

ARTICLES

NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE: ANDROGYNY, NATIVISM AND INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CATHOLICISM

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ABSTRACT

Anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century has rarely been studied as an international movement. This article draws on Róisín Healy's use of androgyny as a conceptual tool to understand the ideology of German anti-Jesuits, and examines its applicability to the antebellum Know-Nothings. Healy argues that the Jesuit was feared in large part because he embodied traits associated with both males and females. Not only can Healy's analysis be applied to the Know-Nothings, but its scope can be extended – in nativist literature, a whole set of Catholic figures, from the Virgin Mary to the Mother Superior and the nun, took on the troubling aspect of the androgyne. The similarity between the ideology of antebellum nativists and German anti-Jesuits suggests that historians have not adequately studied the international dimension of anti-Catholicism in this period.

'If there is an institution in this broad land of ours unsuited to the laws and the spirit of our people,' declared one anonymous Know-Nothing in 1855, 'it is convents.'¹ By the end of that year, the *Order of United Americans*, a hitherto shadowy and obscure fraternal organization, had achieved some spectacular political successes, having elected eight governors, more than a hundred congressmen, the mayors of Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, as well as countless local officials. In a society experiencing massive levels of mainly Catholic immigration, the nativist campaign for a twenty-one year naturalisation period and the restriction of political office to the native-born appeared to be electorally unbeatable. While the Know-Nothing leadership exulted in their apparent invincibility, opponents were glumly conceding that nativism's political momentum seemed unstoppable. The movement, predicted *The New York Daily Times* 'will not improbably rule a future Congress, and may carry in a President on its wave.'² Entrepreneurs began selling Know-Nothing tea, Know-Nothing candy and Know-Nothing cigars. Nativism had emerged as a powerful political force.

Hostility to Roman-Catholicism was at the heart of nativist belief. The Know-Nothings never tired of warning their fellow Americans of the threat posed to the republic by the temporal ambitions of the Church. 'Roman Catholicism,' declared one nativist, 'in all matters of power, is grasping and aggressive. It is wedded to the principles of despotism.'³ Catholicism, the

Know-Nothings alleged, was a *system* based on medieval backwardness and cruelty which everywhere aimed to extinguish political and religious liberties; as such, nativists framed their opposition to Catholic immigration as essentially a defence of republican virtues. According to another nativist, 'The cornerstone of our Republic is political, mental and social liberty, and in direct antagonism with these principles, stands Romanism.'⁴ And nor did individual Catholics measure up to the demands of a republican system. Denied the right to freely interpret Scripture and locked in a hierarchical structure, the Catholic lacked the independence of mind and will that nativists deemed an essential prerequisite for responsible citizenship. For Thomas Whitney, grand sachem of the *Order of United Americans* and a Know-Nothing Congressman, the 'legitimate qualifications of a voter in the United States' involved 'intelligence sufficient to form the basis of an *independent* opinion...'⁵ [emphasis added] In contrast, Protestantism, which favoured rational enquiry and the nurturing of individual conscience, was easily compatible with republicanism. 'Protestantism,' wrote one nativist, 'found the world in medieval barbarism; feudalism and tyranny triumphant; mankind in slavery and ignorance. She has disenthralled the people, blessed them with literature and science, raised them to the virtue and dignity of MEN.'⁶ The secular republic was, in the nativist mind, the child of Protestantism.

In this article, I will argue that historians of North America have failed to acknowledge the advances made by scholars of anti-Catholicism in other countries. In particular, I will draw on Róisín Healy's use of androgyny as a conceptual tool for understanding anti-Jesuitism in the German Reich and examine its applicability to antebellum nativists in the United States.⁷ What such an approach suggests is not only that theoretical approaches developed by historians working in different geographical fields can be usefully applied to events in the United States; incorporating the work of scholars such as Healy also makes clear the international dimension of anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, even a group as devoted to the uniqueness of America as the Know-Nothings formed part of a broader movement in the mid-nineteenth century, which sought to curb the alleged greed and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

