

How to Make a Misanthrope

I

According to Richard Chase, "Melville created two kinds of hero, one of whom may be called Ishmael and the other, Prometheus" (1949, 3). It is the former that immediately interests us. Ishmael—the elder son of Abraham, rejected by his father and heartlessly cast out with his mother into the wilderness—is a byword for the socially ostracized. Forced to live in a state of perpetual quarrel and conflict, the biblical Ishmael turns into a "wild man," a misanthrope whose "hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him" (Gen. 16:12). One of the best descriptions of this man-hating outcast, a figure that so persistently haunts Melville's work, is supplied in chapter 32 of *Moby-Dick* ("Cetology"), where the finback whale is depicted in terms suggesting a cetacean counterpart to the splenetic and misanthropic Ishmael whom we encounter in a state of suicidal desperation at the beginning of Melville's novel:

The Fin-Back is not gregarious. He seems a whale-hater, as some men are man-haters. Very shy, always going solitary; unexpectedly rising to the surface in the remotest and most sullen waters; his straight and single lofty jet rising like a tall misanthropic spear upon a barren plain; gifted with such wondrous power and velocity in swimming, as to defy all present pursuit from man; this leviathan seems the banished and unconquerable Cain of his race, bearing for his mark that style upon his back. (*MD*, 139)

In its shy withdrawal and systematic avoidance of others, gifted as it is "with such wondrous power and velocity in swimming," the misanthropic finback whale displays the most obvious symptom of shame: flight or withdrawal. Intense shyness, a form of shame anxiety, is, of course, the form taken by the fear of being shamed in interpersonal relations, of being rejected by others. To be shamed by a group or entire society is to be ostracized, and the

last image explicitly links misanthropy and social ostracism: the whale's "lofty jet," like a "misanthropic spear," marks it, as the scarlet letter does Hester Prynne, as a *pharmakos* or social outcast.¹

Combined in Melville's image of the misanthrope, as illustrated in this passage, are thus two important emotional or psychological elements: shame anxiety—the fear of being shamed and rejected—and the feelings of resentment and hurt, the sense of betrayal, that result from being rejected. As Gerhardt Piers points out:

Behind the feeling of shame stands not the fear of hatred, but the fear of contempt which, on an even deeper level of the unconscious, spells fear of abandonment, the death by emotional starvation. . . . Accordingly, on a higher social and more conscious level of individual development, it is again not fear of active punishment by superiors which is implied in shame anxiety, but social expulsion, like ostracism. (Piers and Singer 1971, 29)

The misanthropic response is thus a combination of a fear of rejection and the hatred of human society that is itself a reaction to having been betrayed and rejected.

Melville depicts the misanthropic leviathan in the passage quoted above as "the banished and unconquerable Cain of his race." The figures of Cain and Ishmael are, of course, part of the romantic inheritance of which Melville, along with so many other American writers of the period, was such a receptive and creative beneficiary. The presence of Byron's Cain, as Wyn Kelly has shown, is present throughout Melville's work and informs his depictions of both Ahab and Claggart. Melville's reading would have included works such as Bulwer-Lytton's "Ishmael" and his *Timon* as well, which, as Murray documents in his preface to *Pierre*, "enjoyed a great vogue in the late forties" (lxvi). Murray notes that "Ishmael was also a much discussed character in Cooper's *Prairie* (1827)" (1962, xli). Both these figures, Ishmael and Timon, and related ones were extremely popular in Melville's time. As Northrop Frye points out: "With the Romantic movement there comes a large-scale renewal of sympathy for these rejected but at least quasi-tragic Biblical figures, who may be sent into exile and yet are in another context the rightful heirs. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Saul, even Lucifer himself, are all romantic heroes" (1981, 182). The psychological significance of the titanism

that is often such an important part of these figures will be treated more extensively in a later chapter. For the moment I would like to concentrate on the theme of rejection and abandonment, and on the misanthropic state of mind that is the result of being rejected or betrayed by one's fellow human beings. It is worth noting in passing, however, that in *Moby-Dick* the Byronic image of a defiant and titanic Cain, associated with Ahab, is clearly contrasted with a less-heroic Ishmael figure, and this contrast may touch on one of the most important themes in the novel: the difference, as we hope to show, between the shame that is tempered by love and that which has been irreversibly corrupted by defiance, contempt, and hate.

