

“LINES OF SPIRITUAL MOTION”: THE REALIZATION OF AMERICAN CATHOLIC
FICTION, 1845-1965

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Catholic literature, far from being an escape from the historical to the spiritual, revises major literary forms as negotiates American culture and doctrinal orthodoxy to create an American Catholic community. My research in Catholic print culture suggests, on the contrary, that religious writers responded to complex, interwoven political and theological concerns of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I argue, then, that the development of American Catholic fiction participates in the creation a middle-class American Catholic culture. While anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century imagined Catholicism as antithetical to American citizenship, Catholic writers at the turn of the twentieth century tried to overcome divided loyalties and create a Catholicism that both accounted for and engaged with American culture. Although Catholic literary critics deemed traditional genres of American fiction anathema to Catholic theology and culture, Catholic writers adapted formal developments, from the sentimental novel of the nineteenth century to the popular modernism of the twentieth century, to confront an American social world that sought to exclude them and to reconsider official Church doctrine. “Lines of Spiritual Motion” therefore argues that American Catholic fiction is not only a religious discourse, but also a rich *historical* discourse. To that end, I focus on a diverse group of American Catholic writers—Mary Anne Sadlier, Orestes Brownson, Kathleen Norris, Dorothy Day, Hilary Leighton Barth, Harry Sylvester, and Flannery O’Connor—who provided a fertile ground for American Catholics to transition from a conflicted relation to dominant American culture to fuller participation in it, marked by the move from urban Catholic ghettos at the turn of the century to American suburbs in the post-war era.

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CHAPTER 1

FICTION AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

In 1909, Father John Talbot Smith published an article entitled “The Young Catholic Writer: What Should He Do?” in *St. John’s Quarterly* responding to a young, Catholic aspiring writer whose work had recently been rejected by the Catholic press. The young man, willing to stand in “the humblest place with [Orestes] Brownson and [Isaac] Hecker and [James] McMaster and [Mary Anne] Sadlier,” by devoting his life and his craft in the service of the faith, could find no home for his work in the Catholic publishing establishment, “the six Catholic magazines and quarterlies, [and] the five reputable Catholic publishing firms” (Replier 168). Critiquing the Catholic public for failing to demand and support Catholic literature, Smith suggests the young man publish with the secular press and hide his religion. This response, in a relatively obscure Catholic magazine, set off a firestorm of debate among Catholic intellectuals, literary critics, and writers that hinged on the nature of Catholic writing, the role of Catholicism in mass culture, and the effect of American culture on modern Catholicism. Smith suggests that, having been turned away by an uncaring, increasingly secularized American Catholic public, the writer must hide his Catholicism in order to succeed in a hostile American culture. His response presupposes an understanding of American culture as inherently anti-Catholic, hostile not only to the tenets of Catholicism and its adherents, but also to Catholic values.

Agnes Replier, a major Catholic author in her own right, responded in *The Catholic World*, saying that Smith misread modern American secular culture as anti-Catholic, and that he needed to distinguish between Catholic authors, Catholic novels, Catholic “atmospheres” in

fiction, and secular novels in order to understand the literary public. In her view, Americans could not abide the typical Catholic novel dripping with sentimental piety.

On the other hand, Louise Imogen Guiney, a writer whose significant success as a popular poet often leads contemporary critics to ignore her Catholicism, agreed with Father Smith's challenge to American anti-Catholicism. In her view, Americans, Catholic or otherwise, have no time for reading in general, much less for reading novels that explore serious matters and therefore are a "bore." Moreover, she argued, those authors that Smith cited as examples of failed Catholic writers were not read because of their genres or their lack of style. In her view, Catholic authors' failures were not rooted in their Catholic identity or even ideology, but rather in their own aesthetic failure. In turning her attention to Father Smith's advice, Guiney suggested a religious fear for the souls of the writers who would become less Catholic by hiding their faith to publish in the secular press. The real detriment, however, was to American culture: "To leaven the American mass is, after all, their ideal. It will scarcely get done by means of too much tribal seclusion" (210-211). She claimed Catholic writers who simultaneously embrace their Catholicism and seek a broader audience would both make American culture more amenable to Catholics and will strengthen the moral fiber of America itself. Indeed, in her understanding, the world was not so anti-Catholic as Smith suggests. While Catholic magazines were developing rapidly, secular magazines, particularly in England, were growing more amenable to Catholic topics (in part due to the likes of G.K. Chesterton). If, occasionally, Catholic writers suffered for their religion, it was only because major publications, like *The Nation*, were not interested in their "little language" and could not accept Catholic culture as "commonplace." Thus, in Guiney's view, Catholic writers needed to engage with American culture on its own terms while maintaining a Catholic ideology.

At the heart of this debate lies the larger question of the role of Catholic literature in American society. Should Catholic literature seek out a broad American audience in an attempt to transform mainstream culture to be more amenable to Catholic ideals, or should Catholic literature circulate in its own separate sphere, where it can maintain an identity against a hostile society? In response to these debates, American Catholic fiction participated in the creation of a middle-class American Catholic culture. My manuscript traces these larger debates from the anti-Catholicism of the nineteenth century with the first waves of Irish immigration through the integration of American Catholics in the Kennedy Era.

Literary scholarship on Catholicism in American culture has often focused on the cultural work of anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century. For instance, Jenny Franchot's *Roads to Rome* (1994) shows how mainstream American culture did not simply define itself against Catholicism, but experienced an "attraction and repulsion" toward the Church throughout the nineteenth century. Susan M. Griffin's *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2004) argues that anti-Catholic fiction in both America and Britain provides a set of tropes that allows Victorians to define themselves as Protestants, and thus part of a normative culture. More recent work by Elizabeth Fenton and Tracy Fessenden explores how anti-Catholicism was essential to the foundation of the nation. Fenton claims that the early republic envisioned its own religious freedoms against the repressive Catholic culture of French Canada, while Fessenden claims that anti-Catholicism not only laid the ground for interpretations of the first amendment, but also underlies the developing concept of secular culture.

This developing secularism relied on the anti-Catholicism promulgated by the nativist push against Catholics (and Irish immigrants) during the mid-nineteenth century. Nativists imagined Catholicism as antithetical to American citizenship because Catholic devotion to the

Church, and the authority of the Pope, opposed the individual's "free choice" essential to democracy. This nativist construction pervaded mainstream culture, particularly in the debates surrounding the development of the common school. Through these debates, Catholics, particularly Catholic immigrants, became the other against whom American Protestants defined themselves. Anti-Catholicism therefore allowed American Protestants to establish what Fessenden terms a "pan-Protestant" culture that maintained the shared values of mainstream Protestant denominations while avoiding divisive issues like infant baptism and the precise nature of grace. This pan-Protestant culture became the basis for what Americans envision as the secular, while American secularism is, effectively, a specific form of Protestantism devoted to the primacy of the individual conscience.

While a developing American middle-class culture relied upon an opposition to Catholicism to define itself, the American novel as a function of that middle-class culture has often relied on overt anti-Catholicism. Franchot's work exposes the anti-Catholicism inherent in the "inquisitional enclosures" of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville, while Griffin explores this anti-Catholic legacy in the novels of William Dean Howells and Henry James. In its privileging of an individual consciousness and its mode of inculcating social and moral practices, the American novel has subtly excluded Catholic readers and writers. Indeed, Paul Giles' major work on American Catholic literature, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* (1992), begins from the premise that the tradition of Romantic individualism central to American literary history excludes Catholic writers.

While American culture, even "secular" American culture, relies on a particular pan-Protestant ideology, American Catholics have sought to build a community within that culture, while also transforming the culture to make it more amenable to an American Catholicism. This

manuscript builds on the work of Franchot, Griffin, Fessenden, and Giles by asking how American Catholics moved from being enemies to becoming an essential part of American culture in the post-World War II era. The work of Catholic cultural historians like Robert Orsi and Mark Massa that explores this question through major cultural figures like Fulton Sheen and Father Coughlin has opened up the larger literary questions of this era. Since 1950, only two major books on the Catholic Revival of the early-twentieth century have been published. These books, Paul R. Messbarger's *Fiction with a Parochial Purpose* (1971) and Arnold Sparr's *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem* (1990), echo Catholic literary critics of the early-twentieth century in dismissing the literature they examine as sentimental, nostalgic, and anachronistic. In short, the available criticism imagines that Catholic literature before the Second World War is trite and conservative.

Through the recovery of popular Catholic fiction, my project writes a literary history for the new Catholic literature from the first waves of Irish immigration through the Second World War. I argue that literary scholars have often sought to define a "Catholic literary imagination," a way of understanding how literature in the Catholic tradition differs from the Protestant, often Romantic, tradition that dominates mainstream American literature. In doing so, critics have relied upon various articulations of David Tracy's conception of the Catholic "analogical imagination." This concept suggests that the Catholic worldview is distinct from the Protestant tradition because the Catholic faith story imparts sacramentality upon the material world. As Paul Giles explains, "Protestant romance dissolves the mundane world into a more lucid spiritual allegory; Catholic realism invests the mundane world itself with spiritual significance" (168). Many contemporary critics connect this sacramentalism with an inherent realism, meaning that, as Farrell O'Gorman claims, "to *be* a 'Catholic writer' is to be a realist." My manuscript

complicates this established reading by examining popular but often-overlooked novels, showing that Catholic novels from 1845 through 1945, though often denigrated as overly-sentimental, helped to shape American Catholicism as an ideological formation and a community of participants. Not simply didactic fictions, Catholic novels of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century grapple with specific historical and political issues; they attempt to manage the social upheaval of the period and locate Catholicism amidst competing and sometimes overriding loyalties. Catholic literature creates and mediates a framework for engagement shaped both by Catholic doctrine and modernity.

Catholic writers embraced fiction as a tool of both resistance and accommodation. While unable to reconcile Catholicism with the tradition of romantic individualism central to American literary history, American Catholics revised dominant forms—sentimental fiction, modernist experimentation, and reform fiction—in ways that not only created a contemporary literature within Catholic culture, but also helped to carve a space for Catholics within American culture. Through this literary history, I show that American Catholic literature is not simply about the mysteriousness or sacramentality of the material world, but also participates in a greater history of Catholic engagement with the social and political world.

The Historical Landscape of American Catholicism

As Jon Lance Bacon has noted, critics of Catholic literature have often equated the Church “with its ‘catholic’ system of belief, treating Catholicism as a body of doctrine that transcends time and place” (6). Critics have seen literature produced by American Catholics up until the post-World War II boom and increasing Catholic assimilation, marked by Catholic migration to religiously-integrated suburbs, in much the same ways as Catholics themselves—as

part of a confining subculture that works according to the transcendent Church rather than within the temporal and political present. While this approach has deepened our understanding of the theological issues treated by the most canonical Catholic writers, from Orestes Brownson to Flannery O'Connor, it has excluded much Catholic fiction from readings and histories of American literature that hinge on political and social issues, at the same time obfuscating the role of the political and social in Catholic literature. Yet I argue that American Catholics create a community precisely through engagement with the social and political world.

This project treats American Catholicism as a historically developing series of practices rather than a transcendent entity whose doctrines remain the same, if revealing themselves over time. The project covers a long period during which various waves of Catholic immigrants arrived on American shores. With these new waves of immigrants—from the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century to the Italians in the first half of the twentieth century--new outbreaks of nativism rose to meet them. In the nineteenth century, Catholic writers respond explicitly to anti-Catholicism. For the Catholic establishment, the major field of debate on which to combat American nativism was the “common school question.” School reformers like Horace Mann argued for the development of a public school system to combat the threat that Catholic schools posed to Protestant sons and daughters. American Catholics saw not only the rhetoric of the public school advocates, but also the public schools themselves, as challenges to their legitimacy as US citizens. The public schools sought to create a US citizenry grounded in pan-Protestant ideals. The larger project explicitly invoked the need to transform Catholic children damaged by Irish immigrant degeneracy into productive Americans by displacing parental religious authority and shifting allegiance from the Pope. For the Catholic hierarchy, most notably New York’s Archbishop John Hughes, and writers like Mary Anne Sadlier, surviving this attack necessitated

strengthening the American Catholic community through a separate Catholic school system. Sadlier's fiction, then, illustrates for Catholic readers the potential dangers of ceding parental and papal authority to denizens of American Protestant culture, from the ward school teacher teaching Protestant readings of the Bible to the local politician fomenting Irish immigrants' sentiment through appeals to Irish nationalism. For Sadlier, the novel form was a key to establishing an American Catholic community.

Yet American Catholics were not only grappling with assimilation to American culture, but were also struggling to define themselves over and against the Vatican. These struggles play out in the changing definitions of Catholic literature. Paul R. Messbarger argues that nineteenth-century arbiters of Catholic culture understood Catholic fiction to fulfill four central criteria: 1) it is written by a Catholic author, for a Catholic audience; 2) it is set against a Catholic background; 3) it deals with issues of Catholic doctrine or morality; and 4) it is written from a definitive Catholic viewpoint. In the wake of the debates surrounding what theologians call the heresies of Americanism and the ensuing Modernist controversy, a flourishing Catholic print culture reevaluated this nineteenth-century conception of Catholic fiction and negotiated a dynamic readership by attempting to establish an identity that is not just a combination of Americans and Catholics, but a uniquely American Catholicism.

Thus, this migration of immigrants coincides with a major change in American Catholics' conception of their roles in mainstream culture. The theological upheaval of the late nineteenth century, most poignantly addressed in "the Americanist controversy," enabled the emergence of a Catholic American public. This community did not form around the institutional Church, but rather through participation in the work of Catholic cultural institutions associated with the

Catholic Renaissance.¹ Starting in the mid-nineteenth century with figures such as Isaac Hecker, the American convert who founded the Paulist order and established *The Catholic World* monthly magazine, the Americanist controversy was, at its heart, a debate over the extent to which Catholicism could be reconciled with America. In debates over whether Catholic children should attend public schools, whether ethnic Churches should retain ethnic clergy, and whether Catholic immigrants should be naturalized, the American clergy and Roman hierarchy struggled for the power to determine the nature of the American Church. Hecker deliberately misread the doctrine of papal infallibility, wherein he claimed that it presented greater intellectual freedom from Rome as “a wider field of thought and action is thrown open” (*Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* 445). Pope Leo XIII officially addressed the Americanist in *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* (1898) where he argued that such attempts to “modernize” the Church were heretical. While some Catholic historians including Andrew Greeley argue that this proclamation ended the liberal, Americanist movement in the Church, I argue that the literature of the period is this movement’s legacy. Moving beyond the bounds of the institutional Church, beyond the constraints of the catechism, and beyond institutionally sanctioned theological interpretations, the Americanism and Modernism heresies indirectly enabled the formation of a community that could imagine itself separately from Rome, in terms of US culture. Catholic fiction, and the debate over the nature of that fiction, became a fertile ground for this formation.

At the same time as these larger epistemological debates, a major tide was turning in the philosophical grounding of the Church, with resonance for the definition of Catholic literature. Under the influence of Pope Leo XIII, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas became central to

¹ In this movement, American writers tried to replicate the Catholic arts movement in Europe headed by writers and intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain, G.K. Chesterton, and Evelyn Waugh.

Church teachings, where it held sway until Vatican II in 1962. Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* called for a revival of Thomistic theology on the grounds of "taking up the study of philosophy which shall respond most fitly to the excellence of faith, and at the same time be consonant with the dignity of human science" (1). Human reason, when accessing the Truth, will never be at odds with revealed wisdom, though reason in itself cannot reveal the truth of faith. Yet "Faith *frees* and saves reason *from error, and* endows it with *manifold* knowledge" in order to access divine truth (9). The Pope argued that a return to the scholastic approach to theology would endow Catholicism with a means for acting in both the public and the private good. Thus, Thomism became the center of Church teaching on everything from the new social doctrine first established in *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to doctrine on reproduction and sexuality.

While Aquinas did not explicitly develop an aesthetic philosophy, Catholic writers and critics applied Thomistic principles to Catholic literature. Neothomists argued that literature must be judged for its moral effect on the reader, rather than any element inherent in the text itself. A work of art that is aesthetically pleasing may itself be an essentially bad work of art if it leads its reader into sin or the temptation of sin. The literature is only Good if it produces a good. Thus, literature that conveys "poison to the mind" cannot be fine literature. Through these confines, the rise of Thomism challenges the modern Catholic writer who might seek to write on secular topics. It presents a double-bind for Catholic writers. Catholic critics argued that Catholic literature was itself an impossibility—either it was too literary to evoke the necessary Good, and therefore failed to be appropriately Catholic, or it was too Catholic to be literary. Thus, despite the literary production of the nineteenth century, throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, numerous Catholic critics and novelists issued calls, echoed in nearly all the major Catholic magazines, for an American Catholic fiction that reflects

the cultural and economic successes of American Catholics, and consolidates a new self-conception of the Catholic in light of middle-class American culture.

Answering this call, Catholic novelists at the turn-of-the-twentieth century—from Kathleen Norris to Lucille Papin Borden²—turned to issues of sexuality and reproduction as a terrain where Catholics could stake their place in American secular politics. Kathleen Norris, one of the highest earning female novelists of the 1910s and 1920s, had great commercial success while avoiding addressing her Catholicism explicitly. She engaged with Protestant reformers exploring laws governing sexuality and reproduction as a means to eradicate social sin in order to hurry the Second Coming as well as secular reformers seeking a better American society. American Catholics, like Norris, explored sexuality and reproduction through a neo-Thomistic lens. Although generally disavowing both the New Woman and companionate marriage, Catholic intellectuals envisioned a new Catholic woman in the era of suffrage. While the changing social mores associated with unstable gender norms could damage the “weak-minded” Catholic woman, they saw women’s growing authority in their marriages and sexuality as enabling a new ground for political action. Thus, while adhering to doctrinal rejection of birth control, American Catholics explored a positive eugenics that could maintain a pure American Catholic race. As this investment in the politics of sexuality and reproduction developed from the 1910s through the 1920s, it became increasingly allied with the American Right in figures like Father Coughlin.

Yet even as conservative Catholics engaged the Protest and Progressive reform traditions while increasingly aligning themselves with the American political Right in the 1920s and 1930s,

² Lucille Papin Borden wrote popular domestic fiction from a Catholic worldview. Two of her better-known novels, *The Candlestick Makers* (1923) and *Gentlemen Riches* (1925) echo a number of popular novels in addressing the dangers of mixed marriage and of divorce.

a rising Catholic Left turned away from the Church's emphasis on sexuality and reproduction toward its social doctrine. In the wake of the Great Depression, Catholics increasingly turned to the papal encyclicals that established the morality governing economic relations between individuals, corporations, and governments. Embodied in the new Catholic Worker movement headed by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the new Catholic Left supported the primacy of the worker through the Thomistic value of personalism. Centering the integrity of the person as the basis of all interpersonal and economic relations, the Catholic Left saw the primary sin of the modern era not as the failure of sexual morality, but rather as the denigration of the dignity of the person inherent in American class and race relations. Catholic novelists following in the footsteps of Day—most notably Harry Sylvester and Hilary Leighton Barth—grappled with the right to a living wage and racial justice as the essential issues of the era.

While anti-Communism had been a shared value of both the Catholic Right, seen in figures like Father Coughlin and Kathleen Norris, and the Catholic Left of Day and the Catholic Worker movement, the post-World War II Catholic community grappled with the aftermath of an increasingly fracturing American Catholic community. The Catholic investment in anti-Communism turned into a growing alignment with 1950s political conservatism. Catholic leaders and laypeople increasingly ignored Catholic social doctrine, which had long challenged the ability of the market to recognize Thomistic personhood, labeling it “liberal” or even communist. In this era, enabled in large part through the G.I. Bill, American Catholics established themselves as part of the American middle class, moving into the suburbs and for the first time earning yearly wages not just equivalent to but more than the average American worker. Catholic novelists in the post-War era—from Flannery O'Connor to a cadre of 1940s converts including Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon—struggled to define a Catholic community

as somehow different than the Protestant mainstream that had begun to absorb it. American Catholics became part of Christian America, in part, by eroding the orthodox Catholic radical social justice agenda. By the 1960s, as Vatican II began to institute reforms to both the liturgy and the structure of the Church that ushered in a new series of issues, the Catholic community was no longer bound by shared values on social issues like sexuality, economics, and racial justice.

Forms of Catholic Fiction

Each chapter in “Lines of Spiritual Motion” unfolds the religious stakes of major literary forms to map the ways that Catholic writers revise these structures, at times to make them more amenable to Catholic culture and theology, but also to challenge received Church doctrine as interpreted in that historical moment. My first chapter, “‘The Hope of the Church and the Republic’: Mary Anne Sadlier and the Cultivation of Catholic Sentimentality,” argues that nineteenth-century American Catholic fiction developed as an alternative to the Protestant sentimentality of the domestic novel. Critics have recognized how sentimentality, in literary and political discourse, joins the individual to the community of the family or nation, yet this chapter explores how sentimental structures exclude the religious other. I explore how the sentimental structures that inform the domestic novel and inflect political debate—especially the development of the public school system—replicate Protestant models of salvation and moral development, thereby excluding Catholics from participation, both in sentimentality, and ultimately in the nation. This chapter argues, then, that Sadlier’s novels revise the form of the domestic novel to challenge the exclusionary construction of sentimentality that leaves Irish Catholics outside its scope. Sadlier’s novels use Catholic theories of salvation as narrative

strategies not only to counter the more conventional narrative function of sentiment, but also to create a space for Catholic middle-class culture based on participation in a larger religious community.

If chapter one shows that in revising the sentimental form, a popular Catholic writer could challenge how sentimentalism encouraged the exclusion of social forms in the name of secularism, it also reveals what was at stake for Catholics using dominant forms to rewrite the conventional script of social assimilation. In chapter two, I look at modernist experimentation of a religious kind. In “Kathleen Norris and the Politics of Sexual Modernism,” I argue that a Catholic popular modernism emerges in response to the liberal reform tradition’s model of social engineering through control of sexuality and reproduction. Norris negotiates the sexualization of American culture and Catholic tradition by engaging debates around birth control, race suicide, and social reform. While not always embracing these new developments, Norris writes romantic novels that provide an alternative to contemporaneous women’s fiction arising in response to the Social Gospel tradition, relocating femininity and sexuality within the Catholic tradition.

The last two chapters of “Lines of Spiritual Motion” consider the aesthetic and political transformation of Catholic fiction in the wake of the Great Depression. Unlike the sentimentalized Catholic fiction that came before it, the Catholic novels of the 1930s and 1940s not only object to the harm the socioeconomic system has wrought on personhood, but also seek a radical change in those very structures. My third chapter, “‘We Are Our Brother’s Keeper’: Social Doctrine, the Mystical Body of Christ, and the Novels of the Catholic Left,” analyzes the work of the new Catholic Left in the 1930s—particularly by Harry Sylvester, Dorothy Day, and Hilary Leighton Barth—as critical revaluations of American Catholicism and its limits. These

fictions imagine religious communities as an alternative to the various security practices—ranging from the insurance system to the developing welfare state—that arose out of the Great Depression. In the wake of the Great Depression, the Catholic Worker Movement’s orientation toward suffering becomes the model for radical Catholic fiction, and in this relation to suffering that the Catholic realist novels break from the Social Gospel novels of the previous century.

My final chapter, “‘The First Catholic Author of the United States’: Flannery O’Connor’s Radical Orthodoxy and the Politics of Catholic Community,” reassesses Flannery O’Connor’s grotesque as an inheritance of this larger American Catholic literary tradition rather than the apotheosis of it. Critical treatments of O’Connor exhibit the limits of analyzing religious novels ahistorically, and this chapter reconciles readings of O’Connor as a Catholic writer and a Southern writer. Examining her fiction alongside her personal writings and essays, I argue that O’Connor’s grotesque establishes a form shaped as much by the Catholic Left’s personalism as post-World War II conservatism. Her work does not exemplify Catholic or American conservatism, but rather embodies the seeming paradoxes of radical orthodoxy in Catholic fiction.

Far from being simply sentimental or parochial, Catholic fiction grapples with issues of representation, political engagement, and social change. This project, then, not only recovers the neglected literary history of American Catholicism, but also shows how American Catholic fiction plays a central role in American literary history. This manuscript brings into sharper focus the imbricated categories of religion, culture, and American identity. By examining the processes of accommodation and resistance, my research reassesses the relation between cultural authority and literary form. Through investigating religious textual productions within a particular American history, I seek to clarify how literary forms can be altered by those groups

that they have inherently excluded, not only to create a new literary tradition, but also to create a cultural community of believers. My examination of how the Catholic literary community negotiated sentiment and realism, belief and materialism, and piety and upheaval, suggests the complexity of religious assimilation in America.

CHAPTER 2

“THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH AND THE REPUBLIC”: MARY ANNE SADLIER AND
THE CULTIVATION OF CATHOLIC SENTIMENTALITY

The English Bible, in some way or other, has, ever since the settlement of Cambridge, been read in its public schools, by children of every denomination; but, in the year 1851, the ignorant immigrants, who have found food and shelter in this land of freedom and plenty, made free and plentiful through the influence of these very Scriptures, presume to dictate to use, and refuse to let their children read as ours do, and have always done, the Word of Life. The arrogance, not to say impudence of this conduct, must startle every native citizen, and we can not but hope that they will immediately take measures to teach these deluded aliens, that their poverty and ignorance in their own country arose mainly from their ignorance of the Bible; and every attempt to suppress the free perusal of it in our schools, and around our firesides, is suicidal, and if successful, will only make this country what Ireland is, and always will be, till the Bible is put into the hands of the people.

--William Bentley Fowle, *The Common School Journal*, 1852

Disciplinary Intimacy and the Protestant Structure of Sentimentality

On May 6, 1844, shots were fired into a crowd fleeing the rain at a Nativist rally in Kensington, then a northern suburb of Philadelphia with a large Irish population. As the Protestant mob poured into the streets, Irish Catholic inhabitants began shooting at them from the windows of stores and residences. While this violence ended after an hour, the incident sparked large-scale riots in the days that followed. Carrying an American flag that the Irish had allegedly trampled, three thousand Protestants returned to Kensington, setting fire to stores and homes. They were met with volleys of gunfire and homemade bombs. The 1844 Philadelphia Riot marked the beginning of physical hostilities in the debate over religious instruction in public schools that came to be known as the Bible Wars, but it was certainly not the start of the conflict. Debates about forcing children of all denominations to submit to a particular form of Protestant

religious and moral instruction, characterized primarily by the study of the King James Bible in public schools, began in the 1830s with the rise of the public school movement, and grew more vociferous as waves of Irish immigrants increased the number of Catholic students in Northern schools. The Philadelphia Riot, and later violence in other cities like Cincinnati and Boston,³ inform part of a larger narrative about the complex relation between Catholic practices, religious identity, and assimilation. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, larger issues of religious freedom, contested loyalties, and national identification all coalesced in “the common school controversy.”

The common school problem arose from the dissent of many Catholics, and some Protestants, against the formation of “non-denominational” public schools and government-mandated education. Many states, following educational reformers such as Horace Mann, Henry Bernard, Calvin Stowe, Samuel Lewis, Calvin Wiley, and Caleb Mills, established public systems where, by mid-century, the majority of American children received some elementary education (Lannie viii). These public systems, following the reformers’ religious compromises, embraced what the reformers conceived of as “non-denominational” religious instruction. Mann described the vision he had for religious instruction in public schools: “The Religion of Heaven should be taught to children, while the creeds of men should be postponed until their minds were sufficiently matured to weigh evidence and arguments” (quoted in Lannie ix). Rather than focusing on theological claims, this “Religion of Heaven” meant to teach Judeo-Christian values. Mann claimed that the public schools could separate intellectual and moral culture from religious instruction by focusing on the moral lessons of the Bible. His belief in the ability to separate moral education from sectarian instruction is echoed in the Massachusetts Constitution, enacted

³ See Joan DeFattore for more on the Bible Wars.

in 1835, which called on its public schools to “impress on the minds of the children and youth committed to their care and instruction the principles of piety, justice, and sacred regard to truth; love to their country, humanity and universal benevolence; sobriety; industry; frugality; chastity; moderation and benevolence; and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society.” Yet the Constitution prohibited any teachings that are “calculated to favor the tenets of any particular sect of Christians” (Mann, *The Common School Controversy* 9). Exactly what constituted favoring the tenets of a particular sect, though, was highly contentious. Mann and other reformers described a common Christianity, rooted in the same basic beliefs, without clearly defining those shared beliefs. They carefully avoided issues that divided Protestants of the time, such as predestination and the appropriate age of baptism. In practice, then, religious instruction in public schools was based around the reading of Scripture and the recitation of hymns and prayers.

The religion of the public school system, then, amounted to a great compromise among powerful Protestant leaders on local school boards, but this compromise excluded Catholics, Mormons, Jews, and Shakers, among other Christian sects.⁴ As Tracey Fessenden’s *Culture and Redemption* suggests, this “non-denominational religion” marked neither freedom from sectarianism nor a step toward secularism, but actually constituted a specific form of Protestantism.⁵ In the formation of this pan-Protestant faith, religious histories resituated the “threat of diversity” within Protestantism to a threat of diversity from without (Fessenden 63). Educational reformers, too, focused exclusively on the internal harmony of Protestantism.

⁴ See Mann’s *The Common School Controversy* for his discussion of the religious constitution of the Board of Education, which suggests the importance of verifiable Protestant credentials among the boards.

⁵ See Fessenden, especially chapters two and three, for an explanation of how this form of Protestantism developed, and how it continues to shape American conceptions of secularism.

Mann's collection, *The Common School Controversy*, containing critiques of religious instruction in Massachusetts schools and Mann's responses, does not address the Catholic, Mormon, or Jewish resistance to the public schools' curriculums; rather, it documents a series of debates between Mann and other Protestants who see the reformers' religious compromise as pushing Christianity out of the public schools. Both Mann and his critics buttress their arguments with the religious otherness of Catholics and Mormons, refusing to legitimize these religious groups' place in the national conversation. In describing the danger of allowing sectarianism in schools, Mann describes the potential horror of children carrying the book of Mormon to class, while the editor of *The Christian Witness and Church Advocate* argues that Mann's standard of non-sectarianism would mistakenly allow Catholic children to opt out of reading the Scripture on the grounds that it was sectarian. Thus, while debating the religious instruction of schools as non-sectarian, both public school advocates and Protestant critics relied upon the specter of a religious other when they framed the debate in terms of external threats to a shared pan-Protestant faith.

American Catholics, although not represented in Mann's *The Common School Controversy*, fought against the non-sectarianism of the public schools, which they understood to be inherently Protestant, exclusionary, and anti-Catholic. Catholic resistance to the pan-Protestantism of moral education in the public schools coalesced around the reading of the Bible and Protestant hymns.⁶ The "Religion of Heaven" that Mann described was, for many education reformers, most perfectly embodied in the Scriptures, which they believed to be appropriately non-sectarian so long as they were taught without comment. Local governments across the

⁶ The five volume *Life and Works of Horace Mann* deliberately omits any discussion of the common school controversy, dismissing it as "spicy reading" that is both "too voluminous" and "personal" to be included. Still, George Combe Mann's 1890 preface includes a footnote requesting the return of a 1573 page volume on titled "Common School Controversy" and asserting continued property rights to the volume.

country mandated that the King James version of the Bible be taught in public schools. Though local advocates for the public school system generally claimed that there were no significant doctrinal differences between the King James Bible and the Catholics' Douay Bible, the King James Bible, even without any accompanying commentary or exegesis, represented a powerful symbol of Protestant authority for many American Catholics (DeFattore 21). For Catholics, this version of the Bible, as a textual object, embodied the rebellion of early Protestants against the Catholic Church. Beyond the book's power as a symbol of sectarian division, the original preface condemns the Catholic Church, denying its legitimacy and accusing it of "hiding" the scriptures from the people (DeFattore 21). Even without the explicit anti-Catholicism of the Bible's frontis matter, the very act of reading the Scriptures in school offended Catholic sensibilities, because the Bible was not meant to be taught outside the auspices of the Church, which could aid in its appropriate interpretation. Despite the Catholic complaints against the curriculum, public school boards not only insisted Catholic children to read the King James Bible, but also to recite the Protestant version of the Lord's prayer, sing Protestant songs, and read from implicitly anti-Catholic textbooks.

The Catholic population revolted against what they saw as a systematic attack on the Catholic faith. Under the leadership of New York City's Archbishop John Hughes, Catholics filed multiple legal complaints challenging the authority of the schools to force participation in religious instruction, insisted on the auditing of school textbooks and libraries for anti-Catholic rhetoric, and ultimately established a vital system of parochial schools that offered an alternative to public schools for compulsory education. When legal challenges failed, the passions of the Bible Wars filled the streets. As both the Kensington Riot and Cincinnati Riot suggest, American Catholics understood compulsory "non-sectarian" religious education as an attempt to seduce

Catholic children into Protestantism. Shielding their Catholic children from this state-funded seduction to Protestantism was protecting the future of Catholicism.

The American Catholic belief in the dangers of the pan-Protestantism of public schools was not unfounded. In many ways, the public school system's curriculum was a conscious attack on the culture of Catholic immigrants. As John Higham argues, a "Protestant-republican ideology," rooted in the millennial convictions shared by many Protestant groups, bolstered the creation of the public schools. Millennialism, though it comes in numerous forms with varied underlying theological beliefs, is the eschatological belief that Christ will reign on Earth before the end of the world. The millennial belief, combined with American exceptionalism, became an imperative to create God's Kingdom on Earth, which necessitated the conversion of all Americans. Indeed, the rhetoric of the Common School advocates, including Fowles' editorial from the 1852 *Common School Journal* founded by Mann, suggests that the disciplinary structures of the public school were promoted as antithetical to immigrant and Catholic practices. In his "Reply to the 'Remarks' of the Thirty-One Schoolmasters" (1844), Mann describes the public school as a civilizing force that can supplant the home life of an "ill-bred" child:

Was it not and is it not one of the grand objects in and support of Common Schools to bring those who are cursed by a vicious parentage who were not only conceived and brought forth but have been in "sin;" who have never known the voice of love and kindness; who have daily fallen beneath the iron of those parental hands that should have been outstretched for their protection;--was it not and is it not one of the grand objects of our schools to bring this class of children under humanizing and refining influences show them that there is something besides wrath and suffering in God's world to lift these outcast forlorn beings

from their degradation by gentle hands to fold them to warm and cherishing bosoms. (quoted in Brodhead 76)

As Richard H. Brodhead notes, Mann “all but names” the Irish as the object of reform (“Sparing the Rod” 76). Just as Fowles describes the reading of the King James Bible as essential to the development of free-thinking Americans by contrasting America to the ignorance and brutishness of the Irish, so too did Mann suggest moral education through love was contrary to the ignorance and brutishness of Irish disciplinary practices. These reformers imagined reading the Bible individually and modeling a new form of discipline as a two-pronged means of reforming the “savage” Irish immigrant culture by acting as a second mother to the children of Irish immigrants. The common school, then, not only provided the education vital for democracy, but was also designed to “civilize” the Irish Catholics by inculcating Protestant values and practices.

Horace Mann, Disciplinary Intimacy, and Moral Education

The public school, and more specifically its pan-Protestant moral instruction, forms one part of what Brodhead describes, in Foucauldian terms, as the “disciplinary archipelago” of antebellum America (88). That is, the public school, alongside other agencies, brought ordinary experience into a normative order. The public school, the female-centered domestic space, and the novel all formed part of a matrix operating through a theory that Brodhead terms “disciplinary intimacy.” Discipline through love developed in the 1830s and 1840s as a specifically middle-class construct that “generates on one front an animus against corporal punishment; on another front a normative model of character formation; on another, a particular configuration of training institutions designed to support that character-building plan; and on

another, a new place for literary reading in cultural life” (70). Disciplinary intimacy works through the inculcation of middle-class normative values through and as love, but love with a particular force of power.

Disciplinary intimacy, like the sentimental novel that relies upon it, is rooted in a specifically Protestant worldview. The primary feature of disciplinary intimacy is the personification of authority in individuals and the dissolution of abstract authority into the purely personal presence of the disciplinary authority. Disciplinary intimacy sentimentalizes authority through this personal figure and, in so doing, relocates authority into the realm of emotion. In the nineteenth-century model of moral education, the parental figure transmits her beliefs to the child through the bonds of love, and the child’s love for the parent becomes a love for the abstract authority that the parent represents. Through this love, the child internalizes the moral codes of American culture. Ultimately, disciplinary intimacy aims to “implant the parent known *outwardly* only as love as an *inwardly* regulated moral consciousness” (Brodhead 72). While Brodhead claims that the process of disciplinary intimacy is Protestant only insofar as evangelicalism is a constituent of antebellum middle-class culture (83), the focus on the individual internalizing and self-policing morality echoes the Protestant rejection of an exterior religious authority. In fact, the very process of disciplinary intimacy establishes the personal moral subjectivity that underlies the radically individual religious experience central to Pan-Protestant theology. Specifically, because the believer internalizes the moral codes of Christianity, she needs no external mediator in her relationship to Christ. Through this process, both moral development and religious experience become radically interiorized.

For Mann, this radical interiorization can only occur through love, and the apotheosis of love is maternal affection. As Mann imagines the school serving as a child's second home, he describes the classroom itself as a copy of the domestic space. In doing so, he remarks, "I regard it as one of the clearest ordinances of nature, that woman is the appointed guide and guardian of children of a tender age" (Mann 54). Maternal affection becomes the model for the educational practices both inside and outside the home, and the common school teacher's goal is to echo the love children know from their mother, recreating the comfort and safety of the home in the classroom.

Disciplinary intimacy's reliance upon maternal affection mirrors the centering of feminine affection as the appropriate source of Protestant religious education within the home. Since the Reformation, the home had been the center of personal piety and religious instruction for Protestants. Family religion and domestic rituals took on increasing importance in American Protestant faiths, and the home became the primary location not only of religious and moral instruction, but also of religious devotions. During the nineteenth century, however, a major change occurred in the hierarchy of spiritual authority within the family. Until the mid-nineteenth-century, the father typically functioned as the religious head of the family, the primary spiritual authority in religious traditions without the exterior hierarchy of the clergy. Throughout the first half of the century, mainstream Protestantism moved the male to the periphery of domestic religious practices, centering the mother as the primary inculcator of religious and moral instruction.⁷ As Colleen McDannell explains:

⁷ See Colleen McDannell's *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, Susan M. Griffin's *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, and Jane Tompkins for discussions of the role of the mother in Protestant domestic religion.

Protestants maintained the virtue of home worship but slowly moved the father out of his position as the household priest while moving the mother into her role as family minister and redeemer. Moral instruction—a teaching ritual—came to replace worship as the primary goal of Protestant family devotions. This instruction was child-centered, mother-directed, and individual. While paternal authority continued to be acknowledged, and male involvement desirable, fathers were increasingly edged out of a domestic Protestantism which stressed innocence, personal piety, individual education, and the sanctity of domestic sentiments. (McDannell, *Christian Home* 152)

As the father increasingly moved outside the home for work, he moved outside his established roles within the home. In Protestant paternal models, the father functioned as the priest of the household, performing formal religious acts, like the recitation of prayers and reading the Bible. As women were within the home, they took on acts of informal religious devotion, which included individual moral instruction. While the father presided over the family as a group, including leading prayer, the mother taught each child *how* to pray on their own (McDannell, *Christian Home* 135).

Nineteenth-century Catholics, on the other hand, located religious life outside the home, even as the domestic rituals had an important place within Catholic culture. The rising power of the Irish in the Catholic Church, both in the hierarchy that instituted policy and the laity that influenced it, led to the codification of a community-focused, liturgy-centered parish-life.⁸ The

⁸ Irish Catholicism's emphasis on parish-life and liturgically centered rituals was challenged by later waves Catholic immigrants. Italian immigrants, Polish immigrants, and Mexican immigrants all continued to participate in domestic rituals and street rituals that challenged the power of the parish. The overwhelming authority of the Irish way within the Church ultimately required a type of assimilation to American Catholicism that echoes the movement

centrality of religious practices outside the home, coupled with the authority of the clerical father, led Catholics to keep the father as spiritual leader of the family. This fundamental difference in the roles of mother and father in religious practice ultimately suggests that disciplinary intimacy became a hallmark of Protestant, middle-class domestic ideology. In Protestant religious education, including Mann's description of moral education, the primary mode of religious and moral instruction relies upon affective bonds forged with the mother. In both, the mother, rather than the father, is better suited to teach the child the individual spiritual development essential to a Protestant scheme. This moral pedagogy becomes iconized, both in the popular imagination and the antebellum novel, in the image of the mother reading the Bible to the child in her embrace (Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism* 58).

The antebellum domestic novel itself replicates this model of moral instruction, both in the conversion of literary characters and the sentimental outreach to the reader. Within the sentimental novel, the domestic space becomes the site of religious and moral transformation, and the middle-class woman, as the moral compass of the household, becomes the model of Christian authority through love. As Tompkins notes in her influential reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the "home is the center of all meaningful activity; women perform the most important tasks; work is carried on in a spirit of mutual cooperation; and the whole is guided by a Christian woman who, through the influence of her 'loving words,' 'gentle moralities,' and 'motherly loving kindness,' rules the world from her rocking chair. . . . The woman in question *is* God in human form" (141-2). Like the domestic advice manuals discussed by Brodhead and McDannell, sentimental novels like Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*

from immigrant to ethnic described by John Higham. See also Robert Orsi, Ann Taves, and Colleen McDannell's "Catholic Domesticity, 1860-1960."

(1850) and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* situate middle-class domestic rituals within a soteriological framework. Thus, the work of the novel takes on salvific force. Through the power of suffering with and through the soteriologically defined characters, the novel has redemptive power. As Tompkins explains:

Sentimental fiction was perhaps the most influential expression of the beliefs that animated the revival movement and had shaped the character of American life in the years before the Civil War. Antebellum critics and readers did not distinguish sharply between fiction and what we now call religious propaganda. . . . The highest function of any art . . . was the bringing of souls to Christ. Like their counterparts among the evangelical clergy, the sentimental novelists wrote to educate their readers in Christian perfection and to move the nation as a whole closer to the city of God. (149)

The novels rely on their own form of disciplinary intimacy to inculcate moral values and to evangelize the fundamental belief that unified Mann's Protestantism—salvation through Christ alone. Within the novel, the transformation of political sentiments, the harnessing of this moral pedagogy, is not only analogous to, but also performed through, the change of heart that occurs in religious conversion.

