is a foregone conclusion. Additionally, this element of hope is strengthened by the knowledge that there were survivors from the raft. This element is applicable here and not in the earlier discussed work J.M.W. Turner’s *Wreck of a Transport Ship* for two reasons. The first is that Turner did not set out to portray accurately a specific wreck. Although the piece for a time was associated with the wrecking of the HMS Minotaur, the work does not directly depict the disaster, nor was it intended to, with the association

¹⁹ Savigny and Corréard, *Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal in 1816*, 136-137.

²⁰ In his account Savigny describes the ship as having been “half a league distant” from the raft when sighted again, approximately 1.7 miles.

being made only after the painting's completion. In contrast, Géricault very deliberately attempted to portray the aftermath of the wreck of the Medusa as accurately as he could, backing up his choices with exhaustive research and attention to detail. The second is that, in the moment of *Wreck of a Transport Ship* the people in danger are not the focus, the chaos of the wreck itself is. In the moment of *Scene of a Shipwreck*, Géricault is depicting a scene in which the first tangible signs of rescue become apparent to both the survivors on the raft and the viewers of the painting. The hope in this piece then rests on the tiny dot of the Argus in the far distance. If Géricault had not included the small depiction of the Argus and instead had the people waving at a perceived yet unseen ship just over the horizon, the element of hope so important in this piece would have been either lost or greatly diminished and the work likely would have read emotionally closer to Aivazovsky's *The Ninth Wave*, a work where hope is struggling to break through but ultimately lost amidst the dark waves, endless ocean, and clouds that can just as easily be read as dusk rather than daybreak.

The Shipwreck: Reaching a Modicum of Safety

A notable consequence of the parameters necessary for paintings of shipwrecks depicting man overcoming nature to exist is that the works very rarely depict the act of the wreck itself. On the one hand, this makes sense as the necessity of hope in these works is difficult to convey in an image of ongoing tragedy, but on the other it raises the question how much can we actually call these works shipwreck paintings if the wreck has already happened? As a base we know these works are maritime works, as they all draw inspiration from the sea in one way or another, yet they are not depicting a scene of the ship proudly sailing on or a battle being fought. We could almost call them seascapes if

not for the inclusion of some form of flotsam indicating that a ship was there at some point, and this flotsam and/or the interaction of people with it is the focal point of the work. This paradox is exemplified in Francisco de Goya's (1746-1828) work, *The Shipwreck*, painted in 1794 (Figure 9). The work looks to be about as far away from the typical scene of a shipwreck painting as you could imagine. There is no wreck and very little obvious wreckage to indicate what exactly has occurred. Instead, Goya has presented us with a group of bedraggled, waterlogged individuals clamoring over one another to pull themselves onto a desolate rocky outcropping. In fact, the best indication that the piece is meant to be a depiction of a shipwreck is the title that Goya gave the piece, without it any other factors could be explained away as something else.²¹

The best place to start then is to examine what Goya does give us and how (or even if) that supports his chosen title, the people, the wreckage, and the location. The initial point of focus for the viewer is the woman in the yellow skirt with arms lifted to the sky in either praise or curse, all while a group of a dozen or so fellow survivors clamor onto the rock behind her. If this were a depiction of the aftermath of a shipwreck, then we can draw the conclusion that any survivors would be at the point of collapse, and not so much ecstatic at salvation but rather exhaustedly jubilant, all of which checks out among the survivors here. Perhaps most curious about the figures is that, except for the embracing couple on the left, everyone in the painting is completely alone in their desperation to reach the safety of the shore. In this, Goya did not create a tableau like

²¹ Indeed, for a time the work was erroneously titled *The Flood*. (Peter K. Klein, "Insanity and the Sublime: Aesthetics and Theories of Mental Illness in Goya's Yard with Lunatics and Related Works," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 61 (1998): 224, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/751250>).

Scene of a Shipwreck in which there is a feeling of comradery (for in the moment of the painting they all must band together to try and signal salvation). This could be because unlike *Scene of a Shipwreck*, there is no ambiguity about the group's survival in this moment. They are no longer in the open water, no longer on a life raft or a rescue boat, they have reached solid ground. Although the desire to band together may resurface momentarily, in the moment being depicted, the moment of reaching solid ground, the feeling becomes one of making sure you yourself reach safety, no matter what. So, what exactly is it that these roughly baker's dozen of survivors are climbing up on to? What to us looks like a rough and inhospitable landscape is, to the survivors, a welcome salvation from death. Something that I find curious is the state of the survivors as they climb onto the rocks. They are ragged and exhausted with some having had their clothes ripped or been completely exposed, all of which is to suggest that they have been through two ordeals, first the actual wreck and second spending a fair amount of time being buffeted by rough waters. All of this is well and good, until you notice the dark protrusion of the hull of the ship that Goya has almost hidden amongst the rocks. While certainly debatable, the placement of the wreckage suggests that the sinking has just happened which in turn means that either the survivors would have only been in the water a short time or that the wreck happening so close to shore would not have provided the same opportunity for the survivors to reach a state of utter despair before turning into the extreme weary elation seen here. Historian Peter Klein convincingly argues that this work was inspired by works by Goya's contemporary Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) who frequently created greatly theatrical depictions of ships being wrecked on storm battered shores, particularly pointing out the works *Sea-Storm. The Dangers of the Ocean* and

Death of Virginie from 1772 and 1789.²² However the survivors in these works are much more physically composed than the ripped clothes and desperate grasps of *The Shipwreck*, much more expected of the survivors of a wreck on the shore. While parallels can be drawn between how Vernet creates his scenes and Goya's own sense of dramatics, I find the depiction of the state of the survivors more likely comes from Goya's own mental state. *The Shipwreck* is one of a set of cabinet paintings made by Goya after the loss of his hearing, the beginning of one of the lowest periods in his life. The works in this series depicted dark scenes of lunatics being beaten in the yard of an asylum, a crush of people fleeing a nighttime conflagration, and even simple outright murder. Therefore the depicting of his survivors as having barely survived an unimaginable ordeal, even if the set up does not quite support it, reflects more about the state the artist was in than the story he was trying to tell. And yet still, this painting is far more hopeful than the others in the series because, convoluted story or not, Goya still made these people in the moment of the work survivors, allowing the work to still be seen as a depiction of man overcoming nature.

