

Alfred Bader

Art Related Correspondence

Correspondence: Darren Hynes

[Co. 20097]

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David de Witt

From: dhynes@mun.ca
Sent: Monday, October 05, 2009 3:30 PM
To: 3dad5@queensu.ca
Subject: Descartes portrait

Dear Dr. Dewitt: I am currently working on the portaiture of Descartes and would like to request a copy of the Nason portrait to use in an upcoming publication. Perhaps you remember me as we corresponded about this matter a couple of years ago? At any rate, my paper on the interpretation and iconography of Descartes has been accepted at the International Historical Review. If you wish, I will send along a copy of the paper when it comes out. If you are able to email a copy that would be easier for me; if not, please send a hard copy and I will scan it in. Thanking you for your attention,

Darren Hynes
Department of History
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Arts & Administration Building, Room A4019
St. John's, NL
A1C 5S7



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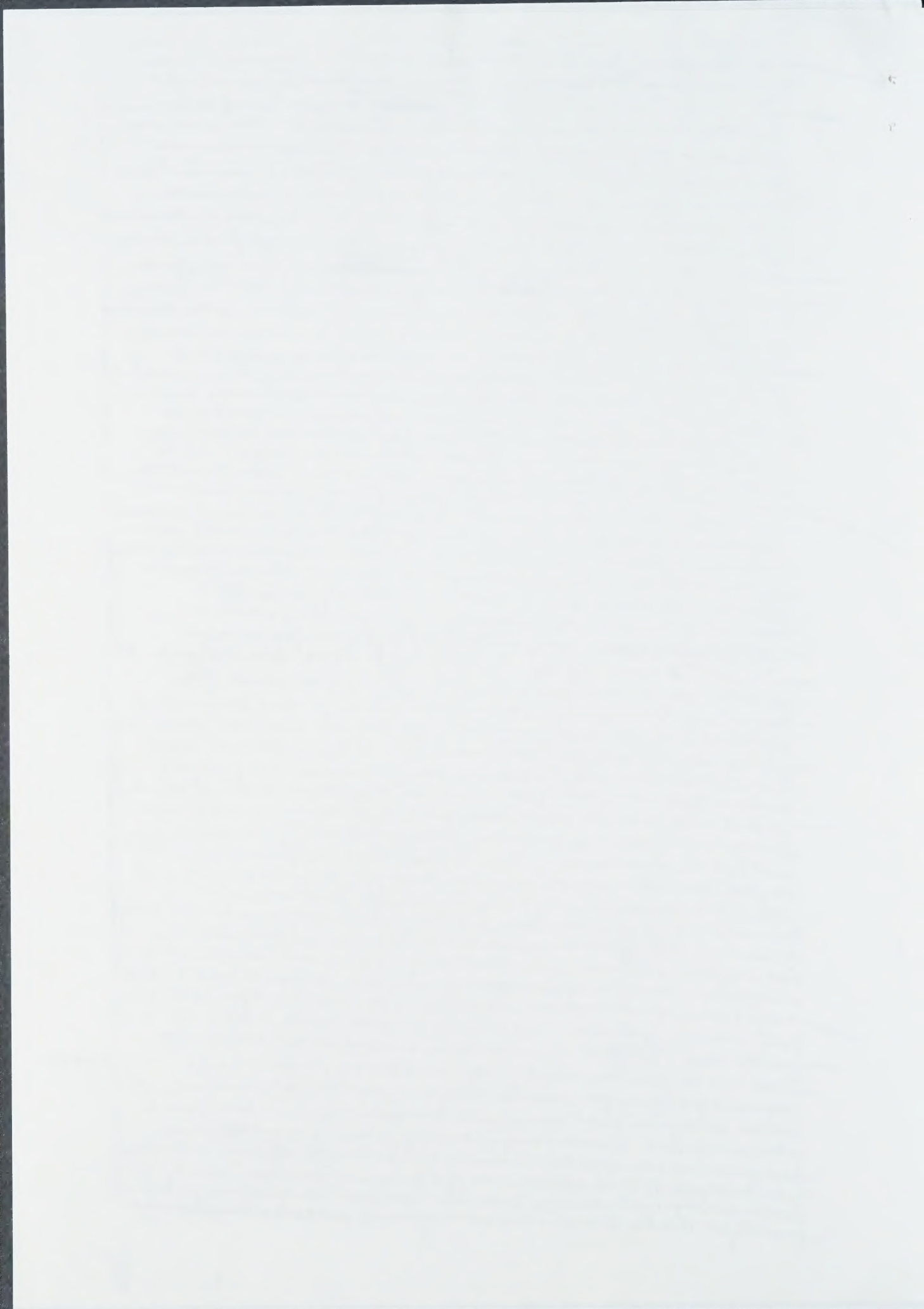
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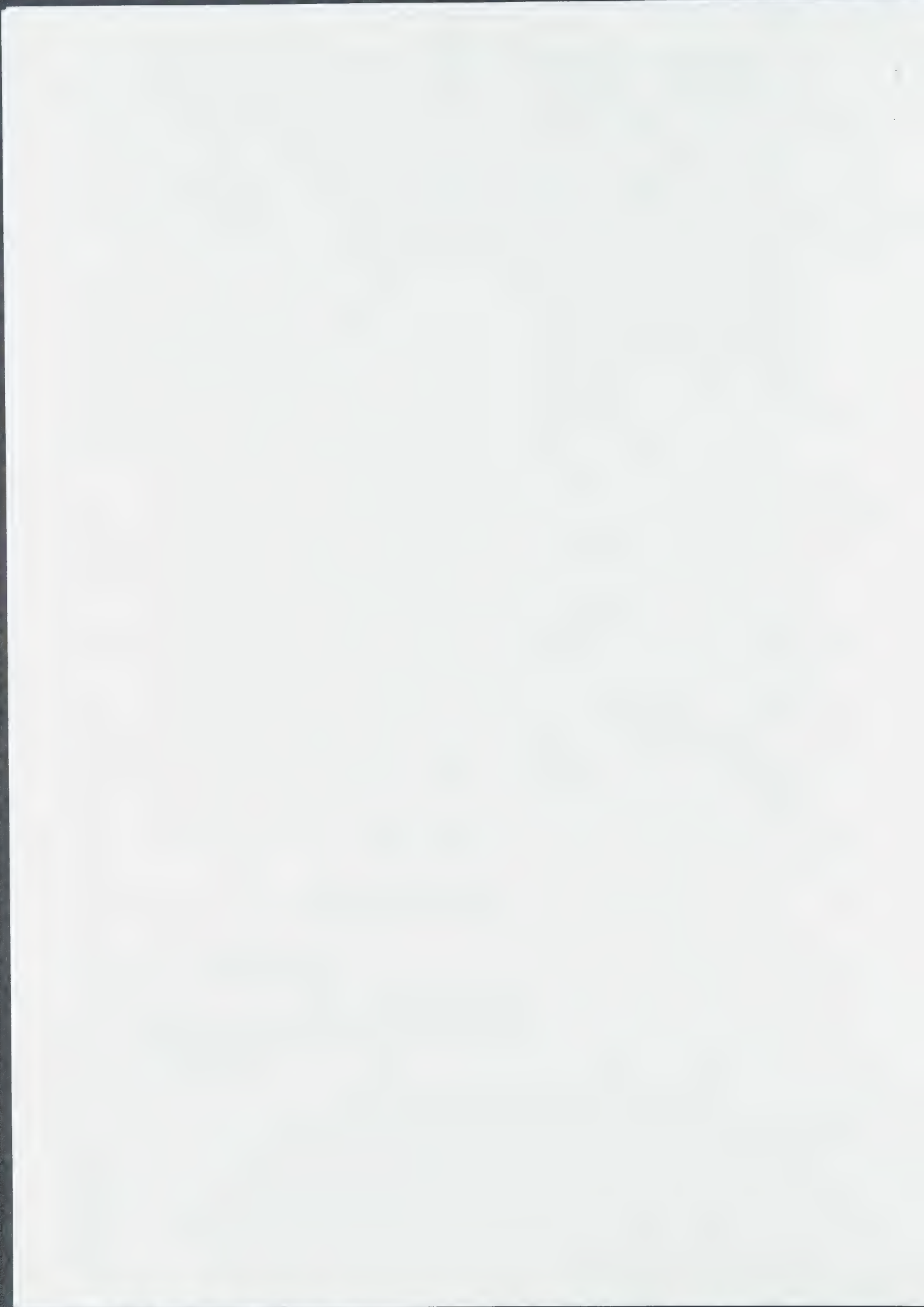
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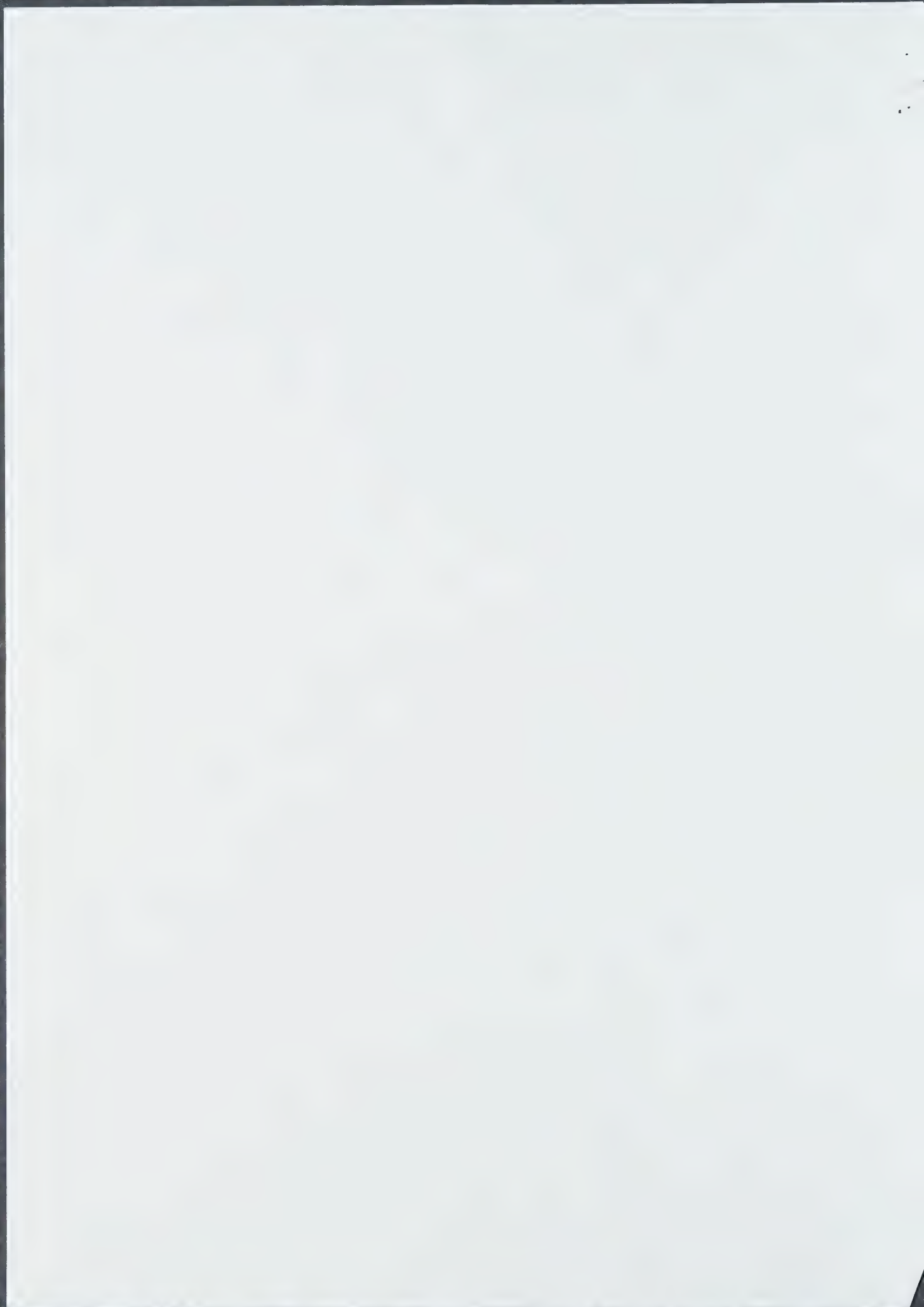
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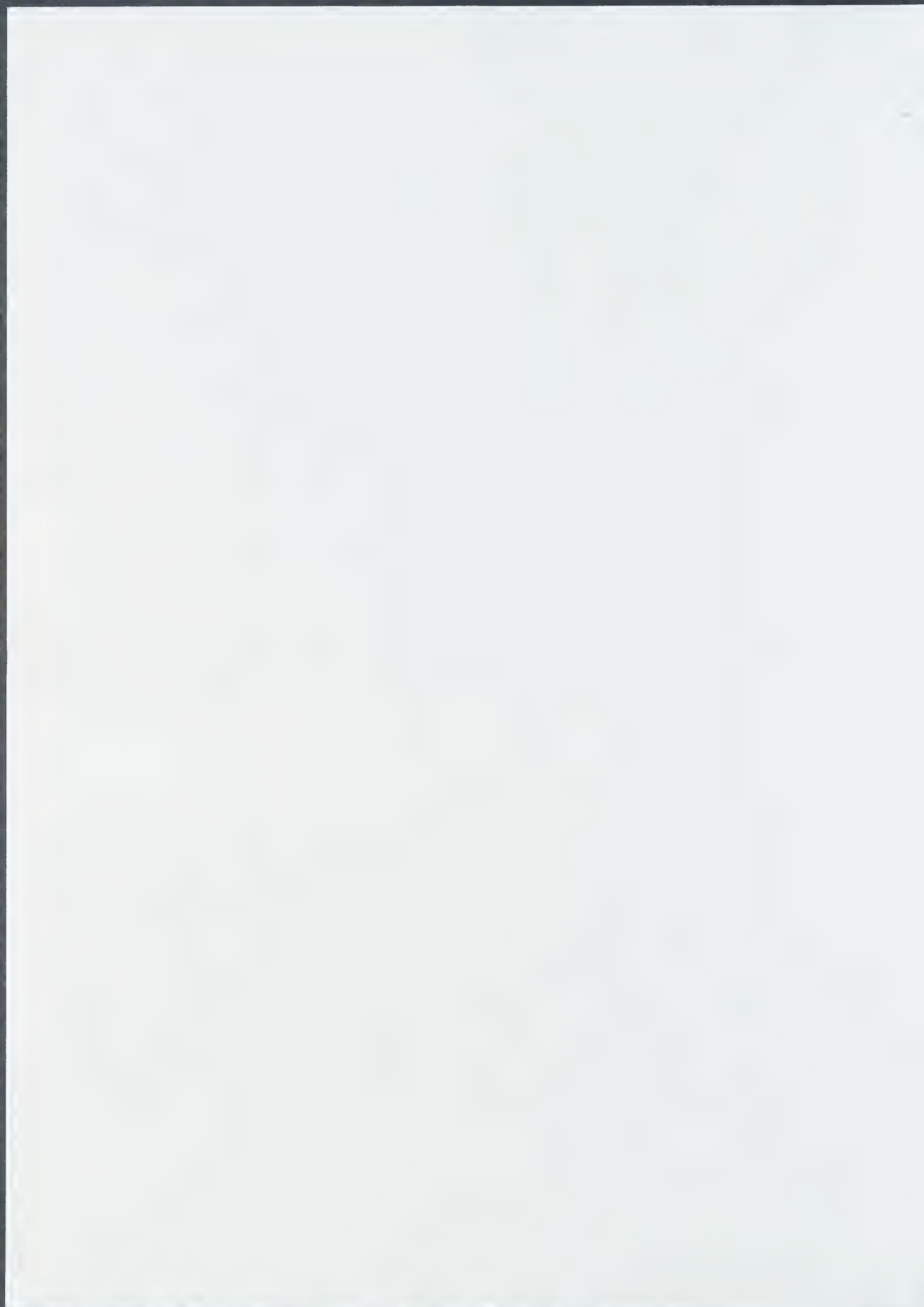