The evangelizing function of the sentimental novel extends beyond literally proselytizing a pan-Protestant domestic religion. These novels apply the central religious narrative of American culture, the crucifixion, to the larger political order (Tompkins 134). The sentimental novel attempts to “discipline” its readers, relying upon the power of emotional persuasion to achieve social transformation. While critics such as Lauren Berlant have challenged the radicalizing power of sentimentality and its ability to effect real political change through

identification, sentimentality was certainly harnessed for exclusionary practices, specifically as a way of defining a middle-class Protestant ideology that represented the interests of presumptively white, Protestant, middle-class women. Laura Wexler, in her study of the “tender violence” used to force Native American girls to accommodate middle-class culture at the Hampton Institute beginning in the 1880s, points out that those who “did not have, could not get, or had been robbed of their ‘homes’” would always be non-participants in sentimentalism. Yet, as she convincingly argues, the very idea of sentimentalism does the work of marginalizing those who “cannot qualify for entry under moral standards determined by arbiters who remain in power” (15-17). In the mid-nineteenth century, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and other Protestants whose religious beliefs fell outside of the pan-Christian theology established by Mann and his colleagues were among those who did not qualify as practitioners of sentimentality, who were believed incapable of cultivating right feeling, and could not, therefore, be a part of the collective national identity.

At mid-century, American Catholics were denied entry into the sentimental collective largely because they were deemed incapable of cultivating an individual spirituality. More specifically, they were believed incapable of internalizing the outward love of Christ into an internal practice of morality. Catholics were deemed incapable of such interiority because, while Protestants centered religion in the home with the mother as the representative and inculcator of love, Catholics worshiped in Church, deferring to the priest’s masculine authority. Griffin notes, “Protestant religiosity was said to be distinguished by its wholeness and integrity: individual reading of the Bible and personal experience of the divine make for a religion that runs deep. Unlike Catholicism, a religion which is theatrically performed, real (Protestant) Christianity permeates the believer, makes for a genuine, homogenous self” (*Anti-Catholicism and 5*). As

suggested by antebellum convent-escape narratives, popular belief held that the priest's version of religion and moral instruction derived from obedience through fear. Thus, the priest and mother superior, the key metonymies of Catholicism in American culture, came to embody the exact opposite of the ideal implicit in disciplinary intimacy. Rather than correctly and Protestantly developing their selves through and as love, Catholics seemed to give their selves to priests' authority. Mainstream culture, then, depicted the ideal of sentimental education, iconized in the image of the mother reading the Bible to her children at home, as antithetical to Catholic conceptions of religious instruction and, more profoundly, to Catholic identity.

The convent-escape narrative, blending elements of the European gothic and the American captivity narrative, embodies anti-Catholic beliefs about the very possibility of an internalized Catholic morality. The form focuses on the protection of Protestant womanhood from a vast Catholic conspiracy aimed to strike at the heart of a Protestant nation by infiltrating the home. This imagined conspiracy relied upon anxieties about Catholic access to vulnerable Protestant women through Catholic educational systems. The continued popularity of convent-escape narratives and the actual violence that surfaced in response to these narratives suggest the power of this anxiety in American culture. The "escape" of Sister Mary John, otherwise known as Elizabeth Harrison, from the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts on July 28, 1834 sparked a new wave of convent captivity narratives that remained extremely popular through the 1850s.⁹ Upon leaving the convent in a "delirium," Harrison sought refuge with a local farm family, and then she returned to the convent with her superior. This incident spurred local rumors about the forced imprisonment of young women in the convent as both nuns and

⁹ Monk's *Awful Disclosures* (1836) sold 300,000 by 1860, Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835) sold an estimated 200,000 copies in one month, and Charles Frothingham's *Convent's Doom* (1854) and *Six Hours in a Convent* (1854) went through eight editions in a single year (Franchot 29-30).

students. Despite local authorities' inspection of the convent, a mob riot erupted two weeks later, and the convent was burned to the ground. While the wealthy convent students were targeted just as the Catholic sisters were, in the wake of the fire the popular press claimed that the need to rescue captive women was the real reason for the mob violence. While the anti-Catholic depictions of the sinister Jesuit, sadistic mother-superior, and naive, innocent young women were hardly fresh, these figures gained particular traction in the wake of the convent burning. Published in the years immediately following the Charlestown riot, Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835)¹⁰ and Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures at the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal* (1836) deploy the tropes of young Protestant women brainwashed and tortured by sadistic nuns and priests. While both tales ultimately proved to be false, these narratives and those that followed remained popular throughout the century, and revised editions of Monk's book were published well into the twentieth century. The editors of Reed's account begin by stating their intention to "open the eyes of Protestants, so as to convince them of the impropriety of intrusting the education of their daughters to a secret and superstitious community of Catholic Priests and Nuns" (qtd. in Nordstrom 36). The convent school, then, came to embody a simultaneous attack on Protestant womanhood and on domesticity, rendering it a strike against the nation itself.

The issue of Protestant daughters educated in Catholic convents—portrayed, at best, as sites of indoctrination, and at worst, as sites of sadistic torture and infanticide—was central to the development of the public school system in America. Mann and other advocates of public education insisted that a common school system be developed as an alternative to Catholic

¹⁰ Franchot argues that the story of Reed's "escape" predates its 1835 publication, and its circulation among the girls at the convent as well as the public surrounding the school fomented the mob violence.

schools. The public school created a space both to teach Protestant virtue and to protect vulnerable children, not only from the religious education of Catholic or sectarian schools, but also from the Catholic other (Tyack and Hansot 74-5). Common school reformers echo convent escape narratives in playing on the anxiety over discipline through fear rather than through love. Both depict Catholicism as “the primitive that Protestantism leaves behind, a religion of holy fathers who demanded unquestioning obedience, a cult fixated on the body, both as the site of penitential torture and as a target of sensuous appeal (incense, candles, brightly colored statues)” (Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism* 5). By attributing such qualities to Catholics, nineteenth-century Protestants were able to define a pan-Protestant religion relying on “internalized self- discipline” that they saw as both more modern and more evolved (5).

Mary Anne Sadlier and the Development of Catholic Domesticity

Franchot, McDannell, Fessenden, and Griffin suggest that sentimental ideology—as imagined in domestic advice manuals,¹¹ sentimental novels, and the public school debate—specifically proscribes the very possibility of a Catholic domestic religion, or even a Catholic variation of disciplinary intimacy. Following their work, this chapter argues that the development of a Catholic, middle-class culture developed in large part through a Catholic sentimental tradition, even as major Catholic figures argued against the feminizing danger of religious sentimentality. This chapter claims that Mary Anne Sadlier’s *The Blakes and the Flanagans* (1854) constructs a Catholic middle-class ideology through the tropes of its own version of sentimentality. Sadlier, the most prolific Irish-American author of the famine generation,

¹¹ See Brodhead and McDannell for a more detailed discussion of Protestant domestic advice manuals and moral instruction through love.

negotiated the sentimentality that mainstream, Protestant culture denied to Catholics and Catholic wariness of the novel form. Against the background of the Bible Wars and common school debate, Sadlier re-conceptualizes sentimental education, insofar as it informs both the novels' characters and their audiences. Her conception of sentimentality responds to Catholic debates about moral education, religious reading, and the role of the novel. Ultimately, *The Blakes and the Flanagans* embodies a sentimental form that focuses on cultivating a collective religious sentiment in the public spaces of the Catholic community.

Sadlier published over sixty novels as well as various theological works ranging from catechisms for children to collections of theological treatises on purgatory. Given her popularity and influence, several critics have read Sadlier's novels as the epitome of famine-era, Irish-American literary production. Her works, and those of her contemporaries, have long been read as wholly didactic, or as Charles Fanning, a historian influential in Sadlier's recovery as part of the Irish-American tradition, calls them "practical fiction." Such criticism reduces Sadlier's novels to sociological texts, instruction for Irish immigrants to America that provides contemporary readers a glimpse into the lives of nineteenth-century Irish-American immigrants. More recent readings, including Catherine Eagan's examination of the presumptive whiteness of the Irish in Sadlier's novels and Marjorie Howes' analysis of Sadlier's construction of an Irish-American public, have suggested the ideological work of Sadlier's writing is more complicated than simple didacticism. Building upon these readings, this chapter argues that Sadlier's fiction cultivates a sentimentality rooted in Catholic soteriology that enables Irish-American and Catholic-American participation in middle-class culture, which in turn opens the door for the establishment of an American Catholic literary tradition.

Sadlier became a foundational figure in Catholic-American literature in part through her connection to the Catholic publishing industry. Born Mary Anne Madden in County Cavan in 1820, Sadlier emigrated to Montreal, Canada in 1844 after the death of her wealthy father. There she married James Sadlier, manager of the Canadian branch of the Catholic publishing house that he and his brother had founded, the D. & J. Sadlier and Co. After the publishing company bought the list of the major Irish-American publisher John Doyle, the D. & J. Sadlier Co. became the largest Catholic publishing house in the United States. While Sadlier published under the name Mrs. J. Sadlier, her literary career was not reliant upon her husband's publishing house. Sadlier's novels were generally published twice, first as serials in Irish-American periodicals such as Thomas D'Arcy McGee's *American Celt*, *The Boston Pilot*, and *The New York Tablet*, and later bound together, with minor revisions, as complete novels. After beginning a large family and a writing career in Montreal, the Sadliers moved to New York City in 1860. By this time, Sadlier had already established herself as "the best known Irish Catholic voice in American letters" (Fanning 115). As a part of New York City's Catholic intellectual community, she befriended Orestes Brownson, Archbishop John Hughes, and Thomas D'Arcy McGee. After her husband's death in 1869, she ran the Sadlier Company for a decade. In later years, Sadlier focused on more strictly religious fiction and non-fiction, and she collaborated with her daughter Anna Sadlier, who became a successful Catholic author in her own right. By the time of her death in 1903, Sadlier was celebrated as major figure in the development of Irish-American literature.

In general, Sadlier's novels establish a Catholic fiction that rivals the popular fiction of mainstream America, including the domestic novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Susan Warner. Her work challenges the exclusionary construction of sentimentality that leaves Irish

Catholics outside its scope: she uses the tropes of sentimentality to cultivate “right-feeling” Catholics who can enter into the middle-class domestic spaces that she imagines; moreover, she depicts Catholic women and their families as embracing American virtues more fully than mainstream Protestants can, because of (rather than despite) their collective religious sentiment. Sadlier’s conception of a middle-class Catholic culture at mid-century is radical and constitutive.

Colleen McDannell argues:

The social and economic conditions of Irish American life kept Catholics from developing a middle-class domestic piety until almost the close of the century. Traditional Catholicism, with its preference for celibate life, church-centered rituals, and private piety worked against the establishment of family religion. The Catholic assertion of the primacy of the sacred space of the church and the mystical, adult-orientation of the Mass competed with the home and child-centered quality of domestic religion. (*The Christian Home in Victorian America* 152)

In these terms, Sadlier mediates a middle-class American culture that was predominantly Protestant and a Catholic community rooted in the hierarchy of the Church and parish-centered religious practices. In doing so, Sadlier’s novels construct the very thing that the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the 1850s denied Catholics in distancing them from mainstream America—a middle-class domestic Catholicism on par with the woman-centered domesticity of Protestantism.

In this way, Marjorie Howes argues that Sadlier creates a “new kind of popular, Christian, secular culture” committed to helping Catholic Irish America “go public” (147). Indeed, Sadlier’s novels, particularly as they enter into the public sphere that includes both a Protestant and Catholic readership, allow a public forum for Catholics, but on their own terms.

Sadlier does not imagine a new “Christian” culture that includes both Catholics and Protestants, but rather an American culture that can accommodate separate cultural communities, wherein Catholics engage in a culture that differs from that produced by Protestant ideology. Sadlier’s novels suggest there must be a middle-class Catholic culture to function as the bulwark of an American Catholic community. In constructing this middle-class culture, Sadlier challenges the female-centered domestic sentimentality of Protestantism in two key ways: first, she challenges the common school, championing a separate Catholic school system funded by the state; second, she re-envision a Catholic novel that centers the Church as the heart of sentimental affection. In imagining this new middle-class culture, she borrows the norms of disciplinary intimacy—the school, the home, and the novel itself—and transforms their roles to reflect Catholic theology.

Catholics cannot simply enter Protestant culture or submit to its modes of moral inculcation because its soteriology is radically different from Catholic belief. In classical Protestant soteriology, embodied in the teachings of Martin Luther, justification, God’s act of making sinners righteous before God, is a singular act that occurs through the works of Jesus and is extended to all believers through God’s gift of grace. In the mid-nineteenth century, the belief that the individual’s salvation rests entirely upon a personal act of faith in response to God’s divine love becomes the central tenet of American pan-Protestantism. This salvation is intensely personal and intensely interior, because the individual before God can do nothing to assure salvation except receive God’s grace. Catholic soteriology rejects the premise that faith alone can assure salvation, because humanity needs to be continually infused with God’s grace, which can only be achieved through the Church’s sacraments. In the Catholic framework, justification occurs twice, first at baptism and again at the final judgment. While justification is distinct from sanctification, they are bound to one another. Salvation can only be achieved through both faith

and works, through the Church and her sacraments. Thus, Sadlier's novels resist the radical interiority of disciplinary intimacy, which rests upon an intensely individual inculcation of authority that echoes the primary moment of personal salvation for Protestants.

The Blakes and the Flanagans rejects the pan-Protestant Christian culture developed by the common school movement and, in doing so, establishes Sadlier's larger vision for a Catholic middle class that functions independently from, but still participates in, American culture. The novel presents the didactic tale of two families' lives across several decades. The families of Tim Flanagan and Miles Blake represent two possible paths for the Irish in America. Sadlier describes Flanagan and his wife as devoted Catholics just as they were in "Holy Ireland," living a middle-class life rooted in the parish and the Irish-American community: "they knew little, and cared less, about the various new-fangled systems of religion; they were good, old-fashioned Catholics, as their fathers were before them, and their chief ambition was to bring up their children in the same faith" (2). Miles Blake and his wife, who is Tim's sister, are more lax in their dedication to Catholic practices. Marking this primary difference in the centrality of religious devotion, the Flanagans insist on sending all of their children to Catholic schools, while the Blakes send their children, Henry and Eliza, to a New York City ward school. The novel follows the families through the children's growth into adulthood, and the consequences of this central choice condemn the Blakes and their progeny, while the Flangans flourish.

Sadlier sets the novel almost entirely within the sphere of the middle class. Both the Blakes and the Flanagans are in a "position of ease and comfort" (2). Tim Flanagan is a leather-dresser who owns his own shop, and he passes the family business onto his sons. Miles Blake's work is left unspecified, but the main focus of his life is "Business! Business!" (3). His material circumstances suggest that he is financially more comfortable than his brother-in-law. While the

men in both families work at a skilled trade or business, the women work within their own homes. Despite living in New York City circa 1830, both families live in large, multiple-story homes, rather than smaller apartments. They are free from financial considerations aside from passing on their businesses, but are always quick to aid the poorer members of the Irish parish. Sadlier's depiction of this Irish middle-class community stands in stark contrast to the realities of Irish-American experience at mid-century. In 1855, the Irish were overwhelmingly more likely than other European immigrants to work in unskilled trades (Roediger 145). During the 1840s and 1850s, Irish immigrants were one of the few groups that sent single women to America alone, with the goal of earning money to send back to their families in Ireland (Glenn 48). This pattern of emigration created a generation of unmarried young women an ocean away from an immediate family, thereby propelling Irish women to take on the domestic service work scorned by other ethnic groups and the middle classes.¹² As a result, by 1850, three out of four domestic servants in New York City were Irish (Roediger 146).¹³ Yet the circumstances of both the Blakes and the Flanagans parallel the Protestant middle class. This contrast between the middle-class life that Sadlier imagines and the historical conditions of Irish life in New York City during the 1850s suggests that Sadlier's novels help to construct the very middle class that she depicts, thereby creating the very possibility of her own readers.

If Sadlier's novel argues the necessity of a specifically Catholic middle-class American culture, it is predicated on the creation of an American Catholic literary culture. Orestes Brownson, Catholic convert and ex-transcendentalist, in the mid-nineteenth century, called for a

¹² See Hasia R. Diner, chapter 3.

¹³ Sadlier's *Bessy Conway, or an Irish Girl in America* (1861) depicts the life of a devout Irish house servant in America and suggests her wariness of the practice of sending young women to America without the protection of fathers or brothers.

Catholic literature that would “amuse, interest, instruct, cultivate in accordance with truth the mind and the affections, elevate the tone of the community, and when they did not directly promote virtue, they would still be powerful to preserve and defend innocence, often a primary duty” (quoted in Howes 146). As the rise of the novel coincided with the rise of the middle class, the act of novel-reading became, by mid-century, a predominantly middle-class pastime. As McDannell explains, “the cultivation of the individual was determined by novelists, ministers, and advice literature of the secular world” (*Christian Home* 153), and Sadlier’s novels seek to establish a Catholic individual with access to the same type of interiority as Protestant subjects. The very act of writing novels meant for middle-class consumption is an act of construction of that Irish-American middle-class that is the subject of her novels.

Like many of her Protestant peers, Sadlier remains ambivalent about the power of the novel, particularly as it relies upon sentiment. In her preface to the 1856 reprinting of *The Blakes and the Flanagans* as a complete book, Sadlier proclaims, “I do not profess to write novels—I cannot afford to waste time pandering merely to the imagination, or fostering that maudlin sentimentality, which is the ruin of our youth both male and female. No conscientious Catholic can write a story wherein the interest depends on the workings of passion” (*The Blakes and the Flanagans* v-vi). Sadlier’s rejection of the novel form uses the same logic that underlies her ambivalence toward disciplinary intimacy. The passions are too easily manipulated, too misleading, particularly when they are shaped by a larger cultural matrix that misappropriates emotion and misrepresents “right feeling” that is actually opposed to Catholic ideology. At the same time, however, Sadlier depicts the popular Catholic novel as essential to the establishment of a middle-class Catholic culture that rivals Protestant culture.

The Common School and the Problem of Disciplinary Intimacy

Sadlier's novels subvert Protestant elements of the sentimental narrative, troubling the private structure of sentimental education along with the power of secular authority. Tompkins claims that "In sentimental fiction, the vocation to be mastered is Christian salvation, which, translated into social terms, means learning to submit to authorities society has placed over you" (176-177). The mentor administers this authority through and as love, and the sentimental heroine learns to sublimate her own desires into a greater authority. The mentor becomes the means through which the sentimental heroine learns to turn in complete submission to Christ. In Catholic ideology, complete submission to Christ can only be accomplished through complete submission to the Church, and in American culture (unlike the Irish culture that Sadlier depicts), submission to the Church is often at odds with submission to worldly authority. Thus, while submission is necessary for salvation in Sadlier's novel, that submission must be uniquely Catholic. The individual must dedicate herself to the Church, to God's voice on Earth, by adhering to the commandments of the clerical hierarchy and to the centrality of the Church's sacraments. For Sadlier and her contemporaries fighting against the institution of a single common school system, submission to the disciplinary structures of American culture could constitute heresy because those structures promote Protestant ideology.

The Blakes and the Flanagans overtly challenges the development of the common school system at a time when Catholic leaders were fighting for government funding for parochial schools as an alternative to the Protestant "secular" school system. For Sadlier, the common school system becomes the symbol of an entire culture that opposes Catholic faith and morality. In modeling the public school's pedagogical practice on the middle-class home, the schools attempted to create a universalized faith that directly challenged Catholic religious beliefs,

making them the embodiment of Protestant culture that Sadlier so feared. Within the broader common school debate, texts and the act of reading became the focus of Catholic anxieties about Protestant indoctrination in the public schools. The King James Bible was only one point of contention. Catholic children were forced to use textbooks, particularly histories, that were not simply Protestant in sympathy, but often directly attacked Catholics. Throughout the 1840s, Archbishop Hughes attacked the Public School Society for using schoolbooks that used the term “Popery” rather than Catholicism, an anti-Catholic descriptor that suggests slavish adherence to the Vatican as the central tenet of the faith (Lannie 103). He also directly challenged histories that depicted Catholics as villains, particularly in their treatments of the Reformation, and the “non-sectarian” religious instruction that relied upon Biblical interpretation. Sadlier’s novel depicts anxiety that Catholic children could not withstand the barrage of anti-Catholicism, particularly when located in the authority of the teacher.

Sadlier’s depictions of the Blake children’s gradual turn from Irish Catholic culture figure the subtle machinations of love and texts as far more dangerous to Catholic youth than physical blows. As a young boy, Henry Blake continuously finds himself in fights with the boys in his class who call him a “Papist” and insult his Irish heritage. While Mr. Blake applauds Henry’s violence because the very act of defending his religion teaches him its value, Sadlier suggests that the physical fight is futile. The Protestant infliction of suffering on his body does not “bear fruit.” It neither reinforces nor challenges his Catholic faith. The physical punishment at the hands of his peers further entrenches Henry in his identification as an Irish Catholic, even as it fails to affect his moral or religious development.¹⁴ Only when he identifies with his peers, who

¹⁴ Sadlier’s position prefigures a central incident in the common school debate. In 1859, a central decision that codified the permissibility of pan-Protestant religious instruction in public schools resulted from assault charges brought against a Boston school teacher by a Catholic family. In a classroom where the majority of the students

are all Protestant at the common school, and internalizes the authority of his Protestant teacher does he begin to resent his religion and his heritage. His teacher, Mr. Simpson, has a deep anti-Catholicism that lurks behind his pedagogical strategies. Mr. Simpson insists that Catholics are not worth the maltreatment the other boys foist upon Henry Blake, enabling him to erode Henry's belief in the importance of his faith. Rather than critiquing Catholicism directly, Mr. Simpson challenges Henry's desire to identify with a particular religion at all. In the public school, all religions are welcome, so marking one as different from, much less superior to, another is unnecessary.

Sadlier's critique of Mr. Simpson is also a challenge to Mann's "religion of heaven": any institution that claims to encompass all religions must have no religion. Mr. Simpson's systematic use of shame erodes Henry's faith. Losing his place at the front of the class for missing school on Saint Patrick's Day marks the beginning of Henry's turn away from his parents—their national pride and religion—and his turn toward Protestant culture and corruption. He begins to resent being Irish and Catholic. While the violence of his peers, akin to the whip, cannot turn Henry towards Protestantism, the desire to belong to the common school community and to receive approbation from that community's authority turns his heart from Catholicism. The physical blows that school reformers fought against, then, are not the greatest danger to Catholic children. Rather, the affective authority of Protestant figures, in this case relying on shame, has the power to turn Catholic children away from the Church.

Sadlier's indictment of the public school system's use of internalized authority is stronger in the case of Eliza Blake, who falls from her youthful piety due to her interactions with a

were Catholics, the student Tom Wall refused to recite the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments, after the local parish priest had told the boys not to participate. When he refused, he was beaten severely by his teacher. For local Catholics, Tom Wall became a hero, but the ensuing lawsuit ultimately legalized the forced participation of Catholic children in Protestant religious instruction.

beloved schoolmistress. Through Eliza, Sadlier contends that while violence may not cause much harm to Catholic boys, the power of affective bonds can lead a child astray. Eliza attends Miss Davison's class at the common school, which embodies an ideal of discipline through love. One day Eliza returns home with a "reward for good conduct" from Miss Davison, *The Beauties of History*, a history that depicts the type of anti-Catholicism Hughes challenged in schoolbooks. The book "was descriptive of the blessed effects of the Reformation, the greatness and glory of those who figured in it, especially Luther, Calvin, and Queen Elizabeth; the hideousness and deformity of Popery as a system, its demoralizing influence on the human mind; its determined hostility to education, and consequently, to civilization; the abominations of the monastic communities, etc. etc." (39). Yet Eliza only understands the "beautiful pictures" that fill the small book with gilt edges, while the book itself represents the anti-Catholicism of Protestant books more broadly. *The Beauties of History* represents not just the anti-Catholicism of the textbooks used in public schools, but the anti-Catholic nature of Protestant, and therefore American, ideology. This prize, then, acts as a subtle instrument of indoctrination in two ways: it reinforces the bonds between teacher and pupil, and it imparts an implicit anti-Catholicism that comes with the teacher's and the school's authority. Sadlier contends that even the history taught to American children builds an identification through the rejection of Catholicism and Catholics.

The book is not simply an example of the type of anti-Catholic sentiment Irish children might confront in schoolbooks; it is a gift from a beloved teacher, a premium that bestows along with it a sense of approval that leads the student to internalize the values of the book, and accordingly the teacher, in order to earn the approbation that the premium represents. The incident with the premium transforms Eliza far more than the beatings that Henry receives affect him. After Mr. Blake tells Miss Davison that Eliza cannot receive any more premiums for her

behavior, Eliza is ashamed and dejected, embarrassed in front of classmates and her beloved teacher. Eliza decides that she has no reason not to accept the premium, and she tells a classmate, who in turn tells Miss Davison, that she will graciously accept all future awards. As a result, Eliza finds herself “a greater favorite than ever” with her own seat at the teacher’s desk. She resolved that she would not “lose Miss Davison’s friendship, but it depended on herself to keep it, and keep it she would at all hazards” (52). Miss Davison, then, functions as an outward manifestation of love, and Eliza resolves to devote herself to Miss Davison’s teaching. Rather than working in concert with the authority of her parents as an extension of middle-class values, as Brodhead describes the role of the school in disciplinary intimacy, the ward school opposes her parents’ values. Eliza chooses between the values of her parents and the values of her teacher, who represents an abstract authority at odds with parental authority. While her parents hold her devotion to the Church as a central point of Eliza’s moral development, Miss Davison believes that Eliza must ultimately reject the Church, and thereby her parents, in order to develop an individual morality. Within the framework of disciplinary intimacy, then, Miss Davison represents a moral paradox, wherein the moral action is the rejection of one type of authority and the internalization of another. Between the representations of Harry and Eliza Blake, Sadlier’s ambivalence toward the structures of disciplinary intimacy within the school begin to emerge. The author sees such bonds with authority figures as a tool used by Protestant culture to lure Catholic children away from the faith of their parents.

The establishment of an internalized authority through disciplinary intimacy only works, Sadlier’s novel contends, if all authorities share the same values. American middle-class culture imperils the children of Catholic immigrants precisely because the Protestant culture opposes the authority of the Catholic parent, and more openly the authority of the priest. Sadlier’s novels

suggest that the Catholic child should internalize the teachings and authority of the Church, embodied in the parish priest. In his 1856 review of *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, Brownson stated the fundamental cultural difference for immigrant Catholics: “Let a child grow up wild in Ireland and he will still grow up a Catholic, for the tone of society, the very atmosphere of the country is Catholic; but neglect a child here, and he is equally sure to grow up a Protestant or an unbeliever.”

Thus, the novel rejects the common schools as dangerous because they ultimately lead to the failure of moral development inherent in American culture. By comparing Henry Blake and the minor character Hugh Dillon, Sadlier attacks two mid-century stereotypes of the Irish, and, far from denouncing them, suggests that they are products of mainstream American culture’s failure, and Mann’s pan-Protestant moral education’s failure, to produce good citizens. While Henry Blake embodies the immorality and corruption of Tammany Hall, Dillon marks the depravity of the Irish that empowers the men of Tammany Hall. Dillon is part of the larger group that Blake relies upon to elect him, as the novel explains: “Many and many a Hugh Dillon was turned out on society from the classes of the Public Schools, and not a few of their Henry T. Blakes mounted to fame and honour on the ruins of those religious principles instilled into them in childhood by Catholic mothers” (247). The dichotomy between Hugh Dillon and Henry Blake represents the two trajectories of the public school system—one becomes a member of a working-class gang and the other a wealthy politician, but both embrace the Nativist rejection of Catholicism and immigrant culture.

The novel thereby portrays the failure of the public school in the development of an American citizenry primarily through Henry Blake. Henry’s affiliations with New York’s Protestant elite that he began in the common school system lead him first to Columbia University

and finally into politics. Through Henry, the novel indicts the American electoral system as an exploitation of nationalist sentiments rather than the fulfillment of American patriotism. Henry Blake, despite his growing disdain for the Irish-American population, hitches his political career to the Repealers, a group that supported the campaign of Daniel O'Connell for the repeal of the Act of Union 1801 and the re-creation of the Kingdom of Ireland and Parliament of Ireland. In a rousing speech, Blake appeals to the Irish-American crowd as a child of Ireland, declaring his deep love for Ireland and swearing to battle for it. He whips the crowd into a frenzy with his sentimental declarations of love for Ireland and Catholicism. Upon leaving with his Anglo-Protestant friend, both men laugh at the gullibility of the Irish, declaring his statement a "capital farce." Blake's service to the nation is rooted not in a genuine sense of affiliation with the Irish or even an American nationalism, but rather in his own ambition. He relies on the manipulation of sentiment to solidify his own power, finally suggesting the very danger of sentimentality: for family, Church, or nation, sentiment can be manipulated by those in power. Blake's rejection of Catholicism, all in the name of democratic freedom and the Republic, illustrates the ultimate failure of the public school system to create moral individuals, and thereby, good citizens.

Despite his parents' attempts to raise him as a Catholic through the ward schools, Henry Blake becomes the corrupt Irish politician, with no moral compass and no genuine emotional affiliations. Just as the schools fail to inculcate norms of proper morality, so too do his parents fail in teaching him appropriate Catholic religiosity. Blake's rejection of clerical authority, foreshadowed in his adolescent rejection of the parish priest, comes to a head in an 1841 debate about the school question within the novel. As Archbishop John Hughes calls for a separate common school system, Henry represents himself as an example of the successful development of a Catholic American citizen from the public school system. In doing so, he voices the

nationalist sentiments of his Protestant counterparts, arguing that the public school is necessary for “the well-being and prosperity of the Republic,” and assigning un-American bigotry to any, including the Archbishop, who insist on the segregation of common schools.¹⁵ His failure to internalize moral behavior comes from his urge to adopt religious sentiment that would be seen as appropriate by his Protestant colleagues. As Mr. Flanagan predicted, the public schools’ attempts to incorporate all religions ends with “no religion.”

Lest readers mistakenly believe that the Blakes’ failure to inculcate Catholicism in their home uncommon, Sadlier relays Hugh Dillon’s story as a stern warning to parents who might not fear religious failure when coupled with material success. Dillon, whose parents are good Irishmen and devoted Catholics, attends public school with Henry Blake. While Henry fought to defend his faith as a child, Dillon had already accepted the Protestantism of his peers. Sadlier describes the adult Dillon as “a ‘loafer,’ the meanest and most worthless of human beings” (181). His depravity, made worse by drunkenness, begins when he accosts the Sheridan family on the street. He and his colleagues make lewd comments to an adolescent daughter, following the family all the way to the door. The specter of rape hangs over the scene, and only the older Sheridan boy’s violent defense of his family protects the Sheridan women. Dillon’s debauchery includes not just his drunkenness and participation in the street gangs of Five Points, but also his disregard for proper Catholic womanhood. His attack on virtuous women marks a disavowal of Catholic respect for the maternal figure. Just as Henry Blake becomes a danger to the nation

¹⁵ The attack on Archbishop Hughes marks Blake’s fall not only because it solidifies his rejection of the Church’s power, but also because it marks his affiliation with American Nativism. *The Blakes and the Flanagans* is acutely aware of Nativism, setting the novel “[a]bout twenty-five years ago, then, before Nativism had developed itself into Know Nothing-ism” (2). Nativists targeted Hughes as a symbol of Irish Catholic power because he was the first non-native born Archbishop in America. In 1854, just prior to Sadlier’s publication of this novel, Orvilla S. Belisle published *The Archbishop, or Romanism in America*, an anti-Catholic novel that applied the tropes of the convent escape narrative in an attack on Hughes. (Griffin “Women, Anti-Catholicism, and Narrative”)

through his political action, Dillon's danger to womanhood, to the family, marks a danger to the future of the nation as a whole.

Sadlier describes Dillon as one of the "b'hoys," suggesting a meaning far more specific than the Irish supporters of Tammany Hall. Here, she rhetorically connects Dillon to Nativist ideology through her allusion to the Bowery Boys.¹⁶ In her depiction of a whole generation of Irish-American youth through Dillon and his gang, Sadlier suggests that the corruption of Irish children into "Bowery B'hoys" is akin to the destruction of Irish, Catholic culture aimed at by the Nativist Bowery Boys. Lest readers assume that Dillon represents something far worse than Blake's semblance of upper middle-class respectability, Sadlier aligns Henry Blake with Dillon, contending that the corruption of Tammany Hall is equally predicated on a rejection of Irish and Catholic culture. Dillon himself draws the direct comparison between himself and Blake. After Blake's speech to the "b'hoys" at Tammany Hall, he chases after Blake (253). He wants to congratulate him, to invite him to a tavern, but Blake repudiates him. Dillon points out that they are not so different because Blake, after all, is virtually Protestant and has repudiated his own Irish heritage and Catholic faith, even more so than Dillon has.

Moreover, Sadlier presents Dillon's disavowal of parental authority as a warning to Catholic parents. Even good Irish parents cannot necessarily save their children from American culture without participating in the broader Catholic community, specifically the Catholic schools. His father's death marks the depth of Dillon's fall and also the extent of worldly suffering that even good Irish parents endure when their children are led astray from the faith. Dillon refuses to go to his father's bedside upon his death, arriving only for the funeral. He will

¹⁶ As Roedigger notes, the term "b'hoy" was street slang meant to echo the Irish pronunciation of "boy." The "b'hoys" came to evoke the working-class Irish youth who defined themselves through play, and as Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace note, "the Bowery was their bastion" (753).

not follow his father's hearse to the Catholic cemetery since he does not want to see his father buried in "Popish grounds." Dillon dies after being shot at by Germans protecting their saloon, without family, without repentance, without remorse (261). While the reader is not asked to mourn the loss of Dillon, the novel forces readers to participate in the suffering of Dillon's mother, whose great pain is that her son is lost not only on earth, but in eternal life.

Through her depictions of the ward schools' failures, Sadlier warns Catholic parents that they must not only act inside the home as inculcators of Catholic values and norms, but must also ensure that the child participates in a greater Catholic community. The parent, particularly the mother who is the source of education through love, has power to shape the child, but must recruit the whole community to ensure good Catholics and good Americans. Thus, Sadlier lays a good deal of the blame for moral failings of the child on the failure of the mother. In Sadlier's novel, the Irish mother is always a good, devout Catholic with an innate sense of what is right for her children. Mrs. Blake continually has second thoughts about the ward schools, but she ultimately refuses to speak to her husband about sending her children to Catholic schools. Like the women in mainstream sentimental novels, she holds sway within her home, but she fails to use her power when it is most necessary. Rather than challenging her husband's belief in the ward schools and his refusal to believe the counsel of the parish priest, she mistakenly submits to her husband's decisions. For Sadlier, the real power of the household lies in a woman's love, which is the Church's love, but it must be shored up by participation in a larger Catholic community outside the home.

Catholic Sentimental Education

Within the context of the common school issue, sentimental novelists and common school reformers alike recode the issue of internalized morality as a national crisis. As David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot explain, “Just as Protestants located salvation in the individual’s relationship with God, most school reformers saw good citizenship as individual righteousness” (21). To Protestant reformers, Catholics posed a danger to the Protestant Republic because they can never embrace the foundation of democracy—“free choice.” Obedience to the laws of man established outside the nation, the Protestant understanding of obedience to the Church, is antithetical to democracy. The “free-born” American must be able to choose freely, and the limits of obedience apart from personal conscience render the Catholic incapable of full participation in democracy. Sadlier challenges the Protestant belief that submission to Church takes the element of choice away from Catholic citizens, making them incapable of moral agency, and also, by virtue of this failure, poor citizens. While ambivalent about the tropes of sentimentality, because she understands them as part of Protestant structures of power, Sadlier suggests that Catholic figures, trained through a particular type of love, can become moral individuals by internalizing devotion to the Church first, then family and nation. The commitment to community, rather than to individual moral choices, becomes the center of Catholic moral teaching. In depicting a moral structure that relies on dedication to the community rather than individual moral transformation, Sadlier challenges the idea that those outside normative Protestant belief systems cannot cultivate individual, moral selves, and therefore, cannot be “free citizens” of the nation that contribute to the American state and culture.

Sadlier's novels suggest that the Church need not rely upon blind obedience because good Catholics adhere to the Church's teaching out of duty and respect, rather than obedience and fear, or even on individual conscience. While Sadlier's novels seem to challenge the ability of internalized sentiment to produce moral agents, Sadlier still embraces the power of affect within the auspices of the Church. Both the Catholic schools and the Church itself ultimately function through love. The Church hierarchy, represented by the local parish priest Fr. Power and by Archbishop Hughes, to whom Sadlier insists good Catholics must submit, is loathe to rely upon commands to shape moral behavior. Challenging the Nativist depiction of an authoritative Church hierarchy that gives orders that its adherents must blindly follow, the Blakes and the Flanagans' parish priest attempts to shepherd his parishioners through reason and love. Thus, he is unwilling to command Miles Blake, or those like him, to send their children to Catholic school. As Mr. Flanagan describes one conversation with Miles Blake, Father Power "said enough to make him ashamed of himself, if he had any shame *in* him" (37). The language here suggests Fr. Power relies upon affect in his dealings with Miles Blake, but fails precisely because the authority of dominant American culture has inculcated opposing values. Yet Blake, in this instance, is incapable of right feeling. He feels no shame because he has been trained by the authority of the state to believe that the common school produces better citizens.

Sadlier's larger project of novel writing argues that the authority of the Church produces not just good Catholics who perpetuate the faith, but also good Americans. If Henry Blake manifests the dangers to the Republic of a public school education, Edward Flanagan marks how a good Catholic education produces good American citizens. The novel first describes the Catholic school in terms of its national production: "Many and many a valued citizen did [St. Peter's School] bring forth for the state" (7). Miles Blake's primary argument against Catholic

education is that Catholic schools are too parochial, in both senses of the word, to make productive men. Yet, Edward's father locates his education first and foremost in the world of business:

He had got a good solid mercantile education, 'and that is all he wants,' said his father; 'he knows quite enough to work his way decently through the world, and I have no fear but he'll do that, with God's help. He's smart and active, writes a first-rate hand, and is able to keep a set of books for any house in the city. He knows grammar and geography, Mr. Lanigan tells me, as well as any boy *can* know them, and, what's best of all, he knows his duty to God and the world; so I'm not much afraid but he'll do well.' (112-3)

Despite the primacy of practical (and capitalist) knowledge, the passage taken as a whole implies that the primary mode of education for schools, whether public or private, is moral instruction. For Mr. Flanagan, the moral education of Catholics makes them both good businessmen and good citizens. An essential aspect of this moral value is religious instruction, and the sense of duty that comes from it trumps all other forms of education.

Sadlier negotiates this duty, derived from obedience to the Church, and the "free choice" of democratic citizenship by centering the prohibition against eating flesh on Fridays. Both the Blake children begin to eat meat on Fridays, against the dictates of the Church. Henry Blake's "stomach lost its Catholic tone at old Columbia, and has never since recovered" (301). Blake not only suggests that he simply became unable to survive on fish for a day, but also that he disavows the Church's teaching. To "lose his Catholic stomach" was to lose his stomach for

Catholicism, and this loss is finally achieved at a secular institution of higher learning.¹⁷ Eliza, who clung to the formalities of Church rituals long after she had abandoned her faith, does not begin to eat meat on Fridays until her honeymoon. Upon return from their honeymoon trip, her husband Zachary tells stories of Eliza's difficulties resulting from refusing meat on Friday, which ultimately lead him to demand that she eat meat (290). For both Eliza and Henry, the presence of Protestants ultimately convinces them that the abstention from meat is not a moral issue.

Through the question of eating meat on Fridays, Sadlier's novel engages the difficult problem of how Catholics can be moral agents and, therefore, good citizens: how do they make their own behavioral choices at the same time that they adhere to the will of the Church? Abstention from meat on Fridays becomes the crux of moral education in Sadlier's novel not only because it is a mark of Catholicity, but also because it is an act that originates entirely in obedience to the Church. Unlike other points of conscience, wherein the individual can internalize the moral code of the authority and reach individual moral conclusions based on those premises, there is nothing inherently abhorrent about eating meat on Fridays. As Edward Flanagan points out to the Protestant Mr. Thompson and Mr. Pearson after they have attended mass, dietary law cannot be understood strictly as a matter of conscience. If conscience is internalized, as Mr. Pearson describes it, "the voice of God speaking within us, teaching us to do

¹⁷ Sadlier explicitly acknowledges the 1841 founding of St. John's College (now Fordham University) in the Bronx as one of John Hughes' great achievements as archbishop. The Flanagans are ecstatic that their Catholic boys no longer have to travel upstate to get a Catholic university education. Sadlier's indictment of Columbia prefigures the debate over "Catholic lambs eating ivy" that takes hold in the twentieth century. Increasingly, American Catholics develop an anxiety about the state of Catholic higher education, which was seen as lacking the intellectual rigor of the secular Ivy league. In response to the debate, the Catholic Church worked to create their own elite institutions, which helped to reshape the intellectual mission of universities like Notre Dame.

good and shun evil,” then why do different religions follow different laws, and how can it address issues of diet?

Edward Flanagan, yet again, stands as a counterexample to Henry and Eliza, this time to the “weak stomachs” that mark their vague Catholicity. At a dinner party with the Blakes, Edward alone represents the Flanagans, the devoutly Catholic son whose religious resolve is strong enough that he can be trusted in the company of Protestants. He dines with a Baptist minister, a generically Protestant minister, the young Blakes, the Thompsons, and Henry’s Protestant friends from school days. On a Friday night, Edward, in accordance with doctrine, dines on fish rather than meat. When Tompkins, the Protestant minister challenges Edward’s choice to eat salmon, he responds, “I do so, sir, because the Church commands me to do so—that is quite enough for you to know, or for me to tell” (299). Edward’s response acknowledges the centrality of the Church’s provisions in private decisions, while refusing to justify Her commands to the hostile audience. Instead, Edward refers the minister to the Catechism:

We Catholics are not accustomed, sir, to put forth any views on a point of church discipline. We believe and practice, but never presume to discuss the wise teachings of the Church. Abstaining from meat on such an occasion as the present, I consider as a public profession of my faith, and I would, therefore, deem it an act of cowardice to shrink from making that profession here or elsewhere. Where the commandments of the Church are in question, a Catholic knows no distinction as to time, or place, or company. (300)

As Edward’s response illustrates, the Catholic has limits of interiorized religious sentiment based on the limits of Church teaching. Church teaching cannot simply be a matter of personal conscience, between the individual and God. To be Catholic is to be a part of a community, and

to practice the rituals of the Church is to participate in the Catholic community. Even if the individual fails to understand the teachings of the Church, the devout must abide by them because that is what defines Catholicity. Thus, the question of eating meat on Friday becomes, in Sadlier's writing, the issue that allows her to work out the relationship between internalized moral authority, the Catholic community, and democratic choice.

