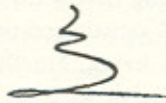


I

Discovery of the Self



REMBRANDT'S initial foray into self-portraiture was entirely unprecedented. Between about 1627 and 1631 he portrayed himself at least twenty times. Often more concerned with character and facial expression than with likeness and public image, he scrutinized his features in the mirror, made faces at himself, and cast his eyes in evocative shadow, paying scant attention to the conventional formalities of portraiture. At first glance the etchings (Figs. 9-12, 14, 16-18) look crude, rough, sometimes careless, like trifles to be discarded, and even some of the paintings (Pl. I, Fig. 23) seem to be sketchy studio exercises, which perhaps accounts for the prevailing view of them as expression studies featuring the artist as his own model. If they are considered in another light, though, it becomes clear that a remarkable individuality distinguishes each of these otherwise unassuming images. In their extraordinary psychological presence we can recognize the initiation of one of the most concerted efforts at self-representation in the history of art. Far from being peripheral to his later self-portraits, they were the crucial first steps. Here Rembrandt discovered the self; or, put more precisely, here he discovered the value of self-portrayal.

I invoke "discovery" here and in the title of this chapter first to emphasize, contrary to current opinion, that Rembrandt's earliest self-portraits display from the very outset his reflective self-consciousness. This is certainly not to claim that self-portrayal was for him the same process of self-analysis that it would become for some modern painters. Second, I wish to qualify the twentieth-century interpretive framework that colors my approach to self-portraiture. Today we would characterize Rembrandt's endeavor as invention rather than discovery, and, indeed, this book traces his invention of a series of different selves. But viewing Rembrandt as inventing or creating himself through his self-portraits is ahistorical in the sense that he and his autobiographer contemporaries, who thought more than we do in terms of objective truths, would have conceptualized their endeavors as self-discovery. The French author Michel de Montaigne, whose *Essais* reflect a lifelong quest to understand the human condition through understanding the self, expressed the age's new attitude of self-discovery and conscious individuality thus: "There is no one who, if he listens to himself, does not discover in himself a pattern all his own."¹

Despite the period's penchant for introspection and despite the nigh-obsessive intensity with which Rembrandt studied his own face, recent scholarship has questioned the status of these early works as self-portraits and has retreated from considering the nature, or even the possibility, of subjectivity underlying them. According to this view Rembrandt, in an etching like the *Self-Portrait, Bareheaded* (Fig. 1), was "probably using himself as a model rather than producing an intentional self-portrait."² With his own face so readily available, he could study dramatic emotional expressions and light effects for use in his biblical and historical paintings, the primary products of his Leiden years. Those who consider these portraits mere studies, however, hardly seem to distinguish them from a studio exercise like Jacques de Gheyn's sheet of nine studies of the head of an anonymous young model (Fig. 2).

My contention is that Rembrandt's earliest self-portraits are indeed self-portraits, informed by reflective self-consciousness. Through them he conceptualized and projected his self-image and role as artist. To bring their self-referential aspects into sharper focus, and to suggest what might have motivated their creation, I offer two readings of these works. Although each interpretation focuses on a different type of self-portrait from the Leiden period—and here I make a distinction that has not been made before—they are, as will become clear, complementary. First I will examine Rembrandt's depictions of extreme facial expressions against the background of his immediate situation in his native Leiden. His education, artistic training, and early activity as a history painter were singularly conducive to a mode of portrayal stressing character and heightened emotionalism or, in the terminology of the period, the passions of the soul. To the young Rembrandt, caught up in the excitement of the new, dramatic style of history painting, rendering the passions required imagining them, for which self-study was essential. Through his early expressive self-portraits he proclaimed his proficiency in the dramatic emotional expression required of the history painter.

Second, I will explore several even earlier self-portraits that are distinguished at once by remarkably evocative shading and by a relative lack of outward emotional expression. That these images seem to penetrate the dark recesses of Rembrandt's mind suggests a depth of introspection not usually attributed to him at this early age. Placing these works in the context of early modern psychology, specifically the psycho-physiological theory of the bodily humors, provides historical access to Rembrandt's conception of the self, what he would have called his nature or temperament.

