

Whistler and German Histories of Modern Painting: Another Case of *Art and Art Critics*

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The story of Whistler and Germany is a story of forgetting. In the 1860s and 1870s, Whistler ordered wines from a wine merchant in Mainz, Siegfried Ladenburg, for a total of half a pot of paint in Ruskinian currency.¹ Ladenburg's shop no longer exists but the invoice he sent to Whistler survives: on the list is a sparkling Riesling from the first-class location "Scharzhofberg" and other wines of superior quality. Whistler never paid for these golden liquids. Perhaps he forgot. More certain is that Germany forgot about Whistler. In 1980 the German art historian Klaus Berger thought it was "curious that the acknowledged avant-garde artist today is so forgotten and unknown."²

Whistler was not always ignored by the German art world, however, and this essay offers an explanation for the long-lasting art-historical amnesia. It focuses on Whistler's important contribution to the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888; and on Richard Muther (1860–1909), art critic and leading German art historian of the 1890s, who had an important role to play in the efforts to establish Whistler as a modern artist in Germany. Muther also helped to shape a neo-idealistic interpretation of Whistler, which made him famous there. And lastly, we have to look at the figure of Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935), another art critic, and what he did effectively to delete Whistler from the German art-historical canon. It is another story of *Art and Art Critics*, this time without Whistler's participation and without pamphlets, but with a lot of heavy German volumes on modern art.

Whistler entered the German exhibition scene on a major scale in 1888. Two years earlier, he had sent two pictures to the Jubiläums-Ausstellung (Jubilee Exhibition) in Berlin, celebrating the centenary of the Königliche Akademie der Künste (Royal Academy of Arts). Whistler was disappointed not to receive a gold medal for his *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* (see fig. 10.2),

1 The unsettled account with S. Ladenburg runs up to a total of £114.15.0; see invoice, October 9, 1876, PWC, GUV 08934. For *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (fig. 2.1), which Ruskin described as a pot of paint flung in the public's face, Whistler had asked £210.

2 "Merkwürdig, daß der als Avantgardist anerkannte Künstler heute so weit vergessen und unbekannt ist..." Klaus Berger, *Japonismus in der westlichen Malerei 1860–1920* (Munich, 1980), p. 39.



FIG. 8.1 Munich Glaspalast (Crystal Palace), ca. 1890, site of the 1888 International Art Exhibition; from Volker Hütsch, *Der Münchner Glaspalast 1854–1931: Geschichte und Bedeutung*, Munich, 1980, p. 74.

and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin did not buy it for its collection as he had wished.³ Perhaps this disappointment was another reason for him to prefer Munich to Berlin two years later, when he again wanted to send some paintings to a German exhibition. His friend at the British Embassy, James Rennell Rodd, persuaded Whistler to exhibit in Munich at the Third International Art Exhibition, explaining, “Munich is much more important artistically than Berlin, in fact whereas Berlin is a city of politics and finance, Munich is entirely consecrated to the Muses. They are very anxious to get a good English room, and there are lots of gold medals going about.”⁴ Indeed, Berlin was only on its way to becoming a major city of the arts. Munich was by far the more fashionable place to show paintings, as everyone in the Bavarian capital was eager to stress.⁵

3 Anderson and Koval (p. 288) state that Whistler “in the end had sent nothing,” but this does not seem to be correct; see Whistler to Henry Graves, [March 14/20, 1886], Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, G UW 10920, expressing hopes that the Carlyle portrait might be purchased for “their Museum.” This could only be a reference to the Nationalgalerie, opened in 1876, although it is unlikely that Whistler had any precise conception of the Berlin museum landscape. After the exhibition, he blamed Helen Lenoir (1852–1913), later Mrs. D’Oyly Carte, for not arranging the award of a gold medal; see Helen Lenoir to Whistler, October 21, 1886, GUL D136, G UW 00930. In any case, Whistler’s paintings were not included in the catalogue of the 1886 exhibition.

4 James R. Rodd to Whistler, January 12, 1888, GUL R107, G UW 05207. The catalogues of all the Munich International Art Exhibitions between 1869 and 1931 are digitized and can be consulted at <http://www.arthistoricum.net/ressourcen/glaspalastkataloge/>.

5 See Richard Muther, “Die internationale Kunstausstellung: II. Die Historienmalerei,” *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 7, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1), writing that Berlin is not the place for artists to prosper. On Munich as Germany’s city of the arts in the later nineteenth century, see Frank Büttner, “Die Akademie und das Renommee Münchens als Kunststadt,” *Zeitenblicke* 5 (2006), <http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/2/Buettner>.

As Margaret MacDonald and Joy Newton have noted, Whistler was in search of a European reputation, so it was understandable that he concentrated on the Munich International Art Exhibition, which had more than three thousand works on display (fig. 8.1).⁶ Whistler considered the event important. The seventy works he sent to Munich was a large number by any standard: apart from his one-man shows, it was the second largest display of his work in his lifetime, outnumbered only by the exhibition at Georges Petit's galleries in Paris the previous year.⁷ Furthermore, most of the works in the English section were sent by galleries or collectors, not by artists, who, according to a Munich newspaper, did not care to exhibit there.⁸ Whistler was an exception — he did care. He had sent his works, as he wrote in a letter, “on condition that what I considered a representative assertion of my work, should in its entirety be be [sic] perfectly hung.”⁹ This was also the reason why he did not exhibit in the American, but in the English section — more space was available, and the works could be better hung.¹⁰ Whistler sent oils, watercolors, pastels, and etchings, trying to present the full range of his artistic modes of expression and his mastery of different media to the German public and also to the prize jury.

During the exhibition, a series of fourteen articles by the young art historian Richard Muther were prominently placed on the first pages of the daily newspaper *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, giving an impression of the art represented. Muther had closely followed the organization of the show and described it section by section. In his first article, he presented the exhibition as one of historical significance, the milestone for the profound changes that German art, in particular the art of Munich, had undergone during the previous years. Art, according to Muther, had passed beyond the stage of mere imitation, history painting, and historicizing genre, had left the brownish finish of the Düsseldorf School behind, and had turned toward the visualization of the modern soul (*moderne Seele*). It was that kind of “New Art” (*neue Kunst*) that was now on display in the Glaspalast. Among the important exhibits was not one, according to Muther, that had anything in common with art from the 1870s — either technically or thematically. Muther praised

6 Joy Newton and Margaret F. MacDonald, “Whistler: Search for a European Reputation,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 41 (1978), pp. 148–59.

7 In 1887 Petit had exhibited fifty works — oils, watercolors, and pastels — by Whistler. In Munich a year later, forty works in these media were on display, plus thirty etchings that have not been identified but included some from Venice.

8 Richard Muther, “Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer,” *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (July 28, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1).

9 Whistler to Robert Koehler, April 11, 1888, Manuscripts Division, 213 Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, G UW 09178.

10 See Robert Koehler to Whistler, May 28, 1888, GUL M475, G UW 04205.

pleinairism and modern subjects, the industrial worker in particular, and the fact that religious painting had become less dogmatic and turned to more universal and humane themes with a psychological interest. Modern landscape painting to him was — after disappointing years of merely juxtaposing its elements — a felicitous synthesis of figures, animals in the landscape, and nature.¹¹ Although celebrating modern painting, Muther contended that every artist who had found his personal style — even if it were not so modern — should stay true to it.¹² Thus, for Muther, even history painting could take on subjective value.

