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**“MELANCHOLY IS MY JOY AND THESE
DISCOMFORTS ARE MY TRANQUILLITY”¹:
MELANCHOLY IN THE ARTIST’S IMAGE**

Melancholy has been one of the main aspects of the image of the artist since the Renaissance, and through perpetual transformations, it has evolved into a term with a multifaceted semantic field, whose influence extends into this century. This article focuses on three questions: (1) How does melancholy, which originates from the theory of the four humours, become the defining element of the psychological portrait of the artist, while simultaneously being both a dangerous health disorder and a positive influencer? (2) Which factors ensure the centuries-long persistence of the idea of melancholy and the development of its accompanying, ever-widening semantic field and modes of manifestation through the prevalent opinions and beliefs of different eras (focusing on art theoretical and art historical ideas and convictions)? (3) In what way and to what extent does melancholy manifest visually in the artists’ self-image in painting?

The relevance of this topic is reflected in the fact that it has been an area of interest for different branches of science throughout their histories. From the history of medicine, I would like to mention

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/BJAH.2026.30.01>

1 Sonnet by Michelangelo Buonarroti, “La mia allegrezza è la malinconia”, *The Letters of Michelangelo*, Volume One: 1496–1534, trans. and ed. by Eustace H. Ramsen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 160.

Jacques Jouanna, who discusses the history of the humoral theory from Hippocrates to Galen and its aftermath in later times.² From the history of philosophy, I would like to name the works of Jennifer Radden, who has researched a range of problems concerning melancholy and depression for years.³ In terms of the development of the persona of the artist, I would firstly highlight a study by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, which offers a complex interpretation of the topic, combining different artist-related legends and myths, viewing them through the prisms of psychology, intellectual history, art history and art aesthetics.⁴ Among the art historical studies on the subject of the artist and melancholy, the monograph by Raymond Klibansky, Edwin Panofsky and Fritz Sax is undoubtedly one of the most trendsetting, with an interpretation of the etching *Melencolia I* by Albrecht Dürer as one of its thematic focuses.⁵ The art historical treatise by Rudolf and Margot Wittkower is dedicated to the study of the concept of 'divine inspiration', insanity and eccentricity of the artist, which allowed visual artists to stand out from other artisans since the Renaissance.⁶ From dissertations in intellectual history, I would like to mention László F. Földényi, who in his book (2016) endeavours to offer his response to the question posed by Aristotle on the reasons for melancholy in remarkable human beings, by opening up different semantic fields of melancholy.⁷ The concept of the artist as a melancholy individual, which is common since early modern times, is discussed by Laurinda S. Dixon in her study (2013), by presenting it through different ideational manifestations of melancholy, touching also on the topic of the self-portrait of the artist.⁸

2 Jacques Jouanna, "The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise *The Nature of Man*: The Theory of the Four Humours", *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 335–359.

3 Jennifer Radden, *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. by Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

4 Ernst Kris, Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler. Ein geschichtlicher Versuch* (Wien: Krystall-Verlag, 1934).

5 Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Sax, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (Nendeln/Lichtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1979).

6 Rudolf Wittkower, Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1963).

7 László F. Földényi, *Melancholy* (London: Yale University Press, 2016).

8 Laurinda S. Dixon, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500–1700* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013).

Since this study focuses mainly on the intellectual historical and art historical treatments of the phenomenon, and not its philological aspect, I have used translated versions of some of the sources. My aim is to highlight two aspects, which the studies on the subject have not focused on in this manner: (1) Consistent utilisation of melancholy as a characteristic of the artist and its impact on the Western intellectual historical view of art; (2) Melancholy's reflection in the self-image of the artist, based on multiple self-portraits by artists.

THE HUMORAL THEORY

To understand how melancholy becomes one of the determining elements of the concept of the artist, we must go back to the theory of the four humours which govern human nature.

The humoral theory first appears in the 5th century BCE in *De natura hominis* ('On the Nature of Man') by Polybus, student of Hippocrates. Those human temperament-defining substances also correspond to the four seasons: blood – hot and wet – dominates the spring; yellow bile – hot and dry – summer; black bile – cold and wet – autumn; phlegm – also cold and wet – winter.⁹ In his treatise *Problemata XXX. 1*, Pseudo-Aristotle raises a question, *Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts, are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from black bile...?*¹⁰

Having become almost forgotten for a few centuries, the resurgence of the four humours theory is associated with Galen (129–216), physician and philosopher, who introduces the connection between the four elements and people's age. He considers black bile to be a bodily fluid that is cold and dry and occurs excessively in humans at the end of the year (in the winter months), and, in terms of aging, once they are past their prime.¹¹ Building on the teachings of Galen, in his treatise *Quid est homo?* ('What is Man?'), Pseudo-John of Damascus (ca 650–750) says that humans who consist of pure blood are always

9 Jouanna, "The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise *The Nature of Man*: The Theory of the Four Humours", 335.

10 Pseudo-Aristotle, "Problemata XXX.1", 953a10–14, *Problems*, vol. 2, trans. Walter Stanley Hett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 155.

11 Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 203.

joyful, japing and laughing, they have a flourishing physique and great skin; those that consist of yellow bile are passionate, brave, rash; those who consist of black bile are lazy, indecisive, sickly, doubtful and cowardly; those who consist of phlegm are depressed and cold, absent-minded and have a short memory.¹² From medieval treatises, Jouanna also highlights a description by Meletius the monk, according to which black bile makes the soul more majestic and vigorous; however, too much of it makes a person traitorous, irritable, timid, worried, sleepy and jealous. The face of someone suffering from it might be black and fat, they love solitude and silence, but at the same time they are restless and spiteful and prone to fits of cruelty.¹³ From the Renaissance, the aforementioned personality traits begin to occur often in the history of the image of the artist, enduring even after medicine abandons the theory of the four humours.

THE MELANCHOLY ARTIST IN THE RENAISSANCE

De vita libri tres ('Three Books on Life') by Marsilio Ficino, published in 1489, is the first written work of its kind to associate melancholy with persons of high intellect, scholars or the priests of the muses (*sacerdotes Musarum*).¹⁴ According to the author, this is determined by three factors – heavenly, natural, and human. The heavenly force is the planet Saturn¹⁵; the natural force is the human soul's move from external things towards internal things in its quest for knowledge; and the human factor is caused by the drying and cooling of the brain due to thinking/contemplation, which is called melancholy

12 Jouanna, "The Legacy of the Hippocratic Treatise *The Nature of Man*: The Theory of the Four Humours", 344.

13 Ibid., 355–357.

14 Marsilii Ficini Florentini, *De vita libri tres, recens iam a mendis situque vindicati* (Basel: Johann Bebel, 1529), 9.

