

longer depended merely on the fact that his face was familiar or his glance engaging: instead, what became most important was the strength of his imagination and the authenticity of the emotions he rendered. Empathizing with historical protagonists and situations enhanced—indeed, it announced—the artist's ability to express the appropriate passions and relate the narrative.

Rembrandt's use of his own face for expressions he then used in his *Raising of Lazarus*, *Christ on the Cross*, and *Descent from the Cross* anticipated Hoogstraten's advice to depict one's passions in front of a mirror. Here we find Rembrandt even more intensely trying to imagine himself in another's place and to experience emotions for the sake of convincing expression. Through his four etched self-portraits of 1630 (Figs. 9–12) he projected an image of one who, in Huygens' words, "gives himself wholly over to dealing with what he wants to express from within himself."<sup>47</sup> That these etchings were monogrammed and dated and were made in a reproductive medium, presumably meant for wider distribution, suggests that Rembrandt's use of himself as a model was a decision prompted by the history painter's imperative to engage his imagination to the fullest extent possible for the sake of emotional expression. Rather than studies, they are deliberate demonstrations of his proficiency in rendering the passions.

Rembrandt's participant self-portraits and his expressive faces are two sides of the same coin. Both arise from the artist's need for emotional engagement in the historical event he depicts. And both reflect the period's new emphasis on the individual, on the particularized face rather than the generalized type as the prime vehicle for emotional expression. They also represent the beginning of Rembrandt's unprecedented self-involvement in his own work, which is manifested not only in the number of times he included his face in history paintings and prints, but also in the frequency with which he included members of his family in biblical scenes and painted them in historicized portraits, as well as in the close ties between his biblical works and his habit of drawing events in his everyday life.

But not all of his early self-portraits can be so closely connected to his history paintings. Another group of images is distinguished by their introspective mood and evocative shadows: not representations of particular emotions, they concern the artist's imagination in a different and perplexing way.

#### THE ARTIST'S TEMPERAMENT

A conceptual transition from historical representation to self-portrayal is encapsulated in one of Rembrandt's earliest endeavors with the etcher's needle. In 1627 or 1628, he etched the *Self-Portrait Leaning Forward* (Fig. 14), probably his first independent self-portrait, on a piece of the copper plate he had previously used for *The Flight into Egypt* (Fig. 15).<sup>48</sup> In the unique impression of the print the Virgin Mary's ghostlike head remains faintly visible, upside down, just above his own. He strains forward, his shoulders hunched, not so much for dramatic effect as to see himself properly in the mirror. Intent on rendering psychological depth rather than simple likeness, he pays little atten-



tion to his hastily sketched-in body. Ignoring the conventional niceties of portraiture, he shades his eyes, deeply creases his brow, and accentuates his unruly hair with heavy scratched lines, imparting a sense of solemn, intense thoughtfulness. Similarities between his expression and Mary's suggest that, mindful of the destroyed work, he was practicing her furtive glance. But of course Rembrandt was primarily characterizing not Mary but himself. In so doing, he proclaimed himself to have the strength of imagination and to be of the proper artistic temperament for historical representation. He announced, in Hoogstraten's words, his *poëtische geest*.

In two other etchings of about the same date he sat up straight and posed for himself, with different results in each. The subtly shaded full-face *Self-Portrait with a Broad Nose*<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 16), though more open and accessible than the *Self-Portrait Leaning Forward*, shares its solemn intensity. In contrast, the gloomy *Self-Portrait with High, Curly Hair*<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 18) seems inaccessible, shrouded in mystery. One of his least attractive self-portraits, it is worth examining closely, for here we find that in the very act of making his first attempt at a proper portrait, adopting a traditional format and paying more attention to his clothing, he employed a loose technique and heavy shading of the eyes atypical of portraiture. He used the same shading device, to almost sinister effect, in his somber *Self-Portrait in a Fur Cap, in an Oval Border*<sup>51</sup> (Fig. 17). Scrawly lines, harshly darkened face, and crudely tooled frame seem to mock the control of more conventional engraved portraits like Hendrick Goltzius's *Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert* (Fig. 19).