Sadlier insists that to abide by the laws of the Church is still a choice and, therefore, a fundamentally American act insofar as it exercises the rights of the first amendment.¹⁸ Edward explains first and foremost that what he chooses to eat or not eat should matter little to the minister. Here, he adopts the language of the "free-born American" that Henry and his friends each profess to be. He chooses his faith and his behavior: the choices do not affect the others, so therefore, as Americans, they should leave him to enjoy his rights to religious choice. He balances his freedom of choice with obedience to the Church, considering his own rights in relation to participation in a greater community. In choosing to adhere to the tenets of Catholicism, and framing this choice in terms of a Jeffersonian belief in the freedom to practice any faith, Edward becomes a marker of true American democracy grounded in civil rights. Edward's engagement with the larger Catholic-American community, particularly when contrasted with Henry Blake's manipulation of the same community, implies that duty to the community becomes the essential marker of good citizenship. In Sadlier's writing, commitment to the collective, to the Church and to the nation, is the heart of morality, rather than just individual choice.

¹⁸ See Fessenden for a discussion of Catholic dissent to the disestablishment reading of the first amendment, which interpreted the law to mean that the state could limit the rights of citizens according to religious practices so long as the state did not expressly establish a state religion. Catholics employed a Jeffersonian reading of the clause to challenge laws throughout the nineteenth century that barred Catholics and others from holding office.

The Catholic Novel and Sentimentality

While Sadlier fears the danger of sentiment in the moral education and reconceptualizes its role within the home, she relies upon it within the novel, even as she remains suspicious of it. “The workings of passion” that the novel plays upon are too unpredictable to be the root of religious and moral sentiment. For Catholics, religious devotion should be rooted not in emotion, but in reason. Sadlier not only disavows the form of the novel, but also repeatedly insists on the “truth” of the stories that she is telling. Through a series of footnotes, Sadlier reiterates the essential truth of her narratives, even if the tales are cobbled together in a fresh form. A footnote after the description of Hugh Dillon’s death says that Sadlier knows of a family whose son died under these exact circumstances. These footnotes, alongside references to popular Catholic texts and figures of the time, imply that Sadlier, in this early part of her career, saw her novels as capturing a spiritual reality, even as she acknowledges the novel genre’s limitations within religious education. To her thinking, then, her novels, then, do not foster “maudlin sentimentality” because they express spiritual truths if not literal truths.

Despite Sadlier’s consistent disavowal of the novel form, she not only continued to write novels until the turn of the century, but also implied they are an essential part of American middle-class culture. Sadlier comments on the Blake children’s reading habits, “They get no Christian instruction at school, and though their mother does all she can to make them read good books at home, they’re getting now that they won’t read them, do what she will. Novels are the whole go with them now” (110). While this passage opposes the novel to “good books” like Gobinet’s *Instructions for Youth in Christian Piety* (1741), novel reading is not a problem in and of itself; the novel becomes dangerous when it crowds out other forms of reading more suitable to Christian instruction. For good Catholics like the Flanagans, who read their Catechism in

school, and their hagiographies at night, the novel does not necessarily pose a threat because religious instruction has not been relegated solely to the domestic space. For Sadlier, then, the Catholic novel, so long as it exists alongside a Catholic home and a Catholic school, can form part of a new American Catholic middle-class culture.

The Blakes and the Flanagans aspires to be a new type of novel for an American Catholic readership because it relies on sentiment to inscribe the authority of the Holy Mother Church. Despite Sadlier's ambivalence toward sentimentality, Sadlier's novels borrow the affective tropes of more popular women's fiction to reiterate a specifically Catholic soteriology. Tompkins claims that the power of the sentimental is most strongly reinforced in the death of the innocent, often a child, in order to save the powerful. Within the mainstream sentimental novel, the death of the innocent functions as both an example of the good death and a re-enactment of the sacrifice of the crucifixion, wherein the powerless dies for the more powerful. This death carries the power to transform both the characters in the book and the readers of the novel. Thus, in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Little Eva's death can redeem the unregenerate Topsy, and the conversion is meant to be echoed in the heart of the reader. Political change begins with this conversion of heart through the alignment of sympathies. The personal transformation is analogous to the experience of religious conversion central to the Protestant conception of justification. The conversion alone, the change of heart in and of itself, is redemptive.

Catholic soteriology, however, rejects justification without sanctification, and Sadlier accordingly rejects the power of death to transform through love. Within a Catholic framework the death of a child, even if rooted in faith, does not necessarily bear the mark of salvation. As Sadlier's novel reiterates through a series of deaths, the death of the child cannot be unattended by the sacraments. Sadlier echoes importance of the sacraments, tying them to the tableau of the

dying child, even in her non-fiction. While the Pierre Collot translation relied upon the traditional catechismal form of question and answer, Sadlier harnessed the power of sentimentality in her *Catholic Anecdotes, or the Catechism in Examples* (1858).¹⁹ Sadlier's catechism breaks from the traditional form of the catechism, a question followed by an answer, and instead relies upon narrative to impart basic doctrinal positions. Her catechism echoes *The Blakes and the Flanagans* in its use of the child to convince the audience, likely mostly schoolchildren, of the importance of the sacraments. Several narratives follow the same basic form: a child, who is either a believer in his own right or the infant of devout Catholics, dies without baptism or extreme unction. Miraculously, the child is resurrected, for a short period of time, during which the child receives the sacrament necessary for salvation. The child then dies, but joy attends the death.

While Sadlier refuses to allow an infant to die without the sacraments in her catechism, she relies in her novel on the horror of infant damnation, contrasted with the "good death" of Susie Flanagan. Little Susie, the Flanagans' kindest and most devout daughter, dies after a protracted illness. On her deathbed, she is surrounded by family, including her newly ordained brother, who offers her both the Eucharist and the cleansing of Extreme Unction in her last moments. Her "good death" gains particular meaning only in contrast to another death of a child in the novel, that of Ebenezer Blake, Miles Blake's grandson through Henry. Although Henry Blake's Baptist wife has suggested she will convert to Catholicism, she refuses to do so after the

¹⁹ American Catholics at mid-century lacked a standard catechism. There was no standard catechism in the United States until 1885 when the Baltimore Catechism became the primary catechism used in the classroom. Prior to that time, a number of catechisms circulated according to region. Typically, American Catholics relied upon European catechisms. In 1829, the First Provincial Council of Baltimore declared the need for an American catechism, ultimately suggesting one based on the Small Catechism of Bellarmine. While a copy of Bellarmine's Catechism was published in 1853, Sadlier herself set about the task of writing and translating catechisms for use in Catholic Schools.¹⁹ That same year, the Canadian division of D. & J. Sadlier published an English-language version of Pierre Collot's *Doctrinal and Scriptural Catechism, or, Instructions on the Principal Truths in the Christian Religion*, translated by Mary Anne Sadlier.

wedding. Upon the birth of the first-born child, Mrs. Blake attempts to see to the baptism of the child, but Henry Blake's wife, as a Baptist who does not believe in child baptism, refuses. The child's death stands as an indictment of both the Blakes and the common school system. By sending Henry to the common school, the Blakes allowed him to internalize pan-Protestant values, chief among them, that there is no major difference between Christian sects. When he then marries a Baptist, it logically follows that she refuses infant baptism. The affective power of Ebenezer's death lies not in just the death of an innocent, but the infant's death without the sacraments. This child's soul is lost, entering the abyss of the unknown—what awaits him is, at best, limbo, and at worst, eternal damnation. In the 1860s, many Catholics likely believed in *limbus infantium*, or limbo of infants, a state beyond salvation and damnation, where unbaptized infants, who have not yet committed any sin but have not been cleansed of original sin, spend eternity. While the fate of unbaptized infants has been a point of contention in Catholic theology for centuries, limbo was neither a part of official Catholic doctrine nor a heresy. Yet *Catholic Anecdotes* makes no mention of limbo; in fact, it seems to imply that a child who dies without baptism is condemned. Thus, in her stories intended for school children, children are not permitted to die without baptism. Infants, too young to have the faith necessary for a baptism of desire are, on three occasions, resurrected from the dead only to be baptized. Sadlier could, then, rely on limbo as space outside of damnation for the Flanagans' progeny, but she leaves readers with the terror of the unknown.

Baptism and Extreme Unction, the sacraments that mark the beginning to a life in the Church and the end of life with the Church, become the most essential sacraments in this novel. Baptism is not the essential moment of Catholic life, but essential to the possibility of salvation. Without baptism, an individual, particularly an infant, has no hope of salvation. Ebenezer is

precluded from heaven, and Sadlier hangs the cost of his soul not on Henry Blake or his Baptist wife, but rather on Henry's mother. Mrs. Blake senses the importance of baptism, and just as she fails to convince her husband to send her children to Catholic schools, she fails to convince her son to baptize the infant. Even more so, she fails to act on her own, as she suggests that she should have stolen the child away for baptism or baptized him herself. Readers, then, are reminded of the terror of the unknown, and Sadlier relies upon this warning, rather than Susie's good death, to reach readers. The burden of the child's lost soul is ultimately left upon the mother, or in this case, the grandmother. In Sadlier's novel, while the father is the spiritual head of the household, the mother is the inculcator of values and norms, but in a fundamentally different way than in her Protestant counterparts. The mother becomes a worker for the Church itself. Mrs. Blake fails this ideal in putting her devotion to her husband over her commitment of the Church. Ultimately, the Catholic mother must work out of devotion to the faith, and the love that she channels to her children is that of the Mother Church. She loves her family by first and foremost loving the Church.

Similarly, *Catholic Anecdotes* reiterates identification with the mother's suffering. In "A Child Resuscitated to be Baptized," a Uzale woman's child died before he could be baptized. The sentimental power of his death does not lie in his actual death, but in his loss of eternal life. As in the case of Mrs. Dillon, the catechism focuses the readers on the mother's suffering: "his mother was overwhelmed with grief, still more for his being deprived of life eternal, than because he was dead to her" (719). The sentimental power lies in the Catholic mother's eternal loss. When he is suddenly restored to life, the mother quickly has him baptized and confirmed, and she does not lament his death "because she knew very well that he was not going into a cold sepulchre, but to dwell with the angels in heaven" (720). The sentimental power of this death

and resurrection lies in the hope of salvation. The transformative power that Sadlier places on death is not the power to convert, but to incite appropriate parental submission to the dictates of the Church. The authority of the parent must enforce the authority of the Church. The parental authority extends so far that Sadlier even suggests that any Catholic's failure to receive extreme unction at the time of death, even as an adult, is an "unpardonable fault in parents" who fail to call for the sacrament.

While Catholic parents can work through and as love, it must be as an embodiment of the Church's own love. Parental love on its own will fail in the face of an American culture at odds with Catholic values. Therefore, Sadlier imagines a structure of Catholic sentiment that endorses the importance of discipline through love while maintaining the importance of collective authority. If Ebenezer's death warns Catholic parents that the love they impart must be the love of the Church, Little Susie's death would seem to gain more power as an example of the good death. Much like the young child in American Tract Society stories that awaits her death with joy because it will mark her entrance into God's permanent presence, she awaits her death in peace. Unlike the child in the American Tract Society pamphlets or the sentimental novels Tompkins examines, the joy in her good death lies not in her faith in heaven alone, but in its circumstances. Her death is surrounded, both in time and space, by the sacraments. She has a private death at home, and she dies only after her older brother has been ordained and can attend to her last rites. Even as the scene of Susie's death hearkens to the sentimentality of little Eva's death, with the whole family gathered by her side, the emotional power of her death cannot convert anyone. Even this good death cannot transform the Catholic who has been corrupted by mainstream American culture. Henry Blake experiences a profound overflow of emotion at Susie's death bed. The joy and peace of her death attended by the sacraments promise to

transform Blake's heart, turning his love back toward the Church. But unlike Little Eva's death, Sadlier suggests that even the good death fails to convert, particularly in the face of American culture. Blake turns from the Church at the very moment that he is poised to embrace it, at the first hint of insult from his Protestant colleagues. The ability to transform, then, falls outside the capacity of the individual, even in the most powerful affective scene—the death of the innocent. The love of the Church must be instilled in childhood, and that love must be protected from the hostility of mainstream American culture, even if that hostility is manifested as love through Protestant structures of discipline—as in both the common schools and in the novel. Thus, while Sadlier envisions a specifically Catholic sentimentality that asks the believer to interiorize a love of the Church and her sacraments above all else, she also calls for a separate Catholic community within American culture—with its own schools, and its own literature—that reinforces those values.

The Novel, Sentimentality, and Catholic literature

While Sadlier was not the first American Catholic novelist, she was one of the first writers to cultivate a Catholic domesticity and embrace the tropes of sentimentality toward her own ends. As David S. Reynolds' *Faith in Fiction* suggests, Catholic novelists prior to 1850 were overwhelmingly men who wrote narratives of conversion, overlaying diatribes of Catholic doctrine onto conventional narratives. Sadlier's novels, particularly in her adoption and subversion of dominant sentimental tropes, transformed the American Catholic relation to fiction. Sadlier's novels became a large part of American Catholic cultural discourse, taken seriously by both the Catholic public and the American Catholic intellectual circles dominated by "native" Catholics.

Brownson was one such voice who became a dominant figure in American Catholic criticism in the latter half of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Despite his consistent commitment to the development of American Catholic arts and culture, Brownson never fully accepted the possibility of a truly Catholic novel, and it is his analysis that ultimately established the critical crises surrounding realism and sentimentality that characterized American Catholic literature. He described novels in much the same terms Sadlier does, as “vain reading” that no parents should allow their children to engage in. For Brownson, the Catholic novelist is caught in a crisis of representation. The religious novel, which attempts to address doctrine through fiction, will always fail, either in its literary merit or in its faithfulness to doctrine:

[T]he “novel of instruction,” as it is called, designed to set forth a particular doctrine, system, or theory, whether sacred or profane, in an artistic point of view, is in our judgment, always objectionable. The form of the novel is never proper in those works which are addressed specially to the understanding, and is allowable only in those designed rather to move and please than to enlighten and convince. (“Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading”)

The novel form, because it relies explicitly on sentimentality, cannot teach the spiritual truths of Catholicism, which can only be apprehended through reason and grace.²¹ Even the more tangible expressions of the divine, the commandments of the Mother Church, cannot be contained within literature, as Brownson’s critique of Sadlier’s novel suggests. Moreover, for Brownson, the novel itself carries a particular danger for women and feminized men whose sentiments are easily exploited by the form, leading readers to submit to the stronger emotional forces of

²⁰ For more on Brownson as a convert and critic, see Franchot, Ross Labrie, and James Emmett Ryan.

²¹ Brownson’s critique anticipates the 1898 encyclical *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, which condemns locating faith in personal experience rather than in the Church as part of the heresy of Americanism,

licentiousness and lust. The play of sentiment that Sadlier claims to disavow and yet relies upon is exactly what Brownson critiques in the novel form. The “maudlin sentimentality” of the form is incongruous with divine grace. In its attempts to convert readers, the novel’s play upon the sentiments inherently degrades the divine and, therefore, the Church. In Brownson’s view, then, there can be no literature that is wholly Catholic and at the same time appropriately literary, a view that ultimately grounds Catholic religious criticism through the first half of the twentieth century.

Brownson’s review of *The Blakes and the Flangans* suggests both how Sadlier’s novels were read by a contemporaneous Catholic audience and her role in the establishment of American Catholic fiction. Brownson’s review does not treat *The Blakes and the Flanagans* as a novel, echoing Sadlier’s profession in the introduction that it is not a novel. Rather, Brownson treats the novel as a text of religious instruction. Ultimately, Brownson claims that Sadlier has “not made her case” (Review 32). His review, then, functions not as a review of a literary work, but rather a response to a piece of Catholic thought. He claims that the reason Sadlier’s case fails is that she did not subject “both parties to the same home influences. . . . Her own good sense and correct observation got the better of her theory” (Review 32). His critique takes the characters as research subjects, rather than fictional representatives, and he subjects the novel to the standards of an experiment in the social sciences.

Brownson has major qualms about Sadlier’s depiction in the novel. First, he disavows her portrayal of nationalism and religion. Indeed, he suggests that she is incapable of understanding American Catholicism because she is a foreigner, a Canadian. Second, he argues that Sadlier mislocates the root of Catholic piety. He claims that Ned Flanagan, “with such a father and his judicious training,” could have attended public schools without any harm to his

faith. The source of Henry Blake's moral failure, then, is his father, who fails to protect his son's faith, and whose own religious devotion is rooted in "force of habit and a point of honor" rather than "any earnest conviction" (31). While Sadlier calls for a broader Catholic culture that can compete with mainstream culture, Brownson claims that "More depends on home and the family than on the school, and when parents are sufficiently interested and disposed themselves to train their children right at home, there is less danger than Mrs. Sadlier would have us believe in our public schools, bad as they are" (31). For Brownson, then, the Catholic school is not necessary when the family practices and instills appropriate piety.

Yet Brownson insists on the necessity of a separate Catholic school system, and a clear system of Catholic hierarchy, with priests, churches, and congregations because not all family practices can instill the devotion of the Church. He notes three classes of children that need the protection of the Catholic school because home education will fail them, but they can be distilled to two groups: orphans and the Irish. Of the latter, Brownson notes, "Their parents, where their parents are living, are in many cases too poor and too unacquainted with home education, to train them up, in this non-Catholic country, in their holy religion. All the life and energy of the parents are exhausted in efforts to obtain the bare necessities of physical existence" (Review 30). Here, then, Brownson adopts the same logic as Mann and the public school reformers. He practically names the Irish as he calls attention to America as a non-Catholic country, and he implies that these parents are incapable of instilling the love of the Church. Others, not so poor, are corrupted on arrival in this country, falling through poor examples in "intemperance" (Review 33). Ultimately, then, Brownson, in keeping with his roots in Protestantism and transcendentalism, locates moral and religious education in the home, as something that can be

internalized. Once the Catholic pupil has appropriately internalized devotion to the Church, no outside forces, through love or the whip, could corrupt her.

Despite his belief in the power of individual conscience, Brownson focuses on the collective power of Catholicism, yet he insists on a masculine form of discipline. He suggests that Catholics need to cultivate more Young Men's societies that can give Catholic men a sense that they can advance through their affiliations with the Church. More importantly, the Church should ask young Catholic men to mentor Catholic youth. It will "engage them in a spirit of Catholic work and develop in them a Catholic public spirit. They deepen their love of their religion, strengthen their attachment to the Catholic body, and secure them graces which enable them the more easily to resist the non-Catholic influences of the country" (Review 35). Here Brownson translates the formative power of disciplinary intimacy from the child to the authority figure. The affective bonds that the authority figure feels toward the child strengthen that person's love toward the Church and to the Catholic body. The actual relationship between the two figures is secondary to the relationship that it cultivates between the individual and the Church. Through these societies, then, young men can establish the same type of bond to the Church that Catholic women cultivate through motherhood.

While the dominant force in American literary culture argues against the feminizing influence of American culture, particularly embodied in the novel, Sadlier's deployment of sentimentality contributed to both a middle-class Catholic culture and a place for Catholic women within that culture. Her devotion to the novel form, even as Catholic leaders stood against it, and her move away from conversion narratives, established her as a foundational figure in both Catholic American literature and Irish American literature. As Sadlier's career developed, she wrote more catechisms and even plays, but she began to embrace the novel as its

own form. As early as 1861, she wrote *Bessy Conway, or An Irish Girl in America*, which expressly borrows the tropes of the British domestic novel, playing with the sensational and gothic elements of susceptible womanhood. As the Irish Catholic population increasingly established themselves within the middle class in America, Sadlier began writing about the experience of the Irish working class, challenging them to embrace the middle-class values that she espouses in her domestic fiction.

For Sadlier, as for many of her Protestant counterparts, the novel was always both religious and political. The novel, like the conversion, cannot exist on its own. It must exist within a larger framework of community, relying upon the teachings of the Church and buttressed by a Catholic community. It reiterates the work of the Church and the community. In Sadlier's novels, dominant culture, whether it works through love or the whip, inculcates Protestant norms. While Catholic parents can work through and as love, that love on its own will fail in the face of an American culture at odds with Catholic values. Therefore, Sadlier imagined a structure of Catholic discipline that adopts discipline through love while maintaining the importance of collective authority. In doing so, she established the need for the Catholic school, and created the Catholic sentimental novel that teaches through love. She presented the spiritual reality of America in order to turn hearts back to the Church. As she ends *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, she reiterates that the goal of the novel is not simply conversion, but salvation:

I have carefully avoided all exaggeration or undue colouring in this simple tale. I have merely strung together a number of such incidents as we see occurring every day in the world around us, growing out of the effects of good or bad education. If it be true—and I fear it is—that a large proportion of the children of Catholic parents are lost to the Church in America, it is altogether owing to the

unaccountable folly of the parents themselves in exposing their children to perish. Catholic parents who so act are more inhuman than the heathens of China and of Madagascar who destroy their helpless infants. They throw them to be eaten by dogs or swine, or expose them to the savage denizens of the forest, but what is the destruction of the body in comparison to that of the soul?" (386).

Mary Anne Sadlier's novels and Brownson's response raise key questions that American Catholic literary culture grapples with through the turn of the century, and that Catholic writers and we as literary critics must address as we think through the formation of American Catholic literary history. First, what is the role of the novel in American Catholic culture? Can the novel be Catholic, moving away from the focus on the individual as the site of transformation to a form that captures the sacramentality of the material world? Second, how can Catholics adapt the novel form, which in America developed alongside an undercurrent of anti-Catholicism and has long relied upon the privileging of the Romantic individual? How does the Catholic novel participate in American culture, reaching beyond the boundaries of a narrowly Catholic audience, without giving up its Catholicism in the name of assimilation?

CHAPTER 3
KATHLEEN NORRIS AND THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF CATHOLIC POPULAR
MODERNISM

In 1912, former President Theodore Roosevelt, in a treatise on women's suffrage and maternal duty, declared novelist Kathleen Thompson Norris's 1911 novella *Mother* "a charmingly told story: and therefore it is a most effective tract which should teach this profound and lofty truth to many, many people who cannot be reached by preacher or essayist" (Roosevelt 113). The "profound and lofty truth" to which Roosevelt refers is that the "highest type of woman of the future" would be the same as that of the present, with or without suffrage—a wife and mother who performs her duties with nobility. For Roosevelt, Norris's novel—about a young, modern woman who ultimately rebuffs her set's rejection of motherhood and embrace of birth control in favor of a home filled with happy children, much like that of her own mother—had the potential to halt "race suicide," the eradication of the white race as fewer and fewer Anglo-Saxon women bore large families. Roosevelt so believed that Norris's novel could reach a popular audience that he even insisted on stopping by the Norris house for dinner. This praise, for a novella developed out of a short story written for a 1910 *Collier's* magazine contest, established Norris's career.

Norris's work, now as it was in its own time, is upheld as moral popular fiction, guiding female readers in proper sexual choices with personal and political resonance. St. Michael's Press, one of a number of small Catholic presses reprinting Norris's works starting in the 1990s, presents her as a major figure in the pro-life movement, despite her death eight years before *Roe v. Wade*. Literary scholars have also seen Norris as a traditionalist in the age of modernism.

Scholars have recently examined the work of Kathleen Thompson Norris and her husband Charles Gilman Norris as examples of early-twentieth century popular fiction. Ann Douglas describes Norris in *Terrible Honesty* as "the most interesting novelist of feminine and matriarchal sentimentalist essentialism in the 1910s and 1920s; vastly popular, with a curious literary style that seems to owe a good deal to Henry James, she developed the themes that would dominate the soaps of early radio, aroused the ire (and perhaps envy) of Dorothy Parker, was adored by Alexander Wollcott (always a fan of the matriarch), and took care of Elinor Wylie's stepchildren (they were related by marriage); forgotten today, she is well worth in-depth study" (533). One of the highest earning novelists of the 1910s through the 1930s, Norris has not been recovered alongside other popular women writers of the era, like Edith Wharton, Edna Ferber, Anita Loos, Fannie Hurst, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher, because her work has been read as too romantic, too melodramatic, to warrant such a recovery. Norris's omission from studies of popular modernist literature has far more to do with her complex political allegiances, which become far more complicated when we examine Norris not just as a writer of popular women's fiction, but as a self-consciously American Catholic writer. Her positioning as a speaker on modern maternity—at the intersection of debates about birth control, race suicide, and religion—suggest the complexity of American Catholic writers' concerns when they more fully participate in American mass culture. Norris's own Catholic popular modernism—rooted in Catholic sexual mores while embracing a new modern sexuality—reached beyond the confines of a more narrow Catholic audience.

Literary scholarship focusing on Norris tends to read her in the tradition of the romance novel, placing her squarely within the sentimental tradition. The earliest scholarly treatment of Norris's work, by Frank Luther Mott (1947), dismisses it as sentimental, but sees its value as a

“good picture” of crowded family in the first decades of the twentieth century. More recent work, including Patricia Raub’s, describes Norris as a typical sentimental writer of the early twentieth century, yearning for a simpler femininity in an era of rapidly changing gender and sexual roles. Anne G. Balay argues that Norris “responds to and helps to create various modern discourses of maternity by deliberate recourse to nineteenth-century forms of femininity” (474); in doing so, Norris relies on “anachronistic rhetorics” of womanhood, maternity, and birth control in order to assert some control over rapidly changing conceptions of womanhood in the early twentieth century. Catherine Carter explores Norris as an early exemplar of the contemporary romance fiction, describing her as the Nora Roberts of her day.

Perhaps this focus on Norris as a sentimental writer is not surprising given the tradition of reading both women’s writing and religious writing within the sentimental tradition. Ann Douglas has argued that the sentimental tradition, which persists in mass culture, is yoked to the religious shifts of the nineteenth century. At the same time, she claims that the sentimental tradition, and mass culture itself, are functions of a feminizing impulse. She associates women with repressive Victorianism. As a writer grappling with issues of domesticity, clearly indebted to the sentimental tradition, Norris falls into the direct line from Victorian sentimentality to modern mass culture that Douglas so disdains. While Douglas argues that modernism was a “a symbolic act of matricide, a killing off of the Victorian mother, who came to represent everything culturally retrograde or dishonest, including moralism, a sentimental religion, sexual repression, and racism” (Francis xvii), scholarship on modern women’s writing and the inheritance of sentimentalism by scholars like Lauren Berlant and Dale M. Bauer suggest that Norris’s body of work fits within the bounds of modernity. Readings of Norris that place her work squarely in the realm of the nostalgic romance obfuscate the radical nature of the popular

conservatism embodied in her Catholic popular modernism. Throughout Norris's long career, she moves from yearning for a nostalgic femininity to developing a particular female sexuality as antidote to threatening, racialized desire that threatens the white race, and thereby, the nation.

While women's popular modernism differs from the high modernism of the era, it often explores the intensely modern issues surrounding the rise of the New Woman—including sexuality, maternity, birth control, and eugenics. Although not always embracing these new developments, Norris's popular modernism, like the masculine high modernism of T.S. Eliot, shows how modernism is shaped by the recovery of tradition. As T.J. Jackson Lears has argued, even high modernism is invested in the restoration of tradition, and much of this recovery was manifest in the return of high religious practices, as T.S. Eliot's turn to High Church Anglicanism or Claude McKay's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Norris's turn to tradition, however, stemmed from modern Catholicism. Norris evidences an intense struggle to relocate women's position within the period's sexual upheaval as well as the rise of Thomism in Catholic theology. Far from simply resurrecting traditional discourses surrounding femininity and maternity, Norris's novels attempt to reconcile modern sexuality with contemporaneous Catholic teaching, from embracing women's sexual pleasure as an essential component of Catholic marriage to exploring a eugenics amenable to Thomism.

While Norris is a moderately well-known, if under-read, writer of women's popular modernism, she is rarely considered within the catalogue of Catholic writers. Still, Catholicism shaped Norris's life and work, though non-Catholic readers might not have been aware of the extent of its influence. She was born Kathleen Thompson in 1880 in San Francisco to Catholic parents, and she describes a devout childhood: "We were raised in the Roman Catholic faith, and urged to pray away any tantrums, any revengeful fury, any panic" (*Family Gathering* 25). In

1909, Norris married Charles Gilman Norris, naturalist Frank Norris's brother and sometimes editor, although he was a practicing Protestant. With Norris, she had one son.¹ Norris first found literary fame with *Mother*, due in large part to Roosevelt's support. After the success of *Mother*, Norris quickly gained fame as a writer of popular romance fiction in women's magazines, as well as a prolific writer of essays on birth control and motherhood.² Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, her novels continued in the vein established by *Mother*—she wrote moral romances that explored threats to modern marriage and femininity. Norris's staunch opposition to birth control and advocacy of large families took a turn in the 1930s. While always a conservative and devoted Republican, in the mid-1930s, Norris began a political career that dovetailed with elements of the far Right. While historians have been wary of labeling Norris a supporter of fascism of the same ilk as her close friend Charles Lindbergh, Norris's personal political history exposes the complex relation between American Catholicism's positions on sexuality and the eugenics movement. Although Norris never entirely escaped her political past, she regained popularity in the 1950s and early 1960s because her novels captured nostalgia for a domestic ideal that returned with a vengeance in that era.

While her editors asked that she not inject Catholicism explicitly into her novels, Catholicism shapes their tenor. In one of the last interviews before her death, she explained that she followed one editor's advice to "Get a girl in all kinds of trouble and then get her out"

¹ Charles Gilman Norris apparently used his brother's novels to woo Kathleen Norris. After meeting Norris at a skating party, he came by her house, on the pretense of bringing her a copy of a novel by Frank Norris.

² Norris struggled with fertility herself in the years after *Mother* was published. She had been pregnant with twin girls when *Mother* was published, but they died quickly upon their birth. Norris briefly mentions this death in her autobiographies, writing of the "creeping terror" as she realized that her daughters had not survived. She ends this chapter by saying simply, "My daughters were gone. There never was to be another child" (*Family Gathering* 122). Her struggles with fertility do not necessarily shape her fiction, because her sense of womanhood was clearly defined by her motherhood, but it does explain why this advocate of the bountiful family had only one child of her own.

(Rexroth). The central caveat was that she had to “keep it clean.” Norris explained, “I didn’t need to be told that because it never occurred to me to write otherwise, with my Irish Catholic upbringing” (Rexroth). Catholicism is perhaps more obviously present in her short stories, particularly her Irish-in-New York tales, which follow in the Irish-American tradition established by Sadlier. Like those of Sadlier’s more direct literary heirs, these stories depict the struggles of Irish-American Catholic families in adapting to America culture.

In her novels, however, the Catholic influence is subtler. Her heroines find prayer essential for navigating marriage, and, as such, Norris depicts it as a part of everyday life, rather than a scene that she focuses on. Her approach to divorce marks her difference from writers rooted in the secular tradition. While divorce was often taboo in women’s fiction of the era, Norris establishes the problem of the divorced man. Catholic doctrine holds that divorce simply does not exist. Unlike in Protestantism, marriage is a sacrament. In very limited cases, marriages are invalid, and therefore not sacramental, but divorce is never recognized. Therefore, no matter how horrific the relationship, a couple is always married, even if separated. The implication, then, is that to marry a divorced person is to commit adultery, a mortal sin. For instance, in *Harriet and the Piper* (1920), the heroine falls in love with a married man whose wife has divorced him. Good Catholic readers, then, are almost waiting for the beloved’s ex-wife to die, because it is the only way that Harriet can be with her lover. Eventually, his wife does die, and Harriet marries him, but, almost as a punishment, there is no real love in the relationship. Theirs is little more than a business relationship. More shocking, then, is the revelation that Harriet herself had been married to the villainous Royal Blandin, and was herself, presumably, divorced. There is no small joke in the fact that Harriet identifies herself as “Church of England” when

Richard asks what her affiliations are in order to plan the quick wedding.³ Catholicism, then, while not overt in her novels, shapes the novels' representations of femininity, sexuality, and marriage.

Mother, Birth Control, and the Victorian Ideal

As Roosevelt's comments on the novel suggest, Norris's *Mother* depicts the sentimental domestic space of a bygone era. Margaret Paget, the heroine, is a thoroughly modern woman, working as a small town school teacher in upstate New York, suddenly swept up in modern, urban life when she aids a child who has been hit by a limousine outside her school. The limousine's owner, Mrs. Carr-Boldt, sees a spark in Margaret, and "rescues" her from her dreary life with her mother and six siblings by hiring Margaret as a secretary and moving her to New York City. There, she observes the life of excess and consumption led by society's elite women. During her stay, her disdain grows for her parents' lives—from the "dinginess" of their home to the clamor of so many children—and she begins to see herself as a rightful heir of New York's high society. Adopting this life, Margaret often forgets her own position as a secretary, and she begins to see children as impediments to an independent modern womanhood. In Margaret's epiphany at the end of the novel, she reconsiders the nature of maternity when she sees her mother through the eyes of her lover. Passionate love for her soon-to-be-husband transforms her dangerous position, and in the final scene, Margaret realizes, like a nineteenth-century sentimental heroine, that "pure religion breathing household laws," enacted through mothering, is the greatest form of femininity.

³ Norris notes she read Newman's *Apologia* until it was in shreds, a document that depicts his intellectual conversion from Anglicanism, from the seat of Oxford—essentially anti-Catholic according to Hillaire Belloc—to Catholicism, which may have shaped her conception of Anglicanism (*Family Gathering* 32).

This novel established the trajectory of Norris's career and shapes contemporary readings of her work. Critics often describe the novel in the same terms as the religious novel—overly pious, sentimental, and moralistic. Indeed, the novel relies on a rejection of the modern woman. Through sentimental structures, the novel presents a backlash against modern femininity and the rejection of the Victorian domestic ideal that birth control enables. Norris's earliest novel champions the most traditional version of maternity, rooting its critique of birth control in traditional sentimental conventions. It encourages women not only to get married and have children, but also to have many children, at a time when middle-class family sizes were declining. Placing modern motherhood within the traditional terms of the angel of the hearth, *Mother* compares the desires of a modern woman, Margaret Paget, to those of her mother—a traditional, sentimental maternal figure who finds joy in her house filled with a large family and a dependent husband.

Early in the novel, Margaret sees her mother as anachronistic, and she hopes to avoid the drudgery of Mrs. Paget's life spent caring for an army of small children with ceaseless demands. In this way, the novel prefigures its main character as a Margaret Sanger figure, whose commitment to birth control developed by watching her Catholic mother's erosion after bearing eleven children.⁴ At one point, Julie—Margaret's sister who is preparing to marry a prominent young physician—discussing all the problems with having a child early in a marriage, describes her mother's life as “one long slavery” (81). A quintessentially modern character, Margaret finds herself enjoying the thrilling life of a working woman in New York City, a life that she believes

⁴ *Mother* was published one year prior to the start of Sanger's column “What Every Girl Should Know” in *The Call* and before Sanger gained notoriety for distributing the pamphlet *Family Limitation* in violation of the Comstock laws. The figure of Margaret Paget, then, is not a direct representation of Sanger, but rather a representation of the modern objections to large families and proponents of birth control.

could only be maintained through birth control. Norris suggests that this character manifests the real pressures that Norris felt as a young wife:

An aunt of mine had hinted to my fifteen-year-old ears long before that there are disgraceful and unlawful steps an over-burdened young mother might take, to cut short too steady a flow of babies, that Frenchwomen were especially culpable, and that we mustn't talk about it. But among my new acquaintances there was more than one woman who, in all friendliness, advised the acceptance of the new doctrine. Better not have babies in New York! (*Family Gathering* 120)

Both Margaret and her sister Julie embody this ideal, describing babies as preventing trips abroad and weekends away, and destroying the possibilities for Julie's husband's career, because moving to Boston or New York would be impossible. Julie reminds Margaret that "It's perfectly absurd to pretend that girls don't discuss these things" (80). The novel plays upon the open secret of birth control, ultimately suggesting that a woman's real fulfillment lies in accepting a full household of children—as many children as she is "blessed" with—and fulfilling her role as an "angel of the hearth."

Norris's critique of birth control and embrace of traditional motherhood seem entirely nostalgic, Victorian even. Yet Balay reminds us that even this form of sentimentality is a function of the modern. Indeed, Norris is modern enough to recognize that her ideal of femininity will seem anachronistic to many contemporaneous readers. The novel displays a consciousness of both the sentimental literary tradition and the ideal of Victorian womanhood, and Norris plays with its use of these forms. When Margaret is preparing to leave for New York, Julie warns: "Watch out for the servants! . . . The governess will hate you because she'll be afraid you'll cut her out, and Mrs. Carr-Boldt's maid will be a cat. They always are, in the

books” (61). To set herself outside of this tradition, Norris assures readers that Margaret’s life is nothing of the sort. Instead, she is a great success in New York. Norris also recognizes that many readers will see her model of maternity as outmoded. One of Mrs. Carr-Boldt’s friends, when hearing that Margaret has six siblings, notes, “My heaven—seven children! How early Victorian!” (96). Yet as Balay suggests, Norris’s emphasis on modern childcare concerns—exemplified even in the Paget’s “anachronistic” home—suggests her modernity. As Margaret begins to move in New York’s social circles, she finds the birth control rhetoric tied to the rhetoric of reform. The women explain the need to limit children because the demands of modern maternity are far greater than those in the Victorian era: “Everything’s different now. Everything’s more expensive, life is more complicated. . . . Everything was so simple. All this business of sterilizing, and fumigating, and pasteurizing, and vaccinating, and boiling in boracic acid wasn’t done those days” (96-7). Norris, however, suggests that these demands are simply whitewashing the new woman’s more selfish interests. Mrs. Carr-Boldt concurs, saying:

Life is more complicated. People—the very people who ought to have children—simply cannot afford it! And who’s to blame? Can you blame a woman whose life is packed full of other things she simply cannot avoid, if she declines to complicate things any further? Our grandmothers didn’t have telephones, or motor-cars, or week-end affairs, or even—for that matter—manicures and hairdressers! . . . Do you suppose my grandmother ever took a baby’s temperature, or had its eyes and nose examined, or its adenoids cut? They had more children, and they lost more children—without any reason or logic whatever. Poor things, they never thought of doing anything else, I suppose. (97-8)

Mother, then, suggests a two-pronged nostalgia—for a womanhood that embraces the simplicity of the Victorian era and for a maternity unfettered by modern necessities. These modern necessities are tied to the reform movement that established fitness for parenting—and for reproductive sexuality—in part through these behaviors.⁵ In *Mother*, Norris not only critiques modern modernity, but also critiques the idea that privilege unfits women for maternity.

Norris, Sexuality, and the Reform Novel

Norris's position on maternity and reproductive sexuality established in *Mother* is shaped not only by modern Catholic teaching on sexuality, but also by Catholic social doctrine. Catholic social doctrine established a fundamentally different orientation toward social reform through control of reproduction than many Protestant reformers. Contrary to E.A. Ross's lament that Christianity rejected key aspects of the sexual reform that shaped the movement from sentimentality to sex expression, birth control and eugenics constituted a key component of liberal Protestant narratives' approach to social reform. The eugenics movement has long been associated with secularism, with the attempt at rational development of human sexuality and reproduction through scientific reason. In the era of Darwin, advocates of eugenics tried to render human evolution controllable through the careful selection of human traits. Given American Protestants' response to many scientific advances at the turn of the century, most notably Darwinian theory, we might assume that religious figures could not help rejecting a movement built on the theory of evolution and an amoral, scientific approach to human sexuality. Yet many politicians and Christian leaders, particularly but not exclusively

⁵ Norris herself was involved in some of these reform campaigns. Most notably, she worked as part of the pure milk campaign, which focused on persuading immigrant mothers to purchase pasteurized milk for their children.

Protestants, embraced birth control and eugenics' programs as a form of the Social Gospel. Most fully formulated in the 1880s, the Social Gospel movement dominated Christian social action until the 1930s. Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel movement called on Protestant Christians to end the hardship of poverty. Inspired by the novels of Charles Sheldon, who coined the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?," the Social Gospel Movement was founded on the idea that the purpose of Christianity was to spread the Kingdom of God. In this best-selling homiletic novel, a powerful preacher commanded a new orientation toward the poor, urging his middle-class congregants to reach out to the working class. Inspired by his fiery sermons, the novels document middle-class men's and women's sojourns into the bellies of the underclass. In urban slums, young girls soothe the dying, rescue the alcoholic, and feed the starving. Establishing the works of mercy for the twentieth-century, the novels drew middle-class Christians toward a new orientation toward poverty and social plight. Most Social Gospel adherents were post-millennial Christians, who believed that the kingdom of God is extended through the spread of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the Second Coming of Christ will occur only after the world has been Christianized.

Thus, a primary motivation of the Social Gospel movement was the belief that the evils of vice and poverty must be redressed by human effort before the Second Coming. The good Christian had a duty to go out into "the world" to ease poverty and eliminate vice.

Rauschenbusch's theological radicalism was rooted in his fundamental belief that Jesus' death on the cross was not a substitution for individual sins, but for the sins of society. To make the kingdom of God for the Second Coming, Christians must seek to eradicate not individual sin, but societal and organizational sin. Unlike earlier American Christians who sought to make America

a city on hill as a religious exemplar, Social Gospel proponents worked to make America into the Kingdom on Earth to establish the conditions for the Second Coming.

The Catholic Church did not participate in the Social Gospel movement proper, but was developing its own liberalism and its own social doctrine around the same time. The central tenet of the Social Gospel, held by post-millennial Protestants, was that the world must be made into the kingdom of God on earth in order to bring about the Second Coming. Catholic teaching did not support this doctrine.⁶ In Catholicism, social action is rooted not in a desire to participate in the eschatological end times, but to practice the corporal works of mercy in the tradition of Jesus. Yet the Catholic Church did not have an official social teaching until the end of the nineteenth-century, when the effects of industrialism demanded a response. Theologians consider Leo XII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum* to be one of the first social encyclicals of the Catholic Church. While condemning socialism (mistakenly) as the ownership of property by the state and reaffirming the right to private property, the encyclical nevertheless establishes the need for social justice for the working class. Although Catholicism understands the stratification of social classes as inevitable in a fallen world, *Rerum Novarum* argued that all workers deserve a living wage, fair hours, and decent working conditions, and all people deserve basic necessities. Perhaps more surprising, the Church argues that while every business owner has the responsibility to provide for these needs (regardless of a family's size), and every individual must practice the corporal works of mercy towards the poor, it is the duty of the state to

⁶ Indeed, the larger system of eschatology essential to the faith of both post-millennial and pre-millennial Protestants is deemed "unknowable" by the Catholic Church. While the Church did not make an official statement on modern millennialism until 1944, historic pre-millennialism—which believed in the coming of an anti-Christ who started a Tribulation, followed by the Rapture prior to the Second Coming—was declared a heresy in 431, shortly after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Applying a similar standard to modern pre-millennialism (known as dispensational pre-millennialism), the Church concluded in 1944 simply that it "could not be safely taught." The Church, then, teaches that the millennium central to these eschatologies, the thousand years when Christ will rule the earth, does not refer to an earthly realm or even a thousand years, but refers to the world since the Pentecost, a world where good and evil coexist.

intervene and ensure that these rights are met. To ensure the rights of workers against both the owners and the state, *Rerum Novarum* ultimately supports labor unions as the modern inheritors of the guild tradition. Catholic social teaching, then, supports change at the larger levels, with the practice of the corporal works of mercy at the personal level. Catholics have a duty to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and those in prison, and bury the dead. None of these, however, calls for the radical re-ordering of society that millennialist Protestants establish as essential to “Christianizing” society. Still, *Rerum Novarum* shaped Catholic modernity in two key ways: it affirmed natural law as the foundation of a Catholic social ethics, and it established a Catholic responsibility to shape moral responses to secular problems.