15 According to medieval beliefs, people born in Saturn's sphere of influence are on the lowest level of society. In *Planetenkinder*, published in the 14th century, the 'children of Saturn' are the 'unhappiest and most unwanted mortals'. This attitude starts to improve with the Neo-Platonic world view in the final quarter of the 15th century. In the context of the artist as a person under the influence of Saturn, this could be regarded as a sign of the rise of the artist's professional reputation, which occurs during the same time. Eric Zafran, "Saturn and the Jews", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 42 (1979), 16. Humanists in Florence discover that Plato was born under the sign of Saturn, which helps to explain the planet's future impact in the story of melancholy. Mario Di Fiorino, Mirko Martinucci, *The Figures of Melancholy and Mania: De Melancholiae et Maniae Figuris* (Forte dei Marmi: Psichiatria e Territorio, 2007), 32.

and which makes scientists either sad or mad.¹⁶ As a Neo-Platonist, Ficino combines in his treatise the idea of 'divine madness' from *Ion* by Plato¹⁷ and the already quoted idea from *Problemata* by Pseudo-Aristotle, regarding the melancholy of remarkable people.

I would like to highlight two aspects here. Firstly, the theory of Ficino, the *famous physician and philosopher* (as per his self-description in the title of the treatise), is based on the author's self-diagnosis. Ficino is deeply convinced of his melancholy, which is attested to by this acknowledgement in his correspondence with Giovanni Cavalcanti, ...*I complain of my melancholy temperament, for to me it seems a very bitter thing, ... I will agree with Aristotle, who described it as a unique and divine gift.*¹⁸ Ficino initiates the idea of the duality of black bile: even though the dominance of that bodily fluid can cause madness/confusion and tristesse, only a few remarkable persons get to experience it.¹⁹ Secondly – in his treatise, Ficino never directly suggests that melancholy would be a characteristic of individuals in the arts. By the 'priests of the muses' the author primarily means the academic community, but later art theoretical and -historical literature integrates that idea into the artist-related narrative. This development, occurring within the framework of humanist ideas, can be linked to the rapid rise of the artist's professional self-awareness and -esteem. We may speak of a new intellectual image which reflects the fragmentation of its tragic (melancholy stemming from the doctrine of 'Aristotle') and heroic (influence of planet Saturn from the Neo-Platonic tradition) origins, which may be called the intellectual image of the 'modern genius'.²⁰

In 1531, Dominican friar Battista da Crema also writes about the extreme duality of melancholy, stating that a saturnine person must

16 Florentini, *De vita libri tres*, 11–12.

17 ... The poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him. (Plato, *Ion*, 534b.)

18 Op. cit. Klibansky, Panofsky, Sax, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 258.

19 For Ficino, the melancholy of certain people is simply a metonym for Plato's idea of divine madness. Later theoreticians of the Renaissance accept this belief. Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Dürers "Melencolia I"* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1923), 104.

20 Klibansky, Panofsky, Sax, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, 247.

be either an angel become flesh or an embodied demon.²¹ Treating melancholy as a natural tendency in that same treatise, Crema names the desire to be separated from others as one of its characteristics, 'It has been said that such a saturnine and melancholy person cannot be with others, wishing only to be with himself, and due to that natural feature he can easily dedicate himself to contemplations on good things'.²²

In 1546, Paolo Pino publishes *Dialogo di pittura* ('Dialogue on Painting'), where he discusses melancholy as a disease inherent in artists, which occurs because of insufficient physical exertion and concentration on ideas. For the sake of their health, he recommends that they engage in horse riding, ball games, wrestling, fencing, taking long walks, conversing with a friend on joyful topics.²³ Alluding to Galen, and *Problemata* by Aristotle, Benedetto Varchi concedes in the middle of the 16th century that no one who was not melancholy by nature has ever been great at any art or science.²⁴ At the same time, he points out that those who are brimming with melancholy are unable to control anger and are most venomous by nature.²⁵

The artists' biographies written by Giorgio Vasari in the middle of the 16th century, include quite a few artists whom the author calls melancholy, using the term to denote both an artist's disposition as well as a disease. Thus, for example, he describes painters Tommaso Fiorentino (Giotto) (1324–1369)²⁶ and Morto da Feltro (1480–1527)²⁷ as melancholy and very lonely; and suggests that Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) had become lonely, eccentric, melancholy and poor in his

21 Battista da Crema, *Opera utilissima della cognitione et vittoria di se stesso* (Venice: Nicolo de Bascarini for Marchio Sessa, 1545), 130.

22 Ibid., 126.

23 Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura de messer Paolo Pino nuovamente dato in luce* (Venice: Paolo Gherardo, 1548), 31.

24 Benedetto Varchi, *Lezioni su Dante e prose varie di Benedetto Varchi* (Florence: n.p., 1841), 394.

25 Benedetto Varchi, *Opere di Benedetto Varchi: ora per la prima volta raccolte con un discorso di A. Racheli intorno alla filologia del secolo XVI e alla vita e agli scritti dell'autore*, vol. 2. Biblioteca classica italiana, secolo XVI, no. 6 (Trieste: Sezione letterario-artistica del Lloyd Austriaco, 1859), 593.

26 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo I (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 627.

27 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo V (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 211.

excessive search for linear perspective.²⁸ For some artists, the author considers melancholy to be the cause of their short life, take Lorenzo di Pietro (Vecchietta) (1410–1480) as an example.²⁹ Vasari calls Antonio Sogliani's (1492–1544) appearance so cold and melancholy that he could be the personification of melancholy itself.³⁰

In addition to melancholy, the idea of madness is also discernible in Vasari's book.³¹ For example, the author vividly describes the temporary madness of Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1468), which is linked to excessive interest in women, which forces him to leave his work and escape from his patron Cosimo de' Medici.³² Painter Bartolomeo Ramenghi da Bagnacavallo (1484–1542) is prominent among others, a moody and strange man, according to Vasari, whose figures all around Italy are just as weird and mad.³³ Painter Francesco de' Salviati's (1510–1563) melancholy-stricken personality made the artist austere, sickly and reserved, declares Vasari,³⁴ and his baffling, suspicious and solitary nature ultimately only harmed himself.³⁵ Speaking of Raffael's contemporary artists in general, Vasari admitted that most of them possessed an innate dose of madness and wildness,³⁶ a generalisation that creates a favourable background for the persistent image of the 'mad artist' in the future.