Muther's view of the exhibition as a thoroughly modern one was, perhaps, exaggerated, and should be understood as a sign of an emerging symbolist interpretation of art, then called "neo-idealistic" in Germany, which in a way was more modern than the pictures themselves.¹³ This subjective approach to art criticism emphasized the inner qualities of a work of art, and within a short time, Whistler would become the subject of these neo-idealistic interpretations, not only in France but also in Germany.

Muther wrote specifically about Whistler's paintings at the Munich exhibition in *Die Engländer*, part ten of his series. To him, the English section was "in spite of its eccentric painters perhaps the most interesting one," and Whistler was introduced as "eccentric and quirky to the extreme and yet by God's grace an artist."¹⁴ The "wonderful" Venice etchings were mentioned, along with Whistler's watercolors, which Muther described as genius-like improvisations (*geniale Impromptus*), despite being unfinished works of art. According to Muther, Whistler's artistic intentions were revealed by the titles of his pictures, which created a poetry of colors: "That man [Whistler] is always working, but almost never on commission, he is as poor as a church mouse and asks horrendous prices of the few who want themselves painted as an arrangement of colors. Incidentally he has exerted considerable influence on French art through his painterly snapshots, street scenes and the like."¹⁵

11 Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: I. Gesamtbild," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 2, 1888), p. 1.

12 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: II. Die Historienmalerei."

13 The portraits by Franz von Lenbach (1836–1904), whose works had been given a room of their own at the exhibition, are a case in point. Lenbach was not a modernist, but as Germany's most celebrated portrait painter was very contemporary. Muther praised the psychological qualities of Lenbach's work; see Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: V. Lenbach," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 27, 1888), p. 1. Works by the more overtly Symbolist painters Boecklin and Klinger, "the *enfant terrible* of the exhibition," could also be seen in Munich; see Richard Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: VI. Mythologisch-allegorische Darstellungen," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (July 3, 1888), pp. 1–2 (at p. 1). At the same time, artists from the avant-garde Belgian exhibition society Les XX were missing.

14 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 1. This and following quotations from German texts are the author's translations, unless noted.

15 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 2.

In the political climate of rivalry between France and Germany after the war of 1870/71, every opportunity was used to belittle the French contribution to modern art. Even so, in his article on the French section, Muther felt obliged to explain that the organizers of the show had attached great significance to the French contributions: although France was the hereditary enemy of Germany, she had been her teacher in art more than once.¹⁶ This political background was one reason that German art critics looked out for modern art elsewhere. For those like Muther, who had to write against a backdrop of anti-French sentiment, Whistler's cosmopolitan identity was an advantage: he enjoyed a solid reputation in France but was based in London. Whistler was able to deliver what was good about French art, particularly its modernity, without being French. Younger critics such as Muther and Emil Heilbut thought him a genius, while conservative critics such as Friedrich Pecht, adhering to a kind of national realism, wrote that one could make up everything in a Whistler watercolor or pastel, because there was almost nothing to see.¹⁷ Obviously, Whistler had made an impression. When, in 1892, the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* remembered past international art exhibitions, its critic Fritz v. Ostini mentioned Whistler's unforgotten "original experiments in color," and in his 1903 obituary, Hans Rosenhagen recalled that the artist had become well known in Germany through the Munich exhibition of 1888.¹⁸

Indeed, it was with that very exhibition and its critical reception by Muther that Whistler made his entry into German art history. In 1893 Muther, by then professor of art history in Breslau, published his three-volume *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert* (History of Modern Painting).¹⁹ An English edition was published only three years later.²⁰ While preparing the book for publication, Muther had asked Whistler to provide him with some photographs of his paintings.²¹ In the book,

16 Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: XIV. Frankreich," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (August 31, 1888), p. 1.

17 Fr[iedrich] Pecht, "Die Münchener Ausstellungen von 1888. [Part 8]," *Die Kunst für alle* 3 (1887/88), pp. 371–79 (at p. 379). Reviewing the Jubilee Exhibition in Berlin two years earlier, he had written that English artists are "highly interesting, if they describe English nature and English custom to us, and become only unbearable when they go beyond"; Fr[iedrich] Pecht, "Die Berliner Jubiläums-Ausstellung [Part 7]," *Die Kunst für alle* 1 (1885/86), pp. 342–51 (at p. 346). On Pecht, see Kenworth Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (Munich, 1973), p. 42. On Heilbut's views on Whistler, see Sabine Schlenker, *Mit dem "Talent der Augen": Der Kunstkritiker Emil Heilbut (1861–1921) — Ein Streiter für die moderne Kunst im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Weimar, 2007), pp. 216–21.

18 Fritz v. Ostini, "Die VI. Große Internationale im Glaspalaste," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (June 2, 1892, Vorabend-Blatt), pp. 1–3 (at p. 2); Hans Rosenhagen, "James McNeill Whistler," *Die Kunst für alle* 18 (1902/03), pp. 533–34 (at p. 534).

19 Richard Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1893).

20 Richard Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 3 vols. (London, 1896). A "revised edition continued by the author to the end of the XIX century" was published in four volumes in 1907.

21 Richard Muther to Whistler, September 5, 1892, GUL M497, GUW 04227.



FIG. 8.2 *Arrangement in Black: La Dame au brodequin jaune* — Portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell, 1882–84, Philadelphia Museum of Art; W. P. Wiltach Collection; YMSM 242.

Muther introduces Whistler, “the creator of a New Idealism of color,” by returning to his works at the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888. He starts with a eulogy of the portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell (fig. 8.2), concluding, “It was a great work of art, the work of a master, a work of James McNeill Whistler.”²² Muther goes on with a romantic interpretation of the *Nocturne: Black and Gold — The Fire Wheel* (1872–77, Tate Britain, London; YMSM 169), also shown at the Munich exhibition, and then turns to the artist’s biography.²³ The main works mentioned or reproduced are the three symphonies in white (see fig. 3.3 and fig 3.5) and the portraits of Carlyle and Whistler’s mother (see fig. 6.3). Muther described how Whistler made a total aesthetic experience through the decorative arrangement of his exhibitions and also how he had departed from Victorian narrative conventions, alluding briefly to *Whistler v. Ruskin* in this context.²⁴ He sharply distinguished the public persona of the artist from the artist in his studio,

working “like a hermit in his secluded house.” Muther then evoked a poetic Whistlerian mood, characterizing Whistler as monarch of a distant kingdom of mysterious landscapes and women.²⁵

In the next paragraph, Muther cited the influences on Whistler’s “exquisite and entirely personal style”: D. G. Rossetti, the Impressionists, Japanese prints,

²² Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 645–46 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 522).

²³ Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 646–47 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 522–24).

²⁴ Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 651 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 524–25).

