

Whistler: A Life for Art's Sake by Daniel E. Sutherland. New Haven: Yale UP, 2014. xvi, 440 pp. + 12 colour, 94 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-300-20346-2. \$40.00.

James McNeill Whistler is an ambitious topic for any biographer. Indeed, perhaps, intentionally so. Notable historian Daniel E. Sutherland has produced an impressive and weighty volume that will be a rich scholarly resource for years to come. He particularly enhances information provided in previous biographies through his incorporation of excerpts from letters from the online edition of Whistler's correspondence edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort, and Nigel Thorp.

Aside from his own intriguing life and lifestyle, Whistler provides an effective lens for studying nineteenth-century luminaries and their contexts, particularly in France and Great Britain. These include Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Edgar Degas, Henry James, John Ruskin, and Oscar Wilde. Yet Whistleriana is a challenging subject due to its interdisciplinary and international complexity as well as the artist's inimitable personality. Not easily categorized, the researcher is challenged to delve beneath the colourful persona Whistler created in his own time and established for the future particularly through his autobiographical volume *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890). He clearly assessed the modern notion of celebrity.

In the annals of art history, Whistler is generally categorized as an American artist. Yet one could just as easily argue for French or British classification as his training and career centred primarily in Paris and London. And, although he was born in the United States, he spent a good part of his childhood abroad. His fluency in French assisted his immersion into the Parisian milieu of the 1850s. When corrected as to his claim of being born elsewhere, Whistler simply responded, "I do not *choose* to be born in Lowell, Massachusetts." In such manner, his knack for storytelling and embellishment further complicates the biographer's task.

Yet there is something essentially American about Whistler, perhaps apparent in the innate irreverence and love of narrative that he incorporated into his lifestyle (if not his artwork). He held his own against the great wits of the day and at times confounded his audience as to how to interpret him: was he a serious artist with genuine talent or simply a self-promoting showman akin to the likes of P.T. Barnum (a native from Whistler's own true land of birth)? His letters reveal insights and, at times, a self-doubt not reflected in his public self. He aptly depicted his multi-faceted persona through his pervasive symbol – a graceful and delicate butterfly with a powerful stinger, charming to behold yet often with an edge, leading to the dissolution of many relationships – both professional and personal. As Sutherland puts it, "Whistler