

# Introduction

SOMETIMES A NEW BOOK reflects the author's interest in an entirely new subject. Other times, a new book reflects the author's continuing interest in a subject in which the author has been interested for many years. This book fits into the latter category. Because it focuses on men and their experience of melancholy, it takes up a subject that I have written about in two previous books: *Men, Religion, and Melancholia* and *Men and Their Religion*.<sup>1</sup> Where it breaks new ground, however, is in the fact that it focuses on works of art.

This book is also related to a more recent book, *Striking Out: The Religious Journey of Teenage Boys*,<sup>2</sup> which focuses on teenage boys' plans to leave home and make their way in the world. In this new book I focus on men's desire to be at home in the world. It is based on the claim that these two psychosocial processes—leaving the security of home to take one's place in the world and the desire to be at home in the world—have roots in early childhood, and especially in the experience of emotional separation from one's mother that begins around the age of two to three years of age. The reasons for this emotional separation are the natural maturation of the child and the fact that his mother is helping him identify with his father and his father's world. The earlier books mentioned above focus on the fact that the effect of this emotional separation is the development of a propensity for melancholy, which is reflected in sadness, sober musing, and pensiveness.<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1940s John Bowlby emphasized the necessity of a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship between an infant and young child and his mother (or mother substitute), and suggested that those who do not experience such a relationship may experience significant and irreversible

1. Capps, *Men, Religion, and Melancholia*; Capps, *Men and Their Religion*.
2. Capps, *Striking Out*.
3. Agnes, *Webster's New World*, 896.

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mental health consequences.<sup>4</sup> At about the same time, Erik H. Erikson, a child analyst, pointed out that year-old infants are already beginning to pull away from their mothers. He attributed this to physical developments such as acquiring teeth and the growing child's greater use of his arms and legs.<sup>5</sup>

While their views might seem to conflict with one another, the fact is that the two processes are occurring at about the same time. In fact, the warm, intimate and continuous relationship between the mother and her young boy may make it easier for the pulling away to occur. A bit later in the child's development, mothers begin to encourage their boys to become more independent of them so that they may develop a stronger identification with their fathers and their father's world.

But even though they are motivated to pull away from their mothers and their mothers are motivated to help them do so, boys sense that something has been lost in their achievement of this independence. What often happens is that the boy feels guilty for pulling away from his mother and also misinterprets his mother's efforts to help him separate from her as a sign that she is unhappy with him and doesn't love him as much as she used to love him. He may begin to feel that he has to do something to win back her unconditional love for him by being a good, even a perfect little boy. He may also begin to search through other relationships and in other social contexts for what he senses he has lost.

I will be suggesting throughout this book that this sense of having lost something precious remains with us throughout our lives, but that what we do about this sense of having lost something precious shapes our religious sensibility. By *sensibility* I mean what the dictionary says it means, namely, a capacity for or having an appreciation or understanding of.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it does not mean our religious beliefs and practices but our receptiveness to a religious way of thinking about our lives. Although an infant is already endowed with a nascent religious sensibility, I believe that it begins to take form in the second and third years of a child's life, and that, especially for boys, the emotional separation that they experience in relation to their mothers plays a very significant role in the very form that it takes. To make this point more concrete, I will be making particular use of Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and the view of the "composite

4. Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*.

5. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 67–76.

6. Agnes, ed., *Webster's New World*, 1306.

Self” proposed by Erik H. Erikson.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on these writings of Freud and Erikson, a central thesis of this book is that the development of a *melancholy self* is a lasting consequence of the emotional separation that a boy experiences in early childhood from his mother, and that this *melancholy self* play a critical role in the development of the boy’s religious sensibility.

I believe that the word *melancholy* captures the sense of loss that a boy feels as a result of the emotional separation that occurs in his relationship with his mother in the second or third year of his life. Support for this view is provided by Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.” But before discussing his essay, I need to say a few words about Erikson’s view of the composite Self.

