

Alfred Baker Fonds

Chemistry and Art  
More Adventures of a Chemist Collector

Adventures II -  
Caravaggio

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**From:** "Alfred Bader" <bexkee@msn.com>  
**Date:** Wed, 18 Oct 2006 21:32:56 -0500  
**To:** <baderfa@execpc.com>

Just sending these for now. Alfred has copy of Caravaggio but wants to send it to Clovis for verification and some further details before it goes to editor. Copy of Velazquez is complete. I don't have Balfour, so can't make corrections. If you can send it to me I'll do them. I didn't get your e-mail today, but did get one from New York. Would you like to try again? Otherwise I'll bring it in to you to do. The other parts of Chapter V Alfred is too tired to check through. Maybe in the morning. I have hairdresser but if he does look at them, I'll send them in the afternoon. Hope you tooth isn't too awful Thinking of you, Isabel

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**From:** "Alfred Bader" <bexkee@msn.com>  
**Date:** Thu, 19 Oct 2006 09:12:44 -0500  
**To:** <baderfa@execpc.com>

- ✓ V a Caravaggio - To go to Clovis for verification
- ✓ V b Velazquez - Now looking for the correct name of one of the paintings.  
V c Balfour - You will send to me or do the alterations yourself - your choice
- ✓ V d Bloemaert - Just in this e-mail
- ✓ V e Rubens - I'm not sure whether Alfred looked at this this morning - will let you know
- ✓ V f Menzel - I'd like to look this over again myself - probably OK

Thanks Isabel

<b>V d Bloemaert Oct 19 ILB.doc</b>	<b>Content-Type:</b> application/msword <b>Content-Encoding:</b> base64
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Perhaps the most exciting painting I ever acquired was a painting of a Lute Player sold by Sotheby's in New York in January 2001 for \$110,000 <sup>(Fig )</sup>. That was not the reason Isabel and I were in New York. We had gone there specifically hoping to buy a lovely, very dirty, unpublished painting of Tobit by Eeckhout <sup>(Fig)</sup>, signed and dated 1652. Eeckhout may have seen his friend Rembrandt's treatment of almost the same subject (RRP A3) painted in 1626. In Eeckhout's painting the old, blind Tobit is clearly fearful that his wife may have stolen the kid. In Rembrandt's version, Tobit regrets having accused his wife of theft. During the auction preview I was bothered when Ben Hall of Sotheby's offered to take the painting down from the high spot where it was hard to see to show me its real beauty with the help of mineral spirits. I already knew how much I liked the painting but feared that he would do the same for others. Whether others had a good look at the painting or not I do not know, but I was able to buy it at the bargain price of \$30,000.

Of course we looked at all the other paintings in the preview and really liked one other, lot 179, the large Lute Player which was catalogued as Circle of Caravaggio and estimated at \$100,000-\$150,000. It certainly looked 17<sup>th</sup> century, not like a copy, but was marred by a thick, yellowed old varnish. I am no expert on Caravaggio, nor on any Italian baroque paintings, but as luck would have it, our friend Clovis Whitfield, who certainly is an expert, was at the preview at the same time. And so I asked him to look at lot 179. He was intrigued as I was, only with much more knowledge. We agreed that I

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would bid on the painting and if I was successful, Clovis would handle the selling and we would share the profit.

Since then Clovis has worked immensely hard to trace the history of our Lute Player and to prove that it is in fact a work by Caravaggio – in fact, the work which Caravaggio himself considered his best. Tracing the painting back to 1726 was easy. The nineteen year old Henry Somerset, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Beaufort, bought it in Rome that year, as a work by Caravaggio. The Duke was on his Grand Tour when he spent the enormous sum of 30,000 scudi on art, 200 of these he paid for the Lute Player which he sent to England. It remained in the Badminton collection of the Dukes of Beaufort, a collection that contained many fine works, until about 1960. Believed by experts to be a copy, it was sold to a London dealer, Marshall Spink and offered at auction as “after Caravaggio” at Sotheby’s, London in 1969 where it brought £750. It was acquired for a family in Athens, Greece looking for decorations for their home. On their deaths the contents of the home were sold and the Lute Player was bought by a dealer in London, who sent it to the Sotheby’s auction in New York in 2001. He must have been happy that I paid \$110,000 for it. So was I.

To discover the path of the Lute Player from 1726 back to the time Caravaggio painted it around 1600 was more difficult. The Duke of Beaufort had bought it from Grand Prior Antonio Vaini, of the Jerusalem Order of the Knights of Malta, who sold a number of seventeenth century Italian paintings to the Duke. But we do not yet know how Vaini acquired it. The problem is complicated by the fact that there are four versions of the

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2. The second part is a letter from the editor to the author.

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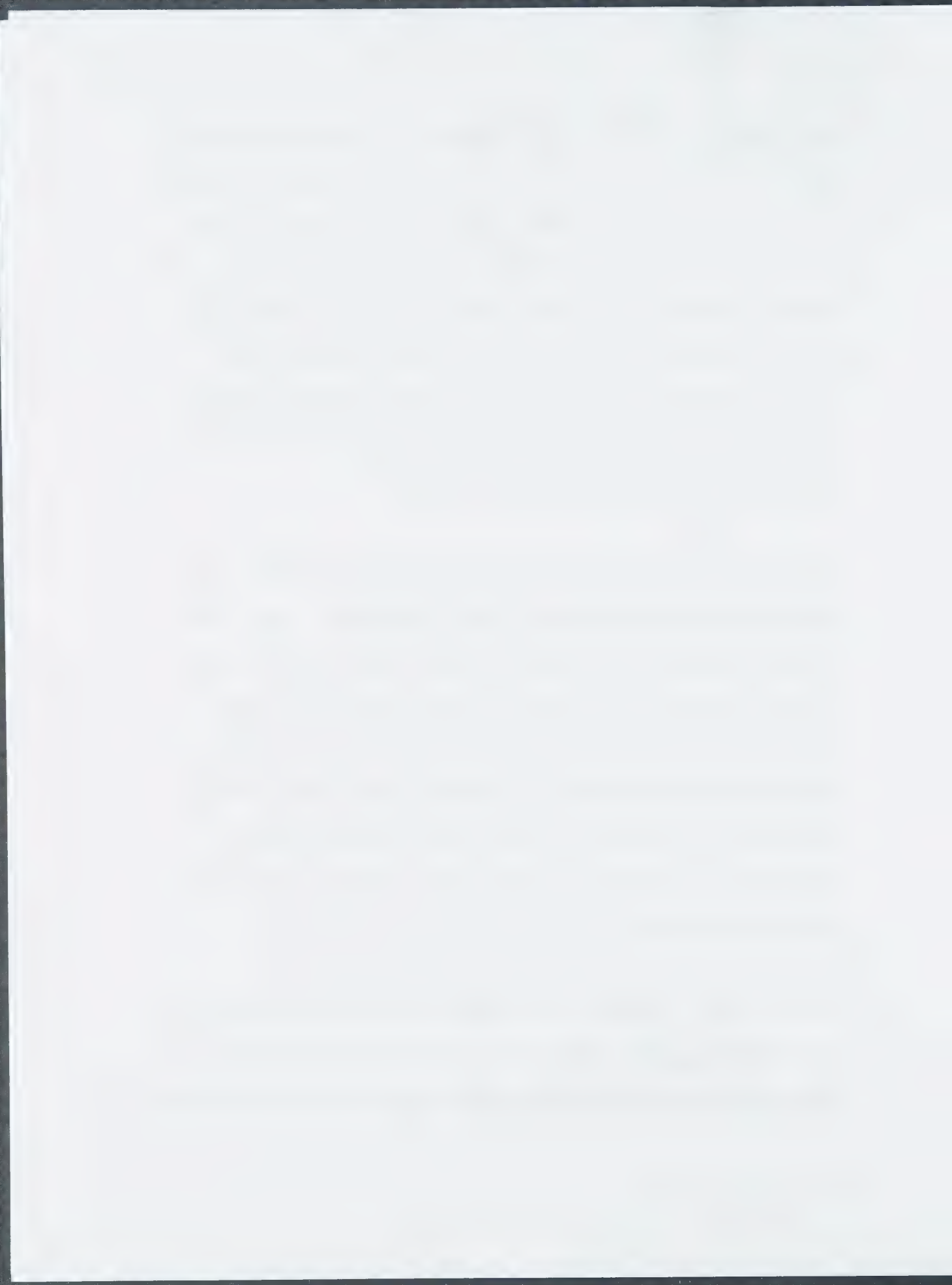
23. The twenty-third part is a letter from the author to the editor.

24. The twenty-fourth part is a letter from the editor to the author.

Lute Player and, until quite recently, scholars believed that Caravaggio did not repeat himself. The prime version was believed to be the one in The Hermitage <sup>(Fig.)</sup>, a painting that came from the collection of Vincenzo Giustiniani and was first mentioned in his inventory in 1638. A third version <sup>(Fig)</sup> owned by Wildenstein, is on loan to the Metropolitan Museum. A fourth version, similar to the painting in New York, is in a private collection in Rome. We now know that Caravaggio did occasionally repeat himself – albeit not three or four times, and that one original Caravaggio version was copied. Which of the versions are originals, which copies? And of the originals, which is the prime version and which Caravaggio’s own replica?

Clovis believes that he found the answer in a dictionary of artists entitled Vite de’ Pittori, Scultori et Architetti written by Giovanni Baglione, a painter in Rome in 1642. On p. 136 Baglione described the Lute Player: “He also painted for the Cardinal [Del Monte] a young man, playing the Lute, who seemed altogether alive and real with a carafe of flowers full of water, in which you could see perfectly the reflection of a window and other features of that room inside the water, and on those flowers there was a lively dew depicted with every exquisite care. And this (he said) was the best piece that he ever painted.” Only our version fits that description exactly, “ a carafe...in which you could see perfectly the reflection...”

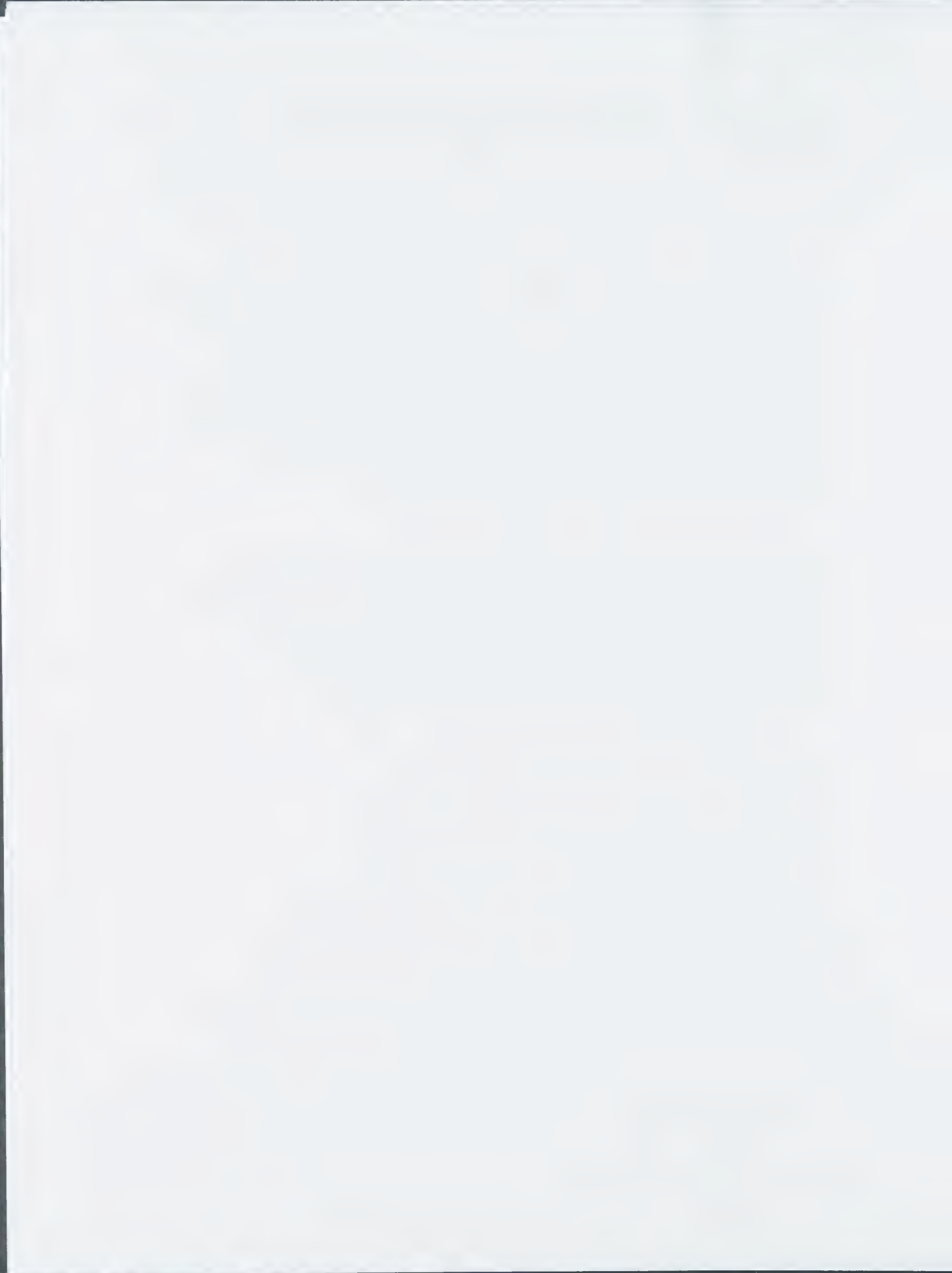
How did Caravaggio paint this? Clovis enlisted the help of Martin Kemp at Oxford, the author of The Science of Art, which traces the connection between art and science. Kemp published his conclusions in Nature (in the November 28, 2002 issue of Vol. 420).



Caravaggio probably used a mirror-based device, and the result greatly impressed our painting's first owner, Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte, who invited Caravaggio to stay at his home, the Palazzo Madama.

Clovis of course has invited many experts to examine our painting and also sent it to the museum in Berlin, for comparison with the Hermitage version then on view there. Sir Denis Mahon, the doyen of English experts of the Italian Baroque agreed that ours is by Caravaggio. At first he thought the Hermitage was the first version, but then agreed that Baglione's description fitted only our version which must therefore be the first.

