

introspection, heightened emotionalism, strange behavior, and eccentric dress. Many seventeenth-century artists—among them Annibale Carracci, Domenichino, Adam Elsheimer, Carlo Dolci, and Borromini—exhibited traits of or were considered to be melancholics.⁹¹

The Dutch in this period represented artists as melancholics in several ways. In 1629 Cornelis Saftleven portrayed himself according to a variation of de Heem and Codde's pensive young scholars. Shortly thereafter Codde (Fig. 31) also presented himself as a painter sitting idly before his easel in a shabby, sparsely furnished studio, smoking instead of working. Smoking, "dry drunkenness," was believed to cloud the brain and color the body brown, in an artificially induced state of melancholy "fatal to genius."⁹² Codde pointedly refers to melancholy by cleverly adapting the scholar's traditional thinking pose to the artist's raised arm holding the clay pipe. In the late 1630s and 1640s Jacob Backer and Ferdinand Bol portrayed themselves in the traditional pose of the melancholy thinker or *pensieroso*, a formula found in the portrait of Michelangelo from Raphael's *School of Athens* and in a self-portrait by Parmigianino, among others.⁹³ And in Samuel van Hoogstraten's self-portrait of 1644 (Fig. 32) the artist's pensive mood, his shaded face, and the vanitas objects of his contemplation—books, an hourglass, a snuffed-out candle, and a skull—mark him as a melancholic meditating on death.⁹⁴

For insight into these works it is useful to turn to England, just as the Dutch frequently did in the seventeenth century, for it was there that melancholy reached its apogee. Its spirit permeates English poetry and drama of the period. Shakespeare's Hamlet was the archetypal melancholic tragic hero. By the time of Robert Burton's wildly popular *Anatomy of Melancholy*, published in 1621 and continuously revised until 1640, this "epidemic disease" had become the privilege of the fashionable, sensitive, yet malcontent gentleman.⁹⁵ Burton's treatise, the culmination of a long tradition, draws on both medical books and the romanticized literary version of the "English malady." Its title page (Fig. 33) is a virtual encyclopedia of the visual conventions for representing the melancholy temperament. Juxtaposed with the pensive philosopher Democritus, seeking solace "under a tree," and the melancholic hypochondriac, we find *Inamorato*, the sad unrequited lover, an emotional, self-absorbed, and alienated young gentleman-poet, with his arms crossed over his body and his hat shading his eyes:

Down hangs his head, terse and polite,
Some ditty sure he doth indite.
His lute and books about him lie,
As symptoms of his vanity.
If this do not enough disclose,
To paint him, take thyself by th' nose.

Thus Burton comments, not without irony, on fashionable melancholy and the vogue for having one's portrait painted as a sensitive melancholic "musing all alone."⁹⁶ Some years earlier Isaac Oliver had painted several miniature por-

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enemies of the Sunne, and shunne the light, because their spirits and humours are together contrary to the light. The Sunne is bright and warme, the melancholike humour is blacke and colde. They desire solitarieness, because they using to bee busie and earnestly following their imagination, doe feare to bee drawne away by others. . . .¹⁰²

In art, a shaded face had long been a clear indication of a troubled melancholic mind. Both children of Saturn and melancholics were traditionally swarthy; but in the Renaissance this physiognomic feature had been transformed into a cast shadow, as in the portrait of Michelangelo from Raphael's *School of Athens* and Michelangelo's effigy of Lorenzo de' Medici from the Medici Tomb, both of whom are posed as the *pensieroso*.¹⁰³ The shadowy face of Dürer's *Melancholia I* (Fig. 28) expresses a tragic state perpetually caught between light and darkness, between near-godly ecstatic experience and earthly wretchedness, or between a glimpse of true understanding and the knowledge that it is humanly unattainable.¹⁰⁴ Dürer's allegory still served in Rembrandt's time as a metaphor for the artistic imagination, which, despite intellectual power, exists in a twilight, "for [in Dürer's words] there is falsehood in knowledge, and darkness is so firmly planted in us that even our groping fails."¹⁰⁵

By shading his face and eyes Rembrandt extracted the essence of the melancholy artist, his imagination or *poëtische geest*. Whether he would have been as captivated as Dürer was by the highly theoretical aspects of the melancholic temperament seems doubtful. Rather, he redefined the ideal of the poetic *pensieroso*, reducing it to its essential element, the introspective mind. His spontaneous, seemingly careless style reinforces this image of inspired mental activity. As crude and unsophisticated as this device may appear in these early self-portraits, it is the same one with which Rembrandt would later achieve similar, though perfected, psychological effects in his paintings of Aristotle the merchant-poet Jan Six,¹⁰⁶ and in his self-portrait in the Frick Collection (Fig. V). The penetrating inwardness usually associated with Rembrandt's later self-portraits in fact had surfaced at the very beginning of his career.

