The Loss of the Steamship *President:* A painting by the German artist Andreas Achenbach

Lars U. Scholl

En 1842, Andreas Achenbach (1815-1910) termina une grosse peinture d'un navire en train de couler au milieu de la glace. Le navire en question avait été mis en service par le grand-duc de Baden et la peinture s'intitulait Der Untergang der Pràsident. De récents travaux de recherche ont permis de découvrir qu'il s 'agissait en fait d'un navire à vapeur britannique et non d'un navire allemand et que ce dernier fût l'un des premiers navires à vapeur à passagers de l'Atlantique Nord. Ce navire, en direction de Liverpool, a disparu en avril 1841 alors qu 'il revenait de New York. Il s'est probablement perdu lors d'une violente tempête. Il est peu probable que ce navire ait coulé suite à une collision avec un iceberg, tel qu 'on le démontre ici. La peinture d'Achenbach est inspirée d'une nouvelle contemporaine à caractère sensationnel et connue comme telle en 1841. Les désastres en mer étaient populaires en Allemagne à cette époque. La peinture d'Achenbach doit donc être perçue comme le produit de cette mode.

A private collector in Diisseldorf gave the large format painting "The loss of the *President"* on permanent loan to the Museum of Arts in Diisseldorf in 1987. The painting came from the studio of the landscape painter Andreas Achenbach (1815-1910) of Diisseldorf. It is signed and dated 1842. North American readers may be interested to know that Achenbach assisted Emanuel Leutze when he was painting the first version of his icon of American art *Washington crossing the Delaware.* In his autobiography, the painter Worthington Whittredge wrote, "Leutze mixed the colours for it over night and invited Andreas Achenbach and myself to help him cover the canvas the next day."[1]

In the course of the preparations for the Achenbach exhibition *Das A und O der Landschaft*[2] the question was asked, "what was the shipwreck portrayed in this large painting (180 x 225 cm)." The title recorded in the file was "The loss of the *President,"* and the spelling *Pràsident* seemed to point to a German vessel. That it showed a paddle steamer colliding with an iceberg prompted naval historians and art historians to pursue a joint

[1] John I.H. Bauer (ed.), *The Autobiography of Worthington Whittredge 1820-1910* (New York,1969), 22.
[2] Martina Sitt (ed.), *Andreas und Oswald Achenbach: "Das A und O der Landschaff* Kôln, 1997).

The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord, **XV No. 3, (July 2005), 53 -71.**

Detail from "The loss of the *President"*

investigation. Was this a German ship suffering damage in Arctic waters? What had inspired the painter to present it in such an impressive format? How had the painter transposed his subject? What technical background did he have, and how had he become familiar with the event? Finally, who had commissioned such an important painting and why?

It was soon found that it could not possibly be a German ship. So attention shifted to Great Britain. The *President,* a steamship with lateral paddle wheels owned by the British American Steam Navigation Company, has no entry in the *Oxford Companion to Ships and Sea* or the *Dictionary of British Ships and Seamen.*[3] There is a rather long entry in Charles Hocking's *Dictionary of Disasters At Sea,* but this only led to further questions.[4] The genesis and history of this painting are the subject of this article. A short summary of the beginnings of steam navigation will provide the context for the technical background of the painting, its image and the question of how realistically the ship is painted. A review of the contemporary press discussion of the loss of the ship and public reaction addresses the question of whether the notoriety of the disaster may have been the motive for the person

[3] Peter Kemp (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Ships and Sea* (Oxford, 1976); Grand Uden and Richard Cooper, *A Dictionary of British Ships and Seamen* (Harmondsworth, 1980).

[4] Charles Hocking, *Dictionary of Disasters at Sea during the Age of Steam,* vol. 2, (London, 1969), 563.

commissioning the painting. The article concludes with a detailed evaluation of the painting and of its place within the work of the painter Achenbach, This will also consider the specific properties of transposition in painting such an event. After a thorough restoration the painting today is in exhibition condition. In the summer of 1998 it was placed in the entrance hall of the Museum of Altona in Hamburg where it may be admired even before paying the entrance fee.[5]

The first ship to use a steam engine while crossing the Atlantic was the American sailing ship *Savannah.* She had been retrofitted with an auxiliary engine as well as collapsible and detachable paddle wheels, which could be stored on deck while under sail. In 1819 she sailed from Savannah to Liverpool in only 27/4 days.[6] During this crossing, she operated under steam for just eight-five hours. Therefore, the *Savannah's* title of "first steamer to cross the Atlantic" may be challenged. After further experiments using both steam and sails for propulsion by the ships *Rhadamanthus, Curaçao,* and *Cape Breton,* as well as the Canadian *Royal William,*[7] it was finally the paddle-wheel steamer *Sirius* who in the spring of 183 8 made the voyage from Cork to New York solely driven by her steam engines. The *Sirius* owed her entry in the annals of passenger shipping as the first steamboat to complete the crossing of the Atlantic to a fortuitous coincidence.

After the first experiments with lateral balance engines had been made in the 1830s and some knowledge had been gained with respect to the financing required to operate a steamer, there the problem of how to tackle scheduled steamer navigation across the North Atlantic remained. Entrepreneurs in three ports founded shipping companies roughly at the same time: the British & American Steam Navigation Company of London, the Great Western Steamship Company of Bristol, and the Transatlantic Steamship Company of Liverpool.

The driving force behind the foundation of the British and American Steam Navigation Company was the American lawyer Junius Smith. Born in 1802 in Hartford, Connecticut, he came to England where he married and settled down. In 1832 he visited the United States and discussed with several business partners the idea of a transatlantic steamboat line. After his return to England he wrote to his nephew: "Thirty-two days from New York to Plymouth and forty days to London is no trifle. Any ordinary seagoing steamer would have run it, the weather we had, in fifteen days with ease. I shall nor relinquish tis project unless I find it absolutely impracticable."[8]

At first he was not very successful with his plan. In June 1835 he printed his first brochure calling for the establishment of the Union Line of Steam Packet Ships between London and New York. While he was negotiating with a number of businessmen, the directors of the Great Western Railway Company, which had recently been granted a

[5] Martin Fass et al. (eds.), *Seestucke. Von Caspar David Friedrich bis Emil Nolde* (Munchen,2005), 43.

[6] John H. Morrison, *History of American Steam Navigation* (New York, 1958), 406; Cedric Ridgely-Nevitt, *American Steamships on the Atlantic* (Newark, 1981), 58-68.

[7] Basil Greenhill, "Steam before the Screw", in Robert Gardiner (ed.), *The Advent of Steam. The Merchant Steamship before 1900* (London, 1993), 11-27.