In *Youth: Identity and Crisis* Erikson suggests that we possess a “composite Self,” which is made up of various selves. Which of these selves is expressed at any given time usually depends on the situation. For example, there is the relaxed self among friends, the guarded self in the company of higher-ups, the imperial self in the company of lower-downs, the anxious self in the dentist’s chair, or the expansive self while walking on the beach or listening to inspiring music. He suggests that it takes “a healthy personality for the ‘I’ to be able to speak out of all these conditions in such a way that it can testify to a reasonably coherent Self.”<sup>8</sup>

The *melancholy self* may be viewed as one among the various selves that make up one’s composite Self. Because it is so closely associated with the boy’s relationship with his mother, it is more enduring than some of the more occasional selves that Erikson describes here, but this does not necessarily mean that it is always among the more predominant selves. In fact, if it becomes one of these predominant selves for a particular individual, we may view him as one of the relatively small percentage of men who are clinically depressed.<sup>9</sup> The development of the *melancholy self* may also be viewed as the necessary price a boy pays for the simultaneous development

7. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”; Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 216–18.

8. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 217.

9. In *Men and Their Depression* Cochran and Rabinowitz cite a major study (n=19,282; w=10,971; m=8311 sponsored in part by the National Institute of Mental Health that found that approximately 5 percent of the men had experienced an Affective disorder (i.e., Major depressive episode, Manic episode, Major depression, Bipolar I, Bipolar II, and Dysthymia). Although this was half the rate of women with an Affective disorder, the authors caution that the large numbers of men in the alcohol abuse/dependence category (24 percent as compared with 4 percent of the women) may suggest that men who are “depressed” are manifesting these symptoms in these other undocumented syndromes (13–14).

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of a *resourceful self*.<sup>10</sup> But if the *melancholy self* is not among a person's more predominant selves, this also means that he may not be consciously aware of its presence and of its role in his life, especially how it expresses itself in feelings of having lost something that was very precious to him, in the sense that he does not quite fit into the home environment, and in the desire to be at home in the world. This unconsciousness of its presence may also be true of a man who is clinically depressed, because there can be various other reasons for his depression in addition to or separate from the *melancholy self*.

Thus, a major purpose of this book is to raise our consciousness of the existence of the *melancholy self* so that we can be more cognizant of the role that it plays in our lives, especially as it expresses itself in the desire to be at home in the world. There are various ways that this purpose might be addressed, but the one that I have chosen here is to focus on works of art and on the lives of the artists who painted them and on some of the representative ways in which male viewers have responded to these paintings. My contention is that the paintings are a reflection of the artist's *melancholy self* and that this is also true of the viewers' responses. This does not mean that the artists' work as a whole is a reflection of their *melancholy selves*, but it does mean that this particular painting was under the guidance, as it were, of the painter's *melancholy self*, and that this was largely because the subject of this particular painting evoked feelings and perceptions that were associated with the emotional separation from his mother in the second or third year of his life. If this particular artist returned to this subject time and again, which is the case with some of the artists presented here, it is also likely that his attraction to this form of self-expression was itself related to difficulties and struggles associated with the *melancholy self* and that his decision to become a painter was an expression of his *resourceful self*, for one of the characteristics of the *resourceful self* is the ability to use one's imagination in a constructive way.

This brings us to Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia."<sup>11</sup> In this essay he compares his melancholic patients with persons who have lost a loved one as a result of death. He suggests that they are similar in a certain sense because melancholic patients come across to him as persons who have also lost a loved one. But there is a noticeable difference as well. For with those who are mourning, the object of their love has actually died, but

10. See Capps, "Erikson's Schedule of Human Strengths and the Childhood Origins of the Resourceful Self."

11. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."

with melancholic patients, the person has not actually died but has become lost as an object of love.

He suggests that melancholic patients are rather like the bride who has been stood up on her wedding day by the man she intended to marry. Here the lost loved object is easy to identify. In other cases of melancholic patients, one gets the feeling from how they talk and act that they have experienced a loss, but it is unclear as to what has in fact been lost. Sometimes the patient knows the identity of the person he has lost but is not at all clear as to what he has lost.