Wreckers -- Coast of Northumberland, with a Steamboat Assisting a Ship Offshore: Life Goes On

At the beginning of this chapter I identified two kinds of scenarios in which survival can be depicted in a scene of man overcoming nature via shipwreck, survivors reaching a modicum of safety and a depiction of a "life goes on" scenario. While both *Scene of a Shipwreck* and *The Shipwreck* focus on reaching safety, the final piece in this

²² Klein, "Insanity and the Sublime," 198-252.

section, Turner's *Wreckers -- Coast of Northumberland, with a Steamboat Assisting a Ship Offshore* (1833-1834), is an example of the use of the wreck to further survival (Figure 10). As previously stated, for this work to be seen as a depiction of man overcoming nature man must be present. However, unlike the first scenario of survivors reaching a modicum of safety, the life goes on scenario does not require the depiction of the actual wreck or any survivors from said wreck. Rather the human element comes from what the people are doing to the wreck, how they interact with it and how they use it for gain. In the case of this work, the wreck has already happened (though as it is difficult to tell exactly what the people are pulling out of the water, how long ago the wreck occurred is up for debate) but what makes this a scene of man overcoming nature is that Turner specifically labels the people on the beach as wreckers, individuals who take part in the stripping of valuable material from wrecked or grounded ships in a process that could be considered the forerunner to modern marine salvage practices.

There is a very romanticized, slightly gothic mystique around the practice of wrecking and wreckers. Dark, inhospitable cliffs populated by towns whose livelihood comes from using lanterns to trick ships into crashing onto the rocks and then surviving off the cargo and wreckage is a scenario played out in song and story.²³ However, as explained by Dr. Catherine Pearce in her book *Cornish Wrecking, 1700-1860: Reality and Popular Myth*, the true nature of wrecking is somewhat less exciting.²⁴ Pearce

²³ Just a few examples include the novels *Jamaica Inn* by Daphne du Maurier and *The Archipelago on Fire* by Jules Verne, as well as the opera *The Wreckers* by Dame Ethel Smyth.

²⁴ Dr. Pearce is a lecturer on Naval and Maritime History at the University of Portsmouth in Portsmouth, England and has written several books on the history of wrecking in the United Kingdom.

separates wrecking into two groups, the mythic (which is the scenario described above) and the realistic, which she then further breaks down into three categories. The first is the deliberate attack and plunder of a vessel, either by intentionally wrecking (she uses the example of cutting a ship's cables, presumably to allow it to drift into rocks and sink) or using the opportunity of a grounded ship to then steal the cargo. This is the scenario that would be most like the romanticized view of wrecking as it is the only one where the actual physical, albeit indirect, act of wrecking the ship is present. The second is the harvesting of goods from the wreck, which is then, again, broken into two subcategories, the taking of goods at the time of the wreck or the taking of goods after the wreck has been claimed by authorities for salvage. The final category is the harvesting of goods, be it cargo or actual wreckage, that have washed up on shore after the event of the wreck.²⁵ This final category is the one Pearce notes as the most common of the three and in studying Turner's painting, it is most likely the type of wrecking being undertaken by the individuals. The ship the wreckage is coming from is not actually depicted, which helps rule out scenario one and casts doubt on scenario two which requires the actual action of removing items from the wreck itself. While the ship in the middle ground is in distress, it is kept separate from the wreckers by Turner and so is unlikely to have anything to do with the wreck being pulled from the water other than proximity. The fact that Turner specifically refers to the boat coming to aid this distressed ship as a steamboat also lends to this being a work of man overcoming nature. The age of the steamboat began in Great Britain in 1812 with the launching of the PS Comet, the first commercially successful

²⁵ Catherine J. Pearce, *Cornish Wrecking, 1700-1860: Reality and Popular Myth* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 5.

steamboat service in Europe, and by 1822, Turner had begun including them in his own compositions.²⁶ Although very much conscious of the power of the sea, the comparative power produced by steamboats would have been fascinating to Turner as shown by his inclusion of one in his watercolor *Caudebec-en-Caux* from 1832 (Figure 11) Although a charming if somewhat ordinary scene of a northern French river town, the inclusion of a small yet noticeably dark figure of a steamboat chugging down the river juxtaposed with the exaggeratedly large riverbank shows us Turner's impression of such boats power over the elements compared to traditional sailing ships.

Further helping the case of *Wreckers* being a work depicting man overcoming nature is Turners chosen setting. While specifically stated as the coast of Northumberland, Turner also included in the background of the piece either Dunstanburgh Castle or Bamburgh Castle, two imposing fortifications situated on the county's coastal cliffs with initial constructions beginning in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries respectively.²⁷ Both symbolically and literally the presence of a castle in the piece solidifies the feeling of man overcoming nature. The image of a castle itself symbolically represents power, strength, and solidity, while when these castles were constructed they would have been made to keep out any invading force, adding a feeling of the permanence and resilience of man to the work.

²⁶ William S. Rodner, "Humanity and Nature in the Steamboat Paintings of J.M.W. Turner," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 455-474, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4049984>.

²⁷ The consensus is the castle depicted is Bamburgh due to Turner having previously created works depicting a wrecking he witnessed at the base of the castle. Additionally, the silhouette of the castle in both his earlier sketches and this painting are markedly similar. Yet the Yale Center for British Art which holds the painting identifies the castle as Dunstanburgh which sits roughly fifteen miles south along the coast.

Chapter Three: Political Position

While the previous motivations, nature over man and man over nature, both rely on the setting and surrounding of the wreck to make their point, shipwreck paintings motivated by political position instead draw their effectiveness from the actions of the individuals involved before, during, and/or after the wreck being depicted. Unlike the first two, this third motivation is not so much reliant on the actual wreck but rather the reactions to the wreck, either the reaction of the artist, the reaction of the public, or even the reactions of the survivors themselves. The emphasis on action over setting however also means that works made for the specific purpose of relaying a political position also frequently meet the criteria specified previously for other motivations. The main difference between those works and works that fall into this political motivation is that the depiction of man over nature or nature over man here is a consequence of the artists initial political goal, not the driving force behind it.

The motivation of political position can be broken into two distinct categories, commemoration of an event and comment on an event. By far the most popular method of political expression through the painting of shipwrecks during the nineteenth century is commemoration, the celebration or remembrance of a significant event often done at the behest of a wealthy benefactor or group. Because of this, political depictions of shipwrecks must either depict or identify a wreck that has actually happened, most often by name, and so the best way to look at these works is to look at the historical events the works portray. The two works in this chapter will be works that fall into the commemoration category, the first commemorating the actions of the individuals in the wreck and the second commemorating the actions of the person or persons after the

wreck. That is not to say that artists did not use shipwrecks to comment on an event, but more often these comments were either added to the work after the fact or have been overshadowed by other aspects of the painting.²⁸ The latter half of this chapter will then discuss how works conceived with little or no political implication were then awarded political stances by examining two previously discussed pieces, Turner's *Wreck of a Transport Ship* and Géricault's *Scene of a Shipwreck*.

