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978-0-521-66940-5 - The Cambridge Companion to Velázquez
Edited by Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt
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1 Introduction

A Brief History of the Literature on Velázquez

Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt

Diego de Velázquez's first biographer was his father-in-law, the painter and art theorist Francisco Pacheco, whose *Arte de la pintura* was published posthumously in Seville in 1649.[1] Besides singing the praises of the young artist, Pacheco's account provides much useful information about Velázquez's youth and training in Seville, his move to the court in Madrid, and his first trip to Italy.

Another writer who knew the artist was the painter Jusepe Martínez, who devoted several paragraphs to Velázquez in the *Discursos practicables del nobilísimo arte de la pintura,* a treatise that he compiled in the 1670s. It should be noted, however, that Martínez's manuscript was not published until 1852.[2]

A third painter and theorist, Antonio Palomino, born five years before Velázquez died, has also left us an account of the artist's career. His three-volume work *El museo pictórico y escala óptica* was printed in Madrid in two parts, in 1715 and 1724.[3] Volume 3, the *Parnaso español,* includes the first published biographies of Spanish artists from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries; the life of Velázquez is by far the longest and most detailed. Although Palomino relied heavily on Pacheco's account of the early decades of Velázquez's life, he also had the opportunity to interview several eyewitnesses to his later career, such as the painter Juan Carreño de Miranda. Moreover, Palomino had access to a manuscript on Velázquez, a biography now lost, by one of the artist's pupils, Juan de Alfaro (1643–80), and he took the scholarly step of corroborating the memories of his informants with information in documents in the royal archives.[4] Since the publication of Palomino's book, the chronology of Velázquez's life and career has been fleshed out, but little changed, by later research.

Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez, son of Juan Rodríguez de Silva and Jerónima Velázquez, was baptized in the church of San Pedro in Seville on

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6 June 1599. On 1 December 1610 he was formally apprenticed to Francisco Pacheco; on 14 March 1617 he received his license to practice the art of painting; and on 23 April 1618 he married Pacheco's daughter, Juana. Between 1617 and 1623 Velázquez was active in Seville as a painter of genre subjects, religious works, and portraits. In 1623 he won an appointment to the court in Madrid as *pintor del rey* – painter to the young king, Philip IV. From then until 1629 he remained at the court, painting, among other subjects, portraits of Philip IV and his minister, the Count-Duke of Olivares.[5] During 1629–1630 Velázquez traveled in Italy, a journey whose impact on his art is analyzed by Jonathan Brown in an essay in this volume.

In 1631 Velázquez returned to Madrid to begin a busy decade, during which he would create a number of paintings to adorn the royal palaces. These include equestrian portraits of the royal family; portraits of the king, his brother, and his heir at the hunt; portraits of the court jesters; and one of his great masterpieces, *The Surrender of Breda.* In 1636 Velázquez was promoted to the position of Assistant in the Wardrobe, which was added to his previous appointments as *ujier de cámera* (Usher of the Bedchamber) on 7 March 1627 and as *pintor de cámara* (awarded sometime during 1627–28). During the 1630s and 1640s he painted mostly portraits, with the outstanding exceptions of the *Coronation of the Virgin* and his single painting of a female nude, the *"Rokeby" Venus.* Between 1648 and 1651 the painter was again in Italy, where the king had sent him to buy works of art for the royal collections. While in Rome, Velázquez painted a number of portraits, including his remarkable likenesses of Pope Innocent X and one of his own studio assistant Juan de Pareja. After his return to Madrid, he was appointed in 1652 to the prestigious position of *aposentador mayor de palacio,* a job whose duties kept him busy for the rest of his life with many tasks besides painting – decorating the royal palaces, arranging for court ceremonies, staging masques and festivals – and increasing his reliance on assistants to meet the demand for royal portraits. In spite of these obligations, Velázquez created, around 1656, two of his most impressive works, *The Fable of Arachne (Las Hilanderas – "The Spinners")* and *The Ladies in Waiting (Las Meninas).*

In 1658 the king nominated Velázquez for a knighthood in the order of Santiago. The resulting inquiry into the artist's genealogy found that he did not have the requisite nobility, a lack that required not one papal dispensation, but two. These were acquired through the king's intervention, and Velázquez was finally granted his much desired knighthood on 28 November 1659. In 1660 he traveled with the king to the Isle of Pheasants at the border between France and Spain, where Philip IV gave his daughter María Teresa in marriage to Louis XIV of France. A month later, Velázquez fell ill. He died in Madrid on 31 July 1660 and was buried in the habit of the Order of Santiago.