²⁵ Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 652 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 525–26).

and Velázquez.²⁶ He contrasts Whistler's "delicate, tender, monotonous" colors to Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite realism and explains Whistler's method—to pick and choose from the elements of nature to form a harmony—by quoting the *Ten O'Clock* lecture.²⁷ According to Muther, even Whistler's portraits are not "uncanny doubles of nature" but "dreamy visions passing before one's fancy."²⁸ The criticism eventually becomes as poetic and "dreamy" as the works themselves:

There is style in all [Whistler's] work, and it is all simple, earnest, and grandiose.... There is produced in his works an effect in the highest sense decorative, and at the same time mysterious. Divested of everything paltry or material, his figures seem like phantoms. They have lost their shadows: shadows indeed themselves, they live in a delicate ashen-grey milieu; they are almost immaterial, as if set free from the weight of the body; they hover between earth and heaven, like a breath that has been compressed and will soon dissolve once more as swiftly as it took shape. They remind the spectator of what is told of spiritualistic séances.²⁹

Hans Rosenhagen in 1903 offered an explanation for these phantasmagorical reactions toward Whistler's works, which, while not inevitable, were the prevailing attitude in German criticism. He noted that "the artist, by not saying and showing everything, most vividly arouses the fantasy of the beholder."³⁰

Indeed, Muther illustrates this observation very well. Whistler's atmospheric surfaces certainly moved him and triggered his imagination. He perceived Whistler's portraits and landscapes as mystic emanations of color, hinting at a spiritual sphere both transcending and defying the physical presence of their respective subjects. In his text, Muther continued to evoke works of either genre, like the portraits of the artist's mother—"an enigmatical and almost mystical effect"; of Carlyle—"it is a wintry London day, at the hour of gathering dusk, when life fades..."; and of Sarasate (fig. 8.3)—"in the dark atmosphere his expressive hands acquire a sensitive, phantom-like animation. His figure looks as though it were floating into another world."³¹ Similarly, he described Whistler's nocturnes as being painted with "soft blue light flooding the sonorous silence of the world like a breath beyond the grave."³² In his understanding, color and mood went together: "the bodily presence of nature is merely the necessary condition of a mood.... The ... highest summit of

26 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 653–54 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 526).

27 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 655–56 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 527–28).

28 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 656 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 528).

29 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 657–58 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 529).

30 Rosenhagen, "James McNeill Whistler," p. 534.

31 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 658–59 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 530–31).

32 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 660–61 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 533).

this art will be reached, as he [Whistler] believes, when there is a public which will make no demand for definite subjects, but be content with tones and harmonious combinations of color.”³³ Muther was not so content himself, however: his insight into the abstract qualities of Whistler’s landscapes and portraits did not stop him from seeing romantic subjects in the nocturnes’ pure harmonies of color, or phantoms in arrangements in black.

Similarly, in discussing Whistler’s etchings Muther emphasized that the medium “permits the artist to create a dreamy world of sentiment, light, and poetry far more readily than painting”; only then does he provide concrete information about the different “sets” and draw the usual comparison with Rembrandt.³⁴ Muther closes with an art-historical assessment of Whistler: “As regards modern art, Whistler is painter par excellence,” and “the ultimate consummation” of the artistic efforts to liberate color from drawing. In Muther’s developmental chronology, Constable painted chromatic suggestions, Corot introduced “the purely poetic conception of the values of light,” the Impressionists entirely broke with “the mere draughtsman’s conception of objects” and color, and Whistler emancipated these colors from nature. “His pictures . . . are purely pictorial.”³⁵

In Richard Muther’s views about Whistler two main lines become discernible. One concerns Whistler’s pictorial qualities — his dematerialization of subject and his emphasis on color harmonies. For Muther, Whistler’s tendency toward abstraction leaves plenty of room for the imagination of the beholder, preparing the way for Symbolism, the modern art of the day. In Germany, Symbolism was also labeled neo-idealism or “Gedankenmalerei,” meaning the painting of ideas. Oswald Sickert wrote of Whistler’s “appeal to the imagination . . . under the name of poetry.”³⁶ In his *History of Modern Painting*, Muther had placed Whistler in this context, as his “dreamy” passages have made clear.

Muther’s criticism fits into a broader trend, evident in the 1890s, which required the “modern” art critic to evoke poetically the mood of the works about which he wrote. To us, this lavish manner of writing seems exaggerated, but at the end of the nineteenth century it was fashionable and appealing — less dry than the usual heavyweight art-historical tomes for which German scholars are notorious to the present day. Indeed, with his *History of Modern Painting*, Muther became one of the most popular art critics in Germany.

33 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 659–60 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 532).

34 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 661 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 534–35).

35 Muther, *History*, vol. 3, p. 663 (*Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 536). The revised edition of 1907 did not contain this passage.

36 Oswald Sickert, “Whistler,” *Kunst und Künstler* 1 (1903), pp. 464–68 (at p. 467).

His view of Whistler as a modern master of painting and of spiritualized vision was shared — in all its ambivalence — by many others.³⁷ A telling example is an 1894 article by Heilbut (using his pen name Herman Helferich), who explains why Whistler is a Symbolist: “He extracts certain colors from the world and gives preference to them. And there is something dreaming, musing, unworldly, and insofar something antagonistic to the world in the expression of his pictures.” On the other hand, “his works are so entirely pictorial” that they can be hung side by side with the old masters.³⁸ Georg Gronau called Whistler’s portraits the “best-painted of our century.”³⁹ This duality in Whistler’s works constituted the quality that made him a master in the eyes of those defining modern art in the German 1890s: they were at once highly subjective and part of an art-historical evolution. By the end of the decade, however, it was that very ambivalence within and toward Whistler’s works that would prompt Julius Meier-Graefe to question his historical relevance.

Meier-Graefe had his first encounter with modern art through Edvard Munch, whom he met in Berlin in 1892. At the Black Pig café (*Zum schwarzen Ferkel*), a Bohemian coterie of aesthetes dedicated to the ideas of Ibsen, Nietzsche, and



FIG. 8.3 *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of Señor Pablo de Sarasate*, 1884, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; YMSM 315.

37 The neo-idealistic or Symbolist interpretation of Whistler’s art was probably more literary than the artist himself would have agreed with in earlier years, but the mastery attributed to him was more important and put any other aesthetic concerns in the shade.

38 Herman Helferich [Emil Heilbut], “Etwas über die symbolistische Bewegung,” *Die Kunst für alle* 10 (1894/95), pp. 33–37 (at p. 35). The term “malerisch” is not fully translatable, but means “pictorial” and also “painterly” or “artistic”. “Pictorial” is used in this all-encompassing sense in the present paper.

39 Georg Gronau, “Englische Porträts,” *Die Kunst für alle* 15 (1899/1900), pp. 147–54 (at p. 152).

Strindberg (who was part of the group) exchanged views on art. Munch would become a role model to Meier-Graefe, a model who would inform his later views on artists' personalities. Meier-Graefe was deeply impressed by Munch, particularly by his depiction of inner worlds revealing conflicts and alienation, and he thought the Norwegian painter a tragic hero of modern times.⁴⁰

In 1895 Meier-Graefe moved to Paris, and began to travel across Europe in order to study art from a transnational perspective. On trips to England in 1894 and 1899, as well as in Paris, he saw some late Whistlers.⁴¹ During these years he developed a method of critical evaluation based on the visual qualities of a work of art, rejecting the prevailing neo-idealism of German art critics.⁴² Even so, it was one of Meier-Graefe's idiosyncrasies to link his interest in formalism with a demand for humanity as a key part of artistic genius. Thus in his critical judgments he introduced a moral component when it came to evaluating artistic personalities.⁴³

This element becomes clear in his 1899 essay "The position of Edouard Manet," published in *Die Kunst für alle*, a German art magazine. Although the essay's title indicated an exclusive interest in Manet, Meier-Graefe also devoted considerable space to Whistler. These artists were considered to be at the two poles of modern painting, with Whistler credited with bringing Japanese and Spanish influences into modern art.⁴⁴ Inspired by Velázquez, Whistler is

*the only portraitist of our times who succeeds in giving his works that ultimate consummation [äußerste Vollendung] far from any banality, in concentrating his marvellous abilities so that nothing remains unresolved. His art is to balance a whole world on the tip of his fingernail so that an absolute balance is in control of every aspect. In front of a perfect Whistlerian work one is seized by the nervous obsession to detect somewhere a weakness, a slip.*⁴⁵

40 See Moffett, *Meier Graefe as Art Critic*, pp. 9–10.

41 He recalls the Grafton Galleries' exhibitions on *Fair Women* (1894) and *Fair Children* (1895), and that *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander* (1872, Tate Britain, London; YMSM 129) was shown at the latter. Julius Meier-Graefe, "Whistler," *Die Zukunft* 44 (1903), pp. 286–88 (at p. 287).