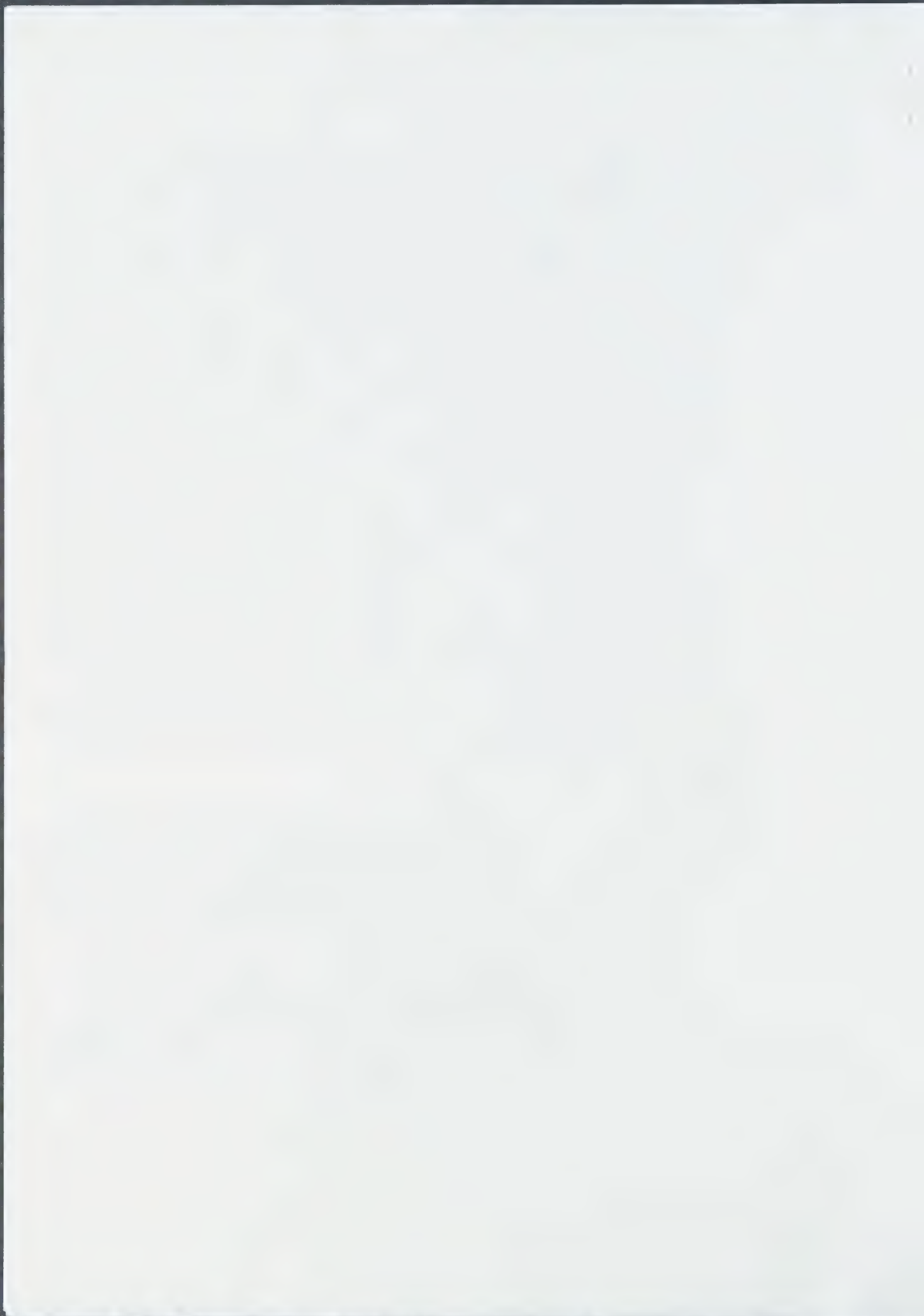




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The Enigma of Descartes

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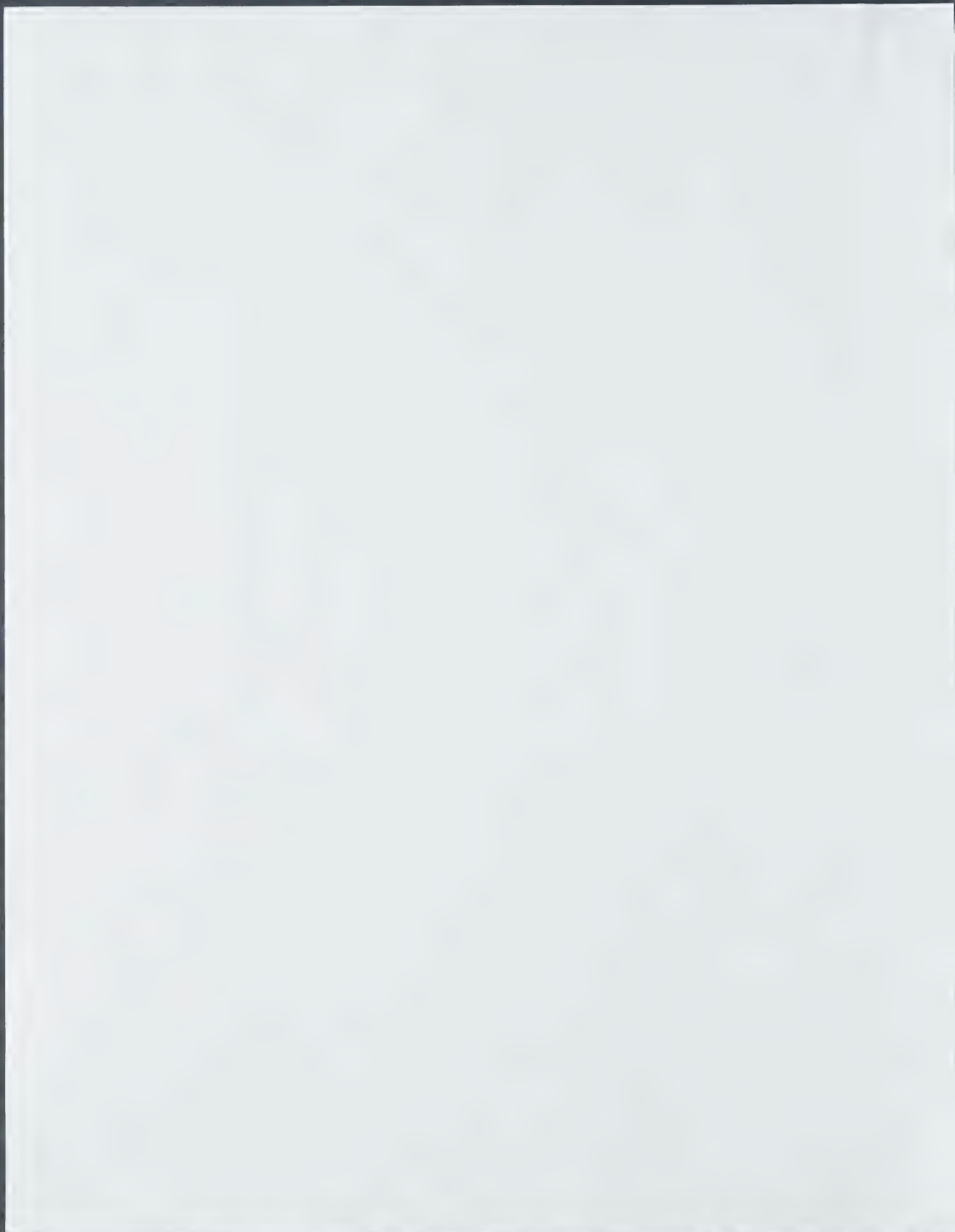
A Representational Joke in Baillet's *La Vie de Monsieur Descartes*

The frontispiece of Adrien Baillet's 1691 biography of Descartes is an engraving of the famous philosopher by Edelinck after the by then well-known portrait by Frans Hals (see Figs. 1 and 2). Below the engraving Baillet has placed the motto, "Bene qui latuit, bene vixit" - "He has lived well, who has lived well-hidden." - perhaps a bitter attempt at humour after a year uncovering the hidden Descartes - but is that who we see in the engraving? Baillet knew that representation is a tricky business. He notes in his Preface:

Unless one writes the life of a man so private as to have no profession or no estate, one always finds two characters to depict in the one whose history is being written. Some have believed that this double depiction is only due to public persons. But the great success had by several private lives that have appeared, principally in our century, has sufficiently convinced us that to have two visages it is not always necessary to be in the service of the state or in the middle of the army, or at the head of sovereign companies, or even in the see of a Prelate. It suffices to have had relations with other men, even if one spends all one's life in a cell or a study.¹

Baillet tells us that he has to relate not only "l'homme intérieur", but also "l'homme de dehors." - the man Descartes himself presented to the world (the philosopher and mathematician) - but he would have ill-profited from the advantage that biography has over general history if he had not been taxed to uncover the interior Descartes; a treasure, he says, that up until then had been hidden from the world.²

Baillet was, in fact, fascinated with uncovering hidden identity. He and his pupil, the avocate-general Lamoignon's eldest son, would play "le jeu des Masques d'Auteurs" a learning game that consisted in uncovering the identity of authors hidden