[8] E. Leroy Pond, *Junius Smith: A Biography of the Father of the Atlantic Liner* repr. (New York, 1971),34.

concession, met in London in October 1835. When one of the directors complained that the railway line to Bristol was much too long to be built, the engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunei replied, "Why not make it longer? Build a steam ship to go to New York and call it *Great Western."*[9] This idea was soon pursued in earnest. Very likely, Smith heard about it, since he immediately published an extended prospectus with a capital sum of £500,000 and larger ships than those proposed in the first brochure. At the end of November, the newly established British and American Steam Navigation Company convened its first meeting of the board of directors. The idea met with little interest in the USA, but two bankers, the American consul in London and Joseph R. Pirn, a director of the St. George and Dublin Steam Ship Company, decided to proceed. Macgregor Laird, the younger son of William Laird, founder of Laird Shipyards in Birkenhead,[10] was appointed the secretary. Thus, this shipping line was established a few months before the Great Western Steam Ship Company."

Each company in their respective ports of registry made efforts to procure a wooden paddle-wheel steamer. On the Thames, in October 1836 an order for the construction of a paddle-wheel steamer of about 1860 gross register tonnage (grt) was given to the shipyard Curling & Young in Limehouse, located north of the entrance to the West India Dock.[12] The ship was to have three masts, rigged as a bark. Originally the *Royal Victoria,* on the occasion of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in June 1837 she was renamed *British Queen.* She was launched on 24 May 1838, the birthday of the queen. In the presence of the prime minister, Lord Melbourne, she left the builder's dock on 23 June 1838 and sailed to Glasgow, where her engines were installed.[13]

The *Great Western,* designed by Brunei, was built in Bristol by William Patterson. The work was started in June 1836. In August of the following year she was towed to London, where the engines were fitted. Meanwhile, the *Royal William,* built in the shipyard of William and Thomas Wilson in Liverpool, was chartered in Liverpool from the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company. In 1838 the *Liverpool,* a three-masted steamer with two funnels, built in the local shipyard of Humble & Milcrest, was purchased and sailed on her way to New York on 20 October with sixty passengers on board.

If everything had gone according to plan, the *British Queen* would have entered service in the spring of 1838. Originally the engine was supposed to be supplied by Robert Napier in Glasgow, but the shipping company considered his price too high. Therefore the engine was ordered from the machine manufacturer Claude Girdwood & Company in Glasgow. This company, however, went bankrupt, and one year later the order had to be given to Robert Napier anyway, who accepted but at a considerably higher price than in 1837. The directors of British and American Steam Navigation Company were not to be left

[9] Adrian Vaughan, *Isambard Kingdom Brunei: Engineering Knight-Errant* (London, 1993),89.

[10] *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 11 (Oxford, 1921/22), 407; Peter N. Davies, *The Trade Makers. Elder Dempster in West Africa 1852-1972, 1973-1989 (St* John's, 2000), 1-17.

[11] N.R.P. Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway* vol.1 (Newton Abbot, 1975), 54-59.

[12] Philip Banbury, *Shipbuilders of the Thames and Medway* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 162.

[13] Denis Griffifhs, *Brunei's* Great Western (Wellingborough, 1985), 101.

behind by the *Great Western* because of the delays with their *British Queen.* They therefore chartered the *Sirius,* built in 1837 by Robert Menzies & Son in Leith, Scotland, from the St George and Dublin Steam Packet Company, whose directors Joseph Pirn, James Beale and Paul Twigg were also on the board of the British and American Steam Navigation Company. She was the newest and largest ship of the St George and Dublin company and was running on the London and Cork route.

On 1 March 1838, the following advertisement appeared in British newspapers: "The tree-masted, topsail schooner *Sirius* equipped with auxiliary steam-driven paddle wheels, a most graceful and elegant vessel owned by the British & American Steam navigation Coy, will sail for New York on April 4 and commence the return journey on May 1 . "[14] Forty passengers booked the passage. Eleven of them travelled first class at a price of £140 for room and board, wine included; eight booked second class (in the fore part of the ship) at £80 for room and board, and twenty-one passengers sailed in steerage. The ***Sirius*** left London for Cork on 28 March with a crew of thirty-five, under the command of Richard Roberts, a half-pay lieutenant in the Royal Navy.[15] She coaled at Cork, and sailed from there on 4 April 1838.[16]

The paddle-wheel steamer *Sirius,* at 700 grt, not quite half the size of the *Great Western,* had a head start, but on 5 April she encountered heavy seas and only made good eighty-nine miles that day. The *Great Western* sailed from London for Bristol on 31 March. She was scheduled to start her Atlantic crossing from there on 7 April 1838.[17] However, out of London, in the vicinity of Sheerness, a fire broke out and set the deck on fire. The engines were working at full speed and could not be stopped because of the smoke. It appeared later that no one had thought of setting up a watch. A dismayed Brunei and the scientists accompanying him had to watch from their customs cruiser as the crew fought the fire with pumps and eventually extinguished it. At times the blaze was so ferocious that a total loss of the ship was feared. Many passengers cancelled their bookings.[18] Only one day behind schedule, under the command of Captain James Hosken (1798 - 1885), (also an RN officer), the *Great Western* with seven passengers on board sailed in pursuit of the smaller *Sirius.* That ship, in her first week had a best day's run of 136 miles, while the *Great Western* was able to average 200 miles per day. The average speed of the *Sirius* was 6.7 knots, compared to the *Great Western's* average speed of approximately 9 knots. Daily the distance between the two ships shrank, but the more coal was used up, the faster the *Sirius* became, allowing her to match her pursuer's speed. Once she made a day's run of 218 nautical miles. But towards the end it got tight. Not yet in New York, when the last of the coke and forty-three

[14] Geoffrey Body, *British Paddle Steamers* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 36.

[15] After the Napoleonic Wars, in the late 1820s and early 1830s there were 3689 lieutenants of the Royal Navy, only 669 of whom were on active duty. John Wade (ed.), *The Extraordinary Black Book* (London, 1832), 483. [David Syrett, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660 - 1815* has a "Robert Roberts," commissioned as a lieutenant on 6 March 1808, but no "Richard" in this period. However, "Robert Roberts" is used in *Gore's General Advertiser.* (Ed.)]

[16] R.A.Fletcher, *Steam-Ships. The Story of their Development to the Present Day* (London, 1910), 139.

[17] **Griffiths,** *Brunei's* Great Western, 32-44.