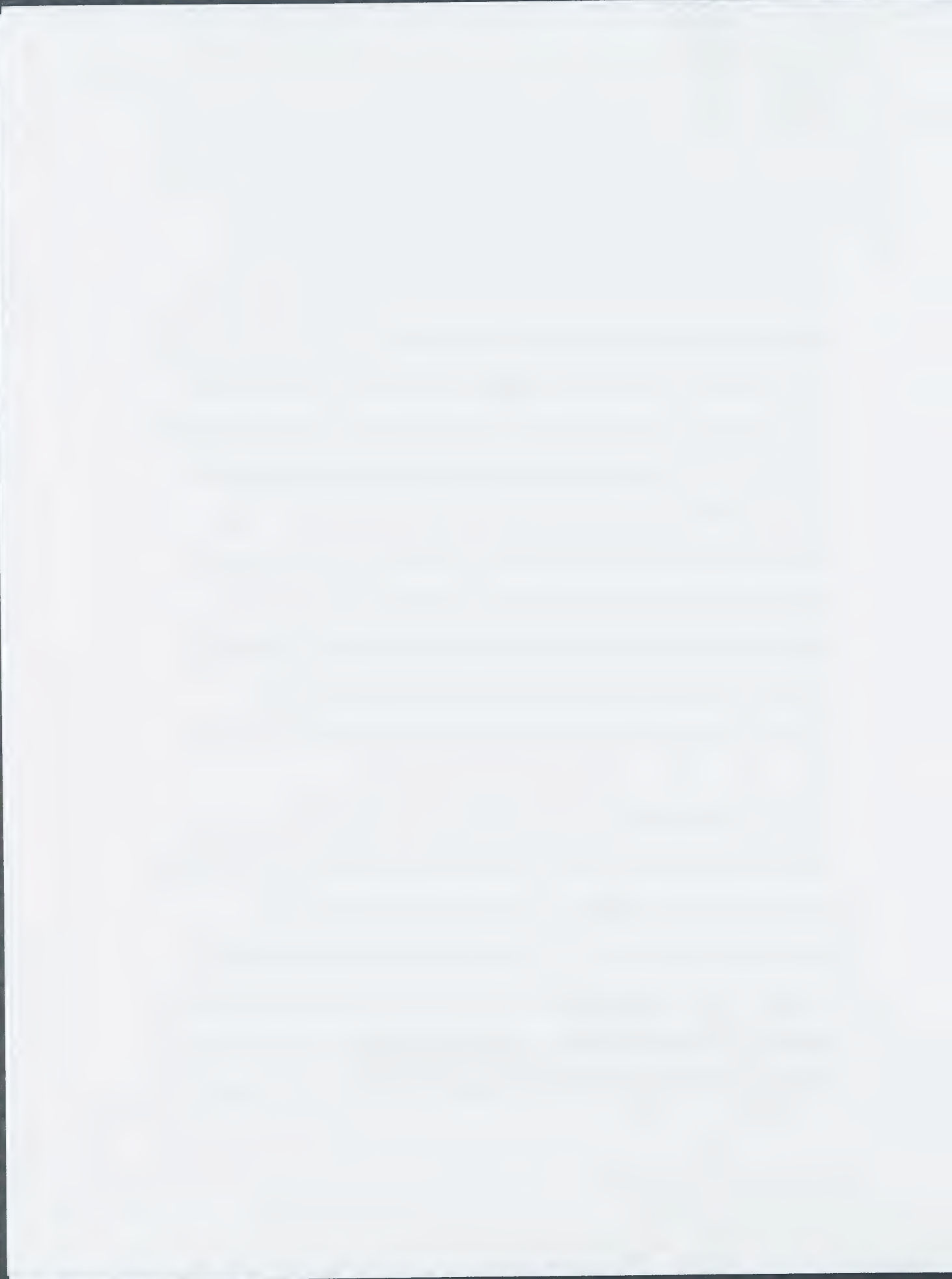
One of Italy's greatest experts, Mina Gregori, agreed and wrote the entry for the catalogue of the exhibition where our painting was first exhibited publicly. That was a beautiful show of Italian still lives entitled "Stille Welt" in the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung in Munich, held from December 2002 to February 2003.



V b OCT 17 ILB VELAZQUEZ

One of the most interesting and in some ways most difficult dealers I have ever known is Christophe Janet. French born, into a wealthy family, educated at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, he has a fine eye for old masters and led me to some beautiful works. He also bought several paintings from me but was sometimes unreliable businesswise. Some of his checks bounced, though eventually he always made good and once gave me a beautiful painting by Aert de Gelder in lieu. Life for his second wife, Roxane, a New Zealander, may have been difficult since Christophe seemed to have no idea of how to manage his financial affairs and make regular, adequate provisions for his home life. However, Roxane was always charming and they were a fun couple to be with. Eventually, in 1985 they left New York; Christophe undoubtedly hoped to do better in Paris.

Once they moved to France we saw each other less frequently. However, early in December 1996 I met him in London, viewing the old master sales. He urged me to look at and bid on lot 36 in the Phillips sale on December 10, a charming study of a Chihuahua, a Mexican dwarf dog <sup>(Fig.)</sup> in a mountainous landscape, from the studio of Velazquez. Interestingly the painting was on the catalogue cover of the Phillips sale on December 10, 1985 and the American collector who bought it then was now offering it eleven years later. December 10<sup>th</sup> has been an important date in my life – it was my last

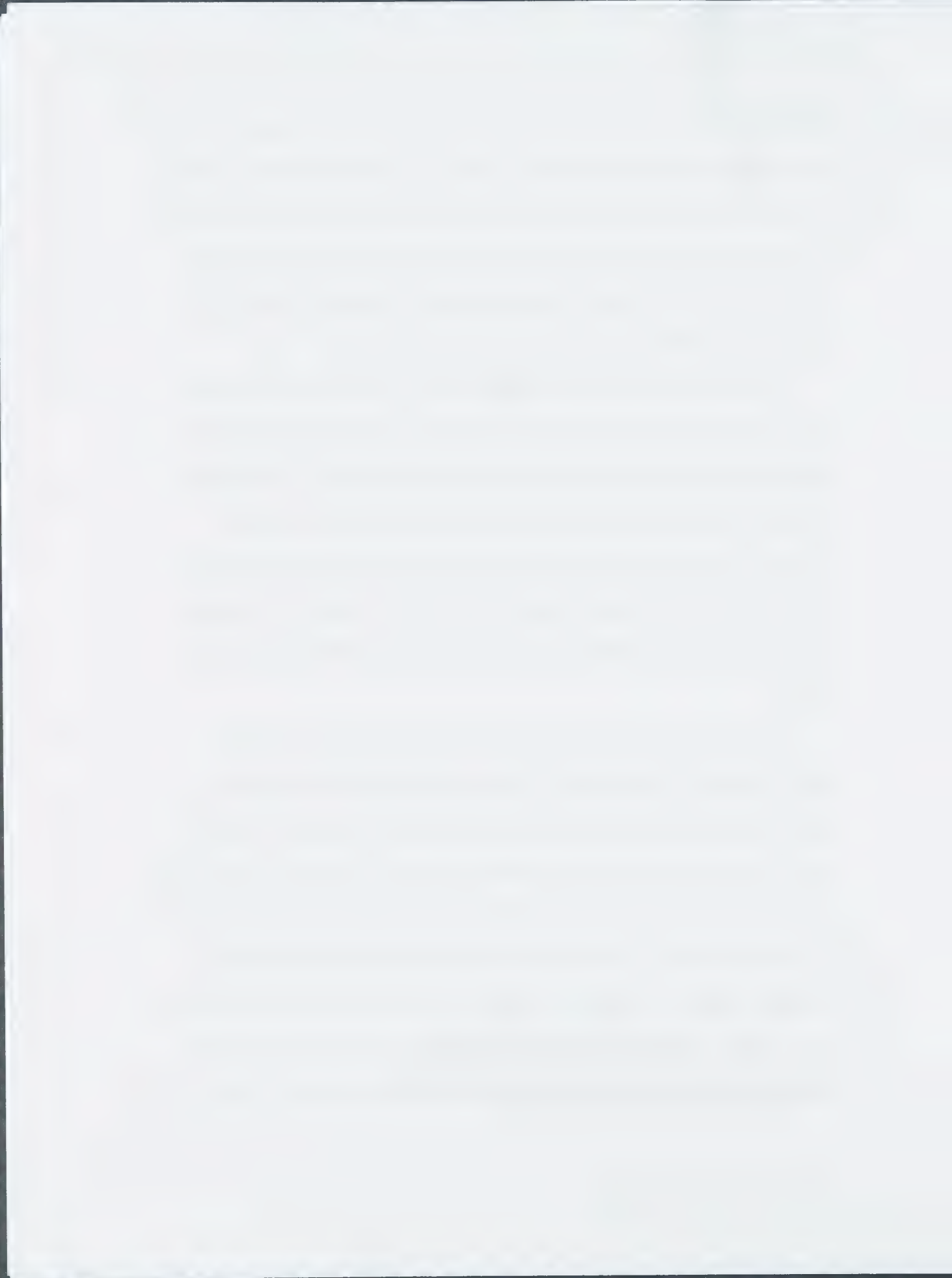




day in Vienna in 1938, and somehow, I have always been sadly alert on December 10<sup>th</sup>. I really liked that little oil on canvas, just 47 x 37cms., but so did several others, including Rob Noortman, and I had to go to a hammer price of £30,000, way above the estimate of £6,000-8,000. If Christophe had not brought the painting to my attention, I would not have noticed the little gem and so I promised him that if I could sell it profitably, we would share the profit equally.

The painting was in very good condition. It just needed a simple cleaning by my friends Charles Munch and Jane Furchgott, and Charles found a decent frame for me. Naturally I sent photographs to many art historians and received very diverse opinions. Werner Sumowski wrote that he had no doubt whatever that this was painted by Velazquez. He believed that the animal must come from the same hand as the dog in the portrait of the *Infant Don Fernando*, painted around 1632/36. And not just the dog but the landscape! But he concluded that sadly he was just Sumowski and not a Velazquez-dictator.

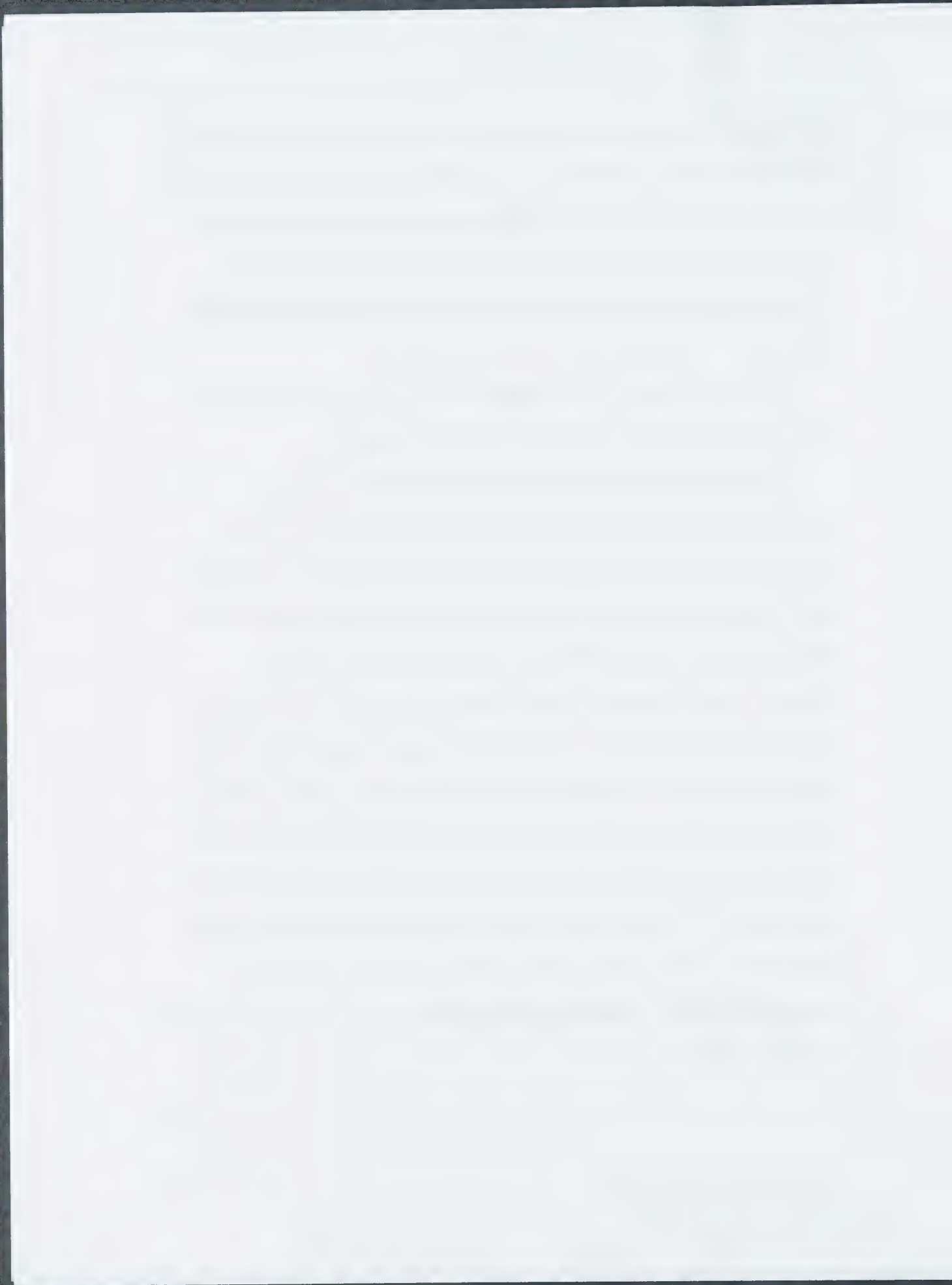
William Jordan, one of the great experts of Spanish 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings, thought differently. He remembered the little painting of a dog which he had seen at both Phillips sales, and wrote: "It is a very beautiful painting, and one filled with charm and vitality. I can understand how anyone might speculate about the painting's relation to the art of Velazquez. Nevertheless, I do not feel it is by him. It is no closer to his style than the work of any numbers of painters of the following generation whose styles were profoundly affected by Velazquez's. Although the free brush work in the modeling of the dog's body is reminiscent of Velazquez (that is what these artists were known for), the conception and execution of the landscape are quite different from his . . . Your



painting does not appear to be a fragment but is instead an intimate portrait of a dog. As such it departs from any painting known to have been painted by Velazquez... The one artist who is known to have painted such pictures of animals is **José Antolínez (1635-1675)**, one of the extremely talented generation of younger artists who followed Velazquez at the Court and who are regrettably too little known by the general public today."

A beautiful painting, in fine condition, painted by whom? Velazquez or José Antolínez? The difference in value was a million or two dollars..