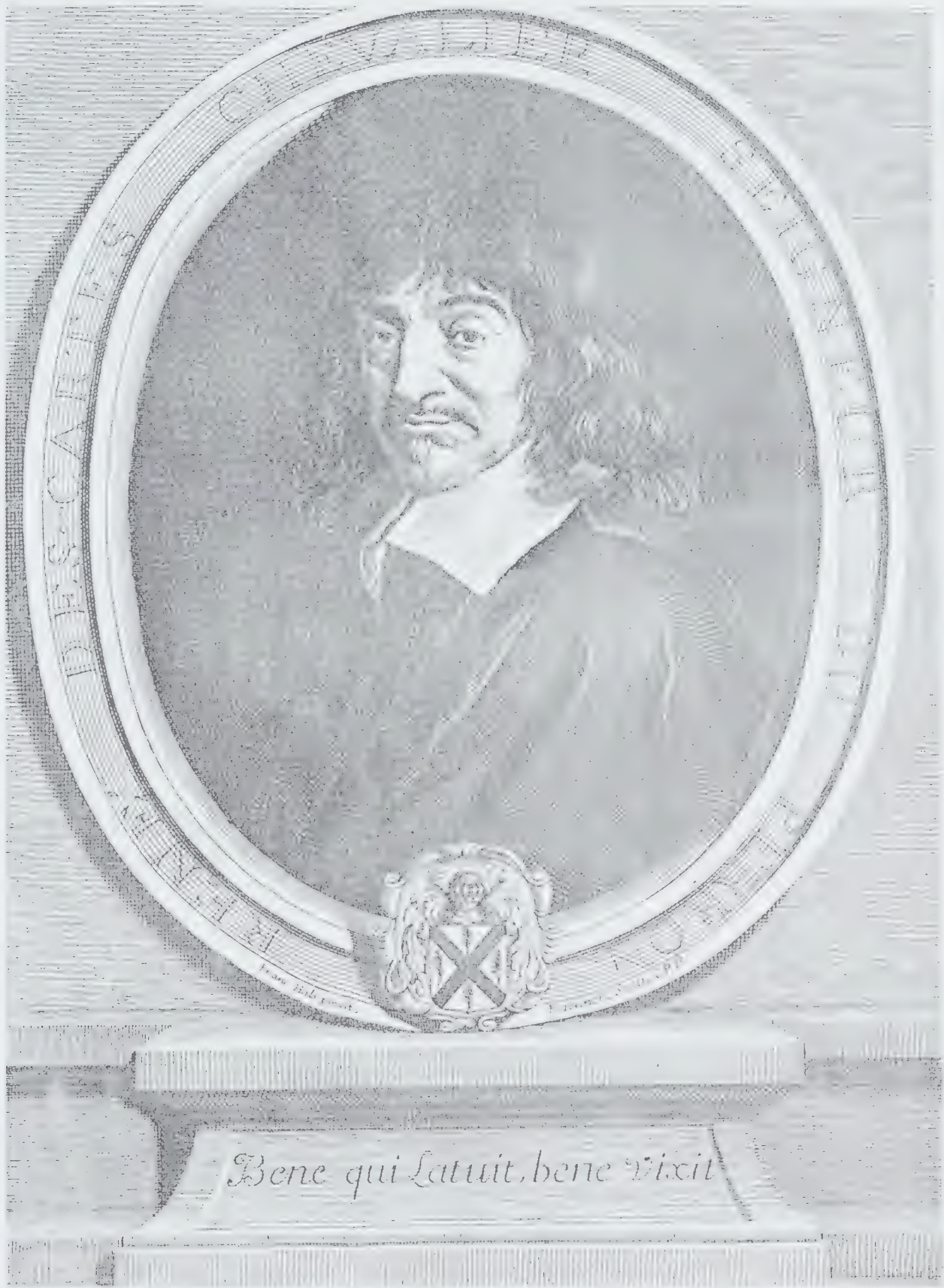


Fig. 1: Frontispiece to Baillet's Biography



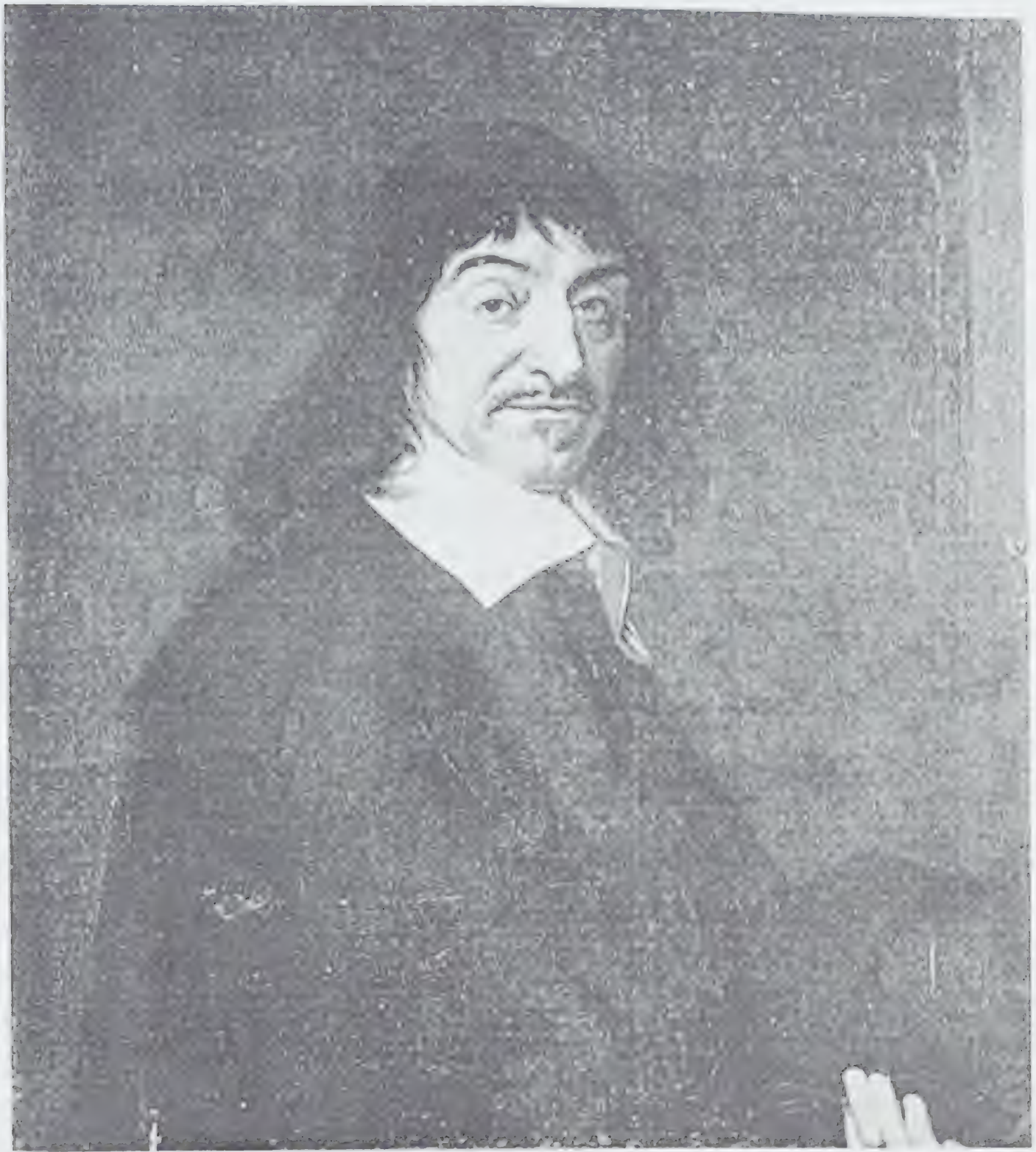


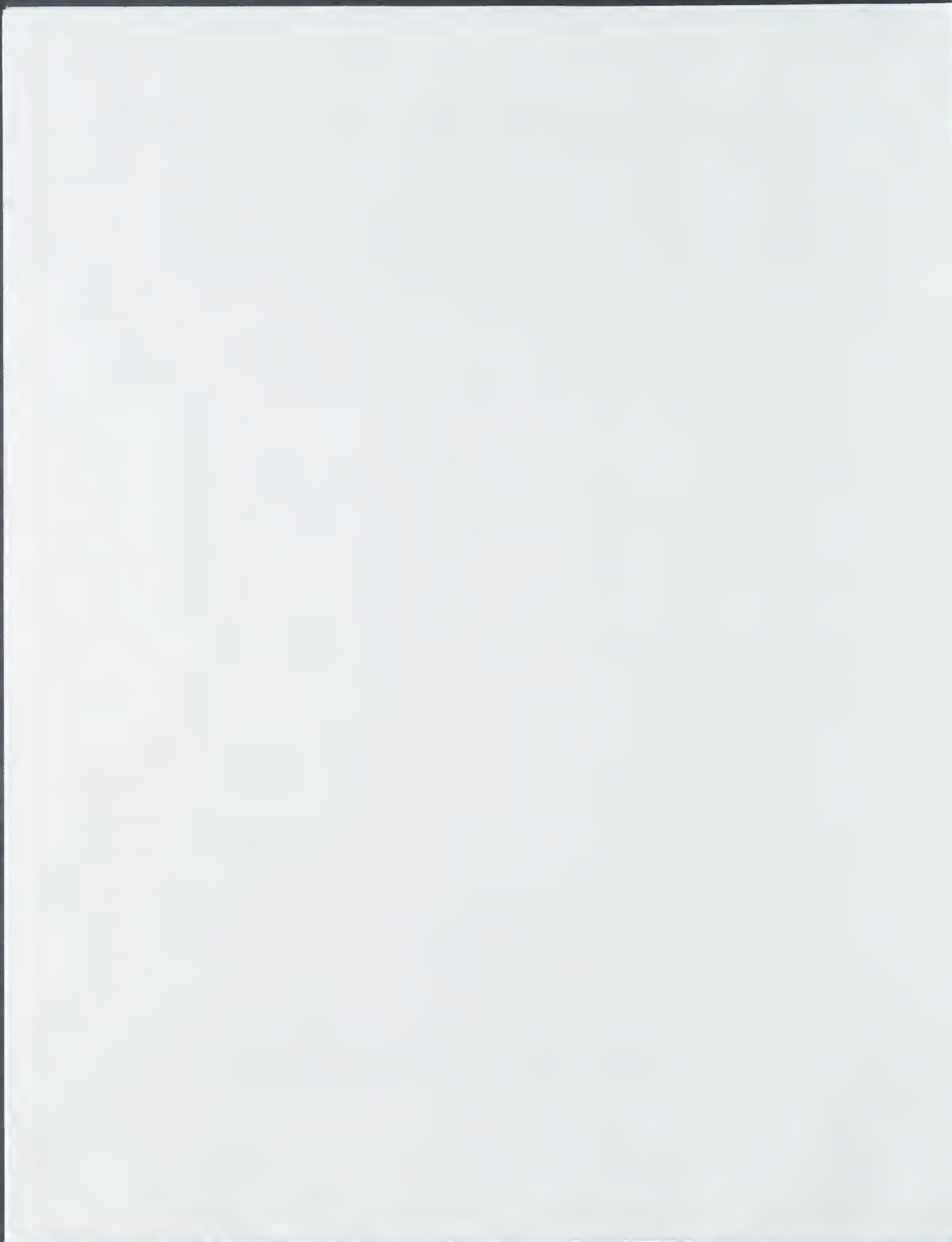
Fig.2: Portrait of Descartes by Frans Hals



behind a false name. His 1689 polemic Satires Personelles, opens with a list of twenty-seven fictitious works by twenty-seven anagrammatically disguised Baillets. A year before the Descartes biography appeared he published his Auteurs dèguisez sous des noms Etrangers, Empruntez, Supposez, Feints à plaisir, Chiffrez, Renversez, Retournez, ou changez d'une Langue à une autre, a work that was originally supposed to have two parts, one on pseudonyms and the other on anonymous works.³ This playful fascination with hiddenness, I think, gives us a clue to his choice of this particular motto for the frontispiece.

Even by 1650 there were several engravings of Descartes available but by Baillet's time by far the most popular were those based on the 1649 Hals portrait.⁴ Many assume that this portrait is the one referred to by Baillet, commissioned by Augustijn Bloemart, a Catholic priest in Haarlem, who asked for a portrait of Descartes so that he could find "some small consolation in the copy of an original which might be lost."