Another difference between mourning and melancholia is that in mourning the world itself becomes poor and empty, but in melancholia it is the ego of the sufferer that becomes poor and empty. Freud tells about patients who are suffering from melancholia who represent their ego as worthless and morally despicable. They reproach themselves, commiserate with family members who have to put up with them, and imagine that they have always been this way. Freud suggests that some of these self-accusations ring true, for the melancholic patient often has a keener eye for the truth about oneself than do persons who are not melancholic. But much of this self-accusation is a gross exaggeration, and it is not difficult to see that there is no correspondence between the degree of self-abasement and its real justification, especially when this person is compared with other persons who have a much higher opinion of themselves.

Freud says that he hasn't found it useful to try to talk a melancholic patient out of this low opinion of himself because he will merely respond by adding more self-accusations. Freud also notes that the analyst needs to keep in mind that the patient is correctly describing his psychological situation regardless of whether it is congruent with the real truth. This, after all, is how he feels about himself. Instead, Freud advises the analyst to consider the likelihood that an unconscious process is going on here, that these self-reproaches are actually reproaches against a loved object which have been redirected toward the patients' own ego. He uses the analogy of the woman who pities her husband for being bound up with such a poor creature as herself, suggesting that she may actually be accusing her husband of being a poor creature in some way or other. These self-reproaches are therefore masks that disguise the fact that someone else is the object of accusation or blame. Freud notes that this interpretation of what is going on here is supported by the fact that melancholic patients are not ashamed to hide their heads. In fact, they do not adopt the attitude of humility and

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submissiveness toward others that one would expect of someone as despicable as the person they portray themselves to be. On the contrary, they tend to give others a great deal of trouble, perpetually taking offence and behaving as if they had been treated with great injustice.

With these observations in hand, Freud suggests that it is not all that difficult to figure out what has happened to make the melancholic the way he is today. First, there was an object-choice (i.e., the patient loved a certain person). Then, due to a real injury or disappointment with the loved person, the object-relationship was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawing one's love from this person and transferring it to another person, but a different process took place. Love, instead of transferred to another person, was withdrawn into the ego, and an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object was established. Thus, the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the ego could from then on be criticized as though it was in fact the forsaken object. Meanwhile, because the person who was loved did not die (as in the case of mourning), there is the possibility that this person is "still in the neighborhood."<sup>12</sup>

If this person is still living and one continues to have contact with this person, there is a sense that for the melancholic patient this person is not one person but two persons. There is the person he knew before the loss took place, and there is the person he knows after the loss has taken place. Thus, the lost loved object that has been withdrawn into the ego is not the same as the "object" who manifests herself in the melancholic patient's daily life. Nor do the reproaches and accusations against this object displaced onto his own ego have any necessary connection with how the melancholic relates to this person today. To be sure, the relationship may be flawed in various ways, but the patient's complaint is not against this person but against the object that was loved and has since been lost.

Because Freud is talking about adult patients who are suffering from an illness known as melancholia, it may seem somewhat far-fetched to suggest that something comparable to this occurs between the two- or three-year-old boy and his mother. But if we keep in mind that we are not talking here about the child suffering from an emotional illness but of the emergence of one of several selves that make up the composite Self (and not necessarily a predominant one at that), plus if we bear in mind the fact that Freud is concerned here with the loss of a loved object who (unlike one who has died and so is mourned) is still "in the neighborhood," then it makes a

12. *Ibid.*, 173.

great deal of sense to apply his reconstruction of the process of the emergence of melancholia to what happens between a boy and his mother in the normal course of development. There may be situational circumstances that make this process more traumatic for a particular boy. Also, a very positive relationship between a mother and her son may help to moderate the felt sense of loss. But the important point here is that the boy has sustained a loss and this loss tends to manifest itself in self-reproach. Also, as the word “reproach” implies, the criticism is *moral* in nature. Thus, the idea that the *melancholy self* emerges in early childhood is consistent with Freud’s view that this is the time when a child’s superego begins to form.