As prelude to examining Rembrandt's early experiments in self-portrayal consider briefly Constantijn Huygens, a most notable contemporary who shared Rembrandt's acute self-awareness. Huygens, a learned humanist, poet, musician, and connoisseur, was secretary to the Stadholder Frederik Hendrik at the court in The Hague, where taste tended toward Rubens, Jordaens, and the more Italianate Dutch painters. He knew Rembrandt during his Leiden years, secured court commissions for him, and lauded him in his manuscript *vita* or autobiography, written in Latin between 1629 and 1631 at precisely the

time the young artist was engaged in his first intense production of self-portraits.³ Although it has often been discussed for what it tells us about the artists of his time, Huygens' writing has rarely been analyzed as autobiography. But his devotion to self-scrutiny and literary self-portrayal, not only here but in many of his published works as well, provides an illuminating parallel to Rembrandt's self-portraits. Like Rembrandt, he was an introspective, seeking to understand himself and his temperament, and like him he also fashioned a public image through which to promote himself.

When Huygens set out, at age thirty-four or thirty-five, to write about his life, he asked questions that point to his awareness of his own uniqueness and complexity. He wondered what made him who he was. He pondered to what extent he had been formed by his upbringing and experience and to what extent he had been true to his inborn nature.⁴ It behooves us, similarly, to explore Rembrandt's nurturing and his nature if we hope to understand his imperative to portray himself.

THE ARTIST AS ACTOR

Rembrandt, at this early stage in his career, fancied himself a history painter and had not, to our knowledge, painted any formal, commissioned portraits. Yet it is no surprise that he turned to making self-portraits. In the seventeenth-century Netherlands it was practically *de rigueur* to paint, draw, or etch one's own likeness. Indeed, the great flowering of Dutch self-portraits constituted a popular genre in itself with its own characteristic forms and conventions.⁵ Although his teachers Jacob van Swanenburgh and Pieter Lastman are not known to have made self-portraits, many of his predecessors and contemporaries in Leiden did, including Lucas van Leyden (Fig. 3), his most renowned fellow townsman, and Jacob van Swanenburgh's father Isaac.⁶ Rembrandt may have regarded Jan Lievens's unusual and evocative profile self-portrait (Fig. 4) of about 1626, which appears to predate even his earliest etched ones, as a particular challenge, for the two were engaged in constant artistic rivalry.

The proliferation of self-portraits in Leiden and the Netherlands as a whole was one manifestation of a burgeoning interest in the artist and his professional status. Painted self-portraits were in increasing demand, and collections of them were being formed in Italy and England.⁷ At the same time, portraits of artists were widely disseminated in engraved series, a dignified format that had originated as a humanist conceit and would shortly find its ultimate expression in van Dyck's *Iconography*. The first of these in the North was Hieronymus Cock's *Pictorum aliquot celebrium Germaniae Inferioris effigies*, published in Antwerp in 1572, which, like the illustrated editions of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, followed the model of Renaissance portrait books of famous rulers, doctors, humanists, and the like. Each of the twenty-three portraits of famous Netherlandish painters from Jan van Eyck to Cock himself is accompanied by a laudatory Latin verse by Domenicus Lampsonius glorifying the artist's achievements or praising him for the fame he brought to his fatherland (Figs. 75 and 76).

This promotion of illustrious Netherlanders marked the beginning of Dutch artistic nationalism, stimulated both by the artists' increased professional confidence and by the heightened political consciousness that developed during the revolt against Spain. It was echoed in Karel van Mander's *Schilderboeck* of 1604, the first compilation of biographies of Northern artists. And in 1610 Hendrik Hondius's *Pictorum aliquot celebrium praecipue Germaniae Inferioris effigies* incorporated Cock's original portraits, with new verses, and expanded the series to sixty-eight artists, incidentally making available a broader repertory of portrait types on which painters could model their own images (Fig. 144).⁸