⁵ There is, however, no direct evidence of this, and, unfortunately, there is no mention of any such painting in the probate inventory of Bloemart's belongings, still extant at the Haarlem archives.⁶ In fact, the painting is somewhat controversial. Amongst all the extant versions there is disagreement over which is the original, or even whether the original still exists.⁷ Johan Nordstrom has argued that there is good reason to believe that Descartes never sat for Hals, and that his portrait is "practically a creation of the artist's imagination." The truer likeness of Descartes, he argues, is that of Frans van Schooten the Younger, which was drawn and engraved in 1644.⁸ (See Fig. 3)

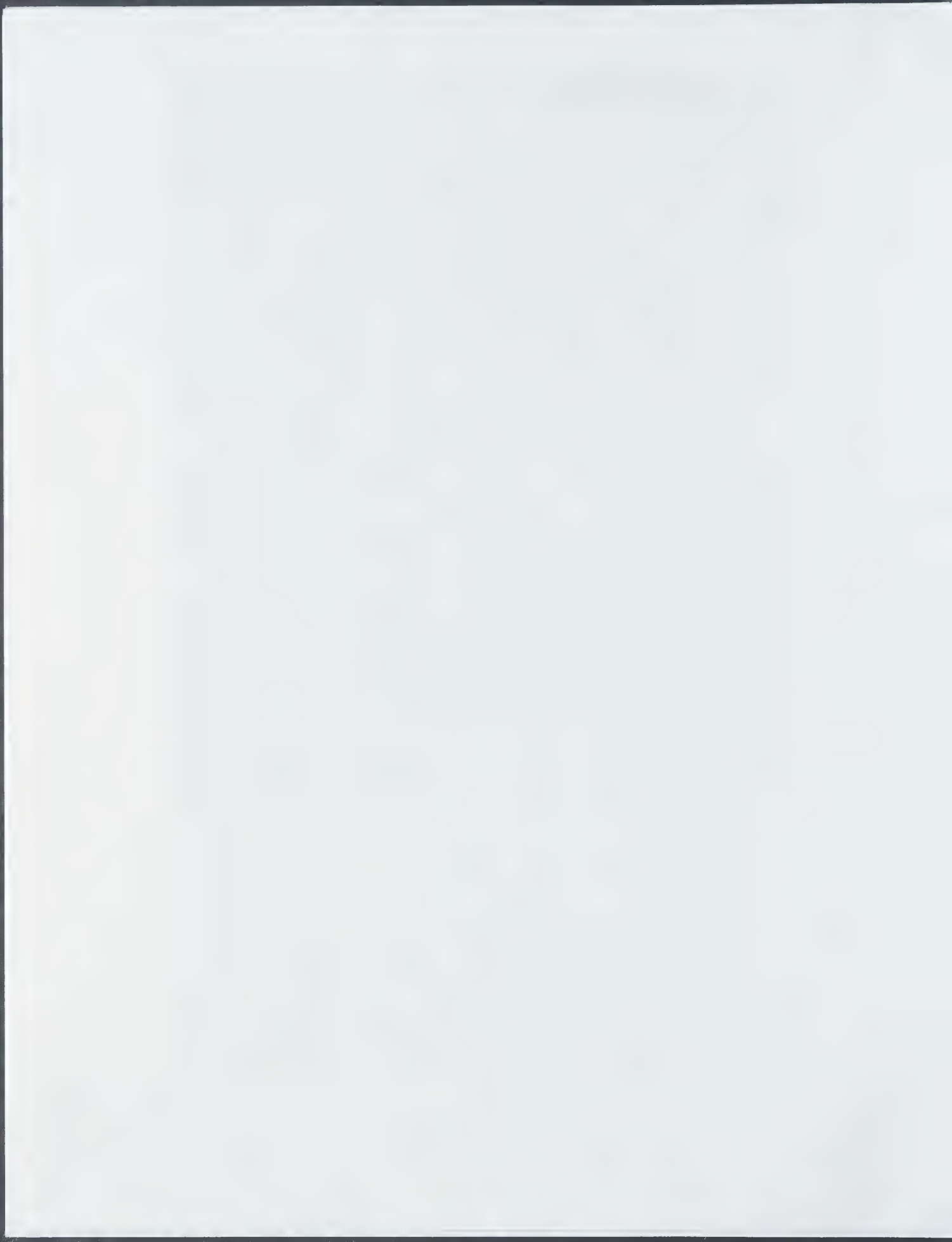
Nordstrom's case is built on the testimony of Erasmus Bartholinus, a pupil of Van Schooten's, who considered his teacher's engraving a superior likeness of Descartes. In





Primas inaccessum qui per tot aecula verum
 Erunt & aetnae longae caligine videris.
 Nulla sagax, Nitens, mus, ac cernitur Orbi
 Cartesius. Vultu access in imago vultus
 Inagere victura artificis per hactenus fama.
 Omnia ut aspicere quae aecula nulla caruerit.
 CAROLVS DE BOSSCHU F.