Catholicism, therefore, established a different relation between sexuality and social reform than the Social Gospel tradition at the turn of the twentieth century because its moral theology operated from fundamentally different premises. Catholicism argues that natural law—divine law manifested in the laws of nature—governs human behavior. When the natural law of Thomas Aquinas came to dominate Catholic moral theology at the turn of the nineteenth century, his conception of natural law applied to human sexuality shaped Catholic doctrine on marriage and family, as well as procreation and human life. According to the Catholic view of natural law, human sexuality gained its meaning through the act of reproduction. Therefore, all sexual acts must be open to that end. In keeping with natural law, the Church had long rejected birth control as an aberration, a means of keeping from God what is rightly His. Official doctrine, however, had not dealt overtly with the issue of birth control, in part because forms of birth control prior to the development of vulcanized rubber in the nineteenth century were not readily available or effective. The development of condoms and cervical caps led to a sharpening of the natural law

critique of artificial birth control. Both were particularly insidious from a doctrinal perspective because they prevent the sperm from fulfilling its natural place. The loss of sperm, either due to birth control or masturbation, was considered a form of homicide, murdering all of those potential lives. In keeping with the premise that the end of human sexuality is reproduction, the Church prior to the 1930s not only rejected artificial birth control, but also any attempt at family limitation.

Throughout her career, Norris adhered to the Church's position on family and reproduction. Yet her embrace of this conservative position did not place her entirely at odds with feminism in the 1910s and 1920s. As Elizabeth Francis notes:

In both Left and popular accounts, feminism reflected and advocated major changes in the organization of gender and sexuality in American life. It encompassed a wide variety of issues, including women's demanding the vote, widening the availability of birth control, redesigning the home and the very structure of domesticity, experimenting with dress reform and new fashions, and pursuing nontraditional careers. Feminism was a key word in the discourse of sexual freedom that characterized the transformation of American culture in the early twentieth century; feminism both advocated women's independence from men and claimed a new agency for women as desiring, sexual subjects. (xv)

In a strange turn, during the era after *Mother*, Norris's work creates a version of feminism that is acceptable for Catholic culture. Norris's narratives after *Mother* imagine a new form of domesticity, emphasizing women's sexual desires as essential to this new domestic and familial structure. While birth control is anathema to this domestic structure, the home is still the heart of reform, a concept shared with the pro-birth control eugenicists.

For Norris, the debates around feminism encompass the potentially liberating aspects of sexual desire. Literary critics that place Norris within the sentimental tradition suggest that Norris rejects passionate sexuality outright. Yet her novels and her politics suggest a far more complicated relationship to sex expression. Her depictions of heroines developing desire as a consciousness, as well as her representation of lascivious desire, suggest a deep ambivalence about sexuality's role within domestic and financial economies. While many women writers from Edith Wharton to Mary Austin demonstrated doubts about the possibilities of sexual power, Norris's ambivalence suggests an alternate conception of feminine sexuality and desire, perhaps even a reformulation of sexual power, rooted in Thomistic moral theology. Her ambivalence shapes her concept of women's sexuality, birth control, and eugenics.

Although many scholars see the femininity represented in Norris's novels as simply nostalgic, Norris's depictions of womanhood are at once intensely modern and intensely conservative.⁷ In the decades after *Mother*, Norris's novels suggest an increasing distance from the Victorian ideal of femininity that Roosevelt upheld. Pamela Raleigh, the heroine of *The Foolish Virgin* (1928), wears short dresses, goes out drinking and smoking, and spends time with men without a chaperone, but ultimately comes to regret this behavior. To justify this behavior, Pam even quiets her mother's admonitions by shouting, "I'm not a mid-Victorian heroine" (*Foolish Virgin* 12). In the middle of the novel, she finds herself ostracized from society after her date's car runs out of gas on a late Saturday night. She spends the rest of the novel distancing

⁷ Indeed, Norris's novels were sold to the public through their very modernity. The majority of Norris's novels are titled after the heroine or her main rival (a device Norris uses to throw the true heroine into doubt for the reader). In many of the original editions through 1930, a colored illustration of the heroine, serves as the frontispiece for the book. For example, the heroine of *Butterfly* (1923) is depicted wearing a full-length beaded dress, a short haircut, and a feathered headpiece, representing a more respectable version of the flapper.

herself from those behaviors, and taking up a new ethic, the commitment to domestic work and family that will make her a suitable wife, and therefore a suitable Norris heroine.

Norris presents a modern woman who has a sexually fulfilling relationship aside from companionate marriage as well as a fulfilling life outside of the domestic space. She does not reject work or the public sphere for women in favor of domesticity. Instead, she rejects the modern consumption of pleasure and style, which Elizabeth Francis suggests is the heart of mass culture in the modern era, as the nature of the public sphere for women. In Norris's fiction, marriage and reproductive sex are not ends in themselves that neither work nor leisure could produce but part of a modern woman's most fulfilling life.

Norris wants women to have the economic and social equality to be independent of men. She presents an alternative to women's work—usually sex-segregated and underpaid—to allow some of her heroines to live independently of men, whether fathers or lovers. The commitment is both evinced and shaped by the type of middle-class work in which Norris's respectable women engage. As Raub notes, Norris's heroines “take naturally” to domesticity (23). The work that they do outside the home, and many of them do work, is work that replicates the chores of the domestic space. Margaret Paget of *Mother* works as a schoolteacher and then a nanny; Pamela Raleigh of *The Foolish Virgin* and Harriet Field of *Harriet and the Piper* (1920) work as the overseer of the house, orchestrating lower servants and organizing dining, serving as companions for their bosses and their children. Harriet Field is invited into the city with Nina, the teenage daughter of one of her charges, and ponders whether she is invited as a guest or a servant. Isabelle Carter, the mistress of the house, informs her that she is invited “as a mother” (36), suggesting that these roles are essentially maternal—appropriate outlets for domestic desires of unmarried women and training for the day when they assume roles as mothers. Even when

women take positions as servants, they are not typical house workers, like cooks and maids. The heroines all come from “good stock,” from a family of previous wealth and status. They may not have the money that they once had, but they have an almost genetic sense of middle-class values.⁸

The major problem, for many of Norris’s heroines and anti-heroines, most famously Margaret Paget of *Mother* is that they do not *desire* to perform domestic labor in the form of mother or wife, even though they do it on a paid basis. What distinguishes Norris’s respectable women from her antagonists is their transformation from youth driven by the desire for sexual freedom to adulthood satisfied by marriage and family. Norris’s 1923 novel, *Butterfly*, establishes these problems through the juxtaposition of Hilary Collier, a diligent office worker at the packing company of John Spaulding, and her sister Dora, whom she calls Butterfly. While this novel seems like it will follow the convention of dime novels popular with working women when Hilary falls in love with Spaulding’s son Craig, it takes an unexpected turn when Craig marries Butterfly. After their marriage, Butterfly’s downfall is indexed by her replication of the values of Craig’s set, most notably Violet Vanderwort, a beguiling divorcee who has had Craig in her sights. Like Vi, Butterfly flirts with other men, and speaks of being “in love” with other men. She spends her time focusing on dresses, lunches at the club, and gossip. Most sinisterly, though, she has no interest in having a baby, even after two years of marriage. Norris suggests that such women are unmoored, and Hilary, as the virtuous woman, gives voice to Norris’s critique that Dora “needs an anchor”: “Just why Dora should need an anchor neither she nor

⁸ One exception is *My Best Girl* (1927), later made into a popular film starring Mary Pickford. Typical of the dime novels read by working girls in the 1910s, the novel depicts a working-class girl’s romance with the boss’s son, who has taken on a false identity. Through the man’s influence, the heroine refines herself, displaying a working class version of femininity that Nan Enstad calls “ladyhood,” a working-class revision of wealthy women’s dress and behavior. Ultimately, she transforms her small home into a working-class exemplar of middle-class values, proving herself worthy of the wealthy heir’s love.

Craig discussed. But it was perfectly evident that the twenty-year-old wife would be the happier for the new care” (106).

Dora’s early romance with the British Lord Atherton establishes her need for “an anchor.” Atherton has no actual money, and so Craig is assured that she will not actually divorce him for the man. Yet Dora foolishly gives him a miniature of herself, much like the one she gives Craig, as a Christmas present. Hilary and Craig chalk this incident up to her youthfulness rather than any malicious plans on her part. Her second affair, though, is far more dangerous. Hilary, voicing a critique that one can envision comes straight from Norris herself, wonders at Dora’s failure to reproduce as a function of burgeoning, if aberrant, sexuality:

How simple it would be to love a good and generous man, to make his home a charming and comfortable place; to fill the sunshiny old nursery with delightful babies; taking them to the quieter beaches, or to the big mountains for long, country summers; to be, in a word, what Mrs. Craig Spaulding should be, a worthy successor to all the good and honourable women who had worn the name. All this hysteria of dances, of artificial beauties, of late hours and of too much smoking and drinking and eating, led to these wretched complications; sex was always there, just under the surface, ready to work its mischief with the quiet course of life. (143-144).

Sexuality, then, needs to be anchored, and marriage alone might not be enough to do so.

Feminine work—child-rearing and caring for the home—provide the tie that binds together a husband and wife, far more than sexual desire. Women without a desire for children or for domestic work of any sort are in danger of falling prey to sexual desire—both their own and others’. As Hilary explains in *Butterfly*, children are “a great interest, a great joy in common”

(256). Thus, when Dora's limited affair with Kronski is outed and she plans leave Craig, the only thing that can save their marriage miraculously occurs: Dora finds herself pregnant. Dora is miserable over her pregnancy, and Norris does not fault Dora for her suffering. Indeed, while she could have painted Dora as selfish, as she does Dora's earlier refusal to have children, Dora instead promises the child to Craig, as a gift, suggesting that her response to her pregnancy is not entirely selfish. Yet even in pregnancy, motherhood has the power to transform the most obstinate women. Dora returns to her old self, lovely and giving, throughout her nine months. By the end, Dora has even rekindled her love for Craig, who happily accepts her back into his life.

The paragon of virtue for Norris is the middle-class woman, while the upper-class is the site of vice. For Norris, wealth stands in the way of true happiness, of the simplicity of true love, because it allows women to distance themselves from the domestic work that anchors sexual love. *Butterfly* suggests that so many of Norris's novels focus on middle-class women because the middle class believes in "the real things, service, and sharing, and working for each other, and love" (165). The wealthy simply are not dedicated to these same ideals because they are antithetical to that class's state of existence. As a result, the wealthy cannot have genuine love: "They don't have the same anxieties, the same sacrifices, or the same need for actually working for each other. Husbands and wives live one life, on a small salary, they need each other. But how much does a woman like Rose West need Walter? Not at all" (165).

Norris's heroines are traditional outlets for sexuality; they are all young and naturally beautiful, while the bad woman are consumers of mass culture, reliant on modern products for their semblance of beauty for drawing men, particularly heavy make-up and expensive gowns. Unacceptable women, then, are those who seek to enjoy sexual freedom without the bonds of

reproduction, either because they do not desire it or because they are too old for it. Frequently, these women are those, like older women, who are outside the boundaries of traditional sex power, as in *Passion Flower* (1930). Often, however, Norris's antagonists are arbiters of sexual power because they are young and beautiful, if frivolous, women. For Norris, these women's denial of reproduction is reprehensible, but their position of sexual desirability renders them redeemable, instructive models for young readers.

Through these narratives of redemption, Norris recuperates a type of sexuality for middle-class women in keeping with her Catholic values. Sexuality, here, is not displaced onto the ugly girl or the degenerate working class. Rather, her model female characters come into consciousness of their own sexuality. Sexual desire is an essential part of both Collier girls' awakenings to womanhood in *Butterfly*. It is with Craig that Hilary feels the first pangs of desire, if not genuine love: "So strangely potent is the first hint of sex in a girl's heart that these casual phrases. . . were enough to distress her" (*Butterfly* 18-19). Sexuality, however, only comes to fruition within the relative safety of marriage. Marriage offers an outlet for sexuality because it is the only space where sexuality can lead to happiness, but it does not necessarily promise to do so. Indeed, women struggling sexually within a marriage fill Norris's novels.

Nonetheless, Norris's novels insist on the power of passionate marriage. While Norris's earliest novels, like *Mother*, depict marriage in much the same way as the sentimental novels of the previous century—a Christian marriage with the angel of the hearth at its center—Norris's conception of marriage changes in the late 1910s through the middle of her career in the 1920s and 1930s. In these later novels, feminine fulfillment does not lie in the family structure that marriage can provide, but rather in the edifying romantic relationship with the husband. Sexuality is ultimately what comes to hold many of Norris's marriages together. Marriages

predicated on the business arrangement model, whether because the woman's job fulfills a wife's domestic duties or because there was an arrangement, prove unfulfilling. In *Harriet and the Piper*, Harriet opts not to marry Ward Carter because, though she loves him, she is not passionate about him. She is also heartbroken by her marriage to Richard Carter because he is equally dispassionate towards her. In one scene, he speaks to her in a tone that suggests a business arrangement, and suddenly all color drains from her face. Love devoid of sexual passion is incapable of sustaining a marriage, though passion alone is not enough to ensure a woman's happiness. Norris's most virtuous characters are devoted to passionate love. The passionate marriage alone is uniquely situated to withstand the struggles of modernity. In the climax of *Harriet and the Piper*, Richard recognizes his desire for Harriet, in an intensely sexual scene. Harriet and Richard realize their intimacy when they are both in night clothes. Sexual desire and middle-class domesticity are brought together, rendering such sexuality entirely acceptable. Thus, Norris's 1923 novel bears a resemblance to the sensuality of the contemporary romance because sexual desire is at the heart of the novel.

Unlike the novels by many of her contemporaries, Norris's Catholic novels attempt to reconcile sexual desire and maternity through the structure of marriage. Not only does sexuality find its "natural" position as a real choice rather than a compulsion within an older marriage, but maternity reinforces women's sexual power for Norris. Women's sexual desirability, then, is predicated on their maternal qualities. In *Butterfly*, Hilary's attractiveness lies in her maternal qualities. Both her desirability as a domestic partner and her sexual desirability are predicated upon her maternal behavior. Her longstanding joke with Kronski is that she is his stepmother and he is her child. She mothers him, taking care of his accounts and his engagements, as well as insisting that he eat well and practice often. Kronski derives real pleasure from responding to

Hilary as mother, “Yes, Mother, I will be a good child!” (189). Ultimately, when Butterfly has convinced Hilary that Kronski reciprocates Dora’s adulterous love, Hilary feels foolish and embarrassed at her maternal behavior toward him.

Norris displays an ambivalence about this sexual authority, however. For Norris, sexual desire should be expressed within a mature marriage. While her characters become conscious of their sexual desire, they are also not necessarily mature enough to negotiate that desire. Youthful sexual desire may lead to mistakes, as in *The Foolish Virgin* and Hilary Collier’s desire for Craig or Butterfly’s desire for Kronski in *Butterfly*. Those first flutterings of sexual desire in women are not necessarily the real, passionate desire that will ultimately sustain a marriage, but simply infatuations as characters come into adulthood. Norris distinguishes the first sense of sex that her heroines experience from the all-encompassing desire that they experience for their future husbands. While Hilary Collier first “felt sex” when she saw Craig, she is not fully awakened to the power of her sexuality—both her desire and her desirability—until it is awakened with Kronski. When she finally encounters Kronski in a romantic moment, the scene is one of sexual awakening, beyond the broad descriptions of adolescent desire that she first felt with Craig:

And in an instant he had kissed her, was kissing her rather, she thought in an agonized confusion of body and soul, for it seemed to last for an eternity. Her heart beating against his own rapidly beating heart, the nearness of his face, the shaken lock of black hair that touched her forehead, here in the secret blackness of the night, all conspired to frighten her. . . . And this time the fire in her own being, unsuspected, but waiting through all these dutiful, happy, busy years for its hour, sprang into sudden flame; she was in his arms, she was young, beautiful, trembling with love and life, and beloved! All the starved impulses of her life

burned in her, she was carried away from a consciousness of time or place; she knew only his arms, the faint fragrance of his skin and hair, and the fire of his lips. (228)

Her desire prior to this moment has been nothing more than false desire. She gives in to her “starved impulses,” which she repressed in her earlier relations with Craig and Kronski. Yielding to her desires, fulfilling these impulses, transports her not only to a new sense of sexual fulfillment, but also to personal fulfillment, as she finds her proper role as Kronski’s lover and wife. Not only can she fulfill her desires to love Kronski, but also to care him for him, and, eventually, their children together.

Women’s desire, then, can only be truly fulfilled by a sexuality that grounds them in the appropriate role of wife, and implicitly, mother. Hilary’s sense of love transcends her sexual desire that she first felt with Craig: “When I think of love . . . I think of poverty, Dora, of a young man and woman and their baby, of her cooking and planning for him, of his toiling for her. . . . I think of mothers all over the Union, saving up for school shoes, remembering that Mary doesn’t like gravy, and that to-day is trial-balance day, and Father will come home tired! That’s love, Butterfly” (217). In Norris’s novels, then, female sexuality and maternity are inextricably bound to one another, just as they are in the Catholic concept of natural law. In this environment, the work of caring for children is “fun.” Norris uses this language both in the novel and in her 1927 article, “The Fun of Being a Mother.” Here, then, she shifts the focus from duty, even to the race, to fun, which is a thoroughly modern move.

Through marriage, sexuality becomes mature. Through maternity, women reconcile their sexual desire with their appropriate roles. In keeping with Catholic natural law, women’s sexual power breaks down when sexuality is divorced from procreation. To Norris, Birth control

stymies the natural development of sexuality. Women and men alike need to be anchored to sexual relationships through marriage and children. While divorce is always a threat—which Norris believes women will always be made to pay for, even if unfairly—it is less likely when a couple shares the joy of children. Children provide the antidote not to sexuality, but to the danger of sexuality becoming a choice. If sexuality is a personal choice, then both men and women alike can be drawn away by sexual desire, as in *Butterfly* and *Passion Flower*.

Catholicism, Birth Control, and Eugenics

For Norris, the danger of sexuality as a choice for both men and women is that it is a fundamental threat to the health of the nation. Indeed, Norris's position on birth control manifests her anxiety about sexuality as a choice for women on just these terms. The anti-birth control position that Norris established in *Mother* shaped her work in the decades that followed, but her tactics, much like her perceptions of sexuality, changed throughout the period.⁹ By the 1920s Norris tailored her critique of birth control to the modern woman she depicted in her novels. Rather than relying upon sentimentalized descriptions of motherhood, she embraces a stark realism, arguing that mothering is a challenge to women, but that it represents a great joy worth the struggle:

These women sometimes write me angrily about birth-control. . . . They tell me that I am afraid, religion-bound, conventional, and sentimental on the subject.

But it is really for none of these reasons—although it might easily be for any

⁹ Indeed, Norris and her husband, Charles Gilman Norris, were so famous for their position against birth control that they were the subject of a satire by Corey Ford called “The Norris Plan.” In this treatise, Ford uses the identifiable Norris style of melodrama to explore America’s “excess productivity.” Charles and Kathleen are the main characters in a typical Norris plotline, but rather than discuss children and birth control, they are discussing novels and “book control.” Ford seems to hope that they will practice restraint and not put out any more novels.

one—that I disagree with the advocates of birth-control. It is because motherhood, rightly taken, is so much the most exquisite, the most satisfying, the most important part of any woman's life. . . . It is my own profound conviction that more sorrow, illness, loneliness, frustration have come, case for case, to the women of the world, through denying motherhood, already, in these very first years of birth-control, than the sum total of the different trials that have come to the distracted and overburdened mothers of large and unregulated families. ("The Fun of Being a Mother" 22-3)

Modern maternity, perhaps because it is a choice like marriage, is no longer marked by strife, most notably children's deaths from horrific diseases, as it was for the earlier generation. Instead, the struggles of the modern mother are the very struggles that Norris believed held romantic relationships together because they necessitate service and compromise. While Norris supports women's empowerment through work outside the home, relative independence from their husbands, and women's suffrage, she fundamentally argues that the divorce of female sexuality from motherhood leads to suffering because it denies women's natural role. Denial of maternity is denial of the natural law, and the natural place of woman in the divine scheme. Birth control, then, because it separates sexuality and reproduction, causes the deterioration of the modern woman, the modern family, and American society.

Norris's position on reproductive control was in keeping with the Catholic Church's rejection of birth control. As for liberal Protestants and secular reformers, the question of birth control was, for Catholics, bound up with eugenics. Although the Church did not establish an official stance on eugenics until 1930, the rise of natural law as the dominant approach to Catholic moral theology provided many Catholic leaders with a moral reasoning to resist

eugenics as opposed to the eternal law. Social reformers used natural law to object to eugenics' reliance on birth control. Even further, many Catholic clerics believed that the Protestant church's engagement in the eugenicist project, primarily by supporting a requirement for physician's certifications verifying physical fitness for marriage at both the level of the church and the state, was ultimately futile. According to Catholic natural law arguments, reproduction is itself a part of the eternal law, a law known to humanity because it is felt innately by most human beings. Therefore, attempts to control it by the regulation of marriage would not lead to fewer children from the unfit, but rather to more illegitimate children. Eugenics, then, would seem to be anathema to Catholic teaching following natural law.

Yet Norris's own work suggests that her position on birth control had a eugenicist component. While many of her novels explore maternity and birth control, *Butterfly* is the only one of her novels to deal directly with the concept of "race suicide." The context of the novel's comment on race suicide suggests that she shared Roosevelt's fear for the white race, justifying her position with religious rhetoric. After Dora's awakening to the joys of marriage and maternity through her unexpected pregnancy, she ruminates on the modern woman's moral failures:

That's what has wrecked Vi's marriage and so many others. There was nothing else, nothing back of the novelty and excitement. I danced and smoked and gambled and drank—it doesn't sound decent, but it's what we all did! I remember being with Katharine Templeton once, on a house party up in the Adirondacks, and it occurred to me that in one week she broke every one of the Commandments—every one, even 'though shalt not kill'—if you call race suicide murder! (333)

While Norris's essays had long compared birth control to murder, she contained her comments to the individual child. In keeping with earlier Catholic doctrine about the ontological status of "wasted" semen, Norris sees each child not born because of birth control as a murdered child. Birth control, prior to 1933, is of a status similar to abortion, because there is no distinction between forms of life, whether a single sperm or a fetus. This novel, though, compares race suicide, in and of itself, to murder. The murder is not at the level of the individual, but at the level of native-born Americans. Norris's description of Roosevelt's ideology suggests that she understood the racial implications of the term "race suicide": "One of [Roosevelt's] many forcefully expressed convictions was that 'race suicide'—by which he meant family limitation and 'birth control'—was destructive to the very existence of the nation. This term and what it implied was quite new at that time" (*Family Gathering* 119).

Norris's fear of race suicide suggests the subtle eugenicist strains in Norris's positions on female sexuality, and uncovers historical issues in the development of American Catholicism's position on birth control. Since the Church did not see birth control and the eugenics project in the same way as Social Gospel reformers, Norris's relationship to eugenics differs from other moderns responding to the reform movement by recuperating sexuality. Norris's rejection of birth control, while in keeping with Catholic doctrine, is part of a positive eugenics movement. For American Catholics, encouraging native-born Americans to have babies at rates that would outstrip immigrants, as well as opposing miscegenation through mixed marriages, would have been amenable to natural law and Catholic doctrine. Her novels do not suggest that white Christian motherhood is preparing the world for Christ, but rather establishing a strong American race.

Norris's novels therefore reflect the American Catholic Church's more tentative relationship with the eugenics movement. While many liberal Protestant sects believed that state bills requiring certificates of health from a physician prior to marriage strengthened the institution by protecting it from degeneration, the Catholic Church saw them as an assault on the sacramental nature of marriage. As a sacrament, marriage is a "divinely ordered institution," and Catholic leaders like Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore argued that the state therefore had no right to interfere in so personal and intimate a matter. Health certificates, then, were seen as a threat to the Catholic Church's authority over the sacraments.

An under-explored aspect of the American Catholic Church's response to eugenics is the question of who was targeted by social reformers. While many Protestant churches supported the verification that all marital parties were physically fit for reproduction, settlement house workers, whether officially associated with the churches or not, overwhelmingly worked with poor immigrants in America's urban centers, like New York and Chicago. During the 1900s and 1910s, the objects of these projects were overwhelming Italian immigrants, who were often Catholics. For the Church, the settlement houses that sought to bring about the Kingdom, were not only a threat to this generation of American Catholics, because they tried to convert devout Italian-Americans, but also to the next generation, because they spread birth control and the eugenicist message.

Yet Catholic discussions of eugenics were far less limited than the social context and official doctrine might suggest. Major Catholic reformers, most notably John A. Ryan, were members of the American Eugenics Society (AES). Many Catholic reform leaders made a distinction between eugenic means and eugenic ends. Social reform was tantalizing for many Catholics who upheld *Rerum Novarum* as a call to engage secular problems. Still, most Catholics

resisted eugenic means, most emphatically birth control, but also sterilization, as incompatible with the Thomistic insistence on the dignity of the individual, the bedrock of most natural law arguments regarding sexuality. While the majority of Church leaders broadly rejected sterilization, Ryan noted that “a Catholic is not compelled to hold that this operation is necessarily forbidden by the moral law” (qtd. in Rosen 51). Indeed, many Catholics used Aquinas on the nature of social power and the common good to argue for eugenics. Prior to the 1930s, when sterilization and birth control became central to the eugenicist project, even Catholic reformers who rejected eugenic means on Thomistic grounds believed that there might be a “pure eugenics” compatible with Catholic moral theology and natural law. Only in the 1930s, when the AES became increasingly committed to birth control, did Catholics migrate from the movement.

Norris’s novels suggest that she was not simply a traditionalist in her rejection of birth control, but was engaging in these vexed discussions about eugenics as a necessary form of social reform that would save the nation. From the outset of her career, Norris’s novels were co-opted into the movement for eugenics as social reform. Norris’s later work suggests that she came to embrace her role as a champion of maternity in the fight against “race suicide.” Characters in her novels are often obsessed with bloodlines. Gertrude, the heroine’s older sister in *Passion Flower* (1930), studies the family genealogy, arguing that the family has more pure Anglo-Saxon blood than the British royal family. As Norris’s commitment to the middle class suggests, she was not interested in maintaining aristocratic bloodlines, but the novels suggest a distinct threat from miscegenation. Her fear of race suicide, then, is not only a fear that good, Anglo-Saxon women were foregoing motherhood in the modern era, but also that invading

immigrants were both reproducing at a greater rate than white women and sully the genuine American bloodline through miscegenation.

Norris's relationship to race is subtle in her novels. Unlike many in her political set, Norris did not display overt anti-semitism. Rather, her concerns regarding marriage and reproduction were, as for many writers centered in the American West, about Mexicans and Asians. Her concerns about race suicide did not figure prominently in her earlier novels, but become more overt through the late 1920s and early 1930s. These novels often depict Japanese and Chinese servants as incompetent, particularly at child-rearing. While Norris's white heroines excel in the role of working women keeping the house, Asian servants like Keno in *Passion Flower* (1930) cannot be trusted alone with a baby. The heroine eagerly awaits the arrival of a new batch of Swedish immigrants from which to hire servants. While the Swedish immigrants run the farm while their young, blonde daughter nannies the children as a member of the house, much like heroines in other Norris novels, the Japanese house workers serve little domestic purpose, reiterating the inherent domestic and parental incompetence of these non-white women.

Yet Asians are not the primary threat in Norris's novels. The real danger lies in immigration from the South, in the form of Mexicans. The dangerous older women who populate Norris's novels are often of Mexican descent. In *Passion Flower*, the heroine's husband divorces her after falling in love with an older woman, nicknamed Dulce, of Spanish descent. While the book highlights Dulce's European bloodline, Dan refers to her as his "little Mex," and the 1947 paperback cover, portraying a passionate embrace, changes her blonde hair and pale complexion to a dark-skinned, dark-haired femme-fatale. Even the scene that introduces her describes Spanish lineage that shaped her "nature." Rather than a consciousness,

Dulce's sexuality seems to be a compulsion, as it is for her other dangerous women. Here, though, the compulsion is tied to her bloodline. Yet Dulce does not have children from any of her marriages. Her sexual desire is not dangerous because it compels her to reproduce, but rather because it comes detached from the natural bonds of love and marriage.

Norris may well be so willing to accept Dulce as an acceptable bloodline because she distinguishes her as a blonde-haired Spaniard. Like other eugenicists of the era, Norris makes a sharp distinction between Mexicans of native descent and Mexicans of Spanish descent.¹⁰ Norris depicts the object of the heroine's affection in *The Foolish Virgin* (1928), Gregory, in a similar fashion. He seems to be a product of miscegenation between a Mexican woman and a British man, but the novel dispels this notion long before the character is introduced. Pam's mother points that he is of a fine Spanish mother and a British father (10). Again, when Pam sees him, he is described as exotic in his dark looks, but pure in blood: "Younger than most of them, yet there was a certain Latin sureness and brevity that marked him obviously master of them all. He was dressed more simply than the rest, his shirt white, his high laced boots old, his coat of well-worn leather, and he wore no handkerchief about his throat. But, as Mrs. Raleigh had pleaded in his defense, Gregory Chard had good American and English blood in his veins, as well as the simpler strain from Castile, and it showed in every gesture and every word" (22). He therefore has the allure of the dark-skinned other, but he has the pure bloodline that makes him a respectable mate for a Norris heroine. Despite his European roots, Gregory is, in fact, Mexican.

¹⁰ Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) establishes similar distinctions, suggesting the imbrication of race and religion. The novel implies a racial hierarchy that overlaps with "acceptable" religious practices. "Indian" Mexicans practice the most base form of faith because they hold onto their original practices, but revere the elements of Catholic worship from afar. Mexicans, a blend of native and Spanish blood, practice more respectable version of Catholicism, though it is still rooted in a childish devotion and naivete. The Europeans, unsurprisingly, practice the most fully formed version of Catholicism. They do not participate in the superstitions of the Mexicans, and seem to repudiate miracles of devotional practices. Instead, miracles are to be found in nature, the natural American landscape.

The novel describes the town of his birth, Mazatlan, as a savage place (255). Indeed, the danger of Mexico is always encroaching on the idyllic California town. There is a sharp divide between the respectable town and the ranches on the outskirts, which are painted as having an exotic, Mexican aura.

The threat of miscegenation lurks behind the text at many other points. While Gregory himself is cleared of the charges of dangerous miscegenation, his mother gains power in the town through her knowledge of the villagers' bloodlines. Her power lies in the fact that she can prove that one of the women who had been shunning Pam was herself related to, or perhaps an indirect heir of, a more scandalous marriage between a white woman and "the only coloured man in town" (227). The threat of mixing blood with Mexicans enters the text when Gregory, rejected by Pam, returns to his hometown in Mexico to find himself a bride. He returns with a "queer, brown, sleek-headed, silent" Mexican woman, named Ynez, and says that they were married that morning. Ynez wears the clothes of a Mexican peasant, and she speaks no English. Norris describes her disdainfully as "a stupid little peasant; silent at her meals, aimless as a child" (321). By this time, Pamela has realized she loves Gregory, but given Gregory and Ynez's Catholicism, there can be no divorce. The threat from Mexico is, no doubt, sharper because migrating Mexicans were themselves Catholic. Gregory's "marriage" to the Mexican wife is so troubling precisely because it is a Catholic marriage, rendering divorce an impossibility, and children a near certainty. Pam's great torment is imagining Ynez, who fits in far better with the Mexican servants than with the family of the house, installed as mistress of her beloved hacienda and mother of Gregory's children: "And she'll have children—little brown boys and girls. She'll tie him to her with his children" (331). Ynez's presence seems to take away the heroine's rightful position as mistress of the house and mother of American children. The novel ultimately

contains this threat in its conclusion, when Gregory reveals that he was never married to Ynez, but had only pretended to be in order to spark Pam's realization that she loves him.

Norris's Politics and the Mothers' Movement

Norris's positions on femininity, birth control, and eugenics took a sinister turn in the 1930s, though few scholars have examined either Norris's role in the far right or the specific movements that she was involved in. In the 1930s, she begins to see sexuality and reproduction as a potential threat. Motherhood can be the base of the nation or its destruction. Norris's far-right politics develop out of her position on reproduction and race that she establishes in her earlier novels, and suggest the deeper problems of Catholic intersections with mass culture in the 1930s.

To understand Norris's role in the far-right political organizations of the era means to understand their origins and ideology, which were formed long before Norris officially took on any leadership roles. In the 1930s, many women, including large numbers of Catholics, were drawn to the far-right politics of Gerald L.K. Smith and Father Charles E. Coughlin. Some of the followers of Smith's America First Party and Coughlin's radio show and magazine *Social Justice* became leaders of the Mothers' Movement when it developed at the end of the 1930s.¹¹ While the mothers' groups overlapped with the male-dominated America First committee and Gerald L.K. Smith's American First Party, the Mothers' Movement differed in several key ways: it was organized and run by women, and its timeframe extended beyond that of the Committee,

¹¹ Glen Jeansonne coined the phrase the Mothers' Movement to describe the woman-led organizations of the American far Right that originated in the 1930s. The term helpfully distinguishes between the Mothers' Movement, the America First committee, and Gerald L.K. Smith's America First Party (Jeansonne xii).

which dissolved after the bombing at Pearl Harbor, but peaked before the formation of the Party in 1943.

The Mothers' Movement encompassed a series of regional and national organizations that engaged in the politics of the far right primarily during the 1930s and 40s (though some continued well into the 1950s). The politics of the far right differed from American conservatism of the era and involved myriad domestic and international issues, which many local groups took up to differing degrees. The movement was marked by a steadfast opposition to Communism, at home and abroad. For many on the right, the danger of Communism justified the right's non-interventionist beliefs about the war in Germany. Indeed, for many of the members of the Mothers' Movement, Hitler and Germany were heroic for their fight against Communism. Elizabeth Dilling, a leader of the movement who had been active as a speaker for the right since the early 1930s, is exemplary of the movement's broader ideology. Dilling was such an important figure in the women's movement of the far right that one magazine in Germany described her as the "female fuhrer" of the United States. Dilling's, and indeed Norris's, opposition to Communism was initially rooted in religion rather than politics. Norris rejected Communism first and foremost on the basis of its rejection of Christ. Dilling, though a Protestant, sympathized with conservative Catholicism and was an admirer of Fr. Coughlin, in large part because they shared her religious faith in American exceptionalism.

The support for Nazi Germany that began in admiration for its fight against Communism quickly became a fervent support for the larger Nazi agenda. Dilling, like Coughlin, lauded the Nazi party for its national success, which she hoped the U.S. could replicate. Like many of the other leaders of the Mothers' Movement, she toured Germany twice at the invitation of the Nazi party, in 1931 and 1938. On one visit, she noted, "The German people under Hitler are

contented and happy. . . . Don't believe the stories you hear that this man has not done a great good for this country" (quoted in Jeansonne 13). The movement, then, staunchly opposed American intervention in World War II, not out of a broad opposition to American intervention abroad, but specifically because it was a war against Germany. Indeed, the Christianity of the far right was not a pacifist Christianity, but a "fighting faith."

Unsurprisingly, the leaders of the Mothers' Movement also adopted a growing and virulent anti-Semitism throughout the 1930s. Leaders of the American right, including Dilling and Coughlin, argued that the Jewish people were behind Communism, attacking America from the inside. Many believed that FDR's administration was secretly run by Jews, and some suggested that FDR was actually Jewish. Dilling published her third book, *The Octopus*, to coincide with the 1940 elections. It was so anti-semitic that she published it under a pseudonym so that it could not be traced back to her. The book claimed that Jewishness and Communism were synonymous, pointing out that Karl Marx descended from a long line of Jewish rabbis (Jeansonne 25-6). For leaders of the far right in the 1930s and 1940s, anti-Communism, anti-Semitism, and anti-interventionism could not be disentangled from one another or from emphatic support for Germany.

Changing attitudes toward sexuality were at the heart of many of the mothers' attacks. Emma Goldman's autobiography, filled with "foul sex ideas," convinced Dilling that only a mother could spur the fight against Communism in America (Jeansonne 16). Indeed, one of the most popular targets for the mothers was Eleanor Roosevelt. Many leaders attacked her not for her politics, but for her refusal to fit into their conception of the American wife and mother. Indeed, the attacks on Eleanor were often harsher than those made against FDR.

As Jeansonne notes, many of the women who became leaders of the Mothers' Movement had "embarked on a path similar to the one followed by feminists, only to take a fork in the road that reached a dead end in reactionary politics" (6). Like feminists, the mothers believed that they were equal to men—indeed some believed maternity made them superior to men—and had the unique capability to transform the nation into a more just society. More importantly, though, while the movement developed out of feminism, it was not feminist. As Jeansonne explains, the movement was "ameliorative," rather than feminist; it did not seek to transform the status of the patriarchy. Rather, the movement sought to make more effective women's roles as wives and mothers.

Despite the organizations' hard line positions, Norris's attraction to the movement seems logical. The movement originated in California, Norris's home, just after the German invasion of Poland in 1939. The movement consisted largely of mothers much like Norris, middle-aged women with grown children. By the 1930s, Norris was fifty years old. Having worked with peace organizations since World War I, she was drawn to the pacifism of the Mothers' Movement. Unlike the pacifism of Catholic Leftists like Dorothy Day, the movement was emphatically right-wing, allowing Norris to preserve her conservative beliefs. The Movement also championed religion in American life. Broadly, the mothers believed that Christianity defined Americanism, and that women's roles were particularly important to the republic as they passed along Christian values, the bedrock of good citizenship, to the next generation. While some regional mothers' groups and specific female leaders of the movement took issue with the inclusion of Catholicism in a Christian nation, the vast majority welcomed Catholic members and leaders, many of them followers of Father Coughlin. Most significantly, the movement's veneration of women's established roles meshed with Norris's conception of modern femininity.

Norris's exact position in the Mothers' Movement, specifically, and the American far right more broadly is difficult to pin down. In January 1940, she accepted the presidency of the National League of Mothers of America. The NLMA was formed in 1939 in Los Angeles, less than month after Hitler invaded Poland, by three mothers with draft-age sons. Inspired by Hearst's opposition to both intervention and the New Deal, the organization was one of many that began in Hearst publication areas, but it was the only mothers' group headquartered in the West. With Hearst's support, the NLMA flourished. Ten thousand women in Los Angeles joined within the first six days of registration (Jeansonne 45). Unlike many of its counterparts in the Midwest and on the East Coast, the organization welcomed all women who were American citizens regardless of race, religion, or political affiliation, though the bylaws still required segregated entry posts. Its relative openness and focus on anti-Communism rather than anti-Semitism lent it a greater air of credibility (Jeansonne 46).

Given the organization's relative moderation, Jeansonne sees Norris as the only moderate in the Mothers' Movement. In his reading, having worked as a member of peace organizations since the 1920s, Norris continued the tradition of women's reform from an earlier era, embracing radical pacifism. Indeed, this is the very explanation that Norris herself puts forth in her 1959 autobiography *Family Gathering*, where she explains her involvement in the NLMA: "For some thirty years I spoke from a hundred platforms of the simple achievement of world peace. It is now more than forty years since Jane Addams gathered together some scores of women who eagerly believed that it could be accomplished" (284). Unlike Dilling and other leaders, Norris opposed all wars, not just the war against Hitler. Indeed, Dilling herself would not endorse the NLMA because she saw Norris as soft on Communism (Jeansonne 50). Father Coughlin, however, was an ardent supporter of the NLMA, endorsing its formation in *Social Justice* and

publicizing numerous chapters on his radio program. Unlike the Coughlinite Catholics in the movement, Norris did not openly embrace anti-Semitism, and she actively tried to distance the NLMA from anti-Semitism in local branches, leading to the breaking away of the anti-Semitic New York branch. According to Jeansonne, Norris repudiated anti-Semitism, and even asked Fr. Coughlin to withdraw his backing, but he refused. In Jeansonne's reading, Norris did not practice the right-wing fanaticism of the movement's other leaders.

Still, the NLMA was unabashedly Republican and anti-New Deal, despite the organization's claims to non-partisanship. Norris herself condemned Roosevelt for the nation's unemployment, blaming him for wasting billions of tax dollars, and asserting that he was trying to trick Americans into war. Norris campaigned vigorously for Republican candidate Wendell Wilkie in 1940, though many right-wing mothers thought that he was too "moderate." Even under Norris's leadership, the NLMA became increasingly right-wing, as members adhering to Dilling's ideology took over local chapters. According to Jeansonne, Norris attempted to control these elements, expelling the Cleveland and Boston chapters once "fascist sympathizers" took control, and ultimately resigning as president in April 1941 when it became clear that she could not shape the group's ideology.

Yet Norris's autobiography points to troubling elements that Jeansonne's history omits, in part because it relies heavily on newspaper articles from the time of Norris's death in 1966, which, like most obituaries, tend to be laudatory. Much of Norris's biography suggests that she was, indeed, a fascist sympathizer, if not an anti-Semite. A close personal friend of the Lindberghs, Norris expresses a common set of political beliefs with Charles Lindbergh, which speaks to her particular type of political fascism (*Family Gathering* 203). While she was stridently opposed to the anti-Semitism of the American Right, her novels and autobiographies

suggest that her politics were not purely rooted in the pacifism of an earlier era, but in her own conception of women's roles in the nation, which were shaped, in large part, by her conservative Catholicism.

Norris's autobiography does not speak much about the NLMA specifically, but it addresses, at great length, Norris's political history and the costs of her affiliations. Her treatment, particularly of her relationship with Nazi Germany, is defensive and strange, particularly from the vantage point of 1955. Norris addresses this history not in a section on her politics, but in a section on her friendships. She defends herself along much the same lines that Jeannesone argues: she was simply a pacifist, not a fascist sympathizer. She claims, "The idea was that because I was opposed to war, any wars and all wars, I must be in sympathy with Hitler" (234). In short, historians of the far right seem to reiterate her narrative, even though parts of her own story, and her novels, tell a different tale. Even in the 1950s, she seems baffled Edna Ferber, a fellow best-selling author who was Jewish and progressive in race relations, ended their friendship after Norris's trip to Germany. Norris explains:

My pacifism, as the Nazis came to power, my charter membership in the newborn America First, and possibly the fact that in 1935 I had a meeting with Hitler, in those days when we were all ignorant of the bloody purges and horrors ahead, and made a routine report upon him, cost me more than one friend. Germany, mercilessly crushed by conditions after the first war, was still shockingly poor, but when we went there she was eating again, she was organizing again, and much of the credit for her recovery was given to this dapper, strange little man.