Among art writings of the second half of the 16th century, *De utilitates* by Cardanus, in 1561, offers an evaluation of painters which

28 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo II (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 203.

29 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo III (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 78–79. In view of the artist's lifespan, Vasari's claim appears untenable.

30 Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo V, 123.

31 With the image of the 'mad/frenzied artist', developing since the Renaissance, we must bear in mind a semantic error which amplifies it, and to which Rudolf and Margot Wittkower allude in their work. Namely, the word *pazzi* or *pazzo*, which is used to describe the artist of the Italian Renaissance, denotes 'foolishness' or 'weirdness' or 'eccentricity', rather than outright 'madness', which however does not prevent the term from being associated with the semantic field of the artist-genius in the 18th–19th century. See: Wittkower, Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, 101.

32 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti. Prima, e Seconda Parte* (Florence: Giunti, 1568), 387.

33 Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo V, 179.

34 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo VII (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 34.

35 Ibid., 42.

36 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti*, Tomo IV (Firenze: O. C. Sansoni, 1878), 315.

undoubtedly reflects the broader view of the representatives of the profession at the time: they are moody, melancholy and changeable in their habits.³⁷

In 1585, Romano Alberti proposes an explanation for the origins of melancholy in his treatise, [...] *painters become melancholy because as they desire to imitate the visible, they must maintain the images in their mind [...] and apply that activity not once but constantly, which keeps the mind abstract and separate from matter, consequently, their melancholy arises.*³⁸

As a counterbalance to the general art theoretical trend of accepting melancholy, the image presented in *De veri precetti della pittura* ('On the True Precepts of Painting') by Giovanni Battista Armenini in 1587, has a sobering effect, [...] *both ordinary people as well as the wiser kind hold the false conviction that an artist cannot be remarkable if they do not possess an ugly or wicked vice or do not have a capricious and strange disposition, which is caused by many extremes of the brain; and the worst thing is that many fools who engage in art continue to entertain the false idea that they are influenced by melancholic extremeness without gaining any advantages from it but considering themselves very special because of it.*³⁹

Nonetheless, melancholy becomes the central element of the artists' self-image. It could be said that Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) is the best-known artist in the history of art who depicts himself as a melancholic. For example, in 1525, he proclaims in his letter to painter Sebastiano Veneziano (1485–1547) that he was pleased to have been invited to a dinner party which gave him great pleasure because it helped him to move away from his melancholy, or rather his madness.⁴⁰ The 16th-century painter Pontormo (1494–1557), complains in his letter to Benedetto Varchi (1502–1563) that because of his exhausting job, a painter is in a poor physical condition, has a depressed mind and a diminished will to live.⁴¹ In 1573, painter

37 Op. cit. Rudolf Wittkower, "Individualism in Art and Artists: A Renaissance Problem", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Jul–Sep 1961), 293.

38 Romano Alberti, *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura* (Rome: Francesco Zannetti, 1585), 17.

39 Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura di M. Gio. Battista Armenini da Faenza, libri tre* (Ravenna: Francesco Tebaldini, 1587), 206–207.

40 Op. cit. Piers Britton, "'Mio malinconico, o vero... mio pazzo': Michelangelo, Vasari, and the Problem of Artists' Melancholy in Sixteenth-Century Italy", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 662.

41 *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, vol. 1, ed. by Paola Barocchi (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1960), 68.

Federico Barocci writes to his patron Simonetto Anastagi, *I am sending you a picture, being certain that it will not please you, because I am not pleased with it myself, either. Regardless, it was born out of hard work and tribulations that I suffered and am still suffering to this day, and I swear to you that I am beside myself. I have been so worried that I am not able to understand what I have done. Please forgive me if I have not fulfilled your wishes, for it is because of my unhappy fate and sickly disposition, which is torturing me constantly.*⁴² Barocci's apologia is not only a sign of a master's unfortunate state of mind, but it clearly demonstrates the professional self-esteem that the artist of the cinquecento had achieved. The following opinion from 1548, just before Vasari's opus, by Francisco de Hollanda, court artist and architect for the Portuguese rulers, reflects the depth of the (false) beliefs about artists in the writings of the era: *There are many who maintain a thousand lies, and one is to say that eminent painters are strange, harsh, and unbearable in their manner, although they are really human and humane. And these fools, and not sensible persons, consider them fantastic and capricious and are loth to tolerate such characteristics in a painter.*⁴³

The semantic field associated with melancholy and its accompanying phenomena, such as loneliness, eccentricity, mental instability, develops during the Renaissance. It keeps appearing in the following centuries, amplified in one way or another in art theoretical thoughts regarding the essence of the artist. During that era, the doctrine of the four humours develops into a complex moral and philosophical system, linking melancholy and artistic creativity. Black bile impels humans towards science and scholarship, and the educated and scientific lifestyle in turn produces black bile, thereby increasing health risks. From the artist's perspective, melancholy now starts to signify the ever-increasing professional self-awareness, expression of the artist's individuality and idiosyncrasy.⁴⁴ Through melancholy we can also examine the history of the concept of subjectivity in a broader sense.

42 *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, vol. 2, ed. by Giovanni Bottari (Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1822), 84.

43 Francisco de Hollanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. Aubrey F. G. Bell (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979), 11.

44 Wittkower, "Individualism in Art and Artists: A Renaissance Problem", 296.

17TH CENTURY AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE RENAISSANCE

The theory of the four humours, which had been at the centre of medical discussions for centuries, starts to lose its medical-pathological significance in the mid-17th century. Nonetheless, paradoxically, this idea surfaces even after the discovery of the human blood circulation by William Harvey in 1629, which should have invalidated the doctrine of humours as false teaching.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in the 17th century, melancholy is regarded primarily in terms of medicine. We could even speak of melancholy as a ‘fashionable disease’ to which copious scientific studies have been dedicated.⁴⁶ In his substantial, very popular and widely read work (17 reprints in the 17th century alone), published in 1621, Robert Burton asserts that it is an epidemic, *a disease so frequent [...] in our miserable times as few there are that feel not the smart of it*.⁴⁷ In 1658, Levinus Lemnius describes melancholy as a disease that *many have come to ... by long continued studies and unseasonable watchings [...] their mind is vexed with absurd imaginations [...] and evil spirits mingle themselves with ill humours, and especially with black choler, because that humour when it exceeds Nature's bounds, is most fit to move us towards wickedness*.⁴⁸

From the artist's perspective, I would like to highlight the link between melancholy and imagination in the last quotation, because the latter will become one of the important components that defines the phenomenon in the narrative of the artist-genius in the following century. Furthermore, the concept of bodily humours will also be undermined by the spread of cartesian philosophy in the second half of the century, and the positivist world view that accompanies it. By the end of the 17th century, the theory of the humours as a pathological phenomenon has been discarded; however,

45 Dominic E. Delaure and John Raimo, “Melancholy and Its Sisters: Transformations of a Concept from Homer to Lars von Trier”, *History of European Ideas*, 47, no. 8 (2021), 8.