[18] Warren Tute, *Atlantic-Conquest. The Men and Ships of the Glorious Age of Steam* (Boston, 1962), 27.

barrels of resin had been burned, all the cabin furniture cabins and all the yards and topmasts were fed into the fire to maintain the required steam pressure. It is alleged that Captain Roberts forced his crew at gun-point to follow his instructions.[19] On 23 April 1838, after 18 days and 10 hours, the *Sirius* reached New York, anchoring in the North River immediately off the Battery. The historic and exciting race was successfully completed. The excitement which prevailed on the arrival of the steamers was described as follows by the New York Press:

> Nothing could exceed the excitement. The river was covered during the whole day with row-boats, skiffs, and yawls, carrying the wondering people out to get a close view of this extraordinary vessel. While people were yet wondering how the *Sirius* so successfully made out to cross the rude Atlantic, it was announced about 11 a.m. on Monday, from the telegraph, that a huge *steamship was in the offing. "The Great Western! - the Great Western^* was on everybody's tongue. About 2 o'clock p.m. the first curl of her ascending smoke fell on the eyes of the thousands of anxious spectators, and a shout of enthusiasm rose on the air. . . . .Thus the great experiment has been fairly and fully tested, and has been completely successful. The only question now in the case is that of expense. Can steampackets be made to pay?[20]

After only 15 days and 5 hours the *Great Western* had entered the harbour of New York with flying colours. Instigated by this success, on 5 July 1838 the steamer *Royal William* chartered in Liverpool, sailed from the Mersey to Sandy Hook with thirty-two passengers and ten thousand letters on board. After 18 days and 23 hours and an average speed of 7.3 knots the smallest of the three paddle-wheel steamers arrived in New York on 24 July 183 8. But glamorous as these achievements were for the three shipping companies, it was to be others who would reap the harvest of these pioneering exploits.

The question in the New York press "will mail steamers pay?" indicates what the issue was at the end of the 1830s.[21] Ever since the first *Royal William* had sailed, driven by wind and steam, from the Isle of Wight and then from Gravesend on the Thames in 1833 - the same year that the East India Company's shipping monopoly for the route to India ended - the British government was particularly open to the idea of steam navigation. Their intention was to subsidize suitable shipping companies with British mail contracts. On the North Atlantic, the American Black Ball Line's packet boats (which in 1816 had established a regular fortnightly service between New York and England) were dominant. Other American shipping companies followed suit, and in the 1820s almost the entire mail and passenger traffic on the North Atlantic was in American hands. Beyond that, Yankee brigs

[19] Fletcher, *Steam-Ships,* 140.
[20] Cited in John Kennedy, *The History of Steam Navigation* (Liverpool, 1903), 72.
[21] Ronald Hope, *A New History of British Shipping* London , 1990), 263-286.

and schooners were pushing their way into the Mediterranean fruit trade, took over the opium trade with the Far East, and were able to transport low-priced goods from the Far East to Europe via Boston cheaper than the East India Company. In 1834, the mail service, which after the Napoleonic Wars had been transferred from the Post Office to the Admiralty, was for the first time assigned to a private company, the General Steam Navigation Company, on the London - Rotterdam - Hamburg route. Other shipping companies were promised similar mail contracts, which were very profitable. They involved subsidies of between 20 and 40 per cent of the operational cost.

The first successful steamer voyages on shorter routes, for example in the Irish sea, and the outcome of the spectacular race between the *Sirius* and *Great Western* helped, of course, to convince the Admiralty that the future of transportation of mail and people was in steamship navigation. On its return from New York to London, the *Sirius* had passed the packet sailing ship *Tyrian,* which was rolling along on the Atlantic in a lull, and taken over its mail cargo. A Mr. Wychoff, who was carrying business mail for the American embassy in London, also changed ships. The news transmission from America to England, which before the telegraph cable was possible only by sailboat, was faster this time because of the *Sirius.*[22] Compared with the 40 days the best American packet boats required on their westward journey (23 days going east), the *Great Western* had reached New York in 15 days, while she needed only 14 days for the return trip. As a consequence, the Admiralty made a bid for tenders by newspaper advertisement for the regular mail service between England and Halifax, with an additional connection between Halifax and New York: "Steam vessels required for conveying her Majesty's Mails and Despatches between England and Halifax (Nova Scotia), and also between England and Halifax and New York."[23]

The requirement was a monthly departure from one of of Liverpool, Bristol, Plymouth, Falmouth or Southampton by steamboat of at least 300 h.p. Only two offers were submitted. The St George Steam Packet Co., owners of the *Sirius,* offered a transatlantic crossing from Cork to Halifax and subsidiary services with smaller steamers from Cork to Liverpool and from Halifax to New York. The Great Western Steamship company offered only one monthly service from Bristol to Halifax. They were not in a position to ensure connecting services to New York. As neither offer corresponded with the bid, the Admiralty refused both. This created an opportunity for the native Haligonian Samuel Cunard, who had invested money in the *Royal William* in 1831. He went to England in February 1839 to get involved in the contest for subsidies.[24] He owned neither shipping company nor ships, but he had influential friends who opened the doors to government circles for him.

Nothing was decided yet, however. For the Transatlantic Steam Ship Company in Liverpool, the end came in late 1839 when they ceased their activities. Their paddle steamer *Liverpool* had made a total of seven Atlantic crossings, all financial losses. The *Royal*

[22] Lars U. Scholl, "The Global Communications Industry and its Impact on International Shipping before1914" in David J. Starkey and Gelina Harlaftis (eds.), *Global Markets: The Internationalization of the Sea Transport Industries since 1850* (St. John's, 1998), 195-215.

[23] David Budlong Tyler, *Steam Conquers the Atlantic* (New York, 1939), 68.

[24] Francis E. Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic 1840-1973* (London, 1975), 3-8.

William crossed the Atlantic only three times. The third ship, the *Unites States,* was sold to the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co. Ltd, (P&O), right after her launch. The shipping company was dissolved in July 1840 and its assets transferred to the P&O Company.[25]

In July 1839 the British and American Steam Navigation Company was at last able to take over the long-awaited *British Queen* and send her on her maiden voyage from London to New York on 10 July. On 12 July she made a stop-over at Portsmouth before putting off to sea. Her bow was adorned with a white figurehead representing Queen Victoria. The ship had a dining room about 18m long and 9m wide with passage to the laterally arranged cabins. One hundred and three passengers could be accommodated forward of the engine room; the sleeping quarters for another one hundred and four passengers were aft. In the ladies lounge there was a library and a piano. A visitor rapturously called the ship "the St Paul's of naval architecture." The *British Queen* was the largest and fastest steam ship of the day on the North Atlantic. On 1 July 1840 her captain, Richard Roberts, who had already commanded the *Sirius,* wrote to a friend: "I can only state there is no faster sea going vessel in the World, and time will tell. We have beat the *Great Western* every voyage this year... I have made the passage from Portsmouth to New York shorter than ever performed, only 13 d. 11 h from Pilot to Pilot. Let *Great Western* do that if she can, though she has ten hours' shorter distance to run."[26]