The misanthropic theme of "Timonism," as Charles N. Watson Jr. calls it, "took its name from [Melville's] reading of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*" (1988, 173), and became increasingly prominent in Melville's work as he struggled with what he felt was a betrayal and desertion by his public, friends, and family. As Tomkins and others remind us, one of the functions of shame in a social context, whether it is external or internalized, is to encourage the individual to repent and seek reconciliation and reaffiliation with the group. But in its most searing and traumatic forms, it is capable of creating deep-rooted resentment and destroying all trust. The misanthropic response—the decision not to reestablish communion with others—is ultimately an expression of deep-seated resentment at some original, unforgivable injury, usually some form of mortifying betrayal or abandonment by others. Timonism in Melville, as Watson sees it, involves two diametrically opposed responses: either the injured party undertakes "a misanthropic withdrawal into spiritual isolation" or he seeks revenge through a "cunning game of literary imposture" (175). The confidence man's use of imposture is a good example of the latter: he vindictively *turns the tables* on his victimizers, other human beings: he has been betrayed, and so he betrays, by deceiving, those who have broken trust and deserted him. As Watson demonstrates, Timonism, in one or both of these two forms, is an extraordinarily consistent feature in Melville's work after *Moby-Dick*. *Pierre*, of course, recounts "a series of Timon-like betrayals" perpetrated on the central character by his family and friends, until "Pierre at last feels deserted by 'even the paternal gods,'" and ends up retreating "into spiritual isolation" (174). In *Israel Potter* as well, as Watson observes, the central character "responds to betrayal by a stoical withdrawal that conceals an underlying bitterness" (177). The stories of Hunilla and Oberlus in "The Encantadas" represent

alternative polar responses to "Timon's misfortune of betrayal and desertion" (175). Hunilla's abandonment is reminiscent of the story of Philoctetes: she is deserted by companions on an island in the middle of nowhere, and her ultimate reaction to this betrayal is one of defiance in the face of mortification and deeply wounded pride: "There was something which seemed strangely haughty in her air, and yet it was the air of woe. A Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament. Pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture" (*PT*, 161). In "Bartleby, the Scrivener" there is defiance as well in the central character's stubborn refusal to acquiesce, which finally leaves him betrayed and abandoned "to a Timon-like isolation and death" (Watson 1988, 176). The image of Bartleby—"he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic" (*PT*, 32)—recalls the epitome of betrayal and desertion in *Moby-Dick*: the image of helpless Pip abandoned in the midst of an endless oceanic waste. The final image of Bartleby "Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones" (*PT*, 44) is a devastating image of social abandonment and human betrayal, and is only surpassed in Melville's work by Redburn's discovery in Launcelott's-Hey of the abandoned "figure of what had been a woman. Her blue arms folded to her livid bosom two shrunken things like children, that leaned toward her, one on each side" (*R*, 180).

The nature of betrayal and abandonment in Melville may range from the intensely personal to the more broadly social and human. When the experience takes a more personal form it involves deep narcissistic mortification. In "Benito Cereno," for example, we have a most dramatic instance of deception and betrayal practiced on the innocent and the trusting: Babo, another one of Melville's confidence men, deceives Delano, that too-trusting man of confidence, with the charming spectacle "of simple-hearted attachment" (*PT*, 64); and he does so in order to hide the treachery he has practiced on his master, who has unwisely placed trust in his servant. (It is, however, fairly obvious to the modern reader—if not to the undiscerning narrator—that Babo is really only turning the tables on a man and a people who have brutally enslaved and humiliated him in the first place). Cereno's reaction to betrayal is a misanthropic withdrawal into monastic solitude, shortly after which he dies. He thus presents the melancholic alternative to Babo's vindictive response.

Trust is the primary foundation of human attachment: the ability to form a bond with another human being presupposes the ability to trust another, and the severe hurt caused by the betrayal of trust is, to be precise, a form of shame or humiliation: one feels helpless, powerless, abandoned—deeply mortified. After he has been betrayed and abandoned by his friends, Shakespeare's Timon acts like someone who has been horrendously shamed: he withdraws from human society and hides like a hermit in a cave. This is what Ahab does, of course, after his encounter with Moby Dick, and he reacts the same way after he is injured by the violent displacement of his ivory leg which "had stake-wise smitten, and all but pierced his groin" (*MD*, 463). He hides, and cloaks himself in a "Grand Lama-like exclusiveness; and, for that one interval, sought speechless refuge, as it were, among the marble senate of the dead" (464). The captain's cabin is generally associated in Melville with a hermitlike reclusiveness, and this is most particularly the case with the misanthropic Ahab. According to the narrator, the crew of the Pequod loses nothing for being little welcomed in it, for in it

was no companionship; socially, Ahab was inaccessible. Though nominally included in the census of Christendom, he was still an alien to it. He lived in the world, as the last of the Grizzly Bears lived in settled Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of his gloom! (153)

The association of bears and melancholic gloom is a conventional and popular one, and in Melville bear imagery is invariably associated with depression, misanthropy, and solitude. In *The Confidence-Man* the man of many masks refers to "the growling, the hypocritical growling, of the bears" on the floor of the stock market—a metaphor still very much with us, of course—"scoundrelly bears," "professors of the wicked art of manufacturing depressions" (48). He thus associates them with splenetic "low spirits" and depression, economic and otherwise; and later in the same chapter he picks up the same refrain, deploring "some gloomy philosopher here, some theological bear, forever taking occasion to growl down the stock of human

nature" (48, 50). Bear imagery recurs with the appearance of the Missouri bachelor who, "somewhat ursine in aspect," is another gloomy misanthrope. He responds to his insinuating interlocutor at one point with "the low, half-suppressed growl, as of Bruin in a hollow trunk" (106, 121), and at one point warns him by "paw-like thrusting out his bearskin arm" (122). A related imagery surrounds the suspicious man (who, like Ahab, is one-legged) admonished for his distrust by the Methodist preacher at the beginning of the novel:

"Nothing; the foiled wolf's parting howl," said the Methodist, "Spleen, much spleen, which is the rickety child of his evil heart of unbelief; it has made him mad. . . . I have been in mad-houses full of tragic mopers, and seen there the end of suspicion: the cynic, in the moody madness muttering in the corner; for years a barren fixture there; head lopped over, gnawing his own lip, vulture of himself." (16)

"Might deter Timon," is the preacher's conclusion. The Promethean imagery of being a vulture of oneself also surrounds Ahab: "whose intense thinking . . . makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that vulture the very creature he creates" (*MD*, 202).

The withdrawal associated with misanthropy is also a way of defending against possible mortification in the future; one hides to avoid a repetition of shame and humiliation. The character Nord in *White-Jacket*, for example, has an overwhelming fear of the scourge, a form of physical punishment that involves shameful exposure and public humiliation. "[A]dded to whatever incommunicable grief which might have been his," this fear

made this Nord such a wandering recluse, even among our man-of-war mob. Nor could he have long swung his hammock on board, ere he must have found that, to insure his exemption from that thing which alone affrighted him, *he must be content for the most part to turn a man-hater, and socially expatriate himself from many things, which might have rendered his situation more tolerable.* Still more, several events that took place must have horrified him, at times, with the thought that, *however he might isolate and entomb himself,* yet for all this, the improbability of his being overtaken by what he

most dreaded never advanced to the infallibility of the impossible.
(51–52; emphasis added)

Nord thus exemplifies the misanthropic response as the result of a wounding mortification: in reaction to a perceived injustice and a feeling akin to that of being betrayed—“whatever incommunicable grief might have been his”—he isolates himself out of resentment, incapacitated by the overwhelming anxiety that the mortification might occur again. His wish to “isolate and entomb himself” concerns that extreme area of shame touching on “wishes and fears about closeness,” as Nathanson describes it, and ultimately involves the “sense of being shorn from all humanity,” a “feeling that one is unlovable,” the “wish to be left alone forever” (1992, 317).

The same fear and the same wish turn up in *Redburn*, written more or less at the same time as *White-Jacket*. Redburn’s initial strategy for dealing with shame is a form of *avoidance*, to use Nathanson’s term; it involves the denial of shame through an unrealistic overvaluation or presentation of the self. Redburn’s narcissistic tendencies, his vanity, his apparent arrogance and self-love, are all masking defenses against painful feelings of shame. The archaic basis of these feelings becomes clear after Jackson’s hatred has turned him into an Ishmael by setting the crew aboard the *Highlander* against him. Redburn fears that ostracism will turn him into a monster—someone who cannot be loved—like his fiendishly misanthropic persecutor. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*—a text that Melville had a particular fondness for, as is clear from the influence of its exuberant anatomical structure on *Moby-Dick*—Robert Burton’s warnings against the destructiveness of voluntary isolation describe just such a process of being converted by solitude into a monster: “woe be to him that is so alone. These wretches do frequently degenerate from men, and of sociable creatures become beasts, monsters, inhuman, ugly to behold, *misanthropi*; they do even loathe themselves, and hate the company of men, as so many Timons, Nebuchadnezzars, by too much indulging to these pleasing humours, and through their own default” (1977, pt. 1, 248–49). The explanation doubtless applies a fortiori to a socially enforced solitariness:

And his being my foe, set many of the rest against me; or at least they were afraid to speak out for me before Jackson; so that at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend

or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew—so much so, that I prayed against it, that it might not master my heart completely, and so make a fiend of me, something like Jackson. (113–14)

This passage reveals how a misanthrope like Jackson is produced in the first place: by being treated as an object of disgust to be shunned and avoided, by being administered, for an extended period of time, toxic doses of shame. Jackson understands all too well the process by which human beings are turned into Ishmaels; his treatment of Redburn is merely the active form of what he has himself passively endured. An outcast from human society, the supreme Ishmael, at one point he is compared to “King Antiochus of Syria, who died a worse death, history says, than if he had been stung out of the world by wasps and hornets” (108). The image of being “stung out of the world,” of being cast out from the world itself, is an extravagant hyperbole of social expulsion. Redburn uses a similar image earlier to describe his feeling as the ship leaves the Narrows of New York Harbor: “About sunset we got fairly ‘outside,’ and well may it so be called; for I felt thrust out of the world” (83).