Anti-Catholicism as an International Phenomenon

In recent years, historians of nineteenth-century North America have paid increasing attention to the flow of people, ideas and cultures between nation-states. Challenging the resolute focus on the uniqueness of the United States, historians working in fields as diverse as progressivism, organized feminism and temperance have shown how these movements were characterized by the mutual borrowing, exchange and adaptation of

ideas in an international setting.⁸ Strangely, however, historians of anti-Catholicism have not followed the trend. Yet few groups would seem as ideally suited to the transnational approach as those opposed to the influence of Rome. Anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century was, after all, very much an international affair. Given their cultural ties and shared Protestant identity, the similarities and exchanges between British and North American anti-Catholics is perhaps not surprising, but only very recently have historians begun to talk of an *Anglo-American* movement aimed at countering the alleged ambitions of the Roman Catholic Church.⁹ But as historians like Michael Benedict Gross have shown, anti-Catholicism was at the heart of efforts to define the nature of the emerging Germany as an essentially Protestant nation.¹⁰ Furthermore, even in majority Catholic countries such as Italy and France, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in the popularity of works dedicated to exposing the purported backwardness and moral corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, American anti-Catholics like the Know-Nothings turned to these foreign sources in their attempts to understand, define and denounce Roman-Catholicism. Several historians have noted the popularity in both England and North America of the French historian Jules Michelet's book *Auricular Confession*, which was an enormously influential book in his native France.¹¹ But no historian has analyzed in any depth the significance of North American Protestants drawing on the work of a French anti-cleric in their crusade against Rome. The case of Michelet was by no means unique. The *Provincial Letters* of Blaise Pascal were a constant reference for Americans seeking to comprehend the alleged wiles of the Jesuits; a new translation appeared in 1851, just as nativism began its meteoric rise. Or, for a more modern take on Jesuit intrigue, the American anti-Catholic need only obtain a copy of the French writer Eugène Sue's *The Wandering Jew*, an international best-seller, with its depiction of Jesuit cunning and artifice in the figures of Père d'Aigrigny and Rodin. For an even more compelling exposition of the iniquities of Roman-Catholicism, a sort of international anti-Catholic lecture circuit was beginning to emerge. In the 1850's, the Italian priest Alessandro Gavazzi electrified audiences and provoked riots in Montreal, New York and a host of English cities with his vehement denunciations of Catholicism. Gavazzi's visit to New York was far from accidental: he had been invited by the American and Foreign Christian Union, a Protestant missionary movement dedicated, amongst other things, to thwarting the expansion of Catholicism in the United States. Who, after all, was better qualified to testify to the secret machinations and corrupt practices of the Vatican than a defrocked Italian priest?

In a sense, this sort of international borrowing was perfectly logical. In his analysis of conspiracy movements in American history, Richard Hofstadter noted the tendency for adherents of what he labelled the 'paranoid style' to

mimic the structures of the movements they set out to oppose: 'A fundamental paradox of the paranoid style is the imitation of the enemy.'¹² While denouncing the occult structure of Jesuitism, for example, the Know-Nothings themselves initially adopted the similarly secretive fraternal model of organization, with its passwords, greeting signs and arcane rituals. In the same way, the international scope of Roman Catholicism inspired a similarly broad anti-Catholic movement. One of the most often-repeated charges against Roman Catholicism concerned its international pretensions; in a claim that was still being made against Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, Catholics were commonly accused of owing their primary allegiance to Rome rather than the United States. Naturally, then, some form of international mobilization was necessary if such an enemy was to be defeated. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed a series of controversies around which such an international alliance could coalesce. Perhaps the most famous was the case of Edgardo Mortara, a Jewish boy from Bologna, who in June 1858 was forcibly removed from his parents' care by Papal authorities after it was learned that he had been secretly baptised by a domestic servant. For opponents of the Vatican, this incident proved both the intolerant spirit of Roman Catholicism as well as its disregard for parental authority, and provoked criticism and denunciation in England, France, Germany and the United States.¹³

International anti-Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century didn't take on the formal institutional structure of later movements such as temperance or feminism. Nevertheless, the ease with which nativists drew on non-American sources in their campaign against the growth and influence of Roman Catholicism, as well as the international character of many of the socio-religious controversies of the time, suggest a consciousness of participating in an international movement. For historians of nativism and anti-Catholicism in the United States, the implication is that approaches and theories developed by historians in other national contexts might serve as useful analytical tools. In this article, I want to test this idea by applying Róisín Healy's conception of the role of androgyny in German anti-Jesuitism to the Know-Nothings.