But I would never have asked to meet Der Fuehrer. He asked to meet me. I was as indifferent to his existence as I had been to a chance for a friendly talk

with Mussolini a few weeks earlier. The condition in the latter case was that every word of my article should be approved by Il Duce himself, which made the whole prospect lifeless. (232-233)

This passage suggests both Norris's political sympathies with Germany, which sound much like Dillings's after her 1930s trips, and also her later defense of her political affiliations. Her ultimate argument is that, though she was a member of America First and a leader of the NLMA, she had no sympathy for the Nazi party, and only agreed to meet with Hitler because he wanted to meet her. In perhaps the strangest aspect of the defense that she offers, Norris claims that Hitler wanted to meet her not because of her political position in the U.S., but because he had learned that she was a descendent of his "idol," the inventor of the cooking stove. Her autobiography, then, suggests that she understands just how detrimental these affiliations are to her career and, by that point, her legacy, but misses the importance of her politics in shaping that legacy.

Norris depicts her political involvement in the 1930s and 1940s as a series of "lost causes." The first of these lost causes is the NLMA, which Norris refers to simply as the Mothers of America. Norris paints a radically different picture of the NLMA than history elsewhere suggests. According to her biography, it was "an organization dedicated only to the ideal of peace and adequate home defense" (284). Pre-empting readers' concerns about anti-Semitism, she reminds them that there were three other women at the head of the Mothers of American, "a Jew, a prominent Catholic, and an equally prominent leader in Protestant circles" (284). In this version, Norris does not leave the NLMA in April 1941 because of the group's rising extremism, but the group simply folds after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December makes non-intervention an unfeasible political and military position. The next lost cause that she addresses

is Wendell Wilkie's 1940 campaign. Norris describes a magnetic candidate who had her in a state of "intoxication" when she campaigned for him. She loved the power and celebrity that came with politics, apparently quite different from her popular literary fame. Though the campaign lost, she fondly remembers a short-lived radio program and the development of her friendship with powerful conservative Clare Boothe Luce.

The America First Committee (formed prior to Smith's party) is the last in Norris's trio of lost causes. The America First Committee, formed in September 1940, opposed not only intervention in Europe, but also supplying military or humanitarian aid. Norris claims that, for charter members, the group simply meant America first: "We liked the Monroe Doctrine. We liked to belong to the hemisphere that respects boundaries and keeps the peace" (291). For some members, this was undoubtedly true. But for many members, the rhetoric of concern for American lives, which Norris herself gave voice to at Madison Square Garden in May 1941 hid a myriad of other, far more sinister political agendas. As David Gordon argues, the year and a half of debate prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor revealed deep-seated anti-Semitism and xenophobic sentiments in both the leadership and membership of the AFC. The AFC set out to convince Americans, overwhelmingly isolationist at this point, that aid to Britain was synonymous with war. As Gordon argues, "America First did much more. It claimed the nation could work peacefully and profitably with Germany. It consistently minimized or ignored Hitler's crimes in Europe. At the same time the Committee's unceasing criticism of the British Empire helped convince at least some voters that democratic England was not only an unworthy recipient of American aid, it was also undeserving of American sympathy." Charles Lindbergh, the Norrises' close family friend for years, shaped the extremism of the AFC, introducing strong support for Germany into the group, and, in doing so, gave voice to Nazi sympathizers and anti-

Semites who repaid the group with fanatical support. While Lindbergh, like Norris, was primarily driven by anti-Communism, he was also motivated by concern for the future of the white race. At perhaps the most infamous of his speeches, a May 1941 speech at Madison Square Garden, Lindbergh presented alongside of Senator Burton Wheeler and Norris. Newspapers carried photographs where the three of them seem to be in a Nazi salute, and eye witnesses claimed they were in full salute blowing kisses at the crowd, though all three later claimed to just be waving to the crowd (Wallace 281)

Despite the committee's development, Norris seemed baffled about the downfall of America First and later accusations against her: "Exactly what happened to dim the simple patriot flame of America First I never quite grasped. Suddenly it was anathema; some lunatic fringe had probably considered it subversive" (292). While she did not understand the political downfall of America First and its ties to extremist members like Dilling, she believed that the same "lunatic fringe" behind its fall orchestrated the public treatment of her politics. She believed that her involvement led to her treatment in gossip magazines just after her widowhood (suggesting the late 1940s). During that time, a weekly magazine described her as a communist cell leader, with a pet name from Stalin. The editor repeated these attacks on a weekly radio show. Another magazine suggested that "the Vatican had taken up the matter and I was to be excommunicated" (292-3). For some reason, Norris understood the attacks on her as presumptions of her being a Communist, rather than a fascist. Of course, the primary accusations against the members of America First, which bear out in many supporters like Dilling, was that they were pro-fascist, pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic, anti-British, and anti-Roosevelt. These accusations from Norris's political career led to fallout throughout her life. She notes, "even today delicate probing and timid inquiry occasionally meet me; in places as far distant as

Virginia Beach and Tombstone, Arizona, much-folded, sodden magazine clippings are brought forth and once again the old libel comes to light” (295).

Norris’s novels as well as her articles suggest that her political affiliations are far closer to Charles Lindbergh’s than either her autobiography or historians like Jeansonne suggest. While Norris, unlike Lindbergh, was undoubtedly a life-long pacifist, opposed to all wars, she too was driven by a hatred of Communism and a fear for the future of the white race. This concern about “race suicide” does not simply arise in the 1930s, but exists from the outset of her literary career. While the ideology in Norris’s popular modernism was likely shared by many Americans, it seems shocking within the context of American Catholicism, which historians have long depicted as uniquely opposed to the racial politics of the early twentieth century and its attendant ideologies, particularly as manifest in the eugenics movement. Indeed, her novels, read as a response to what Dale M. Bauer calls the commodification of sexuality, depict a right-wing American Catholicism whose sexual politics is shaped as much by contemporaneous American political fears and the eugenics movement as by Catholic natural law.

Norris’s Literary and Political Legacy

While Norris was extremely popular with women readers throughout her career, her role within Catholic literary culture is of particular import. Norris, long ignored in American Catholic literary history, explores questions of unique importance to Catholic women. Although conservative Catholic critics of the 1910s and 1920s embraced these novels’ depictions of pietistic Catholic life, such writing was simultaneously derided as “bad literature,” populated by “little monsters of goodness” (qtd. in Sparr 143). Contemporary readings of these novels

reiterate the earlier criticism, and they further claim that the novels are marked predominantly by nostalgia and anti-modernism. As Norris's later political career suggests, she cannot simply be disregarded as a traditionalist or even a sentimentalist. Her novels negotiate changing American womanhood in the first half of the twentieth century. While her rejection of birth control and embrace of maternity may suggest a rejection of modernity, Norris's popular modernism attempts to reconfigure sexual power in way that makes space for the stability of marriage and maternity. Far from simply embodying nineteenth-century ideals, her novels envision a modern sexuality amenable to the Catholic tradition. These novels suggest that, if the New Woman can be Catholic, the changing social mores associated with unstable gender norms can also damage the "weak-minded" Catholic woman. While Norris's birth control novels are often read as versions of the same pietistic narratives, they suggest a profound cultural ambivalence about female sexuality, despite appearing to affirm doctrinal rejection of birth control.

Her negotiation of the traditional and of the modern helps to establish one thread that becomes essential to the American Catholic Right. Indeed, her current resurgence as popular literature, spurred by Catholic presses, suggests that her approach to modern sexuality established a mode of thought that continues to this day. Rather than simply reiterating tradition, she probes the limits of both modern and Catholic roles for women. Her affiliation with the Far Right, while tarnishing her reputation, speaks to the allure of the right for many American Catholics. While Norris rejected many of the premises of the far right, she remained a staunch conservative until her death. Her novels suggest one way that conservative ideology, while rejecting the core tenets of Catholic social doctrine, appeals to other interests of American Catholics. While this convergence is no longer surprising, given the increasing conservatism of

contemporary American Catholics, her participation offers traditional models of maternity and sexuality as intensely modern forms of Catholicism.

CHAPTER 4

“WE ARE OUR BROTHER’S KEEPER”: SOCIAL DOCTRINE, THE MYSTICAL BODY OF
CHRIST, AND THE NOVELS OF THE CATHOLIC LEFT

In the wake of the Great Depression, American Catholicism embraced the social doctrine first established by Pope Leo XIII at the turn of the century. Situating social justice as the core tenet of Catholic philosophy, an American Catholic Left, headed by one-time Communists and Socialists, sprouted in cities from Chicago to New York. The Catholic Left, by its principles diffuse, resisted social, racial, and economic exploitation, whether rooted in governmental systems or the Church itself. Though often ignored by critics of radical fiction as well as critics studying Catholic literature for failing to fit conveniently within either tradition, the American Catholic Left developed its own literary culture to spread the Church’s Social Doctrine. This literary culture began from the premise that writing a Catholic novel meant eschewing the everyday realism of domestic life that guided previous Catholic writers, and confronting the harshness of poverty and racism in America.

In his influential reading of the radical novel, Walter Bates Rideout conceptualizes the radical novel as “one which demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that the author objects to the human suffering imposed by the socioeconomic system and *advocates that the system be fundamentally changed*” [italics mine] (12). Rideout examines only one novel that might be seen as even peripherally Catholic, Dorothy Day’s *The Eleventh Virgin* (1924); he situates it among those of “the tired radical,” with a protagonist who is, ironically, never quite a radical (111-12). Yet Rideout and other critics of the radical novel—from Alan Wald to Barbara Foley—seem to ignore the radical Catholic novel because its vision for changing the system differs

fundamentally from other radical novels of the era. Rather than advocating for a disruption of the system according to socialist or Communist principles, the radical Catholic novel embraces a version of Emmanuel Mounier's personalism, a philosophy of transcendent social engagement rooted in the integrity of the person that opposed itself to both Liberalism and Marxism. Yet, unlike the sentimentalized Catholic fiction that came before it, the radical Catholic novels of the 1930s and 1940s not only object to the harm the socioeconomic system has wrought on personhood, but seeks a radical change in those very structures.

Just as the Leftist Catholic novel calls for a radical reorientation of Catholic attitudes toward social issues, it also calls for a concomitant reevaluation of aesthetics. The Catholic novels of the 1930s and 40s disavow not only sentimental Catholic novelists, but also the ideological underpinnings of their aesthetics. Richard Sullivan, professor of English at the University of Notre Dame and author of six novels and over a dozen short stories, specifically requested that his publisher avoid the "Kathleen Norris" approach in marketing his third novel, *The World of Idella May* (1946) (Cadegan, "Blessings" 52). Kathleen and Charles Norris' novels were publicized as thoroughly modern romances that, while thrilling the reader with intrigues, inevitably resolve in forced happy endings. Despite his novel's focus on the family and everyday life, which would seem to follow the Norrises' form, Sullivan imagined his work achieved an everyday realism that moved beyond the sentimentality of Norris and her contemporaries. His opinion of Catholic literary taste is summed up in his disdain for "persons who think that Kathleen Norris is the world's greatest writer: persons who feel that the virtue of a novel lies in its making one feel either holy (this is preferable) or just plain peachy (which is next best)" (quoted in Cadegan, "Realist" 49-50). Sullivan's denigration of Norris and other authors whose

books were populated by “little monsters of goodness” became standardized in Catholic criticism of the 1930s (quoted in Sparr 143).

After the 1930s, the goal of Catholic literature changed from evoking right feeling to representing spiritual reality in the material world. Catholic critics increasingly saw prior novels as simply trying to represent doctrinal truth, which has the effect of making devout readers feel “holy” when their own values are reflected through the lives of the protagonists. As I have argued, the popular modernism of the 1910s and 1920s works in far more complex ways to negotiate Catholicism and American culture; yet a specific engagement with economic politics and social doctrine emerges in the 1930s, and this model overrides the earlier emphasis on the politics of marriage and sexuality in both the Catholic Church and Catholic novels.

After the onset of the Great Depression, the American Catholic novel, more broadly, undergoes a crisis of representation. If the goal of the Catholic novelist was to depict the ultimate reality, the challenge for the Catholic was to see how the divine is manifest in a material world that has been so utterly destroyed by economic devastation. Suggesting that religious practices are themselves a function of historical circumstances, Catholic literature and literary criticism began to embrace the Church’s investment in suffering as a foundation of faith. Notre Dame literary scholar Camille McCole’s 1930 “The Tragedy of Theodore Dreiser” argues that Dreiser’s fiction misreads suffering:

[W]hile he saw the beauty and the tragedy and the power of life, what he did not see is the pain of life: he did not realize—and here a child could have led him—that all the suffering that he saw, that the unhappiness and very incompleteness of this world would argue for the existence of a God Who [sic] has clearly destined us for some other world. (4)

McCole's article illustrates a fundamental shift in Catholic criticism's assessment of the depiction of suffering in the 1930s. Rather than rejecting the material and spiritual suffering that Dreiser depicts for failing to represent the world realistically as a place of grace, she openly accepts that world is a place of misery. Dresier's "tragedy," then, is that he sees human pain and sadness as reasons to reject God, when such afflictions are actually proof of God's existence.

Other Catholic writers, emboldened by progressive Catholic action, presented a far more radical realism that transformed Catholic literary culture, including the works of Dorothy Day, H.L. Barth, and Harry Sylvester. All are emblematic of the Catholic Left in the 1930s and 1940s. While a range of literature produced throughout these decades challenges the narrative of a unitary conservative Catholic literature, these novels advocated for subsidiarity and Catholic distributism as alternative modes of confronting American social policy and the Church's Social Doctrine.¹ This new Catholic realism believed that only through encountering material suffering can a Catholic encounter Christ. These radical novels function, then, as a call to action, compelling the reader to extend beyond individual feeling toward collective action.

The Catholic social novel was predicated on the Catholic Worker movement as the model for the radical Catholic consciousness. The Catholic novels of the 1930s consistently align themselves with the Catholic Worker, rather than with any other Catholic Action group. Indeed, Barth and Sylvester present their novels as the literary counterpart to Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin's Catholic Worker movement. Though never mentioning the Catholic Worker explicitly, Barth dedicates *Flesh Is Not Life* (1938) "to the C.W.s the world over." Sylvester's three social

¹ Both concepts establish a specific economic relation between the individual and the state. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) established subsidiarity as a "middle way" between laissez-faire capitalism and communism. It calls for providing for the needs of the many at the most local level possible. Distributism, developing out of subsidiarity, calls for ownership of the means of production to be spread as widely as possible, rather than concentrated in either the hands of the state (as in the Church's understanding of communism) or the wealthy few (as in capitalism).

realist novels of the 1940s embody the values of the Catholic Worker movement, but only *Moon Gaffney* (1947), the novel with the most critical treatment, relies upon the movement as a part of its plot. The ethos of the movement—its complex rejection of both communism and capitalism, emphasis on individual suffering, desire to serve the poor as a means to serve God—permeates the novels in complex ways. These radical novels subvert the conventions of the proletarian novel, addressing the human suffering caused by the capitalist economic system while rejecting a materialist philosophy in favor of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body—the Pauline concept that all Christians are a unified body in Christ. In establishing a Catholic locus of radical consciousness, these novels reject the welfare state of New Deal liberalism, the exploitation of capitalism, and the atheism of Communism.

Alongside Peter Maurin, a Catholic social activist inspired by the French personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, Dorothy Day started the Catholic Worker Movement to agitate for social justice within the Catholic tradition. On May Day, 1933, Day began handing out the first edition of 2,500 copies of the *Catholic Worker* in Union Square. The newspaper, developing its title from the socialist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, sought to explore the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church, providing a way for the Catholic poor to turn to its own traditions rather than toward the atheism of Communism or socialism. In that first issue, the *Catholic Worker* laid out its aim:

For those who are sitting on park benches in the warm spring sunlight. For those who are huddling in shelters trying to escape the rain. For those who are walking the streets in the all but futile search for work. For those who think that there is no hope for the future, no recognition of their plight - this little paper is addressed.

It is printed to call their attention to the fact that the Catholic Church has a social program - to let them know that there are men of God who are working not only for their spiritual, but for their material welfare. It's time there was a Catholic paper printed for the unemployed. The fundamental aim of most radical sheets is the conversion of its readers to radicalism and atheism. Is it not possible to be radical and not atheist? Is it not possible to protest, to expose, to complain, to point out abuses and demand reforms without desiring the overthrow of religion? (Day, May 4, 1933)

The Catholic Worker movement did not only act against the abuses of capitalism and government, but also against the Church's complicity in them. Acting independently of the Church, the movement defined itself around three pillars. The most essential aspect of the movement is personalism, a philosophy that regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of all metaphysics and morals. French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) explains how personalism emphasizes the dignity and value of the individual person, the importance of dialogue, and a commitment to human solidarity. Mounier's personalism, in particular, invested in the relation between the individual and the transcendent.

Assuming the supreme dignity of each person, Catholic personalism calls each individual to make a moral stance by making oneself available to all others. As such, it has been described as "hyper anti-elitism" wherein no life is viewed as superior to any other life. Therefore, personalism values solidarity with oppressed peoples as the highest form of moral action. In Day's words, personalism occurs when "human beings enter into a direct relationship with one another and live a life of genuine fraternity" (quoted in Hamington 170). In order to

enact the tenets of personalism, the movement calls for a decentralized society, in contrast to government, industry, education, health care and agriculture. It encourages family farms, rural and urban land trusts, worker ownership and management of small factories, homesteading projects, food, housing and other cooperatives—“any effort in which money can once more become merely a medium of exchange, and human beings are no longer commodities” (*Catholic Worker* May 2008). Following this disavowal of capital, the movement sponsored farming communities, rural counterparts to the urban houses of hospitality.

After the initial success of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day established the first Catholic Worker House of Hospitality on New York City’s Lower East Side. The Catholic Worker House provided space to pursue the goals of personalism. Each Worker aspired toward non-violence, along with practicing the works of mercy described in Matthew 25:31-46, manual labor, and voluntary poverty. In keeping with Day’s Catholic anarchism, each Catholic Worker House functioned independently, and the movement has had no centralized leadership since Day’s death in 1980. The decentralization even extends to the Catholic Church itself. Though fundamentally rooted in the Catholic faith, the movement and the individual houses are entirely run by the laity and have no official relation with the Church.

Catholic Worker novels establish a fundamentally different theological conception of poverty and a radically different relationship with the poor than the Social Gospel novels. While the Social Gospel Movement proclaimed “the revolutionary consciousness in Jesus,” the doctrine of the Mystical Body proclaimed a consciousness *with* the poor and immigrant underclasses (Fisher 11). Gregory S. Jackson suggests the complex pattern necessitated within this model: “Following Romans 6:5-6 homiletic narrative promoted an identificatory theology that helped readers envision themselves ‘crucified *with* Christ’—‘planted together in the likeness of his

death’—to be raised up ‘in the likeness of his resurrection’” (Jackson 164). At the same time, however, the Christian was called to be like Jesus the miracle-worker, not just the crucified Christ. As Social Gospeler Alfred Cave explains, “Wherever we are called to live and work, we are to be known as thinking *with* Jesus, and feeling *with* Jesus and acting *with* Jesus” (quoted in Jackson 165). Thus, while adherents of the Social Gospel imagined themselves to be workers following in the footsteps of Christ, the Catholic Workers considered themselves to be one with the poor, and the Catholic Workers dedicate themselves to lives of poverty. By serving those in need, the Catholic Workers are not replicating Christ, but serving him, literally, embodied in the poor.

The Catholic Left, therefore, not only rejected the central tenets of Social Gospel theology, but also the middle-class settlement house model inspired by it, like Jane Addams’ Hull House. As historian Maurice Hamington explains, “settlements combined epistemology—a desire for understanding—with a moral disposition to use that social knowledge to act and care on one another’s behalf and thus improve society as a whole” (64). Historians have seen the difference between the Catholic Worker and the settlement house models in terms of Christian charity, suggesting that Day problematically relies on a model of giving to the other in a highly self-conscious way, while the settlement model practiced a purer form of anti-elitism. According to this critique, the model of charity suggests a gift from the haves to the have-nots, while the settlement model avoided this disparity because it did not cast itself in Christian terms. Yet the settlement model is rooted in the Social Gospel Movement. Addams claimed that Christianity was “revealed and embodied in the line of social progress” (quoted in Edwards 154). Here, Addams reveals the Christian roots of her project, conflating the sacred and the secular, and echoing the Christian millennial dispensationist logic of the Social Gospel movement in its

emphasis on historical progress through social uplift. The settlement model, then, suggests that the poor are a means by which to enact larger social reform rather than whole persons whose innate dignity is the purpose of the movement. In the settlement house, the middle-class instructors become the mode of salvation *for*, rather than a member *of*, the working class. They are in the working class, but not of it. This orientation towards the poor created the notion of “the worthy poor” that the Catholic Worker explicitly rejects. In influential Social Gospeler Walter Rauschenbusch’s model, the poor must in some ways be deserving of the work that is being put forward. For Social Gospel adherents, perhaps the strongest demonstration of worthiness is conversion.

Rather than seeking to achieve social reform as a means to global salvation, Day particularly welcomed the “undeserving poor,” who were “ambassadors of God.” As suggested by the woodcut that opens *The Long Loneliness* (1952), Day and the Catholic Worker movement identify Christ primarily with suffering. To be Christ-like is to suffer. Therefore, the poor are far more like Christ than the middle class could ever be. The more undeserving the guest, the more difficult the worker’s task; the more unlovable the guest, the more the believer is called to embrace that person. Thus, the Catholic Worker explicitly refuses to proselytize, instead focusing on performing works of mercy. Indeed, the lure of the Church for Day and, later, Thomas Merton, was in its embodiment of that suffering. The Church did not only center suffering theologically, iconized through the difference between the crucifix with its image of a suffering Christ and the Protestant cross empty after the resurrection, but the American Church was a church of immigrants, a church of the working poor. As Day explains in *The Long Loneliness*, “I first became a Catholic because I felt that the Catholic Church was the church of the poor and I still think it is the Church of the poor” (qtd. in Fisher 48). While Addams’ model

suggests, like the Social Gospel novels, that radical change can occur through understanding suffering, Day suggests that radical change can only be achieved by suffering.

Dorothy Day's Writings and the Model of Catholic Fiction

From 1933 to 1980, Day's writings established the foundational principles of the Catholic Worker movement. She wrote one novel, in the midst of her conversion from "Union Square to Rome," and several autobiographies. Despite the progressive radicalism of the Catholic Worker movement, no critics have read Day's work as radical fiction. Indeed, Rideout discounts her novel as a "special case," even among novels of "tired radicals" because of its religious influence. In short, the religious tones of the novel inherently proscribe its inclusion as a part of radical fiction of the Left. While *The Eleventh Virgin* (1924) was written before her official conversion in 1927, Day's only novel becomes a model for a new American Catholic bildungsroman. It traces her spiritual hunger for something more than the structures of progressive politics. From the start of the novel, June, the thinly-veiled Dorothy Day figure, struggles with metaphysical questions, "the question of her soul and where she was before she was born and what would become of her afterward" (18).

Yet *The Eleventh Virgin* is not, in its own right, Catholic fiction. Although written three years before Day's conversion, it contains the seeds of the new fiction of the Catholic Left, suggesting Day's belief that "All my life I had been haunted by God" (Dostoevsky quoted in *Long Loneliness* 11). While it does not chart Day's conversion to Catholicism specifically, as her later autobiographical works *From Union Square to Rome* (1940) and *The Long Loneliness* (1952) do, it reveals a spiritual conversion from Communism to a social activism rooted in metaphysics. Indeed, at the time of the writing, according to Day's autobiographies, Day

explored Catholicism: making trips to St. Patrick's Cathedral, learning to say the rosary at night, and seeking out Catholic companions (*Union Square* 109).

Still, Day herself did not see the novel as an important part of her spiritual turn. She wrote, "During one of these crowded years I wrote a book, a very bad book, which one of the moving picture companies bought on publication" (*Union Square* 109). She later tried to have all copies of the novel destroyed. Ostensibly, she was embarrassed by the novel's depiction of her live-in romance with a fellow hospital worker that led to an unplanned pregnancy. This pregnancy becomes the heart of the novel since the book ends with Day's abortion. In the afterword, Day tries to ascribe meaning to this novel that is more autobiography than social commentary. She concludes, "And the moral of that is . . . that women are more interested in men than in ideas. I thought that I was a free and emancipated woman and I found out that I wasn't at all, really" (312). *The Eleventh Virgin*, then, explores how women are exploited by the radical movement. It is not so much a novel of a "tired radical" as the work of a young radical coming to terms with the limitations for women within the radical movement.

The novel establishes the relationship between spiritual belief and social action, while at the same time struggling to establish the relation between sexuality and the individual life to this larger program. The early sections of the novel adopt epistolary form for several chapters, chronicling the inner life of the young protagonist. In her diary, June chronicles the development of her spiritual life, shaped by strict Protestant structures of faith and morality. Young June struggles with continental philosophy and finds pleasure in the sermons of Jonathon Edwards and John Wesley. She believes that "God is love," an all-enveloping father who holds the believer in his arms. Yet, in her struggle to voice normative piety (or at least an adolescent's conception of it) she divorces this spiritual love from the material body, an ontological crisis that

comes to be the heart of the novel and key problem for the novelists of the Catholic Left. In June's Protestant mind, to be holy is to renounce the body, to renounce sexual love, and to embrace a transcendent life, free from sin by unfettering the self from the material world. To do so is to be "Christ-like," but it is "a continual strife and my spirit is weary" (51). In June's early writings, then, her Protestant faith is rooted in a division between the spiritual and material worlds, and the suffering of humanity is wrought not by material conditions, but by the struggle over the body. Yet June simultaneously embraces the material world, and like Emerson, worships in nature, admiring "the sun on a warm spring day" or "a snowy park when the twilight made deep blue shadows behind the trees" (52). Eventually, this disconnection between June's intuitive beliefs about the relationship between the divine and the material, as well as her Protestant religion, lead her to disavow religion in favor of the usual pastimes of adolescence.

The yearning for a metaphysical grounding and her concomitant struggle with sexual desire as a marker of the material world become the hallmarks of the novels of the Catholic Left. June struggles with the split between mind and body, disgusted by the somatic and fascinated with the sexual. As she ages, June reconciles her frustrations with sexuality through progressive politics. Indeed, the male editors and writers of the Leftist newspapers that she writes for shape her understanding of female sexuality, even as their commentary opposes her own sensibilities. She begins to learn about abortions and depravity via Havelock-Ellis (68). The novel contains a naïve view of sexuality that Day would come to reject. June engages in the sort of arrangement that Harriet in Norris's *Harriet and the Piper* does, believing her relationship to be a spiritual, if not legal marriage. In the end, however, the novel suggests that the sexual freedom of the 1920s traps women in men's sexuality rather than freeing them to explore their own.

While the moralism of the ending may seem to suggest a trite sentimentality, within the context of Day's ongoing conversion, it stands as a feminist critique of progressive politics in the 1920s. Just as her conception of sexuality is shaped by the movement's intellectually-based ideals rather than her own feminine intuition, her sense of political empowerment is truncated by the men of her progressive milieu. June finds the "work" is not about a deep ethical commitment to a movement, as she had naively thought it would be, but rather to a series of "causes" held up as part of the progressive agenda. "It's all about causes, too,—the poor working girl, the police system, homes for fallen women and how they should be run, birth control, pacifism and any number of other things. But all I have time to tell you about are my adventures" (125). This passage argues for the inherent failure of any cause without a metaphysical grounding. June is invested in progressive causes, but they are far less significant to her than her personal drama, her own experiences that she achieves through political participation.

As Day says in her later biographies, she did imagine herself to be a part of the radical movement (though she may have become more committed to the community in the years between the publication of the novel and her conversion). After her abortion, she met Forster Batterham, a progressive leader who was friends with Malcolm Cowley and Granville Hicks. She frames her love affair with Batterham differently from her earlier relationship that led to her abortion. Even in her later autobiographies, Day insists that she was effectively married to Batterham. When she made the choice to join the Church, it was with the knowledge that she would be giving up two loves: that of her husband and that of her radical circle. Even in later years, Day wrote of the desire to be held, to belong as a part of a family. Yet celibacy was important for the Worker Movement. It was a lay community, but just as in religious orders, she saw celibacy as necessary to dedicate oneself to work. The desire for a nuclear family, which

was for Day created the “long loneliness,” could be filled through the family of the Catholic Worker community. Day, after all, also had her daughter Tamar. The novel ends with the desire for men, children, and marriage. A major struggle, then, for Catholic novelists of the Left, both male and female, was how to integrate the private life of the home and family with the commitment to social action that necessitates a deep personal involvement that would limit dedication to the familial life.

The Mystical Body of Christ and New Deal Liberalism

James T. Farrell’s *A Note on Criticism* (1936), often cited for its definition of the proletarian novel, grounds his reproach of Michael Gold and Granville Hicks in a critique of Catholic literature. The literature of Left, like the literature of the American Catholic Church, often placed dogma and didacticism above aesthetics. While little attention has been paid to Farrell’s critique of Catholicism in its own right,² Farrell’s own struggle with his Catholic background and its manifestations in his *Studs Lonigan* series (1932-1935) suggest that his questioning of Catholic critics was not simply an afterthought. Farrell claims that Catholic novels’ aesthetic failure is rooted in the extremism of Catholic criticism. As Farrell understands it, Catholic criticism demands that literature become entirely functional, divorcing purpose from aesthetics. This “functional extremism” demands that Catholic literature illustrate “Catholic truths” and spur faith in them. Farrell fears, at worst, a dedication to “Catholic Decency” and a focus on spiritual drama rather than a focus on the struggles of the working class. Thus, Farrell claims that good Catholic literature is an exception rather than the rule (24). Yet it was precisely

² See Paul Giles for more on the Catholic elements of Farrell’s social realism.

as Farrell was writing in the 1930s that many Catholic novelists on the Left began to challenge overtly those very standards of Catholic criticism.

By 1938, Communism was an undoubted enemy of the Church, but the coalition between American Catholics and right-wing anti-Communists was decades from establishment. During the Great Depression, American Catholics were drawn to left-wing politics. Novels like Hilary Leighton Barth's *Flesh Is Not Life* (1938) depict the lure of both Communism and socialism not as the siren-song of atheistic depravity, but as the pull of truth. American Catholics saw both Communism and socialism as a means to address social ills. One Catholic reviewer approvingly noted that Barth's "Communists [are] not ogres but in the main sincere, self-sacrificing human beings whatever their ends or the means used to attain them" (Skillin 306). For many Catholic authors and activists, Communism's lure was that it spoke to the real need for social justice. Dorothy Day explains her sense of kinship with Communists: "They were the poor, the unemployed, the homeless. They were among the ones Christ was thinking of when he said, 'Feed my sheep.' And the Church had food for them, that I knew" ("Catholic Worker Program").

Day refers not only to the material resources of the Church, but also to its progressive social doctrine that allowed Catholics to turn toward their own tradition to redress societal ills. The major doctrine of the era that reshaped Catholic radicals' orientation toward the Church was the Mystical Body of Christ. The most influential American Catholic novels of the 1930s and 1940s turn away from the family as the dominant metaphor for envisioning the Church and, instead, embrace the Mystical Body, a doctrine that presents the Body of Christ as far more than a metaphor for conceptualizing a much greater community. Adopting the tropes of contemporaneous proletarian fiction, the Catholic novels of the 1930s and 1940s envision the

Church as a means for reorganizing American economics and social relations in a way that opposed capitalism, communism, and New Deal liberalism. In this new ideological vein, Catholic novelists reconceptualize the role of the Catholic novel, transforming just what it is for a Catholic novelist to represent both the material world and the ultimate reality underlying it.

In the radical Catholic novels of the 1930s and 40s, the Mystical Body of Christ arises as the dominant image for conceptualizing the Church and its relationship with the people and God. Long before it was formally propagated in 1943, Pope Pius XI relied upon the Pauline concept to explain both Church authority and Catholic Social Doctrine. Paul's letters to the Ephesians describe the members of the Church as a body guided and directed by Jesus at the head.³ As formulated by the Vatican Council, the doctrine established that membership in the body, accessible only via membership in the Church, was necessary for salvation. The doctrine, in this form, was an attempt to consolidate Church power. No one could come to heaven except through Christ, and, as Christ is the Church, the Church alone could provide salvation. The doctrine gained popularity during the nineteenth century in order to "symbolize the Church's aggressive solidarity" against various "enemies" (Fisher 48). This reading of the doctrine as a consolidation of the Church's unique salvific authority was dominant until the 1930s. In his 1935 work on the Mystical Body, Fulton J. Sheen, one of the most powerful Catholic American theological voices, was careful to distinguish "between the *union* of Christ and the believer within the church, and the mystical *equation* of Christ in and with men and women" (Fisher 50). While the Mystical Body united the believer and Christ as part of one body through the Church, the doctrine should not be misread to suggest that the individual is divine through communion

³ The concept of the Mystical Body existed for centuries, but only gained popularity in the nineteenth century. As James Terence Fisher notes, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theologians who popularized the concept of the Church as the Mystical Body veered close to heresy, but during the first Vatican Council (8 June 1869-20 October 1870), a draft, though never formally put forward, identified the Church as Christ's Mystical Body.

with Christ. Through this careful articulation, the doctrine allowed for a greater sense of importance among the laity without sacrificing the central authority of the Church or its clerics in the economy of salvation. As formally promulgated in Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, the doctrine functioned as a conservative organizing symbol for official Catholic culture and reinforced the Church as "the authoritative teacher and embodiment of salvific truth" (Fisher 50).

Yet the radical Catholic novels rely on a heterodox reading of the *Mystici Corporis Christi*. American Catholics have a long history of interpreting papal decrees well beyond the Holy See's intentions, raising the ire of the papacy and leading to the establishment of "Americanism" as a heresy of interpretation.⁴ Indeed, many Catholics took up the idea that Fulton Sheen was careful to distinguish as heretical: Christ, through a mystical equation, resides in individual men and women, making each person a living tabernacle. Many American Catholics used this heterodox reading to base the even more radical claim that the Mystical Body was more encompassing than the institutional Church: it was society itself. For such thinkers, to immerse oneself in society is to immerse oneself in Christ (Giles 141). While the official Church position used the Mystical Body to consolidate its own power as the singular road to salvation, as an exclusionary concept, the Catholic Worker Movement and others on the Catholic Left argued that the Mystical Body of Christ was radically inclusive. In Dorothy Day's reading, all humanity, regardless of religion, are members, or at least potential members, of the Mystical Body. She interpreted the doctrine to mean that Catholics must not only oppose "the illness of

⁴ The uniquely American interpretation of Papal proclamations applies most famously to Isaac Hecker (1819-1888), founder of the Paulist fathers and founding editor of *The Catholic World*. Hecker famously interpreted the 1870 encyclical on papal infallibility to open up Catholics to explore theology beyond that established by the Church. In his logic, Catholics could rest in the promise that the Pope's infallibility would ensure salvation for all Catholics, regardless of theological variety. Pope Leo XIII ultimately condemned this way of thinking, citing Hecker specifically, as the heresy of "Americanism."

injustice, hate, disunion, race hatred, prejudice, class war, selfishness, greed, nationalism, and war [that] weaken this Mystical Body,” but also that Catholics are called to suffer alongside the least of the body. As Fisher notes, for the Catholic Left, the Mystical Body is a summons to share in Christ’s crucifixion (50). In the Catholic Worker novel, this summons is a call to action.

The growing power of Day’s reading of the Mystical Body not only reshaped American Catholic activism, but also the American Catholic literary world. The Mystical Body called for a radical shift in the way that the world was represented. In the wake of the Great Depression, American Catholicism turned to the Church’s emphasis on suffering—both Christ’s torment at the cross and the travails of the human condition—as a way to make sense of the material world.⁵ Indeed, the imprint on the first edition of Dorothy Day’s *Long Loneliness* depicts a woodcut of Mary, visibly pregnant, sleeping as an angel whispers in her ear. In the background, bathed in light, are the three crosses of Golgotha. Collapsing the annunciation with the crucifixion, the image’s juxtaposition of two temporal moments suggests that the suffering of the cross is present even from the moment of conception. It is not only the end of Jesus’ life, but its ultimate purpose. The image of a pregnant Mary, lovingly holding her belly underneath the cross, connects redemptive suffering to humanity. Mary, too, though entirely human, will make the

⁵ Consider the words of the *Salve Regina*, a Marian antiphone composed during the Middle Ages, that depict the world as a place of human suffering, which Mary is uniquely positioned to understand because she is fully human and has endured the ultimate maternal suffering as she watched her child die:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
 Our life, our sweetness and our hope.
 To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
 To thee do we send up our sighs,
 Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Turn then, most gracious advocate,
 thine eyes of mercy toward us;
 and after this our exile,
 show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
 O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

ultimate sacrifice in giving her son to crucifixion. The evocation of her suffering even as she holds the promise of new life suggests that human life itself, from its very outset, is shrouded in torment. Just as Dorothy Day understood the poor to be the most like Christ through their suffering and alienation, the Mystical Body demanded action on behalf of the suffering who are, literally, Christ.

Perhaps no issue illustrates the Catholic Left's inclusive conception of the Mystical Body and its connection to the Catholic Church as the natural home of suffering more than the centrality of Sacco and Vanzetti's 1927 executions to progressive Catholicism. While Sacco and Vanzetti united the American Left, inspiring literary works from writers like John dos Passos and Edna St. Vincent Millay, their status as atheist anarchists makes them unlikely heroes for the Catholic progressive movement. The state made them martyrs and the international press made them secular saints. While their executions were a major blow to the labor movement, they led, indirectly, to Day's conversion. At the time, Day was living with her new baby Tamar and her baby's father, labor activist Forster Batterham. While Batterham, like so many in the American left, understood their execution as proof of humanity's cruelty, Day saw their death as an example of Christian sacrifice. Even though Sacco and Vanzetti had left the Church, Day saw them as Catholic radicals. As Day biographer Paul Elie explains: "They were native Catholics now resident elsewhere, and their native faith was so strong that they instinctively understood their fate in Catholic terms, at once a victory and a sacrifice" (56). For Day, their deaths united political action and progressive theology: "All the nation mourned. All the nation, I mean, that is made up of the poor, the worker, the trade unionist—those who felt most keenly the sense of solidarity—the very sense of solidarity which made me gradually understand the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ whereby we are the members of one another" (*Long Loneliness* 147).

Sacco and Vanzetti, then, came to embody the new conception of the Mystical Body for the Catholic Left. To be members of one another is not only to feel alongside the suffering, but also to seek to alleviate that suffering.

While the Catholic Worker's personalism demanded that each individual take up that call, the Worker movement also advocated collective action, rooted not in the liberalism of the New Deal state, but in the Catholic concept of subsidiarity, first established in the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Subsidiarity demands that structural organization and functions should be as local as possible. The state cannot reproduce the bonds of personalism. In the *Long Loneliness*, Day recounts a conversation with Peter Maurin about the nature of the welfare state:

'That is why people prefer going on relief, getting aid from the state,' I told him. 'They prefer that to taking aid from their family. It isn't any too easy. . . to be chided by your family for being a failure. People who are out of work are always considered failures. They prefer the large bounty of the great, impersonal mother, the state.' But the fact remained, he always reminded me, no matter what people's preferences, that we are our brother's keeper, and the unit of society is the family; that we must have a sense of personal responsibility to take care of our own, and our neighbor, at a personal sacrifice. . .' It is not the function of the state to enter into these realms. Only in times of great crisis, like floods, hurricane, earthquake, or drought, does public authority come in. Charity is personal. . .' He admitted we were in a crisis then, but he wanted none of state relief. (179)

Thus, the Catholic Worker Movement, like *Rerum Novarum*, criticized liberalism and the welfare state. Yet Day's criticisms of Roosevelt's New Deal programs, as well as the social

relief programs that came later, had nothing to do with conservative arguments about creating dependency; rather, the Workers criticized the “inadequacy of the benefits and the degradation imposed on recipients” (Murray 192). Indeed, the *Catholic Worker* described the Federal Relief Commodities as “foods purchased by the government to raise the market price and distributed as far as they will go to the needy. They do not increase the standard diet very much” (quoted in Murray 193). The welfare state, even at its birth in the 1930s, functions for the Workers as little more than corporate welfare, sustaining corporations at the expense of the individual members of the working class. The effect of this project was, to Day’s mind, the degradation of the working class. Far from helping the working class, the New Deal enabled a new level of surveillance on workers. Day, who refused the notion of the worthy poor, lashed out against welfare programs’ demand for documentation, quoting Louis Ward who described the poor made to sit “for endless hours on the benches of some welfare agency to be subjected to a third degree on their personal lives, treated as crooks and investigated to the point of criminal punishment” quoted in Murray 194).

Perhaps most problematically, the welfare state allows the displacement of personal responsibility to the poor. It allows citizens to let the government take care of the poor, or to assume that their tax dollars fulfill the extent of stewardship. The Catholic Left demands a much more active morality. As the exchange between Day and Maurin offers, the Catholic Worker Movement stresses the “necessity of personal obligation to the poor, and not abdicating responsibility to the state” (Piehl 120). Day always centers personal responsibility for others. While she embraces voluntary poverty as a political allegiance, involuntary poverty must be eradicated, and the problem of poverty cannot be alleviated by turning to the “great, impersonal mother”:

We believe that social security legislation, now hailed as a great victory for the poor and for the worker, is a great defeat for Christianity. It is an acceptance of Cain's statement on the part of the employer. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Since the employer can never be trusted to give a family wage, nor take care of the Worker as he takes care of his machine when it is idle, the state must enter in and compel help on his part

But we in our generation have more and more come to consider the state as bountiful Uncle Sam. 'Uncle Sam will take care of it all. The race question, the labor question, the unemployment question.' ("More About Holy Poverty")

Day's critique of the liberal state, then, is ensconced in her larger critique of capitalism. Just as the employer can abdicate responsibility for the worker, so too can the moral individual. In the end, even the state abdicates responsibility for the poor, providing a paltry sum that cannot provide rent for a decent house or decent food, so that the money is often spent on petty luxuries. If government itself could not practice the works of mercy, the moral imperative of social justice demanded that individuals do so.

While Day and Maurin both couch their discussions of subsidiarity in the unit of the family and may, therefore, seem to share an ideology with contemporary welfare critics, the concept of the Mystical Body transforms the unit of family into a metaphor for society at large. When Day talks about the family as the unit of society, she adopts the language of Catholicism that describes the whole Church in the language of family. Through the concept of the Mystical Body, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Indeed, Day and her counterparts' heterodox reading of the *Mystici Corporis Christi* insists that the stranger is family. The Mystical Body of

Christ includes all its potential members, all of society. Even more so, as a component of the same body, the stranger is not different from the self.