II

The Confidence-Man, the culminating work in Melville’s relentless procession of images of misanthropy, is “a profound examination of confidence or trust on a personal, psychological level” (E. H. Miller 1975, 273). In this terrible satire the relationship between shame and the betrayal of trust or confidence is made dramatically clear. The description, at the beginning of the novel, of the pasteboard sign proclaiming “No Trust,” which hangs over the entrance to the barbershop, is the inscription over the gateway to Melville’s particular hell, while the name of the riverboat on which the action takes place, the *Fidèle*, is only there to remind us of an ideal that exists, in the novel, only to be flouted and mocked. *The Confidence-Man* offers a bleakly ironic vision of a society in bondage either, as regards humanity, to the most foolish confidence or to the most bitter cynicism. There seems no middle ground, and by the end of the novel the assumption of trust in others, the bond that holds society together, has been completely

undermined by a vision of the ubiquity of betrayal and desertion. The suspicious one-legged man sums up the absurdity when he tells a story about the dangers of an unexamined confidence and trust in others: an old Frenchman from New Orleans blindly dotes on a young wife who, his friends advise, is regularly betraying him; he refuses to believe it until, arriving home one night, a stranger bursts from the alcove of their apartment, at which he exclaims: "Begar! . . . now I *begin* to suspect" (*CM*, 30). The sense of absurdity concerning the pervasiveness of betrayal that we get at the end of Melville's novel is very much like what we experience at the end of Shakespeare's *Timon*; it is characteristic of what Frye calls "satire of the low norm," and "arises as a kind of backfire or recall after the work has been seen or read. Once we have finished with it, deserts of futility open up on all sides, and we have, in spite of the humor, a sense of nightmare and a close proximity to something demonic" (1957, 226).

One of the most extraordinary case histories in the novel, and one that powerfully underlines the relationship between shame, betrayal, and loss of trust, is the story of Goneril (*CM*, chap. 12). The tale concerns an extremely sinister woman who through her "manipulation"—the word should be taken quite literally, since it is through the poisonous power of her evil "touch" that she exercises control—manages to isolate her mortified and baffled husband from all human contact. It is, of course, quite appropriate that she should be the namesake of one of Lear's malevolent daughters, since Shakespeare's tragedy focuses on the betrayal and abandonment of a father by his children, an analogous case of the severance of the sacred human bonds of love. In Melville's universe of treacherous human relations, as in the world of *King Lear*, the promise to love according to one's bond, however purely political and legalistic it may sound, is by no means an insignificant gesture. Ultimately, the operations of Goneril have the effect of progressively *ostracizing* her husband, who by the end of the story has been deserted by all his friends. To rescue the child from her mother, the husband is forced to flee with the girl and as a result is shunned by society for abandoning his wife. His wife then sues him for desertion, takes custody of the child, and leaves the husband penniless, in the course of which she destroys his reputation, leaving him alone and disgraced. Threatened with being declared insane and institutionalized, he finds himself—his wife has since died—"an innocent outcast, wandering forlorn in the great valley of the Mississippi with a weed on his hat for the loss of his Goneril" (*CM*, 63).

Object loss, suggested here by the imagery of bereavement, conceals the much deeper scars left by shame and betrayal. We are told that "it largely redounded to his fair-mindedness, as well as piety, that under the alleged dissuasives, apparently so, from philanthropy, he had not, in a moment of excitement, been warped over to the ranks of the misanthropes" (65). The original narrator of the story, however, is the "man with the weed," one of the avatars of the confidence man, and a warping to the misanthropic position seems the most probable result of such a narcissistically mortifying experience, shattering and destroying, as it would, one's feelings of trust in others. Indeed, the figure of the husband in this story is perhaps only matched in Melville's work, in terms of being the passive victim of a compounding of outrageous and often apparently deliberate humiliating blows, by the hapless Pierre Glendinning, the definitive victim of shame, betrayal, and ostracism; in the latter's case, there is, of course, as we shall see, the added complicating factor of a significant element of externalization and self-destructive masochism.

The other most dramatic episode of a personal betrayal inflicting deep disappointment and shame is the story of China Aster. Autobiographically, the story appears to recall a number of important events in Melville's life: his father's bankruptcy and death when Herman was twelve, his brief but intense friendship with Hawthorne, and his discouraging career as an author after a beginning of great promise and public enthusiasm.² The fact that Melville condenses and weaves together these several events suggests that he saw them as intimately related in some way, and the thing that relates them—Allan Melvill and his family, disgraced and abandoned by relations, friends, and society; young Herman, deeply disappointed and wounded by his father's downfall and death, and again by the encouraging older friend whom he believed understood him; and Melville the author, stabbed and deserted by the public and the critics—is that all these incidents are associated with a deep sense of betrayal and the humiliating feeling of helplessness and rejection.