German anti-Jesuits and the Androgyne

In nineteenth-century Germany, hostility to the Jesuit Order was widespread and deep-rooted. In 1872, just one year after the proclamation of the Reich, this antipathy would culminate in the expulsion of the Order from Germany. Healy argues that gender was a crucial element in this anti-Jesuit discourse. Protestant German men adhered to a model of gender relations which posited a strict separation of social roles between men and women. The radical difference between male and female reproductive organs became the

basis of a complementary model in which distinct character traits were attributed to each sex. If men were active, women were passive; if he was rational, she was emotional. And this dichotomy in male and female natures was matched by opposing social roles: since women were deemed to lack the intellectual capacities of men, their appropriate sphere of action was understood to be the home. However, the figure of the Jesuit appeared to muddy these carefully constructed gender divisions. As Healy argues, the unfettered authority enjoyed by the Jesuit gave him an aura of potent manliness; yet at the same time, the Jesuit displayed a passivity and subservience in relation to his own superiors in the Order that mirrored the subordinate status of women. 'In the eyes of devotees of the two-sex model of gender, the Jesuits' domination of the Catholic population made them the most masculine of men; their submission to another man made them the most feminine of men.'¹⁴ In other words, the Jesuit was an 'androgynous'. The literary critic A.J.L. Busst has defined the androgynous as "a person who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual."¹⁵ The Jesuits, Healy suggests, 'challenged the assumption that people were either masculine or feminine... The Jesuits were both at the one time.'¹⁶

How might Healy's idea of the association between the Jesuit and androgyny expressed by German Protestants apply to the Know-Nothings? Although largely preoccupied with questions of ethnicity and religion, the Know-Nothings devoted a great deal of attention to the "Woman Question". Nativists began with the premise that, as much for reasons of biology as of nature, men and women fulfilled different roles in society. All nativist authors agreed that women were best suited by nature and temperament to the domestic sphere, while men engaged with the public world of business and politics. The official organ of the Order of United Americans, *The Republic*, put the idea succinctly in 1851: 'The field to man, the house to woman.'¹⁷ Within the safety of the home, women were entrusted with the task of providing solace and support to men wearied by the battles of public life. Drawing on Republican conceptions of the link between a virtuous citizenry and a stable Republic, the Know-Nothings assigned women the crucial task of raising morally sound children:

She is intended, by instinct and capacity, to follow and not to lead, to obey rather than govern; and happy is her lot when she sees it her mission to sway the heart and will of man by consulting his wishes, by approving his reasonable ambitions, by glorying in his successes, by solacing his sorrows, by virtuously raising his children and proving to him...that she cherishes him and home, above the world besides.¹⁸

In their conception of the nature of women, the Know-Nothings also drew on the sentimental belief in sincerity that was so crucial to middle-class culture in this period. Karen Halttunen has argued that in a society in flux, where both material well-being and the status associated with it were always at risk, a shared cult of sincerity became a key component of middle-class identity. And women, with their greater emotional sensibility and sheltered domestic life, were viewed as the natural leaders of this cult.¹⁹ Nativists, too, expressed this belief in the redeeming virtue of female sincerity for the middle-class family, but extended its reach to the very stability of the republic. In their manners, style of dress and speech, nativists expected women to demonstrate the candour and honesty that were the hallmark of true republicans. If the sincere woman was the bedrock of republican virtue, her opposite, the shallow woman who mindlessly adored fashion and relied on flattery to win admirers, threatened to sap the republic of its sustaining virtues. Nativist literature often presented these two sorts of women. In *Love in the Studio*, a story published in *The Republic*, two wealthy sisters, Mary and Clara Cortley, compete for the affection of the young artist, Arlington. Mary is modest and makes no effort to charm Arlington; Clara, by contrast, has no lack of admirers in the 'butterfly world of fashion'. Mary dresses in a 'neat, household dress'; Clara is arrayed in 'regal splendour'. Arlington, of course, proposes to the unassuming Mary, while vain Clara is punished with a 'rapid decline into the vale of old maidenhood.'²⁰

Though radically different in their respective commitment to republican values, the Know-Nothings shared with the German anti-Jesuits studied by Healy a belief in the different sexual natures and social roles appropriate to men and women. Set against this code of gender relations, the Know-Nothings depicted Catholicism in a very similar way to German anti-Jesuits. However, Healy's analysis can be extended even further to encompass not just the portrayal of the corrupted male Jesuit, but the ambivalent femininity of Catholic women as well. Catholicism, for the Know-Nothings as for German anti-Jesuits, always threatened to wreck the carefully constructed division of tasks between the sexes. And this is apparent as much in the depiction of allegedly female Catholic figures – the nun, the Mother Superior and the Virgin Mary – as the Jesuit. Healy's conception of the androgynous Jesuit is a useful starting point to consider the androgynous nature of Catholicism itself as expressed in nativist literature. In the hands of the Know-Nothings, the androgyne served to define the nature of Catholicism as well as the limitlessness of its corruption. Catholicism, in the nativist imagination, threatened to strip both men and women of their true sexual natures; it constructed a space where the agreed rules on sexual difference no longer applied.