Wreck of the Birkenhead: Stalwart Commemoration

Painted in 1892, Thomas Hemy (1852-1937) created *Wreck of the Birkenhead* as one of a series of works commemorating the heroic actions of the individuals involved in the titular wreck (Figure 12). The HMS Birkenhead was built in 1845 and initially conceived as a frigate. However officials expressed doubts about her iron construction and so she was refitted as a troopship for the Royal Navy, a later iteration of the type of ship painted by Turner in *Wreck of a Transport Ship*.²⁹ Shortly after her refit was completed, the Birkenhead was wrecked just before two o'clock in the morning on the 25th of February 1852 off what is known as Danger Point, near the town of Gansbaai, South Africa.³⁰ While the wreck of the Birkenhead was certainly a tragedy, neither the physical ship itself nor the aftermath of the sinking was anything sensational. The ship

²⁸ The second half of chapter four will explore the latter part of this idea in greater detail with the work *Sea of Ice* by Casper David Friedrich.

²⁹ "The Steam Frigate Birkenhead: Iron v. Wood," in *Iron, an Illustrated Weekly Journal for Iron and Steel Manufactures...* Volume 56, ed. Perry Fairfax Nursey (Knight and Lacey, 1852), 327, <https://books.google.com/books?id=O-g3AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA327#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

³⁰ "The Wreck of the Birkenhead," in *The Annual Register or a View of the History and Politics of the year 1852* (London: J.G. & F. Rivington), 470-471, <https://archive.org/details/annualregistero03unkngoog/page/n5/mode/2up>.

was not famous or especially revolutionary in its design, the location was well known as dangerous and by all accounts grievous navigational error was not to blame, the loss of life was large but not unheard of with no famous passengers or crew, and there was no sort of scandal or political ramification stemming from the sinking. Eliminating the before and after means then that what Thomas Hemy is commemorating must be found in the actions during the wreck itself. Indeed, the significance of the HMS Birkenhead is not in its sinking but in the conduct of the military personnel aboard.

Although now perhaps the most famous phrase in maritime history, there was no real concept of “women and children first” until this point. Contemporary accounts of the disaster tell of an extreme danger and rapid deterioration of the ship as soon as she first struck rocks, with most of her lifeboats being rendered unusable and many immediate casualties. As reported by the Annual Register, of the 630 people aboard, 488 consisted of soldiers of various ranks, 130 crew, and at least 22 civilians, 20 of whom being women and children.³¹ Of these, roughly 193 survived, most notably all 20 women and children. This survival rate is due almost entirely to the conduct of the soldiers during the sinking who “awaited the orders of their officers with firm discipline” and obeyed them “implicitly” including the now famous command of putting women and children first into lifeboats. Captain Edward Wright, who would end up being the highest ranking survivor,

³¹ Interestingly these numbers do not add up. The Annual Register makes clear the number of soldiers supposedly aboard as 13 officers, 9 sergeants, and 466 other men for a military total of 488, 130 total crew members, and an unclear number of civilians. Of these civilians it is stated conclusively that 20 were women and children, a figure backed up by other contemporary sources, but that there were some additional medical officers which indicates at least two, making the suggested total at least 10 persons over the recorded total.

recalled that even after the ship dramatically split in two the conduct of the soldiers “far exceeded anything I thought could be effected by the best discipline.”³²

It is this scene of extreme discipline and honor that Hemy painted. The notion of “women and children first” greatly appealed to the late Victorians sense of chivalry and propriety and Hemy took this already popular idea and elevated it by painting not only a scene of great discipline and nobility displayed by the soldiers on deck allowing the women and children to disembark first, but also by placing it during the most dramatic moment of the catastrophe. Shortly after all women and children had been removed to safety the bow was ripped from the ship with the funnel and bowsprit collapsing dramatically before the entire ship was split in half.³³ While the report says all women and children were clear of the wreck by this time, Hemy chooses to have what looks like half of them still in the process of climbing into the lifeboat as the ship disintegrates around them (notably as the funnel crashes to the deck) and yet still there is an unmoving wall of Royal Military red stalwartly awaiting orders. Some of them even appear rather sedate and accepting of their presumed fate, shaking hands, conversing, and even having the drummer boy play out a tune. This heightened feeling of duty, this apparent willingness of these men to die to save their wives and children made Hemy’s paintings extremely popular.

³² “Wreck of the Birkenhead,” 470-471.

³³ “Narrative of Accident and Disaster,” in *A Household Narrative of Current Events (for the year 1852)*, ed. Charles Dickens (London 1852), 87, https://books.google.com/books?id=LTMOAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gs_bse_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

While this scene of commemoration already falls well within the criteria of a political painting, what elevates it even further is how the painting was received not only upon its completion, but for years after. While I mentioned above that the wreck did not cause any scandal or embarrassment, one thing it did create was an extraordinary sense of pride in Great Britain and respect for British soldiers across Europe. It was even reported that the King of Prussia, famed for his military prowess, was so inspired by their bravery that he ordered an account of the disaster to be read aloud to every Prussian regiment as an example.³⁴ So much so that even fifty years on when Hemy unveiled his painting it was immediately popular with the public, quickly made into lithographs and postcards for large circulation (Figure 13), with its sense of chivalry fitting nicely within the morals of Victorian and Edwardian society.³⁵ But perhaps the most telling legacy of the work comes from Hemy's own obituary in the New York Times. Although very short, just three sentences, it takes the time to note how copies of the painting were widely dispersed

³⁴ Albert Christopher Addison and William Henry Matthews, *A Deathless Story of the "Birkenhead" and Its Heroes, Being the Only Full and Authentic Account of the Famous Shipwreck Extant, Founded on Collected Official, Documentary, and Personal Evidence, and Containing the Narratives and Lives of Actors in the Most Glorious Ocean Tragedy in History* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), 190, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fbs1AQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR3>.

³⁵ Lucy Delep, "Thus Does Man Prove His Fitness to Be the Master of Things': Shipwrecks, Chivalry and Masculinities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 3 (May 2015): 49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478003805cs044oa>.

in German barracks during World War I,³⁶ further solidifying the piece as a work of political commemoration of the chivalry and bravery of the British soldier.³⁷

Wreck of the Forfarshire: Public Celebration

Much like the Hemy painting, Thomas Musgrave Joy's (1812-1866) painting *Wreck of the Forfarshire* (1840) functions much like *Wreck of the Birkenhead* by commemorating the remarkable actions of individuals in moments of extreme peril (Figure 14). But where *Wreck of the Birkenhead* commemorates the actions of a group of individuals, *Wreck of the Forfarshire* was created to commemorate Grace Darling, the 22-year-old daughter of lighthouse keeper William Darling, both of whom are depicted in a small boat at the right of the painting. Now on loan in the McManus Gallery in Dundee, Scotland alongside Joy's portraits of the pair, the work was commissioned as a tribute specifically to Grace whose actions turned her into an instant celebrity.

