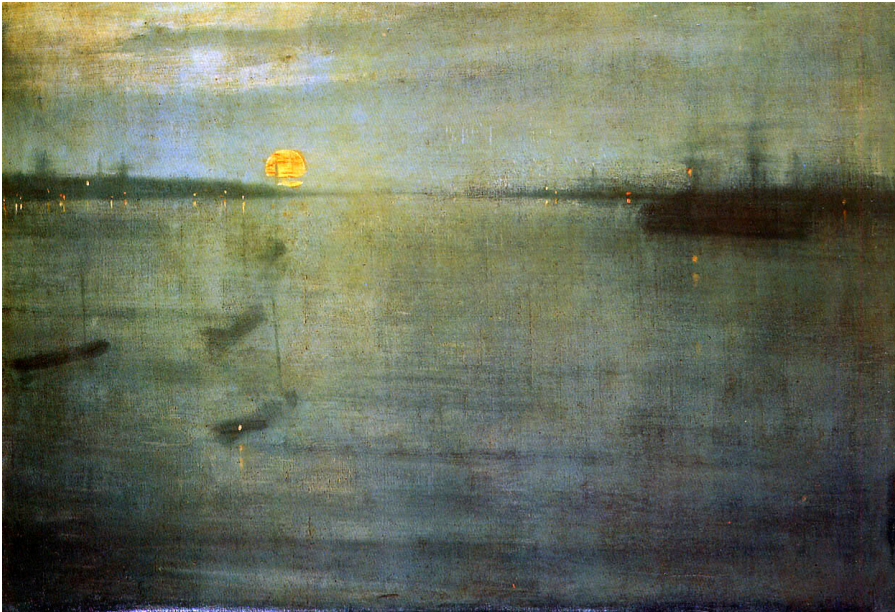


# Swimming on a Lake in 1955

by [Norman Simms](#) (December 2017)



*Nocturn Sun*, James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Never one for speed, I swim across the lake  
Slowly and full of heavy dreams, assuming  
Somewhere at the back of my mind that a boat  
Is following, and so stroke after stroke I swim  
In the hot summer afternoon, time  
Languid, and then I feel and smell the slime  
Over the other shore, my feet entwine  
In the weeds, only then noticing no one  
At my back. The further shore is dense with bush,  
So I turn back again to the lake and begin  
Slowly my languid strokes, my dreams no longer dull  
But alert to how far the journey is, how soon  
The sun will be in decline, and wishing then  
I would be one for speed. My feet do not reach  
The mud and slimy weeds. My arms reach out  
For the distant shore all too slowly and make  
A signal to the unseen boat, the sleepy rower  
Who must be somewhere floating on the lake.  
Shadows begin to float past me heavily,

The horizon a silhouette of darkening hills,  
As stroke by stroke I cross the water, no  
Longer silent but heavy splashing, myself  
A shadow of darkness creeping through the night.

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**Norman Simms** taught in New Zealand for more than forty years at the University of Waikato, with stints at the Nouvelle Sorbonne in Paris and Ben-Gurion University in Israel. He founded the interdisciplinary journal *Mentalities/Mentalités* in the early 1970s and saw it through nearly thirty years. Since retirement, he has published three books on Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus and a two-volume study of Jewish intellectuals and artists in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western Europe, [\*Jews in an Illusion of Paradise; Dust and Ashes, Comedians and Catastrophes, Volume I\*](#), and his newest book, [\*Jews in an Illusion of Paradise: Dust and Ashes, Falling Out of Place and Into History, Volume II\*](#). Several further manuscripts in the same vein are currently being completed. Along with Nancy Hartvelt Kobrin, he is preparing a psychohistorical examination of why children terrorists kill children.

More by Norman Simms [here](#).

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