The Ambiguous Nature of Catholic Women

If the true nature of women lay in their superior qualities of feeling and sincerity, the nun presented a sorry spectacle for nativists and antebellum Americans in general. Between 1830 and 1860, tales of nuns escaping the violence and sexual abuse in convents proliferated; the most popular, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, had sold 300,000 copies by 1860. Much nativist literature, too, is devoted to the “caged birds” held against their wills behind the grim and forbidding walls of the convent. But while historians have tended to focus on the graphic nature of the sexual debauchery portrayed in works such as *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, nativist literature suggests that the crime committed by Catholicism was as much moral as sexual. Convents, like factories, were institutions which robbed women of their true feminine nature. Firstly, the life of female celibacy clashed with the nativist ideal of child-rearing as a female duty. Nuns were ‘wasted mothers’ who performed little or no useful function in society; indeed, the term ‘cloistered’ as an insult levelled at any person who shirked his or her wider responsibilities to society would recur throughout the nineteenth century.²¹ But nativists further argued that the rules and regulations governing convents were specifically designed to crush the softer elements of female nature. One nativist author quoted extensively from Josephine Bunkley’s *Testimony of an Escaped Novice* to describe this process. Firstly, nuns are dressed in garments made of rough, abrasive cloth. Once admitted to the convent, family visits are immediately suspended; no nun is allowed to send letters to friends or relatives, nor receive any gifts. Denied the sustenance of outside moral support, the nun is then subjected to a carefully planned campaign of emotional torture. Cherished objects are confiscated, and nuns deliberately assigned tasks they are known to hate.²² Antebellum sentimental culture idealised the outward physical expression of feeling; the delicate female heart, in particular, was held to be particularly responsive to the slightest emotional stimulus. But in the convent, such manifestations of feeling were outlawed. The face lost its ability to convey sentiment as hooded nuns were instructed to walk past each other, faces turned down and hands clasped in front. And the channel of feeling was blocked. ‘One sister,’ claimed Josephine Bunkley, ‘is not suffered to converse with another respecting her own private feelings.’²³

The result of this suppression of feeling was that nuns wasted away. Indeed, more than the sensational accounts of murder contained in books like *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, death through consumption was portrayed as the most common fate for nuns. The image of the consumptive nun was so prevalent that many nativists declared the disease to be part of the vocation.²⁴ In part, this reflected the primitive physical conditions which nuns were believed to endure. Confined in unheated cells, forced to sleep on

hard boards and bound to a gruelling work schedule, none but the hardest women could hope to survive. But physical death was only the natural fate for a girl whose femininity had already been destroyed. Denied the emotional sustenance to be found in the Protestant home, women's 'soft nature' inevitably withered away. 'It is their fate,' wrote one nativist author, 'to languish and pine away in cheerless solitude, where no friendly word greets their ear and buoys up the sickening heart, where the softer instincts and feelings of our nature are crushed by the iron hand of monastic discipline.'²⁵ The callousness and cruel ingenuity of Catholicism lay in this capacity to strip helpless girls of their female essence, and thereby induce an untimely death.

But Catholic women were not just victims; in much nativist literature, they are also creatures to be feared. In particular, the Mother Superior was cast as a man/woman intent on flouting the accepted code of female behaviour. The most compelling portrayal in antebellum America of the unnatural authority held by the Mother Superior was Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent*, a book to which later nativists would continually refer. Reed became notorious through her association with the destruction of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown Massachusetts in 1834, a convent from which she had allegedly escaped two years earlier. At the trial of those who had carried out the attack, Reed was blamed for having stirred up much of the hostility towards the Ursuline nuns, and her book was intended to counter these accusations by describing the abuses within the convent's walls. Yet on the surface, the accusations contained in *Six Months in a Convent* hardly seem provocative enough to have sparked one of the worst episodes of religious violence in American history. Unlike *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, the book does not describe nuns being strangled by other nuns, and nor are babies hurled into pits in the cellar. But the book does offer a detailed and, to the antebellum mind, shocking picture of the overt power wielded by the Mother Superior. Nuns who wished to speak to their Superior during a time of silence were obliged to 'approach her kneeling and speaking in whispers.'²⁶ Though Reed admits that the Superior treated her with some kindness, she claims that another sister, Mary Magdalene, was incessantly punished merely because the Superior disliked her. In one instance, for the simple fault of speaking in too low a tone to the Superior, Magdalene is forced to lie prostrate on the ground for one hour and then to kiss the feet of all the other nuns in the convent.²⁷ Eventually Magdalene dies (of consumption, evidently), and Reed's conclusion that the Mother Superior had caused her death is cited as a major factor in her desire to escape the convent.