The popularity of studio scenes like Rembrandt's *Artist in His Studio* of about 1629 (Fig. 117) is further evidence of the Dutch artist's professional consciousness. Although the learned atmosphere of a university town perhaps accounts for the allegorical complexity of this subject as handled by David Bailly and Gerard Dou, its sudden flowering in Leiden in the late 1620s has not been explained. It may be that unusually disadvantageous conditions there heightened the painters' concern to elevate their professional status. Leiden was the only important Dutch town in which the painters still did not belong to their own guild of St. Luke. Guild membership afforded a number of advantages, including protection from outside competition, which after the Revolt was aggravated by an influx of artists and picture dealers from the southern Netherlands seeking more profitable markets in the north. The guildless painters' agitation for protection reflected the lack of respect accorded their craft, which, in conjunction with an especially depressed market for paintings, may have prompted their heavy output of self-promoting studio scenes. Indeed, David Bailly, a major contributor to this genre, was one of three overseers assigned to enforce new regulations on picture dealing in 1642.⁹

Hence Rembrandt's earliest self-portraits were produced in a milieu of heightened artistic consciousness, reinforced by the local artists' less than ideal socio-economic circumstances. This, combined with the popularity of self-portraits and images of artists, might in part account for his initial impetus to portray himself. It does not, however, explain the particular, highly original expressive form of his early self-portraits or the motivation behind his singular preoccupation with self-portraiture. For this a closer look at the artist himself and his unique circumstances is necessary.

Though the facts of Rembrandt's education and training are well known, their relevance to his approach to self-portraiture has not been considered. He was trained as a history painter, and the major works of his Leiden years, like the *Stoning of St. Stephen* (Fig. 6), are biblical, mythological, or historical. That this experience deeply affected his self-portraits is obvious: his face appears in several of his earliest history paintings, and some of his independent likenesses, mostly etchings, reappear in larger works. Yet the usual explanation of these images as expression studies done in preparation for, or in conjunction with, more significant subjects is an oversimplification. The complexity of the relation between his self-portrayal and his history painting has not been fully ap-

preciated. In what follows I will argue that Rembrandt, in part because of an attitude toward expression that was central to his history painting, could not have portrayed himself without self-awareness.

For a painter in Rembrandt's time, despite such lucrative specialities as portraiture, landscape, or still life, history painting was still the genre held in highest regard. It dealt with noble, human subject matter and for that reason brought the artist greatest esteem. Rembrandt's parents' high ambitions for their son very likely led to his taking this most prestigious route. As his earliest biographer, the Leiden city chronicler Jan Jansz. Orlers, relates in the *Beschrijvinge der stad Leyden*, published in 1641,

his parents sent him to school, so that in the course of time he would learn Latin and thereafter could enter the Leyden Academy [i.e. the University], and that eventually, upon reaching maturity, he would with his knowledge be best able to serve and prompt the [interests of the] city and the community.¹⁰

At the Latin School, where he probably stayed until reaching the highest class at age thirteen, Rembrandt would receive a rigorous humanistic education, an atypical start for a Dutch painter. We get some idea of what he must have been taught from the "school order" of 1625, which a few years later reorganized Latin schools throughout the Netherlands for the purpose of achieving a uniform standard of preparation for entering the university at Leiden.¹¹ Presumably these guidelines reflected existing practice in Leiden's own Latin School to a greater extent than in those in more distant towns. Instruction was primarily in Latin, but Rembrandt also will have learned Greek. The long school day was devoted to studying the Bible as well as Cicero, Ovid, Vergil, Caesar, Hesiod, Homer, Horace, and other classical authors. Although the books listed in the "school order" may not be exactly what Rembrandt read, they accurately reflect the rigor of his education.

On 20 May 1620, two months shy of his fourteenth birthday, he registered at the University of Leiden. But, Orlers reports,

he had no desire or inclination whatsoever in this direction because by nature he was moved toward the art of painting and drawing. Therefore his parents were compelled to take him out of school, and according to his wish they brought and apprenticed him to a painter from whom he would learn the basic and principal rules of art.¹²

Rembrandt went to school but did not like it. Put another way, he was educated—extremely well, for a painter—and obviously gifted and intelligent, but he was not an intellectual like Rubens, interested in abstract ideas and learning for its own sake. If the Latin School had not made him a scholar, it had prepared him to be a history painter by instilling in him a proper "knowledge of the histories"¹³—the Bible and the classics—and a basically humanist attitude towards them.