42 See Moffett, *Meier Graefe as Art Critic*, p. 24; Jensen, p. 247 ("nascent formalism").

43 See Catherine Krahmer, "Meier-Graefes Weg zur Kunst," *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch zur europäischen Moderne* 4 (1996), pp. 169–226 (at pp. 187–90), and P[aul] G[eorge] Konody, "A German Thinker on Modern Art," *The Connoisseur* 23 (1909), pp. 119–21 (at p. 120).

44 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," *Die Kunst für alle* 15 (1899/1900), pp. 58–64 (at pp. 59, 64). For more recent comparative evaluations of Whistler and Manet, see Robin Spencer, "Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde," in Ruth E. Fine, ed., *James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 47–64; Hubert Locher, "Whistler und Manet: Aktualisierung eines Vergleichs auf den Spuren Julius Meier-Graefes," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66 (2003), pp. 237–60. Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, 1996) also discusses several of Whistler's paintings and etchings in relation to Manet's "Generation of 1863."

45 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 60.

Meier-Graefe soon succumbed to this obsession, stating that Whistler never reached the level of his idol, Velázquez; Manet, in contrast to Whistler, luckily stayed at a distance from the Spanish master. The comparison of Manet and Whistler was not Meier-Graefe's invention. As Robin Spencer has noted, the German artist Otto Scholderer had written of Whistler's nocturnes to Henri Fantin-Latour in 1873: "I find them better each day. The finesse of his colour, above all, his touch charms me; it is as fresh as Manet's and finer, more gourmand, I can say. Still, Manet has a freshness in his subjects that Whistler does not know."⁴⁶

Meier-Graefe used his article on Manet to introduce his comparative method, writing that an art critic has a duty not only to distinguish various currents of art, but also to draw the line clearly between real achievements and mere efforts:

*And therefore it is not only allowed to place Manet higher than Whistler, but our entire aesthetic, which is based upon such differences of value, provokes clear distinction. Of course Whistler already loses out in a comparison because of personal things that inadvertently and wrongfully interfere with contemplation. His sluggish ways of working are less sympathetic than Manet's.*⁴⁷

Meier-Graefe nevertheless conceded that "only the result counts. But let us put a good Whistler beside a good Manet; e.g., the magnificent portrait of Paganini beside Manet's Toreador. Simple greatness in both, only one probably thinks that Whistler appears great because he has attained simplicity through fabulous means, whereas Manet appears simple, because he is great."⁴⁸ (The "Paganini" was Whistler's portrait of Pablo de Sarasate. Manet's "Toreador" is probably *A Matador, or The Saluting Matador* (fig. 8.4).) Meier-Graefe used his comparative method to distinguish between better and lesser art, concluding that Manet was more independent and therefore stronger than Whistler.⁴⁹

In Meier-Graefe's obituary of Whistler, he admired the brilliant synthesis of French, Japanese, Spanish, and English influences as an individual, and even

46 "Je les trouve de jour en jour mieux. La finesse de sa couleur, surtout de sa touche est charmante pour moi; c'est aussi frais que Manet et plus fin, plus gourmand je peux dire; cependant Manet a un fraîcheur dans son sujet que Whistler ne connait pas." Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, January 25, 1873 (Paris, Brame & Lorenceau), quoted in Spencer, "Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde," pp. 56–57, transl. n. 42.

47 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 63.

48 Ibid., pp. 63–64.

49 Meier-Graefe, "Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet's," p. 64. Of course the conclusion depends on the definition of independence. O. Golwin, "Amerikanische Malerei," *Die Kunst für alle* 16 (1900/1), pp. 273–82 (at p. 274), wrote: "No European (see even Manet!) would have been able to bring over the uttermost subtleties of Velázquez as uninhibitedly as Whistler has done." On the occasion of the 1901 exhibition of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers, Meier-Graefe mentioned Whistler's smaller works very favorably, in particular the pastels. Whistler's pictures were "masterworks of unseen perfection"; Julius Meier-Graefe, "Eine Whistler-Ausstellung," *Die Zukunft* 37 (1901), pp. 396–408 (at pp. 396–97).



FIG. 8.4 Edouard Manet, *A Matador, or The Saluting Matador*, 1865–67, H. O. Havemayer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemayer, 1929 (20.100.52), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

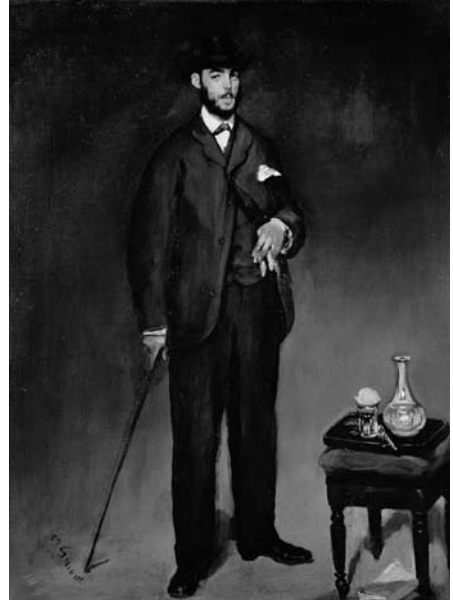


FIG. 8.5 Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Théodore Duret*, 1868, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

perfect, achievement. This perfection, however, prevented any further evolution — it was a dead end, and this assessment later led Meier-Graefe to write Whistler out of art history. That Whistler’s art was seen as “purely individual,” defying any national schools, became — almost — an art-critical truism in Germany.⁵⁰ Facing this highly individual art, Scholderer had already expressed his skepticism when he confessed that he liked Manet “much more” than Whistler, because he did “not know where Whistler’s painting will end up.”⁵¹ As a

50 See Robert Kochler, “Die Entwicklung der schönen Künste in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika,” *Die Kunst für alle* 8 (1892/93), pp. 225–33, 241–46, 257–59 (at p. 245). E[rnst] W[ilhelm] Bredt, “James A. Mc Neill Whistler,” *Die Kunst für alle* 20 (1904/5), pp. 10–15 (p. 15): “Whistler ... was wholly American” and the starting point of American art history. Kochler seems to have been one of the first German critics to describe Whistler as an American artist instead of an English one.

