

Elizabeth Robins Pennell, Nineteenth-Century Pioneer of Modern Art Criticism by Kimberley Morse Jones. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. 221 pp. + 29 b/w illus. ISBN 978-1-4724-5385-3. \$109.95

Elizabeth Robins, later Pennell (1855-1936), was an American (born in Philadelphia) who spent her working life in England as a journalist and author, specializing in art commentary. Her professional name became especially associated with that of fellow American expatriate James McNeill Whistler as she and her husband Joseph Pennell devoted more and more of their energies to promoting, explaining, and defending this controversial artist during his life and far beyond his death in 1903. She has lately been acknowledged as one of the most active and productive art journalists of her time; Kimberley Morse Jones's volume now provides us with the "first full-length study of a remarkable woman and heretofore neglected art critic."

Brought up by her father, a widowed banker, and given a Roman Catholic education to the age of eighteen, Pennell was a capable young woman looking for ways to use her abilities – but not, it seems, contemplating higher education – when in the late 1870s she was taken under the wing of her uncle, Charles Godfrey Leland, a well-off gentleman interested in literature, art, and philanthropy. Through him she became involved in learning and teaching art and design after a Ruskinian fashion, and trying her hand at authorship, publishing her first essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1881. Her first appearance as an art commentator followed in 1883, by which time she was determined to make journalism her main activity. Leland got her a commission to work with the illustrator Joseph Pennell (two years her junior); their friendship appears to have developed rapidly. Though Morse Jones does not scrutinize the character of their lifelong relationship, they appear to have had, in 1884, a companionate marriage in which sexuality played little part; instead, professional interests bound the two parties in a team of equals. After marrying, the couple left for England, which became their adopted country, where their careers flourished both separately and jointly within the setting of London aestheticism. Pennell gained commissions for a range of writing including biography (*Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1884), a cookery column ("Wares of Autolycus," *Pall Mall Gazette*), travel writing (*Over the Alps on a Bicycle*, 1898), and exhibition reviews for both American and British outlets, as well as more discursive writings on art and design. For these latter appearances she used several pseudonyms, most of them gender-neutral, over the years.

After 1900, Whistler was the most important figure in the Pennells' cultural universe and "for the next thirty-five years Whistler would continue