Cavendish, the writer, and Nell Gwyn, the actress and royal mistress of Charles II of England. There are numerous other cases of entries on important women in this period and all are examples of a salutary concern for putting European women back into history. Of course, some figures one would want to find, such as the great Catholic astronomer Riccioli, are not present, but no such book can be all-inclusive.

In some cases, I found the bibliographical entries to be either too short or too old in terms of the literature they cite. Surely the author on William Gilbert could have found something to cite besides a very general survey of Tudor science published in 1972? Was there nothing other than a 1970 article to cite in the bibliography at the end of the entry on the major Jesuit astronomer Scheiner? Why weren’t the standard, valuable essays in the Dictionary of Scientific Biography cited? In the case of political figures, why were the works of the great J. H. Elliot not included in either the article on Philip IV of Spain or in the general bibliography.

I do not want to end on a negative note. This is a very useful volume for students and teachers to have on their shelves. I am sure I will refer to it a lot to help me in my early modern European courses.


Velázquez’s “Las Meninas,” edited by Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, forms part of Cambridge University Press’s “Masterpieces of Western Painting,” a series aimed to present students and scholars with reconsiderations of canonical works of art through various approaches and methodologies. As Stratton-Pruitt explains, she has pursued this objective not by advancing “new interpretations,” but rather by offering “an introduction to the reception history and the critical fortunes” of Las Meninas (1656, Madrid, Museo del
Prado) since its first public exhibition in 1819 (i). This focus on the painting's modern reception provides an apt counterpart to the recent exhibition and catalogue, *Manet / Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2003), which explores the impact of Spanish Golden Age painting on nineteenth-century French art. In Stratton-Pruitt's collection as well as the catalogue, the emphasis on audience response represents an important development in Spanish art history by elucidating how changing cultural circumstances inform perceptions of particular works of art. Students interested in modern artists' engagement with old master paintings and in critics' enduring fascination with Velázquez's elusive masterpiece will therefore particularly profit from this book.

Stratton-Pruitt opens the volume by quoting from the early descriptions of *Las Meninas* by Felix da Costa (1696) and Antonio Palomino (1724) in order to set the stage for the subsequent essays. The next three contributions explore the painting's critical fortunes in the nineteenth century, when Velázquez was "discovered" outside Spain and *Las Meninas* was characterized as a naturalistic snapshot and a dazzling display of Impressionistic brushwork. Focusing on Spain and France, Alisa Luxenberg suggests that critics "mystified" *Las Meninas* by asserting that its invention was incomprehensible to all but true connoisseurs and its virtuosic technique simply lost in the reproductions consumed by the public (14). Xanthe Brooke argues that responses to the painting were more tepid in nineteenth-century Britain, where Velázquez was increasingly admired but *Las Meninas* was not yet hailed as his undisputed masterpiece. M. Elizabeth Boone then analyzes the role of *Las Meninas* in nineteenth-century American painting and criticism, proposing that Americans saw Velázquez as a reflection of their own values and admired both his supposed freedom from the precepts of academic art and the predominantly secular nature of his subject matter. By providing ample testimony to the widespread yet varied pictorial and critical engagement with *Las Meninas*, each of these surveys opens promising avenues for focused studies of specific responses to the work.
Stratton-Pruitt then offers students a helpful guide to the vast twentieth-century literature on the painting, focusing in particular on the multiple strands of inquiry proposed over the past four decades. Her essay summarizes influential interpretations ranging from Michel Foucault’s meditation on the painting as a paradigm of classical representation, to Jonathan Brown’s reconstruction of Velázquez’s role at Philip IV’s court, to Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen’s examination of the artist’s use of perspective. Although Stratton-Pruitt’s aim is to provide a bibliographical tool rather than a critique, the sheer diversity of readings of Las Meninas raises important questions about how scholars should approach the painting. Is Foucault’s characterization of Las Meninas’s mirror as a paradoxical reflection of the monarchs’ image (rather than the viewer’s) compatible with assessments of its original audience and analyses of its perspectival construction? In an article discussed by Stratton-Pruitt, Fernando Marías has analyzed the enigmatic reflection within its historical context by arguing that Las Meninas’s entire composition was designed to puzzle and delight the beholder—the great collector and amateur painter, Philip IV—through a mathematically accurate but deliberately ambiguous depiction of space.

The final two essays further examine Las Meninas’s reception in the twentieth century. Estrella de Diego argues that among the key contributions of Foucault’s analysis was his insistence on effacing Las Meninas’s status as a “masterpiece” created by a “genius” (151). She suggests that by focusing instead on the painting’s role within the Western system of representation, Foucault shifted the discourse from artistic intentionality to the spectator’s necessary role in the composition. Gertje R. Utley next provides extensive evidence of the range of twentieth-century artists’ responses to Las Meninas by distinguishing among artists who admired the painting’s formal qualities, those who appropriated it for political and social aims, and those who treated it as a model of perception. These categories nevertheless overlap significantly; for example, Utley demonstrates that Salvador Dalí extolled Velázquez’s skill while couching his praise in terms of Spanish nationalism. On a technical note, it is unfortunate that the suggestive comparisons
offered by Utley and the other contributors are illustrated only by low-quality black-and-white reproductions.

As a whole, the essays provide a valuable overview of the modern critical reception of Las Meninas. Yet it would be difficult to encompass all relevant aspects of Las Meninas studies within one book. This volume will therefore need to be supplemented by other scholarship in order to provide students with a thorough introduction to the painting. An analysis of Las Meninas itself—the circumstances of its creation, its elusive narrative, and its linear perspective—would have given readers an understanding of the painting within its historical circumstances before guiding them through its subsequent critical fortunes. Similarly, an essay on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century responses to Las Meninas in Spain would have provided a helpful point of comparison for the discussions of the painting’s later reception. Scholars have long used the primary sources to analyze Las Meninas’s narrative content, but have not sufficiently considered the texts as evidence of the painting’s critical context and early canonical status. In his 1724 collection of artists’ lives, Palomino unequivocally characterizes Las Meninas as “the most illustrious work by Don Diego Velázquez” (whom he considers the finest Spanish painter) and describes its christening as “the theology of painting” by the court painter Luca Giordano (Vidas, 1986, 181, 183). Both Giordano and Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo (Velázquez’s pupil and son-in-law) furthermore adapted the composition of Las Meninas in their own works, indicating the painting’s importance to the visual culture of Madrid’s court artists in the generation after Velázquez’s death.

By concentrating on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Velázquez’s “Las Meninas” nevertheless contributes significantly to an understanding of the roles of Velázquez and his most celebrated work in modern artistic discourse. Like the authors of Manet / Velázquez, Stratton-Pruitt and her collaborators amply demonstrate the long overlooked centrality of Golden Age Spanish painting to the birth of modern pictorial traditions.