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Sacred Dominion:
Anti-Catholicism and the Romance of U.S. Imperialism, 1820 – 1900

by

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ABSTRACT

Sacred Dominion:

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“Sacred Dominion” argues that anti-Catholicism fundamentally shaped the development of U.S. imperialism. While current scholarship on nineteenth-century U.S. geopolitics tends to examine imperialism in terms of race, class, and gender, “Sacred Dominion” is among the first literary studies to take seriously religion’s crucial impact on U.S. empire-building. It argues that U.S. romance writers played a pivotal role in forging the alliance between anti-Catholicism and U.S. empire. Their works position westward and overseas expansion as safeguards against Catholic tyranny and anarchy. From the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne to the regional writing of George Washington Cable, this project demonstrates how romance writing constructed a dynamic partnership between Protestantism and U.S. geopolitics that continues to drive American foreign policy today.

“Sacred Dominion” examines subgenres of romance to show how American writers relied on anti-Catholicism to imagine, justify, and contest U.S. imperialism. Beginning with those years long associated with the rise of Manifest Destiny and American Romanticism, this project illustrates how the alliance between anti-Catholicism and expansion underwrites antebellum works of romance such as George Lippard’s serials, Washington Irving’s histories, and even the novels of Hawthorne, an author whose obsession with Catholicism left an imprint on romances like The Scarlet Letter, not to mention his daughter Rose – a Catholic convert and
nun. “Sacred Dominion” then charts the persistence of this romance tradition in the postbellum era. Turning to the work of a writer who made Mark Twain hate “all religions,” I examine George Washington Cable’s regional writing to demonstrate how anti-Catholicism mediated anxieties about the integration of religious and racial difference both at home and from abroad. The manuscript ends at the turn of the twentieth century with the work of Henry James and José Martí, illustrating how the early geopolitical foundations established through nineteenth-century romance set the tone for twentieth-century conceptions of U.S. internationalism. Tracing this romantic tradition across the eighty-year period when American literature emerged as a national canon and the U.S. emerged as an imperial nation, “Sacred Dominion” demonstrates how U.S. geopolitics and American romance were mutually invested in the nation’s Protestant origins and global future.
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INTRODUCTION

Religion, Romance, Empire

I would go to the Vatican itself, the place of the man of sin – I would go into his dark and degrading confessional, where the poor Papists trust their wives and daughters to him while the tyrant presses his obscene impure investigation, putting the heart and sensibility of the senseless creature on the rack till she sinks enslaved and powerless at his feet – yea, I would drag the victim forth in triumph from his grasp, and ring in the monster’s ear no Popery!

– Reverend C. Sparry, *Papacy in the 19th Century* (1846)

On the surface, the preceding statement appears as nothing more than a display of religious bigotry, an extreme response to the increasing numbers of Irish immigrants arriving upon American shores. But, in fact, this characterization of Catholicism by the little-known Reverend C. Sparry rehearses a rhetoric common to nineteenth-century American romance writing. Staging the encounter between the U.S. and Catholicism as a melodrama, nineteenth-century U.S. romance writers called American Protestants to protect the nation – conveniently featured here as a damsel in distress – by confronting the Catholic “monster” in their midst. From Nathaniel Hawthorne’s description of Catholic Rome as the “dark tide of human evil,” to Washington Irving’s portrayal of Catholic Spain’s ecclesiastical “ghostly advisors,” to George Washington Cable’s depiction of Creole Catholic slaveholders, \(^2\) romance writers framed Catholicism as their nation’s enemy. Often associated with tyranny and anarchy or, as Sparry describes, “despotism of the worst kind” (30) and “chaos” (22), Catholicism appeared inimical to the U.S.’s burgeoning democracy. Political and religious pamphlets as well as novels and histories urged for vigilance by framing encounters with Catholic Rome, Irish immigrants, or Spanish travelers as tales of intrigue and conspiracy.
against the U.S.'s young republic. In this way, Sparr's description of Catholicism illustrates what Robert Levine describes as the countersubversive impulse at the heart of American romance, that dialectic within seemingly escapist fictions of the antebellum era that highlights danger only to fortify the nation against such perils. In the case of the passage above, Sparr highlights the Papist "monster" in order to urge Americans to guard the nation against Catholic influence. Yet embedded within this romance of Protestant protection is an urgent call not only to prevent the advancement of Catholicism but also to sow the seeds of American Protestantism. As Sparr continues in his sermon, he urges Protestants to care for the "temporal and eternal welfare of Papists" and to go out into the world to spread the "decided spirit" of "our holy religion." Published in the same year that the U.S. initiated war with Catholic Mexico, his passionate sermon encourages Protestants to be a "voice" that "shall roll in strains of heavenly eloquence from shore to shore through this vast continent and through the world" (21). Only through the "triumph" of a romantic hero who defies Catholicism and spreads Protestantism abroad can the U.S. protect the American home and the globe from Catholic incursion.