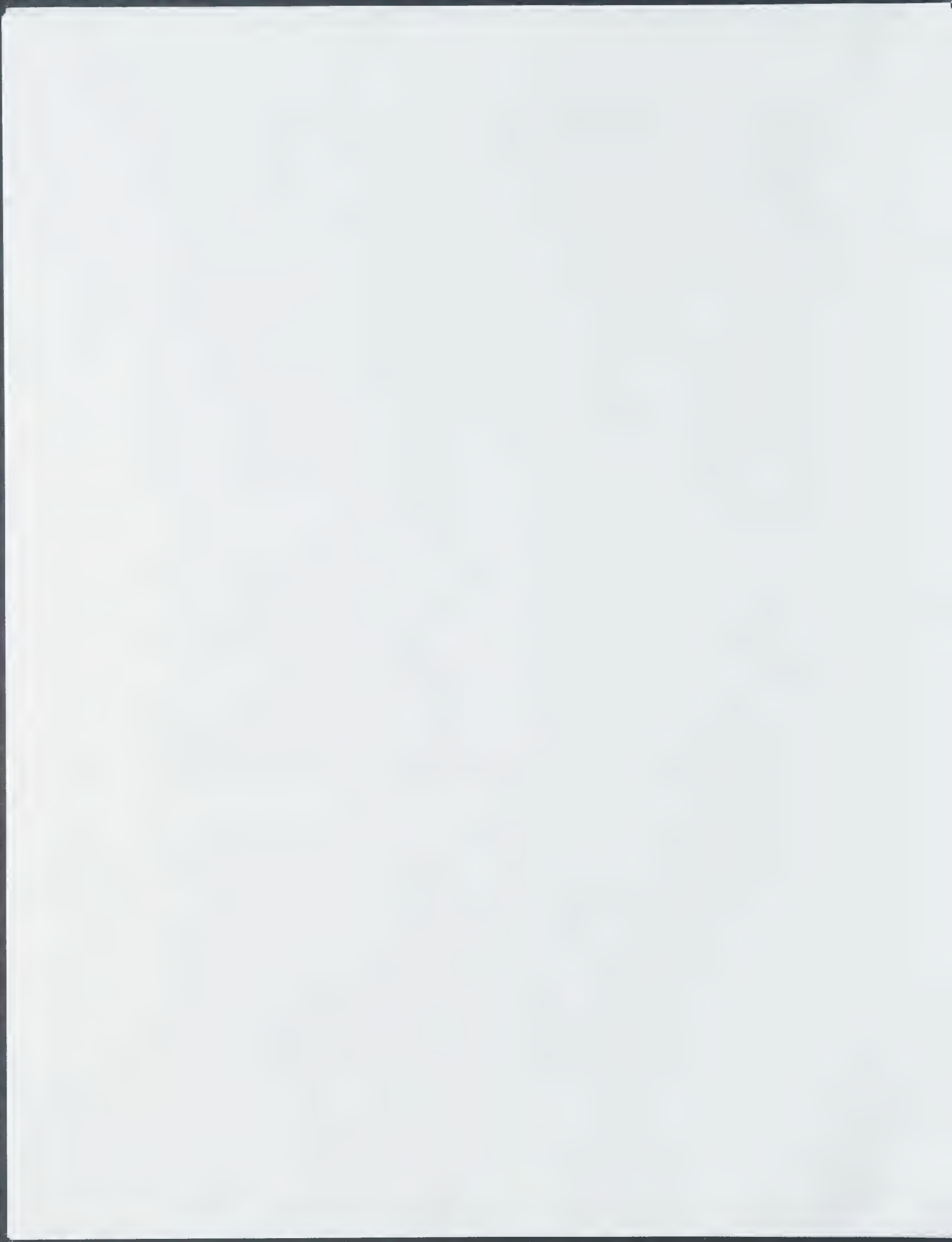
Fig. 3: Engraving of Descartes by van Schooten



a letter dated June 2, 1650, Bartholinus wrote to one of his friends: "I am sending a portrait of Mr. Descartes which represents him exactly according to nature, as far as I and others can judge. So far I have been unable to obtain more specimens of it, as its author has had only 100 copies printed, of which two have fallen to my lot; if I can get more later, I will send them with pleasure.." He later adds that Descartes "has been engraved here in copper twice more, and this with stately appearance [or perhaps: in imposing size], also with excellent skill, but as they [viz. these engravings] do not at all express the features of Descartes I have not thought it worthwhile to send them." Nordstrom has shown that the two engravings referred to here are those by Cornelius van Dalen, and the copy Suyderhoef made after Hals. (see figures 4 and 5).

So, according to a contemporary, Hals' likeness of Descartes was very poor. In addition, according to Nordstrom, the Hals painting was probably a posthumous one modeled after the engraving by Van Schooten, and painted by Hals on the instigation of his friend and relative Suyderhoef, who, for the benefit of both, wanted to exploit the situation created by Descartes' death. It is also significant, I think, that although Baillet discusses the portrait commissioned by Bloemart, he makes no mention of Hals, whose name appears in the frontispiece engraving.

Baillet, an expert on printing and emblems, where riddles and hidden meanings were commonplace, knew of the van Schooten engraving, its provenance, as well as Descartes' comments on it.⁹ Van Schooten wanted to publish it in his Latin translation of the Geometry, issued in 1649, and sent it, along with the engravings of Bartholinus, to Descartes for his comments. In a letter to his friend dated April 9, 1649, Descartes asked that it not be printed. If van Schooten insisted on using it, he wrote, he should remove the





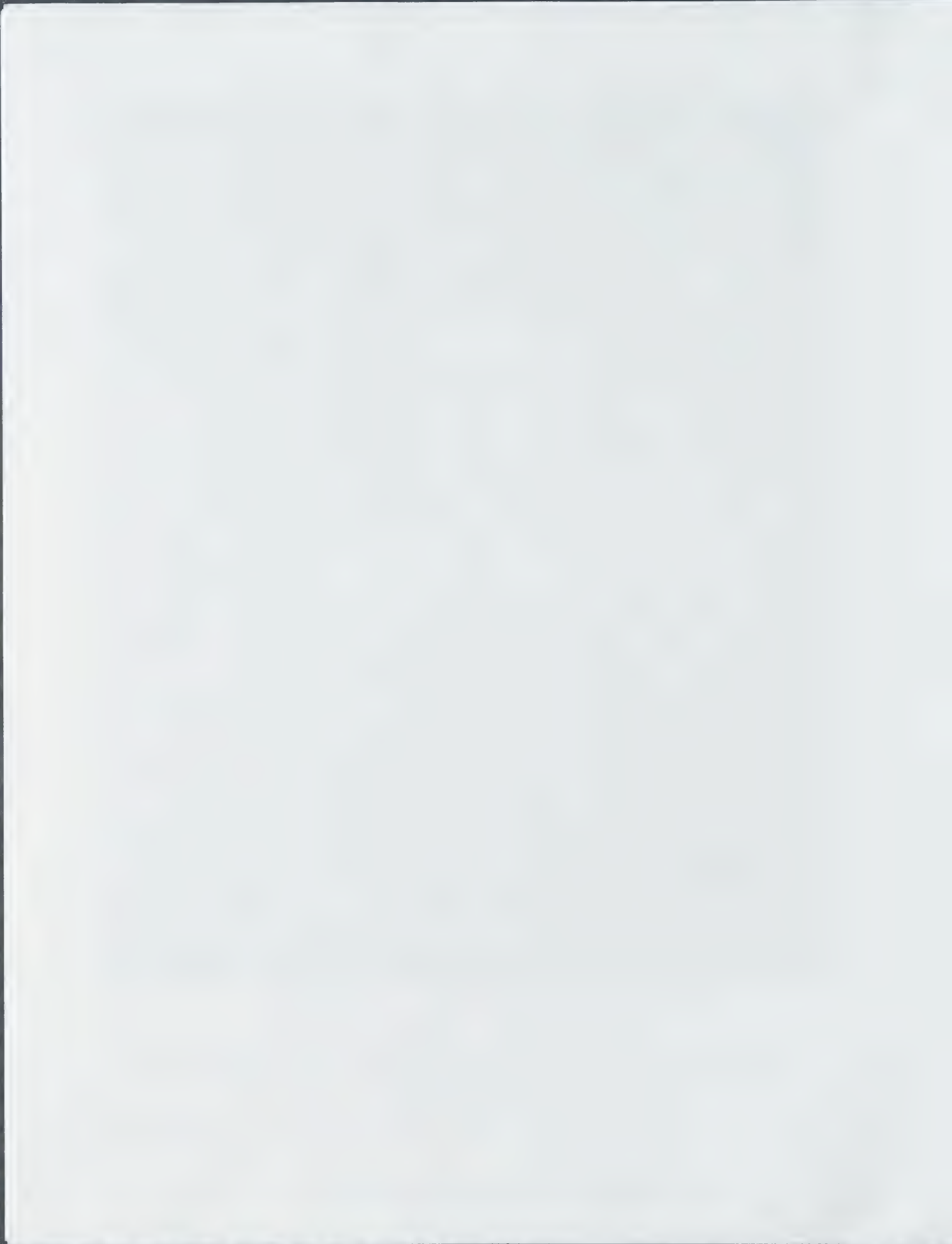
RENATUS DESCARTES

NOBILIS GALIÆ PERBONI DOMINVS. SVMMVS MATHEMATICS ET PHILOSOPHVS
NATVS HAGÆ TVRONVM PRIDIE CALENDAS APRILES 1595 DENATVS HELMÆ
VALENTIS FEBRVARII 1650