46 On this topic: Angus Gowland, “The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy”, *Past & Present*, 191, no. 1 (May 2006), 77–120.

47 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Printed for Henry Cripps, 1621), 75. Having fallen into oblivion for a while, Burton's book is rediscovered by the 19th-century romantics (Keats, Byron etc.), and this time as a valued piece of literature through which nostalgia – the emotional concept amplified by romanticism – may be explained. Delaure, Raimo, “Melancholy and Its Sisters: Transformations of a Concept from Homer to Lars von Trier”, 14.

48 Levinus Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature: In Four Books* (London: Jo. Streater for Humphrey Moseley, 1658), 63.

melancholy is continuously used in definitions of human character and psychological profiles.

Nonetheless, art writings in the 17th and 18th centuries continue to perpetuate the concept of melancholy, which is most clearly observable in many artists' biographies of the era. Although it has been claimed that, for lack of better options, the writers of artists' biographies at the time did not have a choice but to use already existing terminology and style à la Vasari, accepting the point of view set by Aristotle and Ficino,⁴⁹ I would like to consider this issue from a different angle. Namely, reinforced by the 16th-century art theory and artists' self-image, melancholy, and its symbiotic concept of madness, has now become an inherent component of the artist, a consistent feature which belongs to him as inherently inseparable and a priori, allowing to justify the artist's (potentially) eccentric character and placing a representative of a profession that earns a living through manual labour, which has been regarded negatively by society, among the intellectual elite.

In the biographies of the 17th–18th-century, melancholy features clearly both in a positive (as topos) and negative (as a pathology) light.⁵⁰ This is demonstrated in a tome by Giovanni Baglione, published in 1642, which contains biographies of more than two hundred deceased artists who were active during the reigns of Popes Gregory XIII and Urban VIII from 1572 to 1642;⁵¹ Giovanni Battista Passeri's collection on artists active in Rome in 1641–1673 (published in 1772);⁵² *Vite* by Giovanni Pietro Bellori in 1672, including biographies of nine artists⁵³ and a substantial collection of biographies by Joachim de Sandrati in 1683, which represents German art writing.⁵⁴ And in the six-volume artists' biographies by Filippo Baldinucci (published

49 Wittkower, Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, 107.

50 Ibid.

51 Edition used: Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori: dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572 fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano VIII nel 1642* (Napoli: Rispoli, 1733).

52 Giovanni Battista Passeri, *Vite de' pittori ed architetti, che anna lavorati in Roma: morti dal 1641 al 1673* (Roma: Presso Georgio Settari, 1772).

53 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Vite dei pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni* (Rome: Mascardi, 1672).

54 Joachim de Sandrart, *Academia niblissimae artis pictoriae* (Noriberge: Literis Christiani Sigismundi Frobergii, 1683).

in 1681–1728), we encounter both divine madness and temporary fits of melancholy as innate characteristics of one artist or another.⁵⁵

In the case of painter Andrea Camassei (1602–1649), melancholy is what makes him lost in thought, focused on art alone, but it does not allow him to stray from a *certain noble character trait and communication with different people*.⁵⁶ The fate of Francesco Borromini (1599–1667) is extremely tragic, as he, withdrawn, suffers from anxious thoughts, which increase black bile. This causes a *great mania* inside him and on yet another melancholic impulse he complains, '[...] *I cannot sleep, I cannot hear, I want light, I cannot write*, ending his life the following day, in 1667.⁵⁷ Next to Italian artists, examples can also be found elsewhere in Europe. John Constable calls the Dutch painter Herman van Swandeveldt (1603–1655) the 'Italian recluse who lived in romantic seclusion'.⁵⁸ Henry Tilson (1659–1695) takes his own life owing to excessive dedication to art and the melancholy that deepened because of it.⁵⁹

INBORN GENIUS AND MELANCHOLY

In the 18th century, when the idea of the artist-genius as a person of innate abilities starts to take shape, melancholy again assumes an important role. In theoretical treatises that discuss the nature of genius, the personality traits assigned to genius are clearly similar to the features of a person suffering from excess of black bile. Genius means extraordinary deviance from the norm, something special, something hard-to-explain. Wishing to define the nature of the artist-genius of inborn ability, many theoreticians of the rational Age of Enlightenment lean on the established traditions of bygone times. Melancholy, and everything associated with it, becomes the springboard for defining the artist-genius, being the conditional prerequisite for the artist's ability to be innovative, inventive, original,

55 Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno*. Six volumes are published in 1681–1728.

56 Filippo Baldinucci, *Opere di Filippo Baldinucci*, Volume Duodecimo (Milano, 1812), 178.

57 Filippo Baldinucci, *Opere di Filippo Baldinucci*, Volume Decimoterzo (Milano, 1812), 76–78.

58 *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, ed. by Joshua C. Taylor (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 300.

59 Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting and the Lives of the Painters* (London: Printed for J. Nutt, 1706), 467.

and most importantly – creative: an idea that is still novel in the 18th century, but by the 19th century, it is the outright precondition of becoming and being an artist. In 1719, Jean Baptiste Du Bos dissects the artist-genius from a physiological perspective as follows, [...] *their genius consists of the successful collaboration between brain organs [...] creative work heats the blood [...] hatching their ideas, they become extraordinarily enthusiastic*. He adds an example from Aristotle, who talks about a poet whose *poetic fury hurried him into a kind of frenzy*.⁶⁰ Du Bos notes that the mood of geniuses is not *always up to themselves and their spirit seems to abandon them sometimes [...] Happy [are] those painters and poets who have a particular command over their genius, who break loose from the enthusiasm when they leave off work*.⁶¹ It seems that the author is not sure whether genius is a positive or instead a pathological phenomenon, where the 'enthusiasm' of Plato's doctrine is associated with melancholy, which could occur as a result of intense creative work, often with lethal consequences. Denis Diderot defines the artist-genius as a person afflicted by madness, *That person is a detailed imitator of nature [...] unfortunately, as soon as he puts down his professional tools, he is mad*.⁶² Describing that condition from a physiological perspective, he talks about the soul of the artist-genius becoming frenzied and tortured, the heating of his imagination, his emotions being disrupted the moment enthusiasm arrives.⁶³ The last description from Diderot is essentially a direct loan from Plato's *Ion* (see above). Enthusiasm becomes the keyword for describing the essence of inborn genius in the 18th century. As it follows from the idea of 'divine madness', it is also one of the satellites of the semantic field of melancholy.