The central contention of "Sacred Dominion" is that U.S. imperialism emerges from this romance of Protestant protection. I argue that in the nineteenth century depictions of Catholic tyranny and anarchy played a central role in the formation of early U.S. empire, and that romance acted as the primary agent for imagining this collaboration between religion and empire. In recent years, scholars have turned an increasingly critical eye to U.S. imperialism, examining what Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease describe as the simultaneous consolidation of national culture and international relations. From antebellum race relations; to the influence of the Monroe Doctrine; to post-Civil War relations with the U.S. South; to the emergence of rough-riding, white masculinities of the earlier twentieth century; to contemporary U.S. neoimperialisms and the emergence of a global "Empire," scholars have
illuminated and rendered visible the various “cultures” of U.S. imperialism. Though these studies have laid a rich foundation for understanding the emergence of U.S. empire, they have tended to locate religion as a facet of race, class, and gender rather than as a forceful and driving movement of U.S. imperialism itself. While there have been some notable exceptions, such as the recent work of Susan Harris and Albert Tricomi, the vast number of studies on U.S. empire continue to bypass religion. In so doing, they have forwarded the assumption that religion plays little to no part in these formations. And yet, critical assessment of religion’s influence on U.S. geopolitics is urgently needed, not only because it can help us better understand the collaboration between nineteenth-century romance and U.S. imperialism, but also because the early formations of religion and nationhood that a study of anti-Catholicism illuminates continue to influence conceptions of church, state, and geopolitics today. The story of a morally superior U.S. determined to protect national borders and to spread its influence among the religiously and politically oppressed of the globe echoes a wide array of discourses that govern and inflame current U.S. politics both at home and abroad. From 9/11 to U.S. military involvement in the Middle East, to responses surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “religion, whatever a largely secular elite may think,” as Vincent Pecora bluntly states, “matters a great deal.” The global clash of religions, whether between contemporary Islam and Christianity or nineteenth-century Catholicism and mainstream Protestant culture, calls us to answer timely questions about the forces of faith, politics, and globalization.

"Sacred Dominion" offers one answer to these questions by examining how the collaboration between U.S. empire and Protestantism that continues to impact modern-day U.S. geopolitics drew its force from the anti-Catholic imaginings of nineteenth-century American romance writing. The emergence of U.S. imperialism has received increased attention over the last two decades, and current understandings of American romance writing
arise from continuous scholarly attention within American literary studies. Missing from these two bodies of scholarship, however, is an attention to the discourses through which romance and empire worked in tandem throughout the nineteenth century – particularly how they were bound together through an investment in the nation’s Protestant origins and global future. Exacerbated by a disciplinary blind spot surrounding religion, this inattention to the alliance between romance and empire has prevented us from recognizing how many of the American romance writers upon which the American literary canon was founded were complicit in a religiously intolerant discourse that drove and shaped the U.S.’s global rise. Analyzing typical romance works such as the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Lippard, and Henry James alongside non-fiction works such as sermons, histories, and political debates, “Sacred Dominion” argues that anti-Catholicism did not merely coincide with the rise of American romance writing and U.S. imperialism but also helped to constitute these formations. By charting the extent to which U.S. romance’s anti-Catholicism helped to justify and, at times, contest U.S. expansion, “Sacred Dominion” calls attention to the deeply conservative impulse of U.S. literary nationalism in the nineteenth century. The following chapters, thus, ask how approaching U.S. imperialism via religion reframes current understandings surrounding the relationship between literary and political writing; how the convergence of intra- and extranational cultures that the Catholic represents deepens our understanding of U.S. geopolities; and how uncovering the collaboration between U.S. imperialism and religion revises the way in which we have come to know and describe one of American literature’s founding traditions: romance.
So, why Catholicism? Why is anti-Catholicism so apt for uncovering U.S. empire’s religious persuasion and romance’s role in propagating it? While there are multiple sites where Protestantism and national/imperial politics intersect, (for instance, debates over slavery, U.S.-Indian relations, etc.), “Sacred Dominion” takes anti-Catholicism as its focus not simply because, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. states, it is arguably the “deepest bias in the history of the American people,”12 but also because much of nineteenth-century U.S. imperialism emerged through a series of real and imagined encounters between the U.S. and foreign territories, nations, and peoples identified as Catholic. From the Monroe Doctrine, to the U.S.-Mexican War, to postbellum annexation ploys in the Caribbean, to the Spanish-American and U.S.-Philippine Wars, peoples and nations historically associated with Catholicism remained a persistent part of the U.S.’s expansionist purview.