His *Self-Portrait, Bareheaded*<sup>52</sup> (Fig. 1), signed "RHL" and dated 1629, comes still closer to true portraiture. In recognition of his bolder, more public image, Rembrandt had chosen a plate several times the size of the previous ones and etched it with unconventional bravado, experimentally using a double-pointed tool, possibly a quill pen, to achieve dark, bold lines. He also portrayed himself with new confidence, adopting a formal demeanor, donning respectable clothing, and abandoning extreme shading in favor of deepening his eye sockets with concentrated shadows. The workings of the mind are still suggested by his furrowed brow and intense gaze. Although his hair is coiffed with a fashionable "lovelock" or *liefdelok*, it nonetheless seems wild and unkempt. A subject of theological debate in the Netherlands, long hair was the mark of a stylish courtier or gentleman.<sup>53</sup> Whether Rembrandt really wore his hair this way is questionable, since its length varies even among portraits of the same year. More likely, hairstyle is another aspect of the costumes and guises that he puts on and takes off at will.

Rembrandt's small bust-length self-portrait in the Rijksmuseum (Pl. I), probably his first in paint, is just as unconventional as these etchings.<sup>54</sup> From his stubbly beard, shaggy hair, and nondescript clothing we gather that conveying a refined public image was far from his mind. He reduced the portrait to bare essentials. Abbreviating his body and summarily defining his small white collar, he suppressed any interest in his clothing, which would ordinarily convey social status. His face is unmistakable, yet the picture does not primarily



record likeness. Those features crucial to recognition that we most want to see—his eyes and mouth—are inaccessible, cast in deep shadow. Bright light falls from the left, hitting his ear, the side of his face, and a few strands of his bushy hair. This unusual lighting scheme with its dramatic, mysterious shadow is what strikes us most and would have struck his contemporaries even more. In contrast to the polished formality, evenness of lighting, air of permanence, and corresponding lack of emotion in contemporary self-portraits by Rubens and Nicolaes Eliasz. (Figs. 93 and 20), Rembrandt's evokes astonishing psychological depth.

His seemingly spontaneous painting technique enhances mood and personality at the expense of descriptive detail. Sketchy, free brushwork creates an overall unifying effect of atmosphere and light. Though paint is applied thickly in the lightest areas, in areas of dark it is quite thin, allowing the warm ground to radiate through. By limiting his palette to a monochrome range of gray, brown, and yellow, relieved only by touches of pink, Rembrandt focuses all attention on the play of light and shadow. He masterfully enhances the three-dimensionality by incising lines in the paint surface with a sharp instrument, probably the butt end of a brush. Seemingly effortless shortcuts, these brilliantly conceived scratches expose the yellow-brown ground, creating glittery highlights in the frizzy hair on his brow.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, along the left profile of his neckline, incised lines expose dark brown underpainting instead of ground, creating the effect of hairs silhouetted against the gray wall.

Contemporary copies of the Amsterdam panel indicate that what initially may have been a private work must have acquired a wider audience. Rembrandt's daring handling of paint distinguishes it from another, less confident version in Kassel (Fig. 21), long thought to be the original but now recognized as a workshop copy.<sup>56</sup> Subtle highlights have become crude blobs of paint on the neck, the shoulder, and the tip of the nose. Details of the collar and hair have been simplified, and the incising technique has been clumsily imitated with limited three-dimensional effect. Moreover, the copyist, a poor judge of proportions, awkwardly enlarged Rembrandt's features and compressed the top of his head. This and other painted copies may have been studio exercises to teach particular techniques and expressive effects—students customarily learned by copying drawings, plaster casts, and, in Rembrandt's studio especially, paintings by their master. Or they may have been produced in his shop for sale, suggesting a demand for such copies.

Anticipated demand for the image, probably as a portrait but perhaps as an expressive character type or *tronie*, must have prompted the etched copy, dated 1634, by J. G. van Vliet (Fig. 22), a printmaker with whom Rembrandt was associated for a brief time.<sup>57</sup> Van Vliet fully captures, even exaggerates, the startling contrast of light and dark in the painting, impressing upon us just how novel Rembrandt's mysteriously shaded eyes must have seemed at the time.

A smaller self-portrait in Munich (Fig. 23), monogrammed "RHL" and dated 1629, is similar to the Amsterdam panel (Pl. I) in its dramatic lighting and abbreviated bust-length format, but more intense and spontaneous in its



emotional expression.<sup>58</sup> Rembrandt thrusts his head forward, his lips slightly parted, eyes shaded but wide open and brows raised. Sharp side-lighting, now casting a shadow on the wall, reinforces his vitality. His hair, more unruly than in the Amsterdam portrait, magnifies his excitement, as does his larger, nervously painted white collar. More confident, freer handling of paint—visible in the loose brushwork of the face and background—further heightens the immediacy.