J. J. Valart sculp.

J. J. Valart sculp.

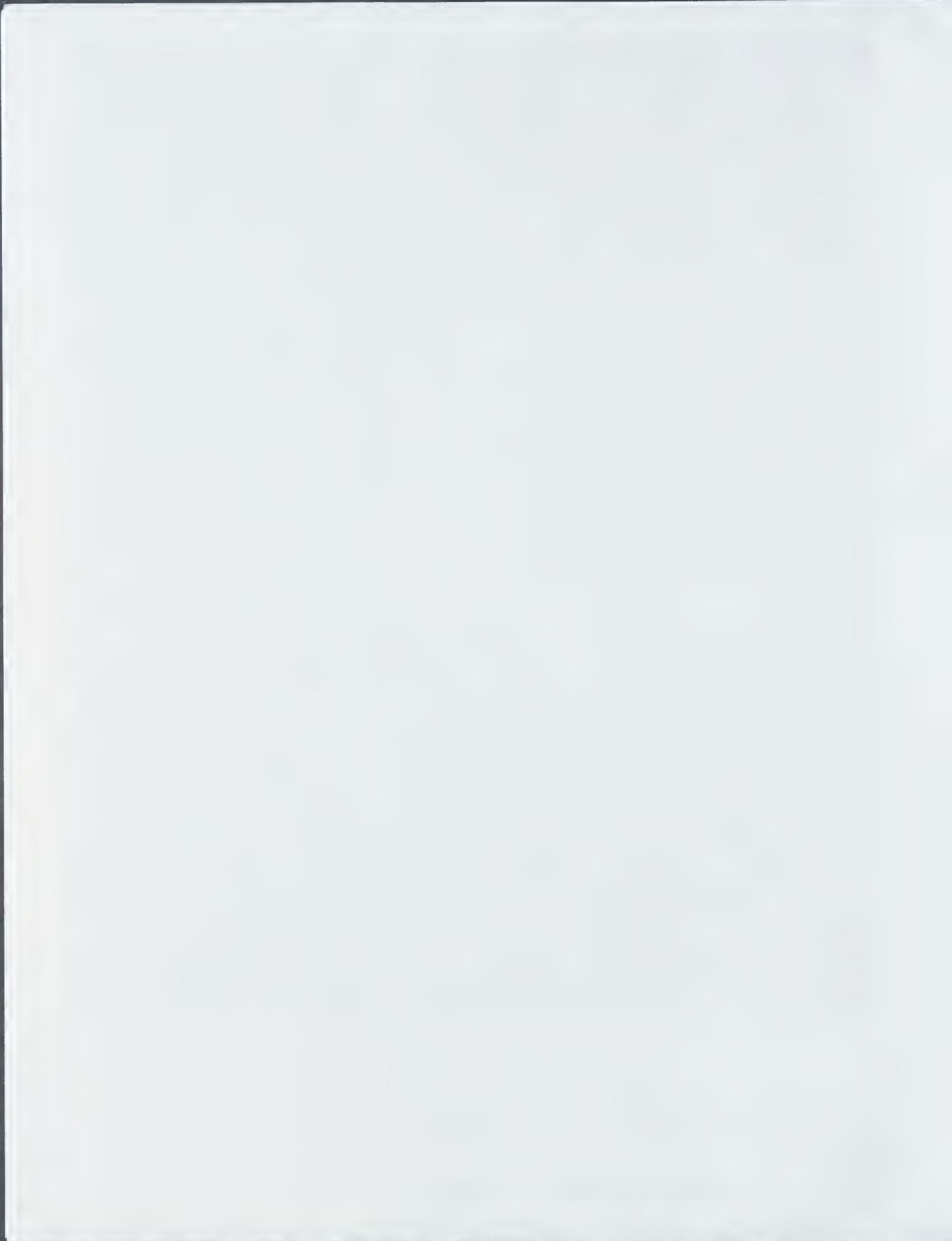
Fig. 4: Engraving of Descartes by Cornelius van Dalen





RENÉ DESCARTES, PHILOSOPHUS GALLICUS, IDEOGENUS, DOCTOR UNIVERSITATIS PARISIENSIS, SEPTUAGESIMO SEXTO ANNO AETATIS SUAE, A SUYDERHOFFO ENGRAVATUS.

Fig. 5: Engraving of Descartes by Suyderhoff



inscription, "A nobleman of the Perron, born on the last day of March 1596." He objected to the first part because he disliked all titles, and to the remaining part "because I also dislike horoscope-makers, whose error we seem to encourage when we publish the date of someone's birth."¹⁰ Schooten subsequently suppressed the engraving until after Descartes' death, bringing out a limited edition, as we have seen, in 1650. In 1659 he used the engraving as the frontispiece for the second edition of the Geometry. It is clearly the basis of the Tollain engraving from 1670, as well as the representation issued by the Academy in Bullart's 1682 Vies & Éloges Historiques des Hommes Illustres. (See figures 6 and 7) Baillet, who was Lamoignon's librarian in addition to tutoring his children, was almost certainly aware of these, given the importance of prints to late 17th century collections.¹¹

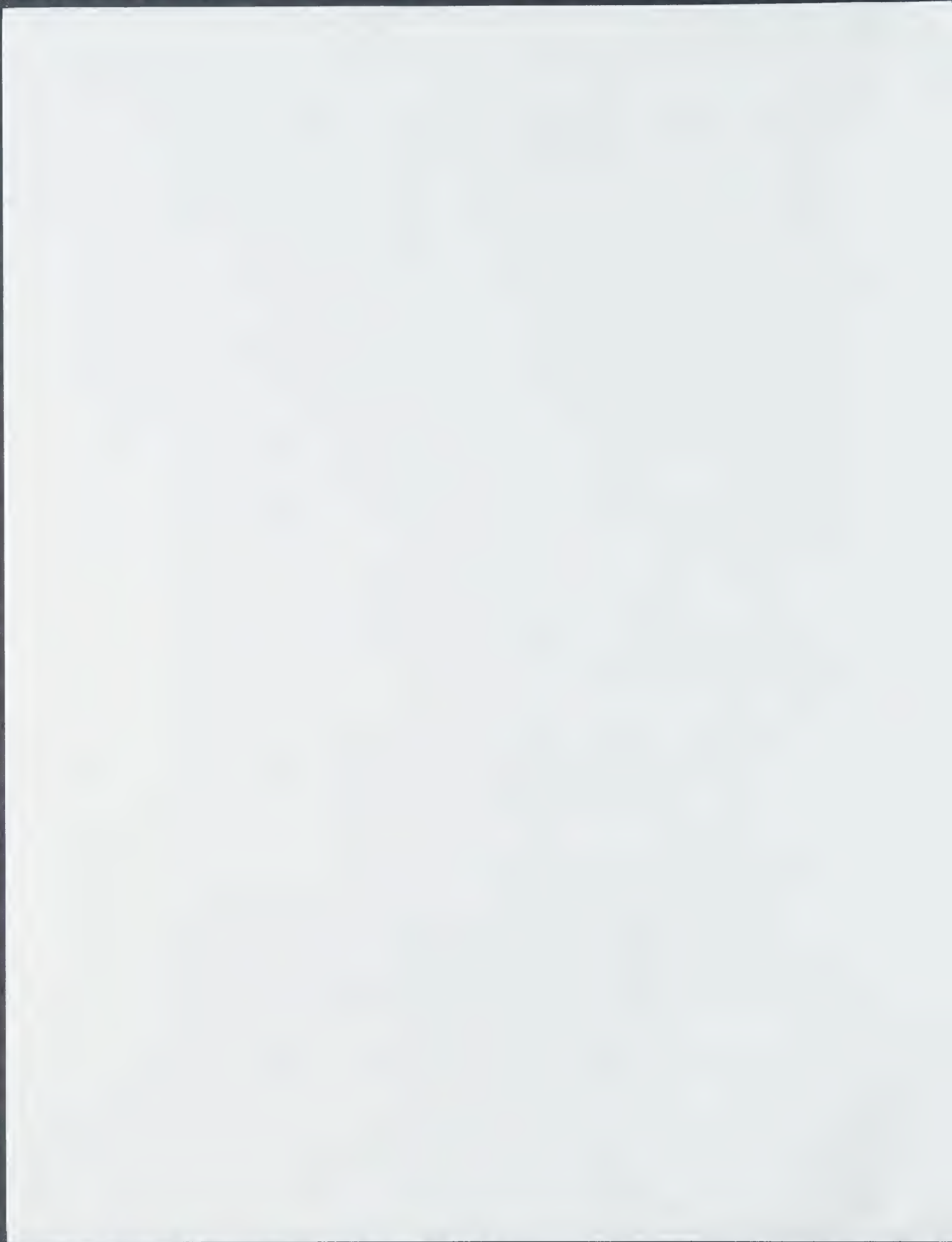
In the 17th century, engraved representations of the famous were notoriously unreliable, but both the Suyderhoef/Hals and the van Schooten claim to be accurate likenesses.¹² The Suyderhoef inscription reads:

This is what the son of Nature looked like:
 One who laid open to the mind the path into his Mother's belly,
 And assigning to each miracle its cause,
 He alone was the only miracle left in the world.

Compare this to the more elegant prose of the van Schooten:

He who was the first to unearth the truth, which was inaccessible for so many ages,
 Out of the foul shades of the long darkness.
 Nature, your wise initiate, Cartesius, appears in this way to the world.
 The dutiful right hand of the artist wanted to join the sacred face on the painting
 To everlasting fame, in order that all generations might look upon the one
 Whom no generations will be silent over.

Of the two claims, however, the second is the most trustworthy insofar as it was





RENE DES CARTES Seigneur de Briques nage
/ An 1595 Et mourut l'An 1650, en l'Isle de Reins
/ avant fait venir avec luy de l'Isle de Reins
/ excellent Scauoir dans les Sciences