Velázquez did not leave behind a "school" of painters trained to continue

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his style. In fact, not long after his death, art at the Spanish court took a turn toward a high Baroque manner influenced by the earlier examples of Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, both amply represented in the royal collections. Their bravura compositions and brushwork had profound impact on the work of such late seventeenth-century Spanish court painters as Francisco Rizi, Francisco de Herrera the Younger, and Claudio Coello. Another infusion of Baroque energy at court came in 1692, when the king, Charles I, brought Luca Giordano from Italy to paint the vast fresco decorations on the vaults of the monastery/palace at El Escorial.

When Charles I died in 1700, the long rule of the Spanish Habsburgs ended, and a new king, Philip V, was chosen from the French royal family. Philip and his Bourbon successors introduced to Spain their "French" taste, a courtly style of costume, etiquette, and taste in art more attuned to their sensibilities than Habsburg austerity. The style of the court portraits created by Velázquez, which continued formal iconographic traditions established in the Renaissance by Titian, no longer suited the crowned heads of Spain, who now preferred lighter, brighter, more informal likenesses in the rococo manner.

In 1761, in the midst of decorating the new Royal Palace in Madrid, the Bourbons brought in the Bohemian painter Anton Raphael Mengs to oversee the work. Mengs also served as director of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Saint Ferdinand in Madrid and used his influence to foster the new neoclassical style championed by the Spanish King Charles III, who had underwritten the excavations at Pompeii, Paestum, and Herculaneum and had paid for the publication of the engravings after the Roman decorations found there.

These artistic developments in eighteenth-century Madrid explain why Velázquez's name is almost completely absent from Spanish art criticism and commentary in the decades following Palomino's publication of the painter's biography. Nor did it help Velázquez's reputation that several of his most important pictures were destroyed when the Alcázar (the royal palace) of Madrid burned in 1734. Except for some appreciative comments on Velázquez's art by Mengs himself (although he was unmoved from his own neoclassical course and thought that Velázquez should have done more to "improve" on what he saw), the great master of Spanish Golden Age painting attracted little interest. Although Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez accorded Velázquez prominent treatment in his *Diccionario histórico* of Spanish artists in 1800, the biography he provided essentially repeated what Palomino had written decades before.[6] In the intervening seventy-five years, no one had thought to search the archives for additional information about Diego de Velázquez – and much had been forgotten.[7]

In the early nineteenth century, however, the painter's popular and critical fortunes soared with the greater exposure of Spanish painting abroad,