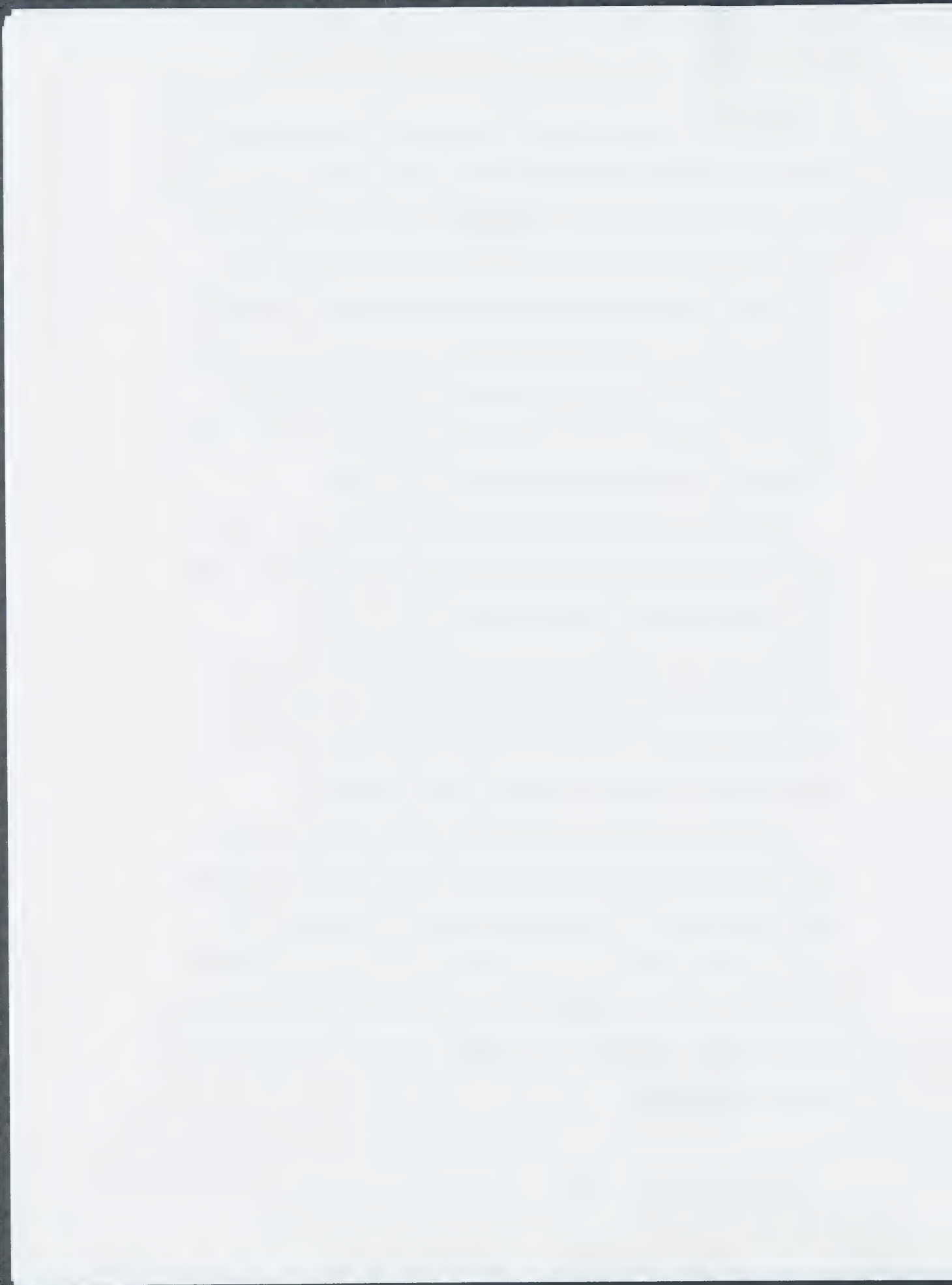
George Gordon, Senior Director of Old Master Paintings at Sotheby's in London, conducts some of the auctions in New York as well as in London, and over the years we have become very good friends. He is always as kind and helpful as he is knowledgeable about old masters and so I showed him this portrait of a dog and mentioned the varied opinions I had had. He thought that there was a good chance that it could be by Velazquez. The key would be the opinion of the world expert on that artist, Professor Perez-Sanchez in Madrid. And so, in April 2000 we signed an agreement that Sotheby's would ship the painting to Madrid for Professor Perez-Sanchez's opinion. If he said yes, Sotheby's would offer it as a Velazquez. If no, they would try to ascertain the correct name and offer it as such. I suggested that Sotheby's insure it for one million dollars, a modest price for a Velazquez in great condition. But George explained that a courier would have to accompany a million dollar painting, at considerable expense. The maximum that Sotheby's would insure it at their expense was \$150,000, and so, not being a prophet, I agreed.



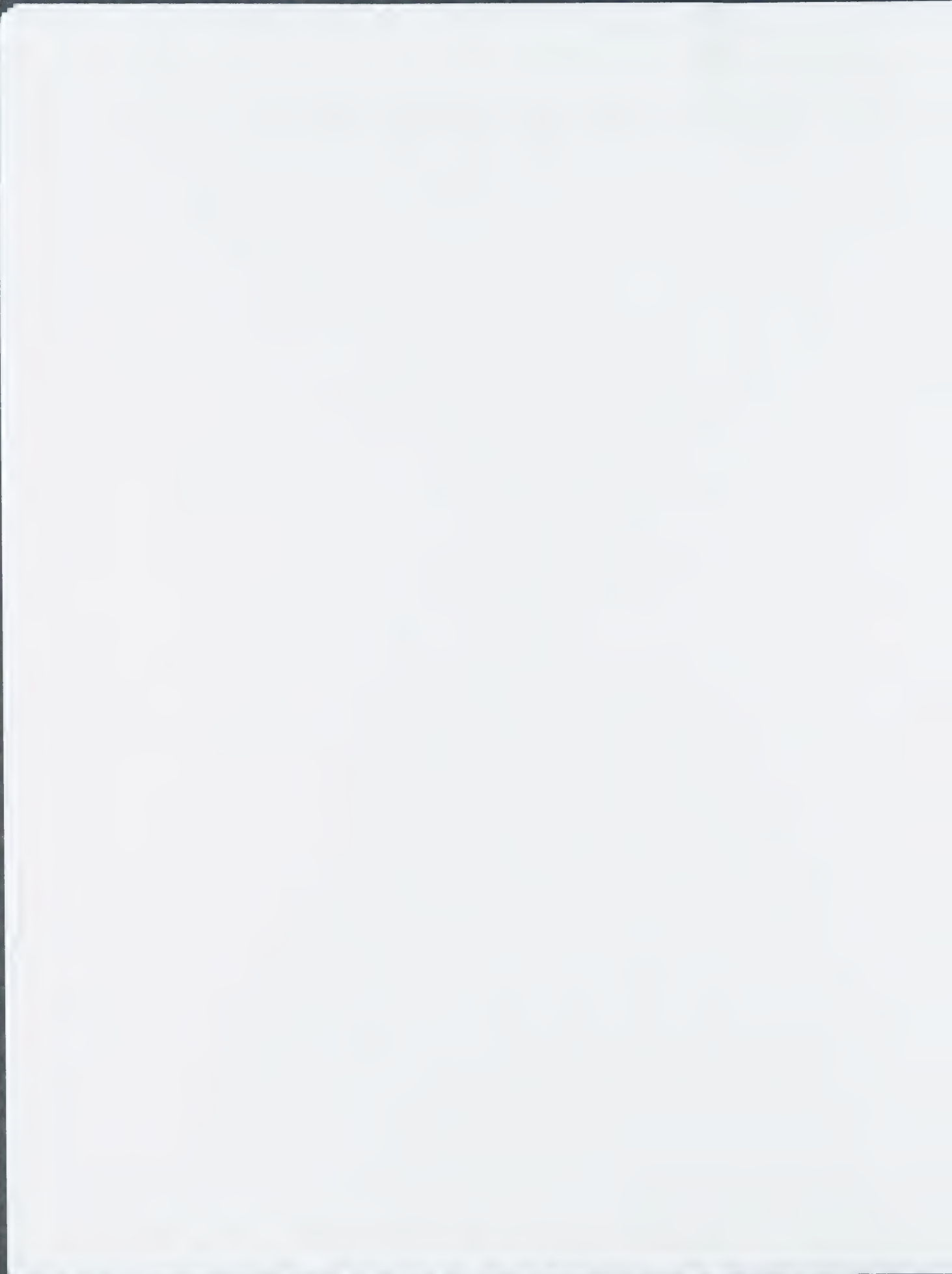
The specialist of Spanish paintings at Sotheby's, James Macdonald, who was to liaise between the Madrid office and Professor Perez-Sanchez, faxed me on January 12, 2001, "As you are aware the painting is currently safely stored in our office in Madrid. Sadly Professor Perez-Sanchez had to cancel my meeting with him during my last sojourn to Spain, however he has kindly agreed to come into the office on Monday of next week (15<sup>th</sup> January) to inspect the picture. Although I will not be there in person I will discuss the matter with him over the telephone." 'Safely stored' until the visit of Professor Perez-Sanchez on January 15. But on Saturday, January 13, Sotheby's office was broken into and our dog and some other works of art were stolen.

The insurance agent, Iain Fairley International, advertised the theft, offering a reward, as did the IFAR Journal – all to no avail. Sotheby's insurance paid us \$150,000 – with the understanding that if the painting should be recovered within five years we would have the option to purchase it for \$150,000. Were it recovered after five years we would have the option of acquiring it for \$150,000 "in addition to a reasonable sum to reflect interest and expenses relating to recovery." The five years have passed, and we haven't yet had to make the decision whether we want to repurchase it.

The payment of \$150,000 gave us a "profit" of close to \$70,000, half of this Janet's. But Christophe had turned his interest over to a former business partner, Paolo Affif, resident in Ireland. Affif told me that Janet owed him a considerable sum of money and was hoping that our gem would yield a great deal. So at first, Affif decided not to accept the half 'profit' but hope for its recovery and sale. Eventually, in September 2002, he decided that a bird in hand is better than two in the bush and accepted his share of the 'profit', \$34,646.00.



Will I ever know whether I owned a real Velazquez? Probably not.



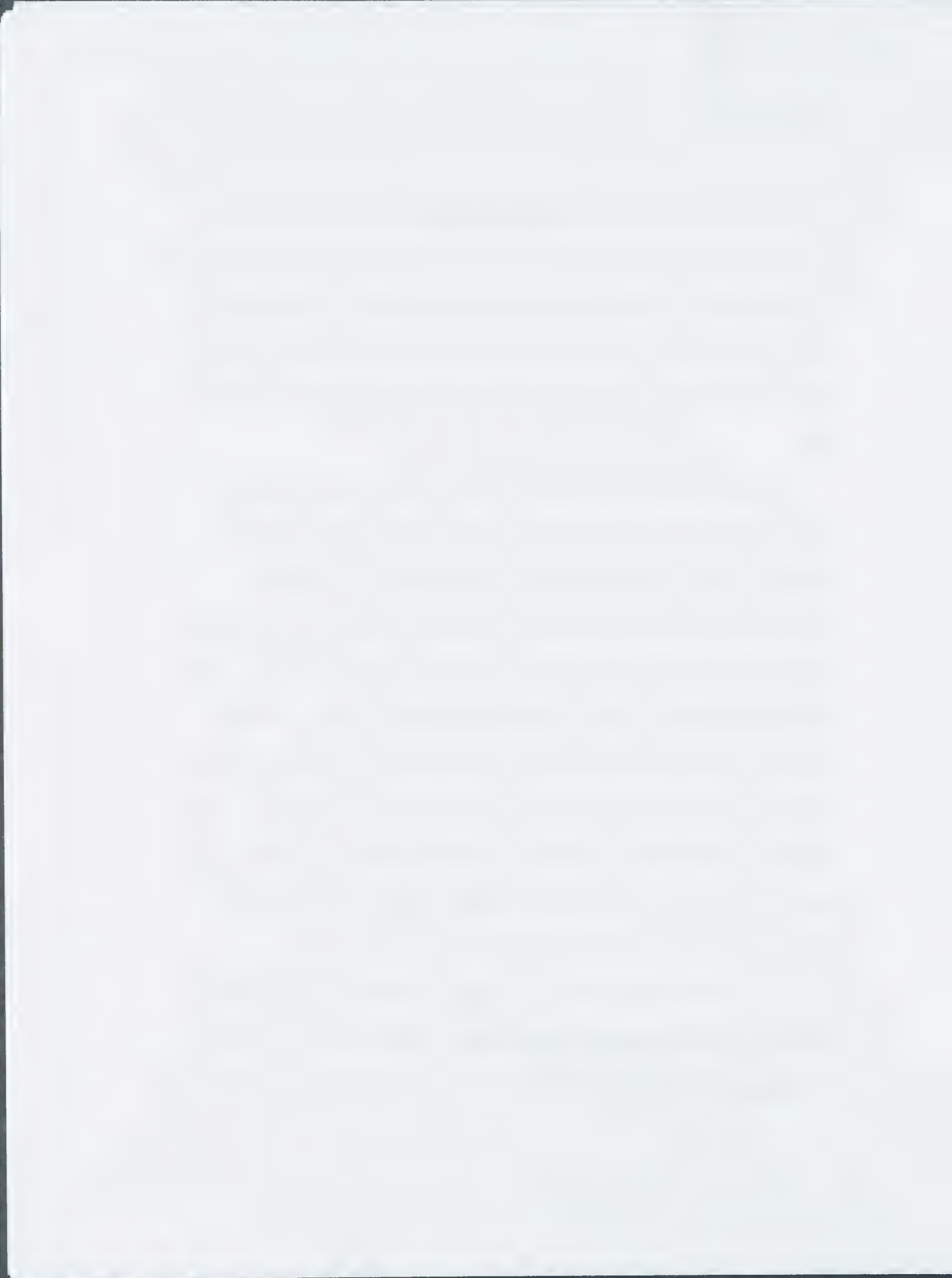


V d Oct 17 Bloemaert

Gui Rochat, a dealer friend specializing in French paintings, who recognized its quality, drew my attention to an enormous canvas - 66" x 92" - lot 24 in Sotheby's New York sale on January 22, 2004. The painting of *Lot and His Daughters* (Fig.1), attributed to Hendrick Bloemaert, had been sent to the auction by a club in Des Moines, Iowa, where it had hung in its dining room.

Although Isabel and I often go to New York auctions in January, we go only when there are paintings I feel I have to have, and there were none such that week. But the *Lot* intrigued me. The quality seemed superb; not just the voluptuous daughters but also the wonderful still life with a large pitcher which reminded me of Adam Van Vianen and the fruit very much resembled that of Jan Davidsz. de Heem. The painting was very dirty and looked Flemish. I thought that it might be an early Johann Liss, an artist I like a lot. Years ago I had bought one of his greatest works at Christie's in London, but then was treated very unfairly by the British Heritage Committee (see chapter \_\_ ) and could not get an export permit. Perhaps this was another opportunity to buy a beautiful Liss.