51 “Mais j’aime ce dernier [Manet] bien plus, je ne sais pas où est la fin de la peinture de Whistler.” Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, 26 November 1872 (Paris, Brame & Lorenceau), quoted in Spencer, “Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde,” p. 56, transl. n. 39.

singular phenomenon, Whistler not only denied the tradition of art (or was incapable of painting himself into it), but also was unable to spur future artistic evolutions. In England, Walter Sickert later wrote that “Whistler’s genius has been purely personal; he has had no following, and left no pupils.”⁵²

In Germany, Meier-Graefe’s voice would become perhaps the most important one for the history of modern art in the twentieth century. His three-volume *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (The Evolution of Modern Art) was published in 1904, and in it he extended his comparative approach. The title alludes to Darwinian or Spencerian theories, and indeed the comparisons drawn in the book serve the purpose of explaining which kind of art was better or stronger than the other.⁵³ Muther’s *History of Modern Painting* had already presented an evolutionary model of artistic development,⁵⁴ but Meier-Graefe pushed it to the forefront of his analysis.

The book contained a chapter on Manet and Whistler, based on the article Meier-Graefe had written five years earlier. Now he summed up the comparison by stating that Manet appeared to be a thorough genius, Whistler a mere “artist” (between quotation marks, to contrast art and life); Manet possessed soul and life, Whistler presented only a masterly surface, an arrangement.⁵⁵ The comparisons go on. Manet reveals the Spanish element; Whistler hides it.⁵⁶ Whistler is a representative of the noblest eclecticism of our times rather than an example of true originality.⁵⁷ Manet shows his human subjects as they are, true to life, naked; Whistler dresses them up to compose his artificial arrangements, which are only great when every aspect of his character is working together in highest fulfilment. As an example of this kind of masterpiece Meier-Graefe singles out Whistler’s portrait of Théodore Duret, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir* (see fig. 6.1), comparing it with Manet’s small portrait of the same sitter (fig. 8.5), which is inelegant, less meticulously finished, but “a masterpiece in front of which the Whistler is fading away.... The art of Manet’s brushwork is not empty delusion.”⁵⁸ Whistler “is lacking the convincing,

52 W. Sickert, “Charles Hazelwood Shannon,” *The Speaker* (April 24, 1897), in Anna Gruetzner Robins, ed., *Walter Sickert: The Complete Writings on Art* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 160–63 (at p. 161); cf. W. Sickert, “Impressionism,” *The New Age* (June 30, 1910), in Robins, pp. 252–55 (at p. 253): “But fatherless as he [Whistler] came into the world, so he left it childless, while the Impressionists have peopled a universe with their art.”

53 See Jensen (pp. 238–39) on what he calls Meier-Graefe’s “signature device — the elevation of one artist’s reputation at the expense of another”; see also L[eopold] D. Ettlinger, “Julius Meier-Graefe: An Embattled German Critic,” *Burlington Magazine* 117 (1975), pp. 672–74 (at p. 672); Locher, “Whistler und Manet,” p. 238.

54 Jensen, p. 218.

55 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1904), vol. 1, p. 156.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

wholly internal organic character of every strong art.” His art, Meier-Graefe suggests, is superficial and forgotten, even before the eye leaves the picture.⁵⁹

While the main argument in Meier-Graefe’s book was taken from his article, its impact now was greater, since it was situated within a magisterial study of the history of art. Meier-Graefe had stated that if art history had to choose between Manet and Whistler, it would be better to forget about Whistler. By transforming his earlier article — a piece of art criticism — into a part of a larger art-historical teleology, Meier-Graefe went beyond exploring art history to shaping it.

Harry Kessler, an influential German critic, disagreed with Meier-Graefe. He thought that the image of Whistler as an egocentric personality had possibly cast shadows into Meier-Graefe’s book. He tried to explain that this image was the consequence of Whistler’s unfortunate submission of minor works to the Salon and the Berlin Secession, and of mistaking the mannerisms of “the Scots” — i.e., the Glasgow Boys — for affectations of the master.⁶⁰ He dismissed Meier-Graefe’s view of Whistler as a weak personality and a derivative artist; on the contrary, Kessler wrote, everything Whistler adopted, he transformed into something new.⁶¹ Kessler introduced Gustave Courbet as another point of reference, stating that Courbet’s role in the development of modern art had been underestimated.⁶² He traced Whistler’s tonalities back to Courbet and described them as a matter-of-fact pictorial principle underlying the nocturnes.⁶³ In them, Whistler had created London as a black flower, “yet nothing is sentimental... Anyhow, Whistler never exaggerates.”⁶⁴ Kessler’s article does not include a single anecdote, and it does not drift off into “dream poetry.” Meier-Graefe enjoyed Kessler’s article on Whistler very much, as he told him in a letter: Kessler “presented the contrary opinion in a manner that is extremely tempting,” but even so, Meier-Graefe did not alter his own assessment.⁶⁵

59 Ibid., pp. 159–60. This is a strange echo of Oscar Wilde’s remark in “The Grosvenor Gallery,” *The Dublin University Magazine* 90 (July 1877), p. 124, on *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* and *Nocturne: Blue and Gold — Old Battersea Bridge*, both exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, that they were “certainly worth looking at for about as long as one looks at a real rocket, that is, for somewhat less than a quarter of a minute.”

60 Harry Graf Kessler, “Whistler,” *Kunst und Künstler* 3 (1905), pp. 445–66 (p. 445). Whistler was very influential for the late nineteenth-century group of Scottish painters dubbed the Glasgow Boys, and the link was part of their public image.

61 Ibid., p. 446.

62 “Aber Manet ist im Grunde nichts als Courbet mit spanischem Wein und Pariser ‘esprit’ versetzt” (But Manet is basically nothing else but Courbet mixed with Spanish wine and Parisian ‘esprit’); *ibid.*, p. 451.

63 Ibid., pp. 452–53, 458.

64 Ibid., p. 460.

65 Julius Meier-Graefe to Harry Graf Kessler, May 1, 1907, in Catherine Kraemer, ed., *Julius Meier-Graefe: Kunst ist nicht für Kunstgeschichte da. Briefe und Dokumente* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 49–50.

William Heinemann published Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* in an English translation in two volumes in 1908, as *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*.⁶⁶ This edition differed from the original in many instances, beginning with its title, from which the biological term "evolution" was omitted. The chapter on Whistler was taken from an altogether different book Meier-Graefe had recently completed: *Die großen Engländer* (The Great Englishmen).⁶⁷ That book contained chapters on Wilson and Gainsborough, Turner, Constable, and Whistler, who surely would have objected to being identified as English.⁶⁸ In his last chapter, Meier-Graefe acknowledged Whistler's cosmopolitanism and under several subheadings presented not only "Whistler the Englishman," but also "the Frenchman," "the Japanese," and "the Spaniard," before concluding that he was an American after all.⁶⁹ Again Whistler was presented as a mirror of influences: "Everything that happened in Europe towards the middle of the nineteenth century had its echo in him."⁷⁰

A closer look at the text of *Modern Art* reveals that the harsher parts of Meier-Graefe's criticism were omitted in the English translation — sometimes more than two entire pages have been left out.⁷¹ It remains unclear whether Meier-Graefe, George W. Chrystal (one of the translators), or William Heinemann, as Whistler's friend and publisher, was responsible for these changes.⁷² As these alterations or omissions are significant, it is proper to speak of two different texts. The original German text will be considered here.⁷³

Meier-Graefe introduces Whistler from the very beginning as a paradoxical figure, simultaneously resisting and embracing Pre-Raphaelitism: "ein verkappter Präraffaelit," a Pre-Raphaelite in disguise.⁷⁴ While Whistler was the only artist who attempted to further develop the English tradition, Meier-Graefe believed this was

66 See Grischka Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*," *Visual Culture in Britain* 6, no. 2 (2005), pp. 171–88.

67 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer* (Munich, 1908).