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especially in France and England. The turbulence of the War of Independence, begun in 1808, followed some years later by the suppression of the monastic orders in Spain, caused the removal of great numbers of Spanish paintings from private palaces, family chapels, churches, and monasteries. These found their way through an increasingly active art market to public and private collections outside of Spain, culminating with the 1838 opening of King Louis Philippe's *Galerie Espagnole* in the Louvre, where artists and art lovers could study Spanish painting firsthand. More important to the enhancement of Velázquez's reputation, however, was the opening of the Museo del Prado in 1819. For the first time, the rich collections that had been gathered by the Spanish Habsburgs since the reign of Charles I (Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire) and expanded by the Bourbon kings were placed on public view. Among the stars of the collection were the paintings that Velázquez had created for Philip IV, which had never left the royal palaces of Madrid and its environs. Following the excitement of Edouard Manet, Henri Regnault, and other painters over their discovery of Velázquez's subtle compositions and brilliant painting style was a new curiosity to find out more about the painter's life and works.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Spanish scholars searched the archives for more information about Velázquez. Among the most diligent of these were Manuel Zarco del Valle and Gregorio Cruzada Villaamil, whose discoveries were published in the 1870s.[8] The work of Cruzada Vallaamil was especially important; his *Anales de la vida y las obras de Diego de Silva Velázquez, escritos con ayuda de nuevos documentos* (Madrid, 1885) is the basis on which much modern scholarship has relied. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, work in the archives has continued to be fruitful, turning up, for example, the inventory of Velázquez's possessions at the time of his death[9] or the body of documents related to the decoration of the Hall of Realms of the Buen Retiro Palace, in which he played a substantial role.[10] Additional information will undoubtedly continue to come to light, but we probably already know most of the facts relevant to Velázquez's life and work. That is, we know the facts. Contemporary observers note Velázquez's "phlegmatic" character but say little else about what kind of individual he was. Much more important to Pacheco, for example, is Velázquez's estimation in the king's eyes: "The liberality and affability with which Velázquez is treated by such a great Monarch is unbelievable. He has a workshop in the King's gallery, to which His Majesty has the key, and where he has a chair, so that he can watch Velázquez paint at leisure, nearly every day."[11] This sort of anecdote says more about Philip IV than about Velázquez, but the most fastidious research has yet to discover any cache of personal letters that might reveal to us more of the painter's feelings and personality, though the trajectory of his career at the court suggests a highly ambitious social agenda.[12]

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The renewed interest in the artist's life brought with it a desire to identify his works. Pacheco had discussed Velázquez's earliest paintings, those created in Seville, emphasizing the *bodegones* (kitchen and tavern scenes) for their verisimilitude, painted "from life" in the manner of Caravaggio. Palomino had cited also many of Velázquez's canvases in the course of recounting his life, and although Ceán Bermúdez had not improved on Palomino's biography, he deserves credit for having been the first writer to atttempt to compile an authoritative list of Velázquez's works, listing 51 pictures.

Since Velázquez was rediscovered by both his fellow Spaniards and by artists and critics abroad at about the same time in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that some of the earliest studies of his life and work were produced by an Englishman and an American. William Stirling-Maxwell's *Annals of the Artists of Spain* (1848)[13] and his *Velázquez and His Works* (1855) were followed by Philadelphia native Charles B. Curtis's *Velázquez and Murillo: A Descriptive and Historical Catalogue* (New York, 1883). Cruzada Villaamil,[14] Sterling-Maxwell, and Curtis each attempted to compile a definitive list, or "catalogue raisonné," of Velázquez's paintings." In an appendix to his 1848 study of Spanish art, Stirling-Maxwell listed 226 works by Velázquez. Cruzada Villaamil listed 240 paintings but did not consider all of those to be by the artist's hand. Curtis was most generous, attributing 274 paintings to Velázquez. Both Stirling-Maxwell and Curtis gathered masses of engravings after paintings thought to be by the artist and depended on them for the compilation of their catalogue entries. A later critic called Stirling-Maxwell's 1848 book "a delightful work, in which, however, the bibliographical element is perhaps stronger than the art criticism."[15] In a dramatic turnaround, the Spanish artist and critic Aureliano de Beruete y Moret, in 1898,[16] accepted only 83 works as authentically by Velázquez. Beruete's response to the methods of his predecessors, though severely reductive, is an understandable reaction to outdated methodology and the nineteenth-century tendency to attribute even very questionable pictures to revered masters. August L. Mayer returned to the expansionist vision of the artist's oeuvre in his catalogue of 1936,[17] in which he accepted 164 paintings as authentic and published a total of 610 works: his book is useful primarily as a guide to shop work and followers of Velázquez. Today, scholars accept an oeuvre that numbers about 125 paintings; the catalogue raisonné generally relied on is by José López-Rey, first published in 1963 and recently in a new edition.[18]

Although a catalogue raisonné is a basic reference for questions of attribution, dating, condition, and provenance,[19] Velázquez's life and career have also been the subjects of many monographic studies, most without catalogues. The changing interpretations of Velázquez's art over time serve as guides to evolving tastes and values – even when they fail to help us understand his art better. In the hands of nineteenth-century writ-

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ers and critics, for example, Velázquez became both the ultimate realist and the first impressionist. Both ideas built upon long-standing notions about the artist.