Built in Dundee for travel along the coast of Great Britain, the *Forfarshire* was a paddle steamer, like the *Birkenhead*, that would have had the option of the aid of sail power. Launched in 1834, the ship was wrecked in a storm on September 7, 1838, on the Farne Islands, Northumberland (just off the coast of Bamburgh Castle, one of the possible locations of Turner's *Wreckers -- Coast of Northumberland, with a Steamboat Assisting a Ship Offshore* discussed in Chapter Two) carrying an estimated 63 people.

³⁶ The works wide distribution among German troops is likely because Prussia was the driving force behind the formation of the German Empire in 1871, with the Prussian King becoming the German Emperor, so Prussian military tradition became German military tradition.

³⁷ "Thomas M. Hemy," *New York Times* (April 3, 1937): 19, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1937/04/03/94348527.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0.

Initially a lifeboat carrying nine survivors, eight of them crew, managed to escape leaving the remaining 54 people aboard to their fates.³⁸ It was Grace who first spotted the wreck and alerted her father, the lighthouse keeper of what is today known as the Longstone Lighthouse. Due to the dangerous conditions it would not be until morning that William attempted to reach the wreck at the urging of his daughter who, upon realizing they did not have enough available men to row out to the rocks, took the place at the oar herself. Together, father and daughter managed to rescue a further nine survivors from the wreck, five crew and four passengers including the only female survivor Sarah Dawson, and keep them safe at the lighthouse for a further three days until the storm abated.³⁹ Almost immediately the event thrust Grace into national prominence, receiving equal parts praise and fascination as the girl who rowed out to sea to rescue those in jeopardy. Among gifts received, Marianne Farningham (using the pseudonym Eva Hope) records in her contemporary account that Grace was given the sum of £700 (roughly £63500 today) from donations across the country, ten times her father's annual wage. Such was the generosity that the Duke of Northumberland felt compelled to step in and act as a guardian for the young woman to help her manage the large number of gifts and money being given to her.⁴⁰ Of these many honors included the creation of the three Joy

³⁸ *The Loss of the Steamship Forfarshire, Captain Humble, Which Struck on the Fern Islands on her Voyage to Dundee, on the night of the 7th September, 1838, and the Heroic Conduct of Grace Darling. In venturing her life, and rescuing the survivors from destruction* (Glasgow: [s.n.], 1840 – 1850), 3, <https://digital.nls.uk/chapbooks-printed-in-scotland/archive/117737767/#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-1082%2C-133%2C3585%2C2657>.

³⁹ *The Loss of the Steamship Forfarshire*, 10 – 16.

⁴⁰ Additional honors included a silver medal from The Royal National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck, a silver teapot from the President of the Royal Humane Society, numerous portrait painters, and even offers to be put on the stage (she of course refused). (Eva Hope [Marianne Farningham], *Grace Darling Heroine of the*

paintings, the two portraits and the shipwreck scene, all commissioned by the 1st Baron Panmure, a Scottish landowner who had represented county Forfarshire (for which the ship was named) in Parliament and was a patron of Joy's.⁴¹

Much like *Wreck of the Birkenhead*, the events Joy portrays are not exactly true to life. But where Hemy simply appears to have played with the timeline for dramatic effect, Joy takes it a step further by creating an almost entirely new narrative and immediately upon viewing we can see a discrepancy between the events and Joy's painting. We know from contemporary accounts that upon hitting the rocks, the *Forfarshire* quickly broke up and much of her was swept away with only the fore of the vessel being stuck on what is known as Big Harcar rock with at least 12 people still alive. Of those twelve, three subsequently died and their bodies recovered (a Reverend John Robb and James and Matilda Dawson, children of Sarah Dawson).⁴² But a quick headcount shows Joy painted 16 people on the rock, 13 men, one woman, and two children, four heads too many. The figures are arranged in a fashion reminiscent of Géricault's *Scene of a Shipwreck*, forming a pyramid capped by a waving scrap of fabric (Figure 6), or similarly dramatic shipwreck scenes by Joseph Vernet. It stands to reason that, having studied both in France under an associate of the Royal Academy, Joy would have been at the very least

Farne Islands (London and Felling-on-Tyne: Walter Scott Publishing Company, 1875)
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23295/23295-h/23295-h.htm>.)

⁴¹ "Joy, Thomas Musgrave," Grove Art Online, last modified January 20, 2016,
<https://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.sothebysinstitute.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000045260>.

⁴² Jerrold Vernon, *Grace Darling, the Maid of the Isles* (London: W. & T. Fordyce, 1839), 212,
https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=QocEAAAAQAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=%22grace+darling:&ots=cPvtSmisKj&sig=ZR0t6MBxNVOWEQ_5uB2i4HcKJLA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

familiar with the way these artists depicted shipwreck scenes.⁴³ Additionally, the accounts tell us the storm that sank the *Forfarshire* raged for three more days, even stranding an additional rescue party at the lighthouse, and the sea was incredibly dangerous during the time Grace and William made their way to the survivors.⁴⁴ Yet Joy paints the scene as though the storms are breaking up, calm enough for one of the men to be dangling his legs in the water while another appears to be tending to a fellow survivor with relative calm. The simplest answer for this, as well as the stark standing of the figure of the lighthouse against the grey black sky, is that Joy is painting a scene of hope and salvation, brought to those stranded by a young girl in a rowboat. By tweaking the narrative to better fit the story, Joy gives us a picture that creates a sense of awe and admiration for this young woman, elevating her deeds from a level of someone trying to help to one of almost sainthood.

The Coast of Utopia: Creating Political Meaning from Unpolitical Works

Commemoration works such as these were exceedingly popular methods of storytelling during the Victorian and Edwardian eras in Great Britain. This tradition of painting wrecks in commemoration remained popular through World War I, with large numbers of torpedoed passenger and warships providing ample subject matter. But it is rarer to have a shipwreck painting act as a political commentary by the artist. The argument can be made that any painting of a shipwreck, if the is wreck named by the artist, is a political painting as the artist would inherently impart their own interpretations and biases of events onto the scene, but by and large political commentary of shipwreck

⁴³ Grove Art Online, "Joy, Thomas Musgrave."