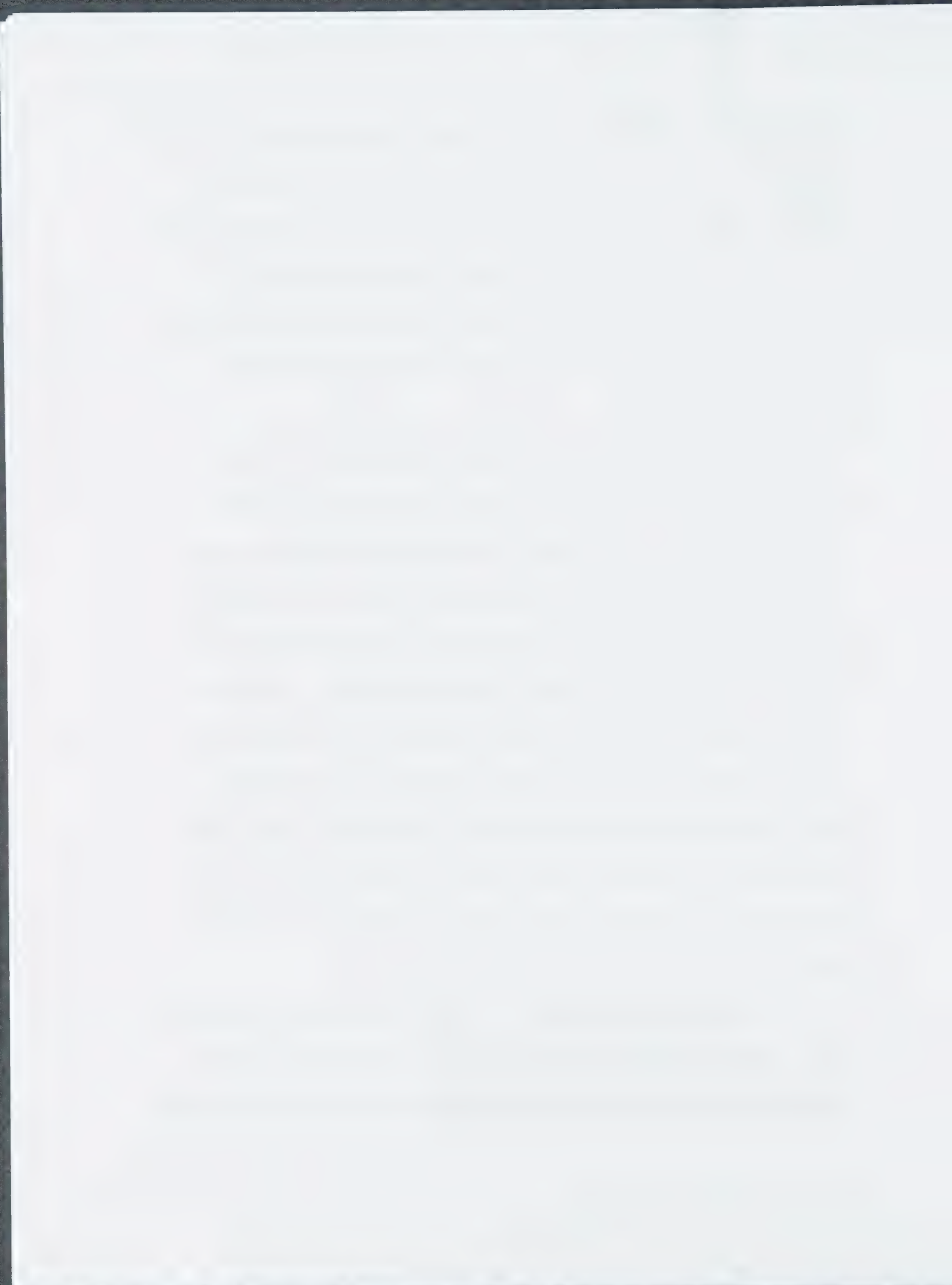
I knew that George Gordon was going to conduct the sale, and then visit us for a restful weekend in Milwaukee. I called Sotheby's in New York and arranged with Ben Hall that he would call me in Milwaukee the morning



of the sale so that I could bid by phone. I had already talked to Otto Naumann and knew that he liked the image, but he had no room in his gallery for such a large painting and did not intend to bid. I had decided that my limit would be \$200,000 - but I was lucky. The size must have discouraged other bidders, for bidding was slow and I could hear George knocking it down to me for only \$75,000, for a total cost of \$90,000 after the buyer's premium was added.

I was delighted with my buy, but what was I going to do with it? Certainly not have it sent to my conservators. Charles Munch and Jane Furchgott, who have conserved most of the paintings in my collection, could not take it - their truck and their vacuum table are too small. Fortunately Gui suggested a conservator in lower Manhattan, Michael Heidelberg, who gave me a not-to-exceed price of \$40,000 for the conservation. Wow! More than twice what I had ever paid for any conservation - but then, think of the size! Richard Charlton-Jones and George Gordon suggested sending the canvas to London where conservation would cost about half as much. But there was such an advantage to having the work done in New York where Gui could keep a close eye on it and help with any problems as they came along.

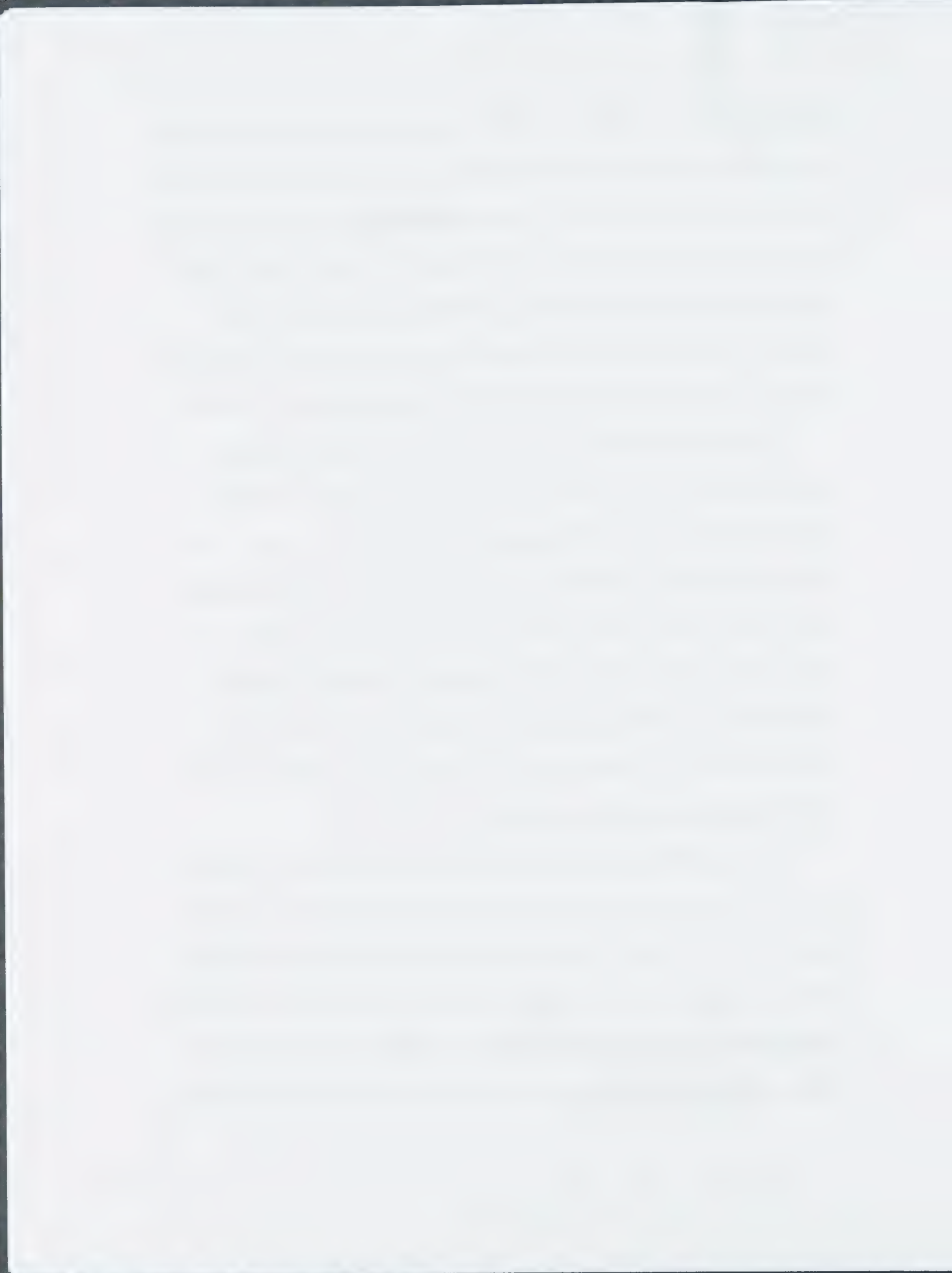
The first problem came at once: the truck Gui first considered was too small. I asked Ben Hall how had this ever come from Holland to a club in Des Moines? He promised to try to find out but has not succeeded. Gui finally



found a trucker who could help, and the conservator received the painting on a snowy Wednesday, January 28. Carrying such a behemoth up three flights to the conservator was not easy. Carrying a Steinway would have been more difficult, but perhaps not much. Just two days later, on the Friday, Michael called Gui and me in great excitement. Under the later inscription P.P. Rubens, on the lower right, was the genuine two line inscription A. Bloemaert fe. 1624! And Michael was certain that the painting would clean beautifully.

At almost 80 I still have a lot to learn. I had thought the painting to be Flemish, perhaps an early Liss; instead it is the finest, most Rubensian Bloemaert I have ever seen. More good news was on the way. An old friend in Rotterdam, Hubert van Baarle, is most interested in Abraham Bloemaert and was really excited when I told him about this painting. A few days later he wrote that on February 14, 1811 "A. Bloemart *Lot and His Daughters*, a grand gallery picture [formerly in the collection of Charles II] "was sold in London for £39.18, the highest price an Abraham Bloemaert fetched at the time. "A grand gallery picture" indeed!

Of course Abraham Bloemaert's work is well known to me - or at least I thought so, just not well enough to recognize the *Lot* as his work. I had bought a fine *St. Jerome Working by Candlelight* many years ago in Holland. And then, in the preview of Christie's sale in South Kensington on December 7, 1995, I had seen a dirty, unframed canvas described as "After Abraham Bloemaert *The Dream of Jacob*" and estimated at £2,000-3,000. The original



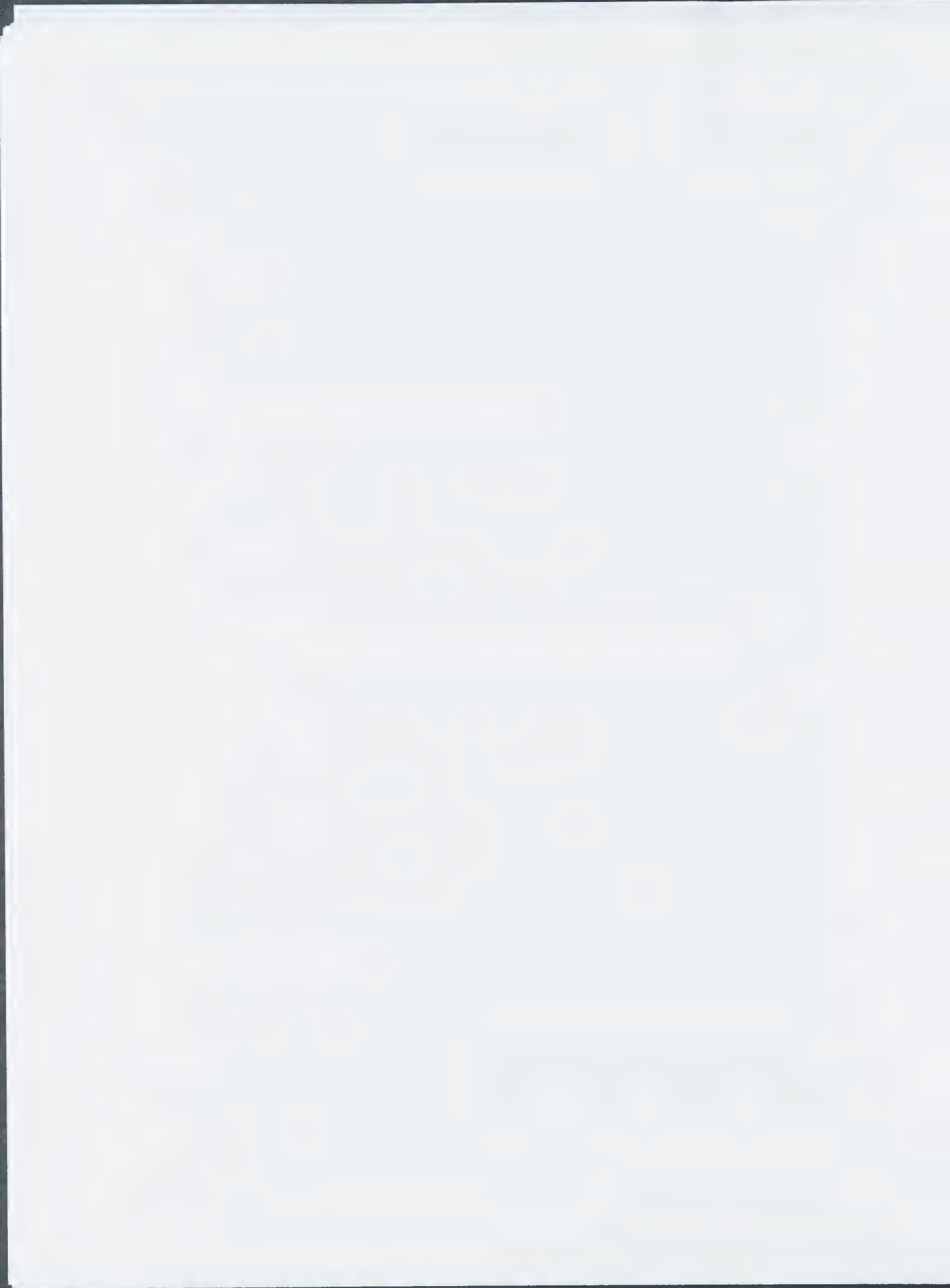
was thought to be with a dealer in London where I had already seen it, and liked this "copy", dirt and all, much better. I was the only bidder in the room, but was bidding against someone on the telephone, who was almost as stubborn as I was - I had to go to a hammer price of £17,000!

My friends Jane Furchgott and Charles Munch did a fine job cleaning and relining my painting and I thought that this was the finest Abraham Bloemaert I could ever own (Fig. 2).

Some twenty years earlier, in 1976 I had written about *Jacob's Dream* for "The Bible Through Dutch Eyes", an exhibition at the Milwaukee Art Center: "The vision of a ladder with angels going up and down on it is unique in Biblical imagery, and so *Jacob's Dream* has aroused artists' imaginations for centuries.

