



The Gentle Art

Poems

WILLIAM WENTHE

The poems in *The Gentle Art*, a compelling new collection from William Wenthe, move between the life of the painter James McNeill Whistler and a poetic version of the author, who is at once inspired and disturbed by Whistler. The present-day author sheds light on Whistler's artistic vocation and the beauty of his paintings, most notably the liminal London riverscapes that he named *Nocturnes*, yet recoils at the cost of Whistler's devotion to art: lovers abandoned, friends turned into enemies, his own children given away to adoption.

Creating a kind of dual biography, Wenthe grapples with feelings of admiration and disaffection toward Whistler as he tries to perform his own roles as parent, partner, and poet. While some of the poems are narrative, their overall effect is associative—two lives superimposed in a double exposure, with attention to what the contrast of two centuries, the nineteenth and the twenty-first, reveals about the relationship of art to money, class, and politics.

WILLIAM WENTHE has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts, as well as two Pushcart Prizes. His previous poetry collections include *God's Foolishness* and *Words before Dawn*. Born and raised in New Jersey, he has lived in New York City and Virginia, and teaches poetry at Texas Tech University.

Today, in a hushed gallery
of the Tate, I'm sitting ten paces away
from *Nocturne: Blue and Silver*—

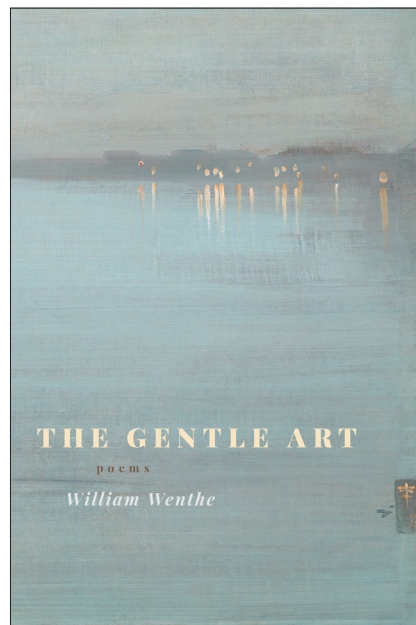
Cremorne Lights.
Twenty-two notes of gold
train a slow melody

of gas lamps on the shoreline, reflected
in counterpoint on the water.
But as I linger,

sky and river, their one
infusion of color, lift
out of the frame

and resonate—no, not music,
but what music shadows,
some great being, being quiet.

—from "Thames Music"



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Poetry

PRAISE FOR *THE GENTLE ART*

"Not only does Wenthe pursue, with a detective's vigor, a biographer's diligence, and a poet's spellbinding wizardry, the human and artistic enigma of Whistler, he likewise investigates crucial elements of trailblazing Whistler's triumphs and travails to illuminate aspects of his own life experiences—in questing and distinctive fashion. In this allusive and deftly braided book, teeming with trenchant Victorian incidents and details, Wenthe consistently moves beyond mere ekphrasis to empathy, identification, and revelation."—Cyrus Cassells, Poet Laureate of Texas (2021) and author of *The World That the Shooter Left Us*

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