⁴⁴ *The Loss of the Steamship Forfarshire*, 15-17.

paintings of the nineteenth century was affixed to the work after it was completed by the public rather than the artist. Two of the most notable examples of this kind of phenomenon are J.M.W. Turner's *Wreck of a Transport Ship* and Théodore Géricault's *Scene of a Shipwreck* (Figures 1 and 5). Both of these works have been previously discussed in this paper in the first and second chapters respectively however I have attempted to keep any discussion of the works political legacies separate, specifically because it is more effective to examine their political legacies independently of their motivation to understand why they were made political by the public and not their respective artists. Before discussing this, it is important to point out that this argument is not saying that these artists did not create other works that were meant to be political, such as Turner's *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon coming on* or Géricault's series of insanity portraits. The argument is simply that politics were not the driving creative force behind these two works that has been attributed to them.

Of the two, *Scene of a Shipwreck* is the one which had the more profound political impact as the work was taken to be a condemnation against the French people's own government, not a foreign one like *Wreck of a Transport Ship*. Although the basic events of the wreck were horrifying in their own right, and widely disseminated to the public thanks to the account written by survivors Jean Baptiste Henri Savigny and Alexandre Corréard, the true outrage came from the politics that created the wreck in the first place. When the *Medusa* sank in June of 1816, France was less than a year free of Napoleon and his empire, whose rein had officially ended with his defeat at the end of the War of the Seventh Coalition, and had been replaced with the Bourbon Restoration which saw the younger brother of executed King Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, come to power. The new

government rewarded those they deemed as having stayed loyal to the monarchy, including the man who was appointed captain of the Medusa, Hugues Duroy de Chaumareys.⁴⁵ On the surface, de Chaumareys seemed like an acceptable choice to captain the ship. His family was old and well connected, he was descended from a great French admiral, and had served the crown faithfully until the Revolution. He had even been thrown in prison for participating in a failed royalist siege in 1795, an account of which he published in England after his daring escape, subsequently being awarded high honors. However, a closer look reveals his account as highly exaggerated and by the time he was appointed to captain the Medusa he had not captained a ship in a quarter century.⁴⁶ The subsequent wreck (of which de Chaumareys and his fellow elite survived by quickly securing their place in a lifeboat) was seen by the public as a symbol of the weakness and corruption of the new government, as well as the callousness of the upper class towards those below them.

Géricault's piece was polarizing when it was first exhibited in 1819, with anti-monarchists viewing it as sympathetic to their cause but the king himself specifically praising it to the artist.⁴⁷ Despite the public reaction, the reason that *Scene of a Shipwreck* was not meant to be political lies in what exactly Géricault painted. Author Julian Barnes lays out eight possible alternative scenes that Géricault could have painted from the

⁴⁵ Jonathan Miles, *The Wreck of the Medusa: The Most Famous Sea Disaster of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Grove Press, 2008) 23, https://books.google.com/books?id=KkygClyt8cYC&pg=PA24&dq=hugues+duroy+de+chaumareys&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwju1IaGI9rsAhU3I3IEHZZXBPYQ6AEwAHoECAyQAg#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴⁶ Miles, *The Wreck of the Medusa*, 24-26.

⁴⁷ King Louis XVIII reportedly stated "Monsieur Géricault, your shipwreck is certainly no disaster." (Barnes, "A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters," 125-126.)

wreck and what these depictions would have represented, a) the moment of the wreck (political), b) the abandonment of the raft by the lifeboats (symbolic), c) the various mutinies (theatric), d) the cannibalizing of the dead (shocking), e) the so called mass murder that took place (thrilling), f) the arrival of a butterfly on the raft (sentimental), g) the gradual sinking of the raft (documentary), or h) the rescue (unambiguous).⁴⁸ The fact that Géricault chose not to paint any of these scenes throws the idea that this was created as a political work into question, especially considering the almost obsessive attention to narrative detail he paid to the work. As previously mentioned, he researched the details of the event exhaustively and very nearly painted one of the above scenes instead, which tells us that everything he put onto the canvas was a deliberate and thought out choice. If he had wanted the work to be a political statement, there would have been no sense of ambiguity one way or the other. Rather, by looking at the works he almost painted, we can begin to get a better idea of what Géricault did paint. Two of the more complete studies Géricault created for *Scene of a Shipwreck* are scenes D and H, cannibalism (Figure 7) and rescue (Figure 8), which feel like two opposing ends on the emotional scale until you look at what both scenes represent. While Barnes characterizes the scenes as shocking and unambiguous respectively, it is important to take into consideration what Géricault ended up painting. That moment of *peripeteia* when the survivors feel as though they have made it through the storm. While this is certainly not reflected in the cannibalism study, what the viewer does see in it is people just like them willing to do anything at all to survive, a sentiment that likely felt familiar to many who had survived the previous three decades. As for the scene of rescue, as previously stated there is no

⁴⁸ Barnes, "A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters," 126-127.

longer any need for hope here as rescue is assured. So Géricault scaled back the shock value to just a handful of dead and chose an earlier point in the narrative. Barnes ends up characterizing the final work as an allegory for man's place in the universe, drifting endlessly between hope and despair.⁴⁹ But I believe what Géricault was initially attempting to portray was an allegory of hope for the common man through the worst of struggles (remember, the elites of the ship saved themselves, leaving the lower ranking men to fend for their lives on the raft), and it is this hope that the public grabbed onto and allowed them to turn the work into a symbol of their discontent.

While *Scene of a Shipwreck* has more of a lasting political legacy, Turner's *Wreck of a Transport Ship* also created a politically charged reaction when exhibited (Figure 1), quickly being renamed *Wreck of the Minotaur*, and, like *Scene of a Shipwreck*, it was not initially created by the artist with this intent. In this case, the argument is a fair bit more cut and dry. The HMS *Minotaur* was a British transport ship that sank with heavy loss of life on December 22, 1810, off the coast of the island of Texel, today part of the Netherlands but at the time under French control.⁵⁰ The sinking caused much outrage in England as not only were all survivors taken as prisoners of war by the French, but the high death toll was believed to be due in part to the apparent inaction of the Dutch to help those aboard the vessel as she sank.^{51,52}

⁴⁹ Barnes, "A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters," 137.

⁵⁰ William O.S. Gilly, *Narratives of shipwrecks of the Royal Navy: Between 1793 and 1849* (London: J.W. Parker 1851), 154-155, https://archive.org/details/cihm_50416/page/n207/mode/2up?q=texel.

⁵¹ Gilly, *Narratives of shipwrecks of the Royal Navy*, 158-159.