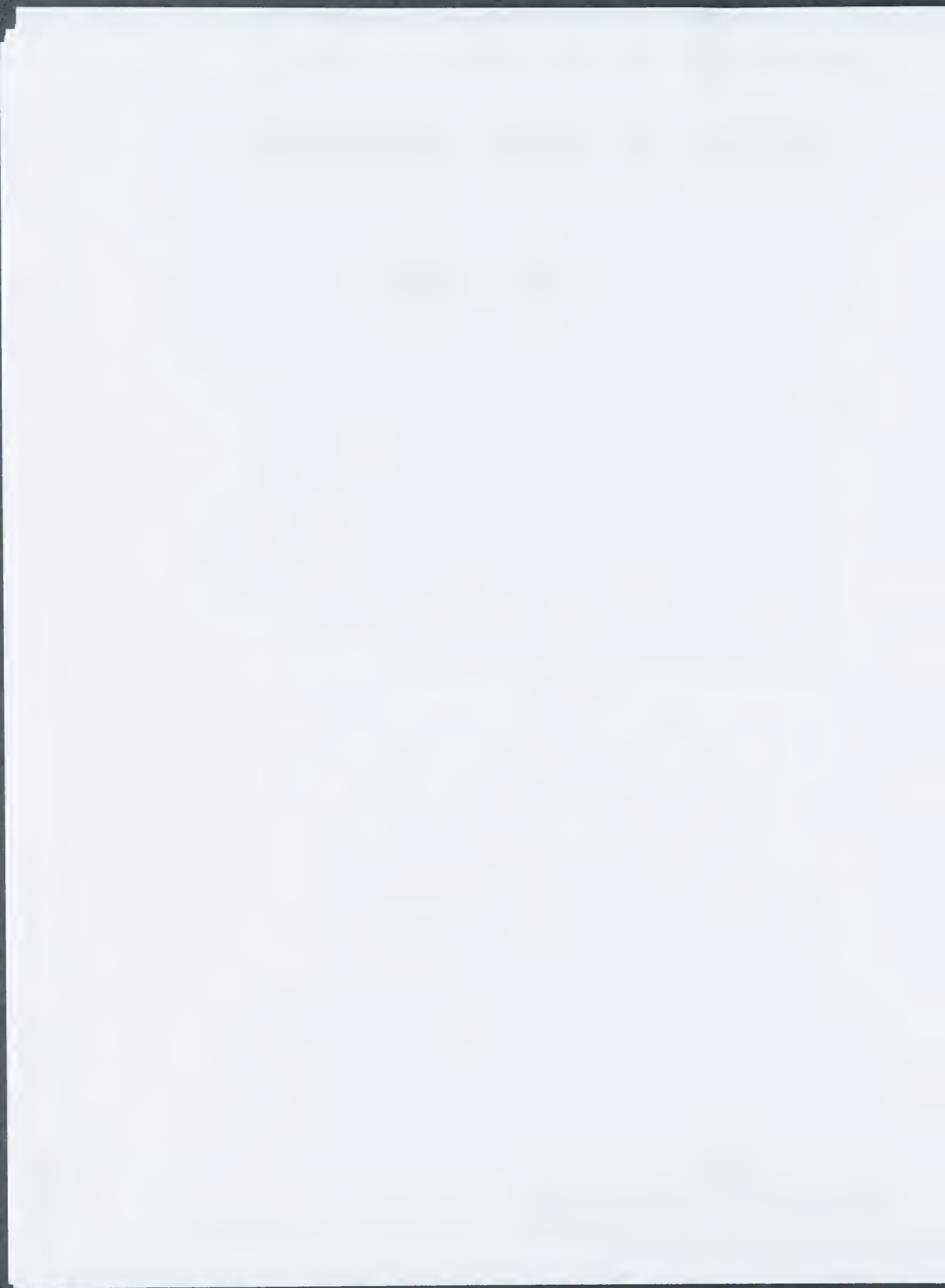
"The Bible is the book of dreams, par excellence: dreams of individuals, dreams of a people, dreams of all mankind. It is surely no accident that the very first well-known dream in the Bible is not that of a king or of a general but of a man at the lowest point in his life - homeless and hunted, yearning for God's promise that He would return him to his country." How often had I thought of *Jacob's Dream* while in the prisoner of war camp in Canada. That dream is especially meaningful to me.

The great expert on Bloemaert is Professor Marcel Roethlisberger at the University of Geneva, who has published the two volume catalogue raisonné on the artist. He is a most helpful scholar and so, naturally, I sent





him photographs of my new acquisition and he replied, "I am much interested to see how *Jacob's Ladder* has come out. I saw the painting at the sale viewing in London. As you know it was quite dirty, fine in some area and abraded in others; I felt it was difficult to know what was underneath, but it looked interesting and seemed worth a try. I mentioned it to nobody, nor did anybody ask me, to my surprise. I could not stay for the sale but it was indeed I who bid on the phone, not suspecting that it was against you, otherwise I would have abstained." In an article entitled "Abraham Bloemaert: Recent Additions to His Paintings", Professor Roethlisberger published my *Jacob's Dream* and I can hardly wait to learn of his comments about *Lot and His Daughters*. It is, I believe, in a class by itself—certainly the best of Bloemaert's works that I have ever seen.



V e RUBENS Oct19 ILB

The first painting I ever bought at auction was an oil on canvas (Fig ) depicting an old woman with a basket, shielding a candle with her hand, purchased for £28 at Sotheby's in London during my honeymoon, on July 23, 1952. This lot 153, was just called Jordaens, not Jacob Jordaens, not even J. Jordaens indicating that Sotheby's did not think it really was by Jordaens. The seller, Lord Mackintosh of Halifax, wrote to me, "I bought this picture in London nearly thirty years ago and always thought it was by Wright of Derby, but of course you know he specialized in candle-light pictures. I sent it with another Wright of Derby to the Bi-centenary exhibition in his native town of Derby. The authorities there said it was a Jacob Jordaens and showed it as such in the Exhibition and it has always been accepted as such ever since."

But it wasn't by Wright of Derby or by Jacob Jordaens; nor was it by Rubens as Professor Erik Larsen stated in an expertise he wrote in 1956. It was an old copy after a painting on panel by Rubens which was on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston between 1948 and 1965. Still, I enjoyed looking at my painting, but did eventually give it to a school in Milwaukee which sent it to a local auction in November 1965 where it sold for \$7,000. The school was happy and so was I. In 1952 I could have bought a better



painting, an original, for £28, but we all make mistakes and hopefully we learn as we live.

Fifty one years later, when I went to London to view the old master sales at Sotheby's in December 2003, George Gordon showed me the Rubens original which he hoped would come up for sale in July. What a difference between this original and my copy! The original (fig. ) includes a boy lighting a candle from that of the old woman and shows a clear pentiment of the old woman's left hand which had originally been painted in a higher position. Rubens produced this night piece around 1616 and etched the subject around 1621. The counterproof of the first state is inscribed in his hand, in Latin and translates to "Light can be taken a thousand times from another light without diminishing it."

The work is on five pieces of wood, a clear indication that Rubens painted this not for sale but for his own enjoyment, and it is included, as no. 125, in the posthumous inventory of pictures found in his house in 1640.

I told George Gordon how much I liked this original and recounted the story of the old woman with a candle, the first painting I had ever bought at auction. In March 2004 he confirmed that the Rubens would be included in



Sotheby's London sale on the evening of July 7, 2004 and would be exhibited before then in New York, where Otto Naumann was able to examine it carefully.

Sotheby's catalog described the painting, lot 30, in six carefully written pages with three photographs. Among the many copies, mine in Milwaukee was included. I simply could not understand the estimate, only £2-3 million. Two years earlier, on July 10, 2002, Rubens' Massacre of the Innocents, wonderfully well painted but a ghastly subject, had sold for a hammer price of £45 million. I would much rather look at this wonderful night scene - one of Rubens' few night scenes - and like the Massacre painted entirely by Rubens, without workshop involvement - but for his own enjoyment. Otto thought that he could sell it profitably if we could buy it for £4 million, but I doubted that it would sell that inexpensively.

As at the sale of the Massacre of the Innocents in 2002, Henry Wyndham was the auctioneer. Once again the room was packed, not in anticipation of the Rubens this time, but of lot 8, a small painting described as the last Vermeer not in a museum. I did not like the painting and was rather surprised when Rob Noortman told me on the day of the sale that he wanted to buy it. He was indeed the underbidder to the purchaser, Stephen Wynn, who bid by phone. The hammer price was £16.2 million

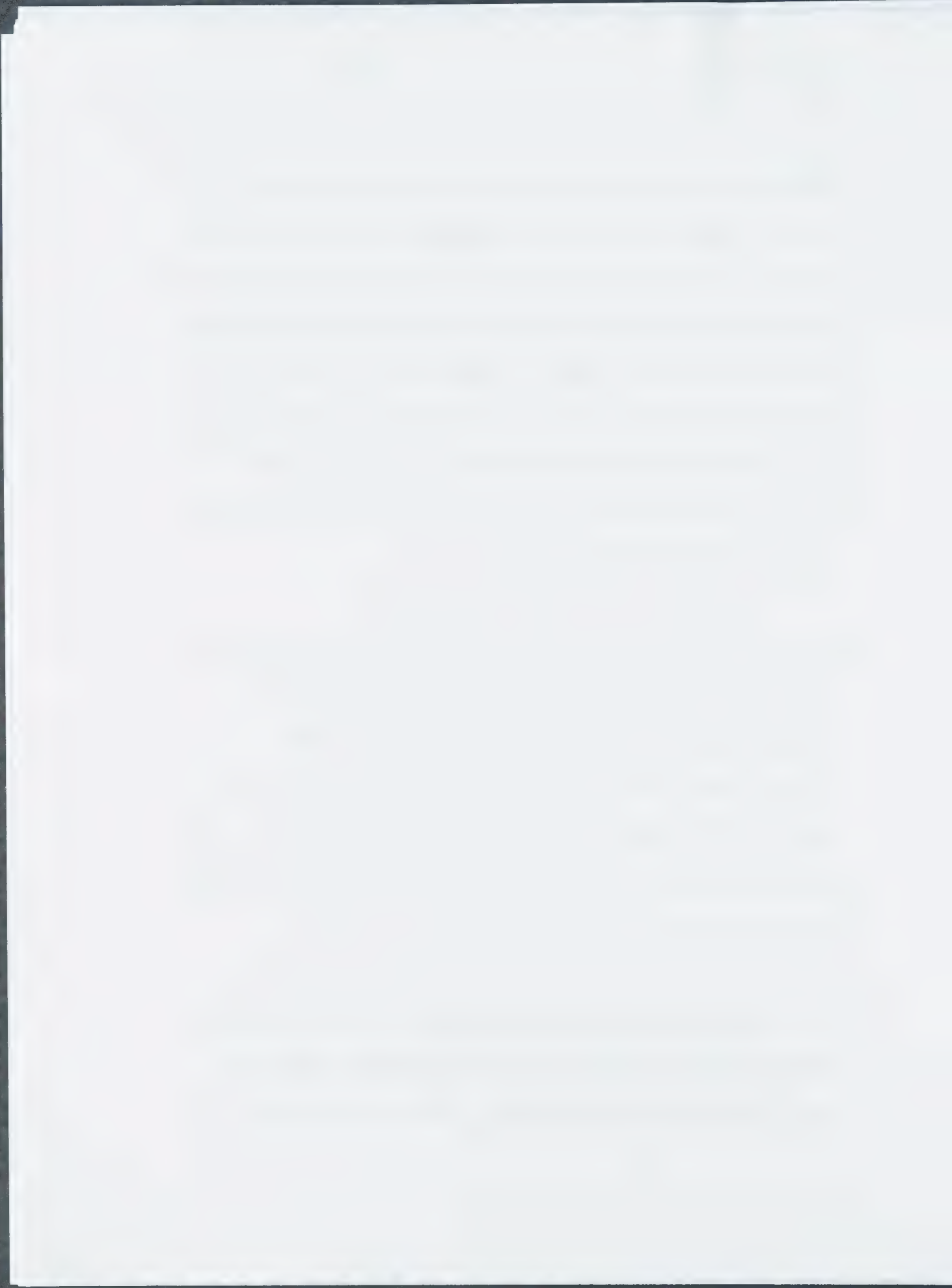




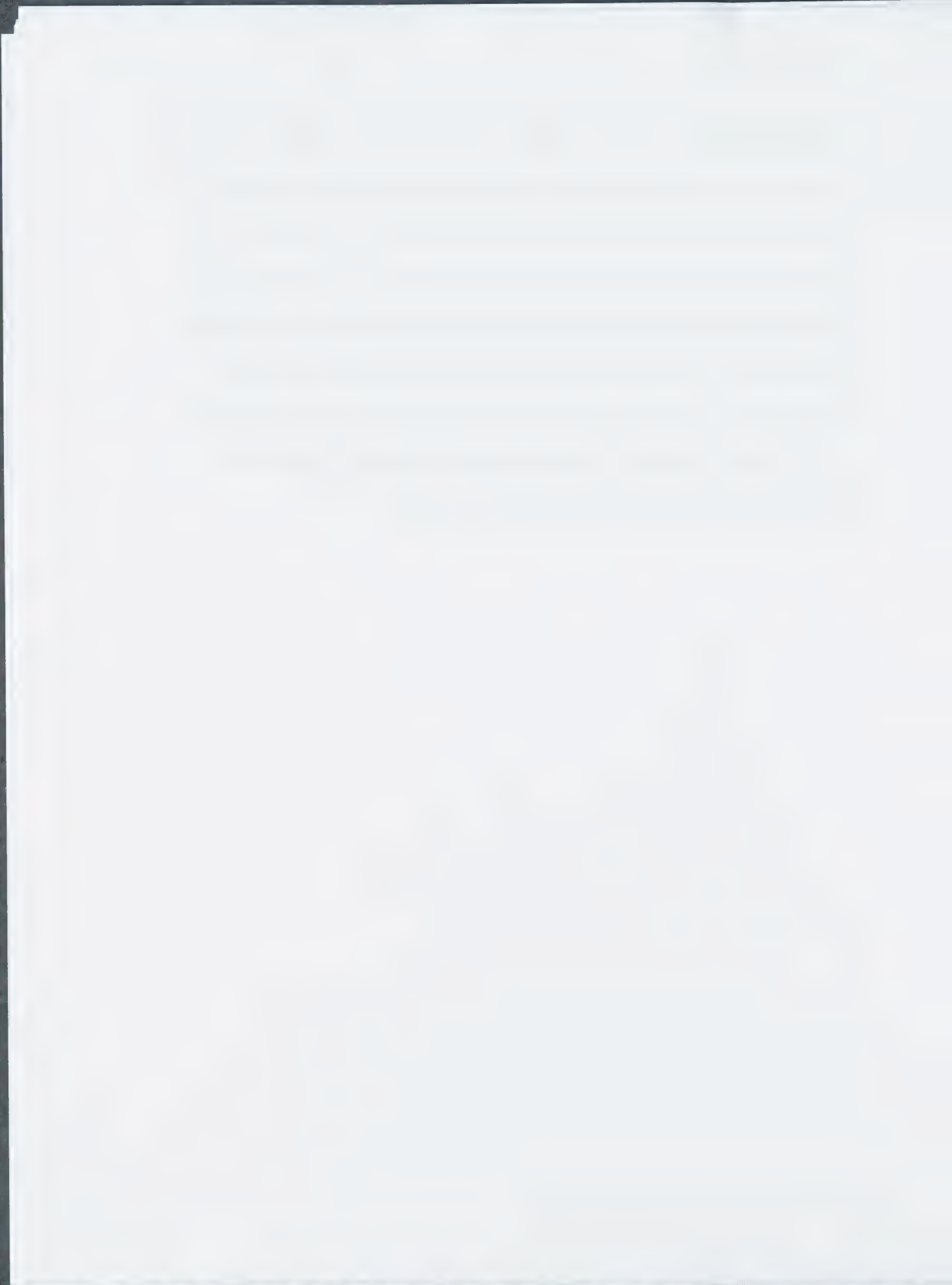
Tension in the salesroom eased after this and bidding was rather slow. A number of the paintings in the sale were bought back, but that wasn't going to happen to lot 30, the Rubens. However there was only one other bidder, on the telephone, and Henry Wyndham knocked the Rubens down to me at £2.2 million, much to my happy surprise. Briefly I wondered whether I should keep this beautiful candle –light painting I had bought so inexpensively, but Otto of course was eager to sell and wanted it to go to the Mauritshuis in The Hague. There it was described as a “Topstuk van Rubens”, an exceptional painting by Rubens, which of course it is.