And the theory of humours is still applied to definitions of genius. In 1725, poet and medic Richard Blackmore states that *a great and admirable genius will be allowed to result from some curious structure of the brain, from regular and exalted ferments [...] which enrich the imagination with clear ideas [...] their different temperament, resulting from the various combinations of*

60 Jean Baptiste Du Bos, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, Vol. 2, trans. by Thomas Nugent, (London: John Nourse, 1748), 11.

61 Ibid., 13–14.

62 Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*. Tome quatrième (Paris: Chez A. Belin, 1818), 270.

63 Darrin M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 88.

humours and ferments.⁶⁴ Diderot also considers whether genius is an association of the head and intestines, or whether it is a particular distribution of bodily fluids.⁶⁵ Although some scholars (Wittkower, Becker, etc.) have argued that in the 18th century the topic of melancholy either disappears from or recedes within writings on art and artists, the evidence examined here suggests otherwise. Melancholy remains a persistent theme in artists' biographies, theoretical discussions, and other contemporary writings.

ROMANTICISM AND MELANCHOLY

An all-encompassing concept *par excellence* of the melancholy artist-genius develops during the Romantic period. Genius and melancholy are inseparable. The melancholy genius is testing the boundaries of human abilities, and his metaphysical solitude sets him apart from everyone around him. A genius is not mentally ill/mad, but he is also not completely healthy. Speaking about the oppressive solitude of a genius, Heinrich von Kleist said, *There is nothing more sorrowful than this situation: a lonely figure who is the only spark of life in the broad sphere of death, the sole centre of a lonely circle*.⁶⁶ Suffering from melancholy is associated with the sensation of something large, sublime. Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling links melancholy with nostalgia. According to him, nostalgia (*Sehnsucht*) is the most hidden and deepest side of human nature, which manifests as melancholy (*Schwermut*). Through melancholy, humans feel an innate bond with nature: a veil of melancholy is spread all over nature, because everything finite must perish.⁶⁷

Romanticism develops melancholy into an emotional state, creating a direct link between humans and nature. Caspar David Friedrich, the best-known melancholy painter of Romanticism, has said that melancholy is not created by some external force, demon or a star/planet, but it is a state of the soul, and since it functions

64 Richard Blackmore, *A Treatise of the Spleen and Vapours* (London: J. Pemberton, 1725), 257–258.

65 Darrin M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 85.

66 Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Band 3 (Leipzig: Im Insel Verlag, 1911), 502.

67 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 230.

in association with nature, melancholy can primarily be found in nature.⁶⁸ In *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* ('Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'), published in 1764, Immanuel Kant has described the melancholics as people who by their nature are capable of understanding the sublimity of beauty. The beauty that they sense does not interest or tempt them. The melancholics care little for other people's opinions. Being steadfast, they rely solely on their own principles.⁶⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer associates melancholy directly with genius, which is manifested in the genius's desire for solitude, the extreme states of affect in his behaviour that are similar to madness, *Genius is lacking sobriety, which manifests in only seeing that which is characteristic of things, which is why a sober person cannot be a genius*.⁷⁰ In the 18th century we find the melancholy-driven writings *Herzensegiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* ('Confessions of an Art-Loving Monk', 1797) and *Phantasien über die Kunst* ('Fantasies on Art', 1799) by Wilhelm Wackenroder, which later influence Johann Friedrich Overbeck and his *Lukasbund* associates.

The melancholy of the artists of the Romantic period can manifest in various ways, appearing in art writings as well as in the self-image of artists. As an example, I would like to note Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869) and his artistic allies, who choose monasterial seclusion and deeply Christian lifestyle in order to devote themselves completely to their creative work.⁷¹ John Constable talks about his sad-hearted, isolated lifestyle.⁷² In his *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin describes William Turner's isolation caused by melancholy.⁷³ And even Gustave Courbet, a leading figure of critical realism, admitted to becoming melancholic, *Because of that sword of Damocles that is hanging above my head for so long now, it is impossible to fight delirium, exhaustion, numbness and ultimately the magic power that leads to madness*.⁷⁴

68 László F. Földényi, *Melancholy* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 154.

69 Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1771), 30.

70 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Kunstidee*, trans. by Tiiu Mikenberg (Tartu: Mõte, 2002), 31–38.

71 Joseph Beavington Atkinson, *Overbeck* (London: Samson Low, 1882).

72 *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, 300.

73 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 5 (London: George Allen, 1897), 355.

74 Gustave Courbet, *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 558.

An interesting art philosophical sentiment comes from Hippolyte Taine, who discusses the causes of melancholy in *The Philosophy of Art* (1865). Viewing the evolution of art through the prism of social history, he sees the catastrophic historical events over centuries in Europe as the cause of melancholy in both art and the artist – barbaric invasions, constant famines or disease-carrying pests, which turn the compassionate artist, who also experiences those social tragedies, from joyful to sorrowful and from a melancholic to an even more melancholic person. The artist's melancholy is also caused by the melancholic environment surrounding him since childhood, which preaches of life filled with evil, the world as a prison, etc., constantly deepening and amplifying the melancholic feelings of the artist, and influencing his artistic attitudes, which, through the artist's own heightened perception and imagination, are realized in the form of dark-toned, gloomy works of art. However, Taine considers the most compelling reason for the melancholic themes in the artist's work to be that his work would only be praised by the audience if they express melancholic ideas. Since the driving force of the artist is to achieve recognition and praise, this inevitably and constantly forces him to turn to melancholic expression.⁷⁵ This is a vicious circle that inevitably ties the artist to melancholy. Again, we should pay attention to the dual nature of melancholy in Taine's train of thought, which has accompanied it since its inception. On the one hand, melancholy is an innate characteristic of a person (expressed in the theory of the four humours), on the other hand, it is influenced by the surrounding environment, the person's lifestyle and circumstances.