Because he is a physician dealing with an emotional illness, Freud was naturally concerned with the question whether melancholia is curable. As I do not assume that the development of a *melancholy self* is an illness—it is the consequence of a normal process of development—much of his discussion of this question does not concern us here. But his view that there are two possible curative scenarios is relevant because these two scenarios identify ways one may come to terms with the loss that he has experienced in early childhood and even make constructive use of it. One scenario relates to the fact that in most cases of melancholia there are often manic states as well. Freud suggests that such manic states are comparable to winning a lottery. In one single victory the winner is able to throw off a heavy burden of poverty or indebtedness that he or she has endured for a long time. In a similar way, the manic state is one in which the ego surmounts the loss of the loved object in one single blow. Instead of a seemingly interminable process of struggling with ambivalent feelings of love and hate toward the lost loved object, in one decisive act one withdraws one’s feelings of love toward the object and abandons it as no longer of value. Thus, the manic state enables one to break the loved object’s hold upon the ego by deeming it unworthy of loyalty or longing.

The other scenario is one in which the process is more comparable to mourning. Here, one gradually accepts the reality of the fact that the object is dead and withdraws the feelings of love that are felt toward it in order to make it possible for the ego itself to live again. While it may seem rather odd to say that the mother the infant boy experienced is no longer living and needs, therefore, to be relinquished, this is in a real sense true. The consoling factor—one that also often provides consolation in mourning—is that the mother continues to exist, albeit in a different form, and *this* mother may be no less worthy of love and affection. I suggest that it is precisely

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boy's emerging *resourceful self* that avails itself of this very possibility and in doing so takes initiatives that compensate for the loss of the original loved object. This process, in turn, may inspire alternative ways of experiencing love that are patterned after the relationship with the mother but involve new "objects" discovered in the world beyond the maternal sphere itself.

This is where the boy's religious sensibility comes in. As I noted earlier, we have reason to believe that a nascent religious sensibility is present in and through the infant's relationship with his mother. But the religious sensibility that remains with us throughout our lives begins with a loss that evokes a desire to reverse the loss and to find ways to overcome it. This personal experience may, in fact, be the basis for a biblical view of how religion itself began. As Genesis 3 suggests, man became religious as a result of the fall. That is, he began to engage in behaviors designed to regain God's favor or recapture some sense of being in God's good graces.<sup>13</sup>

I suggest that the boy's religious sensibility takes two different forms initially, and that a third form is added somewhat later. The first is a *sense of honor*, which is based on his assumption that if he is a good boy, he may regain his mother's favor and get back into her good graces.<sup>14</sup> The second is a *sense of hope*, which is based on the view that he may be able to find what he has lost in the world beyond the maternal environment; thus, unlike the hope based on the infant's relationship with his mother, this is a hope that looks beyond the maternal relationship for intimacy and love. The third is a *sense of humor* that makes light of the other two senses, suggesting that they are not what they are cracked up to be. Thus, it satirizes the *sense of honor*, suggesting that moral rectitude does not always secure the desired

13. In *Young Man Luther* Erik H. Erikson discusses the relationship between the Genesis story, the role that the infant's maturing organs play in the emotional separation that occurs between the infant and his mother in the second year of life, and melancholia (120–22).