In the same sale was another painting that I found very beautiful, the head of an old man by Jan Lievens, from the collection of the late D.G. van Beuningen in Rotterdam. It was estimated at £200,000-300,000, but there were many bidders, two of them particularly determined. It finally went to Johnny Van Haeften (bidding with Richard Green) for £1,650,000, a record price for a Jan Lievens. With commission the price was well over \$3 million. I can't buy them all.

For years I have been writing and lecturing about Jan Lievens, called “Ein Maler im Schatten Rembrandts”, a painter in the shadow of Rembrandt. Well, I believe the shadow is in our minds. Lievens was a great painter and



not just while working close to Rembrandt in Leiden. Over the last forty years I have bought ten paintings by Lievens, most for just a few thousand dollars, and four of these ten I have given to Queen's. Some of them - one of Rembrandt's mother, for instance, and another of St. Paul, I like even better than the painting of the old man that brought a record price, and my favorite is a late work, painted in the 1660s, a portrait of Jacob Junius. I am so happy to see Lievens coming out of Rembrandt's shadow and I look forward to a "Lievens in America" exhibition which the Milwaukee Art Museum is considering with the National Gallery in Washington.

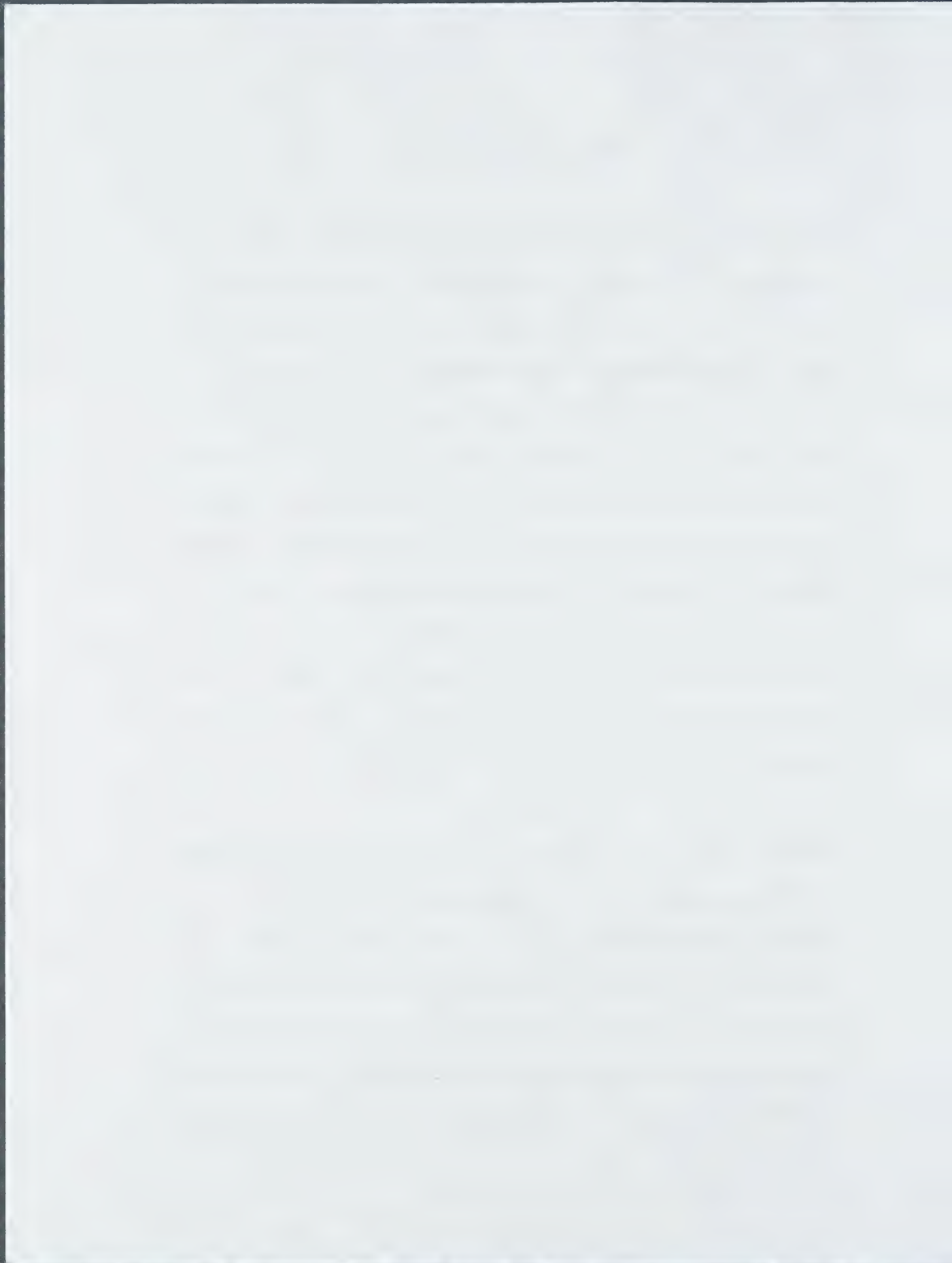


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CARAVAGGIO

Paintings by Great Old Masters

Perhaps the most exciting painting I ever acquired was a painting of a Lute Player sold by Sotheby's in New York in January 2001 for \$110,000 <sup>(Fig.)</sup>. That was not the reason Isabel and I were in New York. We had gone there specifically hoping to buy a lovely, very dirty, unpublished painting of Tobit by Eeckhout <sup>(Fig.)</sup>, signed and dated 1652. Eeckhout may have seen his friend Rembrandt's treatment of almost the same subject (RRP A3) painted in 1626. In Eeckhout's painting the old, blind Tobit is clearly fearful that his wife may have stolen the kid. In Rembrandt's version, Tobit regrets having accused his wife of theft. During the auction preview I was bothered when Ben Hall of Sotheby's offered to take the painting down from the high spot where it was hard to see to show me its real beauty with the help of mineral spirits. I already knew how much I liked the painting but feared that he would do the same for others. Whether others had a good look at the painting or not I do not know, but I was able to buy it at the bargain price of \$30,000.

Of course we looked at all the other paintings in the preview and really liked one other, lot 179, the large Lute Player which was catalogued as Circle of Caravaggio and estimated at \$100,000-\$150,000. It certainly looked 17<sup>th</sup> century, not like a copy, but was marred by a thick, yellowed old varnish. I am no expert on Caravaggio, nor on any Italian baroque paintings, but as luck would have it, our friend Clovis Whitfield, who certainly is an expert, was at the preview at the same time. And so I asked him to look at lot 179. He was intrigued as I was, only with much more knowledge. We agreed that I



would bid on the painting and if I was successful, Clovis would handle the selling and we would share the profit.

Since then Clovis has worked immensely hard to trace the history of our Lute Player and to prove that it is in fact a work by Caravaggio – in fact, the work which Caravaggio himself considered his best. Tracing the painting back to 1726 was easy. The nineteen year old Henry Somerset, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Beaufort, bought it in Rome that year, as a work by Caravaggio. The Duke was on his Grand Tour when he spent the enormous sum of 30,000 scudi on art, 200 of these he paid for the Lute Player which he sent to England. It remained in the Badminton collection of the Dukes of Beaufort, a collection that contained many fine works, until about 1960. Believed by experts to be a copy, it was sold to a London dealer, Marshall Spink and offered at auction as “after Caravaggio” at Sotheby’s, London in 1969 where it brought £750. It was acquired for a family in Athens, Greece looking for decorations for their home. On their deaths the contents of the home were sold and the Lute Player was bought by a dealer in London, who sent it to the Sotheby’s auction in New York in 2001. He must have been happy that I paid \$110,000 for it. So was I.

To discover the path of the Lute Player from 1726 back to the time Caravaggio painted it around 1600 was more difficult. The Duke of Beaufort had bought it from Grand Prior Antonio Vaini, of the Jerusalem Order of the Knights of Malta, who sold a number of seventeenth century Italian paintings to the Duke. But we do not yet know how Vaini acquired it. The problem is complicated by the fact that there are four versions of the



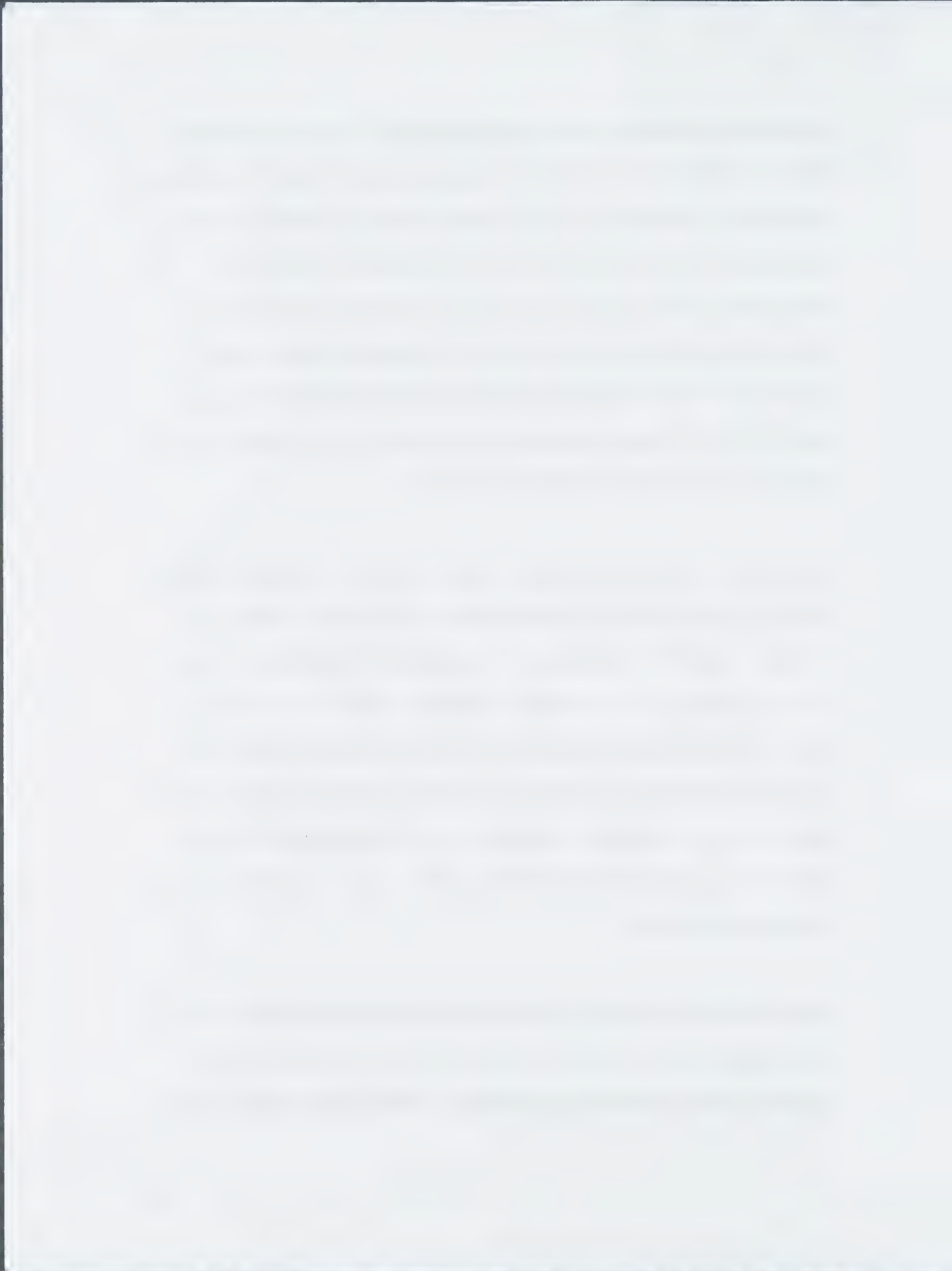


Lute Player and, until quite recently, scholars believed that Caravaggio did not repeat himself. The prime version was believed to be the one in The Hermitage <sup>(Fig.)</sup>, a painting that came from the collection of Vincenzo Giustiniani and was first mentioned in his inventory in 1638. A third version <sup>(Fig)</sup> owned by Wildenstein, is on loan to the Metropolitan Museum. A fourth version, similar to the painting in New York, is in a private collection in Rome. We now know that Caravaggio did occasionally repeat himself – albeit not three or four times, and that one original Caravaggio version was copied. Which of the versions are originals, which copies? And of the originals, which is the prime version and which Caravaggio’s own replica?

Clovis believes that he found the answer in a dictionary of artists entitled Vite de’ Pittori, Scultori et Architetti written by Giovanni Baglione, a painter in Rome in 1642. On p. 136 Baglione described the Lute Player: “He also painted for the Cardinal [Del Monte] a young man, playing the Lute, who seemed altogether alive and real with a carafe of flowers full of water, in which you could see perfectly the reflection of a window and other features of that room inside the water, and on those flowers there was a lively dew depicted with every exquisite care. And this (he said) was the best piece that he ever painted.” Only our version fits that description exactly, “a carafe...in which you could see perfectly the reflection...”