Accordingly, the Catholic Worker novels establish a different orientation toward social responsibility from both the homiletic novels and the New Deal liberalism of many WPA writers. In marking the distinction between the homiletic novels of the Social Gospel movement and the secular realist and naturalist novels that borrowed their discursive strategies while jettisoning their teleology, Jackson claims that “anchored in Protestantism’s revived emphasis on individual volition and commitment to spiritual self-evaluation, the proponents of homiletics assumed personal experience to be the measure of reality” (169). For Catholics, of course, personal experience is never the primary epistemological category. Indeed, reliance on personal experience to validate faith is a key component of the Modernist heresy. Grace, while it can be felt in the world, exists independently of the individual encounter. Thus, the novels of the Catholic Left shift the focus from the individual experience of the Christian encountering poverty to the collective fight against poverty. While the individual bears responsibility to act responsibly in the world, that responsibility is solely aimed toward the collective good.

Social Doctrine and the Catholic Worker Novel

The conventional narrative of Catholic social and political thought, like the dominant American Catholic literary history, emerged in the era after World War II when American Catholics grew safely ensconced in the suburban middle class. American Catholic leaders built a coalition with fiscal conservatism based on a mutual rejection of Communism. Indeed, the Church had long rejected Communism because the Church refuses all materialist philosophies. The Church’s disavowal of Communism does not, however, constitute an acceptance of

capitalism. Yet the popular narrative that centers anti-Communism has obscured Catholic Social Doctrine such that contemporary American Catholics often mistakenly believe free-market principles to be almost as much a part of Church teaching as transubstantiation. American Catholics of the 1930s and 1940s were far more aware that the Church's disavowal of materialism did not require an embrace of capitalism. The landmark social encyclicals, Leo XII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's 1931 *Quadragesimo Anno* condemned both liberal capitalism and socialism.⁶ The 1891 encyclical, translated as "On the Condition of Workers," begins with a disavowal of socialism on three grounds: that it goes against natural law, that it misapprehends the role of the state, and that it harms the spirit of the worker.⁷ Dismissing the role of the state in ordering economic relations between social classes, the encyclical suggests that the Church itself should "administer the remedy" (40), by maintaining private property as "sacred" at the same time that it demands just wages for the worker.⁸ By the 1930s, theologians recognized a fundamental misreading in *Rerum Novarum*. Pius's condemnation of socialism is rooted in his miscomprehension of its aims. In upholding private property, the encyclical mistakenly suggests that socialists advocate the transfer of private property to the community, rather than the transfer of the means of production to the community (Shannon 135). While certainly open to critique for its Lockean approach to private property and its paternalism towards the poor, the encyclical is radical in its establishment of papal support for labor unions. Leo nostalgically compares unions and labor associations with medieval guilds, and he proclaims

⁶ See Peter Hebblethwaite for an overview of Catholic Social Doctrine, substantive critiques of both encyclicals, and explanation of how these encyclicals have shaped more recent social teaching.

⁷ The encyclical's argument against socialism relies heavily on the concept of natural law, which evokes Aquinas, whose work Pope Leo re-popularized.

⁸ Pope Leo resented his predecessor's loss of the papal states in 1870 (Hebblethwaite 86).

the Church's support for unions as a means to challenge the greed of unbridled capitalism that has "laid a yoke almost of slavery on the unnumbered masses of non-owning workers" (6).

Quadragesimo Anno, or "After Forty Years," establishes continuity with *Rerum Novarum*, but responds more adeptly to the conditions of the worker in light of the Great Depression and develops a more fully articulated critique of liberalism, toward which *Rerum Novarum* had only gestured. Pius pushed for more intervention by the State to protect the common good even as it protects individual rights, invoking the concept of social justice: "Social justice refers to the central and necessary set of conditions wherein each member is contributing, and thus enjoying, all that is needed for the common good. But this justice must be leavened and enlivened by the virtue of social charity or love" (88, 137). Rooted in social justice, the encyclical rejects free-market competition as the basis for an economy on the grounds that it is fundamentally immoral. The rights to fair wages and basic human necessities are intrinsic to personhood. Capitalism establishes a worker's value through competition, in effect turning the person into a commodity, which undermines the essential value of the individual in natural law. Social doctrine, then, rejected both socialism and capitalism as failing to recognize the rights of personhood. Joshua B. Freeman aptly describes Social Catholicism of the era as "a sometimes noble quest for the impossible, capitalism without its logic, its morality, its necessity" (quoted in Fisher 31).

Even Catholicism's right wing rejected the claim that capitalism is a necessary good over Communism. Father Charles Coughlin, whose weekly political radio program reached an audience of forty million, rejected both Communism and capitalism throughout his career. While he vocally supported both Roosevelt and his New Deal policies through 1934, even declaring, "The New Deal is Christ's deal!" he broke with Roosevelt later that same year.

Following *Quadragesimo Anno*'s call for large workers' associations, Coughlin established the National Union for Social Justice, which demanded an end to Roosevelt's capitalistic monetary policies and supported nationalizing "necessary" industries, wealth redistribution through taxation, federal protection of unions, and the decrease of property rights. For Coughlin, capitalism was an evil suffered in this world, while Communism was an evil paid for in the next. In 1935, he proclaimed, "We maintain the principle that there can be no lasting prosperity if free competition exists in industry. Therefore, it is the business of government not only to legislate for a minimum annual wage and maximum working schedule to be observed by industry, but also to curtail individualism that, if necessary, factories shall be licensed and their output shall be limited" (54). Even as Coughlin became increasingly embedded in fascist ideology and anti-semitism after the 1936 election, he maintained a commitment to the end of capitalism. While Catholic anti-Communism, coupled with the rapid movement of American Catholics into the middle-class, created a coalition between Catholics and fiscal conservatives in the 1950s, Catholic Social Doctrine has radically opposed both capitalism and socialism since the 1890s.

If Catholics on both the Right and the Left rejected capitalism as an immoral system, why did this position fail to take hold in the popular narrative of American Catholicism? Peter Hebblethwaite has argued that the real problem of Catholic Social Doctrine of the 1930s was that it "lectured to the world from outside," building upon a nostalgia for a peasant past and ignoring genuine class conflict. A number of cultural Catholics, those like Sacco and Vanzetti who left the Church and turned toward materialist radicalism, shared this critique during the 1920s and 1930s. For such Catholics, Leo's corporatism was little more than the petit bourgeois socialism that Marx warned against in *The Class Struggles in France* (1850).

Literary criticism has only recuperated proletarian fiction that presents religion as a part of false consciousness. For instance, Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1938) critiques the Church as an institution unwilling to assist Italian-American immigrants with their material needs. The novel, a proletarian bildungsroman depicting a first-generation Italian-American boy's development into a Marxist, suggests that the failure of the Church to care for its people's physical needs manifests its ultimate failure to care for their spiritual needs. When Paul's father is encased in concrete, his devotion failing to save him, young Paul takes on the role of father. Attempting to provide for his family, he moves through various modes of social support, only to be turned away. First, the local grocer, himself a Catholic, refuses Paul credit. Then, the government welfare office refuses Paul because his father had not completed the naturalization process. Finally, Paul heads to St. Prisca, his parish, to speak with Father John. When he finally reaches the priest, the priest is in the middle of a lavish meal, "baked potatoes and cuts of brown dripping lamb and fresh peas and platters of hot food cool food hard food soft food," paid for by donations from the very faithful who refuse to help Paul (81). Like the government office, the priest turns Paul away toward bureaucracy, claiming he has nothing to do with "the Charities." But this rejection is no different than the others before it; the striking moment that speaks to the priest's complete disconnection from the suffering of his parishioners comes as he sends Paul away. Father John comments on Paul's coat, asking if it keeps him warm, suggesting, perhaps, that Paul's poverty is not so great, that Paul's family has not yet reached the litmus test to be included among "the worthy poor." Still, he sends Paul home with a chunk of strawberry shortcake, an act that parodies the Eucharist. Rather than giving Paul something that can sustain him and his family, the priest sends him home with something frivolous. The Church, both the faithful as individuals like the grocer and the institution itself, is unwilling to help Paul. Paul is

the only father his family can depend on as the family of the Mystical Body proves itself a hollow metaphor. Even Paul's faith, beyond the institutional Church, cannot save him. His desperate prayers before the cross underscore the Church's failing, because the crucifix depicts a bloodied Christ's "white athletic" body, contrasting with Paul's own "thin wrists getting thinner," suggesting that even in his suffering, Christ fails to speak to the struggles of humanity (75, 83). Paul's ultimate turn away from the Church, which the novel depicts as little more than a corrupt institutionalization of superstition, frees him from the beliefs that trapped his father.

Christ in Concrete depicts the Church in the way that some criticize *Rerum Novarum*: as a church which talks about the poor rather than living with them; which upholds the good of private property at all costs; and which suggests poverty is a blessed state that one need not escape. *Christ in Concrete's* treatment of Catholicism echoes the rejection of religions as outdated ideologies that trap the worker, as seen in much proletarian fiction, like Mike Gold's *Jews without Money*. In these novels, the characters must realize that religion forms part of false consciousness to develop into proletarian heroes. The novels depict this turn from religion to Marxism as a conversion experience, as the protagonists' realization of false consciousness functions as a moment when scales fall from their eyes. While di Donato's novel is relatively rare in its overt depiction of the turn away from Catholicism, even non-Catholic novels follow the conversion narrative from naïve Catholicism to robust Marxism. Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* (1935) features a Catholic protagonist who "converts" to Marxism. In both Steinbeck's story and di Donato's novel, the language of Catholicism, of ritual, and of the sacred remain an essential part of the character's world and the novel, transferred from the practice of religion to new faith in the cause. Of Steinbeck's main character, Peter Conn writes, "Nolan's displaced religious vocabulary accurately suggests how religious beliefs were often recast in secular terms

in order to enlarge the domain of oppositional politics. Put simply: a radical message may find a more congenial audience if it is domesticated and familiarized by association with the sacred” (254). Yet within the Leftist Catholic novel, the radical message is itself sacred. While Jackson rightly suggests that “secularized literary modes such as realism and naturalism . . . tended to disengage the mechanism of activism so crucial to the tradition of homiletic fiction” (162-3), Catholic authors like Barth and Harry Sylvester turned to the novel to depict an active social Catholicism that spoke to the needs of the people. Borrowing the structures of what Barbara Foley terms the proletarian bildungsroman, these novels re-envision a Catholic Social Doctrine for and by the people, and critique the Church’s failures to address the needs of America’s poor. The Catholic Worker novels seek a basis for collective action rooted in the Catholic tradition, both for “Catholics now resident elsewhere” and for practicing Catholics trapped in the ideologies of liberalism and nationalism.

The Radical Fiction of Hilary Leighton Barth and Harry Sylvester

Hilary Leighton Barth’s 1938 *Flesh Is Not Life*, the tale of “Charm Girl” Tandra Sothoron’s intellectual conversion from socialism to a progressive Catholicism, depicts an older Catholic author trapped in the literary tropes of yesteryear. The novel describes Mrs. Grover as a writer of “stereotyped books of romances and syndicated Sunday-morning advice to the lovelorn, the stenographer, and the shop girl” (53). Her literary circle includes Louise Imogen Guiney and “the Meynell group,” a literary collective of Catholic poetesses that was almost laughable by the

1930s due to their outdated sentimentality (186).⁹ Her son, Brendan, representing the new Catholic literary vanguard, laments the state of such writing:

[Mo]dern writing was at an impasse, . . . it never took the reader beyond the natural circle of love and marriage because neither the modern mind nor its leaders could conceive of any good, beauty, and truth outside of such a circumference. . . ‘Any writer unable to see that the greatest dramatic and motivating force in life is Creator and creature intercourse, cannot write literature—especially not a human love story.’ (Barth 54)¹⁰

Longing for a Catholic fiction that moves beyond the marriage plots that came to seem so trite in the early 1930s, she and Brendan envision an American Catholic literary resurgence predicated on a new Catholic aesthetics. Barth’s depiction of the Grovers and their literary circles captures the impulse to create a thriving Catholic literary community in the United States that would parallel the revival in Europe that had produced Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Georges Bernanos. As Catholics tried to establish themselves within America’s literary culture, Catholic writing communities sprouted up in cities around the country, Catholic presses flourished, and Webster University in St. Louis developed The Gallery of Living Catholic Authors. Brendan Grover embodies this move toward a new Catholic literary establishment when he fights for a Catholic writers community like the agrarian communities of the Catholic Worker Movement “with a flaming Catholic Action motivating them where they can study together” (226).

⁹ Kathleen Norris describes her excitement at meeting Meynell in *Family Gathering*, though the meeting seems to have been the result of a misunderstanding.

¹⁰ Ironically, *The Commonweal* criticized Barth’s novel for its “purply passages,” suggesting that the prose renders the novel virtually unreadable (Skillen).

While writers like Kathleen Norris have been recovered by the contemporary Catholic literary world, both Barth and Harry Sylvester have fallen out of memory, even in American Catholic history. No doubt their current status is the result not only of their often oppositional position toward the institutional Church, but also of their work's challenge to the dominant narrative of a socially and economically conservative Catholic Church. Like so many Catholic writers of the 1930s and 1940s, their novels remind contemporary readers that the current conception of Catholic literature has been shaped by the politics of the post-World War II era that aligned American Catholicism with the Right in the fight against Communism. Little information is available on Barth, though he is catalogued in Arnold Sparr's *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*. Harry Sylvester has fared better in recent years among the popular Catholic press, though not among literary critics. After Sparr's initial recovery, Sylvester was profiled in the Catholic magazine *First Things*, as a forgotten author who writes strong novels that, although they may prove politically problematic, are "worth reading."

Harry Sylvester (1908-1993), though a classmate and life-long friend of Richard Sullivan, took an alternate literary and theological path.¹¹ Born in Brooklyn to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, Sylvester attended Notre Dame, playing football under the famed Knute Rockne. Graduating in the 1930s with a degree in journalism, Sylvester wrote for secular publications like *The New York Post* and *The New York Herald Tribune*. He found success as a fiction writer and commentator on Catholic matters, even included by Evelyn Waugh in his survey of American Catholic thought. Despite his popularity through the 1940s, he has largely been forgotten by Catholic literary critics, no doubt a result of his "intellectual disconversion"

¹¹ Cadegan's " 'Blessings on Your Old Head, Kid: The Friendship of Richard Sullivan and Harry Sylvester'" analyzes the decades-long correspondence between the two novelists.

from Catholicism at the end of the 1940s. He wrote four novels, only three of them generally deemed his “Catholic novels”: *Dearly, Beloved* (1942), *Day Spring* (1945), and *Moon Gaffney* (1947). Sylvester maintained a radical skepticism of the institutional Church, which he summed up as “bingo Catholicism,” challenging conservative positions on social justice, civil rights, and activism.

Barth’s *Flesh Is Not Life* is typical of the Catholic Worker bildungsroman. Much as in the proletarian bildungsroman Foley defines, the protagonist experiences a “conversion” after a series of struggles. While the proletarian bildungsroman typically depicts the falling away of the protagonist’s disjunctive class-consciousness resulting in the hero dedicating himself to the working class, the Catholic Worker bildungsroman depicts the disjunctive spiritual state of the protagonist. The struggles of the hero are almost entirely internal; thus, the moment of realization leads not to an embrace of socialism or Communism but of a radical Catholic consciousness. This new consciousness is embodied not in the distributism espoused by Catholic Social Doctrine, but in the Catholic Worker movement. The hero converts not only from atheism or Communism, but what Sylvester calls “bingo Catholicism,” a middle-class American Catholicism more interested in social comfort than in the difficult work of personal spiritual and social reform. Though they develop from conversion narratives, the novels consciously rework proletarian fiction rather than the conversion narratives of religious fiction that preceded them. Indeed, Barth’s characters strive to create “a corps of writers like the communists” (174), and the characters invested in the work of writers like Clifford Odets rather than Richard Sullivan.

Flesh Is Not Life depicts the transformation of Tandra Sothoron, the “Charm Girl,” from vague socialist sympathies to a radical Catholic consciousness.¹² Tandra seems to be a character much like June in Day’s *The Eleventh Virgin*, a character struggling to find a metaphysical grounding to challenge her political disaffection. As the novel begins, Tandra is taken under the wing of Harvey Sothoron (though no relation to Tandra, the unusual shared name evokes the Mystical Body by establishing the two characters as always already family), a charismatic young leader in the Communist Party, after being expelled from the fictional Northern University for speaking publicly at the Student Socialist Mass Meeting. From the outset, Tandra struggles with both Communism and socialist atheism. Under the influence of a teacher in high school, a Catholic version of the mentor that Foley describes, Tandra establishes a “sense of a supreme spirit,” a belief in an unarticulated metaphysical truth. The Catholic Worker Movement, in the background from the beginning of the novel, represents the means to achieving the ends of “oneness,” of bringing together the need for social justice with justice’s root in divinity. Unknowingly, Tandra carries around a copy of *The Catholic Worker* that she picked up at a workers rally. When she asks what the movement is, the Communists are quick to dismiss it, saying, “You can’t argue with the fools. They start on a different platform—premise. . . . They say God exists. We say He doesn’t. That is the whole difference between them and us” (22). This language evokes Day and Maurin’s call to be “fools for Christ,” to embrace a radically illogical existence, to forsake even the well-established logic of Communism for a faith in something larger. Indeed, while Tandra studies philosophy and comes to understand

¹² Arnold Sparr’s describes Brendan Grover as the protagonist, but Brendan does not appear as more than a minor character until the latter half of the novel.

Communism intellectually, a feeling, a sense that there must be something greater than herself, converts her.

The novel relies on the language of feeling—the yearning of the individual to participate in something larger—to articulate the Church’s critique of both Communism and socialism. For the Church, the larger problem of both was their root in a materialist philosophy.¹³ Materialism inherently disavows what is most real about the sacramental world for Catholics: spirit. Materialism of any stripe inherently denies grace. At a more fundamental level, in Barth’s, the striking flaw in the logic of Communism can only be rectified by Maurin’s personalism. Judy, a communist mentor figure who tries to explain Communism as a “counterreligion” without absolute goods or evils, claims: “ And for the individual, myself for instance, there is no such a [sic] thing as an action being right or logical in itself. . . . A thing is right if I desire it” (118). The logic of feeling, of personal desire, shapes Communist morality. For the Catholic Left, however, personal feeling is problematic at best, and it can only work if it elevates the individual to collective emotion. The morality Judy expresses is individual rather than personalist—personalism claims personal responsibility for the collective rather than the self. Personalism, unlike individualism, is other-directed. The Catholic Worker Movement, particularly with its emphasis on personalism and decentralized authority, demands individual action rooted in an ethical framework with clearly delineated moral lines. *The Catholic Worker* explains personalism saying, “we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the

¹³ The novel echoes Mary Anne Sadlier’s critiques of non-Catholic education. By the early twentieth century, the debate had moved from compulsory public education to secular universities. Asking whether “Catholic lambs should eat Ivy,” the Catholic press pushed for Catholic institutions of higher education that could rival the Ivy League. Harvey Sothoron was raised Catholic, but he became an atheist through his secular university education. As a football player, he received a scholarship to a private, secular institution after a play that was morally right, but lost his team the game, effectively costing him a place on the Notre Dame football team. For more on the importance of the university debates, the Notre Dame football team, and Catholic assimilation, see Mark Massa’s “Thomism and the T-Formation” in *Catholics and American Culture*.

other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal ‘charity.’” Thus, only through individual action can people effect social change. Echoing the complex relation between the individual and the community in Catholic literature since the nineteenth century, even while forcing recognition of the position of the individual, participation in the collective community is essential. The community, however, is no longer conceptualized as just the Church, but as society at large. As Day explains “Men are beginning to realize that they are not individuals but persons in society, that man alone is weak and adrift, that he must seek strength in common action” (“Liturgy and Society”).

In keeping with the personalist tradition, Barth’s lay Catholic, the working man, is the voice of moral authority. Brendan Grover, the essential mentor for Tandra Sothoron, articulates the necessity of the union to the Catholic parishioners:

My Church cannot agree with such things. I imbibed my Catholic religion with my mother’s milk as you did. I couldn’t give it up if I wanted to, just as none of you could. But gentlemen, when the masses, the common people, are forgotten, then we’re in very dark days. He’s bound to break loose. The church has always been proletarian—of the people. And its activities must center around that and not around buildings or money. . . . Otherwise the Catholic church will be included in the general damning of Christianity as a dead body. (201-2)

The voice of the layman, rather than the voice of the sympathetic priest, speaks truth to the authority of the Church. He suggests both his own authority through the Church and his threat to the Church’s power. The truth, here, is rooted in the doctrine of the Mystical Body. The Church is not buildings or even the hierarchy, but rather the people who make up that body. To neglect

the people is to allow the body to die. Like Grover, the Catholic Worker novels themselves become the site of genuine critique from within the Church.

Despite the orthodox doctrine, particularly as Barth uses it to envision the Church, the novel depicts the Mystical Body as inherently radical. In arguing for its inclusion as part of Catholic Action, Brendan explains to Father Gunn: “Why-why, Padre, those who could stand the pressure would shock the word out of its boots. They’d scandalize it. The Mystical Body has more dynamite in it than—” (234). The Mystical Body becomes the force to transform American culture, but in order to do so, it must first transform the Church. While maintaining an orthodox conception of the relation of the individual within the Church to the larger body of the Church, Barth’s novel embraces (in a potentially heretical way) the doctrine as empowering the laity, and it not only presents lay radicals as the voices that will explode the current Catholic lethargy toward social justice, but it also envisions the Catholic writer as uniquely positioned among those voices. The novel depicts a *Daily Worker* column, entitled “An Open Letter to God,” which suggests that the atheist criticism of the Church could just as well come from within the Church. Indeed, it could be from the voice of Brendan Grover himself:

Dear God, Supreme Spirit or whatever they call you That was a fine job some of your hired hands did down in Maryland last week, lynching a poor colored boy, with the minister’s blessing. Great stuff. I suppose you were around somewhere, chuckling. Wait till we get the string around your own white old neck, but gosh, this letter is supposed to make one spiritual, and here I am bitter again. Well sir, I see where your Hitler is doing big business for you. By the way what are your quotations on poison gas and bombs? The Pope admires the efficient way you are

starving out the unemployed. This beats birth control. (125)

Condemning, in one stroke, the racial politics in Catholic Maryland, the Pope's position on fascism, and birth control, this "letter" ties together the larger issues that the Catholic left sought to change through the doctrine of the Mystical Body. Placing these critiques in the pages of the *Daily Worker* evinces Barth's focus on reaching out to mainstream Catholics, who listen to Fulton Sheen or Father Coughlin on the radio, and consider the Catholic Worker far too radical. While presented as the voice of the *Daily Worker*, these criticisms could just as easily have been read on the pages of the *Catholic Worker* (though the tone would differ, as the paper would start from a different premise). The Catholic Worker movement demanded a restructuring of American race relations because all people are not just equal but ontologically the same within the Mystical Body; it broke with the Church and the Catholic right over pacifism broadly, and the support of Fascism beginning with the Spanish Civil War in 1936; and it understood birth control not as a good, but as a function of the failure to provide a living wage to workers and their families.

Barth's novel, then, creates a framework for Catholic social action beyond the safety of the Catholic Workers' Houses of Hospitality. Without a Catholic structure for organizing workers, the impoverished laborers of the ninth ward must turn to the C.I.O. to keep the corrupt Matt Doyle from "bleeding" the laborers (200). Yet Barth's Catholic Actioneers look a bit like their real-life counterparts that Farrell describes. Their focus on "decency" precludes social action, and they refuse to support Catholic laborers joining a secular labor union, even over forty-five years after *Rerum Novarum*. As Farrell complains, "decent" Catholics espouse the liberalism of Roosevelt's New Deal or the national corporatism of Father Coughlin. Barth's Father Gunn describes the problem of Catholic social action as a "vicious circle," and at the heart

of it is the “sincerity” of the individual. Gunn explains that “Roosevelt’s sincere, Coughlin’s sincere, Lewis is sincere, many of our conservative capitalists are undoubtedly sincere. . . . In every walk of life you can see a part of the spherical mirage that started rolling itself round at the Reformation” (231). Liberal individualism, which Gunn unsurprisingly traces back to Martin Luther, focuses on personal feelings, and thereby precludes collective social action. At the same time, “sincere Catholics” condemn the Catholic Worker Movement, while participating in a circle of commodity fetishism that shapes American life (231-2). The only way to break the cycle, to escape the progressive secularism that Barth imagines is bound to capitalism, is “an explosion,” a Catholic counterpart to Marxist revolution.

While Barth’s novel relies upon the Mystical Body as a means of re-imagining American economic relations, it ultimately returns to the marriage plot, containing the novel’s radical potential. Tandra only converts after her “husband” Harvey’s murder (295). Only after the haze of infatuation wears off is she able to understand the radicalizing potential of full participation in the Mystical Body, or, as the Grovers call it, “the Life.” Adopting epistolary form, the novel depicts Tandra’s spiritual rebirth through a series of love letters between her and Brendan. Unlike her love for Harvey which was rooted in utter materialism—both in the sense of their shared commitment to Communism and in their physical desire for one another—her love with Brendan is transcendent, such that the love letters might also be letters to God. To mark her participation in the Mystical Body, Tandra takes on a new name, Pauline, before she marries Brendan. Her new name—Pauline Grover, evoking St. Paul as the initial writer of the Mystical Body—suggests a different conception of the Mystical Body. For all its potential, the Mystical Body ultimately becomes a way to reconceptualize marriage as a relationship among husband, wife, and God, reconstituting the middle-class that the Catholic Worker model seeks to overturn.

While Day imagined the Catholic Worker movement as a celibate, lay religious community, Barth focuses on middle-class activism. The heart of Catholic middle-class values continues to be Catholic sexual doctrine rooted in natural law. In the novel, as in the Catholic Left's historical activism, middle-class domestic values overcome social doctrine.

If Barth seeks a middle-class Catholic activism, Harry Sylvester seeks to transform the Church by shifting its focus from sexuality to social doctrine. Writing only five years after Barth, he rejects the marriage plot altogether, providing a series of more radical Catholic Worker novels. The novels reveal particular disdain for the American Church's focus on sexuality, which verges on Manichaeism.¹⁴ Thus, *Dearly, Beloved*, as well as *Dayspring* and *Moon Gaffney* all mock the intricate theological distinction between adultery and fornication. While much attention has focused, rightly, on *Moon Gaffney* as the most explicit example of Sylvester's progressive Catholic thought, his first novel, *Dearly, Beloved*, establishes the complexity of new Catholic forms in the wake of the Great Depression.¹⁵ This novel portrays the changes in Catholic ideology responding to the economic crisis and the concomitant rise of the Catholic Worker movement. Though never explicitly invoking Day or the Catholic Worker, as *Moon Gaffney* does with its dedication to a group of Catholic radicals including Day, the novel nonetheless relies on the Catholic Worker movement's conceptualization of the Mystical Body as a way to reorganize both Catholic culture and American social relations. Tying together issues of racial justice and class equity, the novel depicts the spiritual struggles of a small county in Southern Maryland, a rural area that identifies as both Southern and Catholic.

¹⁴ A Gnostic tradition deemed heretical in the early years of the Church whose cosmology emphasized a struggle between good and evil, spirit and body.

¹⁵ See Arnold Sparr and Paul Giles.

As Sylvester depicts American Catholic literature's focus on sexuality as a form of Manichaeism, he establishes Catholic literature's failure to address the interrelated sins of capitalist exploitation and institutionalized racism. The novel challenges the capitalist economic system and addresses the failures of the welfare state. Unlike Sylvester's other novels, *Dearly, Beloved* follows the struggles of two Jesuits presiding over segregated parishes in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The older Jesuit, Father Kane, presides over the black parish, St. Patrick's, including a convent, and "the Institute," a trade and agricultural school for the black parishioners loosely based on the Cardinal Gibbons Institute at St. Inigoes, Maryland. Father Cornish, a newly-ordained, young Jesuit arrives in St. Mary's to oversee the white parish. Both Father Cornish and Father Kane seek to establish workers' associations that allow the people of St. Mary's county to escape the exploitations of capitalism. Father Kane seeks to establish a banking cooperative run by the black men in his parish that would effectively end usury while allowing more people access to property. The Church suggests such cooperatives will allow workers to escape poverty. Similarly, Father Cornish seeks to establish a fishing cooperative to fight the exploitative prices established by the buy-boats.

Sexuality dominates *Dearly, Beloved*, as it does all of Sylvester's novels. For Sylvester, the Church's focus on disciplining sexuality, also the subject of major Catholic novels of the preceding decades, allows Catholics to avoid the far more serious sin of social injustice: the treatment of the black men in the county, the abuse of black women's bodies, and the failure to pay fair wages for fair work. In Sylvester's novel, Jane Saunders, the daughter of a prominent businessman, suffers from an illness shrouded in secrecy until the end of the novel, when it is revealed that she is a nymphomaniac. Her sexuality, far from being depicted as sin, functions as

illness.¹⁶ Leslie Mattingly, the son of a prominent Catholic, “feels defiled” by his sexual relationship with Jane, and feels deeper shame that Jane does not. Most horrifically, though, “he felt that it was Jane who was using him, not he Jane; and that had seemed odd to him, because like most boys he had been made to believe that in having a girl, she had been humbled and defiled while he attained a kind of evil triumph” (97). Leslie’s desire to attain “a kind of evil triumph” is echoed in a sermon in *Moon Gaffney* where the priest discusses the special place in hell for men who deflower virgins outside marriage. In the novel, Catholicism always assumes that the man is the one deflowering, and Jane, as a nymphomaniac, flips this moral paradigm on its head. Despite the vexed depiction of female desire even as Sylvester attempts to move beyond the obsession with sexuality, Leslie’s sexual relationships underscores that his “real” sin is his failure in community. He undermines the community in two key ways: First, the small fisherman’s co-op fails, in large part due to Leslie’s consistent loss of money, when he lets the peelers become hard crabs because he fails to retrieve them from the water in time. Second, he abuses the black residents of the county, refusing them participation in the cooperative. Leslie’s confession before extreme unction suggests that “being with a girl” is not his great sin, but “being bad to the Negroes” is. Only after he has confessed this sin, does he die with absolution (102-3).

The novel, then, following *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, critiques economic competition that leads to exploitation as the ultimate sin for Catholics. Following Social Doctrine, capitalism is never a workable starting point in the novels of the Catholic Left. The black fishermen of the county cannot make a living because buy-boats from Virginia fix price of

¹⁶ While Sylvester rails against the Church’s focus on sexual sin, he has a very clear set of moral standards for female sexuality, which he depicts as almost always corrupt. *Dayspring*, in particular, problematically struggles with male desire while easily dismissing female desire as inherently sinful.

herring (15). Leslie Mattingly, in charge of the co-op, tries to give Loker Abell, a local black fisherman, one dollar and sixty-seven cents for his haul of peelers, which are worth one dollar sixty-seven and half, but Loker demands one dollar sixty-eight cents, explaining that rounding is the common thing to do. Leslie refuses, saying that he is lucky to get that rate at all because the Baltimore dealers would have paid him even less. Loker responds with a withering indictment: “I know But Father Kane, he say they do wrong. You people doing what’s suppose be right” (91). In this scene, Sylvester establishes the primary starting point for Catholic Social Doctrine: reliance on “the market” is immoral. “The market” can be exploited by immoral actions, but the very idea of the market itself, which forces workers’ livelihoods onto the field of competition, can never be accepted by a Catholic.

Thus, the novel espouses the relatively new American Catholic idea of “a living wage.” First articulated in 1906 by John A. Ryan, a professor of moral theology at Catholic University, *A Living Wage* follows Leo XIII in advocating a Thomistic notion of property rights, and chief among these rights is the right to a minimum wage. Building from *Rerum Novarum*, Ryan argues that the worker has a moral claim to living wage:

If a worker receives a wage sufficiently large to enable him to provide comfortably for himself, his wife and his children, he will, if prudent, gladly strive to practice thrift; and the result will be, as nature itself seems to counsel, that after expenditures are deducted there will remain something over and above through which he can come into the possession of a little wealth. We have seen, in fact, that the whole question under consideration cannot be settled effectually unless it is assumed and established as a principle, that the right of private property must be regarded as sacred. Wherefore, the law ought to favor this right

and, so far as it can, see that the largest possible number among the masses of the population prefer to own property. (65)

While Leo XIII espouses minimal state intervention in matters of economics, Ryan believes that the establishment of a living wage is an exception where the state should establish legal guidelines. Ryan goes even further, claiming the failure of laissez-faire capitalism and advocating for broad state intervention to protect the welfare of the worker. Indeed, Catholic support for this type of intervention is exactly what led Catholics on the Left and the Right to support FDR during his first term.

Echoing *The Catholic Worker's* critique of the welfare state, however, Sylvester charges the novel with the task of reaching the individual. In *Dearly, Beloved*, the local government, embodied in the town's elected officials, continuously supports capitalist exploitation and racial oppression. Sylvester, therefore, calls on the Church to begin preaching social justice from the pulpit, and to demand reform from individual Catholics, rather than to rely upon state-mandated minimum wages, which may well be inadequate. The novel saves its harshest admonishment for the hypocritical lay people in the Church, like the head of the Catholic Daughters, a banker's wife, who only pays her black servants the two dollars and fifty cents a week rather than the wage that they need to survive, deciding that the wage is "fair" based upon what others pay. Employing such a market-based approach is both a social and personal sin. Through Cosgrave, Sylvester predicts "she'll be in purgatory so long she'll smell like roast beef." For Sylvester, the failure of social justice is heresy, "or something worse, something unnamable" (256-7).

Through figures like the head of the Catholic Daughters, Sylvester's novel critiques modern Catholicism's self-positioning as an outsider within American culture, recognizing the increasing political, cultural, and economic power of the rising Catholic middle class. Father

Cornish, in a Coughlinite vein, hypocritically and without irony, attempts to displace the abuses of capitalism onto “the Jews,” but the workers, the fishermen, are all too aware that the men responsible for fixing the herring prices are Irish Catholics. Father Cornish explains:

‘[W]e’ve got to be true Christians. The Pope and the best Catholic thought want people to have a better economic life, and they specify that co-operatives of one sort or another are among the means to be employed. Now, for the sake of a better social order you ought to be willing to work with someone whom you dislike. Not only for that reason but to help yourself. It’s the only way you’ll break the organization of these Jews that run the buy-boats.’ (20)

Fenner, a local fisherman, gets confused, not knowing some of the terms the priest was using: “‘Only one buy-boat run by a Jew,’ he said, absently, because ‘Jew’ was the last term he remembered hearing the priest use. ‘Worst one of all, name’s McCarthy, carries a cross in the cabin of his boat. It was his idea, I hear, about them fixing a top price’” (20-32). Here, Sylvester insists on the complicity of American Catholics in the abuses of capitalism, which are utterly incompatible with Church doctrine. The cross becomes a symbol of capitalism, united with the ideology that exploits the workers. Sylvester’s real critique, then, is that the logic of capitalism has overrun the logic of the cross, and Christianity is defined by exploitation of the poor rather than suffering with the poor.

The novel’s solution to the failure of American Catholicism in its embrace of free market ideology follows the models of stewardship and bottom-up corporatism of Catholic Social Doctrine. Leading to the establishment of corporatism as an economic structure that rejected both liberalism and materialism in keeping with Catholic principles, Pope Leo requested a report from the Fribourg Union, a seven-session meeting of Catholic advocates of corporatism. Chief

among their beliefs was that “liberalism. . . in both the political and economic realms had brought about nothing but grief” (Shannon 145). Thus, the only way to combat capitalism and protect private property is the establishment of workers’ associations. Following the historical Cardinal Gibbons’ commitment to workers’ associations, Sylvester breaks with Social Doctrine by suggesting that trade unions need not be entirely within the auspices of the Church (as many had once been in Europe), nor should they be composed exclusively of Catholics.¹⁷ Solely through collective action on the part of the workers, rather than through intervention of the state or even of the Church, can the economic and social structures be reordered.

For the Catholic Left, the problem of the Church’s Social Doctrine in America has been inextricably linked to its racial problem, and the Catholic Worker Movement, from its outset, was highly critical of the Church’s failure to address the deep inequities of race relations in America. Sylvester contends that the Church, and indeed, all of the Mystical Body or potential members of the Mystical Body, must be considered as one in order to achieve any good social change. In the novel, the priests’ first discussion of credit unions and co-operatives as a means of establishing “economic independence” both from the government and the capitalist leaders is riddled with confusion over race. The subjects of the sentence, always, “the people,” are overlaid with discussion of who those people are—“the whites” or “negroes” (14). The very grammar of the novel, then, suggests the importance of treating the Mystical Body as a whole, rather than fragments broken by racial difference. Here, the novel prefigures Day writing that if people of all races could see each other as brothers “the problems of tenant farming,

¹⁷ Cardinal Gibbons, the namesake of the real-life counterpart to Sylvester’s Institute, was an advocate for an economic framework that would aid working-class Americans, whose worker’s associations were different from those in Europe. As Leo was preparing to write *Rerum Novarum*, Gibbons traveled to Rome to appeal to Leo on behalf of the Knights of Labor. Some have suggested that Gibbons’ influence led Leo to include the line that creates space for Catholic participation in secular unions (Shannon 146).

sharecropping, day labor, peonage, destitution, debt, and so on, would be solved, for Negro, for white, for Mexican, for Puerto Rican, for all” (“On Pilgrimage” 6). An even fuller conception of the Mystical Body is necessary to achieve the economic justice required by *Quadragesimo Anno*. Father Kane says of the white parish, “ ‘They go to Mass all right The letter of the law doesn’t trouble them. It’s the spirit of the law. You’d think there wasn’t any such thing as the doctrine of the Mystical Body.’ . . . ‘The doctrine of the Mystical Body,’ he said, ‘that all men, regardless of race or any other delineation, are part of one another in Christ, does not admit of different interpretations in different place’” (*Dearly, Beloved* 13). He describes not the Orthodox conception of the doctrine, but the Mystical Body as understood by Day and her cohort. Each member of the body is connected to each other in Christ, not just to Christ. While the priests describe the encyclical in a doctrinal way, one resident of the town explains how the very nature of the local community embodies it. Loker Abell becomes the embodiment both of the doctrine and of its failure in the modern world. Just as one man, Mattingly, treats Loker, the central African American character in the text, as his cousin, because indeed he is likely his biological cousin, another man suggests that he treats all the black people in the county well, because he never knows who is his cousin, and he should assume, therefore that they all are. The Mystical Body here is rendered literally, not just theologically, as a result of the county’s history of miscegenation. The county, despite its segregation, is a microcosm of the Mystical Body.

Still the novel goes even farther in its adoption of a heterodox reading of the Mystical Body. For Sylvester, the Mystical Body means that the individual also has a mystical relationship with Christ. Indeed, heterodoxically, Loker embodies the mystical *equation* of Christ in and with men and women. At one point, Cosgrave, self-conscious of his personal racism, asks, “Supposing God is a Negro?” The line is presented as a joke, and Cosgrave shrugs off the idea.

Yet within the context of the Mystical Body, God is indeed a negro. If the members of the Church make up Christ's body, and there are black members, then God is "a negro." But more importantly, if God mystically resides within the individual, each individual person is God.

Sylvester drives home the dangers of the American social system within the framework of the Mystical Body wherein God resides in the individual member of the Church. The lynching of Loker in the name of white womanhood evokes not only the connection between the individual and the divine, but represents "good Catholics" as the killers of Christ (224). The attack on Loker explicitly re-enacts the Passion:

By now they had the quadroon stripped. They had bound his hands and feet with running cedar—they used it to festoon the churches with at Christmas—twisting five and six strands of it together so that it would hold. And they had broken branches off the holly trees—the ideas was Joe Tennison's—and them in a thick mat on the ground; and then they had rolled the naked man over the thorny mass. He was no longer yelling—he was too frightened and besides Luke Havenner had hit him across the windpipe. A thick slime of blood was beginning to cover him from the hundreds of tiny holes in his skin. (228)

Like the woodcut in *The Long Loneliness*, the image of the running cedar binds the nativity to the cross, evoking the mass that daily performs the sacrifice. The thorns of the holly evoke the thorns of Christ's crown on the road to Calvary. The physical suffering of the Passion is tied to the mocking and emasculation of Loker. Loker is robbed of his basic human dignity, which Sylvester reminds us is a logical extension of the basic privation of dignity forced onto African Americans in general. Loker becomes Christ-like through his suffering. Here, the image not only evokes Christ's suffering to paint Loker as a Christ figure, a common enough trope in

American literature, but it connects Loker to Christ through the Mystical Body. He is not a mere Christ figure; he is, for a Catholic reader, obviously Christ. Here, God is indeed “a negro.”

The novel, then, forces the reader to encounter not only the suffering of the poor, but also of the racialized other. When Loker ultimately dies of his wounds, despite the intervention of Cosgrave and a reluctant Catholic, the failure becomes the reader’s. The novel does not end with Loker’s death, but with the dissection of the horrible events in St. Mary’s county. In this conversation, the reader is indicted—for hypocrisy or inaction. When Cosgrave discusses his horror, he conflates “the toughs that hurt Loker” and “the head of the Catholic Daughters, the banker’s wife, that pays her Negroes two and a half a week. And of the ones who say they’d stop going to church if the niggers weren’t made to sit in the back of the church” (256-7). The lynching of Loker represents the horrific sins that white American Catholics commit through complicity. Through the experience of the novel, the reader can no longer claim “invincible ignorance.” The novel exposes readers to the realities of human suffering, along with their own complicity in creating the systems that enact that suffering.

Catholic Literature’s Call to Action

Like the novels of the Social Gospel movement that preceded them, the Catholic Worker novels of both Barth and Sylvester are a call to action. The novels of the Catholic Left call on the Catholic Church collectively, and its members individually, to enact Catholic Social Doctrine. In its turn toward the depiction of poverty and race relations, the Catholic Worker novel embraces a new Catholic social realism demanded by the commitment to the Mystical Body. Just as Day, breaking from the tradition of Sheldon and Rauschenbusch, argues against sentimentalizing the poor, the Catholic Worker novels reject the sentimentalization of poverty,

developing a social realism for modern American Catholics. Poverty must be encountered as it is, in order to encounter Christ. It is precisely in the suffering and alienation of the working classes that they embody Jesus. As Day entreats, “They do not want people to be sentimental about them. They do not want people to idealize them” (“More about Holy Poverty”). Indeed, Barth’s and Sylvester’s characters hardly fall into the category of the worthy poor. While Loker Abell seems to be sentimentalized, he resides within a realistic world where poverty shapes the actions of the community. The black residents of St. Mary’s County sin, but many of their choices are shaped by involuntary poverty, rendering all the white Catholics of St. Mary’s County responsible. Thus, these novels call Catholics to personal responsibility, demanding collective action while rejecting the ideology of the individual at the heart of liberalism.