Thanks to the enthusiastic studies of the nature of genius, the idea of a genius as a person with a mental disorder, including the 'mad artist', begins to expand and develop during the 19th century, which may again be seen as an amplification of an idea with a long history. The emerging disciplines of psychology and psychiatry, inspired by the spirit of the Romantic era, contribute to this. The year 1800 sees the publication of Philippe Pinel's study *Traité médico-philosophique sur l'aliénation mentale* ('Medico-Philosophical Treatise on Mental Alienation'), which initiates the association of genius with mental disorder, with imagination caused by pathogenic melancholy as one

⁷⁵ Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art, 374–376.

of its main factors.⁷⁶ In 1836, in *Du démon de Socrate* ('The Demon of Socrates'), a treatise on the history of genius, Louis-François Lélut, well-known psychiatrist, makes the sensational claim that Socrates suffered from hallucinations caused by a supernatural force – his demon –, and that the philosopher was undoubtedly suffering from madness.⁷⁷ One of the main founders of this school of thought was the criminologist and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso, whose paper *Genio e follia* ('Genius and Madness'),⁷⁸ published in 1864, compares the work of geniuses with the work of his patients who suffer from mental illness. Following Lombroso, two medical research directions begin to emerge: the study of the so-called great geniuses in order to understand the origin of their psychopathology, and the analysis of aesthetic objects created by people with mental disorders in order to discover the 'greatness' of these people, which is manifested through their illness.⁷⁹ Francis Galton declares that we have a large amount of evidence for the painfully close relationship between genius and madness.⁸⁰ In 1921, Emil Kraepelin publishes a study on manic-depressive mental disorder, which hypothesises that this disease has the ability to influence thought processes, which results in a significant increase of creative thinking. Even at the end of the last century, Kraepelin's hypothesis is still recognized and accepted in psychiatric research.⁸¹ In his essay *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Sigmund Freud states that melancholic people have a keener eye for the truth than those who are not melancholic.⁸² However, Freud describes the mental state of a melancholic as that of [...] *profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding*

⁷⁶ Ann Jefferson, *Genius in France* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 97.

⁷⁷ George Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy* (London: Sage Publications, 1978), 28.

⁷⁸ Lombroso's treatise is very popular, and its fourth edition is published in the 1880s. It is translated into many European languages, and it may be considered a catalyst for the hundreds of studies on genius and madness in the 1880s–1890s in Europe and the United States.

⁷⁹ Sander Gilman, "The Mad Man as Artist: Medicine, History and Degenerate Art", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct 1985), 579.

⁸⁰ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), ix.

⁸¹ On this topic: Robert W. Weisberg, "Genius and Madness? A Quasi-Experimental Test of the Hypothesis that Manic-Depression Increases Creativity", *Psychological Science*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov 1994), 361–367.

⁸² Sigmund Freud, *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by John Rickman (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1957), 128.

feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.⁸³ This is an assessment that carries a distant echo of the ancient theory of 'black bile', demonstrating the tenacity of that idea even in the 20th century. Thus, the idea of melancholy as a health disorder, which originated in antiquity, is now manifesting itself as an extreme mental illness, as an idea of the 'mad artist', and thus it has come full circle back to the clinical stage.

ARTIST'S SELF-IMAGE AND MELANCHOLY

As mentioned earlier, from the Renaissance we enter an era where artists are associated with melancholy – a position that is particularly prominently cultivated in artists' biographies through centuries. However, when we try to answer the question, how and to what extent does melancholy manifest in the works of art that reflect the visual self-image of the artists (their portraits and self-portraits) during those centuries, then we must admit that we are facing a topic that is based largely on intuitive iconographical interpretations, which in turn depend on the ever-expanding semantic field associated with melancholy.

One possible approach to this question is to take Cesare Ripa's description of the personification of Melancholy in *Iconologia* as the basis for an iconographical interpretation of melancholy.⁸⁴ In Ripa's account, Melancholy is a sad woman in simple clothing, with her head resting on her hands, against the backdrop of a bleak, rocky terrain and a leafless, barren tree.⁸⁵ Throughout art history, we can find several works where artists have depicted themselves or their colleagues in accordance with that description, or in the classic head-resting-on-hand position. We find melancholy depicted in this manner in a woodcut

83 Ibid., 125. On this topic: Jennifer Radden, *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

84 *Iconologia* does not only present textual and pictorial explanations, in alphabetical order, of allegories and other phenomena from ancient mythology, astrology and the Christian tradition (virtues, vices, different emotions, etc.), but it is also a collection of pictorial convictions and beliefs developed in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It is hard to underestimate the impact of that 'manual' for artists in European art culture – the unillustrated first edition in 1593 is followed by an illustrated edition in 1603, during the following century it is translated into the French (1636), Dutch (1644), and English (1704) languages. Revised reprints are published in different languages in the second half of the 18th century.

85 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Roma: Appresso Lepido Facij, 1593), 159–160.

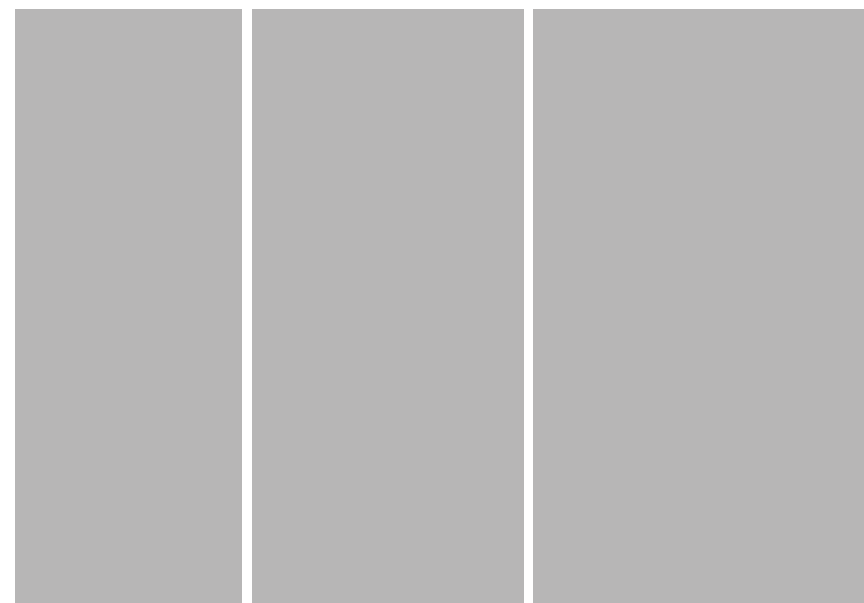


FIG. 1. *THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS. MELANCHOLY*. COLOURED WOODCUT. 1450s. ZENTRALBIBLIOTHEK, ZÜRICH.