Rembrandt's parents had had higher hopes than the painter's trade. But when their son displayed unusual talent they saw that he took the most ambi-

tious route and sent him to train with the best local history painter, Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburgh, a well-connected artist of moderate talent, with whom he apprenticed for about three years. Orlers tells us that he then went to Pieter Lastman, the most renowned history painter in Amsterdam, "for further and better instruction."

This choice of teacher was a clear indication of Rembrandt's ambition, for Lastman embodied, to the extent then possible in the Netherlands, the ideal of the classically trained history painter. One of a generation for whom it was obligatory to go to Italy, he, like van Swanenburgh, had made the requisite trip to Rome and returned home having assimilated both classical forms and humanist attitudes. His *Coriolanus and the Roman Matrons* (Fig. 5) of 1622, for example, is based on the ancient Roman formula used for scenes of emperors addressing their troops—the *adlocutio*, as found on the arches of Trajan and Constantine—and was directly influenced by an important High Renaissance work, the fresco of *The Vision of Constantine* in the Sala di Constantino of the Vatican Palace by Giulio Romano and Rafaellino dal Colle.¹⁴

Rembrandt's earliest known history painting, *The Stoning of St. Stephen* (Fig. 6) of 1625, is heavily indebted to Lastman's compositional and narrative style. Two works of 1626, *Balaam and the Ass* and *The Baptism of the Eunuch*,¹⁵ rework his teacher's versions of the same subjects. The 1626 *Historical Scene* in Leiden (Fig. 7)—so called because its subject has yet to be satisfactorily identified—is directly based on Lastman's *Coriolanus* and clearly demonstrates the older artist's influence in composition, color, and archaeological accuracy. In all these works Rembrandt, with characteristic boldness, improved upon his master, pushing figures forward, intensifying actions, heightening emotions, and concentrating the narrative to isolate the dramatic moment.

In one respect Rembrandt's paintings differed from Lastman's right from the start: in *The Stoning of St. Stephen* two or possibly three of the saint's tormentors look very much like Rembrandt, and in the Leiden *Historical Scene* he included himself just to the right of the standing ruler. These visages indicate that as early as 1625, before any of his extant independent self-portraits, Rembrandt was drawing his face in the mirror. More important, they suggest that he came to self-portraiture through history painting and that his practice in that genre colored his approach to his self-portraits.

Including oneself in a larger work imitated a tradition widespread in the Renaissance and sanctioned by Antiquity. According to Plutarch, Phidias portrayed himself in the battle between Greeks and Amazons on the shield of Athena Parthenos. Vasari informs us that there are self-portraits of (to name only a few) Masaccio as one of the Apostles in the *Tribute Money*, Raphael in the *School of Athens*, and Michelangelo as the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew in the *Last Judgement*. Van Mander provides similar information about Northern painters: Jan and Hubert Van Eyck are said to be portrayed, on horseback next to the Count of Flanders, in the *Ghent Altarpiece*. Albrecht Dürer was especially noted for painting himself in many of his works, including his *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* and *Adoration of the Trinity*.

A participant self-portrait traditionally functioned in several ways. As a pictorial signature it expressed the artist's pride in his work, spread his fame, and, like any portrait, preserved his image for posterity. Besides promoting his personal glory, the participant self-portrait was a reminder that the artist's God-given gift of creation accorded him a privileged position. Furthermore, it enriched the beholder's experience of the work of art, since the artist acted as a mediator between the viewer and the divine or historical event portrayed. Often the painter, who usually stands to the side, looks out of the painting and catches the viewer's eye, thereby drawing him into the scene. The expressive effect of his presence can be compared to theatrical devices employed to intensify the audience's involvement: in Dutch drama beginning with Bredero and Coornhert, just as in Jonson and Shakespeare, characters speak directly to the audience in the form of a prologue, soliloquy, epilogue, or other commentary on the action, conveying the insight of the author.