Two self-portrait drawings of about 1629 exhibit analogous differences. The pen and wash drawing in the Rijksprentenkabinet (Fig. 24), like the Amsterdam panel (Pl. I), achieves a restrained psychological presence without such dramatic lighting.<sup>59</sup> More than either of the paintings it has qualities of a traditional portrait—even lighting, psychological composure, and formal clothing. Nevertheless, it too is a study in character rather than a simple likeness. In contrast, the drawing in the British Museum (Fig. 25), like the Munich panel (Fig. 23), emphasizes momentary expression.<sup>60</sup> With half of his gaunt face lost in shadow, Rembrandt raises his brows and opens his mouth as if speaking. Heightening the immediacy, his collar is open and the rest of his body is only summarily indicated. It has been suggested that the drawings were made in conjunction with the painted portraits or, more likely, with the etched *Self-Portrait, Bareheaded* of 1629 (Fig. 1), but they are too independent to be true preparatory sketches.

Rembrandt's intense, rough, sometimes gloomy countenance in many of these portraits from the late 1620s contradicts our image of him as a confident, ambitious young painter. After all, by 1628, at age twenty-one or twenty-two, he was an established independent master with his first paying pupil, Gerard Dou, and he probably counted among his patrons one of the most prominent intellectuals in Leiden, Petrus Scriverius. Furthermore, he had achieved sufficient renown to attract the attention of Constantijn Huygens and of Hendrick Uylenburgh, the art dealer from Amsterdam with whom he would soon go into business.

The difficulty of reconciling Rembrandt's position and promise with these coarse, shockingly informal images may explain in part why recent scholars have resorted to thinking of them in formalistic terms, as studies in light and expression. Yet precisely their relative lack of emotionalism separates them from the likenesses he included in history paintings and from his expressive etchings of 1630, as well as from more traditional portraits of the time. Moreover, consistent features—shaded eyes, expressive brows, unruly hair, and (when shown) careless garments, combined with extraordinarily free and loose handling—suggest that these are not purely naturalistic studies but portraits governed by certain conventions designed to convey a particular image.

Again and again, from these earliest etched and painted self-portraits to the *Self-Portrait in a Cap and Scarf with the Face Dark* of 1633 and the painting in Berlin dated 1634 (Figs. 26 and 27), Rembrandt evoked his vital psychological presence, nature, or character primarily through the relatively simple



device of shading his eyes.<sup>61</sup> This feature is so stunning visually and so original, yet so widely misunderstood, that it deserves our close consideration. The usual formalist explanation—that Rembrandt was practicing chiaroscuro effects—trivializes these images. He could study lighting techniques much more easily using other models, yet no such studies exist from this period. More to the point, he shades his eyes specifically, and the eyes, as van Mander knew, are “the mirrors of the soul.”<sup>62</sup> I suggest a different interpretation of this device that pertains to the art of portraiture: that Rembrandt, responding to the reiterated challenge to paint the inner man or the soul, portrayed himself as a man of melancholic temperament.

At the time, portraiture was faulted for being slavishly tied to nature and capable of representing only external appearances. In the hierarchy of genres implicit in Dutch art theory, portraits were accorded lowly status because they were thought to rely exclusively on the imitation of a model, leaving no room for the painter’s imagination. As late as 1707 Gerard de Lairese wrote, “As far as [portraiture] is concerned it has often seemed strange to me that someone can abandon his freedom to make himself a slave.”<sup>63</sup> A century before, van Mander had called it a “calamity” that so many Dutch painters,

lured by profit or simply in order to make a living, start and continue on that side road of the arts (that is, portraiture from life) without having the time or the desire to look and search for the road of historical or figure painting which leads to the highest perfection.<sup>64</sup>

Seventeenth-century Dutch poets criticized portraits for representing only man’s physical exterior, not his soul.<sup>65</sup> And so they entered into a philosophical debate over the relation between mind and body and over the nature of representation that goes back at least to Socrates’ question to the painter Parrhasius: “Do you not imitate the character of the soul?” To which he replied: “But how could such a thing be imitated, O Socrates, which has neither proportions, nor color, nor any of the things which you mentioned just now, and which, in fact, is not even visible?”<sup>66</sup>