After the *British Queen,* the company had ordered a second vessel, practically a sister ship, from Curling & Young. The paddle steamer *President* was scheduled for launching on 7 December 1839. The first attempt failed because the tide was not high enough. A second attempt was not successful either; thus, she only actually "took to the water" on Monday, December 9, 1839. She was towed from Limehouse Dock down the Thames to Blackwall, where she was docked. Later in December she sailed from there to Liverpool, where the two lateral balance engines manufactured by Fawcett and Preston were to have been installed. On the passage in the Channel, however, she suffered considerable storm damage which, coupled with ballast problems, forced her to out into the Plymouth dockyards for repair work.[27] Experts deemed her sailing properties unsound; she was top-heavy and rolled to a disquieting degree, even in relatively calm waters, (a problem compounded because her engines were not yet fitted). After repairs she reached Liverpool without further problems. The two engines had an output of only 540 h.p., much too small for a ship of her size. The *President* differed from the other paddle steamers; she had three decks instead of one. This made her look bigger, even though she was somewhat shorter than the *British Queen.* The *President* looked similar to a frigate, not least because she was adorned with painted ports.[28]

She was built from oak, with pine planking and a continuous upper deck. She had three masts, two of which were aft of the funnel. She was schooner rigged. A contemporary

C.R.Vernon, *British Passenger Liners of the Five Oceans,* (London, 1963), 37.
Fletcher, *Steam-Ships,* 145.
Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway,* 56.
Grifffiths, *Brunei's* Great Western, 104-105.

COMPARATIVE DURATION OF CROSSINGS

Sailing ships	**outgoing**	**return**
Black Ball Line	**33 days 17 hours**	**22 days 12 hours**
Dramatic Line	**30 days 12 hours**	**20 days 12 hours**
Star Line	**30 days**	**24 days**
Swallow Tail Line	**35 days**	**22 days 12 hours**
Paddle steamers		
Great Western	**16 days 12 hours**	**13 days 9 hours**
British Queen	**17 days 8 hours**	**16 days 12 hours**
Liverpool	**17 days 4 hours**	**15 days 16 hours**
Average duration		
Sailing ships	**34 days 1 hour**	**22 days 1 hour**
Paddle steamers	**17 days**	**15 days 4 hours**
Difference	**17 days 1 hour**	**6 days 21 hours**

Charles E. Lee, *The Blue Riband, the Romance of the Atlantic Ferry* (London, 1932), 27.

lithograph gives an impression of the interior furnishings. The dining room was about 12.5m wide and 26.5m long. At the left side, the ladies lounge is visible, to the right one gets to the corridor leading to the two- and four-berth cabins, in which one hundred and ten passengers could be accommodated. Second class accommodation for forty-four passengers was forward of the engine room. The stern was adorned with the British and American flags as well as a lion and an eagle. The figurehead was a portrait of George Washington. The casings of the paddle wheels were each decorated with a pentangular star.

Before she went on her maiden voyage, the *President* was open to an interested public on 30 July 1840. Tickets at a price of one shilling could be obtained from the office of the shipping company. The proceeds were to go to charitable purposes, to be chosen by the mayor.[29] On Saturday, 1 August she left Liverpool under the command of Captain R. J. Fayrer, lieutenant of the Royal Navy, with only a few passengers,[30] as the *Great Western* and the *Acadia* were leaving for New York at about the same time. Fayrer was the former captain of the paddle steamer *Liverpool* of a competing shipping company. On 17 August

[29] *Gore's General Advertiser* No. 3901, 30 July 1840.

[30] *Lloyd's Register* 1840, s.v. "Liverpool." [Syrett, *Commissioned Sea Officers,* shows a Robert John Fayerman, commissioned lieutenant on 19December 1808, and on half pay in August 1814(which would be consistent with having been wounded), but no Fayrer, the name used in contemporary publications. (Ed.)]

1840, the *President* reached New York after 16½ days at an average speed of 8.4 kts. Compared to the *Great Western's* speed, this was not satisfactory. Worse, however, and more detrimental to the reputation of the shipping company, the *President* was overtaken on her maiden voyage by the steamer *Acadia* owned by the new competitor Samuel Cunard, in spite of the fact that the *Acadia* had left three days later.

Cunard had succeeded in obtaining the mail contract, which was subsidized with £55,000, from the British Admiralty[31] on 4 May 1839. In 1840, together with George Burns of Glasgow and David Mclver of Liverpool, owners of competing coast shipping lines between Glasgow and Liverpool, he had founded the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (later known as Cunard Steam Ship Company) and accumulated a starting capital of £270,000, into which he contributed the amount of the subsidies received. The remaining £215,000 came from businessmen in Glasgow and Manchester. In addition, he had contracted with several of the shipbuilders in Port of Glasgow and Greenock for the construction of the four wooden paddle steamers *Britannia, Acadia, Columbia* and *Caledonia.* The experienced engine manufacturer John Napier was to supply the necessary lateral balance engines. The breath-taking speed with which Cunard confronted his competitors with a *fait accompli* was emphasized by the fact that all four ships were ready to sail in 1840. The *Britannia* and *Acadia* were sold to Germany in 1849, after forty and thirty-three transatlantic round-trips respectively, and included in the German fleet as *Barbarossa* and *Erzherzog Johann* respectively.[32]

The disappointing result of the maiden voyage of their paddle steamer *President* prompted the owners to take the utterly unexpected and abrupt step of dismissing Captain Fayrer one day before the ship was to sail for New York. On 17 September the departure of the steamer under the command of Fayrer had still be advertised in *Gore's General Advertiser?*[3] M . M . Keane was appointed in his place, allowing the *President* to leave for New York on 1 October 1840 as scheduled.

But the subject was far from closed. The friends of the dismissed captain convened a public hearing in the "Exchange News Room and Underwriter's Room" for Wednesday, 30 September at 11:00 o'clock.[34] The room was overcrowded in no time. Many influential businessmen from Liverpool, most of the officers resident in this city, and many English and American captains of commercial vessels came. The cotton merchant Thomas Todd,[35] principal owner of the company Todd, Jackson & Co. with head offices at Rumfort Street, was elected by acclamation to chair the meeting. He said "that it was for the purpose of inquiring in to the cause of the late abrupt dismissal of Capt. Fayrer from the command of the *President.'"* He also said that the public had a right to know the reasons for the

[31] Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic,* 30.