In his history paintings of the Leiden period, Rembrandt transformed the Renaissance convention by assuming an active presence. No longer a bystander discreetly pushed to the side, he took a central position in the Leiden *Historical Scene* (Fig. 7). In *The Stoning of St. Stephen* (Fig. 6) he participated fully in the scene enacted, appearing, curiously enough, in several roles. I think we can assume that Rembrandt's face would be recognized by at least some of his contemporaries, for it is likely that these two works were commissioned as pendants by a fellow townsman, the prominent Leiden historian and Remonstrant sympathizer Petrus Scriverius.¹⁶ Yet here especially the signature function of the participant self-portrait has diminished in favor of emotional engagement.

Examining how one of Rembrandt's contemporaries responded to the intense emotionalism of his early history paintings provides insight into his motivations for including himself. In his autobiography Constantijn Huygens reviewed the state of painting in the Netherlands, singling out two especially promising young Leideners, Rembrandt and Jan Lievens, and contrasting their talents. He praised Rembrandt as surpassing Lievens "in the natural power with which he is able to move the spirit [of the viewer]."¹⁷ As evidence he described the *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (Fig. 8) of 1629, the first truly independent work in which Rembrandt replaced Lastman's classicized naturalism with his own brand of dramatic emotional expression.¹⁸ Huygens was particularly struck by the remorseful Judas's pathetic attempt to atone for his betrayal of Christ:

the posture and the gestures of this one despairing Judas, leaving aside so many other breathtaking figures [brought together] in a single painting, of this one Judas I say who, out of his mind and wailing, implores forgiveness yet holds no hope of it, or has at least no trace of hope upon his countenance; that haggard face, the hair torn from the head, the rent clothing, the forearms drawn in and the hands clasped tight together, stopping the blood-flow; flung blindly to his knees on the ground in a [violent] access of emotion, the pitiable hor-

ror of that totally twisted body—*that* I set against all the refined art of the past.¹⁹

If Huygens' description strikes us as more impassioned than the figure of Judas itself, it is because, like others of his period, he demanded that a painting move the beholder through immediacy and emotional intensity. His praise of Judas as filled with emotion ("vivacitas affectum") and his characterization of Rembrandt as one who "gives himself wholly over to dealing with what he wants to express from within himself"²⁰ confirm that the empathetic, heartfelt rendering of the passions was precisely what moved him.

Rembrandt's sole utterance on his artistic aims, written in a letter to Huygens in 1639, similarly expressed his desire to capture "die meeste ende die naetuerelste beweeghelickeijt," the greatest and most natural emotion.²¹ This phrase has prompted a great deal of debate because critics are divided over whether Rembrandt meant "motion" or "emotion." Probably he meant "emotion," but our confusion arises from the fact that he used a term, indeed a concept, that originally implied physical—bodily and facial—motion. The concept of the *affetti* (movements of the soul) as formulated in the Renaissance meant physical gesture. A classical concept, derived from ancient rhetoric, the *affetti* connoted the system of figural expression at the basis of Renaissance art theory. As Alberti put it, "these feelings are known from movements of the body."²²

Early seventeenth-century artists, and Rembrandt in particular, with their intensified concern to make visible the deepest recesses of the human psyche, tried increasingly to represent the more intangible aspects of emotion and thought. In their attempts to capture great extremes of feeling and to penetrate the depths of the inner man they relied even more on the face as a primary vehicle for expression. This interest in the emotions and the corresponding tendency to individualize were evident already in van Mander's regard for the expression of the passions as the very "soul of art."²³ He devoted an entire chapter of *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, the theoretical section of his *Schilder-boeck*, to the "passions of the soul," or *affecteden*, recommending an intuitive, naturalistic approach to facial expression. He provided a few formulae for representing specific emotions: for instance, to depict gaiety of the heart "make the eyes half closed, the mouth somewhat open and merrily laughing,"²⁴ advice which Rembrandt seems to follow in his *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Laughing* (Fig. 9).²⁵ Mostly van Mander offered general observations on the expressive roles of different features: the eyes are the "seat of the passions, . . . mirrors of the soul, messengers of the heart"; the forehead and brows "reveal the thoughts," and in them "one can read the human mind."²⁶ More specifically, "wrinkles and furrows" on the brow "show that in us is concealed a sorrowful spirit, anxious and full of cares. Indeed, the forehead resembles the sky and the weather, wherein sometimes blow many gloomy clouds, just as the heart is oppressed by the weight of sadness and discord."²⁷ For the most part van Mander declined to describe specific emotions, maintaining that the artist can best learn from observing nature how to represent feelings and states of