The Catholic Worker Movement has been criticized for this personalist approach, but the novels of the Catholic Left redress these critiques. Historians Keith Morton and John Saltmarsh argue that the turn to personal morality was a turn away from an emphasis on political and social change. The literary places the personalist message within a larger call for social change. It seeks to move the individual to act within the collective, inciting Catholic readers not only to be responsible for themselves and their families but also to be responsible for all their brothers and sisters. It is this shift from individual responsibility to personal responsibility that indexes the shift from the American Catholic literature of the 1910s and 1920s to the 1930s and 1940s. While the Catholic domestic novels of the early decades reified Catholic values regarding family and sexuality, allowing readers to “feel holy” for embracing middle-class domesticity, the Catholic Worker novels of the 1930s and beyond challenge readers to move beyond feeling and accept responsibility for the greater Mystical Body. Like the Catholic Worker, the reader is called to suffer and serve alongside America’s downtrodden.

Catholic literature portrays the Mystical Body as the whole of American society, even as it invokes participation in transformative social justice. Indeed, as in the sentimental novels of the nineteenth century, the first step in readerly transformation is a change of heart. Yet the authors are clear that this change of heart is not sufficient. The criticism of the Church suggests that Catholics must not be content to feel, but must act. Over and over, feelings, like the “sincerity” that Barth criticizes, enable deeply-ingrained prejudice and poverty. Sylvester’s characters feel shock and disgust at the poor black community, but the radical transformation is not one of feeling, but of acting. Like the Catholic Worker who serves the most unlovable, the Catholic reader must act despite feeling. Indeed, the less empathy one feels toward the object of political activity, the more the worker is serving the suffering, disdained Christ. The first step is to take a critical stand in one’s own back yard, to challenge the practices of the Church. The next step is to transform the worker’s relation to capital through the principle of subsidiarity.

The larger project of the Catholic Worker literature seems to have failed to reorient the American faithful’s attitudes toward economic justice. Tellingly, while these novels have had little contemporary life, the proletarian fiction that rejects Catholicism as false ideology and the spiritual autobiography, like the autobiographies of Day and Merton, survive. Yet the Catholic Worker Movement, in both its political action and its literary heritage, established a vein of Catholic activism that still survives. Figures like Daniel and Philip Berrigan, inheritors of the Catholic Worker’s radical tradition, bridge Catholic activism and Catholic literary culture. Yet the impact of the Catholic realist tradition that these novels established reverberates beyond the countercultural tradition. In its emphasis on uncovering the real within the material world, the mode of realism that the Catholic Worker novels establish reshapes post-World War II American Catholic literature.

CHAPTER 5

“THE FIRST CATHOLIC WRITER OF THE UNITED STATES”: FLANNERY
O’CONNOR’S RADICAL ORTHODOXY AND THE POLITICS OF CATHOLIC
COMMUNITY

Questions of domesticity and sexuality dominated Catholic fiction through the early part of the twentieth century as writers from Sadlier to Norris reinforced Catholic middle-class values; following Day, in the era after World War II, a new Catholic writing emerged as a fresh wave of writers committed to exploring the faith in fiction. Cradle Catholics like Flannery O’Connor, J.F. Powers, and Mary McCarthy, as well as converts Walker Percy, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, and Caroline Gordon, all published self-consciously Catholic fiction.¹ Here, the Catholic literary world realized its goal of a Catholic resurgence to rival Europe’s Catholic Renaissance. These writers sought to develop a form of Catholic writing to remedy what they saw as the failures and pitfalls that marred the American Catholic literature that preceded them—a new Catholic literature that was imbued with the spirit of Catholicism without the trappings of cloying piety and manipulative affect.

While this cadre of Catholic writers wrestled with similar theological, political, and aesthetic issues, Flannery O’Connor has become the apogee of Catholic authorship in that generation, and her work has become the center of the American Catholic canon. She is the most famous self-identifying American Catholic fiction writer. O’Connor’s position as a cradle-to-

¹ The vast majority of these writers are identified as Southern writers. While this is in part due to Allen Tate’s established goal to transform the nature of Southern writing, I would suggest that it speaks to the Romantic (and Protestant) vein in American letters. As Paul Giles explains, American literary history is a history of Romantic individualism, and Catholic literature has always offered a different tradition. Yet the Catholic writer in the American South embodies the qualities of the Romantic individual, as an outsider to the Protestant culture.

grave Catholic has shaped the reading of her fiction. Born Mary Flannery on March 25, 1925 in Savannah, Georgia, O'Connor felt the alienation of a Catholic in the Protestant South. Raised according to the structures of the Catholic Church, O'Connor grew up around the corner from the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, which she attended faithfully. After graduating from Georgia State College for Women in 1945, she was accepted into the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. In 1948, she accepted an invitation to the Yaddo Foundations' artists' colony near Saratoga Springs. There, she cultivated relationships with Robert Lowell and Robert Penn Warren,² which led to her friendship with Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon. In 1951, the debilitating pain that she endured for much of her life was diagnosed as lupus, the same disease that had killed her father. To cope with her condition, O'Connor eventually moved home to Andalusia, her mother's dairy farm in Milledgeville, Georgia. From Andalusia, O'Connor wrote prolifically. Beyond her two major short story collections, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) and *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1965), and two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), O'Connor wrote hundreds of essays, over one hundred book reviews for two local diocesan newsletters, and countless letters to her editors, other authors, and her fans.

² Paul Elie suggests that O'Connor was in love with Lowell. During his time at Yaddo, Lowell returned to Catholicism, after drifting since his conversion just nine years earlier, and he and O'Connor had an intense relationship based on the shared struggles of writing as a Catholic. After an FBI investigation into Yaddo as a Communist haven, Lowell and O'Connor left for New York together, where O'Connor was struggling to publish *Wise Blood*. Shortly thereafter, Lowell turned manic, and his mania manifested in a religious fervor. He called O'Connor's editors, Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, to share his revelations: he was a prophet, like Sacco and Vanzetti, and Flannery O'Connor was a saint, whose new feast day was March 4. His episodes of mania ultimately led to his institutionalization, and, after a series of shock treatments, Lowell was cured not only of his mania, but of his Catholicism. Of the ordeal, O'Connor said, "I guess the shock table took care of it. . . . It was a grief for me as if he had died" (qtd. in Elie 178). According to Elie, when Allen Tate divorced Caroline Gordon, Gordon became convinced that Tate was possessed by the devil, and O'Connor and others were alarmed that Gordon was heading down the same path as Lowell.

This chapter reexamines O'Connor's post-War Catholic fiction as the legacy of American Catholic literature from Sadlier to Sylvester. While O'Connor has arguably become the most significant figure in the twentieth-century canon of American Catholic literature, her fiction does not always suggest her Catholicity. Although many literary critics read Thomistic theology into her work in order to justify reading O'Connor's fiction as Catholic fiction—no doubt due to her own claim to be a “hillbilly Thomist”—the soteriology in her stories is only vaguely Catholic. Indeed, the grace essential to her stories may just as well be the grace of Protestant soteriology. In this chapter, I argue that O'Connor's fiction is indeed Catholic, but in unexpected ways. Her fiction develops out of the struggle of post-World War II Catholics to define themselves over and against American mass culture at a moment when they are being subsumed into the American middle class and increasingly adopting American Protestant ideology regarding the role of the individual in society as well as the political function of religious communities.

In this era, the schism that developed between the Catholic Left and the Catholic Right during the 1930s and 1940s transformed into a fragmented Catholic community of “liberal Catholics” and “conservative Catholics.” Contemporary critics who read O'Connor's work as a critique of American culture read her through a contemporary lens, and they project onto her fiction a particular brand of conservative Catholicism that developed during the 1950s and 1960s as part of this process. I argue, however, that the Catholicism in O'Connor's fiction is “radically orthodox,” defying such categorizations that rely on a fragmented Catholic community. That is to say, O'Connor's Catholic fiction displays an orthodox Catholicism that develops out of the Church's radical social doctrine—the very same doctrine espoused by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement. In many ways, her fiction is Catholic not because of her presentation of transcendent reality, but rather because of her political treatment of human

suffering. In O'Connor, the outcast—whether the stranger or the freak—is the redemptive figure who can transform the readers' souls.

The First Catholic Writer?: The Problem of Grace in O'Connor's Fiction

In a reading that took hold only after O'Connor's death in 1964, O'Connor's writing has become the implicit standard by which contemporary critics define Catholic literature. In an article in *The Catholic Worker* shortly after O'Connor's death—a retrospective review of *Everything That Rises Must Converge*—Anne Tallefer suggests that O'Connor may be “The first (lower case) catholic writer of the United States.” In O'Connor, American Catholic critics felt they had finally found a writer who could be embraced by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, a writer whose fiction captured the mysteries of the Church while achieving the literary heights of the greatest American writers.

Yet Catholics did not always embrace O'Connor because they did not readily see what marked her fiction as Catholic. When *Wise Blood* was published in 1952, only one Catholic periodical, *Commonweal*, reviewed it. Despite the magazine's liberal Catholicism, the reviewer, John W. Simons, did not see the novel as Catholic in any way. Indeed, he described the novel as a “Southern-Baptist version of ‘The Hound of Heaven’” and claimed that it depicts an animalistic world with no possibility of redemption.³ According to the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), found a better reception with five

³ Simons' description is paradoxical, because Southern Baptists refute irresistible grace, and also a misreading of the poem, which ends in inevitable redemption. “The Hound of Heaven,” a religious poem by Francis Thompson first published in 1893, describes grace as a hunting animal, chasing the elect through the world even as they try to escape God's salvation. The poem metaphorizes “irresistible grace,” a Calvinist concept. The concept of irresistible grace holds that individuals accept grace through no innate goodness of their own, but rather because God overcomes the resistance of those he is determined to save and applies grace. The elect's acceptance of God's grace, then, is not a personal decision, but rather the inevitable display of God's choice.

Catholic publications, including the influential *Catholic World*.⁴ Yet O'Connor still felt neglected by Catholic readers. She wrote to John Lynch in November 1955:

[T]he ironical part of my silent reception by Catholics is the fact that I write the way I do because and only because I am a Catholic. I feel that if I were not a Catholic, I would have no reason to write, no reason to see, no reason ever to feel horrified or even to enjoy anything. I am a born Catholic, went to Catholic schools in my early years, and have never left or wanted to leave the Church. I have never had the sense that being a Catholic is a limit to the freedom of the writer, but just the reverse. (*HB* 114)⁵

This passage reveals not only O'Connor's frustration with recent converts' dominance of the American Catholic literary scene, but also a profound sense of abandonment by her community. Ironically, in the years since O'Connor's death, beginning with the posthumous reviews of O'Connor's life and works that filled Catholic publications in 1965 and 1966, this passage from her letter to Lynch has come to both define and justify reading O'Connor's work as essentially Catholic.

O'Connor herself invested deeply in the project of redefining Catholic fiction. In "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," she denies the critical assessments of Catholic fiction common to American Catholic magazines and journals, like the *Catholic World*. She argues that they demand an unnecessary, even false, piety from Catholic authors. Following Jacques Maritain's neo-Thomistic aesthetics in *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), O'Connor argues that

⁴ The Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, published by the Catholic Library Association since 1933, is the most comprehensive source of bibliographic data on American Catholic magazines.

⁵ This chapter uses the following abbreviations for O'Connor's work: *The Complete Stories*: *CS*; *The Collected Works*: *CW*; *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*: *HB*; and *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*: *MM*.

overly-pious fiction is not just bad fiction, but it is “essentially bad,” which is to say non-edifying or too narrowly, didactically edifying. While Aquinas did not establish a proper aesthetics, neo-Thomists like Jacques Mauritian developed an aesthetics out of Aquinas’s natural law. As natural law came to dominate the Catholic Church at the turn of the twentieth century, Catholic literary critics began to ground their readings of novels in neo-Thomistic aesthetics. Although literature had long been read in terms of its moral qualities, this new Catholic criticism hinged upon a book’s effect on readers. A good Catholic novel needed to be edifying, to have a positive effect on the faith and morality of the reader. The book, in and of itself, has no moral qualities. Thus, if it can be misread or misunderstood, or stir up unintended feelings that might lead to sin, it is an immoral book, regardless of the intrinsic nature or intentions of the book. The Catholic author need not even be Catholic, but must create a book that is edifying, that ties a reader to the proper conception of reality.

O’Connor, then, espouses a broader conception of the Catholic novel: “If I had to say what a ‘Catholic novel’ is, I could only say that it is one that represents reality adequately as we see it manifested in this world of things and human relationships. Only in and by these sense experiences does the fiction writer approach a contemplative knowledge of the mystery they embody” (*MM* 172). As this definition hinges upon a particular conception of reality above all else, the Catholic novelist does not “have to be a saint”; indeed, she does not even have to be Catholic (*MM* 172). O’Connor here reconceptualizes the Catholic novelist: the Catholic writer is defined by a particular orientation to the real, a particular ontology, before any aspects of the faith. In her own mind, then, she was a Catholic novelist by virtue of her belief that humanity is labors in a fallen, imperfect world, rather than by the direct manifestations of Catholicism in her fiction.

Although O'Connor saw herself as a Catholic novelist and she has become central to the canon of Catholic literature, the project of establishing how and why to read O'Connor as Catholic is ongoing, and rightly so.⁶ Even in her personal faith, O'Connor was frequently accused of being a Protestant. O'Connor's dearest friend, Maryat Lee, herself a Protestant, called O'Connor "the best Protestant I ever knew." Far from rejecting this descriptor, O'Connor teased Lee: "I am glad you find me a good Protestant. That is indeed a compliment. All good Catholics have the best Protestant qualities about them; and a good deal more besides. My good deal more besides I try to keep from view lest it offend your delicate sensibilities" (Letter). For O'Connor, then, Protestantism was not some evil other faith, but a form of Christianity that is more deficient (simply because it is erroneous) than Catholicism in the hierarchy of faith.

Just as O'Connor's personal faith often looked like the Protestantism of her Christ-haunted South, so too does her fiction look like the South's Protestant fiction. Following her belief that the Catholic novel stems from an ontological orientation rather than subject matter, O'Connor's fiction is rarely overtly Catholic. O'Connor's editor, Robert Fitzgerald, commented that her readers "are aware of the Roman or universal Church mainly by its absence" (quoted in Bacon 78). O'Connor's fiction reverberates with what she called "the Christ-haunted South," a world defined not by the practices of Catholicism, but by the beliefs of Bible-belt Protestants. O'Connor's work, particularly prior to the posthumous *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), rarely has explicitly Catholic characters, topics, or spaces. Rather, O'Connor's stories overflow with the experience of "grace," which is a twofold mystery for Catholics—God's loving presence in the world and the person's transformation in light of that presence. Yet grace

⁶ See, for example Richard Giannone's *Flannery O'Connor and the Mystery of Love*, Joanne Halleran McMullen, and Patrick Samway, S.J.

is of profound importance for Protestants as well. Grace, defined quite similarly, is the central tenet operating in the reformed tradition of New England and the evangelical tradition of the South. In most Protestant traditions, particularly those of the American South that permeate O'Connor's fiction, justification, the act of being made righteous before God, occurs through grace alone. While the precise function of grace differs according to particular denominations' theology, grace—whether that grace is resistible or efficacious—hinges on the the divine call.⁷

For Catholics, as O'Connor was acutely aware, God's loving presence alone is not transformational. As O'Connor explains, "Grace can't be experienced in itself" (*HB* 275). It can only be achieved through the sacraments, through the instrument of the Church. Yet O'Connor's fiction often depicts grace as a sudden, transformative act, like the grandmother's experience facing down the barrel of the Misfit's gun in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The Grandmother's moment of grace comes only when faced with grotesque evil. For O'Connor, the horror of profound violence, then, can become the instrument of God's grace in this fallen world. The Grandmother finds a form of salvation when she recognizes her communal identification with the Misfit. By confronting the grotesque sin of the world, marked by the murder of her family, does she find redemption. Thus, the Misfit voices the narrator's assessment when he says, "She would have been a good woman if there was someone there to shoot her every minute of her life." The Grandmother's moment of actual salvation, far from being inherent in her choice to present herself as a good Christian, comes only in this moment of crisis, where she accepts Jesus as she sees him in the Misfit. As exemplified in the Grandmother's misapprehension of the nature of her salvation, O'Connor saw that the problem for so many American Christians was the

⁷ Efficacious grace is another term for irresistible grace that emphasizes the full effectiveness of the Holy Spirit's inward work. Such grace works on the spirit of those that resist it just as the Word works in those seeking conversion.

misapprehension of grace in a postlapsarian world. Grace in O'Connor, whether the resistible grace that the Grandmother accepts or the irresistible grace of Calvinism that hounds Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* (1952), comes in a singular moment of extreme violence that ends any possible enactment of that grace in the material world. The saturation of O'Connor's texts with this broad notion of grace, divorced from Catholic practices, deeply troubles claims to read O'Connor's work as Catholic fiction.

A Fracturing Community: The Trouble with O'Connor's Catholicism

Despite the difficulties in locating O'Connor firmly within the Catholic tradition through a theological lens, critics have consistently attempted to construct a cohesive Catholicism in O'Connor's stories. Critics exploring religiosity in O'Connor's work have taken to heart O'Connor's September 1955 pronouncement that "If you're a Catholic you believe what the Church teaches and the climate makes no difference" (*CW* 956), paying consistent and thorough attention to the transcendent theological aspects of her writings.⁸

In the past two decades, scholars like Jon Lance Bacon, Thomas Hill Schaub, and Michael Kreyling have argued that the consistent critical discussion of the Catholic tenor in O'Connor's work has often led to a failure to examine other aspects of O'Connor's fiction, sidestepping her Americanness and ignoring the very "climate" that O'Connor, mistakenly if not disingenuously, claims is irrelevant. More recent work, then, responding to this criticism has taken up the call to situate O'Connor more firmly within American history—as a product of the Cold War, the Civil Rights era, and the South. Such scholarship often ignores the religious

⁸ See Richard Giannone, Christine Bieber Lake, Susan Srigley, and Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede.

O'Connor's writings as a way to redress the critical failure to see the historical situatedness of her work. This criticism still imagines the Church and its theology as transcendent, as an unchanged theology in the midst of an American culture changing how it views this once foreign religion. Therefore, readings of O'Connor as Catholic writer and O'Connor as a mid-century American writer often have been positioned at odds with one another; yet, on its own, each reading has a particular, significant blindness. Catholic readings position O'Connor as an ahistorical theologian working through fiction, while mid-century American treatments present O'Connor's Catholicism only insofar as it makes her an outsider within Southern culture as well as American mass culture.

By reading O'Connor through the lens of the American Catholic tradition that preceded her, I see O'Connor as a specifically post-World War II American Catholic writer. The dominant narrative of American Catholicism at mid-century coalesces around the convergence of American Catholic literature, politics, and the American Right, embodied in Joseph McCarthy's strident nationalism and fervent anti-communism. Accordingly, the definitive post-World War II Catholic realists are often read through a lens of conservative politics. Critics like Kreyling and Schaub, then, often read O'Connor's political critique of liberalism as a function of her orthodox Catholicism. Yet Catholicism, particularly in its American iteration, was undergoing rapid changes in the years that O'Connor was writing. Religious leaders and the lay community alike were trying to come to terms with the theological and political ramifications of the Holocaust and the Second World War; proponents of Americanism, supporting doctrinal assimilation to American culture, heralded a new era as American Catholics entered the middle class, moving out of predominantly Catholic urban spaces into religiously integrated suburbs; and the Church was in the first throes of the radical theological tumult—involving debates about the role of the

clergy, the role of the laity, and the larger obligation of Catholics as civic actors within communities—that would lead to the Second Vatican Council.⁹ All of this upheaval was heading toward a fracturing of American Catholicism along political lines when Catholics began to imagine themselves as either conservative Catholics who embraced anti-Communism and *realpolitik* or progressive Catholics who championed Catholic Social Doctrine and social justice as central tenets of the Church. The power of this fracture, along with the dominance of the Catholic conservatives in the decades since, has led historians and cultural critics to map religious orthodoxy onto political conservatism and theological radicalism on to political progressivism.

In the 1950s, however, as O'Connor wrote *Wise Blood* (1952) and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), the distinction between conservative and progressive, as well as orthodox and heterodox Catholicism, was far blurrier. Dorothy Day, the twentieth-century paragon of Catholic radicalism, embodied this seeming paradox. Despite her social radicalism, Day herself was an orthodox Catholic, conservative in matters of faith. Indeed, the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Francis Spellman, did not know what to make of the woman who said her beads in St. Patrick's daily but marched in the streets in protest of American foreign policy. For all her radicalism, Day was, after all, upholding Catholic social teaching and adhering to the authority of the Church, albeit in distinctly American ways.

O'Connor, too, troubles the equation between conservatism and orthodoxy. Yet critics consistently read her as a conservative figure, locating her conservative politics in both her Catholic background and her Southern identity. In constructing this reading, critics rely on O'Connor's non-fiction writing—her letters collected in *The Habit of Being* (1979) and *Flannery*

⁹ For more on the changes in the Catholic cultural community during this era, see Mark Massa.

O'Connor: The Collected Works (1988) as well as the essays and speeches collected in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (1969). Yet reading her fiction alongside her letters and essays offers a complicated picture of a writer whose religion allows her to transcend the categorizations of 1950s American politics and to position herself as a figure resistant to both American mass culture and American political culture.

As a Catholic positioning herself over and against mass culture, O'Connor negotiates the Catholic literary culture of both the Left and the Right that came before her. The resituation of American Catholic literature prior to O'Connor that I have argued for in the previous chapters allows us to reconceptualize O'Connor's fiction and the nature of Catholic realism. Examining a specifically historicized Catholicism alongside O'Connor's politics in the Cold War positions her as resistant to dominant American ideology. O'Connor's negotiation of the Left and the Right allows her to position herself as an outsider critiquing American culture at the same time as she positions herself outside of a Catholicism increasingly turning from its social doctrine.

O'Connor's Grotesque as the Modern Catholic Form

O'Connor's fiction relies upon the grotesque form to make these critiques. In her view, the horror invoked by the grotesque can establish a chain of events that transforms the reader from spiritual error to a proper understanding of the ultimate reality. The grotesque, as the form of O'Connor's "hard Christian realism," is the Catholic form that enables the readers' turn toward grace. For O'Connor, horror plays a pivotal role in Catholic fiction. O'Connor harnesses the trauma and alienation, both of the grotesque and of recent history, to shock the reader out of complacency in both American culture and spiritual life. The horror inherent in the form holds a mirror up to the reader, sparking this transformation. In her worldview, the horror of the

material world stems from its fallen nature as humanity always labors in a state of depravity. Far from repudiating the fallen world as the site of sin, O'Connor's grotesque embraces horror and suffering. Indeed, for O'Connor, that horror must be encountered as the only true road to grace.

Literary critics and readers position O'Connor as a realist writer, ostensibly separating her from the "sentimental" religious writers that preceded World War II. She wrote Elizabeth Hester, a Catholic convert with whom O'Connor exchanged many letters about religious matters, that "stories are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism" (*HB* 90). In keeping with this valuation, O'Connor consistently disavows the everyday realism of writers like Richard Sullivan.¹⁰ She wrote that every writer seeks to show that "in some crucial and deep sense, he is a realist; and for some of us, for whom the ordinary aspects of daily life prove to be of no great fictional interest, this is very difficult" (*MM* 37). Thus, O'Connor rejects mimetic realism in favor of "the deeper kinds of realism." Within her Catholic framework realist literature cannot simply depict the material world, but must access those deeper kinds of realism because "a literature which mirrors society would be no fit guide for it" (*MM* 46). O'Connor, then, seems to accept the basic premise of Catholic writers like Sadlier, Norris, and Sylvester, that Catholic literature should hold the power to transform readers by revealing spiritual truths. That is to say, literature must be *essentially* edifying.

For O'Connor, "Christian realism" marks a literary realism that opposes not only the sentimentalism of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Christian writing, but also the social realism of American naturalism and proletarian fiction. O'Connor defines "Christian realism" as realist in the neo-Aristotelian sense. That is to say, for O'Connor, the real exists outside history, though it can be accessed through it. Indeed, she explicitly rejects the social realism of the 1930s

¹⁰ See Una Cadegan's work on Richard Sullivan's Catholic "everyday realism."

and 40s for its misapprehension of the historical as the real: “They associate the only legitimate material for long fiction with the movement of social forces, with the typical, with fidelity to the way things look and happen in normal life. . . . In the public mind the deeper kinds of realism are less and less understandable” (*MM* 39). For O’Connor, social realism, or political writing of any kind, misses the fundamental truth of existence. Seeing the real as the “movement of social forces,” or as the project of history, social realists rely on a misapprehension of the fallen state of humanity as the real. Yet, to be a modern Catholic is, as Paul Giles notes, to be an ontological realist. While Catholics recognize that humanity labors in a fallen state, the material world is itself imbued with a transcendent spirit. Grace, indeed God, exists within the material world. For the Catholic writer, knowledge of the ultimate reality must shape both literary form and political action.

The role of the Catholic author, then, differs radically from that of the secular author. Following the neo-Thomism of Jacques Mauritan, O’Connor claims that the Catholic author’s task is “the accurate naming of the things of God.” This is, as Elie notes, akin to Walker Percy’s conception of metaphor as well as Day’s conception that the gospel is “metaphor made real” (277). In “Catholic Novelists and Their Readers,” O’Connor sees this central understanding of the spiritual nature of reality as the defining characteristic of Catholic fiction. Always holding the idea of Catholic fiction suspect, O’Connor ultimately defines the fiction through a specific ontological positioning: “If I had to say what a ‘Catholic novel’ is, I could only say that it is one that represents reality adequately as we see it manifested in this world of things and human relationships. Only in and by these sense experiences does the fiction writer approach a contemplative knowledge of the mystery they embody” (*MM* 172). Echoing the position of Orestes Brownson nearly a century earlier, O’Connor believes that the primary truth that

Catholic fiction can capture is the mystery of creation, specifically manifest in the material world. Yet unlike Brownson, O'Connor believes that fiction is uniquely suited to the task of exploring divine mystery, revealed truths that surpass the powers of natural reason. For O'Connor, the only way to capture this mystery is not through sentimentality, everyday realism, or overtly religious fiction, but through a jarring experience of the extraordinary, which for O'Connor is the grotesque.

Although she often wrote about the form of the grotesque, O'Connor's feelings toward the grotesque were, at best, ambivalent. Often, she felt the label applied to any writing that outsiders did not understand; yet she came to embrace a particular working definition that opposed both sentimental writing and social realism. "In these grotesque works," O'Connor wrote, "we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. We find that connections which we would expect in the customary kind of realism have been ignored, that there are strange skips and gaps which anyone trying to describe manners and customs would certainly not have left" (*MM* 40). Shucking off the everyday realism that fettered writers prior to the 1930s, O'Connor defines realism, then, as ultimately dependent upon the author's "view of the ultimate reaches of reality." The grotesque differs from realism then by focusing on "what we don't understand rather than what we do" (*MM* 42).

O'Connor explores the complex trajectory of sentimentality, realism, and the grotesque in her introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann* (181). When the sisters of the Dominican nuns of the Rose Hawthorne Cancer Foundation wrote O'Connor to ask that she write a novel about one of their charges, she responded, "A novel. Horrors." For her, the story of the child, like those of Mary Anne Sadlier, epitomized the failures of sentimentality:

Stories of pious children tend to be false. That may be because they are told by adults, who see virtue where their subjects would see only a practical course of action or it may be because such stories are written to edify and what is written to edify usually ends by amusing. For my part, I have never cared to read about little boys who build altars and play they are priests, or about little girls who dress up as nuns, or about those pious Protestant children who lack this equipment but brighten the corners where they are. (*MM* 213)

Referring to the “edifying,” the primary category of neo-Thomistic aesthetics, O’Connor initially rejects the story of Mary Ann because the sentimental prohibits access to the ultimate reality.

Yet as she learns more about Mary Ann’s deformity, O’Connor begins to see Mary Anne’s grotesque face as a key for examining good and evil, sentimentality and the realism, modernity and faith. Mary Ann is not the beautiful pious child of the deathbed tableau in nineteenth-century novels, and this dissonance attracts O’Connor. Her face bears the marks of her cancer. She has one glowing, rosy cheek, and another enflamed, tumor-ridden cheek. This child could be one of O’Connor’s gallery of freaks. Her grotesque face draws O’Connor to the child, establishing Mary Ann as a part of the grotesque rather than the sentimental.

For O’Connor, the only way to reorient a modern audience to the right notion of reality is through the grotesque. Broadly speaking, the grotesque simultaneously evokes both horror and recognition in the reader. The crucified Christ emblemizes the grotesque—he is both recognizable as familiar and yet utterly disgusting, causing a fracturing in one’s reactions. The grotesque in O’Connor functions much like grace itself: it is a sharp moment that calls both her characters and her readers to recognize the relation of the divine order to the fallen world where we live. Indeed, grace and horror converge in O’Connor’s fiction. Only through the horror that

comes with recognition, like that evoked by the crucified body of Jesus, do modern readers accept religious truth that transcends the affective and the personal. While the grotesque relies upon a form of affect—in its initial moment of horror or disgust—the affective moment is transformational. Yet it cannot stand on its own as edifying. In the face of what horrifies and disgusts, readers must turn to rationality and morality to overcome affect. The moment of affect must be echoed by a turn to a reasoned faith, transformed into a sanctifying grace.

Sentimentality, for O'Connor, then, opposes the grotesque because it stymies the necessary turn to reason. In her introduction to the “factual story” of Mary Ann, penned by the Dominican sisters, O'Connor explores both the boundaries and the pitfalls of the sentimental. She considers sentimentality one of the worst sins of fiction, of the same ilk as pornography, because its excess impedes meaning. Indeed, she repeatedly rejects sentimentality in fiction—whether in Cardinal Spellman's novel *The Foundling* (1954) or Nelson Algren's novels—because it fails to edify. She rebukes a book by Algren, recommended by Elizabeth Hester, which offends her with its sentimentalizing of the poor because a fiction writer “cannot sentimentalize the poor and get away with it” (HB 95). O'Connor, like the writers of the Catholic Left who reject the sentimentalization of the poor in the Social Gospel tradition, rejects these depictions of the poor as fundamentally unable to represent the actual deprivation of human existence. O'Connor critiques this sentimentalizing impulse not only in the overtly affective writing of authors like Cardinal Spellman and Algren, but also in the proletarian fictions of 1930s which “seem to consist in numbering their lice” (HB 96). She sees the depiction of the poor, particularly by those writers who are not among them, as hindered by the existential orientation of the author; the representation is always first about the writer, then about others, and only lastly about the actual poor. As such, sentimentality, particularly about the poor, and

equally about children, fails to get at “the accurate naming of things,” misapprehending the essential privation of humanity in the fallen state as material deprivation.¹¹

O’Connor struggled to create a form of religiously-infused writing that was neither politicized nor sentimental; she came to see the grotesque, her version of “hard realism,” as the form best suited for writing to an irreligious modern audience. O’Connor opposed the Catholic grotesque to Protestant romanticism. She positioned the grotesque as a form that redressed the affective failures of the American Calvinist tradition. The sisters who wrote to O’Connor, who raised Mary Ann from infancy, were members of the Dominican Congregation started by Rose Hawthorne, the very order whose cancer hospitals for the poor inspired Dorothy Day. Noting this connection, O’Connor turns to the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne to explore the nature of spiritual realism. The Hawthorne that O’Connor locates is not found in his fiction, but rather in his personal writings and the spiritual autobiography of his Catholic daughter. O’Connor compares two scenes of encounter with a grotesque, diseased, and suffering child—from *Our Old Home* (1883) and from Hawthorne’s notebooks. In his notebooks, Hawthorne recounts the advances of a “sickly, humour-eaten fright” that insisted he pick “it” up. Despite his disgust, he takes up his “burden” and feels that “it was as if God had promised the child this favor on my behalf” (*MM* 218). Here, Hawthorne is the guilt-ridden Puritan father who cannot bear the suffering of cancer victims. His Catholic daughter, Rose, takes up this work and fulfills

¹¹ Perhaps even more problematically, the sentimental fails to achieve its ends because it relies on affect, which O’Connor claimed to reject. Like the Catholic Left, O’Connor believes that emotion is not tied the reality of spirit. Indeed, reliance on affect can mislead in fiction just as it does in theology. At the turn of the century, the Church officially dismissed personal experience or feeling as the basis of faith. Rooting personal faith in experience or feelings rather than an understanding of the rational truth of the Church was a form of Modernism, a heresy. Likewise, O’Connor dismissed Hester as a “Romantic” for demanding that Christ’s incarnation be “emotionally satisfying.” In O’Connor’s view, the spiritual truth does not express itself through affect. Indeed, “the very notion of God’s existence is not emotionally satisfying for great numbers of people, which does not mean that God ceases to exist.” Thus, fiction that relies upon affective bonds fails to function according to the proper relation with the ultimate reality.

Hawthorne's "hidden desires": "The ice in the blood which he feared, and which this very fear preserved him from, was turned by her into warmth which initiated action" (*MM* 219).

Catholicism, then, becomes the way to escape the Puritanism that Hawthorne feared. It transforms emotion into action, romanticism into realism. It is through action, specifically through the embrace of suffering, of the grotesque, rather than through individuated spirituality, that we find redemption. O'Connor's conception of the grotesque seems akin to Day's "downward path that leads to salvation." In both, by embracing what is not respectable, by recognizing what is imperfectly formed, we are transformed. Echoing the Catholic doctrine of grace as a two-fold process requiring action rooted in faith, to embrace the repulsive child is to be saved.

O'Connor argues that Americans tend to confuse the grotesque with "the sentimental" by mistaking it for "compassion," and O'Connor rejects traditional concepts of the grotesque on this ground:

Thomas Mann has said that the grotesque is the true anti-bourgeois style, but I believe that in this country, the general reader has managed to connect the grotesque with the sentimental, for whenever he speaks of it favorably, he seems to associate it with a writer's compassion. . . . Certainly when the grotesque is used in a legitimate way, the intellectual and moral judgments implicit in it will have the ascendancy over feeling. (*MM* 43)

Thus, the grotesque form stems not from feeling or sentiment, but rather from intellectual and moral judgments. In the face of the grotesque—the ill child at the workhouse or the face of Mary Ann—the individual feels disgust and horror rather than empathy and love. The heart of the grotesque, then, lies in the rejection of the merely affective. The reader must allow the

intellect and moral judgment to overcome feelings. Just as Dorothy Day and Harry Sylvester reject sentiment as something that must be conquered, O'Connor sees emotion failing to incite the proper response. Thus, O'Connor focuses on strange moments—moments that shock, disgust, and confuse—in order to penetrate the divine mystery of reality.

The key to divine mystery lies in the encounter with suffering. When one of the sisters asked O'Connor why “the grotesque was her vocation,” a visitor pointed out that it was the sister’s calling as well. The shared calling, among the sisters, O'Connor, Day and the Catholic novelists of the left, was to experience suffering, to make suffering apprehensible. This recognition of a shared experience opened up a new facet of the grotesque for O'Connor. Goodness, particularly as it exists in the material world, is like Mary Ann’s face: “the good is another matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction” (*MM* 226). Rather than face good, even its partiality, and examining it, the modern condition is to see suffering and reject the source of good. While Emily Hickey referred to Dreiser as an exemplar of this fallacy, O'Connor sees it as a trope of modernity:

Ivan Karamazov cannot believe, as long as one child is in torment; Camus’ hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ, because of the massacre of the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss in vision. If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetic, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached

from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber. (*MM* 227)

While such moments of horrific violence mark the end of the grace for so many, O'Connor sees the camps and gas chambers as conditions for a dark night of the soul, a spiritual travail that ultimately brings the believer into greater communion with the divine mystery.

Suffering therefore becomes the key to grace in O'Connor. Lacking an ability to transform suffering into actual grace—the ability to act according to the principles of Christianity—O'Connor suggests that contemporary American faith lacks grace altogether:

Today's reader, if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift. This reader's favorite word is compassion. I don't wish to defame the word. There is a better sense in which it can be used but seldom is—the sense of being in travail with and for creation in its subjection to vanity. This is a sense that implies a recognition of sin; this is a suffering-with, but on which blunts no edges and makes no excuses.

When infused into novels, it is often forbidding. (*MM* 165-6)

For O'Connor, spiritual reality is marked by human suffering. Human suffering begins with the Fall in Eden. Yet Catholicism insists that the effect of the Fall is not the reality of the material world. The suffering of the fall leads the way to the redemptive torment of the crucifixion, the *felix culpa*. Suffering is precisely the means to redemption. Yet for O'Connor, suffering as the means to redemption is precisely what the American Protestant tradition, rooted in Calvinism, has missed: "The Puritan's dream is to attain innocence without passing through Redemption. . . . He does not want to pay the necessary price, he wants to escape that horror powerful enough to nail a God upon a cross" (Taillefer 2). O'Connor's division between Hawthorne and his daughter

hinges on just this distinction. Despite Hawthorne's rejection of the Puritan tradition, as a Romantic author, he was running away from this horror; as a Catholic convert, Rose, his daughter, was running headlong into just such a horror.

Only through horror that overwhelms, through an encounter with the suffering, the grotesque, and the alienated, does O'Connor find the transformative power of fiction. Both physical and spiritual violence become the center of O'Connor's works. Jan Nordby Gretland and Karl-Heinz Westarp argue that "O'Connor saw terror as a means to destroy, violently if necessary, our false pride in the man-made and to purify our channels of perception for a revelation of the roots of all reality" (xii-xiii). Even terror, however, which overcomes sentimentality, cannot stand on its own. O'Connor criticizes emotion that focuses on individual feelings—whether of horror or suffering—rather than on an active response to suffering.

O'Connor's Political Catholicism

O'Connor's desire to evoke an active response to suffering would seem to ally her with the novelists of the Catholic Left who preceded her. Yet O'Connor's political stance embodied the ambivalence of an orthodox Catholic, living in the South, who envisioned herself as an outsider poised to criticize the failings of American culture. Despite her own conception of herself as an outcast, O'Connor hardly embraced radicals. Indeed, along with Robert Lowell, she left the artist colony at Yaddo after an FBI raid searching for Communist sympathizers. While many of the artists were outraged at the government intrusion, Lowell was convinced that the director had harbored Agnes Smedley, against whom the accusations of Communist ties were at best tenuous, and he, along with several others, left in protest against Yaddo. O'Connor left at the same time, seemingly in solidarity with Lowell, going to New York City work with

publishers on her first novel. Her reaction at Yaddo establishes O'Connor's ostensible anti-Communism.

The official Catholic position on Communism was monolithic by the post-War era. The Catholic Right, exemplified by Norris's movement, had coalesced around the issue of anti-Communism. Even moderate Catholic figures like Bishop Fulton Sheen, the popular American radio and television star, saw Communism as the Church's central enemy in the twentieth century. He appeared on television, sprinkling the guns of American soldiers in Southeast Asia with holy water and blessing the fight against godless Communists, thereby reasserting God's will underlying American imperialism as an essential fight against atheism. Yet there was a deep ambivalence about Communism on the Catholic Left, headed by figures who were themselves once active members of the Socialist and Communist parties in the United States. For the Catholic Left, Communists were kindred spirits in both their disavowal of economic inequality and their subsequent alienation from American culture. Yet, in keeping with Church doctrine, the Left rejected the materialist basis of Communism. While they saw Communists as people deserving of sympathy and care, Communism itself was based upon privation, and the Catholic Worker Movement rose to fulfill the same needs from a Catholic position. Perhaps surprisingly O'Connor seems to have shared, in a much more limited way, Day's tolerance for Communism as a function of American failures to care for others. Sounding much like Day in the first issue of the *Catholic Worker*, O'Connor claimed that "The Communist world sprouts from our sins of omission" (*HB* 450).

Despite this shared belief, O'Connor was at best irresolute about Day and the Catholic Worker Movement. Though increasingly leaving Andalusia only to give public lectures, O'Connor actively participated in the American Catholic community, including not only her

Catholic literary milieu but also regular lectures at Catholic universities like Notre Dame as well as correspondence with Catholic leaders and intellectuals. It should come as no surprise, then, that O'Connor was well aware of Day and the Catholic Worker Movement.¹² Caroline Gordon, O'Connor's literary mentor and frequent editor, wrote *The Malefactors* (1956), a novel based on her own experience of conversion.¹³ The novel not only contained a Dorothy Day figure, but was also initially dedicated to Day. O'Connor noted that she did not know anyone "with a greater respect for Dorothy Day" (*HB* 167).¹⁴ O'Connor, like Archbishop Cardinal Spellman, hardly knew what to make of the orthodox Catholic with radical politics. Most likely, O'Connor's commentary on the Movement, as on so many things, was scathing. *The Catholic Worker* drew particular ire from O'Connor for its positions on conditions in the South. The paper had long established a progressive stance on racial issues, arguing since the 1930s that the systemic suffering of African Americans was not the voluntary suffering that led to redemption, but a uniquely American sin. In 1957, Day traveled to the South to view the effects of segregation first-hand. She spent two weeks, including Holy Week, at Koinonia, an interracial farming cooperative founded by a Baptist minister one hundred miles outside Atlanta. After fifteen years of successful operation, segregationists were trying to put the farm out of business by boycott and acts of terror. Day published a series of letters to the *Catholic Worker*

¹² There is evidence that she was a long-time subscriber to the *Catholic Worker*. After a visit from Erik Langkjaer, O'Connor ordered back copies of *The Third Hour* and subscribed to the *Catholic Worker*. According to Elie, she recalled receiving a prayer card in the mail from the Catholic worker "a couple of years ago" in a letter to Hester, January 17, 1956, which suggests that she was already a subscriber on the paper's mailing list.

¹³ For more on the relationship between the Southern Agrarians and the Catholic Worker Movement, see Farrell O'Gorman.

¹⁴ According to *The Habit of Being*, Gordon sent Day an advanced copy of the book, and Day said that she would burn all available copies of the book, much as she sought to do with *The Eleventh Virgin*. Once Gordon removed the dedication, Day found the novel much more agreeable (135). O'Connor seemed to resent Day's treatment of Gordon, even noting later that Jacques Maritain found the depiction of Day to be quite pleasant (*HB* 166).

community from Koinonia, even describing an incident where local segregationists shot at her. In a letter to Hester, O'Connor describes the violation she felt upon reading these letters in the newspaper:

I wish somebody would write something sensible about Koinonia—as you say it is something regressive which is getting all the benefit of martyrdom. I think they should be allowed to live in peace but that they deserve all this exaltation I highly doubt. D.D. wrote up her trip there in the CW, which I duly enclose. It would have been all right if she hadn't had to stick in her plug for Their Way of Life for Everybody. (*HB* 219-220)

While O'Connor expresses her disdain for Day's utopian vision, her feelings seem to be more the reaction of a woman bristling under the perceived judgment of an outsider than a person who rejects Day's project outright. Here, O'Connor's loyalties as a Southerner come to the fore, when she establishes an opposition to Day as emblematic of Northerners intruding on the Southern way of life. Indeed, the issues of race and segregation often seemingly put O'Connor's sensibilities in tension—her personal opposition to racism and her respect for the traditions that maintain Southern identity—and her work suggests this deep ambivalence.¹⁵ O'Connor ends her letter by remarking that although she admired Day very much, “all my thoughts on the subject are ugly and uncharitable—such as: that's a mighty long way to come to get shot at, etc.” (*HB* 218).¹⁶

¹⁵ In 1959, O'Connor declined to meet with James Baldwin, whose work she admired, on the grounds that it would “cause the greatest trouble and disturbance and disunion.” She saw this refusal as maintaining some aspect of Southern identity, noting that it would have been nice to meet Baldwin in New York, but “here it was not” (*HB* 329).