[32] Arnold Kludas, " Die Kriegsschiffe des Deutschen Bundes 1848 bis 1853", in Walter Hubatsch (ed.),D;'e *erste deutsche Flotte 1848-1853* (Herford, 1981), 51-60.

[33] *Gore's General Advertiser No.* 3908, 17 September 1840.

[34] *Gore's General Advertiser No.* 3910, 1 October 1840.

[35] I owe this information to Adrian Allan, archivist at the Sydney Jones Library of Liverpool University. Todd lived in number 10 Abercromby Square in the 1840s.

dismissal, as the prestige of a vessel was dependent mainly on the character of her captain. Fayrer had served in the Royal Navy with distinction, had been wounded defending his country, and had acquired an impeccable reputation in the merchant marine. He had been entrusted with the *President,* "in preference of other applicants, principally for the ability and skill which he had displayed in command of the *Liverpool."*

A passenger, Samuel Cossins, got up and reported that they had been somewhat disappointed that the passage lasted sixteen days. But the captain could not be blamed for this. They were convinced that he had done everything possible to make the passage a swift one. The experienced engineer William Jones, who had also been on board, commented that if the directors wished the *President* to sail faster, she would have to be equipped with stronger engines. One Mr. Daniel Neilson had calculated that instead of the available 540 h.p., an additional 270 h.p. at least would be required. The experts, colleagues and passengers were all in support of Captain Fayrer and expressed their disapproval of the shipping company's action.

Captain Keane had sailed for New York on 1 October. Only two weeks later the shipping company announced another voyage from Liverpool scheduled for 1 December 1840. Keane left New York on 2 November, but because of strong north-easterly storms he had to turn around on 9 November to bunker more coal. On 11 November he sailed again from New York, reaching Liverpool only on 27 November. Subsequently, the passage scheduled for 1 December was cancelled. On 26 November, the day before the *President* arrived, *Gore's General Advertiser,* published a long article that discussed her failure to arrive.[36] The *President* and the packet boat *Oxford* were supposed to have left New York on 2 November. The two ships were anxiously expected. While the sailboat was still within normal scheduled time, the steamer was overdue. Since the day before had been very foggy and the semaphore was not working, people had been waiting with great apprehension for the ship to appear on the Mersey. Speculation about the causes for the delay were rampant. Some thought she was out of coal, others presumed engine damage, others again supposed that bad weather had delayed her departure. On the following Thursday the readers were informed about the strong storms which had caused the delayed arrival. Keane too had failed to satisfy the senior management of the shipping company, and he was also discharged.

On 14 January 1841, the shipping company gave notice that Lieutenant Richard Roberts was to take command of the *President* on her passage from Liverpool to New York on 10 February. He would have preferred to remain on the *British Queen,* probably because he was aware of the engine problems of the *President.* He is rumoured to have called the steamer a "coffin ship."[37] Finally he agreed, after the management of the company agreed that the First Engineer Peterson of the *British Queen,* would be transferred as well. On 10 February the ship left on her third round-trip with modified paddle wheels. It took her twenty-one days to reach New York. Her third captain could not equal the time of the *Great Western,* let alone beat it. After only eight days the *President* was loaded again, and with a

Gore's General Advertiser **No.** 3918, 26 November 1840 and No. 3919, 3 December 1840.
Hocking, *Dictionary of Disasters at Sea,* 563.

total of one hundred and thirty-six people on board was ready to sail. She left New York on 11 March 1841 and sank on her way to Liverpool in the North Atlantic without leaving any traces. What happened? Why was she lost while other ships crossing the Atlantic at the same time reached their destination safely?

To the viewer of Achenbach's painting, showing the *President* fighting the elements, surrounded by icebergs, the parallel with the *Titanic,* ramming by iceberg and sunk on her maiden voyage on 15 April 1912, comes spontaneously to mind. Had a similar accident occurred almost 70 years? Had the *President* collided with an iceberg and sunk? While a large number of the passengers of the *Titanic* were rescued, the *President* in 1841, on her way back from New York to Liverpool, disappeared and left no trace. It was therefore not possible for her contemporaries, nor for later generations, to reconstitute the exact course of the accident. The great interest of the public for the fate of the *President,* which attained the sad prominence of being the first steamer to go down in the North Atlantic, gave rise to much speculation as to the possible cause of the accident.

What influence did this public speculation have upon the selection of Achenbach as the artist for this special commission, or his composition of the subject? Was the portrayal consistent with known facts?

People in Liverpool first began to worry on Saturday, 3 April 1841. *The Times* reported that the packet sailboat *Virginian* was expected to arrive soon, having left New York not before 14 March.[38] Perhaps her master, Captain Allen, would bring news about the *President.* On the morning of 5 April it was reported that the *Virginian* had not seen the *President.* On 7 April at 10:15 a.m. the *President* still had not arrived. Communication with Holyhead by semaphore was interrupted by to fog and smoke. *The Times* published a list of the twenty-seven passengers and two children who had embarked in New York. Among them was the famous actor Tyrone Power (1797 - 1841) who, as a comedian of Irish descent, had enjoyed great success on the theatre stages of the London West End since 1826.[39] But there were no Germans, or any other person whose name might suggest why the commission would be of interest to or given to a German painter.[40]

The Liverpool paper *Albion* was the first to that the steamer might have deviated from her route to the south in order to bunker fresh coal at Fayal in the Azores, as she had done in the winter of 1839 when she had been en route for twenty-seven days. On 8 April two articles appeared in *The Times.* They reviewed the many speculations circulating of the unfortunate steam-ship's probable fate. Experienced sailors suspected that in view of the length of the vessel that she might have suffered great, if not fatal damage in the heavy storm that was ravaging the North American east coast on 12 - 13 March, and sunk. The second article was prefaced with the following sentence, on the one hand referring to the disastrous second voyage, but on the other hand also pointing out its happy ending: "This is the second time within these months that intense anxiety has been created in the public mind relative to the fate of this fine vessel... The vessel has, at present, been only two days

[38] All information originates from *The Times* April to November 1841.

[39] *Dictionary of National Biography vol.* 17 (Oxford, 1921/22), 260.

[40] The passenger list was published in *The Times,* 7 April 1841.

longer at sea than the period which elapsed between the 2nd and 27th of November, and we yet hope to hear of her arrival." Care was taken to stress that technical improvements had been made which resulted in lower fuel consumption, and that the performance under sail had considerably improved as compared to the voyage from London to Liverpool, when the *President* had had to stop at Plymouth.