mind.²⁸ Van Mander's naturalistic, subjective, and particularized approach to the passions signaled an important modification of the Renaissance convention of figural expression. It was, moreover, far more intuitive than the later systematization of the passions in Charles Le Brun's formulaic catalogue of generalized facial expressions, the *Conférence sur l'expression*, published in 1698.

Rembrandt's contemporary Franciscus Junius took a similar naturalistic approach to the passions in his erudite treatise *De Pictura Veterum*, published in Amsterdam in 1637, which he translated into English (as *The Painting of the Ancients*) in 1638 and into Dutch in 1641. Junius was a classical scholar and librarian to Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, one of the greatest English collectors of the period. Though writing in England, he had been educated at Leiden and continued to correspond with G. J. Vossius, professor first at Leiden and then at the Remonstrant Academy in Amsterdam and author of the treatise *De Graphice, sive Arte Pingendi* (1650). The importance of Junius's book as a reflection of views on painting held by learned Dutchmen, like Huygens, and ambitious artists, like Rembrandt, has been underestimated. While ostensibly writing about ancient artists and criticizing modern practices, he seems to have combed classical texts for ideas supporting the current theoretical model of the learned virtuoso painter: "Seeing also that many Artificers seeme to have drawn that same love of new-fangled conceits from *Poets*, I do not thinke it amisse to shew what affinitie there is between *Poesie* and *Picture*."²⁹ Regarding emotional expression Junius wrote,

An Artificer . . . must be well acquainted with the nature of all things, but principally with the nature of man. . . it sufficeth that he doe but learne by a daily observation [of] how severall passions and affections of the minde doe alter the countenance of man.³⁰

These art theorists' appeal to observation was symptomatic of the period's increasingly empirical scientific approach to knowledge. A broader confidence in experience, especially of the self, as a means to understanding human nature is reflected in Montaigne's statement:

Whatever fruit we may glean from experience, that which we draw from outside examples will hardly contribute much even to our elementary education, unless we profit from the experience we can have of ourselves; that is more familiar to us and certainly enough to teach us what we need.³¹

Even Descartes, whose mechanistic treatise *Les passions de l'âme* is at the root of Le Brun's formulaic expressions, claimed to reject the teachings of the ancients and to study the passions by observing himself:

everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature. And yet the teachings of the ancients about the passions are so meagre and for the most part so implausible that I cannot hope to approach the truth except by departing from the paths they have followed. That is why I shall be

obliged to write as if I were considering a topic that no one had dealt with before me.³²

We sense in Rembrandt's four etched self-portraits of 1630 a similar impulse to study himself and represent the emotions as if no one had done so before. In the *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Laughing* (Fig. 9), he glances over his shoulder with a toothy grin, his eyes half-closed in pleasure, following van Mander's formula for gaiety and, more important, his advice to particularize expression by observing nature. In his *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Open-Mouthed*³³ (Fig. 10) he starts in amazement, his eyes bulging and brows raised, though whether his somewhat theatrical reaction should be read as horrified shock or surprised wonderment is difficult to tell. For the *Self-Portrait, Frowning*³⁴ (Fig. 11) he arranged his features into a tense glare. Frowning, fully lit eyes stare out from under flattened brows, the horizontal line of which is echoed in his tightly closed mouth. Leonine hair and furry garments complete his image of fierce anger. His moving *Self-Portrait Open-Mouthed, as if Shouting*³⁵ (Fig. 12) is the most strongly emotive representation of momentary passion. He cries out in distress, his mouth snarling in pain, his forehead deeply creased. Sharp sidelighting intensifies his anguish.