Antoine TOLLAIN 1678

Fig. 6: Engraving of Descartes by Tollain

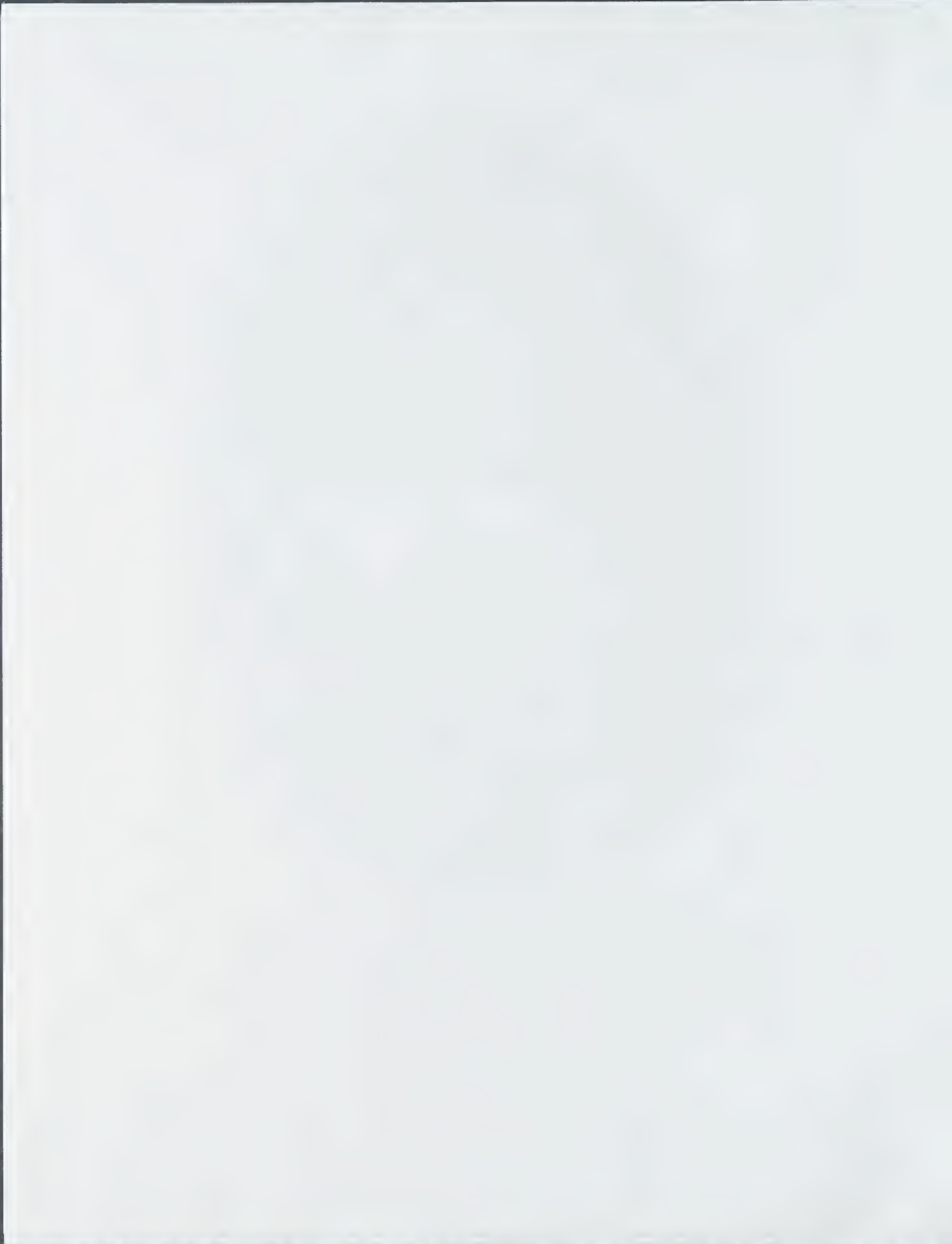
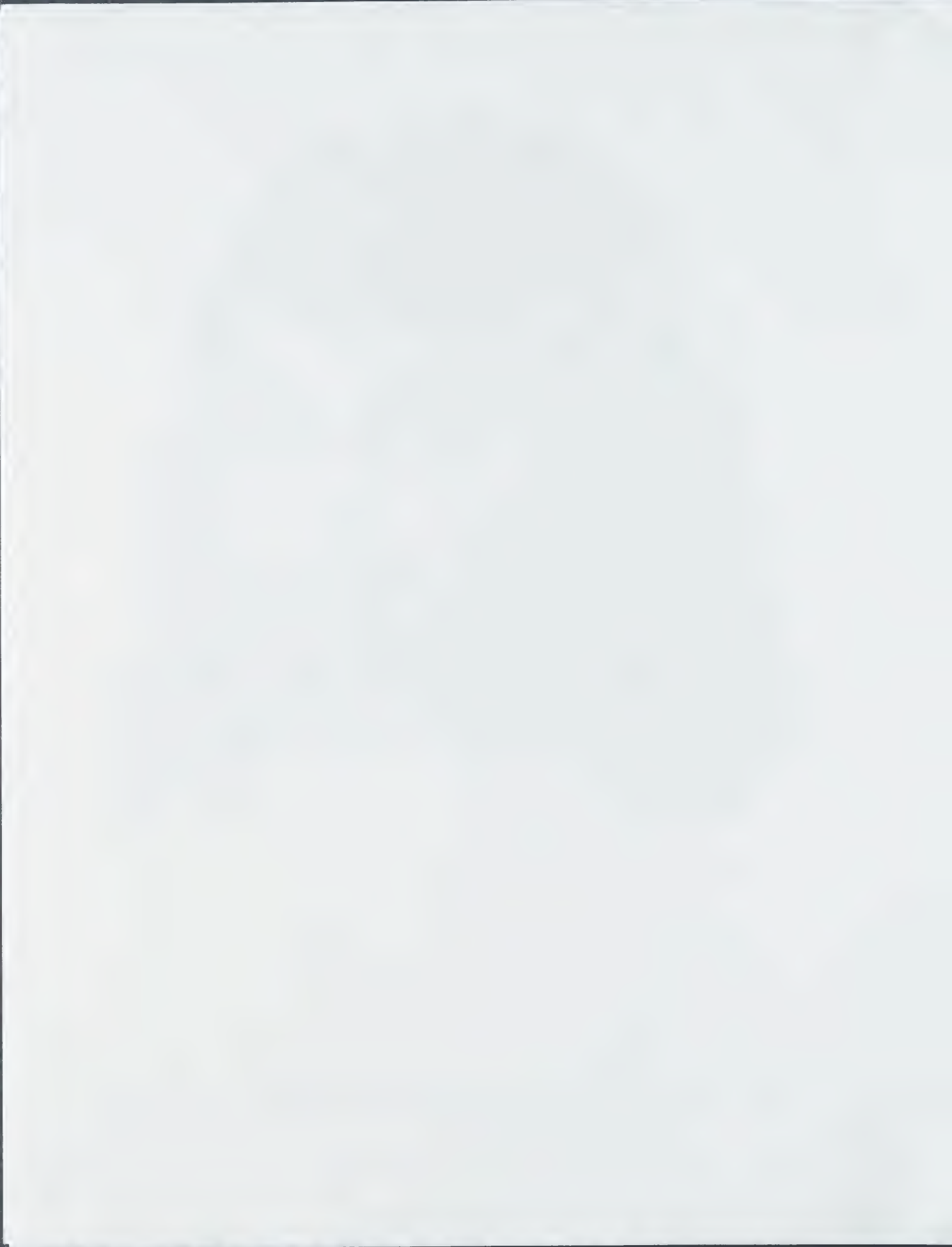




Fig. 7: Engraving from Bullart's *Vies & Eloges des Hommes Illustres*



written by Constantine Huyghens Junior, who had known Descartes since childhood, and it was attached to the Schooten engraving when Descartes saw it in 1649.¹³ Finally, we have Descartes' own testimony, which Baillet quotes, that the van Schooten portrait is "a very fine representation" although "the beard and the clothes bear no resemblance to reality." - two details that are altered in the Hals/Suyderhoef piece.¹⁴

There is therefore some question as to the reliability of the likeness in Baillet's frontispiece engraving, and he probably knew it. It is possible that he is playing another one of his games here. We have to remember how meticulous he was, his love for curious encyclopaedic detail. As Sebba points out "if he had a vice it was the compilers vice of stopping nothing short of total coverage."¹⁵ Baillet's subtle representational joke highlights a hermeneutical problem we all face in trying to understand Descartes - uncovering the man behind the image.

1 Adrien Baillet, La Vie de Monsieur Descartes, 2 vols. (Hildesheim, New York: George Olms Verlag, 1972), v. I, p. iv.

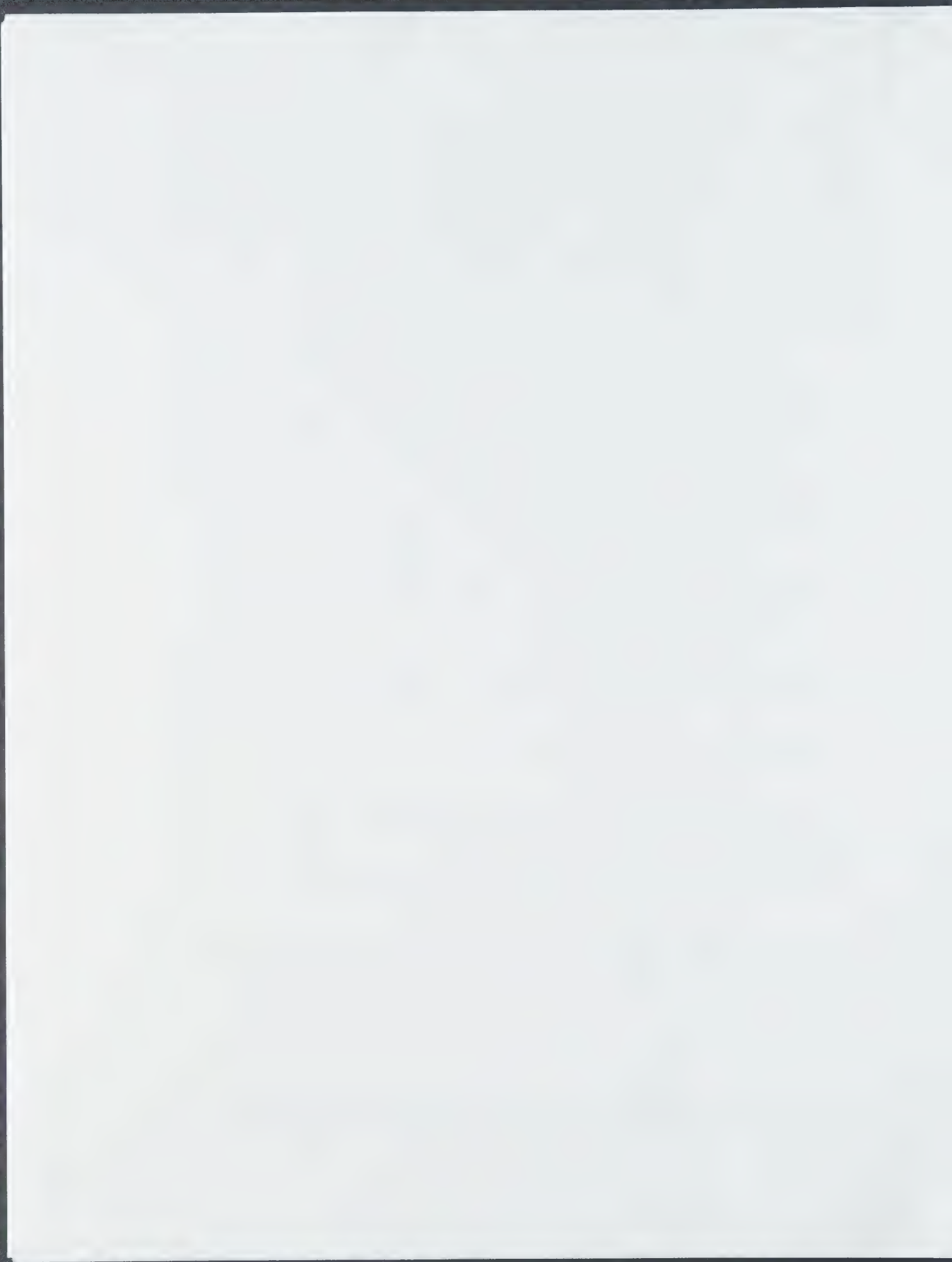
2 Ibid, pp. iv-vi.