Speculation continued. On 9 April a report was discounted that the sailing ship *Orpheus* had been in touch with the *President* on 12 March. "There is no account of the steamer having been seen after she left New York on the 11th, the *Orpheus* having sailed two hours after her." The following day a passenger who had made the second voyage under Captain Keane came forward and declared that in spite of the heavy storm there never had been any doubt among those on board regarding the safety of the ship. He had "never been in a better or a safer sea-boat." Others suggested that the *President* had returned to New York or had turned off to the Bermudas rather than to Fayal to bunker coal, because no fuel was available there. If she had returned to New York, she would only have sailed again on 26 April. "A few days longer, and the uncertainty and the alarm which prevail respecting the fate of this unfortunate ship may be expected to be cleared up and removed." On Monday 12 April it was presumed that any hour news of the ship would arrive. On the same day, a letter reached the office of the editors of *The Times,* indicating that on 7 April a steamer had been observed in the vicinity of Cork which was believed to be the *President.* Furthermore, it was announced that Lord Fitzroy Lennox, second son of the Duke of Richmond, was among the passengers. He had been serving as an infantry lieutenant in Canada and was now on his way to his new regiment.

On 13 April, thirty-two days after the departure from New York, *The Times* still attempted to keep up hope. Now the possibility was discussed that the ship might have sailed to Madeira. It had been learned that on 11 April Mrs. Roberts, the captain's wife, had received letters from which it appeared that the ship had been seen in Madeira. She also had received a letter from Captain Fayrer who was of the same opinion: "There is no doubt for the safety of the *President.* No doubt something has happened to the rudder or engines but I will stake my reputation on the stability of the ship. I have no doubt she has gone to Bermuda." On the following day, early in the morning, there was a great commotion in Liverpool. A steamer from Ireland reported that a very large steam ship was standing off waiting for the tide to enter the Victoria channel. It was immediately assumed that this was the *President.* On Friday, 16 April, the Queen asked to be informed immediately by special courier as soon as the ship had arrived.

Meanwhile the shipping company had sailed their second vessel, the *British Queen* from Portsmouth to New York on 11 March. She diverted to Halifax on 29 March because her rudder was damaged. The reason given was drift ice. This explanation was soon disclaimed, but now ice had been introduced in the debate, and at once the possibility rased that the *President* might have encountered ice as well. Other accounts cropped up that the *Caledonia* (Cunard Line) had also been caught in ice. This discussion was reported in detail on 17 April. On 20 April, Captain Fayrer said that he was convinced a rudder damage had forced the *President* to call at the Bermudas, but information could realistically be obtained

from there before 25 April. "Captain Roberts is a sharp fellow, and will do much under any difficulties. He has his own engineer and officers - every thing to give confidence." On 26 April one Palinurus (faithful helmsman, actually the helmsman of Aeneas) wrote that icebergs were not found in the region where the *President* was supposed to have been in February and March, but rather in May or June. Coming from the Bermudas, a ship reached New York on 9 April without any information about the *President.* This was reported in Liverpool on 30 April 1841. The daily reporting in *The Times* stopped after 30 April. Obviously, in London the view generally prevailed that the *President* was lost at sea. In Liverpool, *Gore's General Advertiser* announced in mid-May that "accounts from the Bermudas to the 8th of April, 27 days after this vessel left New York, have destroyed every hope which existed, that, if she did not founder in the storm of the 12th and 13th of March, but was merely damaged, she might reach that island."[41]

One week later it became known that the *President,* which had cost £85,000, had insurance coverage only for £60,000. "If, which seems but probable, she has been lost, the company will, therefore, lose £25,000."[42] For the entire month of June, *Gore's General Advertiser* kept silent. On 1 July 1841 however, James Hosken, captain of the *Great Western,* spoke up on the occasion of an inquiry into the cause of the disappearance of the *President.* He ruled out that waves breaking over the ship might have extinguished the fires in the boilers. A solid steamer was the safest ship that had ever sailed the seas, even if there had been some damage to the engines. He was then quoted saying, "I am not called upon nor do I feel justified in giving any opinion respecting what may have happened to the *President* which I yet believe is above water, possibly a log, working about at the mercy of winds and waves. Capt. Roberts is a sailor with energy of character and resources from a long experience, which is a strong inducement for hope that the *President* will yet be heard of."[43] This investigation had been initiated by the British consul in New York, Mr. Buchanan. He had invited a number of experts to the consulate in the beginning of July, "for the purposes of inquiring into the condition of this steam ship when she put to sea last from new York, what cargo she had, how her coal was stowed, whether there was any deficiency of spars, yards, &c, whether or not she was hogged or strained by previous storms, and every particular connected with her up to the last time that she was sent to sea, so far as known by any one in the United States."[44] The representative of the pilots of New York stated that Captain Roberts had started on the assumption that he would make a fast crossing, that his ship was in good condition, that he had sufficient fuel on board and that the *President* was well trimmed. The most important statement was given by Captain Cole. He had last seen the *President* at sundown on 12 March on the crest of a giant wave, pitching under enormous difficulties. She had been in that dangerous part of the Atlantic between the Nantucket Shoal and St George's Bank, where the waves were building up four and five storeys high. He assumed that a great amount of water had entered her in a very short time

[41] *Gore's General Advertiser* No. 3942, 13 May 1841.
[42] *Gore's General Advertiser* No. 3943, 20 May 1841.
[43] *Gore's General Advertiser* **No.** 3950, 1 July 1841.
[44] ***The Times,*** 29 June 1841.

and possibly quenched the fire in the boilers. On 13 March the wind had suddenly turned from northeast to southeast and the sea became even more agitated. He presumed that the *President* had not survived this storm and had sunk on the night from 12/13 March with all persons on board. This assumption was backed by Captain Waite of the packet sailboat *England* as well as all other nautical experts.[45]

Before a hearing committee of the House of Commons in May 1843, Captain Edward Chappell RN,[46] said that legislative measures were required to make accidents of steam ships less likely. He had been warning already in 1839 or 1840 that sooner or later a dreadful accident was bound to happen. When asked whether he had the *President* in mind he replied, "No, certainly not." He had been thinking of her as well, but he had misgivings in the first place about other ship of the same size. The reasons he gave were the withstanding force of material in a ship of 2000 tons that had been designed only for a steamer of 1400 tons. When he was questioned in detail, he explained that he had inspected both the *President* and the *British Queen* under construction. Therefore he had been referring to both ships. Admittedly, the shipyard was as competent as any other in the world, and they had observed the design specifications of the contract painstakingly. But the strength of the beams and planks had been insufficient.[47]