The protagonist of the story is China Aster, a candle-maker, who is encouraged by his friend Orchis to expand his little business into something more ambitious. Orchis all but forces him to accept the offer of a generous loan with the promise that he may repay him when he can. This is done on mere trust, on confidence, since no papers are signed. The predictable happens: China Aster runs into unforeseen difficulties, is forced to borrow from

another creditor at exorbitant rates, and when he approaches his friend for assistance is met by the unfeeling request that he start repaying interest on the loan immediately. Eventually, he goes bankrupt, collapses, and dies. The circumstances of Aster's end are strikingly similar to those of Alan Melville's last days: financial ruin followed by physical collapse and delirium. In the same way the theme of Aster's reputation of honesty, which encourages a usurious farmer to trust him in the first place and enter into a shady agreement—"had China Aster been something else than what he was, he would not have been trusted" (CM, 215)—seems to be modeled on the illegal transactions undertaken by Allan Melvill, transactions that helped to speed his financial downfall.³ Melville's father died with both his finances and reputation in ruins, and "the straits in which China Aster had left his family had, besides apparently dimming the world's regard, likewise seemed to dim its sense of the probity of its deceased head" (218). The stigma of dishonesty, one can imagine, can only add to the shame of bankruptcy and destitution and to the deep feeling of betrayal in being deserted by one's friends and society.

The details that recall the circumstances of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne are equally notable. Orchis is associated with the experiment of a quasi-religious sect, as Hawthorne was with Brook Farm, and China Aster is encouraged by his friend to progress from tallow candles to spermacetti, in the way Melville was encouraged by his early success, and perhaps by the example of Hawthorne, boldly to move from trivial things like *Redburn* to the more serious affairs of *Moby-Dick*.⁴ Orchis, who has a flowery name like Hawthorne's, is a shoemaker, "one whose calling it is to defend the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things" (CM, 208). The image suggests other depictions of Hawthorne by Melville (not to mention by other contemporaries), such as the "shyest grape" of "Monody," or the depiction of Vine, "the recluse," in *Clarel*, both of which emphasize his shadowy, shy, screenlike, or veiling timidity. Hawthorne himself portrayed these aspects of his personality in characters such as Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* and Clifford Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables*. (The central role of shame in Hawthorne's work requires an elaborate study of its own.) The shyness of such a person—"Vine's manner shy / A clog, a hindrance might imply" (*Clarel*, 1.29.9–10)—appears to be caused by a deep-rooted fear of exposure, a wish to keep one's secret self concealed:

Like to the nunnery's denizen
 His virgin soul communed with men
 But thro' the wicket. Was it clear
 This coyness bordered not on fear—
 Fear or an apprehensive sense?
 Not wholly seemed it diffidence
 Recluse. Nor less did strangely wind
 Ambiguous elfishness behind
 All that: an Ariel unknown.

(1.29.43–51)

What lies behind this “coyness” of Vine is, it would seem, a narcissistically protected core, a hidden self very reluctant to reveal itself in genuine communion with other. In Orchis, there appears to be something worse: a fundamental dishonesty and bad faith, which barely disguises a deep selfishness and heartless lack of empathy or genuine human feeling. When Aster is at his most helpless, the narcissistically self-engrossed Orchis, feeling the pull of the other's need, is unable to give anything and becomes evasive, refusing to grasp the reality of his friend's difficulty: “But he could not drive the truth into Orchis—Orchis being very obtuse here, and, at the same time, strange to say, very melancholy. Finally, Orchis glanced off from so unpleasing a subject into the most unexpected reflections, taken from a religious point of view, upon the unstableness and deceitfulness of the human heart” (216). Similarly, the elusive Vine, in his later encounter with Clarel, “Dwelling upon his wayward dream” (2.27.72) and rambling, discourages, with a “rebukeful dusking” (2.27.116), the central character's attempt at intimacy, his poignant desire “for communion true / and close” (68–69).

The story of China Aster is part of the conversation between the cosmopolitan and Mark Winsome as they act out the dialogue between the two hypothetical friends, Frank and Charlie, and is recounted by the latter as an illustration of the foolishness of being either borrower or lender. The satirical point of this hypothetical debate, which casts such an absurd degree of doubt on the advisability of coming to the financial aid of friends, is that sociable relations, like financial relations, depend on trust and confidence, and that without them society collapses. In this regard, Charlie's refusal to lend money to a friend is the same thing as withdrawing the basis of trust not only in their relationship but in the social contract. We will explore this