68 The chapter on Whistler in *Die großen Engländer* again contained passages taken from the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* but was on the whole rewritten.

69 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 172 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224).

70 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 128 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 199).

71 For example, Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 150–52.

72 See Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe," pp. 173–75; on Heinemann and Whistler see Patricia de Montfort, "Whistler and Heinemann: Adventures in Publishing in the 1890s," *The Whistler Review* 2 (2003), pp. 64–73.

73 The text of the English translation follows wherever appropriate; otherwise my own translation is given.

74 Meier-Graefe's "ein verkappter Präraffaelit" in *Die großen Engländer* (p. 128) was erroneously translated as "an unfrocked Pre-Raphaelite" in *Modern Art* (vol. 2, p. 199), and has ever since been so quoted.

a dead end.⁷⁵ Key works in Meier-Graefe's analysis are *At the Piano* (see fig. 4.8) and the portraits of Thomas Carlyle and the painter's mother. He presents *At the Piano* as the starting point of two roads: one leading to England and the "white girls," the other leading to France, illustrated in works such as *The Coast of Brittany* (1861, Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.; YMSM 37). Whistler's forked road, according to Meier-Graefe, had "no more in common than a Rossetti and a Courbet," and he implies that Whistler consciously chose to abandon a strong, organic mode in favor of a more decorative and superficial one.⁷⁶

He linked the fork in the road between Courbet and Rossetti to *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (see fig. 3.3), which possessed a modern (French) arrangement but an unmodern and insufficient conception. The passage devoted to this work deserves to be quoted in full (with those parts translated from the original German text in italics), because in its pictorial fury it contains much of what troubled Meier-Graefe about Whistler:

The "Symphony in White" of the "Fille Blanche" scorns any, even the most primitive harmony. The hair's greasy brown colour gives the lie to the complexion meant to be vaporous, the blue eyes are inserted instead of painted, and the white on white of the figure and the background, a pure, or rather quite impure decorative effect of the most brutal sort, does not rank much higher than the Miss Grant by Herkomer of blessed memory and other imitations of the kind. The whole tendency to give a spiritual appearance without any spiritual essence, the ghostly by means of a trap-door, is Rossettian. The artist simply asserts what he had to demonstrate, reproduces his mystery instead of creating it and making it effectual. Look, how curious! says Whistler and disappears with a slight bow behind the blue-eyed white lady. It is the trick of a juggler at a fair. But we do not attach much significance to such a delusion, unless we were in that very psychological state of mind where everything, even a transfer-picture or the sounds of a barrel organ, or the sequel of a murder mystery story, lures us to shed tears of emotion. [W]e do not want to see the artist behind his white lady, but in her: we want to know how she works, how the puppet comes to life, how she moves and lives, and if there is a mystery we like to have it explained without turning off [English edition: so much wear and tear of] our senses. But the apparatus [i.e., Whistler's painting] is unequal to these demands. It remains merely glass eyes, false hair, clothes, carpet and curtains. The more energetically we contemplate it, the more cruelly is the illusion unveiled, and we recognise the affinity of the puppet to those works which demand of the spectator the inspiration which failed the artist. There are no spirits,

75 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 128 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 199).

76 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 130 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, pp. 200–201).

and *all the coquetry with apparitions of a more or less ghostly kind can only tempt an old maid*. [N]othing happens of itself least of all in art, which knows nothing of the arbitrary and accidental.⁷⁷

This passage reveals Meier-Graefe's disavowal of subjective spirituality and mystery, and he used Whistler as a reference point to attack the spirit-evoking Symbolist art critics: "There are no spirits." The question of the spiritual content of a picture had been of central concern to the neo-idealistic art critics like Richard Muther, who by now had become Meier-Graefe's adversaries.⁷⁸

While Meier-Graefe had based much of his *Entwicklungsgeschichte* on comparisons of formal qualities, the neo-idealists clung to content, particularly admiring the poetical and dreamy. It is possible that Meier-Graefe had difficulties in assessing Whistler according to his own visual criteria because the artist was a key figure in the neo-idealist world he was fighting. Everything that to the previous generation of art critics had been a reason to praise Whistler was, in Meier-Graefe's eyes, a reason to condemn him. Suggestiveness to Meier-Graefe meant only lack of inspiration. Artful color harmony was mere artificiality, turning the human figure into a clever apparatus or a dead painting. Whistler's gesture of aesthetic refinement was proof of a lack of authenticity. In contrast to the white symphonies, *The Coast of Brittany* was, despite being "a very bad, a very amateurish work . . . nearer to art than all the phrases of the Pre-Raphaelites."⁷⁹

It was exactly these Pre-Raphaelite phrases that had fascinated the Symbolist artists and their critics, not only in Germany but also in France. Much of Muther's estimation of Whistler was drawn from J.-K. Huysmans's chapter on "Wisthler" (*sic*) in *Certains*, published in 1889, and the writings of Gustave Geffroy.⁸⁰ Meier-Graefe frontally attacked this entire school of art criticism in his assessment of Whistler's nocturnes.⁸¹ In the original German text, Meier-Graefe declared Whistler's musical titles to be an affectation designed to make his art more interesting.⁸²

77 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 132. The italicized passages are omitted in *Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 201.

Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914) had shown his portrait of *Miss Katherine Grant (Lady in White)* (1885, private collection) at the Munich International Art Exhibition of 1888. Muther had praised the work; Muther, "Die internationale Kunstausstellung: X. Die Engländer," p. 1.

78 See Jensen, p. 237.

79 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 137 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 204).

80 See J[oris]-K[arl] Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris, 1889), pp. 67–72; for a comparison of Muther and Geffroy, see John Siewert, *Whistler's Nocturnes and the Aesthetic Subject*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994, pp. 202–204.

81 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 144 (*Modern Art*, p. 209) explicitly mentions Camille Mauclair, *De Watteau à Whistler* (Paris, 1905, p. 310), "c'est l'ombre en soi-même"; and Léonce Bénédite, "Whistler", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 34 (1905), p.152, "Apparences! illusions! c'est la grande chimère et la grande poésie de la nuit elle-même."

82 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 146: "Das Mäntelchen tat seine Wirkung."

Whistler's "atmosphere," he maintained, was "a wonderland of infinite opportunities. One learned to read in the air, and on real picture puzzles the critics wrote poetry of substantial content. One composed as he composed."⁸³

In Whistler, Meier-Graefe missed the "autocratic power of a coherent system, which alone secures for the work of art independence from time."⁸⁴ He distinguished between the Impressionists' lack of finish and Whistler's incompleteness, warning against confounding the Impressionists' succinct forms and Whistler's more trivial use of color. Whistler, Meier-Graefe claimed, left too much room for the spiritual in art, or rather for the fantasies of art critics and the public, and he reproached Whistler for having "set aside the obstacles necessary to all ideal effort."⁸⁵

The chapter continues with passages taken from the original German first edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, comparing the Spanish influence on Manet and Whistler.⁸⁶ It ends with an art-historical assessment — again abridged in the English edition: "Perhaps in Whistler we have not at all to deal with a painter.... Setting the painter aside, there is still enough over, though what remains is a very different figure from that hitherto presented by European art history. No painter of spiritual conditions and *other invisible jests*."⁸⁷ Meier-Graefe also tells us which role Whistler would have to play within a rewritten art history — "an industrial artist of delicate taste, a stimulating influence, which we may turn to good account, *a select collector*. He has left us things, which reflect his nature exactly; and as this was intensely modern the reflection becomes almost a symbol."⁸⁸

Ten years earlier Meier-Graefe had enthusiastically welcomed a decorative art expanding beyond the picture frame.⁸⁹ This would have been a movement to write Whistler into, but even then, Meier-Graefe had emphasized that a painting as work of art and decoration were two different things, and that a good painter had to separate the independent and intrinsic laws of painting from those of modern decorative art.⁹⁰ Meier-Graefe never abandoned this idea, and in *Die großen Engländer* it becomes clear that, for him, a mixture of poetical and decorative art was

83 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 146, not translated in *Modern Art*.