At the end of July 1841, the shipping company invited the public to visit the *British Queen* in Liverpool. The entrance fees brought in a sum of about £336. The closest relatives of each and every member of the crew received 5 shillings a week for eight weeks. The rest of the money was distributed among the widows and children. The widows received £5 each, the children under fourteen, 10 shillings each.[48] The press which carried this news story also published reports from Philadelphia. The captain of the *North Bend* had seen a wreck afloat near Cape Hatteras, burned down to the waterline. He therefore had been unable to see the ship's name. He said, however, it must have been a ship with three decks. He therefore supposed it must have been the *President?*[49] This was the last time in 1841 that *Gore's General Advertiser* report on the *President.*

On 17 September 1841, *The Times* printed a longer report which was based on an article in the *New York Herald'.* This paper in turn was quoting the *St Thomas Times,* which had printed a story about reported a bottle containing a message which had been retrieved. The title was "On Iceberg, March 17,1841." It was claimed that on 14 March *the President*

[45] The commission comprised Vice Admiral Jacob Walton, George Barclay, Lloyd's representative in the port of New York, Thomas W. Moore, Royal post agent, Henry Smith, representative of the Wadsworth and Smith company and shipbroker of the *President* and *British Queen,* Captains Benjamin White, Cole and Bell and other nautical experts.

[46] Lieutenant 18 April 1811, Commander 19 August 1826, Captain 27 December 1838. An officer with considerable experience in steam, since 1828 he had been the superintendent of the Post Office steam packets. In 1817 he had written *A Narrative of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay in His Majesty's Ship* Rosamund, an account of an 1814 convoy. In 1841 he published *The Reports Relative to Smith's Patent Screw Propeller.* [Ed.]

[47] British Parliamentary Papers. *First and Second Reports from the Select Committee on Shipwrecks with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index.* Shipping Safety 3 (Shannon, 1970), 46-49 (11 May 1843).

[48] *Gore's General Advertiser* No. 3953, 29 July 1841.

[49] *Gore's General Advertiser* No. 3953. He said he had seen the wreck on 3 July.

had been pushed on an ice floe by the storm and had been filled with water so fast "that we had barely time to escape to the ice before she went down." Many details were elaborated before the author ended with the remark, "My hand freezes, and I cannot write no more, [sic]" - not without commenting that the last few days on the floating prison they had survived on a shark cadaver and a few bottles of wine. *The Times* commented on this letter with the observation that this was a shameful and foul prank. The excerpt from the letter was sufficient proof that it had never been written on an ice floe. It had been established long ago that the *President* had never collided with an ice floe that made it sink. "We proved by extracts from the logbooks of the *South America,* the *Gladiator,* and *Paoli* that the numerous icebergs which filled the Atlantic last spring did not come from the north till one month and one day after the *President* left the harbour of New York." The *President* had, and this opinion was based on the statement of Captain Cole who had last seen the paddle steamer from his ship *Orpheus* in the night of 12 March, gone down with all on board. Cole had taken the same route as the *President* and he did not see any icebergs. Besides, it was not very likely that the storm would have driven the icebergs south, but the bottle with the message north. The article ended with the hypothetical question: "But, to have done with this hoax, we will ask if there is any one who believes for a moment that the above extract, so long, and worded so nicely and correctly, was written on a cake of ice in the middle of the Atlantic, with death staring the writer in the face, and the thermometer perhaps never so low?"[50]

For the last time *The Times* was occupied with the fate of the unfortunate paddle steamer, and again quoted American newspapers that stressed once more that the ship could not possibly have sunk because of the force of the storm and the agitated sea. Referring to the American frigate *Potomac,* that had almost been lost on the St. George's Bank, the report suggested that the storm might have forced the *President* to turn into the wind and that she had been directly in front of the bank when she was last seen.[51] Finally, there was a paper in Cork venturing an account of a message in bottle "from a well-known comedian" - they were referring to Tyrone Power - which had been washed on shore. The note supposedly said that the *President* was due to sink soon.[52]

Before turning to Achenbach's painting, it may be helpful to summarize the facts. The *President* was not near any icebergs. A disaster similar to the sinking of the *Titanic* some seventy years later did not occur. In all probability the paddle steamer went down in the storm that was raging on 12 March 1841. Any other conclusion is too speculative. This is what William J. Leathern portrayed in his oil, "The *President* as last seen signalling with the Brig *Pearl,"* now in the Merseyside Maritime Museum. Leathern lived in Brighton but between 1840 and 1855 had exhibitions mostly in London. He was specialized in the depiction of storms and dramatic scenes at sea. Leathem's painting, dated 1841, portrayed the *President* from port as she is washed over by a huge wave. The bowsprit is broken. Both on the upper deck and on the quarter-deck groups of people are depicted. The *President* has

[50] *The Times,* 17 September 1841.

[51] *The Times,* 17 November 1841.

[52] C.R.Benstead, *Atlantic Ferry* (London, 1936), 78.

three flags set on the mizzen. The message signalled to the *Pearl* cannot be identified.[53]

By contrast, clearly either Andreas Achenbach painted the ship in a setting that was a product of his own imagination, or was based on a suggestion of the buyer. But to determine that, some other questions need to be answered. Who commissioned the painting? Why was Andreas Achenbach chosen to execute the painting and why was the scene, colliding with an iceberg, picked from any number possibilities?

The dimensions of the painting suggests that it was commissioned by a wealthy patron who had the appropriate facilities to hang such a large painting. From Martina Sitt's researches we know that the painting had hung in the art gallery of the grand duke of Baden in Karlsruhe before it went to auction in Munich in September 1930.[54] Unfortunately, the archives in Karlsruhe where the painting was registered and last referred to in 1921, have no further information about either the exact circumstances of the commission or of the acquisition. Only the date of the purchase, November 1842, could be ascertained. There are, however, a few letters in existence which deal with the payment of a "large oil painting, showing the loss of the *President."* Frommel, the director of the art gallery, wrote that the price of the painting was 270 Friedrichs' or a sum equalling 1528 Taler which was about half of the yearly salary of the director of Diisseldorf s art academy, Wilhelm von Schadow. This extraordinary price for the painting was well above of what Achenbach had asked for a painting hitherto. Obviously it was not easy to get the sum from the grand duke who had some outstanding commitments for his art gallery. In November 1843 there was still money to be paid to the artist. Martina Sitt concluded from the correspondence that it was the grand duke rather than the gallery's director Frommel who wanted the painting in his art collection. Nothing could be found showing how the painting was received in Karlsruhe by visitors to the gallery.

Apart from costs of 91 Guilders little is known about the transfer of the painting from Achenbach's studio in Diisseldorf to Karlsruhe. Since both cities are either on or close to the river Rhine, the most likely means of transport of the rolled canvas was a steamboat or river barge tugged upstream to the port of destination. Surprisingly, all the newspapers in Diisseldorf remain silent over this event. This is unusual because on other occasions they reported about Achenbach like court commentators.[55] The young artist must have worked quite hard in order to finish this prestigious commission. In his day it was a common in Diisseldorf for artists to open their studio for one or two days and present their latest work for a few hours to the public.