⁵² A coincidence that both analyzed works would be seen as condemnations of French government.

Although a great tragedy, it is almost impossible for Turner to have conceived of this work as a political reaction for two reasons. First, sketches at the Tate show that Turner had been preparing this work since at least 1805 (Figure 2). Second, and perhaps most conclusively, the painting was first exhibited in 1810, likely months before the *Minotaur* went down at the end of December. It is certainly possible that Turner was inspired by other wrecks from around the time of his first sketches, as at this point the Napoleonic Wars would have been in full swing;⁵³ however, to have the work be based on the *Minotaur* is not possible. Most likely the work was retitled by the patron of the piece, the first Earl of Yarborough, due to the coincidental resemblance between the work and the events of the sinking.⁵⁴ Thankfully, as noted by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon, the theory of a connection between the painting and the shipwreck has long been abandoned, leaving only a small political legacy in its wake.⁵⁵

⁵³ It is generally accepted that the Napoleonic Wars started in 1803 and ended with Napoleons final defeat at Waterloo.

⁵⁴ Graham Smith, "David Octavius Hill, David Roberts, and J. M. W. Turner's 'Wreck of a Transport Ship'," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal*, 1986 14 (1986): 153-156, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4166556>.

⁵⁵ "The Wreck of a Transport Ship," Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, accessed October 27, 2020, https://gulbenkian.pt/museu/en/works_museu/the-wreck-of-a-transport-ship/.

Chapter Four: Personal Upheaval

The final motivation to create shipwreck paintings is one that has been depicted by artists for centuries. A well-worn trope about art is that it can be used to help the creator process, deal with, and attempt to explain their emotions in ways that might otherwise be too difficult or inappropriate to express. Artists of the nineteenth century certainly used their art to communicate personal struggles, such as John Constable's *Hadleigh Castle Mouth of the Thames – Morning after a Storm* (1829) or Goya's so-called "Black Paintings" (1819-1823). But the difference between these two examples and the use of a shipwreck to exhibit emotions is what each subject represents. The ruins in *Hadleigh Castle* have been interpreted to represent the brokenness and grief Constable experienced over the loss of his wife from tuberculosis, a disease characterized by the apparent wasting away of the sufferer, paralleling the decay and wasting of the ruins.⁵⁶ Meanwhile *Saturn Devouring His Son*, arguably the most famous of Goya's Black Paintings, serves as a physical representation of Goya's fear of losing his own power after being severely weakened by illness and the suppression of his liberal ideals under the reign of King Fernando VII.⁵⁷

The use of a shipwreck to represent an artist's personal struggles is a powerful image due to the finality of the violence being depicted. Unlike similarly brutal scenes such as fire or storm, there is no symbolic silver lining to a shipwreck. While fire can be

⁵⁶ "John Constable, 1776–1837, British, Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames-- Morning after a Stormy Night, 1829," Yale Center for British Art, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:5001>.

⁵⁷ "Saturn," Museo Del Prado, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/saturn/18110a75-b0e7-430c-bc73-2a4d55893bd6?searchid=cc101ca6-ac6d-d83b-8dcf-d2b7c21e796e>.

devastating and all consuming, there is also a tradition of rebirth and cleansing associated with it. Storms are savage and painful but must sometime end. By choosing to express their personal trials through a depiction of a shipwreck, the artist has chosen a medium in which there is no hope of recovery or change. A depiction of wreckage reads closer to the grief and decay of the ruins in *Hadleigh Castle*, but I believe that the depiction of a wreck in progress means that the artists is experiencing something that they truly believe will destroy their life.

The Tempest – Miranda: Coming to Terms with Tragedy

Exhibited in 1916, *Miranda – The Tempest* by John William Waterhouse (1849-1917) at first pass looks like a typical scene for the artist (Figure 15). A later follower of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Waterhouse frequently painted scenes of Shakespeare, ancient myth, and Arthurian legend, typically depicting tragic females such as Ophelia or the Lady of Shallot shortly before their demise, and placing them in lush surroundings full of colorful flora and symbolism. His work exemplified what art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen characterized as the three qualities of English art, a fanciful invention, an inclination of melancholy, and topographic historical truth.⁵⁸ However the differences in *Miranda – The Tempest* from Waterhouse's other works become apparent on closer examination. Not only the out of character (for Waterhouse) inclusion of a shipwreck, but the violent storm and the absence of the artists typical vibrantly colored surrounding make the work noticeably unique. Unlike many of the other shipwreck paintings previously discussed, the wreck itself only serves as a secondary focus of the painting,

⁵⁸ Anthony Hobson, *JW Waterhouse* (London: Phaidon Press, 1989), 122.

with the main focus being the titular heroine. However, the wreck is an integral part of the narrative which allows the work to be considered a shipwreck painting under the previously set terms.

The woman depicted, Miranda, is the principle female in Shakespeare's "The Tempest." The daughter of Prospero, her first introduction in the play is her reporting to her father that she witnessed the wreck of the ship belonging to her uncle, the Duke of Milan, who had usurped and exiled Miranda's father many years previously.⁵⁹ As a result, lone depictions of Miranda often include her watching the sea on the beach, either before or in the middle of the storm. Waterhouse himself painted her like this near the beginning of his career in 1875 (Figure 16). In this earlier depiction, Waterhouse creates almost a polar opposite of his 1916 Miranda. In 1875 the storm has not yet broken and the young, innocent Miranda sits, perfectly poised with hands clasped and hair set, watching the ship that is little more than a dot on the horizon pass by. But by 1916 the storm has arrived, the cliffs have closed in, and the dot has become a full galleon hurled onto the rocks. Miranda herself has undergone a transformation: her clothes are more rugged, her hair wild in the wind, and her eyes fixed to the tragedy before her.

The dramatic shift between Waterhouse's Mirandas can be explained by two external factors influencing two separate parts of the 1916 painting, the setting and the shipwreck. An early sketch of the work suggests that the two came about separately from one another (Figure 17). Created in April 1914 while at Clippesby Hall, the home of Waterhouse's sister-in-law, this rough pencil sketch is unmistakably a study for his

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

eventual 1916 Miranda. While the finished work would eventually grow wilder, the study suggests that initially Waterhouse was going to create a work more similar to his 1875 Miranda. The raised arm, coiffed hair, and suggestion of wreckage at her feet suggest he originally planned to depict Miranda after the storm. The sketch also shows that Waterhouse always intended some large object to be in place of where the eventual shipwreck is, but the similar sketch work between the mass and the cliffs leads me to believe Waterhouse was sketching a large outcropping of rocks rather than a shipwreck. Much like the final image, here we can see Waterhouse closing off the space with steep cliffs, almost appearing to trap Miranda on the beach. The sharp contrast in the setting of the finished piece from Waterhouse's other works suggests that Waterhouse was reacting to something he had never had to before. As the sketch was created in April of 1914 and the final work was exhibited in 1916, the most logical answer would be the beginning of World War I, which saw many of Waterhouse's contemporaries such as Charles Ernest Butler and John Singer Sargent turn their hand to war related compositions.