For Pacheco, Velázquez's early *bodegones* and portraits had epitomized "the true imitation of nature." Likewise, over two hundred years later, for an anonymous critic writing about the exhibition of Spanish art at the New Gallery in London in 1896, Velázquez's "uncompromising naturalism" was the salient characteristic of his work: "The naturalism of Velázquez as here so completely illustrated, stands by itself; it is not the smiling, sympathetic naturalism which Murillo later on developed, or the naturalism of the great Dutchmen, consciously exaggerating the grotesque side of their subject from the point of view of the humourist; it is something simpler, more purely objective, more truthful than all this."[20] Although for some nineteenth-century artists, Velázquez was the "painter of painters," Beruete, himself an artist, criticized Velázquez for never working without a model. In turn, a contemporary critic decried Beruete's statement that, "The poverty of his imagination did not allow him to give free rein to his fancy," by asserting: "The opinion that a painter's imagination is most clearly exhibited by the portrayal of the unseen is too vulgar to need refuting, and assuredly Velasquez had so fine a sense of his art that he need not waste his ingenuity in the contriving of curious subjects. Nor is it becoming to charge the painter with a trammelled fancy, whose sincere vision and miraculous accomplishment revealed to the world a new art."[21] Beruete was not the only writer to interpret Velázquez's work as realistic and thus as the harbinger of modernity in painting. Indeed, this was the standard interpretation of his achievement in the books of Stirling-Maxwell and Paul Lefort (1888)[22] and by Carl Justi in his magisterial *Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert* ("Velázquez and his Times"), first published in 1888.[23]

By the close of the century, Velázquez was additionally annointed the father of impressionism, particularly in R. A. M. Stevenson's *Velázquez,* published in London in 1895.[24] Stevenson was a Scottish painter who had studied in Paris with the academic artist and influential teacher Carolus-Duran. Stevenson's small book on Velázquez was more an appraisal of Velázquez's painterly technique than a biography, and his critical evaluation was seen through the lens of his own artistic training and interests. He admired the "apparent artlessness" of Velázquez's technique. He identified Velázquez's crowning achievement as "unity of impression" and so considered Velázquez the first impressionist. While this conclusion is completely ahistorical, it must be granted that Stevenson captured Velázquez's technique beautifully in words. About a portrait of the Infanta Margarita, he wrote: "every inch of the dress is painted by Velazquez with a running slippery touch which appears careless near at hand, but which at the focus gives colour, pattern, sparkle, and underlying form with the utmost preci-

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sion and completeness."[25] Justi, Stevenson, and Beruete were joined in their conception of the artist by Sir Walter Armstrong, director of the National Gallery of Ireland, who asserted in *Velázquez: A Study of his Life and Art* (1897) that "impressionism was first fully made manifest in the work of a portrait painter, Velázquez."[26] After having been largely ignored for decades following his death, Velázquez had become the artistic man of the hour. Reviewing the four books mentioned above, a critic wrote: "After two centuries of neglect, Velazquez now occupies a position which is, we should imagine, without parallel in the history of art. He is no longer an old master, he has become a living influence on modern painting; it is as if he had recently opened a studio."[27] Another writer went so far as to title an article "Velázquez and his Modern Followers."[28] However, the novelty of impressionism faded with the development of fauvism, cubism, and other artistic movements of the early twentieth century, and, for a while, production of books about Velázquez slowed.[29]

But to see Velázquez as the great champion of naturalism (as opposed, we may assume, to the idealized classicism of Guido Reni, or to the frothy rococo elegance of Watteau or Boucher) is to overlook the artfulness of his art. The view of Velázquez as a realist, or a naturalist, or even an impressionist, is misleadingly reductive, for regarding him as a mere copyist of nature ignores the intellectual wherewithal that he brought to his work. Nineteenth-century impressionists might have needed little beyond bringing their paints, brushes, and an easel outdoors, but it behooved a seventeenth-century court painter to be a learned man. In his biography of Velázquez, Palomino emphasized the artist's education beyond the preparation of a support or the grinding of pigments:

> He practiced the lessons to be found in the various authors who have written distinguished precepts on painting. In Albrecht Dürer he sought the proportions of the human body, anatomy in Andreas Daniele Barbaro, geometry in Euclid, arithmetic in Moya, architecture in Vitruvius and Vignola, as well as in other authors from all of whom he skillfully selected with the diligence of a bee all that was most useful and perfect for his own use and for the benefit of posterity. . . . Velázquez was also well acquainted and friendly with poets and orators, for it was from such minds that he gained much with which to embellish his compositions.[30]

When the inventory of Velázquez's book collection was published in 1925, scholars slowly began to recognize that, in Jonathan Brown's words, "Velázquez had used his eyes to read as well as to study nature. Thus, his art could be connected to several branches of Renaissance learning."[31] This revised vision of Velázquez's art is taken up by the historian José Antonio Maravall in his consideration of Velázquez's position in the history of ideas.[32] Maravall asks that we place Velázquez in the age of Galileo, Descartes, Pascal, Leibnitz, Locke, and Newton and that we bear in mind that Velázquez was not the "genial inculto" suggested by partisans of the

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painter's adept capture of reality, but rather a cultivated and well-read man in a period when painting was understood to be a "science."

This "new" Velázquez, a painter whose depth was largely unsuspected by his nineteenth-century admirers, has inspired considerable research into the meaning of Velázquez's works. This is particularly the case for his enigmatic "history paintings" such as *Los Borrachos*[33] and *The Fable of Arachne (Las Hilanderas)*.[34] Even more striking are the interpretations of his group portrait *Las Meninas,* which are so numerous that they have inspired the compilation of bibliographies dedicated to this one painting.[35] *Las Meninas* has as well attracted the attentions of philosophers such as José Ortega y Gasset[36] and Michel Foucault.[37] The latter's 1966 interpretation of *Las Meninas* as a classical representation has spawned a number of articles influenced by linguistics and structuralism.

Traditional art historians have produced a plethora of books and articles situating Velázquez's work within the context of his time, particularly at the court of Madrid. Justi's 1888 monograph stands as the noble ancestor of monographs about the artist that discuss the many duties he performed for the king of Spain other than painting. Those tasks, through which Velázquez sought to enhance his prestige at court, have frustrated some writers such as Beruete, who suggested that if Velázquez had never entered the royal palace, "his production would not have been so restricted." However, there is a fascination with royalty even today that makes Velázquez's proximity to Philip IV of Spain a matter of keen curiosity. In a review of Beruete's book, an anonymous critic scolded him for even suggesting that Velázquez's career might have unfolded more fruitfully without the demands of being Painter to the King: "The author of 'Philip IV,' of 'Pope Innocent,' of 'las Meniñas' did not die with the consciousness of an undelivered message. He was no Keats perished with talent unfulfilled. The offices he held at Court, while they sensibly increased his dignity, did not diminish his work by a single stroke of the brush."[38] The critic, who tellingly entitled his review "Velasquez the Courtier," then goes on at length to tell the story of Velázquez's career at court without ever discussing the paintings, upon which it had been Beruete's intention to focus his reader's attention.

Velázquez's steady climb in status at the Madrid court, the special attention the painter to Philip IV was accorded on his travels in Italy, and his difficult, ultimately successful campaign to be received into the Order of Santiago – all this makes for an entertaining biography. However, Velázquez's career as a courtier who was more than a painter has deeper implications. Ortega y Gasset suggested that what mattered most to Velázquez was not artistic, but social, distinction. Ortega held that owing to the circumstances of Velázquez's birth and training, "in the deepest recesses of his soul he obeyed this imperative: 'Strain every nerve to become a nobleman.'"[39] In a monograph on Velázquez for a general audi-

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ence published in 1969, another author has noted that, at the turn of the nineteenth century,

> the biographical or autobiographical associations of Velázquez's pictures were virtually ignored – or rather, deliberately set aside. These were the heady days of the rediscovery of Velázquez's true stature as a painter; there was no time to spare for petty details of seventeenth-century history . . . the labours of such critics as Karl Justi, whose encyclopaedic study of Velázquez had appeared in 1888, seemed tedious and irrelevant.[40]

He goes on to insist that Velázquez did not "see himself simply as a painter and portraitist, but also as an architect, decorator and stage-manager of royal progresses and pageants. These were his official duties during a successful career at court that lasted for nearly forty years."[41]

This approach to Velázquez reached its apogee in Jonathan Brown's *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (New Haven and London, 1986). Brown chronicled Velázquez's career with special emphasis on the various tasks undertaken for the court outside of painting, demonstrating that analysis of the decorative programs Velázquez created for the royal palaces, and of his choice of works of art purchased for the king in Italy, have much to teach us about patronage in seventeenth-century Spain and the use of art to create a compelling iconography of monarchy.