¹⁶ O'Connor's last, unfinished manuscript, *Why Do the Heathen Rage?*, deals with Koinonia.

Despite her scathing commentary on Day in the aftermath of the Koinonia series, O'Connor's admiration for the Movement that shaped the Catholic Left formed long before these later criticisms. Her interactions with Erik Langkjaer, a traveling sales rep for Harcourt Brace in the Deep South, suggest that O'Connor was invested in keeping abreast of the Catholic Left. Langkjaer was from Denmark but studied at Princeton and taught at Fordham, which afforded him a knowledge of American Catholicism. His "aunt," a close family friend, Helen Iswolsky, published the journal *The Third Hour* and was a regular speaker at the Catholic Worker. O'Connor describes his first visit to Andalusia in a letter to the Fitzgeralds on May 7, 1953. Mr. Langkjaer was "much interested in Dorothy Day, only he couldn't see he said why she fed endless lines of bums for whom there was no hope, she'd never see any results from that, he said. The only conclusion we came to about this, was that Charity is not understandable. Strange people turn up" (*HB* 58). While this passage may seem to constitute a dismissal of the Catholic Worker Movement, read within the context of Catholicism, it does not necessarily. Charity here is the proper form, suggesting that O'Connor reads Day's enterprise as instructive. It informs a reading of Catholic charity as a function of primarily loving God and loving others through the act of loving God. In this sense, charity exists beyond the bounds of reason. Charity becomes mysterious, in the religious sense; it is spiritually beneficial to the giver, if not transformational for the receiver. In ending her introduction to the *Memoir of Mary Ann Long*, O'Connor theorizes charity in much the same way as Day in evoking the Mystical Body: "This action by which charity grows invisibly among us, entwining the living and the dead, is called by the Church the Communion of Saints. It is a communion created upon human imperfection, created from what we make of our grotesque state" (*MM* 228).

O'Connor's belief that all of humanity labors in a grotesque state muddles her description of "strange people." In O'Connor's conception of the grotesque, given humanity's fallen state, all people are "strange." The idea that "strange people turn up" is certainly borne out in Day's descriptions of the various visitors to the Catholic Worker house on Mott Street, and that strangeness was a call to serve even more. Still, the referent for "strange people" is unclear, and it seems to refer just as much to the Catholic Workers as it does their guests. For O'Connor, with her own "gallery of freaks," to be strange may be redemptive. After all, as Giles notes, "The freak, said O'Connor in one of her essays, is an emblem of this displacement: only a person alienated from the smugly secular and humanist world could become an appropriate vessel for the infusion of divine grace" (359-60). For O'Connor, the freak is more than a mere stranger to be comforted by the works of mercy or an emblem of modern society's failure to act appropriately before God, but a vessel of God's grace in and of herself.

Despite her seeming dismissal of the Catholic Worker Movement, O'Connor shared the Catholic Left's sense that Catholicism, even in its orthodoxy, is inherently radical. The religion as the site of resistance to mass culture was as important to O'Connor as its anti-Communism. Her logic for embracing the grotesque as a form suggests that only the truly shocking can adequately mirror Catholicism's rejection of mass culture. Much like Day, she believed that "Catholicism is opposed to the bourgeois mind" (CW 862). While it is not clear whether O'Connor's personalism evolved through her contact with the Catholic Left via texts like *The Catholic Worker* or through her reading of Maritain, a frequent writer for *The Catholic Worker* who shared the same philosophical grounding in French personalism as Peter Maurin, O'Connor's resistance is rooted in a distinctively Catholic personalism.

O'Connor's Catholic Stories and the Community of Freaks

Due to her idiosyncratic depictions of grace, much of O'Connor's fiction does not lend itself to Catholic readings. Her work troubles Catholic critics' desire to appropriate any and all writing by a self-proclaimed Catholic writer into the Catholic canon. Yet some of O'Connor's work, particularly her short fiction, suggests the complexity of the Catholic community of the mid-century. Both "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" (1955) and "The Displaced Person" (1955) show a Catholicism rooted not in theological notions of grace, but in an ethic of suffering that transcends that of the Catholic Left and the Right. Enfreakment and suffering can neither be overcome nor transcended; they must be embraced. O'Connor breaks from the insistence that social action can transform the world. Instead, she believes that suffering, personally or as part of a community, can transform the individual. In suffering and alienation, the believer finds grace. Together, these texts suggest that O'Connor's work cannot simply be read as ahistorical, theological conservatism, but rather as works striving to make sense of Catholicism as a religion that practices actual grace in key moments.

"A Temple of the Holy Ghost," ostensibly about the material reality of the Corpus Christi, grounds O'Connor's spiritual realism in God's response to human suffering. The story is fundamentally Catholic, not simply because of its Catholic settings or inclusion of Catholic ritual with its specialized language, but because of the centrality of the Body of Christ in the text. The multiple functions of the Holy Body in the story challenge a critical tendency to locate O'Connor neatly within a conservative Catholic tradition. The story conceptualizes the material world in a way that aligns O'Connor with the Catholic radical, social activist tradition of the 1930s and 40s. Individual suffering becomes the means to achieving grace, and it is only through acts of violent awakening can we enter into a community of believers.

“A Temple of the Holy Ghost” tells the tale of a young girl during a weekend visit from her fourteen-year-old cousins. The twelve-year-old protagonist, known only as “the child,” is wry and sardonic, taking pleasure in mocking those around her. She is, as Ralph C. Wood notes, on the verge of becoming one of O’Connor’s gallery of “curdled intellectuals.” She scoffs at her cousins’ play at womanhood, but helps her mother to set the girls up with some local boys, future Church of God ministers. While the child feels revulsion at the girls’ behavior toward the boys, she lies awake waiting for the girls to return from their date at the carnival. When they finally return, she coerces them to tell her about the freak show, where the girls saw a hermaphrodite. The girls recount the hermaphrodite’s plea to be accepted because “God made me thisaway.” The image of the hermaphrodite captures the child’s imagination, and she recreates the scene in her mind before falling asleep. The next day, the girl and her mother return her cousins to the convent school, where they all attend the Benediction. On the way home from the convent, the girl learns that the carnival has been shut down by local ministers, and, lost in thought, stares at the vast stretches of land and the setting sun.

The critical response to the story has, quite rightly, centered around the ambivalence of the story’s ending. A number of critics have argued that the primary character is indoctrinated into normative religion, inculcated into appropriate expressions of piety, while at the convent. Richard Giannone suggests that the story, despite its Catholic influence, is a conventional O’Connor tale in its humbling of the proud protagonist. Yet other critics have suggested that the alternative spirituality of the hermaphrodite triumphs. Christine Bieber Lake claims that the child’s experience with the hermaphrodite creates an immense spiritual openness within her, and Marshall Bruce Gentry argues the text affirms the child’s “willful rebellion” rather than the hermaphrodite’s meek submission (69). O’Connor herself claimed that the conclusion reveals

“the acceptance of what God wills for us, an acceptance of our individual circumstances” (*HB* 124). Here, O’Connor uses the Body of Christ as a way to create a community, not despite the alienation and displacement that she sees as essential elements of the modern condition, but through them. The horror of the grotesque that disgusts us becomes what bonds humanity.

As the previous chapter explored in analyzing Day’s influence on the Catholic Left, by the time of O’Connor’s writing, the Body of Christ, both as a phrase and a theological concept, resonated with multiple, and sometimes contested, meanings. The phrase refers most overtly to the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist: in the Thomistic conception, the essential property of Jesus residing in the accidental properties of the host. By the 1930s, it simultaneously conjures the Pauline concept of the Mystical Body of Christ. Paul’s letters describe the Church as a body with Jesus at the head. The doctrine was intended to function as a conservative organizing symbol for official Catholic culture. As formally promulgated in Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, it reinforced the Church the Church as the authority on salvific truth. Yet for Day and the Catholic Left, the Mystical Body was more encompassing than the institutional Church: it was society itself.

The story’s title, “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” comes from a joke between the cousins. The girls call one another “Temple One” and “Temple Two” in response to a lecture from Sister Perpetua, the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy. She advises them that if a young man should “behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile” they were to say “Stop sir! I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!” (*CS* 238). While the lecture sends the teenagers into “gales of giggles,” the child finds a solemn pleasure in the phrase, repeating it to herself—“I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost”—and feeling “as if somebody had given her a present.”

The phrase allows the child to feel, if only momentarily, connected to a “community of temples,” to borrow Bruce Marshall Gentry’s phrase. After she learns the phrase, her mother chastizes her for teasing Miss Kirby, a schoolteacher who boards with the family, about her distasteful beau, Cheat. Of Miss Kirby, the child’s mother says, “‘that poor soul is so lonesome she’ll even ride in that car that smells like the last circle in hell.’ Miss Kirby’s desperation renders her as pathetic as her suitor. The child’s unspoken response, “And she’s a Temple of the Holy Ghost too” (CS 239) resonates with her confused recognition that Miss Kirby, and indeed Cheat, are somehow Holy despite their desperation and grotesquery. The child is struck by their inclusion in this mystical world of the Holy Ghost even as she laughs at them. Through these figures, the “community of temples” symbolically includes all the characters in the text. As the child’s mockery of the whole town—her cousins, the teacher, the taxi driver, Cheat—suggests, they are all worthy of laughter, all fallen and pathetic. Even as a community of temples, they constitute a veritable “community of freaks.” Yet the Holy Spirit inhabits them despite these flaws, and the girl relishes the gift of this similitude, this sense of being the same as the others in this crucial way.

While the child’s interest in the phrase is as much linguistic as it is spiritual, it affirms her immature religious sentiments that hinge upon a romantic connection between religious devotion and the bodily sacrifices of the saints, the very type of romantic connection that O’Connor disavows in her letters to Hester. In her spiritual ruminations, she understands religious faith in only two valances: the rote and mechanistic expressions of institutional prayer and the romanticized tales of saints’ gory martyrdom. When she decides that she “would have to be a saint” when she grew up, she realizes her own limits, choosing martyrdom as her only sure path to sainthood. She recalls the violent images of martyrs burned in oil and torn apart by lions, but

imagines that her own death will be quick and painless, her body immune to the suffering her captors intend for her. Even as she envisions martyrdom, she cannot envision her own pain; her faith cannot allow for it. The child is another version of the American Puritan, seeking redemption without suffering, heaven without the price of the cross. As a child, she is like O'Connor's description of the Puritan, who seeks innocence without redemption because he cannot conceive of the ultimate suffering.

The voice of the hermaphrodite, as retold by her cousins, disrupts the child's immature conception of faith. While the child's imagination had imbued the mundane world with a deep significance, her world becomes sacramental through the introduction of the freak. As she lies in bed at night, the child's imagination transforms the carnival tent into a religious space. Before she hears the devotion of the hermaphrodite, she focuses on the exterior of the forbidden tents, comparing the "faded-looking pictures. . . of people in tights" to "the martyrs waiting to have their tongues cut out by the Roman soldier" (CS 243), echoing the religious devotions of her own canonization fantasies. Once the child hears of the hermaphrodite, however, she mentally enters the interior of the tent, imagining it as a revival: "the men more solemn than they were in church, and the women stern and polite, with painted-looking eyes, standing as if they were waiting for the first note of the piano to begin the hymn" (CS 246). The child transforms the hermaphrodite's simple plea not to be laughed at into a call-and-response prayer, the audience affirming the hermaphrodite-as-preacher with "Amen!"

Into this prayer, the child integrates Sr. Perpetua's lecture:

"Raise yourself up. A temple of the Holy Ghost. You! You are God's temple, don't you know? Don't you know? God's Spirit has a dwelling in you, don't you know?"

“Amen. Amen.”

“If anybody desecrates the temple of God, God will bring him to ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you thisaway. A temple of God is a holy thing. Amen. Amen.”

In this exchange, the voice of the hermaphrodite shatters the child’s experience of faith as distant, a part of a romanticized past that never was. The hermaphrodite’s alienation, expressed not just through her enfreakment but also through her entreaty for tolerance if not acceptance, collides with the sense of the community that the child feels as a “temple.” The hermaphrodite, whose body is an aberration that can exist only within the freak show, is a “temple of the holy ghost.” As a member of the community of temples, the hermaphrodite stands in for the larger cast of misfits, the literal sideshow in a community of freaks. In her radical difference, the hermaphrodite breaks open the child’s narcissistic world and sense of religious devotion to reveal a new set of spiritual possibilities.

Yet some critics suggest that the child’s break from the world of the imagination and return to the material world, with its established religious devotions, ultimately mark the girl’s maturity into more normative religious practices. In light of O’Connor’s reliance on the Mystical Body, however, the final scenes imply that the girl grows into a more mature spirituality that hinges upon the connection of the sacramentality of the freak to the holiness of the Eucharist. Upon arrival at Mt. St. Scholastica, the child is whisked away by a jolly, round nun to the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a rite centered around the adoration of the Sacrament as the Real Presence. As she is thinking nasty thoughts about the round nun, she reminds herself that she is “in the presence of God” and begins to pray, “hep me not to be so mean. . . hep me not to give her so much sass” (CS 248) While some critics suggest that these

prayers ultimately mark the child's chastening, the text is clear that these prayers are mechanical, no different than her recitation of the Apostle's Creed on the night of the carnival before her cousins' return from the freak show. The central moment of the text is the most sacred moment in the Benediction, when the priest prays the Collect of the Corpus Christi and, donning the humeral veil, raises over his head the gold monstrance that holds the host, tracing the sign of the cross in the air. In this moment, thoughts of the hermaphrodite break through the child's mechanistic devotions: "When the priest raised the monstrance with the Host shining ivory-colored in the center of it, she was thinking of the tent at the fair that had the freak in it. The freak was saying, 'I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted me to be'" (CS 248). Just as she did the night before, the child combines established religious practices with the simple religious faith of the hermaphrodite. Here, she overrides the communal connection of the tent with the community of the Eucharist. The body of the hermaphrodite becomes the Body of Christ when the Host is raised. When the sacred Body is put on display, the child hears the hermaphrodite's voice. The body of the hermaphrodite—made in the image of God—is, in the child's mind, a part of the Host, the body of Christ. Echoing Day's heterodox reading of *Mystici Corporis Christi* against which Fulton Sheen warned, Christ resides in the aberrant bodies of humanity—in the hermaphrodite, in Cheat, and in the child herself.

The text's final image connects these holy bodies to the mundane world that is itself a sacred mystery because of, not despite, suffering. As she returns home, the child stares out the window of the backseat of an automobile and "looked out over a stretch of pasture land that rose and fell with a gathering greenness until it touched the dark woods. The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees" (CS 248). The simile of the blood-red sun creates a

syllogism, of sorts, that compares a sanctified sun to the hermaphrodite through the image of the elevated Host at the Benediction. Unlike the “ivory” host shining in the gold monstrance, the sun is blood red, recalling the child’s religious ruminations on Jesus’ three falls on the road to Calvary. The sun, and thereby the hermaphrodite, are connected to the body of Christ, but not the perfect body of the Benediction; rather, they are connected to the bloodied and suffering body of Good Friday. The freak—because of her alienation, because she is stricken to be like no other, to be gawked at, to be laughed at—becomes like Christ on the road to the cross. Through the hermaphrodite’s alignment with Jesus, the whole “community of freaks” that she represents becomes not just a community of temples, who are holy despite how laughably pathetic they are, but a part of the Mystical Body, who are holy precisely because of how laughable they are, because God made them this way. Indeed, like the guests of the Catholic Worker house, the more grotesque the stranger, the more she embodies the rejected, suffering Christ.

The child too is drawn into this community through a violent expression of love that marks her with the suffering of the Cross, echoed in the image of the sun. As she and her mother escape through the convent door, “the big nun swooped down on her mischievously and nearly smothered her in the black habit, mashing the side of her face into the crucifix hitched onto her belt” (CS 248). This moment, when she is brought face to face with the sacrifice of the Calvary, aligns her material suffering with the crucifixion. The child is brought into a greater community than her community of Temples through the experience of physical suffering (though on a much smaller, almost comedic scale) through identification with the suffering of the historical Jesus, and through him, through the Body of Christ, she is aligned with the freak, the outsider. This identification only occurs through the violence, through her literal encounter with crucifixion—the very violence reenacted in the mass. The child’s suffering, in connecting her to the

hermaphrodite, is exactly what is powerful in connecting her to others in this world. Her sense of alienation—of enfreakment—as well as her horror, mark her entry into the Catholic community

The story suggests, ultimately, that O'Connor's work participates in a larger history of Catholic literature. While she is rightly connected to contemporaneous Catholic figures like Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, her investment in a community of suffering makes her equally akin to a series of Catholic social realists that preceded her. In establishing her characters, indeed all of humanity, as a community of freaks that all participate in the Mystical body, in part because each suffers her own lot, O'Connor echoes Dorothy Day's radical interpretation of the concept of the Mystical Body—all of society participates in the Body. The short story suggests, as Day had, that the *Mystici Corporis Christi* calls for Catholics to participate in the suffering of the crucifixion, to be broken alongside the cross. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" suggests that aware suffering can function not just as a means to grace, but as a means to greater communion. Like Day, O'Connor reads what is meant to be a prelude to the encyclical of *Mystici Corporis Christi* as the most essential part. It is the center of faith in the story: "For we intend to speak of the riches stored up in this Church which Christ purchased with His own Blood, and whose members glory in a thorn-crowned head. The fact they thus glory is a striking proof that the greatest joy and exaltation are born only of suffering, and hence that we should rejoice if we partake in the sufferings of Christ" (1-2). . She does not seek to overturn this suffering or avoid reproducing it, but to participate in it.

Violence, Grace, and “The Displaced Person”

Although suffering is central to the doctrine of the Church—it is the means to understand the sacrifice of the cross and is given meaning through the cross itself—as well as a means to enter into the community of Catholicism, involuntary suffering is still a moral problem to be remedied. If O’Connor shares a conception of a material world in which ultimate reality is bound to suffering, and it is only through suffering that we are capable of encountering grace in the material world, she differs from the Catholic Left of the 1930s and 1940s in her orientation towards violence. Borrowing a Thomistic framework, O’Connor suggests that sharp experience of violence, a facet of the grotesque, can awaken human beings to the natural law, to the spiritual reality. While involuntary suffering is never good, it is precisely this suffering that edifies the human soul. Thus, if literature has the power to press readers to recognize deeper spiritual truths, O’Connor sees horror of violence as a key part of the transformation: “I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace” (*MM* 112).

O’Connor’s insistence on suffering, however, does not mean that she fully embraces the Catholic Left. Critics who read O’Connor’s work as a critique of new liberalism or post-War liberal intellectuals have long noted that she claims liberalism misapprehends the spiritual truth of reality. As Schaub argues, O’Connor levies a staunch critique of American liberalism on the grounds that it fundamentally misapprehends the essential nature of humanity. Liberalism, in her estimation, relies upon the belief that the individual is inherently good. In the era after the Holocaust, after the “gas chambers and the box cars,” this view of humanity is untenable to O’Connor. The social and political failures of the twentieth century stem from the failure of the

modern individual to enact grace in this world. This failure, however, functions not at the larger level of governments, but at the level of the individual.

“The Displaced Person,” the last story in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, shows O’Connor’s rejection of liberalism as a displacement of personal responsibility for the community—the larger body of Christ—onto the state. While “A Temple of the Holy Ghost” reflects on the way that suffering calls all humanity into community, “The Displaced Person” reminds readers that they are all participants in the horror of human suffering.

In a letter to Hester, O’Connor noted that she had received a holiday card in the mail from the *Catholic Worker*, with a linoleum-block print of St. Raphael the Archangel on one side and a prayer to the saint on the other: “The prayer had some imagery in it that I took over and put in ‘The Displaced Person’” (*HB* 132). As Elie notes, the image of eternal life as “new country” is not the only similarity; the description of migrant poverty and capitalist racism may well have come from the pages of the *Catholic Worker*.

“The Displaced Person,” initially published at half its length in a 1954 issue of *Harpers*, narrates the arrival of Polish refugees, the Guizacs, to work as fieldhands on the McIntyre farm in the wake of World War II. A Catholic priest convinces Mrs. McIntyre to accept the Guizacs on the grounds that she will not only be doing a moral act, but will also benefit herself through the new workers. The arrival of Mr. Guizac disrupts the usual running of the farm. The original publication in *Harpers* focuses on the reaction of the Shortleys, the white couple who oversee daily operations. Mrs. Shortley sees Guizac, whom she calls Gobblehook in her attempt to make his foreignness translatable, as a grotesque figure who is at once victim and aggressor, carrying the contamination of the Holocaust with him: “Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the

water with them directly to this place" (CS 198). Despite Guizac's association with the horrors of the Holocaust, Mrs. McIntyre seems thrilled with the new worker, who seems set to displace the Shortleys as the powerful workers in the farm's hierarchy. Threatened by Guizac's arrival and disturbed by his familiarity with the black hands, the Shortleys suddenly leave the farm. In the car on the way out of town, Mrs. Shortley has a beatific vision of her "true country" just as she dies of an embolism.

While the version published in *Harpers* ends here, O'Connor rewrote the story for its publication in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, continuing with the tale of the McIntyre farm. In this version, Mrs. McIntyre is the focalizer, and we see the disruption of the social order through her self-serving perspective. While Mrs. McIntyre is thrilled with Guizac's work, she is horrified to learn that he has been receiving money from Sulk, a black hand, in order to fund Guizac's niece's emigration to America. Guizac promises Sulk the girl's hand in marriage in exchange for help with the cost to bring her to America. Shocked by Guizac's failure to understand Southern race relations, Mrs. McIntyre attempts to return Guizac to the priest. The priest convinces Mrs. McIntyre that she cannot simply "return" a human being, and she feels that she is tricked by priest. In the grotesque ending, Guizac is crushed by farm equipment while Mrs. McIntyre and several field hands look on. The workers and Mrs. McIntyre share a meaningful glance, sealing an agreement of non-intervention, effectively creating a community that enables the death of the displaced person:

[Mrs. McIntyre] heard the brake on the large tractor slip, and looking up, she saw it move forward, calculating its own path. Later she remembered that she had seen the negro jump silently out of the way as if a spring in the earth had released him and that she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head with incredible slowness and

stare silently over his shoulder and that she had started to shout to the Displaced Person but that she had not. She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever, and she heard the little noise the Pole made as the tractor broke his backbone. (CS 234)

In this moment, the farm acts as microcosm of the fallen world that could enable the horrors of the Holocaust in its refusal to care for the stranger. After Guizac's death, the terrible community that formed in that moment falls apart; Mr. Shortley leaves the farm for other work, and Sulk is taken with a desire to travel the world. Mrs. McIntyre suffers a "nervous affliction," which gradually grows into a numbness in her legs that leaves her in bed and causes her to lose her voice. The priest, never abandoning Mrs. McIntyre in the lone act of positive community on the farm, continues to return, bringing breadcrumbs her the peacocks and sitting by her bedside explaining the doctrine of the Church to her.

In "The Displaced Person," the terror of the Holocaust looms over these other social injustices. For O'Connor, the Holocaust upended the ontological categories that shape human understanding of the material world. No longer could a positive view of humanity be upheld as the central truth of existence. Humanity may have been made in God's image, but we live as fallen people in a fallen world. The McIntyre farm of "The Displaced Person" exemplifies the brokenness of material existence. Indeed, in yet another letter to Hester, O'Connor described the McIntyre farm as "an evil place" (*HB* 118). Lest readers mistake the farm for something uniquely horrific, the story interjects the horror of history as a reminder of the evil that lurks inside all humanity. Any temporal distance from the Holocaust is broken by a filmic image that continuously interjects into the narrative present:

Mrs. Shortley recalled a newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it in your head, the picture changed and a hollow-sounding voice was saying, "Time marches on!" (CS 196)

The image of the Holocaust, of "the ovens and the boxcars and the sick children," evokes O'Connor's earlier claim that modernity's rejection of grace creates the very reality of social sin (CS 231). Indeed, when the priest speaks to Mrs. McIntyre of the "ovens and the boxcars and the sick children" and "our dear Lord," she responds that he has listed one too many (CS 231). She is, then, emblematic of the modern consciousness that feels more and sees less, missing "the source of tenderness," which results in the "forced labor camps and the fumes of the gas chamber" (MM 227).

The social sins of Mrs. McIntyre's farm, then, stem from her repudiation of the spiritual reality underlying the material world that is essential to O'Connor's Catholic worldview. She denies that God functions in the material world even though it is utterly fallen. As the specter of the Holocaust looms over the story in the form of Mrs. Shortley's visions and the Guizacs' desperation, O'Connor places the sins of the farm on the same horrific trajectory. Indeed, the image of Guizac's wife and daughter looming over his dead body echoes the image of bodies from the Holocaust that Mrs. Shortley remembers. Mrs. McIntyre's and the Shortleys' "evil" stems from the same failure that leads to the utter destruction of humanity. The rejection of God and concomitant rejection of grace are manifest in the refusal to care for the stranger, in the breakdown of any possibility of genuine community. Mrs. Shortley vocalizes the attitudes that

fracture community by continuously identifying the other members of the farm as strangers and invaders. Vocalizing American tropes of anti-Catholic rhetoric, she imagines the Catholic priest, who is American, as a foreign invader alongside the Guizacs, saying “the priest spoke in a foreign way himself, English, but as if he had a throatful of hay” (CS 198).

Indeed, the priest is, actually, a representative of foreign invasion. He literally brings foreign invaders when he brings the Guizacs to the farm. In bringing them, he is not just an agent of social change, but also an actor for social justice. In taking up the case of the Guizacs, in finding and maintaining a home for them, the priest acts much like the Catholic Worker in the house of hospitality. The stranger, here the Displaced Person, becomes the site of moral obligation, and in this moral obligation the individual can encounter grace. “The Displaced Person” relies upon the concept of the stranger in the Catholic Worker ideology—the more alienated the individual, the more he embodies Christ. In this post-World War II moment, the European displaced person, ambiguous in his role in the war, becomes both historical victim and aggressor, not only worthy of care but potentially contaminating. Mrs. McIntyre’s unwitting remarks about Mr. Guizac mark him as a redemptive character, when she says “That man is my salvation!” and “He came to redeem us” (CS 203, 226). Mrs. McIntyre is speaking in financial terms, about labor on the farm, but O’Connor’s irony is that he is also the avenue for salvation. Mr. Guizac, then, is a Christ figure, but not any more so than any other suffering human being. Like the hermaphrodite or Mary Ann, his alienation renders him Christ-like, placing him among the gallery of freaks.

In O’Connor’s fictional world, just as in the Catholic Worker house of hospitality, moral obligation to the community of Christ becomes personal obligation to act. Mrs. Shortley’s evil lies not simply in her petty hatred for the Guizacs and the black farm workers, but also in her

refusal to care for other members of the Body of Christ, even as they suffer terrible violence: “She thought there ought to be a law against them. There was no reason they couldn’t stay over there and take the places of some of the people who had been killed in their wars and butcherings” (CS 205). While Mrs. Shortley tries to avoid confronting the systemic violence that the Holocaust brings to the fore, the Guizacs force her into recognition of it. Indeed, the Guizacs’ presence not only forces a confrontation with violence, but enables those on the farm to participate in that violence on a smaller scale. In O’Connor’s fiction, violence already exists because we live in a fallen world, but through the power of the grotesque, that violence can transform. Mrs. Shortley’s sudden, violent death comes with a vision of the new land, with an understanding of the ultimate reality. Betsy Bolton suggests that in the contrast between Mrs. Shortley’s death and Mrs. McIntyre’s deterioration at the end of the story, O’Connor offers her readers a choice between “violence with comprehension and meaning and violence without” (99). Mrs. Shortley’s vision grants her a sense of an ultimate reality beyond herself, while Mrs. McIntyre lays immobile, listening to mechanistic descriptions of doctrine.

Mrs. McIntyre never accesses the spiritual reality, and her moral failings on the farm index this greater failure. The priest insists on the Guizacs’ place as a moral responsibility, consistently confounding the economic and sociological logic that Mrs. McIntyre continuously insists upon. Mrs. McIntyre no longer wants any relation to Guizac because he has broken the social norms of the American South by attempting to marry his (ostensibly white) niece to a black farmhand. As she tells the priest, “He’s extra. He doesn’t fit in.” As such, Mrs. McIntyre repeatedly insists “There is no moral obligation to keep him” (CS 225), denying her own participation in the moral, and salvific, economy. Here, Mrs. McIntyre attempts to displace her personal responsibility for the Guizacs onto the Church or the State. She refuses to take

responsibility for him, to embrace her role in the larger community. Indeed, she rejects the very possibility of community on the farm, reminding the workers on the farm that they are “dependent” upon her.

Crucially, both Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley rely upon the logic of capitalism to supercede the imperative of community. Like the head of the Daughters of the Sodality who does not pay her African-American workers a living wage in Sylvester’s *Dearly Beloved*, Mrs. McIntyre prides herself on paying less than a living wage, noting that her salary will keep Guizac from ever putting aside any money, whether to buy a car or to save his cousin (CS 205). Underlying this pride is a capitalist logic, one that seems to twist the Catholic conception of suffering to arrive at a premise of the political right: “People ought to have to struggle. Mr. Guizac had probably had everything given to him all the way across Europe and over here. He had probably not had to struggle enough” (CS 219). O’Connor critiques not only American mass culture as it relies upon corporatization and consumerism, but also the very logic of capitalism, rejecting the foundation of both American post-war conservatism and new liberalism.

Indeed, “The Displaced Person” contains not just an indictment of the laissez-faire economy, but also a condemnation of Southern ideals, a rare charge as O’Connor so often sought to preserve Southern identity. She merges the logic of capitalism with the logic of racism—the very logic that leads to the ovens—through the exploitation of workers. In discussing “the black farm workers” Mrs. Shortley asks her husband, “Do you know what’s happening in this world? It’s swelling up. It’s getting so full of people that only the smart thrifty energetic ones are going to survive” (CS 216). Here, the capitalist language of competition repudiated in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadregesimo Annos* is tied to Malthusian fears, suggesting the link between the eugenicist project of the Holocaust and capitalist ideology. As Jon Lance Bacon notes, segregationist and

anti-Communist rhetoric in the South merged during the 1950s. Miscegenation, the very threat that leads to Mrs. McIntyre's turn against Guizac, was presented as a form of Communist infiltration. Here, O'Connor is not simply flipping the moral poles of invasion in a way that critiques anti-Communist rhetoric, but she is also critiquing the segregationists, the people who guard the very tradition that she felt Dorothy Day had unfairly entrapped and disparaged in her article about Koinonia. Thus, the push for social just that the priest reiterates echoes the call for integration that is an essential part of the American left's interpretation of Catholic Social Doctrine.

The violence of the "Displaced Person," the social sins of economic exploitation, racism, and solipsism, as well as the material violence they precipitate, are rooted in the same privation of the soul that O'Connor saw leading to the gas chambers in her introduction to the *Memoir of Mary Ann*. This is not simply the terror that occurs when humans take over the power to determine the value of life, but rather the result of entering into the vertiginous gulf of a fallen universe and embracing a disconnection from God. This disconnection from God manifests as a breakdown of community, a destruction of the Body of Christ, metaphorically embodied in the broken pile of limbs that Mrs. Shortley envisions. Ultimately, this vision, once historically and geographically distant, is re-enacted on the McIntyre farm. In the final break down of humanity, the workers all collude in Guizac's death, acting collectively to condone the savage death of Guizac. While the tractor breaks Mr. Guizac's body, the body of the community unifies as "Mr. Guizac's body was covered with the bent bodies of his wife and two children and a black one which hung over him" (CS 234). That mess of broken bodies, a pile of human suffering, marks both the fallen nature of humanity and the grace that has the power to transform. These "bent bodies" form a model of community within Catholic social doctrine. Within this fallen, broken

world, the bonds of suffering—or suffering with a purpose—create a community. Through the ending, Mrs. McIntyre herself becomes the stranger, and it is in this suffering that she has a chance at redemption: “she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance” (CS 235). The redemptive power is precisely in this inversion. By becoming the outsider, in part through the dismantling of this dysfunctional community, and taking on her own suffering, Mrs. McIntyre has a chance at redemption, though she ultimately misses this understanding. Indeed, Mrs. McIntyre’s rejection of religion is, ironically, when she comes closest to understanding the ultimate reality. “Christ was just another D.P.” (CS 229).

“The Displaced Person” unsettles the division between the spiritual and the political in O’Connor’s stories. The priest notes that Mrs. McIntyre dons a “puritanical expression” whenever he mentions God (CS 226). Her discomfort at the public discussion of the theological suggests her desire to relegate religion to the private sphere, and one not her own. Her farm, a microcosm of America in modernity, depends upon maintaining what O’Connor sees as a false distinction between the theological and the practical, and the text calls into question the distinction between the political and the theological. O’Connor, unlike Christian realists, sees the material world as itself sanctifying, and the way that we exist within it, however fallen it is, is exactly what is at stake. Through suffering, through an encounter with the grotesque, ultimate reality can act upon the human soul. When Mrs. McIntyre insists that “I don’t find myself responsible for all the extra people in the world,” she speaks to mass culture’s spiritual failure (CS 226). Her failure, and the failure of mid-century America, is denying personalist responsibility for the other—a denial particularly insidious when grounded in the ideologies of capitalism, nativism, and racism—rather than accepting her responsibility for the stranger. Just as Day and Maurin denied the idea that the state was an adequate mechanism for the

administration of human needs or justice, “The Displaced Person” insists on the spiritual need of personal responsibility for the stranger. The personalism in O’Connor rejects the liberal model as well as the communist model, echoing Day’s claim that “we must never cease to emphasize personal responsibility. When our brother asks us for bread, we cannot say, ‘Go be thou filled.’ We cannot send him from agency to agency. We must care for him ourselves as much as possible” (quoted in Massa 106). The spiritual reality that shapes the political and social worlds cannot be relegated to the private sphere. The ultimate reality is like the triumphant feathers of the peacock in “The Displaced Person”—always present if not always clearly displayed.

O’Connor’s Orthodox Moment

O’Connor’s conservative Catholicism, radical in its very orthodoxy, paved the way for Catholic poets and writers to stand as critics of American culture, warriors for a Church that is not only transcendent, but also politically active. In the 1950s, before the clear fracturing of American Catholics that Dorothy Day feared, to be an orthodox Catholic was, in many ways, to be radical. Thus, O’Connor’s radical realism, her radical truth, is indebted to the Catholic Left that she seemed to reject. Her position as an outsider was not only a function of her position as a Southerner in American culture or as a Catholic in the Protestant South, but as an American Catholic. By the 1950s, as American Catholics moved solidly into the middle class and established themselves as major figures on the national political stage, the trope of the Catholic as outsider become increasingly powerful, even as it became less rooted in reality. Prior to World War II, to be an American Catholic was to be a member of powerful, if often disdained subculture. For Catholics like O’Connor, resistance to key aspects of American culture became a defining aspect of Catholic identity in America, even as Catholics themselves formed the very

ideological structures that other Catholics positioned themselves outside of. Modes of resistance, both on the Left and the Right, became a way for Catholics to identify themselves as different in the increasingly assimilationist movement of American Catholics, which coalesced in the broad coalition of the Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s.

Flannery O'Connor's radical stories of community, suffering, and love present the other side of the orthodox American Church. O'Connor's fiction, even in its orthodoxy, blows the dynamite of Catholic doctrine at the very moment when American Catholics are growing complacent within mass American Culture. American Catholics have long negotiated a Catholicism that simultaneously resisted doctrinal hegemony and American mass culture. They embraced the possibilities of the Catholic Church as a dominant force in American social and political life because of its radical possibilities.

AFTERWORD

I turned to American Catholics' own writing to explore how they imagined themselves in relation to a culture that they were at once a part of and outside of. In reading issues of Catholic magazines from 1900 to 1945, I uncovered a series of major debates occurring among American Catholic laypeople and clerics, writers and critics, that lays bare the challenges and contradictions of assimilation into American culture. Through this focus on Catholic print culture, including the literary and cultural journal *The Catholic World* and the various Catholic novels addressed in this manuscript, I saw that Catholic literary critics and writers grappled with the problem of a literary culture that was not aligned with Catholic commitments to a communal identity. The myriad tensions—between the theological and the political, the transcendent and daily life, ethnic concerns and community cohesion—in these oft-forgotten Catholic texts suggest the complexity of religious identification and its attendant historical concerns.

Working through these tensions, the project necessarily defines American Catholic fiction. This project began with an understanding that Catholic fiction must meet some basic criteria that differs from those that Arnold Sparr established as the basic terms of nineteenth-century Catholic literature. I used Catholic magazines as well as historical work in American Catholic Studies to establish a body of Catholic literature. As such, this project examines the work of writers who self-identified as Catholic and saw themselves as writing Catholic literature, and were major cultural figures in both the Catholic milieu and American letters. My starting criteria, then, was that Catholic literature must first be the product of a self-identifying Catholic writer, and it must, second, be grapple with Catholic issues. The arc of this project establishes, however, that Catholic literature cannot *simply* be understood as work by Catholic writers, nor

can it be defined by an emphasis on Catholic atmospheres. Rather, through this research, I have come to see American Catholic literature as literature that concerns itself with the tension between Catholic theology and social concerns, whether it grapples with Catholic theology implicitly or explicitly. This conversation originates out of a commitment to the Catholic community, rather than a critique from outside. Thus, American Catholic literature, by self-identifying Catholic authors, explores the larger issues affecting the Catholic community from a shared, if contested, vision. Catholic literature, therefore, is Catholic via interpretation, which is to say, in light of the particular moment in Catholic culture.

In exploring both the historical nature of Catholicism and the role of literary production in Catholic culture, the project speaks to two key audiences that are rarely in conversation with one another: American Catholic Studies scholars and scholars of U.S. literature. This project places these two distinct audiences in conversation through the often shared methodology of American Studies. American Catholic Studies examines Catholic intellectual thought, history, experience, and culture in the United States. Originating in the American Catholic Historical Association, the field's methodology places materialist concerns and theological debate in conversation. I adopted this approach to theological issues, working from the premise that theology is a historical construct, rather than a transcendent and stable set of ideas, grounded in a particular moment and doing particular historical work. In this project, I sought to understand how Catholic literature, in part through issues of literary form, helped to develop an American Catholic community that negotiated doctrine and American culture. In doing so, I historicized Catholic doctrine, seeing Catholic fiction's engagement with it as a part of a larger American political discourse rather than as part of a debate within the Church. Through engagement with the issues of public school education, the New Woman's sexuality, social reform, and racial

politics, American Catholic fiction negotiated Catholic doctrine and the American political and cultural landscape. While not always agreeing on these issues, writers used fiction as a space to challenge both the Church, American political leaders, and one another. At the same time, I hope to suggest the significance of these issues, and religious issues writ large, to American literary scholars, who sometimes see religion as an outmoded lens in seemingly secular modern discourse.

As I continue to engage the questions raised by this manuscript, I hope to reconsider both the nature and the scope of the project. At the heart of this re-envisioning is a return to the archive of American Catholic print culture. While there were a limited number of Catholic magazines and publishing houses in the nineteenth-century, the early-twentieth century marked an explosion of Catholic publications aimed at a broad American Catholic audience as well as publications aimed at smaller ethnic communities, including *The Catholic World*, *Commonweal*, *America*, *Ave Maria*, *The American Catholic Tribune*, *The Interracial Review*, and *The Catholic Worker*. By examining more of these publications in greater depth, I hope to place the larger issues of transcendent theology alongside the daily lives of various Catholic communities. Placing the theological debates occurring in these texts alongside Catholic fiction will allow me to further explore how Catholics used theology to navigate the historical crucible as they considered their historical and political moment.

A return to the archive, particularly to smaller-scale publications, will enable me to address the often submerged issue of ethnicity in American Catholic literature and community. This project's focus on major magazines like *The Catholic World*, as well as its emphasis on writers from backgrounds that had already assimilated to an American Catholic Church organized around the principles of the Irish Church, suggest the limitations for acceptance into

the American Catholic literary milieu. Yet ethnic communities whose Catholic practices were often at odds with the parish-centered devotionalism of the American Church undoubtedly grappled in very different ways with larger theological issues and their relation to lived experience in America. Many immigrant communities struggled to maintain their ethnic Catholic religious practices in American Church ruled by the parish- and liturgy-centered model upheld by the Irish Church at the same time that they struggled to assimilate into American culture. These tensions shaped different relations to the Church and American culture, with emphasis on different aspects of American culture and Catholic theology. While these tensions often dovetail with issues of immigration, integrating the struggle to define the Catholic community in America suggests the multiple ways in which American immigrants defined themselves across and against multiple communities.

As part of a book project, I will add a chapter on the rise of Catholic print culture, the reconceptualization of immigrant enclaves in urban spaces, and the genre of realism. In the late nineteenth century, as realism was becoming the central genre of American letters, American Catholics writers and literary critics split on the problem of ontological truth in fiction. While Catholic literary critics in periodicals from the *Catholic World* to *America* describe the essentially un-edifying nature of American realism, writers from Elizabeth Jordan to James Sullivan explored realism through fiction of the city. In this fiction, journalism becomes the means for interrogating the genre of realism, the moral development of urban geographies, and their attendant effects on Catholic communities. Far from replicating the reform movement's fear of contagion in urban environments or the Social Gospel movement's related desire to overcome "social sin" manifest in the tenements, Catholic realist writers, prefiguring the Catholic Worker Movement's motivation, imagined the city as a site of redemption for the

middle-class. This chapter will analyze the relation between the rise of Catholic print culture, the form of realism, and urban environments as a way to establish the later trajectory of social reform in the novels of the Catholic Left, Norris's right-wing Catholicism, and Flannery O'Connor's mid-century Catholicism.

The larger question that I will continue to grapple with why religion, as both belief and practice, is essential for twentieth-century literary scholars. Certainly, religious beliefs underlie the subjectivities developed, in part, through literary production. They are foundational frameworks that shape the very possibility of textual production and subject formation. Yet theology is more than simply a part of religious ideology. As Tracy Fessenden's work suggests, religious beliefs and practices form the basis of even our seemingly secular culture. They shape the very possibility of our own literary and critical productions.

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