84 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 167, not translated in *Modern Art*.

85 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 167–68, not translated in *Modern Art*; and *Die großen Engländer*, p. 153 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 214).

86 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, pp. 168–70 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 222–24).

87 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224). The "other invisible jests" are mistranslated as "the like."

88 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171 (*Modern Art*, vol. 2, p. 224). Italicized passage not included in the English edition.

89 Julius Meier-Graefe, "Beiträge zu einer modernen Ästhetik. [Part 1]," *Die Insel* 1/1 (1899), pp. 67–68.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

neither true nor modern, and Whistler represented this unfortunate amalgamation. To Meier-Graefe, England's contribution to modern art mainly consisted in modern design and decorative arts.⁹¹ But while Whistler's works might have been considered appealing in terms of interior decoration, "we do not have to take him as an industrial artist and collector but as an artist. In this way he dished himself up for us, in this way he tried to appear and was accepted by the elite."⁹²

The last paragraph of the German text, again not included in the English edition, is a lament over Whistler's influence in Germany. Several of his works were exhibited in the exhibitions of the Berlin Secession.⁹³ Partly mediated by the Glasgow Boys' success at the Munich Secession, Whistler's refined arrangements became artistic prototypes.⁹⁴ Meier-Graefe commented ironically: "The Teutonic bear received a proper hairstyle and learned how to sit down well-manneredly.... The whole world was beautifully cut out, adopted a stylish attitude and a slightly dreamy touch.... Where would it have been more welcome than in the land of dreamers?"⁹⁵ Meier-Graefe wanted to wake them up and make them look at art, not dream up poems in front of it.

After Meier-Graefe's outburst in *Die großen Engländer*, some art critics wrote in defense of Whistler. But even in their articles, one senses the underlying influence of Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, especially evident in the proliferation of the term "evolution" and in the reiteration of aspects of Meier-Graefe's argument.⁹⁶ Other critics accepted Meier-Graefe's anti-neo-idealist argument and distanced both themselves and Whistler from the old spirits: Werner Weisbach, for example, explained in 1911 that Whistler did not paint for the sake of any spiritual content, but only for the sake of visual appearance.⁹⁷ In the same year Richard Oertel insisted that purely pictorial problems were more important to Whistler than psychological ones, and that a strong artist's personality stood behind his subtle arrangements of

91 See Petri, "The English Edition of Julius Meier-Graefe," pp. 181–83.

92 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 171, not translated in *Modern Art*.

93 In 1900, *Arrangement in White and Black* (ca. 1876, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 185) was shown; in 1902, an unidentified nocturne; and in 1904, *Arrangement en couleur chair et noir: Portrait of Théodore Duret*.

94 Other critics mention Whistler's influence in Germany; see O. Sickert, "Whistler," p. 467; Richard Oertel, "Whistler," *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* 3 (1910/11), pp. 345–61 (at p. 352); see also Anderson and Koval, p. 328.

95 Meier-Graefe, *Die großen Engländer*, p. 173, not translated in *Modern Art*.

96 See, e.g., Albert Dreyfus, "James Abbott Mac Neill Whistler," *Die Kunst für alle* 22 (1906/7), pp. 201–16 (at p. 201).

97 Werner Weisbach, *Impressionismus: Ein Problem der Malerei in der Antike und Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1911), vol. 2, p. 184. Overall, Weisbach's chapter on Whistler in his book is much more factual than any other. Having read the Pennells' biography, he was much better informed than most of the other German authors of articles on Whistler.

color.⁹⁸ Yet he also tried to rescue the “dreamy” poetical reaction, reminding his readers of Whistler’s intense “power of suggestion” and repeating the claim that Whistler had painted night as a form of visual poetry: “We feel the enigmatically deep poetry enveloping these pictures.” In a last effort to reconcile modernism and neo-idealistic poetry, Oertel wrote that Whistler was a “poet who unified his dreams and color-fantasies with the spirit of a thoroughly modern man.”⁹⁹

But Whistler’s modernism could not be redeemed, at least not for Meier-Graefe. He wrote: “Since Monet and Manet, painting has changed. Certain things that are still possible in Munich are no longer tolerated in Europe.”¹⁰⁰ Weisbach could already sum up the recent steps in the evolution of modern art by observing the victory of French pleinairism — and the disappearance of Whistler from European galleries.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Whistler’s few oil paintings in German collections had been sold by the 1920s.¹⁰²

Meier-Graefe’s answer to his critics was to erase Whistler from the history of modern art, which he accomplished in the second edition of his *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, published in 1914/15 (and never translated into English).¹⁰³ In this text, Whistler was part of the errors of his generation, and an error that had to be “corrected.” In a letter to Richard Dehmel from 1919, Meier-Graefe stated that the first edition was “full of praise” for Whistler, while this “clown [Popanz] of modern painting is not mentioned at all in the second edition.”¹⁰⁴ This is only half true: the first edition had not been full of praise for Whistler, but he appears in the second edition only in sporadic depreciating remarks that mainly repeat Meier-Graefe’s well-established views. For instance, in a chapter on David, the critic notes how great the influence of fashion was on the French master and dares to predict that

98 Oertel, “Whistler,” pp. 346, 350, 353. This may also have been aimed at Max Nordau’s article on Whistler, “Zur Psychologie Whistlers” (On Whistler’s psychology), in which he claimed Whistler was a hyperaesthetic; Max Nordau, *Von Kunst und Künstlern* (Leipzig, [1905]), pp. 126–34. But Oertel’s main target was very likely Meier-Graefe himself. It is interesting to note that Oertel began his article on Whistler with an assessment of the Whistler art market in the artist’s own time and circa 1910. Meier-Graefe had opened his article on Manet of 1899 in a parallel way: see Meier-Graefe, “Die Stellung Eduard [sic] Manet’s,” p. 58.

99 Oertel, “Whistler,” pp. 354, 360.

100 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der moderne Impressionismus* (Berlin, 1902), p. 4.

101 Weisbach, *Impressionismus*, vol. 2, p. 202.

102 *Nocturne: Grey and Gold — Chelsea Snow* (1876, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; YMSM 174), was sold by the Kunsthalle, Hamburg, after 1922 under Gustav Pauli. *Arrangement in White and Black* (ca. 1876, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; YMSM 185) was sold by Max Linde, Lübeck, in 1904.

103 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Munich, 1914); vol. 2 (1915); vol. 3 (1924).

104 Julius Meier-Graefe to Richard Dehmel, November 6, 1919, in Krahmer, *Julius Meier-Graefe*, pp. 143–45 (at p. 144). This is reminiscent of Ruskin calling Whistler a coxcomb in the notorious article in *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 79, July 1877, in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols. (London, 1903–12), vol. 29, pp. 146–69 (at p. 160).