More recently, impelled by the fourth centenary of Velázquez's birth in 1598, renewed attention has been paid to Velázquez's formative years in Seville. The catalogues of two recent exhibitions in Edinburgh (*Velázquez in Seville,* 1996) and in Seville (*Velázquez y Sevilla,* 1999) included essays about the painter's years before his life at the Madrid court.[42] These studies place the young Velázquez in the context of a cosmopolitan city with a cultivated elite that fostered and supported a lively intellectual and artistic life. Recent scholarship has enhanced our understanding of the complex milieu of the visual arts in which Velázquez's young talent was nurtured, as well as the cerebral aspects of his training under Pacheco. When Velázquez arrived in Madrid, he brought with him the best artistic education available in contemporary Spain (outside of Madrid), as well as an originality, an inventiveness, encouraged by the varied art market of Seville, where collectors commissioned and purchased not only religious subjects and portraits but the still radically new *bodegones* created by a young native painter.

Recent Velázquez research has, as well, paid considerable attention to Velázquez's technique, not only how he was taught to paint as a youth in Pacheco's shop but how he actually painted during his years at court. Modern science has enabled us to see Velázquez's paintings as they were never before seen. Conservators and conservation scientists, together with art historians, have used techniques unimaginable to earlier generations – microscopy, microchemical analysis, radiography, and infrared reflectogra-

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phy among them – to plumb the secrets of the painter's magic.[43] Such technical analysis is obviously of great importance to the curators and conservators who are responsible for preserving Velázquez's paintings. However, technical analysis also reveals exactly how the artist painted: that is, how he adapted his media (supports, pigments, and binders) and the basic techniques learned by every painter-apprentice, to serve his pictorial vision. Technical analysis has revealed how Velázquez, using the same elements at the disposal of even the most ordinary of seventeenth-century painters, transformed their material nature into works of genius, achieving what Stevenson eloquently called "a running slippery touch which appears careless near at hand, but which at the focus gives colour, pattern, sparkle, and underlying form with the utmost precision and completeness."[44]

The *Cambridge Companion to Velázquez* offers the reader nine further essays on Velázquez. The first three of these, by Zahira Véliz, Jonathan Brown, and Alexander Vergara, focus on traditional art-historical concerns about the painter's training and the influences – especially those from Italy and northern Europe – on his works. The next two, by Antonio Feros and Magdalena S. Sánchez, both historians of early modern Spain, focus on Velázquez's work as a portraitist. Dr. Feros's piece explores contemporary belief in the actual effect of a portrait of the monarch upon the viewer, and Dr. Sánchez brings our attention, for the first time, to the female members of the Habsburg dynasty whose portraits Velázquez painted.

Although Velázquez painted relatively few religious subjects as compared to other Spanish artists of his time, he did paint some. The article by historian Sara T. Nalle offers a brief analysis of the religious tenor of Velázquez's time and of the issues of concern to Spanish churchmen and their parishioners during most of the seventeenth century.

The final three essays examine other aspects of the cultural life of the court that Velázquez served so brilliantly. In his service to the king he was joined by a number of other original and talented men of the era, including the poets Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo, whose contributions are presented by Lía Schwartz, and the court playwright Calderón de la Barca, whose work is discussed by Margaret R. Greer. The role of music at court and, especially, in Velázquez's paintings, is the subject of a pioneering article by Louise K. Stein. Each of these essays brings completely new light to bear on Velázquez. It is our hope that these new and innovative additions to the literature on Velázquez will increase not only our readers' understanding of the artist's work but their delight in it as well.

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