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Suzanne M. Singletary, *James McNeill Whistler and France: A Dialogue in Paint, Poetry, and Music*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. xv + 204 pp. Figures, plates, notes, bibliography, and index. \$150.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4724-4200-0.

Response by Suzanne M. Singletary, Jefferson (Philadelphia University + Thomas Jefferson University).

I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the review. In doing so, I will outline the specific goals of my manuscript and address the discrepancies between my text and the assertions of the reviewer. *James McNeill Whistler and France: A Dialogue in Paint, Poetry and Music* has a very specific focus upon the artistic “dialogues” or interchanges between Whistler and several renowned French painters. These artists are spotlighted strategically because of each one’s canonical status. This list is hardly exhaustive; a study of a broader scope could undoubtedly include other significant “dialogues,” such as Paul Gauguin and Odilon Redon, two notable examples. Investigation into Whistler’s reciprocity with or influence upon these specific figures determined the shape of the bibliography that necessarily includes scholarship deemed most relevant to the thesis of this text whose purpose is to call attention to an understudied aspect of Whistler’s aesthetic enterprise. There is no reason to repeat the arguments over the urban atmospherics and veiled geographical specificity of the *Nocturnes* when these aspects have already been sufficiently and thoroughly explored. That is not the stated rationale for this book nor do these topics fall within its parameters.

Similarly, positioning Whistler within the nexus of his British colleagues has been well established and is in no way disputed within this study, but rather referenced at certain points, specifically in chapter two. Nowhere is there a claim that a single narrative can account for the complexities of nineteenth-century artistic production and its relationship to cultural modernity or that “permeable boundaries” did not fuel artistic expression. Indeed, in the book Whistler is upheld as a cross-cultural catalyst because of his peripatetic lifestyle. However, the goal of *James McNeill Whistler and France* is to trace Whistler’s incipient aestheticism to earlier in his career and to examine its French roots in the writings of seminal literary and artistic figures. This exploration expands the perspectives in which his output can be read. To this end, online sources and correspondence are frequently consulted, as seen by notes to the text. The specific intentions and scope of this study are clearly outlined and justified in the book’s introduction.

Moreover, there are other instances when the reviewer has misrepresented or misinterpreted the text, at times taking key elements out of context. For example, the reviewer claims a “vague conceit” in chapter two that apparently carries over into chapter three, but does not back up this remark with any documentation or clarify what exactly is the “vague conceit.” There is no claim in chapter four that Mallarmé’s “affiliation” with Monet made him “an Ideal translator” of Whistler’s *Ten O’Clock* lecture, as the reviewer asserts, but only that Monet arranged a luncheon between Mallarmé and Whistler where the translation was initially discussed. The affinity between Mallarmé and Whistler predated this 1888 meeting, as Mallarmé’s 1876 essay “The Impressionists and Edouard Manet” clearly attests. Chapter five focuses attention upon Seurat’s little-known admiration for Whistler that is contextualized within

the Symbolist milieu of artists, writers, and musicians in which Seurat can be situated. There is no assertion that Seurat was Whistler's "most revelatory Parisian interlocutor," as the reviewer states, and neither is the larger aesthetic context ignored. Seurat's butterfly and the running girl, conspicuously positioned in *La Grande Jatte*, are springboards to investigation of the unexpected Whistler-Seurat aesthetic "dialogue." Additionally, the reviewer incorrectly describes Seurat's running girl as a "girl jumping a rope," which is the activity of Connie Gilchrist in Whistler's portrait of the vaudeville entertainer, an error that confuses a key aspect of the argument. Similarly, the description of the Japanese porcelain vase on the mantel in *Symphony in White #2: the Little White Girl* is described in the text as blue-and-white "ceramics," referencing not only the physical vase but also its mirrored reflection. There is no suggestion that there are "several vases." In addition, Whistler's painting technique was a merging of observation (*sur le motif*) and memory, as was explained in chapter one in reference to the *Nocturnes* specifically. Despite the reviewer's claims to the contrary, definitions of key terms—most particularly Baudelairean *correspondances*—are reiterated, amplified and contextualized throughout the study to support the argument of each chapter. In reference to Baudelaire, the point is not when Whistler knew *Les Fleurs du Mal* but how he deployed its meaning for him in his work.

While the reviewer is certainly entitled to disagree with the methodology, conclusions, and sources of the book, there is one claim that is objective and should be corrected, namely the number of color images included. The reviewer states that there is one color image (or "signature") included in the book. There are, in fact, thirty-nine, high-contrast color plates. The reviewer is correct that any discussion of Whistler's work would be impossible if only black-and-white reproductions were available to the reader. In black-and-white reproduction, Whistler's *Nocturnes*, for example, do indeed resemble "a pot of paint flung in the public's face," as critic John Ruskin famously complained. While no color reproduction can convey the subtleties of a Whistler *Nocturne*, the thirty-nine high-contrast color plates are indispensable in supporting the major arguments threaded throughout each chapter and the artistic "dialogues" between Whistler and the artists under consideration.

The reviewer appears to assess *Whistler and France* through a very specific and already established prism. What the reviewer calls the "circular nature of the argument" in *Whistler and France* is in fact the tracing of significant themes and variations within French nineteenth-century art and thought that link Whistler to his French cohorts and to the French aesthetic milieu. The aim is not to flatten out differences among principals, but rather to train a lens on the rich aesthetic discourse that ensued.

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