14. I have chosen the word *honor* because one of the dictionary definitions of the word is "a keen sense of right and wrong" and one of the meanings of the word "honorable" is "having or showing a sense of right and wrong; characterized by honesty and integrity; upright" (Agnes, *Webster's New World*, 685). The tendency to venerate the word *honor* is reflected in the fact that we use the terms *honor student* and *honor role* for exemplary academic achievement, *honor system* to convey the idea that individuals can be trusted to obey the rules without direct supervision or oversight, and *honorable mention* to convey the idea that even if one has not achieved the highest level in a competition, one's achievement is nonetheless worthy of recognition. Also, the phrase "on my honor" is not only an affirmation of one's trustworthiness but also a declaration that one will stake one's name and reputation on this claim. See also Baden-Powell's emphasis on the sacred nature of honor in *Scouting for Boys*, 222–23.



outcome, and also pokes fun at the *sense of hope*, by remarking on the absurdity of the efforts expended in the search of someone or something to compensate for the loss. By poking fun at the other two senses, the *sense of humor* saves them from outright ridicule or cynical rejection. By relativizing them it helps to preserve them.

An essay by Freud titled “The ‘Uncanny’” offers another perspective on the loss that the boy experiences and also enables us to make some connections between this loss and the works of art that we will be considering in this study.<sup>15</sup> As the English word *uncanny* is a translation of the German word *unheimlich*, Freud notes that “the uncanny” is something that was once “homelike” (*heimlich*) but has since turned into its opposite, the “unhomelike” (*unheimlich*). One thinks here of our sense of uneasiness when we enter a house that has been vacant for years. Even if we are not superstitious, we may find ourselves thinking that it is haunted by the spirits of the family members who used to live in it.

Freud also endorses the view of the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling that the *uncanny* is the sense that something familiar has become unfamiliar. He notes, for example, that male patients sometimes observe that there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. He suggests that behind this feeling is the patient’s experience of his mother’s genitals or her body, with which he was originally so familiar (having lived inside her body for the first nine months of his existence), but which became unfamiliar in the course of time, often as a result of the weaning process. Freud cites the humorous saying that “Love is home-sickness,” and adds that whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself that “this place is familiar to me; I have been here before,” we may interpret the place as that of his mother’s genitals or her body. His point is that this familiar place has become defamiliarized, and the defamiliarization of the mother’s body (the place where he was originally at home) together with its attendant anxieties are implicated in all subsequent experiences of the uncanny.

Freud’s allusion to male patients implies that the sense of the uncanny in this case is greater for the male than for the female child because his physical difference from his mother is precisely what the *heimlich/unheimlich* ambivalence is about. As a result, men are more likely than women to experience “home-sickness” and to express the melancholy view that “you cannot go home again.” Indeed, they frequently experience themselves as strangers or intruders in that most familiar of places: the family home.

15. Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” 152–53.

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Freud does not make an explicit connection between the uncanny and melancholia in this essay, but his analysis of the uncanny suggests that they are in fact related: If melancholia focuses on emotions relating to the loss itself, then the uncanny draws attention to the fact that what was once “homelike” is no longer experienced as such. One is on the outside looking in or condemned, as it were, to make one’s way in the external world. Thus, the question with which I will be concerned throughout this book is how art works assist in our efforts to recover creatively from the loss of the loved one we experienced in early childhood. There are two ways in which it does so. One is to help us to recover through the imaginative process that which we have lost. The other is to help us experience the world that is external to the maternal environment as a place in which we can be at home.

We saw earlier that Freud envisioned two possible curative scenarios for his male patients’ melancholia. One is the employment of a manic state in which one withdraws through a single decisive act one’s feelings of love toward the object, and summarily abandons it as no longer of value. The other is more comparable to mourning in which one gradually accepts the reality of the fact that the lost object no longer exists and withdraws the feelings of love that are felt towards it. This acceptance and withdrawal are then followed by the consoling realization that the mother continues to exist albeit in a different form, one that is no less worthy of love and affection.