For both Reed and the Know-Nothings, the Mother Superior was above all guilty of not acting like a Mother at all. Even the use of the term *Mother* in

reference to a figure so flagrantly lacking in maternal virtues was, for nativists, a sign of the perverse nature of Catholicism. Physically, of course, the celibate Mother Superior had renounced her maternal destiny. But emotionally, too, the Mother Superior represented a distortion of the maternal ideal. All the convent tales accuse the Mother Superior of ruthlessly crushing the delicate sensibilities of her female charges. In Reed's account, nothing enrages the Mother Superior as much as tears.²⁸ Having cried upon reading a letter from her family, Josephine Bunkley records being rebuked by an angry Mother Superior who told her 'it esteemed a step toward perfection to suppress all demonstration of feeling.'²⁹ And in the despotic power she exerted over the other nuns, the supposedly feminine Mother Superior took on a distinctly masculine aura. Nativists, as we have seen, shared the common antebellum idea that women could properly exert moral influence over the family, but the right to claim obedience from others was held to be a masculine prerogative. For this reason, the undisguised nature of the Mother Superior's authority and independence made her seem more like a man than a woman. Maria Monk described her Superior as 'bold, and masculine'³⁰; accounts of the burning of the Charlestown Convent made much of the Mother's Superior defiance of the mob and her unwillingness to accept their offers of protection. One witness at the trial of the rioters declared, 'he and others then offered the lady their protection, upon which the Superior appeared at another window, and told them she did not require to be protected.'³¹ This dismissal of male offers of protection suggests that the Superior conceived her own authority extending even beyond the community of women in the convent. Most provocatively of all, the Mother Superior was often portrayed ordering men about. Rebecca Reed, for example, describes the Superior reprimanding male servants and porters.³² Defying the antebellum requirement that female power be expressed through persuasion and influence rather than outright command, the figure of the Mother Superior distilled the frightening deformations to the nature of women wrought by the Catholic Church.

The ambivalent shape of Catholic femininity was of course most dramatically manifested in the Cult of the Virgin Mary. In 1854, just as the Know-Nothings were beginning to sweep elections throughout the North, Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception of Mary to be Church dogma. As a result, an enormous upswing in devotion to Mary occurred throughout Catholic countries. Images of Mary were placed throughout churches and homes; miraculous apparitions of the Madonna in places like La Salette and Lourdes in France and Marpingen in Germany inspired huge number of pilgrims to these sacred sites.³³ For Protestants, this elevation in the status of Mary was deeply unsettling on a number of levels. Neither the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, Protestants argued, nor the belief in the ability of Mary to intercede in human affairs, had any basis in Scripture. As such,

Protestants dismissed the Cult of Mary as yet another example of Catholic blasphemy and idolatry. But Protestant men were clearly conscious of the social implications of what they called *Mariolatry*. For some, making a Virgin into a deity was a means of justifying unnatural Church doctrines like celibacy, which in turn condemned nuns to a life of barren austerity. 'The Romish doctrine of the Virgin is the source of the most demoralizing and unchristian theories of the merit of virginity and celibacy, with a view of the true position, duty and liberty of women under the gospel dispensation,' declared one Protestant minister.³⁴ The 'true' duty of women was of course to raise virtuous children; the insistence on Mary's virginity was not only another Catholic superstition, but also an affront to women's special role. But many Protestants were just as troubled by the power attributed to the Virgin. Capable, as at Lourdes, of healing the sick and changing the course of human affairs, Mary as a deity presented an unsettling image of female power.³⁵ In the nativist mind, the capacity of the Virgin Mary to inspire claims for female autonomy and empowerment was, of course, deeply troubling, and yet another example of the sinister consequences of the ill-defined nature of Catholic femininity. As a figure of worship, the Madonna was imbued with a troubling degree of power; as a Virgin, she was deprived of her most maternal attributes.