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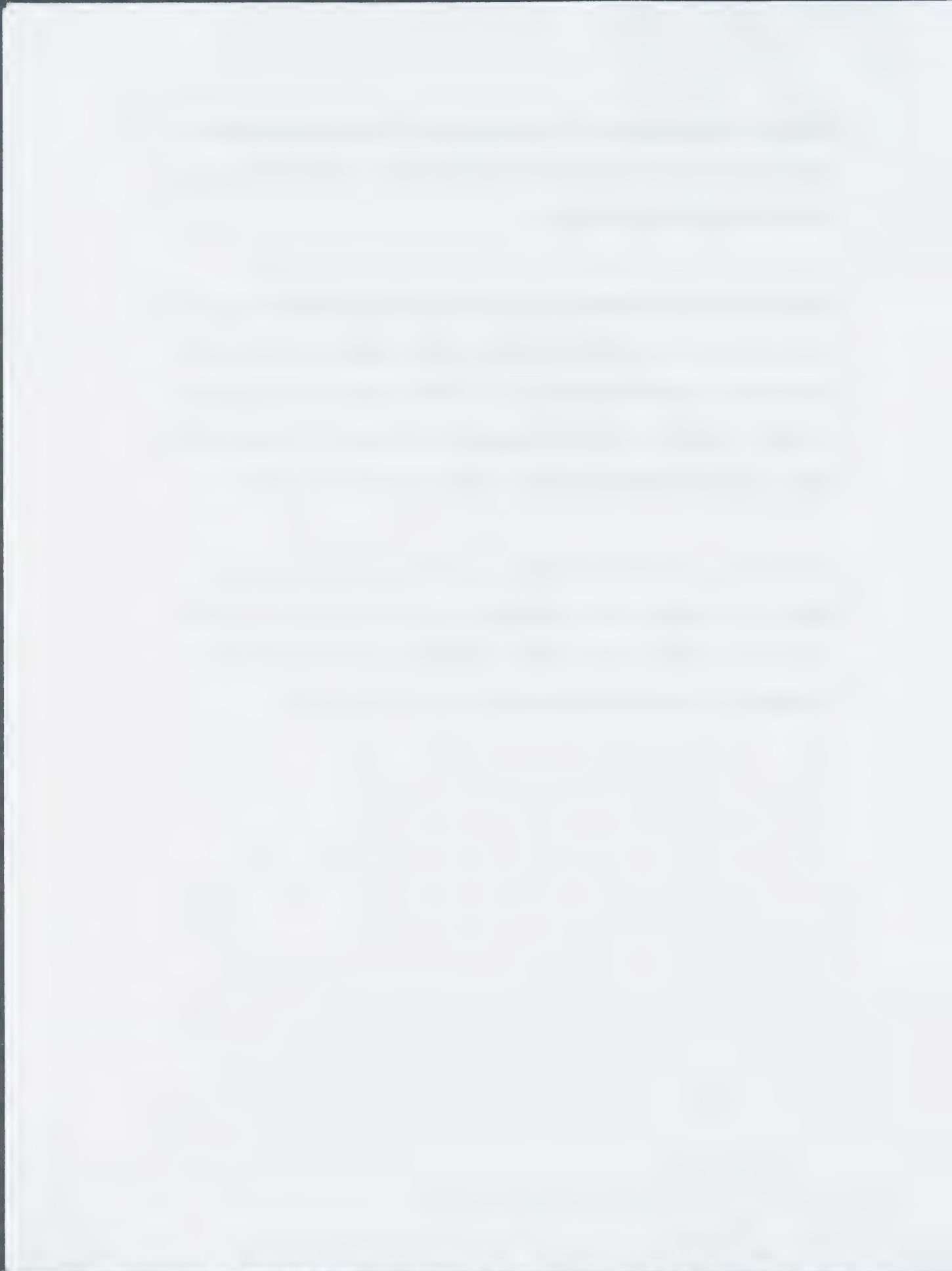
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One of Italy's greatest experts, Mina Gregori, agreed and wrote the entry for the catalogue of the exhibition where our painting was first exhibited publicly. That was a beautiful show of Italian still lives entitled "Stille Welt" in the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung in Munich, held from December 2002 to February 2003.



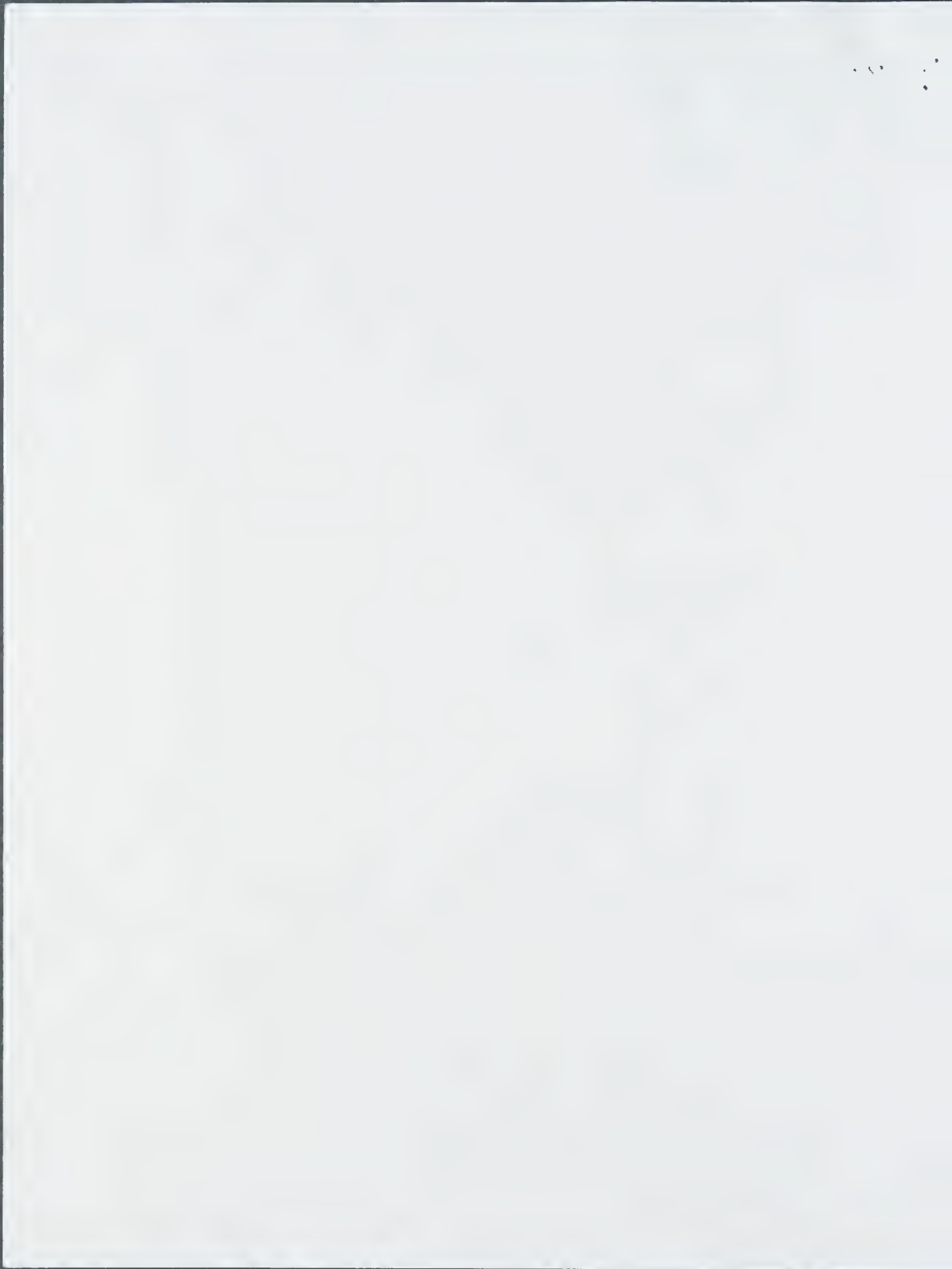
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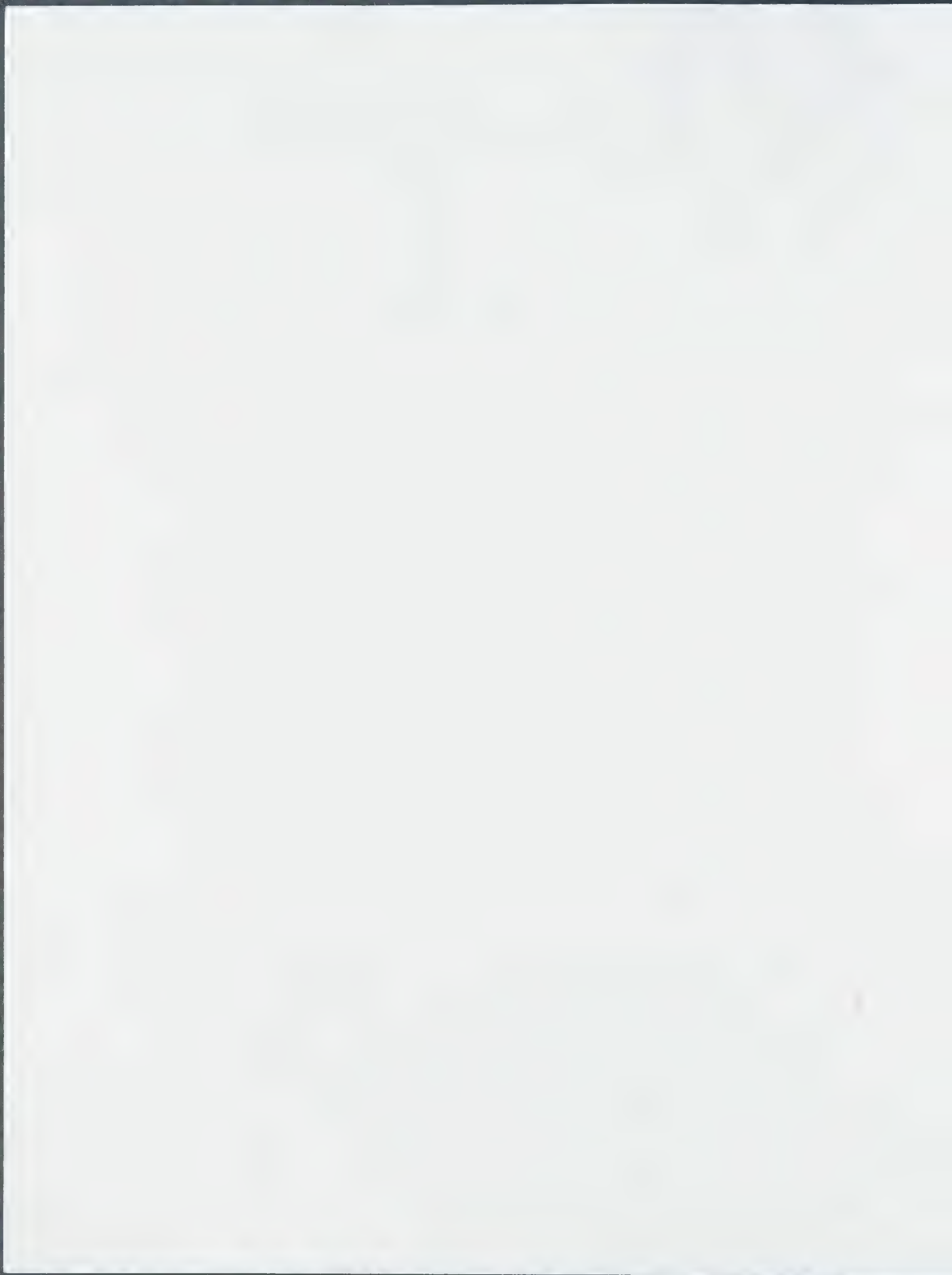


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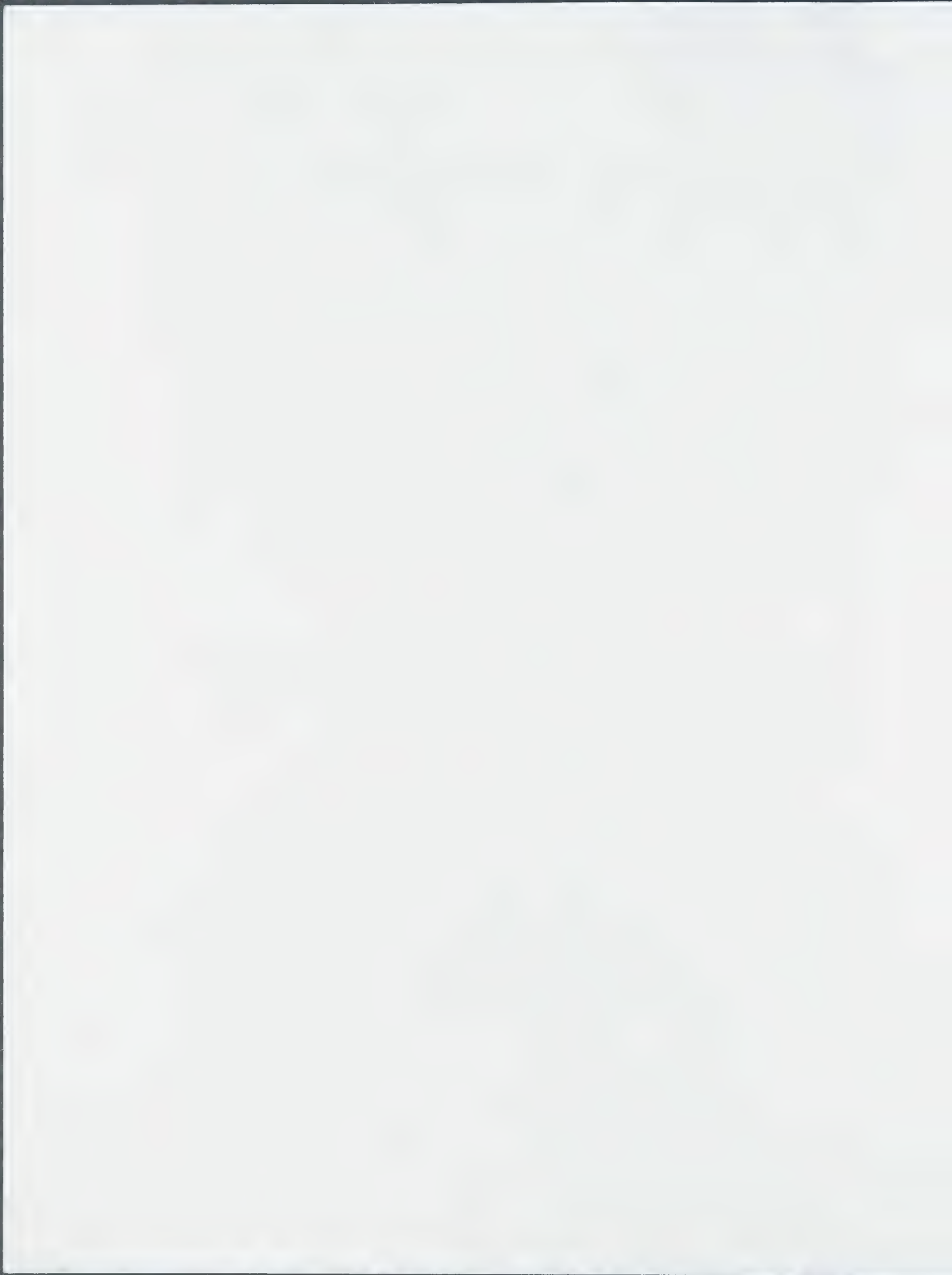