While war may explain the setting of the work, the absence of the shipwreck from the initial sketch and its inclusion in the final painting suggest that a separate force acted to have Waterhouse include it. As previously stated, the use of a shipwreck in a painting is a violent and destructive choice; therefore, to include it in a scene that does not necessarily require it suggests the artist did so as a reaction to a personal upheaval in their life. For Waterhouse, that upheaval was the progression of fatal liver cancer sometime between April 1914 and mid-1915, a disease that would eventually kill him in February

1917.⁶⁰ By looking at the timeline of the early sketch sans shipwreck in 1914, the generally accepted point by which Waterhouse realized he would not recover from his cancer in 1915, the exhibition of *Miranda – the Tempest* with shipwreck in 1916, and finally his death in 1917,⁶¹ one can see how the inclusion of such a violent scene, and indeed the heightening of the overall violence of the storm in the finished painting, can be interpreted as Waterhouse coming to terms with his own mortality. None of his other works from this period have the same wanton desperation, rather in his few remaining works he almost seems to be surrounding himself with familiar subjects by painting figures he had painted before such as the Lady of Shalott and Ophelia.⁶² It is only in *Miranda* that Waterhouse expresses something in the way of devastation for his impending death, and allows his inclusion of a shipwreck to serve as an example of how such a depiction can symbolize an artist's personal turmoil.

Cold Comfort: Many Positions of Sea of Ice

When setting out the guidelines for what is and is not considered a shipwreck painting, I mentioned that often depictions of shipwrecks can fall into multiple motivational categories, only to have one motivation be overshadowed by another. For example, *Man Proposes, God Disposes* by Landseer is a work of nature over man but can

⁶⁰ Dani Cavallaro, *J.W. Waterhouse and the Magic of Color* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2017), 77, https://books.google.ca/books?id=FvcwDgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁶¹ "John William Waterhouse," *American Art News* (March 10, 1917): 4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25589029>.

⁶² In his book "J.W. Waterhouse," Hobson writes it is as though Waterhouse is "gather[ing] his memories around him. What is more comforting to an old man than the presence of former girlfriends..." (Hobson, *JW Waterhouse*, 109.)

be classified as both political (the artists reaction to Franklins Expedition) and personal (the fear of losing his sanity), *Scene of a Shipwreck* by Géricault represents man over nature yet overwhelmingly has been received as a political work, and both Hemy's *Wreck of the Birkenhead* and Joy's *Wreck of the Forfarshire* are political works that can be classified as man over nature due to the feeling of hope they both stir in the viewer (Figures 4, 6, 12, and 14). While it is highly unlikely for one work to display all four motivations along the set guidelines, examining works that fit multiple categories helps to recognize the importance of depictions of shipwrecks in art of the nineteenth century. An excellent example of this is *Sea of Ice* (1823 – 1824) by German artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), as it has strong motivations of nature over man, political, and personal, as well as a thin but not discountable thread of man over nature (Figure 18).

The strongest initial motivation of the work is nature over man, as against the giant, jagged shards of ice the crushed ship seems insignificant, almost hidden until the viewer practically stumbles upon it by accident. Unlike *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, in which Landseer uses wreckage to further a true to life narrative, *Sea of Ice* uses the image of the wreck to create a more symbolic message about the danger and power of the Arctic. The work was initially commissioned as *Northern Nature in the whole of her Terrifying Beauty* by Johann Gottlob von Quandt, a wealthy German collector, to be a contrasting companion to another commissioned work depicting the lushness of the south. However, when the work was exhibited in 1824 it was given the title *An Idealized Scene of an Arctic Sea, with a Wrecked Ship on the Heaped Masses of Ice*.⁶³ Then in

⁶³ Peter Russel, *Complete Paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (Illustrated)* (Delphi Classics, 2016), *Sea of Ice*,

Friedrich's estate inventory the work was catalogued as *Ice Picture. The Failed North Pole Expedition*,⁶⁴ and at some point was retitled *Wreck of Hope* before finally being titled *Sea of Ice*. The common thread throughout each name is the sense that the work is meant to serve as a cautionary tale not to underestimate nature's force as man strives to conquer it. The political aspect of the work is two pronged, both in commemoration and condemnation. The commemoration comes from one of the chief inspirations of the painting, the account of explorer Sir William Edward Parry's first attempt to locate the Northwest Passage in 1819. An inscription on the painting identifies the wreck as the HMS Griper, the smaller vessel of the expedition, although unlike Friedrich's depiction the ship made it through intact and so Friedrich is commemorating what could have happened, and likely what he believed would eventually happen.⁶⁵ The stronger political prong is condemnation. Friedrich was well known for placing subtle yet sharp political criticism in his paintings and according to art historian Norbert Wolf, *Sea of Ice* has a great deal to say about Friedrich's pessimistic view of politics under Chancellor Klemens von Metternich. An autocratic and highly conservative politician, Friedrich likely (and rightly) saw his time in power as highly oppressive with hard line policies that stifled liberal ideology.⁶⁶ Therefore, Friedrich's bleak and desolate depiction of the Arctic

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Delphi_Complete_Paintings_of_Caspar_Davi/zCwbDQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

⁶⁴ Eberhardt Roters, *Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts: Themen und Motive · Volumes 1-2* (DuMont, 1998), 51,

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Malerei_des_19_Jahrhunderts/SYbqAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

⁶⁵ Russel, *Complete Paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (Illustrated)*, Sea of Ice.

⁶⁶ It has been argued that Metternich's policies are to blame for not only the dissolution of the German Monarchy, but the entirety of World War I. (Alan Sked, *Metternich in Austria: An Evaluation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 248,

symbolized the “political winter” Friedrich believed had been created under Metternich’s rule, an analogy likely not lost on those who viewed the work.⁶⁷ It is generally accepted that the personal upheaval aspect of the work comes from a traumatic event in Friedrich’s childhood. In 1787, at the age of 13, Friedrich watched as his younger brother drowned after falling through the ice on a frozen lake. The tragedy cast a great pall over Friedrich’s life, especially as he supposedly was the one to convince his brother to join him on the ice.⁶⁸ That the work is not as violent as *Miranda – The Tempest* can be attributed to the time between the loss of his brother and the painting of the picture, with the anguish and guilt settling into an ever present ache that can be felt throughout many of Friedrich’s similarly wintry scenes, no longer as sharp or desperate but still always there.