Some of these expression studies soon show up in his biblical works. That in the *Self-Portrait Open-Mouthed, as if Shouting* reappears the following year on the face of the crucified Savior in his *Christ on the Cross* (Fig. 13), as if Rembrandt was acting out the emotion he wanted to use for Christ. His look of wonder in the *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Open-Mouthed* appears on the faces of some of the astonished witnesses to Christ's miracle in the painted *Raising of Lazarus* of 1630-31 and in the etching of the same subject from about 1632. And in the etched *Descent from the Cross* (Fig. 150) the figure standing on the ladder, helping to lower Christ's body, not only has Rembrandt's features but makes a face similar to that in the *Self-Portrait, Frowning* (Fig. 11).

The period's empirical attitude toward rendering the passions, which we have seen recommended by van Mander, practiced by Rembrandt, and admired by Huygens, led artists throughout Europe to study their own emotions. Bernini is said to have thrust his leg into the fire to observe his agonized expression when carving his St. Lawrence martyred on the grill.³⁶ Caravaggio seems to have used himself as a model for such works as the *Sick Bacchus* and *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*. And Domenichino reportedly went around "talking to himself, crying out in pain or gladness, and then practicing the proper *affetti*."³⁷

The idea that the artist must draw on his own experience to imagine emotions and dramatic situations for the sake of convincing expression stems from ancient poetic theory. In the *Ars Poetica*, a text Rembrandt probably read at the Latin School,³⁸ Horace advised the tragic actor:

Not enough is it for poems to have beauty: they must have charm, and lead the hearer's soul where they will. As men's faces smile on those who smile, so they respond to those who weep. If you would

have me weep, you must first feel grief yourself: then . . . will your misfortunes hurt me: if the words you utter are ill suited, I shall laugh or fall asleep.³⁹

In Dutch art theory, as in Italian theory since Alberti,⁴⁰ Horace's idea that the poet had to imagine emotions he wanted the beholder to feel was interpreted literally and applied to the painter. According to Junius, the painter, like the poet, was "most of all advanced by the ready help of a strong and well-exercised Imagination."⁴¹ This enabled him to empathize with his subjects and thus move the beholder. Painters, he wrote,

first of all passe over every circumstance of the matter in hand, considering it seriously, as if they were present at the doing, or saw it acted before their eyes: whereupon feeling themselves well filled with a quick and lively imagination of the whole worke, they make haste to ease their overcharged braines by a speedie pourtraying of the conceit.⁴²

And, he continued, for proper invention "our minde must first of all be moved, our minde must conceive the images of things, our minde must in a manner be transformed unto the nature of the conceived things."⁴³ Only an artist who is so moved himself can hope to move the spectator with his work:

A minde rightly affected and passionated is the onely fountaine whereout there doe issue forth such violent streames of passions, that the spectator, not being able to resist, is carried away against his will.⁴⁴

Samuel van Hoogstraten, who was Rembrandt's pupil in the 1640s and in 1678 published a rather eccentric theoretical treatise, the *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (Introduction to the Elevated School of the Art of Painting), discusses "the passions or movements of the heart" in the section of his book devoted to history painting. Here he presents his own version of the Horatian dictum, possibly reflecting what he had learned in Rembrandt's studio: "If one wants to gain honor in this most noble part of art [the passions], one must reform oneself totally into an actor."⁴⁵ He goes on to say, "the same benefit can be derived from the depiction of your own passions, at best in front of a mirror, where you are simultaneously the performer and the beholder. But here a poetic spirit [Poëtische geest] is necessary in order to imagine oneself in another's place."⁴⁶ Hoogstraten seems to distinguish between acting out a role and experiencing passions as one's own, the latter being more difficult because it requires imagination or *poëtische geest*. He recognizes, then, that the artist gains unique insight in being both performer and beholder, or represented and representer.

Rembrandt's earliest history paintings manifest the artist's heightened emotional involvement. When he appears as a participant in the Leiden *Historical Scene* and *The Stoning of St. Stephen* (Figs. 7 and 6), he claims his ability to "reform [him]self totally into an actor." Although the participant self-portrait was not new in the seventeenth century, the artist's role as mediator no