In reality the provocative mental vitality, emotional vivacity, and “speaking likeness” in portraits by Rembrandt, Frans Hals and others seemed to plumb greater, more varied depths of feeling than ever before, thereby defying the Aristotelian disbelief in the possibility of representing the invisible. In contrast to the stoical ideal of *tranquillitas* expressed in emotionless, even-tempered portraits by artists of the previous generation such as van Miereveld, van Ravesteyn, de Keyser, and Eliasz., beginning in the late 1620s portraits seemed to project a less idealized, more individualized notion of character.<sup>67</sup> As Hoogstraten would later put it, the face was “the mirror of the heart . . . wherein can be seen and read favor and envy, love and hate, joy and sorrow, and as many emotions as stir the heart.”<sup>68</sup> Constantijn Huygens called the portrait “a summary of the whole man, of his body as well as his spirit.”<sup>69</sup> His defense of his portrait by Jan Lievens (Fig. 36) as accurately capturing his troubled mental state signaled a new idea of what a portrait could appropriately reveal:



There are those who claim that the pensive expression on the face belies my geniality. [In the painter's defense] I must point out that, as I freely admit, this is entirely my own fault, since I was weighed down at the time by serious family matters, and although I tried to keep my worries to myself, I apparently displayed them for all to see in my features and eyes, as one always does.<sup>70</sup>

The period's fascination with investigating the nature of the soul and the relation between body and soul, which we have seen in the emphasis on expression in history painting, is also reflected in the several hundred books that were published on physiognomy, memory, the emotions, theories of cognition and perception, and questions of free will and the immortality of the soul. Indeed, the term "psychology," from the Greek *psyche* (soul), was coined in the sixteenth century to denote the scientific study of the human mind or soul.<sup>71</sup> Although many authors still based their ideas on Aristotle, whose *De Anima* (On the Soul) was reprinted with some forty-six new commentaries in the sixteenth century alone, others transformed ancient and medieval ways of thinking about the inner man into attitudes that were fundamentally new.<sup>72</sup> In his *De Anima et Vita* of 1538 the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, called by some the father of empirical psychology, covers all aspects of man's psychological makeup, treating, with heavy reliance on Aristotle, the nature of the soul and the senses and, with greater originality, memory, understanding, will, and the emotions.<sup>73</sup> Symptomatic of the new emphasis on the individual is Juan Huarte's *The Examination of Men's Wits, in Which, by Discovering the Varieties of Natures, is Showed for What Profession Each One is Apt, and How Far He Shall Profit Therein*, first published in 1575 and widely read throughout Europe. Huarte's study of men's "wits," or intelligence, focuses (as its title indicates), on different types of intellectual abilities suitable for different professions. Huarte is concerned with how identity is formed, and his suggestions as to how different types of intellect should be educated thus tend toward a conscious cultivation of individualized talent.<sup>74</sup>

Just how vastly early modern psychology differed from that of today is made clear by the currency of humoral theory. According to this psycho-physiological system, which had originated in Antiquity, the four elemental fluids of the body determined, by their relative proportions, each person's physical and mental constitution. The four bodily humors—blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile—were conceived of as having the same essences as the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth. They were held responsible, by their balance or lack thereof, for all of man's physical and emotional conditions and diseases. And they were thought to govern which of the four personality types or temperaments—the sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic—would dominate in each person.

The melancholic temperament in particular caught the attention of this age of heightened self-awareness.<sup>75</sup> For it was associated with depression, self-absorbed introspection, and artistic creativity. As conveyed in Dürer's complex



humanistic allegory *Melancholia I* of 1514 (Fig. 28), *melancholia imaginativa*, a particular aspect of the temperament dominated by the imagination, was regarded as a mandatory condition for creative genius.<sup>76</sup> It distinguished the artist as divinely inspired by *furor melancholicus*, alienated him from society, and made him acutely vulnerable to his passions. Jacques de Gheyn's somewhat later allegory of Melancholy simplified Dürer's and transformed his female personification into a Saturnine old man brooding, in the darkness of night, atop a terrestrial globe, symbol of melancholy's earthy essence. De Gheyn repeated the pensive pose of *Melancholia I* and encapsulated his elaborate emblematic accouterments in a compass and orb, which symbolize the creative powers of the true artistic genius who, like God, the architect of the universe, "ordered everything by measure and number and weight."<sup>77</sup> The print's caption, by Hugo Grotius, conveys the most important aspect of the seventeenth century's less abstruse concept of melancholy: "Melancholy, the most calamitous affliction of soul and mind, often oppresses men of talent and genius."<sup>78</sup>