Although there may be occasions when a painting may be so overwhelmingly powerful that a cure is realized in a single blow, I believe that the more common experience is that repeated exposure to several paintings is likely to have a more enduring effect. In other words, the second scenario is the more likely one. The psychoanalytic term for this scenario is *displacement*, a psychological mechanism by which emotions associated with one object are directed toward another object, one less likely to evoke overwhelming anxieties of dread, fear, and helplessness.<sup>16</sup>

The works of art that will be the focus of our study here have associations with the lost loved object, but at the same time they invite the displacement of the strong emotional feelings associated with this object by means of a representation that has less intensity of feeling. And because this is so, the work of art enables the artist and the viewer to work through their ambivalent feelings toward the lost object without resorting to the psychological violence that Freud describes in the first curative scenario he identifies in “Mourning and Melancholia.” These works of art represent a

16. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 209–10.

variety of such displacements, each of which serves the purpose of working through the ambivalent feelings, but doing so in quite different ways.

Among the various genres of pictorial art, the ones that are most germane to this project are portraiture, interiors, still life, and landscapes. Portraits play a central role because they enable us to focus on the development of the *melancholy self* and to trace it to the relationship between the mother and son in early childhood. As Richard Brilliant points out in his book on portraiture, the core of this genre “involves the representation of the structuring of human relationships going back to the earliest stages of life, when the interacting self comes into existence,” and that the “dynamic nature of portraits” and the “occasionality” that anchors their imagery in life may be traced to “the primary experience of the infant in arms.”<sup>17</sup> As the baby gazes up at her, her vitally important image becomes so firmly imprinted in the baby’s mind that before long she can be recognized almost instantaneously and without conscious thought. A little later a name (“Mama”) will be attached to her familiar face and body and soon thereafter a more conscious acknowledgment of her role as “nurturer” or provider will emerge. An understanding of her character as loving and warmly protective will also begin to form unless, of course, her behavior towards her little one is neither loving nor protective. Eventually the infant will acquire a sense of its own independent existence, of a being in its own right, capable of responding to the other, and of having its own given name.<sup>18</sup>

Especially noteworthy here is Brilliant’s observation that the “dynamic nature of portraits” depends on the primary experience of the infant being held in the mother’s arms and gazing up at her face. As time goes on, reading the mother’s face becomes an interpretive task, one that is rarely straightforwardly clear. As he points out, “Visual communication between mother and child is effected face-to-face, and when those faces are smiling, everybody is happy, or appears to be.” Thus, the human face is not only the most important key to identification based on appearance, but is also the primary field of expressive action, “replete with a variety of ‘looks’ whose meaning is subject to interpretation, if not always correctly, as any poker player knows.”<sup>19</sup> As we will see, there is a profound connection between the development of a *melancholy self* and the male viewer’s uncertainty as to what is being communicated in and through this “primary field of expressive action.”

17. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 9.

18. *Ibid.*, 9.

19. *Ibid.*, 10

Portraiture, then, enables us to explore the experiential roots and emotional sources of our *melancholy self*, and the chapters that focus on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and James Whistler's *Mother* are essentially concerned with these experiential and emotional factors. I view these two portraits as the defining paintings of the religious sensibilities—the *sense of honor*, the *sense of hope*, and the *sense of humor*—that emerge in and through the development of the *melancholy self*. The responses and reactions of male viewers to these two paintings reflect the very different emotions that the maternal figure evokes in them. I suggest that Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* is the iconic center of the religious sensibilities associated with the *melancholy self*, but that her very elevation to iconic status also invites an iconoclastic backlash, which has been expressed in both aggressive and nonaggressive ways (e.g., humor). I also suggest that Whistler's *Mother* is the devotional center of the religious sensibilities associated with the *melancholy self*, but that her status as object of devotion also renders her vulnerable to irreverent reactions expressed mostly in humorous terms. I note that the painter himself initiated this irreverence.

The chapter on Norman Rockwell's *Shuffleton's Barbershop* shifts the focus from portraits of the maternal figure to the desire to recover a sense of being at home. If men are exiles in the world—no longer at home in their original maternal environment—they are condemned, as it were, to find for themselves a place to be at home in the world in some other actual or imaginary environment. Some men have recovered a sense of being at home in the homes they have cocreated with spouses or significant others. Others have recovered a sense of being at home in other physical settings, especially ones in which men congregate together. The local tavern or bar is one such place. The barbershop is another. But what gives *Shuffleton's Barbershop* a distinctly melancholy tone and force is the fact that the painter—and viewer—are on the outside looking in.