economic metaphor in greater detail in the next chapter when we look at the theme of human inter-indebtedness, a theme that Melville adapted, it seems, from Panurge's great disquisition on the virtue of being in debt in Rabelais's *Tiers Livre*. Panurge's comic thesis, the idea that social and human relations depend on indebtedness, is the very reverse of Charlie's argument that credit destroys friendship. What threatens Frank and Charlie's friendship, in fact, is that one of the parties is forced into a reduced and potentially humiliating position of helplessness and need: like China Aster, Frank is rudely rejected when he approaches his friend for assistance, and thus made to feel shame, shame here carrying the most explicit threat of abandonment, not just personal but social, given the supplicant's financial situation. Indeed, Charlie treats Frank's state of helplessness as itself a source of shame. Comparing a friend in need to a friend in love, Charlie asks: "Would you not instinctively say of your dripping friend in the entry, 'I have been deceived, fraudulently deceived, in this man; he is no true friend that, in platonic love to demand love-rites?'" (*CM*, 206). He concludes that "there is something wrong about the man who wants help. There is somewhere a defect, a want, in brief, a need, a crying need, somewhere about that man" (206). This entire episode is an excellent illustration of the way shame regulates attachment by "governing the interpersonal effect produced when one member of a dyad assumes a *self-image* unjustified by what can be validated consensually or accepted within the bounds of the relationship as previously agreed" (Nathanson 1987b, 32). As Frank desperately sums up his dilemma, "[H]ow foolish a cry, when to implore help, is itself the proof of undesert of it" (*CM*, 206). We are reminded here that unrequited love is a paradigmatic example of just such a needy and humiliating state. When we are in love we are in a state of helplessness, in which our worth depends entirely on the other's recognition; and therefore we find ourselves automatically under threat of abandonment, and in fear of being confirmed in the suspicion, which lies at the very core of shame, that we are defective and unlovable after all.

III

Depression, according to Bibring, as Lewis summarizes his views, is "an affective reaction to what is perceived as helplessness. . . . As to the specifics of

what the ego is helpless to do, Bibring emphasizes its powerlessness to maintain, at any psychosexual stage, its narcissistic goals or aspirations, from the oral wish to be loved, to the anal wish for mastery, or the phallic wish to be admired" (Lewis 1978a, 38). These three "narcissistic goals or aspirations" play a particularly important part in Melville's work. Oral imagery—images of ingestion and incorporation—insistently crops up. The anal wish for mastery finds its most dramatic incarnation in Ahab's unlimited will to dominate and be above all others. Finally, the phallic wish to be admired can be observed, for example, in the inappropriate exhibitionism of Redburn, or, as a wish fulfilled, in the successful exhibitionistic display of Billy Budd. In each of these cases (and they are by no means exhaustive), these "narcissistic goals or aspirations" assume a somewhat distorted or prominent form.

In Lewis's view, the powerlessness to maintain narcissistic aspirations is better understood as the helplessness of the ego "to maintain its position of being loved in the other's and its own eyes. It has fallen victim to shame. The secondary aggression that results is humiliated fury, an inevitable accompaniment of shame" (1987, 38). It is this self-directed fury that would appear to be the root cause of Ishmael's depression at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, which takes the form of a splenetic melancholia, with its attendant conventional imagery (reference to humors, the "damp, drizzly November," the funereal theme, the grimness of mood). This is followed by the revelation of a hostile antisocial impulse to go about knocking people's hats off, and finally by Ishmael's declaration that he is off to sea in order to avoid killing himself:

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily passing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such a upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's

hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.
This is my substitute for pistol and ball. (*MD*, 3)

Feeling that one is an object of scorn, contempt, and hatred, one may learn, out of the fear and guilt that accompany the wish to retaliate, to attack and hate oneself instead, which leads to chronic depression. The resentment and self-hatred grow to such proportions that these painful feelings about the self must be discharged by being directed outside onto others: the whole crew of the ship for the ostracized Redburn—"I began to feel a hatred growing up in me against the whole crew" (*R*, 62)—or innocent passers-by in the street for Ishmael. When this fails, and self-loathing, the conviction that one is unlovable, takes over, self-annihilation becomes the only available solution. Melville, in his last meeting with Hawthorne in London, told his estranged friend he had pretty well made up his mind about self-annihilation, and one of his sons, it seems, finally committed himself to it entirely.

In the opening pages of *Moby-Dick*, then, Ishmael displays all the signs of a dangerously precarious narcissistic disequilibrium, a state of shame that expresses itself as the shyness and depression of withdrawal and self-attack, or alternately a sudden impulse to attack others in anger. The novel opens with the curing of Ishmael of this imbalance. It is overcome when he establishes a lasting bond with Queequeg, a loving affiliation that cures him of his misanthropy: "I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (51). The allusion to the passage in Genesis—"his hand against every man and every man's hand against him" (Gen. 16:12)—stresses the reversal that takes place: Ishmael may not ever leave the wilderness, but at this point the wilderness leaves him.