The Androgynous Jesuit

But in the nativist discourse on gender, much more than the defence of femininity was at stake. The Know-Nothings were not just concerned with the proper role of women; they were equally concerned, like the German Protestants studied by Healy, with defending the distinctive attributes of masculinity. In this discourse on masculinity, nativists, like German anti-Jesuits, focussed on the figure of the Jesuit. If Catholicism threatened to distort the female character and violate the female body, the Jesuit represented an attack on Protestant manhood. As detailed earlier, Healy argues that Protestant men imagined the Jesuit in two contrasting ways: as symbols both of unfettered authority and effeminate submissiveness. In his power over other Catholics and his sexual prowess, the Jesuit took on an almost inhuman masculinity. But viewed in another light, the Jesuit's total submissiveness to the dictates of the Church hierarchy represented the emasculation of the male character in its most dramatic form.

In their depiction of the Jesuit, nativists emphasised his super-human willpower and single-mindedness. Unlike the corpulent monk, the typical Jesuit was described as tall and lean to emphasise his sense of purpose and discipline. The Jesuits had a mission to extend the power of the Pope over all civilised nations and thus everywhere extinguish liberty— and as Papal agents could command the unquestioning loyalty of clergy and

congregation. In 1854, Thomas Whitney, the Grand Sachem of the *Order of United Americans*, wrote a play called *The Jesuit*. In one scene, Morales, the scheming Jesuit, has only to reveal a secret medallion of the Order to the friar Gonzales, who responds, 'you plan and I will execute.'³⁶ The Jesuit was a dictator whose authority was bolstered by a powerful tool: moral expediency. Nativists devoted much energy to exposing the 'pliant morality' of the Jesuit; echoing the accusations of anti-Jesuits in countries such as France and Germany, nativists believed that Jesuit morality could be reduced to one principle: the ends justify the means. 'They are permitted to press all manner of instrumentalities into their service,' declared one nativist author, 'and as with them the end accomplished justifies the means, they are fully authorized to commit any atrocities which are deemed necessary to effect their purpose.'³⁷ Jesuits would invent any reasoning to excuse sinful behaviour if it served their goals; indeed, throughout the 19th century, the term *Jesuitical* itself took on the meaning of hypocrisy and falseness.³⁸ At the same time, the absolute moral mastery exercised by Jesuits prevented individual Catholics from developing an independent conscience. If independent reasoning and sound judgement were held to be masculine virtues, the moral authoritarianism of the Jesuits forced Catholics to take on the feminine qualities of dependence and submission. The heightened masculinity of the Jesuit reduced the Catholic congregation to effeminate subservience.

At its most corrupt, this authority took the form of sexual mastery. Celibacy, in the Protestant mind, was a treacherous and futile effort to suppress natural desires; unrestrained by conventional moral codes and the honourable behaviour expected of fathers and husbands, Jesuits were free to indulge in the most fantastic sexual excesses. In a sense, nativists rejected the exaggerated masculinity of the Jesuit as leading to moral corruption and domination; the anti-Jesuit discourse clearly functioned as a means of reassuring Protestant women of the relatively safe attributes of Protestant masculinity. But it is difficult not to detect in nativist writings a certain jealousy of the unfettered patriarchy enjoyed by the Jesuits. The Jesuit typified what some scholars have described as the "masculine achiever": the Victorian ideal of manhood which promoted hard-work, persistence and independence as the keys to success. As E. Anthony Rotundo has written, 'For a man to rise above others in this competitive world, he needed more than independent thought and action; he also had to have freedom from emotional dependence on others, freedom to be clear-headed and rational.'³⁹ Free of the demands of family, place or propriety, the Jesuit seemed to have a clear competitive advantage over Protestant men. Indeed, if not for his moral casuistry and sexual corruption, the Jesuit, with his extraordinary discipline and energy, might easily have flourished in the public world of politics and business. Striving towards a clear objective, and armed with the

weapon of moral expediency, the Jesuit represented a fearsome competitor in the race to get ahead.

But the paradox, as Healy suggests, is that the Jesuit also figured as a warning of the perils of emasculation and submissiveness. Though vested with enormous power and authority over the members of his flock, nativists at the same time believed the individual Jesuit to be bound in a slave-like obedience to his own General. The obedience demanded by the Order was so thorough that individual Jesuits were often described as ‘cadavers’ and ‘dead bodies’; nativists cited Jesuit documents to prove that ‘they are the obsequious vassals of their Superior General ‘whose commands they have ‘taken a secret oath to obey without qualification.’⁴⁰ Jesuitism was a ‘system’ that stripped individuals of their free will and left them as helpless tools in a vast, organised plan. The Jesuit General, many Protestants believed, possessed a ‘complete moral and intellectual daguerreotype of every candidate for the full degree’; armed with this information, the General ‘is thus enabled to choose each department in which every member may be most useful.’⁴¹ This total subservience of individual members of the Order to their General led nativists to associate Jesuits with femininity. In his docility and passivity, the Jesuit had been emasculated by his own General; as a ‘moral automaton’ unable to come to independent conclusions or moral judgements, he had been stripped of his most masculine attributes. The Jesuit, like the Mother Superior, presented a worrying androgyny, combining qualities associated both with men and women, and muddying the supposedly incontrovertible differences that Nature had imposed on men and women.