“in a hundred years, when we will be a fashion, one will rhapsodise over paintings by Whistler, who side by side with David is a foppish bungler”; in volume two, he notes that Whistler fell victim without resistance to the overt exoticism of Japan, while Manet understood the aesthetic behind the surface appeal; Meier-Graefe also attacks Monet’s London paintings of Waterloo Bridge and Westminster, reproaching him for indifference and a foggy lack of structure and noting, “One has seen before that sort of painting with poorer features. Whistler painted likewise, only thinner and more Japanese, cheaper.”¹⁰⁵

The main result of the second edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* was that Whistler was virtually written out of German art history, although Meier-Graefe would mention him one more time. On the occasion of Whistler’s centennial birthday, Meier-Graefe wrote a short article for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which was peppered with impertinent anecdotes and acid barbs aimed at Whistler’s superficial and commercial egomania.¹⁰⁶

In Meier-Graefe’s *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, modernism had become, in Robert Jensen’s words, “an exclusively French property,”¹⁰⁷ and this had long-lasting effects. When Max Deri published an “evolutionary description of painting in the nineteenth century” in 1919, he did not mention Whistler. It was one of the first art histories in which Impressionism was superseded by expressionism in Germany, and cubism and futurism in France and Italy.¹⁰⁸ In his 1926 landmark book on art of the twentieth century, Carl Einstein wrote along the same lines. The chapter on the historical preconditions of modern art focused on the Impressionists and Cézanne.¹⁰⁹ Whistler had never happened. The art history of Richard Muther had never happened.

Einstein’s book was a volume in the series of the *Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte*, the standard work of reference for generations of German scholars and students of art history. The volume dealing with the nineteenth century treated Whistler on just one-and-a-half pages, very much on Meier-Graefe’s terms: Whistler’s painting was considered “decorative to the finest taste and ravishingly ‘new’; but it is an arrangement and mere arts and crafts.” His portraits were said to be “unsimilar” and expressionless, not showing human beings but only decorative effects. In particular,

105 Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, second ed., vol. 1, p. 88; vol. 2, pp. 258 and 413.

106 Julius Meier-Graefe, “Whistlers ‘L’art pour l’art,” *Frankfurter Zeitung* (July 20, 1934), repr. in Carl Linfert (ed.), *Grundstoff der Bilder* (Munich, 1959), pp. 215–19.

107 Jensen, p. 235.

108 Max Deri, *Die Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Darstellung auf psychologischer Grundlage*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1919), vol. 1.

109 Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhundert (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte, vol. xvi, Berlin, 1926)*, pp. 9–23.

Whistler's portrait of Duret was criticized, as it had already been in 1899 in Meier-Graefe's article on Manet.¹¹⁰ The stamp of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* is unmistakable. It enjoyed great popularity and exercised a normative influence both before and after World War II. Robert Jensen has noted Alfred Flechtheim's statement that it was "the most significant modernist art history of the era."¹¹¹

Meier-Graefe moved to France in 1930 for health reasons and did not return to Germany after 1932. As an advocate of modern and French art, Meier-Graefe was considered by the Nazis as degenerate as the works he admired. At the Degenerate Art exhibition in Munich in 1937, a large photograph of him was put up in the entrance hall.¹¹² After the war, German art history rediscovered modern abstract art; a selection of Meier-Graefe's writings was published in 1959, and the second edition of the *Entwicklungsgeschichte* was reprinted in the 1960s. Kenworth Moffett, the author of the major study on Meier-Graefe as an art critic, noted in 1973 that it is "indeed remarkable ... how close the book is to our present view of the nineteenth century."¹¹³ Present views have changed, but Moffett's remark bears witness to the profound effect of Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. The new edition of the *Propyläen* in the 1960s again virtually omitted Whistler: the volume on the nineteenth century contained a short biography of Whistler in the reference section, but he was only named twice in passing in Fritz Novotny's article on Impressionism.¹¹⁴ An exhibition at the Nationalgalerie in West Berlin in 1969 presented Whistler as an outsider.¹¹⁵ It has remained his only one-man exhibition including paintings in Germany until the present day. Whistler's reputation never recovered from Meier-Graefe writing him out of German art history.

This story of Whistler, Richard Muther, and Julius Meier-Graefe is of course not a mono-causal chain of events that leads from Whistler's fame in Munich to German art-historical amnesia. It must be qualified by at least three considerations. The first is that after his death Whistler's reputation experienced ups and downs in the United States, in Great Britain, and in France as well. His star probably faded away much faster

110 Emil Waldmann, *Die Kunst des Realismus und des Impressionismus im 19. Jahrhundert (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte)*, vol. xv, Berlin, 1927), pp. 90–91. Waldmann (p. 57) also compared a portrait by Wilhelm Trübner (1851–1917), *Lady in Grey* (1876, Folkwang Museum, Essen) to Whistler in general and found that beneath it the "highly acclaimed Englishman [appeared] pictorially barren."

111 Jensen, pp. 242–43; W. Sickert, "Straws from Cumberland Market," *Southport Visiter [sic]* (January 24, 1924) in Robins, *Walter Sickert*, pp. 470–80 (at p. 476) named Meier-Graefe as "probably the most important and influential critic in Europe." See also Jensen, pp. 13–14.

112 See Moffett, *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic*, p. 127.

113 Ibid., p. 50, p. 86.

114 Rudolf Zeitler (ed.), *Die Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts (Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte)*, vol. xi, Berlin, 1966), p. 133.

115 See Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz (ed.), *James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903)* (Berlin, 1969).

in Paris than in Munich after 1905.¹¹⁶ In 1925 Sickert wrote about Whistler's absence in Europe.¹¹⁷ But in Germany, unlike the other countries, Whistler never became part of the tradition. The potential for reviving his reputation was always stronger in the countries where he had worked and lived, and of course in his native country.

The second qualification concerns the art history referred to here: it is the history of painting. As an etcher, Whistler's reputation remained unquestioned, even in Germany.¹¹⁸ The third qualification has to do with expressionism, or modern art in Germany after 1905. It was in many aspects quite the opposite of the refined art of Whistler, and it was understood as more "modern." It was so modern that even Meier-Graefe disapproved of it. Nevertheless, the effect of his books was not just a symptom of art-historical fashion: they formed, rather than merely reflected, attitudes. The same is true for Richard Muther's *History of Modern Painting*, which not only presented a neo-idealistic or symbolist view of Whistler, but played an essential role in shaping it.¹¹⁹ Meier-Graefe's views had superseded Muther's by the beginning of World War I, and went further, to establish the values of art history in Germany for decades to come.

116 In this year Maurice Denis wrote that "the influence of Whistler is over.... The herd of imitators has ceased to follow him" (*L'influence de Whistler est finie.... Le troupeau des imitateurs a cessé de le suivre*); Maurice Denis, "La Peinture," *L'Ermitage* 16 (1905), pp. 309–19 (at p. 311).

117 W. Sickert, "With Wisest Sorrow," *Daily Telegraph* (April 1, 1925), in Robins, *Walter Sickert*, pp. 510–12 (at p. 510).

118 Hanna Hohl, *James McNeill Whistler: Die Graphik im Hamburger Kupferstichkabinett* (Hamburg, 1999), pp. 11–12. The graphic arts, however, are rarely the focus of scholarly interest, and Whistler's reputation as an etcher has always been one held by connoisseurs rather than the wider public. The German collectors of Whistler's prints still need to be investigated.

119 On the importance of Muther's book, see Jensen, pp. 212–19.