Since Antiquity, melancholy had been regarded both as the source of creative and contemplative intelligence and as a dread disease, the source of madness. Aristotle had summed up its importance in his question, "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly melancholics, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?"<sup>79</sup> The idea of heroic melancholy as the natural condition of genius was formulated by the Florentine Neoplatonists, most notably Marsilio Ficino, who conflated Aristotle's notion that all great men are melancholic with the Neoplatonic idea of Saturn, the highest of the planets, which bestowed the noblest faculties of the soul, reason and speculation. According to Ficino, "Saturn seldom denotes ordinary characters and destinies, but rather men who are set apart from the others, divine or animal, joyous or bowed down by the deepest grief."<sup>80</sup>

The many late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century medical treatises devoted to melancholy and, above all, to melancholic diseases are evidence that the popularization of the temperament also represented a dilution of the complex humanistic concept as Dürer and the Florentine Neoplatonists knew it. Still believed to be seated in the imagination, melancholy was simultaneously feared as the cause of madness and of countless physical diseases and romanticized as the source of genius or "inventive wit." Laurentius recognized three sorts of melancholy. One "altogether grosse and earthie, cold and drie" made people "grosse and slacke in all their actions both of bodie and minde, fearful, sluggish and without understanding." The "hot and burnt" sort caused men "to be outrageous and unfit to be employed in any charge." Only that which is mixed with blood made men "wittie and causeth them to excell others":

when this humour groweth hot, by the vapours of the blood, it causeth as it were, a kinde of divine ravishment, commonly called *Enthousiasma*, which stirrith men up to plaie the Philosophers, Poets



and also to prophesie: in such manner, as it may seeme to containe some divine parts.<sup>81</sup>

Unfortunately, the fluid boundaries between these types of melancholy meant that the witty melancholic was especially prone to “accidents” that might thrust madness upon him at any time. Despite this risk, “the melancholike are accounted as most fit to undertaking matters of weightie charge and high attempt.”<sup>82</sup> They are most likely to be solitary, introspective thinkers, for, as Huarte put it, “wits full of invention . . . will not follow any beaten path, nor go in companie.”<sup>83</sup>

Scholars, humanists, professors, philosophers, poets—anyone engaged in solitary intellectual pursuits—either suffered from or affected “the disease of the age.” Not unexpectedly, Leiden, home of a famous university and medical school, produced numerous dissertations on melancholy and a wealth of imagery associated with its scholarly aspects.<sup>84</sup> The Leidener Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s *Man Seated at a Table* (Fig. 29), painted in 1628, is a genre-fied version of Dürer’s *Melancholia I*: a young scholar, seated in the traditional pensive pose of personifications of melancholy, turns away from the books on his desk. In a similar work by the Amsterdammer Pieter Codde (Fig. 30) the brooding scholar’s face is cast in shadow. Rembrandt’s *Old Man Asleep by the Fire* of 1629, called “a philosopher” in the eighteenth century, is probably an allegory of melancholy—perhaps stressing *acedia*, idleness or sloth, one of its principal causes—as are some of the other Rembrandtesque representations of scholars in darkened rooms.<sup>85</sup> In the early 1640s, Rembrandt fully captured the dark, gloomy mood of idle melancholy produced by “overmuch study”<sup>86</sup> in his richly tonal etching *A Student at a Table by Candlelight*.<sup>87</sup> And some years later, as Julius Held has convincingly argued, he characterized Aristotle as a somber melancholic deep in thought.<sup>88</sup>

Artists, especially, were thought to be born under Saturn and dominated by melancholy. In the Renaissance a melancholic temperament had come to be regarded as a divine gift necessary for true artistic genius. The theorist Romano Alberti offered this explanation in his treatise of 1585:

painters become melancholic because, wanting to imitate, they must retain visions fixed in their minds so that later they may reproduce them as they have seen them in reality. And this not only once but continuously, such being their task in life. In this way they keep their minds so abstracted and detached from reality, that in consequence they become melancholic which, Aristotle says, signifies cleverness and talent because, as he maintains, almost all gifted and sagacious persons have been melancholic.<sup>89</sup>

As early as 1519, Raphael was described as “inclining to Melancholy, like all men of such exceptional gifts.”<sup>90</sup> Other Renaissance artists, most notably Michelangelo, cultivated—and Vasari exaggerated—the idea of the artistic personality driven by poetic fury, prone to alternating periods of solitary, obsessive work with spells of “creative idleness,” and distinguished by extreme