Conclusion

For scholars of American anti-Catholicism, acknowledging the usefulness of Róisín Healy’s theory of androgyny may point to some promising directions in future research. Firstly, we need to be far more cognizant of theoretical approaches adopted by scholars of other countries. Androgyny as a conceptual tool can, I have argued, be as usefully applied to North American nativists as German anti-Jesuits. Indeed, I have suggested that Healy’s approach can be further extended to an analysis of the androgynous nature of supposedly female figures such as the nun, Mother Superior and Virgin Mary. Nativists, like German anti-Jesuits, strove incessantly to uphold the doctrine of separate spheres, which anchored women very firmly in the Protestant home and gave each sex a clearly distinct identity and set of tasks. As much as its despotic ambitions and medieval spirit, the apparent refusal of Catholicism to adhere to the clear-cut divisions between the sexes seemed to prove to Protestants in both countries its essentially perverse nature.

The second implication for scholars is that we are yet to fully understand the international nature of anti-Catholicism in this period. The Know-Nothings, for all their belief in the unique destiny and superior virtue of the United States, understood themselves to be participants in a movement that extended beyond national boundaries. To a greater extent than we have recognised, anti-Catholics in the nineteenth century were prepared to borrow ideas from abroad, observe developments in other countries, and seek out international support. Indeed, as I have argued, this sort of international approach was, in many ways, perfectly sensible. For an American nativist dedicated to unearthing the hidden corruption of Catholicism, it was only natural to turn to opponents of Catholicism in countries like France and Italy for expert witnesses. And if the Vatican defiantly ignored national boundaries, a movement intent on checking its growth needed a similarly broad perspective. Twenty years ago, the French historian René Rémond, in assessing the nature of opposition to the political pretensions of the Church, suggested that, 'The time has come to take a wider view, crossing political frontiers and transcending national particularisms.'⁴² In the field of anti-Catholicism, this is a challenge that historians have yet to take up.

ENDNOTES

¹ *The Know-Nothing Almanac and True American's Manual for 1855*, DeWitt and Davenport, New York 1855, p. 47.

² 'The Know-Nothing Movement', *New York Daily Times*, 6 December 1854, p. 4.

³ n.a., *The Controversy between Senator Brooks and "John"*, Archbishop of New York, DeWitt & Davenport, New York, 1855, p. 13.

⁴ Cited in T. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850's*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1990, p. 105.

⁵ Thomas Whitney, *A Defence of the American Policy*, DeWitt & Davenport, New York, 1856, p. 128.

⁶ n.a., *The progress and prospects of America*, Edward Walker, New York, p. 165.

⁷ Róisín Healy, 'Anti-Jesuitism in Imperial Germany: The Jesuit as Androgyne' in Helmut Walser Smith (ed.) *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany 1800-1914*. Berg, Oxford, 2001, pp. 153-184.

⁸ For example, Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: the transatlantic sources of nineteenth-century feminism*. University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1999; Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire – the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1991.

⁹ See Philip Ingram, 'Protestant Patriarchy and the Catholic Priesthood in Nineteenth Century England'. *Journal of Social History* 24, 1991, pp. 783-797. Also, Susan M. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and nineteenth Century fiction*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004, which appeared too recently to be included in this article, but which sets out to study anti-Catholicism as an Anglo-American phenomenon.

¹⁰ Michael Benedict Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2004.

¹¹ See, for example, Susan Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1997, Chapter 2. Also Jenny Franchot *Roads to Rome: Antebellum Protestant Encounters with Catholicism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, pp. 120-123.

¹² Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style and Other Essays*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1966, p. 32.

¹³ For a recent account of the Mortara Affair, see David Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1997.

¹⁴ Healy, 'Anti-Jesuitism in Imperial Germany,' p. 160.

¹⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 174.

¹⁷ n.a., *The Republic*, Volume 1, Number 3, March, 1851, p. 220.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁹ On the pervasive belief in sincerity, Halttunen has written, 'The sentimental ideal of sincerity that shaped the norms of middle-class conduct in the antebellum period was central to the self-conscious self-definition of middle class culture during the most critical period of its development.' Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture in America 1830-1870*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1982, xvii.