The chapters on Sanford R. Gifford's *Kauterskill Clove* and George Inness's *Sunrise* take a different approach in that they suggest that the world to which men have been exiled is—or at least can be experienced as—a maternal environment. In effect, they express the view that what one has lost in the domestic world may be recovered in the exterior world, if not in the very same form, at least in a form that is reminiscent of the feelings and aspirations associated with it. Thus, the paintings discussed in these chapters are expressions of the *sense of hope*, and they suggest to their viewers that their hope is not in vain.

The chapters on Grandma Moses's *Little Boy Blue* and Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* build on this suggestion that their hope is not in vain because the painting and the story portray a boy and a man who are truly at home in the world. That Anna Mary Robertson Moses was known as Grandma Moses means that she does not seem to evoke the range of ambivalent feelings associated with the mother. Furthermore, unlike Whistler's mother, Anna, Grandma Moses was not the subject of a painting. She was a painter, and this means that she could *represent* the world as she chose to represent it. I focus on her *Little Boy Blue* because it portrays the reassuring mother who continues to make her presence felt to men who carry within themselves the self-image of the little boy who sleeps peacefully on the hay while the men toil and try to control the world around them. I also introduce Eugene Field's poem "Little Boy Blue" to explore his suggestion that the boy has experienced a rude awakening that challenges but also supports and reinforces his sense of being watched over by a maternal presence that is not his mother—who is, in a sense, more than a mother. I view this painting and accompanying poem as representing a self-reconciliation, that is, the *melancholy self's* reception into the company of the selves that comprise the composite Self, thereby overcoming its own sense of being an exile or dysfunctional aspect of an otherwise well-integrated Self.

The chapter on Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* focuses on a poem by Billy Collins that was inspired by visual portrayals of Rip Van Winkle.<sup>20</sup> His poem presents us with a picture of a man who is thoroughly at home in the world because he has chosen to imitate the non-anxious presence of Mother Nature herself.

In *The Individual and His Religion* Gordon W. Allport concludes that a man's religion "is his ultimate attempt to enlarge and to complete his personality by finding the supreme context in which he rightly belongs."<sup>21</sup> I suggest that the art of painting is one of the ways that men may make this ultimate attempt and that those of us who are not painters may nevertheless participate in this attempt by opening ourselves to their work. Writers who have made the art of painting an object of study can be of help in this regard, and as these introductory remarks should also make clear, this

20. In his *Museum of Words* James A. W. Heffernan focuses on *ekphrasis*, i.e., the verbal representation of visual art. He traces the literary use of *ekphrasis* to the lengthy description of the shield that Hephaestus made for Achilles in the eighteenth book of Homer's *Iliad* (9). Gail Levin's *The Poetry of Solitude*, a collection of poems inspired by paintings by Edward Hopper, is illustrative of poets' use of *ekphrasis*.

21. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion*, 142.

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study is especially indebted to Sigmund Freud who worked through issues relating to his own *melancholy self* by studying the life and art of Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>22</sup> In his monograph on Leonardo da Vinci, he placed in juxtaposition two of Leonardo's paintings. One is Leonardo's painting of the young Italian gentlewoman now known as Mona Lisa. The other is his painting of St. Anne, Jesus's grandmother, her daughter, Mary, and the boy Jesus. If we look closely at the boy's face as he looks at his mother's face, we can see that he will not be spared the melancholy feelings that will instigate his own ultimate attempt to find the supreme context in which he rightly belongs. Yet, through this attempt, he will also experience the self-reconciliation for which the *melancholy self* residing in us all yearns and longs.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*.

23. Although this book focuses on men, Julia Kristeva explores the relevance of melancholia to women in *Black Sun*. See also Jennifer Radden's "Love and Loss in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*: A Rereading"; and Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*.