FIG. 2. FILIPPO LIPPI. *SELF-PORTRAIT FROM THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN ALTARPIECE* (DETAIL). 1441–1447. GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI, FLORENCE. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

FIG. 3. RAPHAEL. *THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS* (DETAIL). 1509–1511. STANZA DELLA SEGNATURA, VATICAN CITY. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

from the 15th century (Fig. 1.). One of the first examples on the theme is the self-portrait of Filippo Lippi in the *Coronation of the Virgin* altarpiece (1441–1447) (Fig. 2). Heraclitus, depicted by Raphael in his *School of Athens* (c. 1509–1511), deserves attention – he is supposed to have been modelled on the famous melancholic of the era, Michelangelo (Fig. 3).⁸⁶ From the Romantic period, we have the self-portraits of Johann Heinrich Füssli and Théodore Géricault (Fig. 4, 5). Paul Gauguin depicts himself as melancholy in a self-portrait made in 1896 (Fig. 6). The pose described earlier could be considered the most clear-cut and direct pictorial expression of melancholy in artists' portraiture.

A rather clearly defined iconographical interpretation may be obtained from the description of the personification of planet Saturn,

86 On this topic: Daniel Orth Bell, "New Identifications in Raphael's School of Athens", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Dec 1995), 638–646.

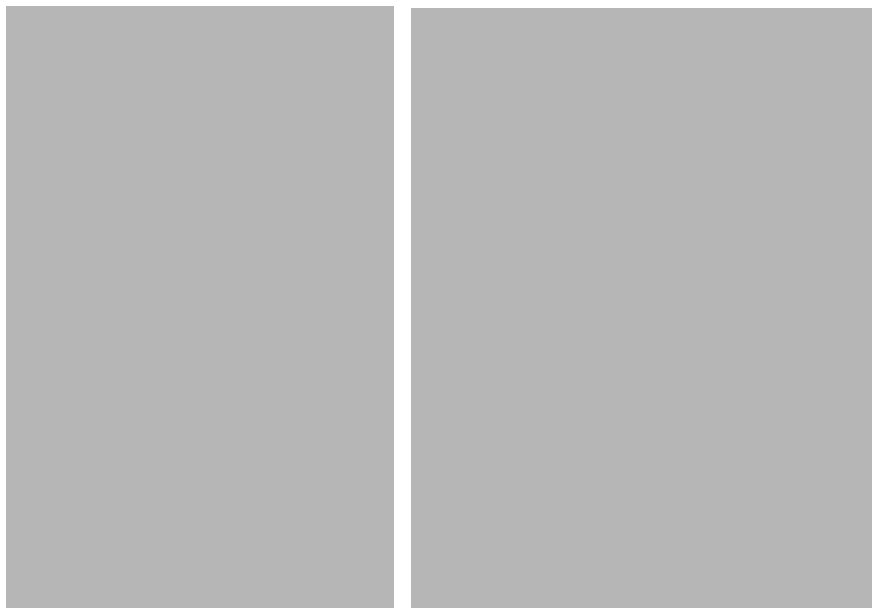


FIG. 4. HENRY FUSELI. *SELF-PORTRAIT*. PENCIL ON PAPER. 290 × 194 MM. 1780s. VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON.

FIG. 5. THÉODORE GÉRICAUT. *SELF-PORTRAIT*. OIL ON CANVAS. 146.5 × 101.5 CM. 1820s. MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.



FIG. 6. PAUL GAUGUIN. *SELF-PORTRAIT*. OIL ON CANVAS. 46 × 38 CM. 1893. DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS, DETROIT. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

FIG. 7. ALBRECHT DÜRER. *SELF-PORTRAIT WITH A BANDAGE*. PENCIL ON PAPER. 204 × 208 MM. 1491–1492. ALBERTINA MUSEUM, VIENNA. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

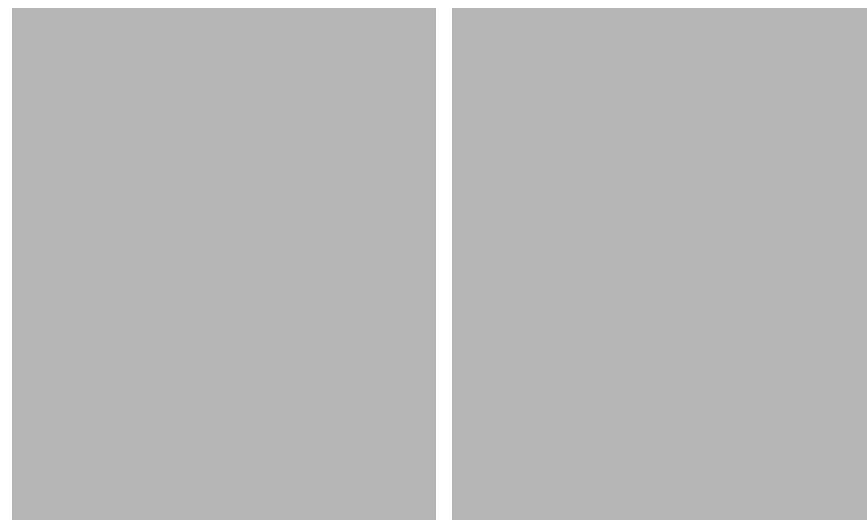


FIG. 8. WILLEM DROST. *SELF-PORTRAIT*. OIL ON CANVAS. 72 × 64 CM. 1660s. GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI, FLORENCE. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

FIG. 9. REMBRANDT VAN RIJN. *SELF-PORTRAIT*. OIL ON WOOD. 22.6 × 18.7 CM. 1628. RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

specified in *Iconologia*, whose sphere of influence included not only scientists but also artists, according to the idea that began in the Renaissance. Saturn is described as a melancholy, ugly-looking old man in ragged clothes, whose lowered head is covered by a dirty piece of cloth.⁸⁷ Following that line of thought, as one of the more striking examples I would name the pencil drawing *Self-Portrait with a Bandage* (1491–1492) (Fig. 7) by Albrecht Dürer, which corresponds to the descriptions of the personifications of both Melancholy and Saturn. From the 17th century, we have the self-portraits of Willem Drost (Fig. 8) and Salvatore Rosa, which allow us to assume that both authors wish to depict themselves as belonging to Saturn's sphere of influence.

One possible interpretation is based on the medical views of the 17th century, according to which one of the characteristic features of the appearance of a person suffering from melancholy is an ashy

87 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padova: Pietro Paolo Tozzi, 1611), 61.