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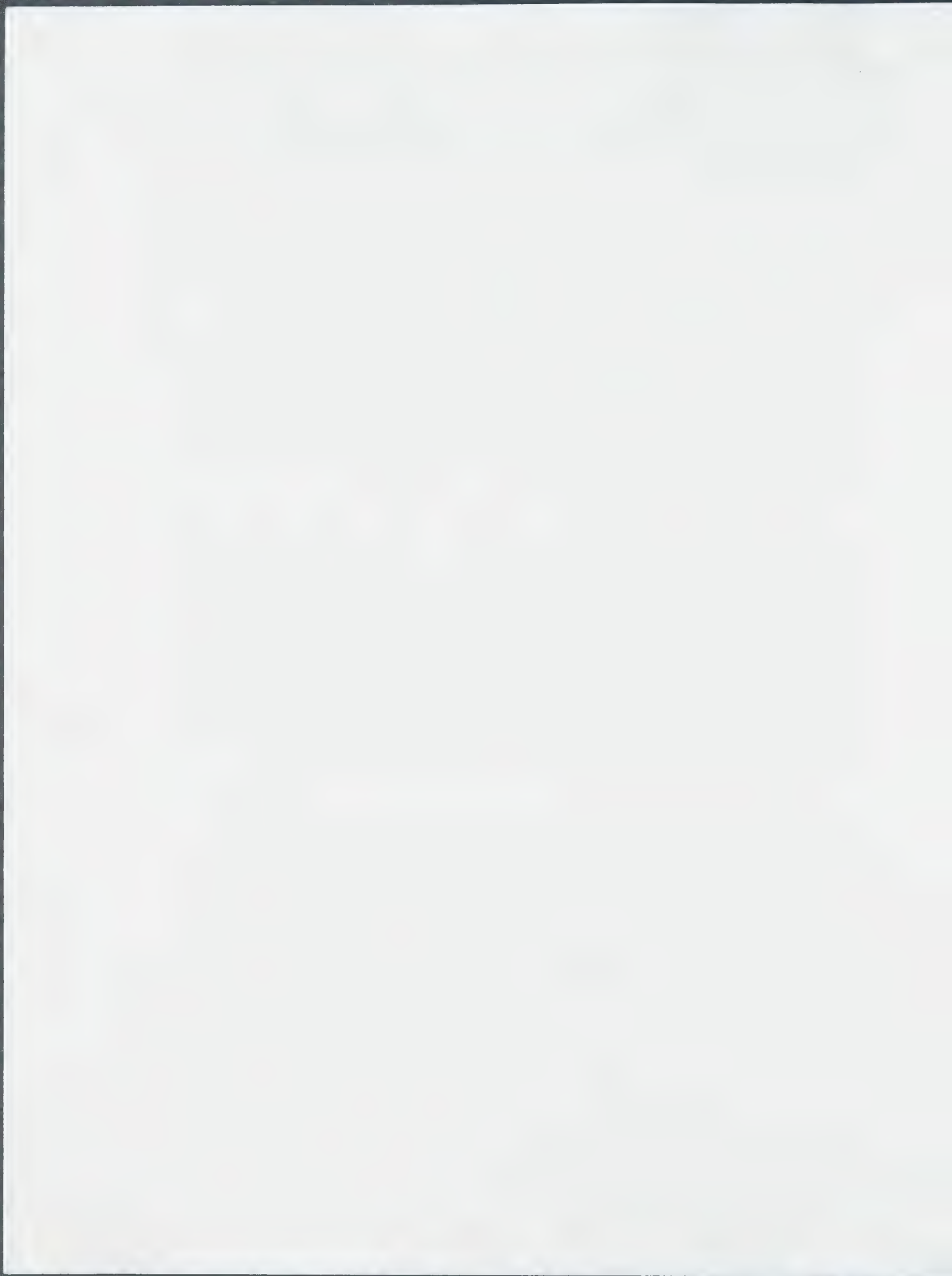
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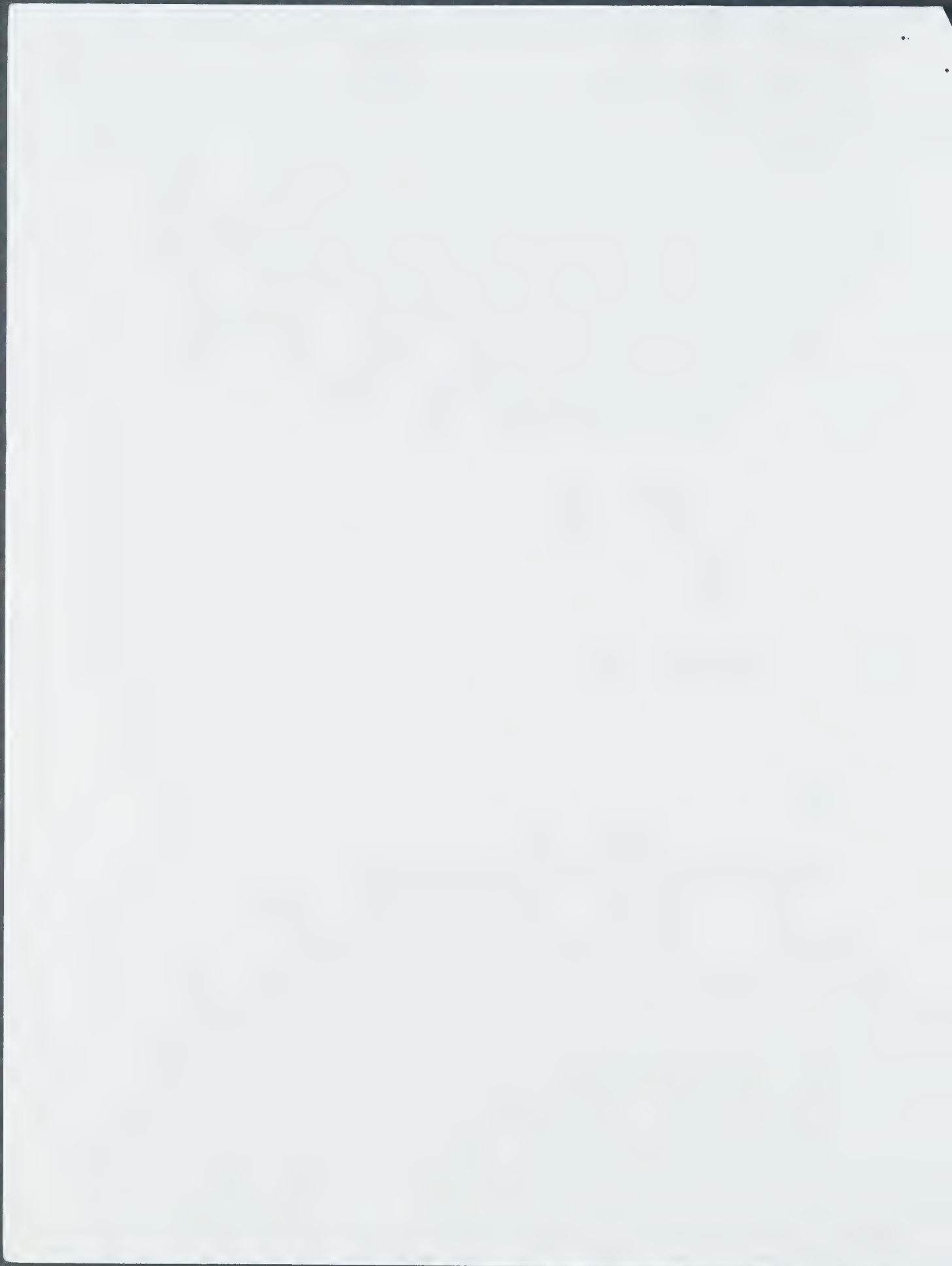
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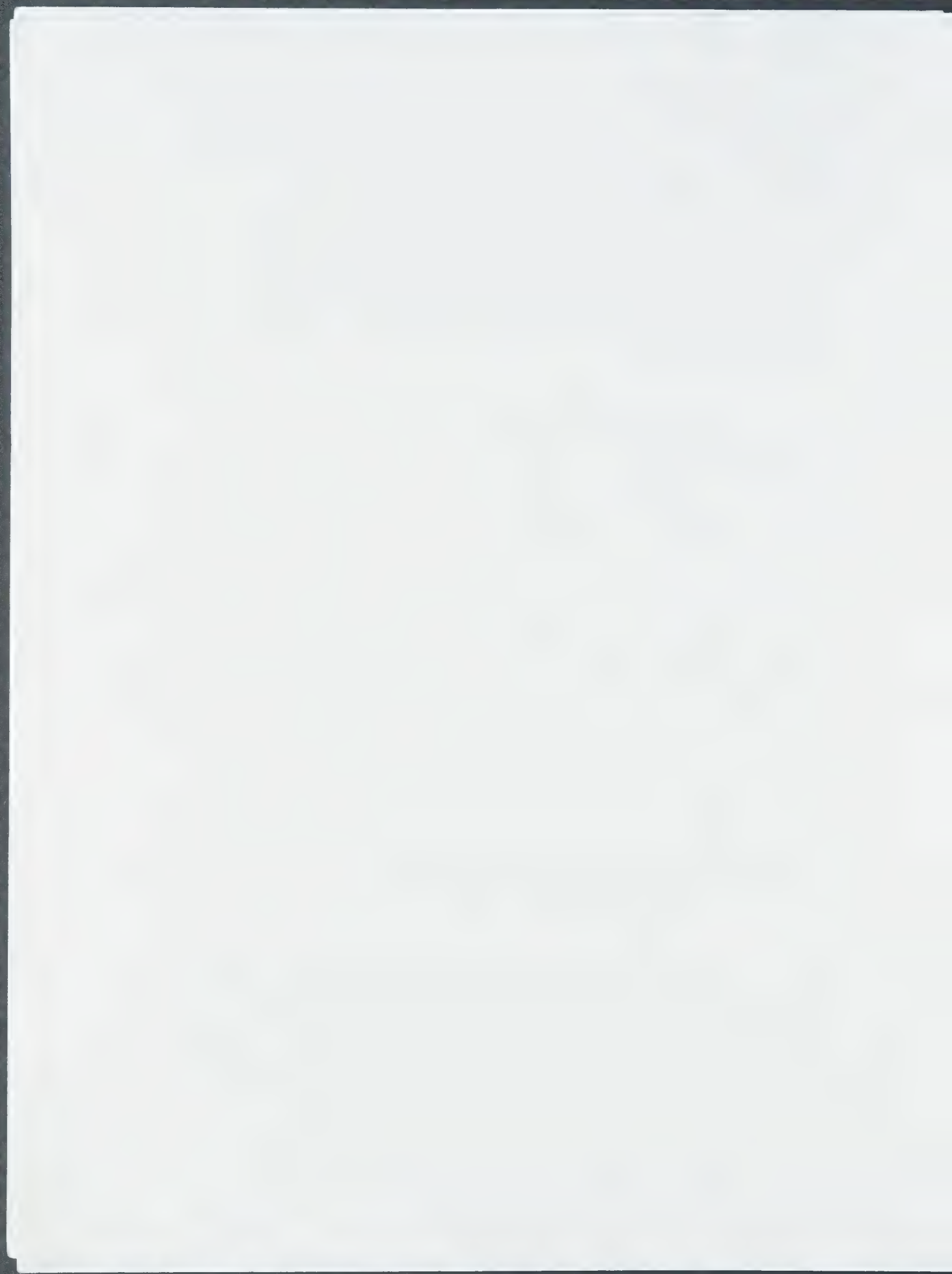


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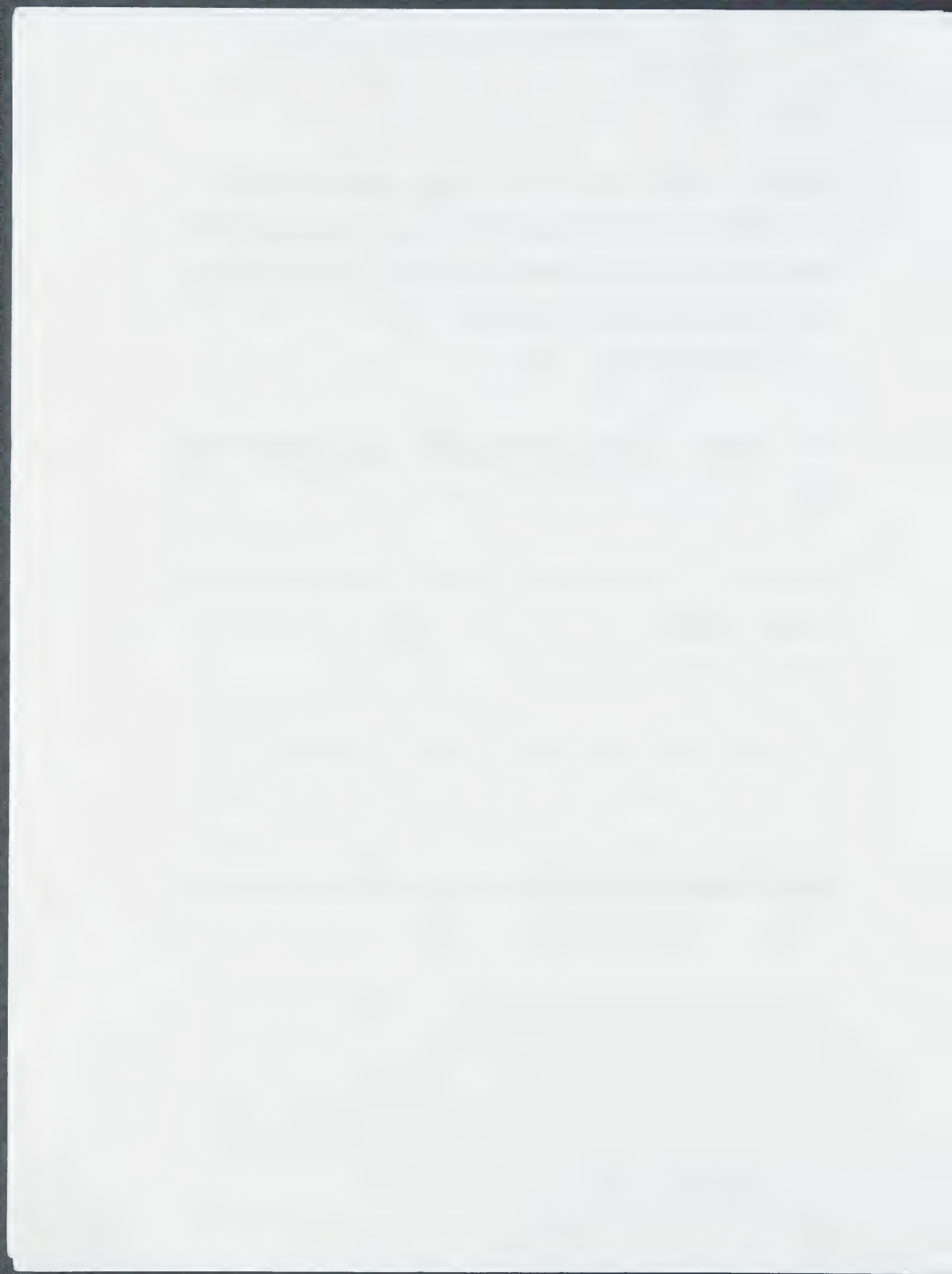
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Adventures II