Thus, as more than one commentator has noted, it is important to make a distinction between two Ishmaels: Ishmael-sailor and Ishmael-narrator-and-anatomist, the narrated and the narrating Ishmael, the latter being in some sense a "cured" version of the former.⁵ As shame among the Melvills and Gansevoorts was bound up with family name and social pretensions, and with secret feelings of personal ambition and grandiosity, one highly creative way in which Herman seems to have disarmed its effects was, as can be seen often in his letters, the adoption of a comic, self-deprecating attitude to such posturing. This is the very special province of the outcast

Ishmael's narrative voice in *Moby-Dick*. The narrator's self-depreciation, his humility, modesty, and humorous self-underestimation, are all variants of shame, but *comic* and, generally speaking, positive ones; they represent a healthy alternative to his initial misanthropy and rage. Ishmael, for example, tells us that he never goes to sea as "a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. . . . What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighted, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament?" (5-6). In "The Town-Ho's Story," recounted later in the novel, Radney deliberately humiliates his subordinate, Steerkilt, by asking him to "get a broom and sweep down the planks, and also a shovel, and remove some offensive matters consequent upon allowing a pig to run at large" (246). This insulting order provokes a tragic quarrel with fatal consequences. In contrast, Ishmael's self-deprecating equanimity makes him, it appears, largely immune to narcissistic injury and therefore to such conflict. He cannot be 'put down' since he has already put himself down, as when he mocks his own importance in light of the grand design of Providence and Fate: "I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces" (7). This attitude is clearly not without its resentful and subversive side, but the revenge envisioned is a purely comic one: the reference to Dives and Lazarus at the end of chapter 2 ("The Carpet Bag") evokes a bitter state of social injustice that is, however, ultimately contained by the Gospel vision of an upside-down world in which the low are comically exalted and the superior thrust down. The earlier allusion to the scales of the New Testament evokes the same carnivalesque vision of the social hierarchy overturned.⁶

Ishmael's ironic defense of his conspicuous lack of ambition is thus a comic answer to the resentful sense of defeat and failure that we find in the embittered Redburn, who, at the beginning of his life, declares himself to be "as unambitious as a man of sixty" (*R*, 10). We noted how Redburn tries to escape shame by a strategy of avoidance, specifically a narcissistic overvaluation of the self that is manifested in his transparently pretentious social ambitions and aspirations. In contrast, Ishmael, who at the opening of

the novel seems to be swinging back and forth between the modes of “attack self” and “attack others,” comes to adopt an alternative strategy; he no longer tries to escape shame, but learns to accept it. His sense of irony thus counters the sort of tragically unrealistic grandiosity that we find, for example, in a character like Ahab, a grandiosity that disguises or masks deep shame and the haunting fear of mortification. Ishmael’s credo—“Who aint a slave? Tell me that” (*MD*, 6)—reflects an unambitious acceptance of low status, and is thus the perfect comic reply to the towering ambitions summed up in Ahab’s defiant question: “Who’s over me? Truth hath no confines” (164). Ishmael has discovered that there are, to use Nathanson’s terms, “bargains to be achieved from the open acceptance of shame” (1992, 326–27). In this spirit, he eschews hierarchical social distinctions and celebrates human contact and sociability. When he is cured, it is to sociable life that he is restored, epitomized in the comic image of a human brotherhood that, after a sort of universal comic drubbing, engages in a collective mutual massage:

Who aint a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed around, and all hands should rub each other’s shoulder-blades, and be content. (*MD*, 6)

The process of restoration for Ishmael begins when he arrives at the Spouter-Inn, at the beginning of his voyage, and finds himself the victim of some good-natured teasing by the landlord concerning the prospective partner with whom he is to share his bed. Still in a state of melancholic spleen, he responds to this teasing with *exasperation*. The latter word, used twice in this passage, is a particularly resonant one in Melville’s work, and invariably signals the presence of humiliated fury or shame-anger. Ishmael breaks into a “towering rage,” and flies “into a passion” (18), all of this in a comic key, of course, and in instructive contrast to the narcissistic rage to which Ahab gives such unrelenting expression in the rest of the novel. The next day, having spent the night with Queequeg and survived, Ishmael cherishes

"no malice" toward the landlord, and is able now to laugh at himself, to enjoy the teasing and joking that the day before his more vulnerable self had taken as so injurious an assault on his pride.

However, a good laugh is a mighty good thing, and rather too scarce a good thing; the more's the pity. So, if any one man, in his own proper person, afford stuff for a good joke to anybody, let him not be backward, but let him cheerfully allow himself to spend and be spent in that way. And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about him, be sure there is more than you perhaps think for.
(29)

The practical joke that the landlord plays on Ishmael is, then, ultimately therapeutic. The melancholic misanthrope learns the trick of turning one's "personal embarrassment" into a source of laughter and thus bringing "pleasure and comfort to an entire group that now views the "jokester" with increased respect" (Nathanson 1992, 326). This "rueful willingness to accept the laughter" of others and thus fashion "an even stronger connection to them" (326) is worth comparing to the theme of contrition and repentance that is the subject of Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah, which Ishmael hears before boarding the *Pequod*.⁷

Coffin's joke seems particularly well aimed at Ishmael's dangerous self-absorption and his inhibiting fear of embarrassment and intense shame anxiety. It is, significantly, explicitly focused on a delicate source of shame for a man in the Victorian culture of nineteenth-century America: the issue of being physically intimate with a male partner, an *intimacy* that the landlord parodically compares to the sexual intercourse of a married couple. It is the unbecomingness, the untoward nature, of such intimacy, the sharing of a bed with a male *stranger*, that makes Ishmael so uncomfortable, and the fact that Queequeg is a dark-skinned "savage" only adds to the nagging fear of possible mortification:

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed. . . . I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of this "dark complexioned" harpooner. At any rate, I made up my mind that if it so turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into bed before I did. . . . No man prefers to sleep two in a bed. In fact, you

would a good deal rather not sleep with your own brother. I don't know how it is, but people like to be private when they are sleeping. And when it comes to sleeping with an unknown stranger, in a strange inn, in a strange town, and that stranger a harpooner, then your objections indefinitely multiply. . . . To be sure [sailors] sleep together in one apartment, but you have your own hammock, and cover yourself with your own blanket, and sleep in your own skin. (*MD*, 14, 15, 16)

In reaction to the helpless and embarrassing position that he has been put into by the landlord, Ishmael, "cool as Mt. Hecla in a snow storm," strikes an attitude of icy haughtiness and chastises his tormentor: "And about the harpooner, whom I have not yet seen, you persist in telling me the most mystifying and exasperating stories, tending to beget in me an uncomfortable feeling towards the man whom you design for my bedfellow—a sort of connection, landlord, which is an intimate and confidential one in the highest degree" (18). Ishmael's defensive reaction here, and his suspicion and "uncomfortable feeling" towards this stranger, his anxiety about such "an intimate and confidential" connection with a stranger, his emphasis of the strangeness of the stranger and the situation (unknown stranger, strange inn, strange town, etc.), his fear of exposure (the stranger must undress, expose himself, before he will) and of being uncovered (even sailors have their own blanket with which to cover themselves)—all of this adds up to an intense case of shame anxiety. Ishmael's growing "uncomfortableness" (23)—a type of shame affect, a feeling of inhibition, in Tomkins's terms, activated by an incomplete reduction of positive affect—anticipates his sensation of uncanniness the next morning when he wakes up in Queequeg's arms, his sense of modesty being rudely shocked by his companion's explicitly matrimonial style of grasp. "My sensations were strange" (25), as he puts it. Shame anxiety, the fear that one is in danger of being suddenly exposed in a vulnerable area, is, in fact, often described as an awkward, funny, or strange, feeling, and Ishmael, in the embrace of the sleeping Queequeg, seems to be making an unconscious connection between this uncomfortable feeling and the memory of an apparently traumatic episode in his childhood: the memory of being banished to his room by his stepmother and of the terrible sense of isolation and frightening disorientation experienced upon awakening in the pitch darkness.

The analogy of the child who *makes strange* when faced with someone unfamiliar—*stranger anxiety*, as it is called—may seem rather fanciful, but it most certainly illuminates the dynamics of Ishmael's initial encounter with Queequeg, in which Ishmael's precautions against being put in an embarrassing situation come to naught and he eventually finds himself in bed with, and at the mercy of, his sleeping companion, this frightening "stranger" who unexpectedly enters the room and begins to undress: "But I lay perfectly still, and resolved not to say a word till spoken to. . . . I was all eagerness to see his face, but he kept it averted for some time while employed in unlacing the bag's mouth. This accomplished, however, he turned round—when, good heavens! what a sight! Such a face!" (20–21). Interestingly enough, Ishmael's action here—playing dead, lying still and saying nothing—recalls his childhood memory; it is precisely what he did when, isolated in the darkness of his room, he awakened to find his hand in the frozen clasp of a mysterious phantom. The difference is that the reaction of gaze aversion typical of shame was, in the latter case, so composed of fear and terror as to leave Ishmael in a state of physical paralysis, incapable of interaction. His terror of Queequeg, on the other hand, is countered from the beginning by a strong element of curiosity, precisely as a child will hide and then look, and then hide again, when making strange. Thus Ishmael shyly *hides* at first, peeking through his hands, until this strategy of withdrawal, of lying still and silent and concealing his presence, is overcome by his curiosity, to the point of his becoming *fascinated* with the awesome marvel of his roommate's gradually exposed anatomy. Ishmael's terror and paralysis in the presence of the phantom figure suggests an explicit contrast to this growing interest in Queequeg. As shame necessarily reduces interest and a healthy, curious interaction with one's environment, drawing an inhibiting, self-conscious attention to the self instead, so the active drives of interest and curiosity may, in turn, overcome shame. And so Ishmael conquers his shyness and embarrassment in these opening chapters and ends up in Queequeg's matrimonial arms. This is no small achievement. As Nathanson writes: "Shame haunts our every dream of love. The more we wish for communion, so much more are we vulnerable to the painful augmentation of any impediment, however real or fancied" (1992, 251). Ishmael moves from extremely uncomfortable feelings of embarrassment, strangeness, and even terror to a growing interest in, and eventual intimate familiarity with, the other, and his intense attentiveness to Queequeg's unusual