FIG. 10. DAVID BAILLY. *SELF-PORTRAIT WITH VANITAS SYMBOLS*. OIL ON WOOD. 65 × 97.5 CM. 1651. MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL, LEIDEN. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

skin colour, which is caused by the vigorous beating of the heart that carries sulphur-containing secretions into the bloodstream.⁸⁸ Consequently, portraits where the artist has depicted himself in contrasting light-shadow effect, with the face partially hidden and dark, Laurinda S. Dixon interprets as allusions to the dramatic duality of melancholy.⁸⁹ The many self-portraits of Rembrandt van Rijn illustrate this fittingly (Fig. 9).

An even broader interpretation of melancholy is provided by the works of art in which artists have depicted themselves in a workspace filled with Saturnian objects – books, a clock, a flask, a compass, etc. – attributes that indicate the artists' ambition to claim a higher social and intellectual status as the melancholic

⁸⁸ Gideon Harvey, *Morbus Anglicus: or the Anatomy of Consumptions* (London: Printed by Thomas Johnston, 1672), 61.

⁸⁹ Laurinda S. Dixon, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500–1700* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 133.



FIG. 11. SAMUEL VAN HOOGSTRAATEN. *SELF-PORTRAIT WITH A VANITAS STILL LIFE*. OIL ON WOOD. 58 × 75 CM. 1644. MUSEUM BOIJMANS VAN BEUNINGEN, ROTTERDAM. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

'children of Saturn'.⁹⁰ A characteristic example would be David Bailly's self-portrait with the symbols of *vanitas* (Fig. 10), and Samuel van Hoogstraten's self-portrait with a *vanitas* still-life (Fig. 11). Of course, these interpretational possibilities expand the gallery of self-portraits that allude to melancholy. However, several questions remain unanswered regarding the last two interpretations, for which it is difficult to find factual proof. Were the shadowed facial features, the sad gaze, and *memento mori* features in the images deliberately and consciously chosen by the artists as an expression of their melancholic self-image or not?

I dare to claim, however, that despite the extent and ambiguity of the meaning of melancholy, self-portraits referring to melancholy may be considered exceptional in the history of art. Most portraits that have reached us from the period under consideration are portraits in which artists have depicted themselves as dignified, self-sufficient

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

artist-geniuses, wearing (sometimes exaggeratedly) the finest garbs. This is a professional *noblesse oblige* that does not allow presenting oneself as insecure, suffering from mental or other illness. The reason for it is tough professional competition, success on the career ladder, where any manifestation of weakness could endanger the hard-earned position in the court of one's patron, or be detrimental to commercial success.

CODA

One of the characteristics of melancholy is survivability. Out of the four classical temperaments, it is melancholy that has survived as relevant and widely used, having overshadowed choleric, phlegmatic and sanguine temperaments in the history of ideas. Such resilience may be at least partially attributed to the flexibility of the concept: melancholy has been cursed as the cause of inactivity and morbidity but praised as the source of intellectual and artistic creativity. With its sustainability on the one hand and its changeability on the other, melancholy is one of the most disputed terms in Western thought and art from antiquity to today. The term does not simply define one phenomenon, rather, it alludes to a group of phenomena that possess common features, despite belonging to completely different phenomenological categories. Melancholy is simultaneously a natural state of mind and a sign of mental deviation, signifying both an emotion and a demeanour.

Further confusion is added by the fact that the different and opposing meanings of melancholy coexist and develop together, generating ambiguity and resonance over the centuries. The comprehension of melancholy has become an increasingly complex undertaking throughout the history of the term. Melancholy and its components remain fluidly polysemantic. Sadness, to name a parallel concept, refers to either an external symptom of melancholy or to a set of different emotions to which melancholy belongs. Similarly, loneliness may be understood as a circumstance that accompanies melancholy, or as an independent cultural phenomenon which is common to people of solitary lifestyles in general, and in a narrower sense to artists, scholars, etc. Other concepts such as 'spleen' in English, *ennui* in French, *Weltschmerz* and *Nostalgie* in German denote specific forms of melancholy and are tied to certain

periods, fashions, social connotations, or attitudes. In medicine, melancholy connotes concepts such as mania, hysteria, depression, and exhaustion. Nowadays, the concept of 'burnout' is associated with melancholy. Tales of melancholy and 'divine/artistic madness' become an inseparable part of the artist-genius narrative, deriving its sustainability from many sources. We may speak of melancholy as a separate aesthetic, which is adaptable to new contexts and persists in the sense of a personal emotion as well as in an intellectual and artistic form, offering us a way of framing and understanding the experience, and possibilities for new disputes and interpretations.

HOLGER RAJAVEE: 'MELANCHOLY IS MY JOY AND THESE DISCOMFORTS ARE MY TRANQUILLITY': MELANCHOLY IN THE ARTIST'S IMAGE

KEYWORDS: MELANCHOLY; RENAISSANCE; GENIUS; AESTHETICS; ICONOGRAPHY

SUMMARY

This article examines the historical development of melancholy as one of the key elements of the artist's image in Western culture from antiquity to the twentieth century. Originating in the ancient theory of the four humours, melancholy gradually evolved from a medical concept associated with black bile into a complex intellectual, philosophical and aesthetic category. The study explores how melancholy became linked to artistic creativity and exceptional intellectual ability, while simultaneously retaining its pathological connotations. Particular attention is paid to the role of Pseudo-Aristotle, Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance art theory, artists' biographies, and later philosophical and psychological interpretations in shaping the enduring association between the artist and melancholy.

The article argues that the persistence of melancholy in art-theoretical and art-historical discourse cannot be explained solely by the survival of ancient medical ideas. Rather, melancholy became an integral component of the artist persona, functioning as a cultural construct that justified artistic individuality, eccentricity, solitude, and claims to creative genius. Through an analysis of writings by authors ranging from Vasari and Bellori to Diderot, Schelling,

Schopenhauer, and Freud, the study traces the expansion of the semantic field of melancholy and its transformation into a defining feature of the artist persona.

The final part of the article investigates the visual manifestations of melancholy in artists' self-image. Drawing on iconographical traditions associated with Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, the symbolism of Saturn, and selected self-portraits from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, it examines the ways in which artists represented or alluded to melancholy in their own likenesses. The article concludes that, despite the remarkable longevity and adaptability of the concept, explicitly melancholic self-representations remained relatively rare in comparison with the dominant image of the artist as a self-confident and socially elevated creative individual.

CV

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