Martin Warnke. *The Court Artist: On the Ancestry of the Modern Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xx, 299.

David Howarth, ed. *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xvii, 303.

The study of the history of court art provides an important contribution to our understanding of the conditioning of artists through social institutions. Courts were vital in shaping artistic self-understanding and encouraging uniqueness. The two books discussed here deal with the subject of court art in very different ways. While Warnke traces the history of court artists in an encyclopedic manner from the early Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century, Howarth, on the other hand, follows the pattern of a *festsschrift*, selecting essays by various scholars who focus on the era of Van Dyck.

Martin Warnke, a professor of art history at the University of Hamburg, originally published this book in 1985 in German, calling it a pre-history of the modern artist. This publication is part of the series "Ideas in Context" which has as its goal both a contextual and an interdisciplinary approach to historical phenomena. Warnke's book originated in the mid 1960s as an examination of the court of Mantua. However, it continued to grow in scope and format until it almost overwhelmed him, as he confesses in the preface.

Although it is well organized into four parts and 23 smaller sections, readers have to work patiently through the vast amount of information. At times, almost half the page is set in smaller print, composed in quasi-footnote style with quotes and references in Italian, French and Spanish (but not German), and there are additional footnotes at the bottom of most pages. Warnke admits that his wish to publish this book without any illustrations was "somewhat eccentric"; but when one considers the number of artists, works and places mentioned, this wish becomes less eccentric while remaining unusual. One cannot help but wish Warnke had approached his material in a less democratic way, highlighting some artists in greater depth, and providing an occasional interpretation, rather than accumulating so many details. But, apparently, interpretation was not the intention of the book.

While one admires Warnke's diligence, one can also find cause for some reservation: events such as the granting of gifts and titles are recounted chronologically, and yet these facts are insufficiently contextualized due to the brevity of the discussion. For example, the same title or gift for an artist may have very different cultural implications depending on where it was conferred (such as Bohemia or England) or when (such as the Middle Ages or the Baroque). Thus, facts are stated without sufficient allowance for changed political and societal circumstances.

The most valuable theme emerging from this wealth of information is the perspective of the uniqueness, self-confidence and public importance of the court artist. This status was not the result of the cultural climate of early Renaissance city states, as has been previously believed, but was much rather a direct outcome of the

artist's prestige at the courts of early modern Europe. This status was, however, bought at the price of obligations, limitations and frustrations encountered at court which would stand in the way of full artistic freedom and emancipation.

The most reflective and philosophical part of the book is the conclusion which makes allowance for "A look back in anger," as Warnke calls the conclusion (pp. 243-259), since a court artist's life was fraught with psychological bondage, political propaganda, moral acquiescence and spiritual conformity. Nevertheless, what the modern artist has "inherited from the court artist," Warnke observes, is "a radical claim to freedom and the right to realize his potential as he chooses." In this way, artists "retained their former consciousness of a higher destiny for the arts," while the history of the court artist is actually "the history of their suffering."

Here we find the perpetuation of the myth of the heroic male artist as tragic, lonely and exceptional. One can raise doubts concerning this generalization. Is the court artist syndrome the qualifying mark of artistic genius in the European tradition? What about artists that do not fit this pattern of having been forged in the conflict and crisis of court life, such as Brueghel or Rembrandt? Was their self-understanding less developed because they lived and worked in a middle class environment? And where are all the women artists of these past centuries? Only a few of them (such as Sophonisba Anguisciola and Angelica Kauffmann) are briefly mentioned, while many others, who were influential court artists (such as Artemisia Gentileschi or Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun) are missing from the pages of this huge, and yet incomplete, undertaking.

The 14 essays collected in *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts* were written in honour of Sir Oliver Millar, a foremost authority on English seventeenth-century art. Half of the essays focus on painting, especially on portraiture connected with Van Dyck, but also on artists such as Lely and Kneller. Two essays discuss architectural aspects (especially Inigo Jones), another one concerns itself with tomb sculpture, while two others are concerned with etching and with manuscripts about artistic techniques. These diverse studies are the result of a collaboration of British, American, and Canadian museum curators as well as scholars of art, history and literature; the essays are aptly edited by David Howarth, an art historian at the University of Edinburgh.

Patronage took various and unexpected forms during this crucial time in the history of England, when foreign artists were more likely to be welcomed by princely collectors than by local artists. While both Holbein and Van Dyck were highly favoured at court because of their unequalled skills in portraiture (which was essential to the monarchy), they were at the same time bitterly opposed by the so-called "Painters-Stainers Company" (p. 32) which saw its livelihood threatened by these intruders. The documentation of this London-based company allows valuable insight into an otherwise little known cultural and political aspect of society during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The most fascinating essay of the book, as far as women's issues are concerned, is the discussion of "The Great Picture of Lady Anne Clifford" (pp. 202-219), a triptych attributed to Jan van Belcamp. The author of the essay, Graham Parry, traces

with great sensitivity and precision the details of this unique visual document of 1646. In its careful arrangement of portraiture and still life the work reveals not only Lady Anne's prominent ancestry but also her fine education and strength of character as suggested by the kinds of books depicted in the background. She commissioned this work in order to celebrate her victory concerning her inheritance in a law suit which began when she was 15 and ended when she was in her fifties.

The book features 77 black-and-white illustrations, the only colour plates serving as dust cover. The front cover depicts the young courtier, playwright and patron Thomas Killigrew with his brother-in-law, both in the state of mourning and melancholy. This and other works are interpreted by Malcolm Rogers in a fine essay which provides valuable insight into the life of one of the most intriguing and controversial contemporaries of Van Dyck.

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Camille Wells Slights. *Shakespeare's Comic Commonwealths*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Pp. viii, 290.

The title of Slights' book suggests plurality of consideration, but the volume embarks upon a more singular exercise, exploring "how the ten comedies from *The Comedy of Errors* through *Twelfth Night* represent the problems and satisfactions of people living together in an ordered commonwealth" (p. 4). This notion of an unproblematically posited "commonwealth" undermines attempts throughout the book to engage and accommodate a variety of critical approaches and cultural interpretations. And yet Slights is clearly familiar with recent critical trends, as indicated by her full bibliography and variety of analytical gestures. She might have exchanged more fully with recent criticism or asserted more fully her own defining methodology. After all, it seems rather late in the day to be challenging the "traditional view" that Shakespeare's early comedies are simply romantic excursions into the experience of love. Having detected, however, a "relative neglect of the social dimensions of the comedies" (p. 4), Slights issues just such a challenge. She proposes to go beyond the "festive" comedy approach of C. L. Barber and the "green world" comedy approach of Northrop Frye — derived as they are, Slights claims, from psychological models — to examine the social nature of Shakespeare's early comedies. And yet most recent critical responses to Shakespearean comedy, including issue-oriented studies of gender, race, class, or history, anthropological rite or carnivalesque celebration, take some measure of the social dimensions involved.

On the question of critical approach, Slights is content with suave irony: "These