Not only was the intellectual climate of Leiden especially conducive to melancholic imagery, but Rembrandt was also in contact with the most notable Dutch melancholic of his time, Constantijn Huygens. In his autobiography Huygens described his temperament as dominated by black bile, and he enumerated its causes.¹⁰⁷ In his long autobiographical marriage poem *Dagherwerck* (Day's Work), written around 1630, he complained that his spleen, commonly thought to be the source of black bile, "makes me so often vexed with melancholy cause."¹⁰⁸ Huygens also revealed his melancholy in his early pessimistic religious poems with their overriding concern with vanity and the sinfulness of man. Indeed, this may partly account for his powerful fascination with B

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brandt's *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, for Judas was thought a tragic melancholic because of his avarice.

Huygens' melancholic tendencies had most likely been stimulated during several visits to England early in his adulthood. In 1618 he had traveled on a kind of "grand tour" in the company of Dudley Carleton and Jacques de Gheyn II to England, where he met John Donne, whom he held in highest regard and whose poems he would later translate. From there he wrote home to his parents of his "melancholie."¹⁰⁹ On his third visit, between 1621 and 1623, he suffered a spiritual crisis, a depression that may have coincided with an unlucky love affair, and again wrote of his tendency toward melancholy.¹¹⁰ During this same stay, in June 1622, he drew a remarkable self-portrait (Fig. 35) in which he characterizes himself as an intense, thoughtful young man with wild, unkempt hair and deep-set eyes, and which he cast in a mysterious sidelong shadow. His image of himself as melancholic is also projected in the pensive portrait Jan Lievens painted of him in the winter of 1628 (Fig. 36).

It is tempting to speculate that Huygens imparted to Rembrandt some of the ideas and imagery that so impressed him. After all, his unusual interest in the young artist coincided with Rembrandt's first serious venture into self-portraiture. On the other hand, even without direct contact we can consider the two as parallel products of the same cultural climate, the same historical psychology. Like Rembrandt, Huygens devoted his life to self-portrayal, not only in his manuscript *vita* but in his many other strongly autobiographical works as well. Though melancholy was fashionable and often affected, Rembrandt and Huygens seem to have been genuine introspectives. Their enhanced self-awareness and preoccupation with self-portrayal suggests that both fit the age's definition of melancholic.

Such self-interest was regarded with suspicion, an attitude reflected centuries later in Jacob Burckhardt's surprising question: "One may wonder whether this constant examination of his own features with a mirror was good for [Rembrandt]. . . ."¹¹¹ And, to be sure, melancholy had its dangers. The witty melancholic was by definition a self-doubter, a solitary thinker or malcontent, and an outsider, subject to extreme shifts from exaltation to despair. His biggest worry was that by some accident or affliction he could slip from genius to madman, from creator to idler, or that he could become totally isolated, outcast, reduced to a beggar. Burton lamented that scholars are so far from being properly rewarded or honored that

they shall in the end be rejected, contemned, and, which is their greatest misery, driven to their shifts, exposed to want, poverty, and beggary.¹¹²

Especially the crippled beggar, like Rembrandt's shadowy-faced *Beggar with a Wooden Leg* (Fig. 37) of about 1630, was governed by Saturn and melancholy.¹¹³ But any beggar could be a "Childe of Idleness" or, in Huygens' "Moral Prints," a series of character studies in verse, "an earthly Planet, a Toroise with no shell; though his house be by him, a homeless snail."¹¹⁴

Rembrandt portrayed himself as a beggar, the ultimate outcast, in an etching of 1630 (Fig. 38).¹¹⁵ He sits, stooped, on a bank beside a road, hirsute and ragged, his garments torn and tattered, his toes poking through his shoes. He extends his hand, begging yet snarling at us, overwhelmed by the miseries of the outcast. A year or two later, he juxtaposed on a single plate a shadowy partial self-portrait with studies of several old beggars (Fig. 39). There is obvious misbiting, and it is generally assumed that the ruined plate was arbitrarily used for unrelated studies.¹¹⁶ But what better way to admit defeat and confess the fear of failure than to picture oneself among the end results of carelessness and idleness?¹¹⁷

With his very earliest self-portraits Rembrandt had appeared on the scene, boldly flying in the face of convention and shocking the public—assuming there was one for these works—to announce his *poëtische geest*, his imagination, as something to be reckoned with. By inventing a vital new imagery of self-absorbed, creative melancholy he claimed for himself the temperament proper to his profession. The almost morbid self-scrutiny that produced these portraits would last throughout his life. As few but Emmens¹¹⁸ have noted, he would later develop other melancholic traits, reflected in his supposed miserliness and documented financial irresponsibility, his social isolation and unconventionality, his increasing independence, and, above all, his continued preoccupation with self-portraiture. More immediately, as we shall see in the next chapter, he demonstrated his acute self-awareness by fashioning different roles for himself, roles that distanced him from his everyday life.