²⁰ n.a., 'Love in a Studio', *The Republic*, Volume 1, Number 5, May, 1851, pp. 210-214.

²¹ See, for example, Theodore Roosevelt: '...that cloistered life which saps the hardy virtues in a nation' in *The Strenuous Life; Essays and Addresses*, The Century Co., New York, 1902, p. 2.

²² *Remarks of the Honorable E. Joy Morris of Philadelphia to the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, February 12 1856, Against the Introduction of the Monastic System and the Secret Religious Orders of the Church of Rome*, Harrisburg, 1856, p. 11.

²³ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁴ Andrew Cross, *Young Women in Convents or Priests' Prisons to be Protected by Law, or the Prisons to be Broken Up*, Sherwood and Company, Baltimore, 1856, p. 20.

²⁵ *Remarks of the Honorable E. Joy Morris*, p. 10.

²⁶ Rebecca Reed, *Six Months in a Convent*, Russell, Odiorne and Metcalf, Boston, 1835, p. 76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁹ Josephine Bunkley, *The Testimony of an Escaped Novice from the Sisterhood of St Joseph*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1856, p. 94.

³⁰ Maria Monk, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, Howe and Bates, New York, 1836, p. 183.

³¹ 'Documents Relating to the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown' in Richard Hofstadter and M. Wallace (eds.) *American Violence: A Documentary History*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1973, p. 299.

³² Reed, *Six Months in a Convent*, p. 166.

³³ For an account of the Marpingen apparition, as well as an interesting analysis of the phenomenon generally, see David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany*, Knopf, New York, 1994.

³⁴ Reverend Thomas Smyth, *Mary Not a Perpetual Virgin, Nor the Mother of God: but only a Sinner Saved by Grace, Through the Worship and Mediation of Jesus Christ*, Charleston, 1846, p. 20.

³⁵ This fear of Mary as a role-model for assertive and independent women was perhaps not as unfounded as it might seem. Even in a majority Protestant country like the United States, both men and women could find the power of the Virgin appealing. The most famous example of an American in the nineteenth century invoking the symbolic potential of Mary is, of course, Henry Adams and his dichotomy between the Virgin and the Dynamo. But as John Gatta has demonstrated, educated and influential women like Harriet Beecher Stowe

and Margaret Fuller found the idea of the Virgin Mary not only intriguing, but potentially liberating. For Fuller, Gatta argues, the figure of Mary 'represented the potency of spirit rather than passivity before the will of men.' John Gatta, *American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 51.

³⁶ Thomas Whitney, *The Jesuit: A National Melodrama in Three Acts*, Democratic Review Press, New York, 1850, p. 2.

³⁷ *The Sons of the Sires: A History of the Rise, Progress and Destiny of the American Party*, Lippincott, Grambo and Company, Philadelphia, 1855, p. 36. For a fuller treatment of anti-Jesuitism in a European context, see Róisín Healy, *The Jesuit Specter in Imperial Germany*, Brill Academic Publishers, Boston, 2003; Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

³⁸ See, for example, *The New York Daily Times*, 1 December 1858, 'His letter, addressed to his cousin LOUIS NAPOLEON JEROME...is a masterpiece in its way of Buonapartias Jesuitism.' So widely employed was the pejorative *Jesuit* that Protestants began using it against other Protestants whom they suspected of exploiting anti-Catholicism for personal gain. See, for example, Calvin Colton [pseud.]. *Protestant Jesuitism. By a Protestant*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1836.

³⁹ E. Anthony Rotundo, 'Learning about Manhood: Gender Ideals and the Middle-Class Family in 19th Century America,' in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds.) *Manliness and Morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *Remarks of Honorable E. Joy Morris*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Reverend Joseph F. Berg, *A Lecture Delivered in the Musical Fund Hall on the Jesuits*, T.B. Peterson, Philadelphia, 1850, p. 13.

⁴² René Rémond, 'Anticlericalism: Some Reflections by Way of Introduction', *European Studies Review*, Vol. 13 (1983), p. 122. Rémond himself has made a start. In *Religion and Society in Modern Europe*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, he offers a Europe-wide account of secularisation in the modern era. However, he doesn't examine the case of the United States; and he limits his analysis to the process of separating Church and State. Consequently, much of the anti-Catholic discourse, particularly on gender and family issues, is missing from his analysis.