The question why the grand duke commissioned the painting cannot be answered

[53] I thank Anthony Tibbies, Liverpool, for drawing my attention to this painting. Leathern painted another version of the *President,* showing the steamer in the storm of November 1840, but the location of this work is not known.

[54] Martina Sitt, " Die Geschichte des Gemaldes", in Lars U. Scholl and Martina Sitt, „Der Untergang der PRESIDENT. Ein Gemàlde des Dusseldorfer Malers Andreas Achenbach" in *Deutsches Schiffahrtsarchiv, 22* (1999), 425-456, esp.446-454. Bought by the Stern Gallery in Diisseldorf, it was sold to a Carl Schwarz in Leipzig. From there it went to a private collector in Diisseldorf who in turn gave it to the Art Museum in Diisseldorf in 1987.

[55] See Martina Sitt *(ed.), Andreas und Oswald Achenbach: "Das A und O der Landschaft"(* Kôln, 1997), 187.

despite extensive research. Even a check of the passenger list in order to find out whether relatives or friends or any other persons who could have the faintest interest to the duke did not reveal any information. The duke's biography has to be written yet, so his private life remains obscure. He does not appear to have had personal and family ties to Great Britain. However, his residential city of Karlsruhe was so close to the river Rhine that he developed an interest in shipping and inland navigation and he planned to have a harbour built to connect Karlsruhe with international shipping. It was just twenty-five years earlier that steamships from Great Britain, Holland and Belgium had started to operate on the Rhine, giving the grand duchy access to international trade.

Martina Sitt has asked if the mysterious disappearance of the *President* could be connected with the political situation in the grand duchy in the years before the political upheaval in Germany of 1848. In his diary (16 August 1841), the duke made there a reference to King Belshazzar who was giving a banquet for his nobles drinking from vessels of gold and silver which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the sanctuary at Jerusalem. "Suddenly there appeared the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster of the palace wall. ... At this the king's mind was filled with dismay and he turned pale, he became limp in every limb and his knee knocked together." Nobody could read the words but Daniel who interpreted the inscription: *"mené mené tekel u-pharsin.* God has numbered the days of yours kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in balance and found wanting and your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."[56] Could this story from the old testament have anything to do with the Duke's mental disposition linking King Belshazzar's fate and the loss of the *President* and interpreting the loss as a menetekel? A shipwreck caused by an iceberg could be looked at as meaningful motif. This is perhaps going too far and may have to be dismissed as pure speculation for the time being. However, shipwrecks do have a suggestiveness and a highly allegorical substance.

Andreas Achenbach was a former student at the art academy in Diisseldorf. His fame was established very early in his career. Although he never became a professor at the academy his influence on the reputation of the institute and on many students was enormous. Generally he is regarded as the father of marine painting in Germany. At the age of twenty he was able to sell his painting *Large seascape with a lighthouse* to King Frederic of Prussia in 1835. The following year the Bavarian King Ludwig I. bought his painting *Stormy Sea off the Swedish Coast.*

Achenbach travelled widely in Europe with his father and went to Holland and Norway in the early 1830s where he was fascinated by the shore and the sea. In July 1835 he met the marine artist Friedrich Theodor Klofi (1806-1876) in Copenhagen. KloB had been educated by the famous Danish marine artist C. W. Eckersberg[57] and became a professor at the art academy in the Danish capital. Achenbach was impressed by his host's seascape paintings. After his return from Norway, Achenbach had important sales of seascape

[56] *The New English Bible* (Oxford, 1970),Daniel, 5:25-28.

[57] Catalogue: The Royal Museum of Fine Arts (éd.), C. *W.Eckersberg and his Pupils* (Copenhagen, 1983).

paintings in Germany. The Stàdelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt bought the painting "Stormy Sea off the Norwegian Coast." This canvas dates from 1837 and shows a sailing vessel in a choppy sea struggling for survival. It has similar dimensions as the grand duke's commission. In the same year he painted another painting "Stranded Ship at a Northerly Coast," now in the art museum in Wiesbaden. It is possible that KloB, who was of German origin and had been the drawing teacher of the royal sea cadets, drew Achenbach's attention to detailed studies of the ship. So Achenbach's reputation as a celebrated marine artist may have been a decisive element in the grand duke's decision to order the large painting from his studio in Diisseldorf. The grand duke may have envied the two capitals, Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, and wanted his own dramatic paintings. Achenbach's early fame rested on his love for the dramatic scenes in heavy seas. His intention was to stir the emotions of the viewer who was pitying the crew desperately fighting against too powerful forces of nature.

Ships in stormy seas and shipwrecks were by no means an invention of the nineteenth century.[58] In the works of Allart van Everdingen, Jacob Adriansz Beelevois, Jan PeetersWilliam van der Velde in the seventeenth century and Claude Joseph Vernet, Philip de Loutherbourg, William Turner, Copley Fielding, Caspar David Friedrich or Johann Christian Clauseen Dahl in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are shipwrecks to be found. So the subject was very common in the 1840s when the *President* disappeared. As we have seen in the second part of this paper, no one knew anything about the circumstances of the loss of the *President.* Considering the fact that such a large oil painting was commissioned to be displayed in the grand duke's art gallery one has to conclude that the canvas belongs to the genre of *sensational paintings.* Painted for display in one of the gallery's saloons it was intended to make the visitors shiver and make them thank God for not meeting their fate in icy waters. Achenbach had not intended to give a realistic account of the event for the obvious reason that he could not. It was more important to make the viewer aware of what little chance human beings stood against huge waves and gigantic icebergs.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that other collectors asked Achenbach to create further versions of this frightening catastrophe. In 1850 he reproduced the incident in a smaller version, unfortunatley lost during the Second World War. However, a lithograph of this painting was made and a few copies were produced before the stone broke into pieces. The art museum in Diisseldorf and the art gallery in Hamburg both have a copy in their collections. Achenbach was able to satisfy the public's sensationalism for watching a most dramatic scene from a safe and dry position while the passengers and the crew aboard the *President* were doomed to loose their lives at any minute.[59]

[58] See Sabine Mertens, *Seesturm und Schiffbruch. Eine motivgeschichtliche Studie* (Hamburg, 1987).

[59] I would like to thank Adrian Jarvis,Dawn Littler and Antony Tibbies of Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, John Armstrong, Thames Valley University London, David M. Williams, University of Leicester, and Barbara Stirner, Zurich for their help.