3 Gregor Sebba, "Adrien Baillet and the Genesis of His **Vie de Monsieur Des-cartes**", Problems of Cartesianism, Thomas M. Lennon, John M. Nicholas, and John W. Davis, eds. (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), pp. 17, 43-44.

4 For the popularity of the Hals likeness see Seymour Slive, Frans Hals (New York: Phaidon Press, 1970), p. 168.

5 Baillet, v. II, p. 387.

6 My thanks to Dutch art historian Marten Jan Bok, of the University of Amsterdam, (?) for telling me where to find the Bloemart will. In the early 1990s he published a



biography of the Utrecht painter Abraham Bloemaert and had tried to find a connection to the priest but failed. He did, however, discover a lot of material on Augustin Bloemart, all at the Haarlem Municipal Archives. Found there is:

30 Sept. 1659: Testament of Augustinus Alstenius Bloemart (Haarlem Town Archives, Loketcast 1.4.1., notary Michel de Keyser, after an autograph last will d.d. 11 Oct. 1657.)
1 October, 1659: Codicil (ibid.)

Bloemart made the Catholic poor of Haarlem his universal heirs. After his death most of his possessions were sold and the proceeds were put into a trust fund known as the Bloemartfonds. Part of Bloemart's papers are still preserved in the so-called Archief Bloematfonds. See especially:

20 November 1659; probate inventory of the late Augustinus Alstenius Bloemart, died Nov. 14, 1659. (Archief Bloemartfonds, 1, notary Michel de Keyser).

My thanks also to David A. Dewitt, Bader Curator of European Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University who looked at this material for me.

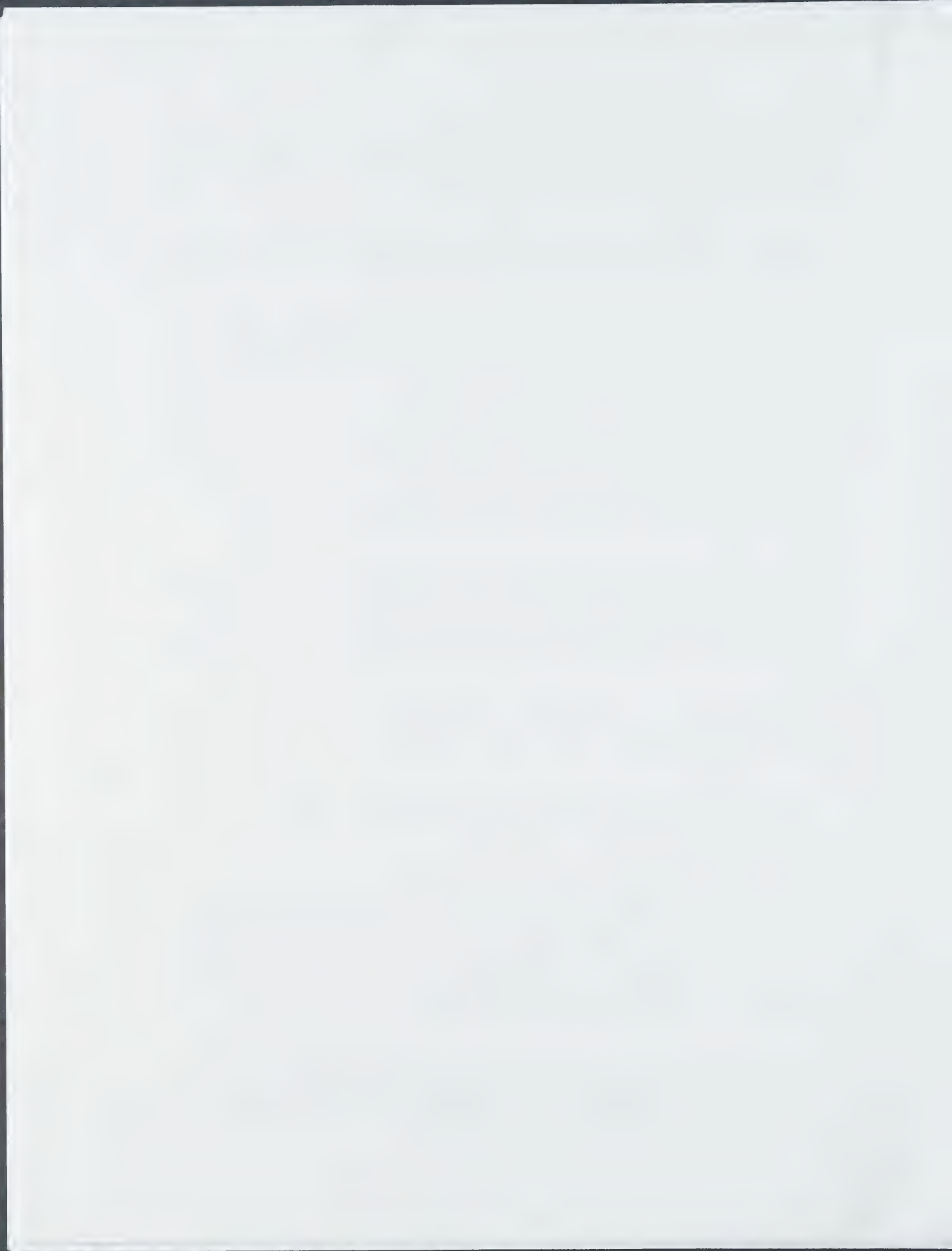
⁷ See Genevive Rodis-Lewis, Descartes: His Life and Thought, tr. by Jane-Marie Todd (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 218, and Claus Grimm, Frans Hals: The Complete Work, tr. from the German by Jurgen Riehle, (New York: Harry Abrams Inc., 1990), pp. 105-106. Grimm misidentifies the Bourdon portrait as the one by Beck.

⁸ Johan Nordstrom, "Till_Cartesius_Iconografi), Lychnos, 1957-58; the article comes with an English summary.

⁹ Van Schooten is discussed in Baillet, v. II, p. 375; for Baillet on printers and emblems see Sebba, p. 24.

¹⁰ René Descartes, Oeuvres, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds., 13 vols. (Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1897-1913). Reprinted with additions, with the exception of vol. XII, Adam's biography (Paris: Vrin, 1964-79), v. V, p. 338. Hereafter cited as AT. I use the reprinted edition throughout. Volume 13 of the first edition, containing an index and supplements, is integrated into v. V of the second. For the letter from Erasmus Bartholinus to Wormius, discussed by Nordstrom, see AT V, p. 33.

¹¹ For prints in 17th century libraries see William W. Robinson, "The Passion for Prints: Collecting and Connoisseurship in Northern Europe During the Seventeenth Century," in Clifford Ackley ed. Printmaking in the Age of Rembrandt (Connecticut: Meridien



Gravure Company, 1981).

¹² At each illustrious death or birth, publishers refurbished well-worn plates and brought out the same faces again, under different names; some portraits of the Pope and the Dauphin served for several generations. See Michel Melot, Anthony Griffiths, Richard S. Feld, André Beguin, Prints: History of an Art (Geneva: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1988), p. 78. Perhaps the most notoriously unreliable engraving, but for different reasons, was that of Milton, executed by William Marshall (at the insistence of the printer, Humphrey Mosley), for the frontispiece of the 1645 edition of Poems of Mr. Milton. Milton was clearly unhappy with the likeness and had Marshall engrave the following lines in Greek:

“On the Engraver of His Likeness”

Looking at the form of the original, you could say perhaps, that this likeness had been drawn by a rank beginner; but my friends, since you do not recognize what is pictured here, have a chuckle at a caricature by a good-for-nothing artist.

Marshall was one of the most popular engravers of the time; he presumably did not read Greek. See the online edition of the 1645 Poems at www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/1645_front/.

¹³ Baillet, II, p. 375. Adam and Tannery think the first verse may be by Bartholinus, and that it was, in fact, sent to Descartes with the van Schooten, accompanied by the Huyghens verse. The evidence for this is that the date of death given in the Suyderhoff is Calendris February, which is the first of February in the Old Style calendar (corresponding to February 11th, New Style, the date usually given for Descartes death), and Bartholinus gives the same date in the letter to Wormius cited in the main body of the text. Suyderhoff also made an engraving of Erasmus' brother, Thomas, in 1651, as well as one of Bloemart (containing the inscription *hollantsche Augustyn*), so this leads Adam and Tannery to conclude that they may have known each other and, indeed, that Bloemart himself could have chosen Suyderhoff to do the engraving, after the portrait he had already commissioned from Hals. See AT V, pp. 587-590. Bloemart himself was painted by Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck (FransHalsmuseum). Suyderhoff used this as the model for his engraved portrait. My thanks, once again, to Marten Jan Bok for this information.

¹⁴ AT, V, p.338. Descartes was writing two years later.

¹⁵ Sebba, p. 21.

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1659

30 sept. 1659: Testament of Augustinus Alstenius Bloemaert (Haarlem town archives, Loketkast 1.4.1., notary Michiel de Keyser, after an autograph last will d.d. 11 sept. 1659).

1 october 1659: Codicil (ibid.).

In his last will of 30 september 1659 Bloemaert made the Roman Catholic poor of Haarlem his universal heirs. I therefor assume that soon after his death most of his movable goods were sold on behalf of the poor and that the proceeds were put into a trust fund, named Bloemaertfonds. Part of Bloemaert's papers are still preserved in the so-called Archief Bloemaertfonds, also preserved at the Haarlem Municipal Archives. There you will find, for example:

20 november 1659: Probate inventory of the late Augustinus Alsten Bloemaert, died 14 nov. 1659 (Archief Bloemaertfonds, 1, notary Michiel de Keyser).

David: Thanks for going over this material for me - references are above. You caught me off-guard on the phone the other day but you will see that my guess of 1660 for Bloemart's death wasn't far off. What is the ~~significance~~ significance of the date for the appearance of the script?

Both documents are ^amystery to me, so please tell me what it is I have. I include the first few pages of my dissertation on the representational joke in Baillet - I ^{would} appreciate your comments on this, as well as any advice you can give me on it. My advisor (Tom Lennon @ U.w.a Philosophy), thinks it would be appropriate for the Bulletin Cartésien.

I also include the bare bones of my outline for your interest.

Yours in anticipation,

Darren Hynes

P.S. Please e-mail me about this when you get it figured out. dhynes@mun.ca