These three motivations make up the bulk of *Sea of Ice*, however as previously mentioned the final motivation, man overcoming nature, does have a small thread here as well. Although the work does not meet the three guidelines necessary to be considered a work of man over nature, it does meet three guidelines that are similar. There is no survival in the picture but there is in the actual events of the Parry Expedition. Both ships and almost all the men sent out survived the expedition, including the one Friedrich

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Metternich_and_Austria/yiMdBQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.)

⁶⁷ Norbert Wolf, *Caspar David Friedrich 1774-1840: The Painter of Stillness* (Köln: Taschen, 2003), 73,

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Caspar_David_Friedrich/kJp8TYaFsFYC?hl=en&gbpv=0

⁶⁸ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 81-82,

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Caspar_David_Friedrich_and_the_Subject_o/uu7aBpj9TuIC?hl=en&gbpv=0.

depicts crushed in the ice. The work becomes an alternative history rather than a faithful depiction lending an uneasy sense of triumph to the work, a look at what could have happened versus what actually happened. There is no sense of hope but there is one of salvation. Much like one of the possible interpretations of *The Ninth Wave* (Figure 3), the sunlight represents the holy spirit, the wreck symbolizes sacrifice, and the pile of ice represents an altar. Finally, there is no human element but once again there is the sense of uneasy triumph that stems from Friedrich creating an alternative history rather than factual events. Had the ship not been specifically identified as part of the 1819 expedition, this would not exist. Because of this, while the work does not meet the set criteria to be considered a work of man over nature, it meets criteria similar enough that it makes it worth mentioning. Looking at a work such as this that represents almost all four motivations allows us to better understand the complexities involved with creating a shipwreck painting. The imagery of shipwrecks is powerful and their ability to portray multiple motivations at a time means that they are as important a subsection of art as capriccios or vedutas of the same period.

Conclusion

At the end of “The Shipwrecked Sailor” the weary traveler returns home with precious gifts and a lesson: “become a wise man, and you shall come to honor.”⁶⁹ By examining the motivations behind what drove artists of the nineteenth century to create shipwreck paintings, we too can gain great insight into the importance of these depictions. The wrecking of a ship is a powerful image, one that almost always calls to mind thoughts of tragedy and despair. But once we look past these initial sentiments, we begin to see there is a much more intricate analysis to be understood.

The four motivations I have laid out provide us with a broader idea of what a shipwreck in art can communicate. While the most impactful motivation is a cautionary tale of Nature over Man, given the right criteria and circumstances these motivations show that shipwrecks can also bring about great joy, anger, pain, and even pride in the accomplishments of mankind. Of the four, the one I find most fascinating is the motivation of Man over Nature as, on the surface, it seems completely counterintuitive to the very nature of the shipwreck. However, using the guidelines I have laid out it becomes clear how various depictions can display this idea, utilizing a balance of survival, human figures, and a sense of hope. As this paper focuses on European artists of the nineteenth century, it would be interesting moving forward to further examine the motivations and criteria for what constitutes a shipwreck painting and broaden the scope to other global locations, eras, and cultures.

⁶⁹ Fordham, “Tales of Ancient Egypt: The Shipwrecked Sailor, c. 2200 BCE.”

As we face our own era of social turmoil that has prevented us from examining these works in person as many of us would like, it has not prevented us from continuing to find new and profound appreciation of such incredible artwork. Artists of the nineteenth century found themselves at the forefront of a world changing more rapidly than they ever previously imagined, and they used this change to create art that is considered the world over to be some of the greatest ever created. By using shipwrecks to communicate fear, pain, hope, and even pride, they have elevated a sub-subgenre into a type of art that can be considered one of the most interesting of the art world.

Illustrations



Fig. 1 J.M.W. Turner, *Wreck of a Transport Ship*, 1810, oil on canvas, 68.1 x 94.88 in.,
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.



Fig. 2 J.M.W. Turner, *Study for 'The Wreck of a Transport Ship,'* c. 1805-1810,
pen on paper, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 3 Ivan Aivazovsky, *The Ninth Wave*, 1850, oil on canvas, 87 x 130.7 in., State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Fig. 4 Edwin Landseer, *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, 1864, oil on canvas, 36 x 95.9 in., Royal Holloway University of London, Egham.



Fig. 5 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Icebergs*, 1861, oil on canvas, 61.5 x 112.5 in., Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas.



Fig. 6 Théodore Géricault, *Scene of a Shipwreck (Raft of the Medusa)*, 1819, oil on canvas, 193 x 282 in., Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 7 Théodore Géricault, *Cannibalism on the Raft of the Medusa*, mixed media on paper, 11 x 15 in., Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 8 Théodore Géricault, *Study*, oil on canvas, 15 x 18.11 in., Louvre Museum, Paris.



Fig. 9 Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *The Shipwreck*, 1794, oil on canvas, 19.68 x 12.6 in., Private Collection.



Fig. 10 J.M.W. Turner, *Wreckers -- Coast of Northumberland, with a Steamboat Assisting a Ship Offshore*, 1833-1834, oil on canvas, 35.625 x 47.56 in., Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.



Fig. 11 J.M.W. Turner, *Caudebec-en-Caux*, 1832, gouache and watercolor on blue paper, 5.4 x 7.5 in., Tate Britain, London.



Fig. 12 Thomas Hemy, *The Wreck of the Birkenhead*, 1892, oil on canvas, Location Unknown.



Fig. 13 After Thomas Hemy, *The Wreck of HMS Birkenhead off the Cape of Good Hope on 26 Feb. 1852*, 1892, engraving, 33.7 x 25.8 in., The Argory, Dungannon.



Fig. 14 Thomas Musgrave Joy, *The Wreck of the Forfarshire*, 1840, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in., McManus Art Gallery & Museum, Dundee.



Fig. 15 John William Waterhouse, *Miranda – The Tempest*, 1916, oil on canvas, 39.5 x 54.3 in., Private Collection.



Fig. 16 John William Waterhouse, *Miranda*, 1875, oil on canvas, 29.9 x 40 in. Private Collection.



Fig. 17 John William Waterhouse, *Miranda (Study)*, 1914, pencil on paper, 8.7 x 11 in., Private Collection.



Fig. 18 Caspar David Friedrich, *Sea of Ice*, 1823-1824, oil on canvas, 38 x 50 in., Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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