Scholars have by and large elided anti-Catholicism’s part in these formations, more often seeing animosity toward Catholics as a reaction to rising immigration.13 To be sure, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans experienced an unprecedented increase of immigration from Catholic nations. Beginning in the 1820s and reaching its height in the 1850s with the institutionalization of the “Know Nothings,” U.S. immigration from Catholic countries such as Germany and especially Ireland inspired an outpouring of vitriolic propaganda not seen since the colonial era. “[F]oreign immigration on a large scale,” as Ray Allen Billington argues, “was probably the most important causal force leading to this revival.”14 But during these same years in which Americans were protesting against what they saw as an inundation of Catholic immigrants, the U.S. was also paradoxically establishing policies and undertaking wars to consume and control territories once colonized and/or still inhabited by Catholics. Thus, anti-Catholicism – much like U.S. imperialism itself – was never only a movement against an “internal minority”15 nor simply an extranational impulse. Rather, it was a two-front movement, in which, for instance, clashes against Irish
immigrants in U.S. cities were shaped by U.S. expansionism into Mexico, and, conversely, in which concerns about the U.S. assimilation of Catholic terrains in the Caribbean were informed by anxieties about Catholic religious difference at home. Recognizing these dual tendencies, “Sacred Dominion” demonstrates how anti-Catholicism served the fantasy of Americans going out and colonizing the world. It shows how those religious movements that we have come to see as “nativist” were not purely national, but were, in fact, forged through a complex network of national and international relations.

We can begin to understand the extent to which anti-Catholicism impacted the fraught relationship between U.S. domestic and international politics by turning to the political and literary discourses that shaped conceptions of foreign and domestic spheres within nineteenth-century U.S. culture. James Fenimore Cooper, for instance, describes the uncivilized domains of the French and enemy natives in his 1826 *Last of the Mohicans* as “the idolatrous province of the Jesuits.” Less than thirty years later, Augusta Evans portrays unincorporated San Antonio as a “benighted town” languishing under “the iron rule of the papal see.” And in 1901, Mark Twain begins his vitriolic indictment of U.S. imperialism in “To the Person Sitting Darkness” with a description of Tammany Hall vice, implicitly presenting Irish Catholic immigrants as a force behind the national corruptions of empire. Such characterizations locate Catholicism at the center of the nation’s emerging expansionist project and transform it into a discourse through which U.S. writers envisioned their nation’s increasingly global errand. Recognizing how anti-Catholicism served as a discourse through which these American writers and others navigated the overlapping questions of national development and extranational engagement, “Sacred Dominion” treats Catholicism much like Jenny Franchot does – as “an imaginative category of discourse through which antebellum American writers of popular and elite fictional and historical texts indirectly voiced the tensions and limitations of mainstream Protestant culture.” As one of the central “tensions”
throughout the nineteenth century, expansion weighed heavily on Americans, and, as this project demonstrates, Catholicism offered a particularly potent site through which to imagine its promises and perils.

Yet analysis of the Catholic in nineteenth-century U.S. culture not only illustrates how U.S. imperialism materialized from historical and imaginative engagements with Catholicism both within and outside U.S. borders, but also, more centrally, demonstrates how U.S. empire was imaginatively constituted and sustained through the romantic narrative of Protestant protection that Catholicism inadvertently helped to establish. Characterizations of Catholicism as the villain of U.S. nation derived from what nineteenth-century Americans perceived as its antipathy toward U.S. democracy or, conversely, its affinity with tyranny and anarchy. Take for example, Walt Whitman’s 1842 description of Irish immigrants at a Tammany Hall meeting in New York:

Bands of filthy wretches, whose very touch was offensive to a decent man, drunken loafers; scoundrels whom the police and criminal courts would be ashamed to receive in their walls […] these were they who broke into the midst of a peaceful body of American citizens – struck and insulted the chosen officers of the assemblage, and with shrieks, loud blasphemy, and howlings in their hideous native tongue, prevented the continuance of the customary routine. We saw Irish priests – sly, false, villains – looking on and evidently encouraging the gang who created the tumult.20

Aided and abetted by romance elements, Catholics appear in nineteenth-century U.S. culture as an unruly mob of immigrants controlled by despotic priests, the “villains,” in Whitman’s words, of “peaceful American citizens” attempting to carry out the doctrines of democratic governance. Such depictions positioned Protestantism as the safeguard of U.S. democracy, as Elizabeth Fenton has recently shown21; however, they also fueled an emergent imperial narrative wherein Americans deployed fears of Catholic tyranny and anarchy as a way to
reframe U.S. expansion as the protection and extension of democracy. This narrative is why, for instance, President John Quincy Adams envisioned U.S. diplomatic involvement at the 1826 Panama Congress as a form of “moral influence” that would advance “religious liberty” in the “southern nations” living under Catholicism’s “dominion of prejudice.” It is also why the public outlet of the relatively pro-Catholic President James Polk published an 1847 editorial suggesting that “justice and policy” called the U.S. to drain “the immense revenues” of a tyrannical church in the U.S. march to Mexico. And finally, this same narrative of Catholic difference and Protestant democracy motivated a heavenly-inspired William McKinley in 1903 to pronounce U.S. acquisition of the predominately Catholic Philippines as an opportunity to “uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” For these presidents and other Americans throughout the nineteenth century, anti-Catholicism helped to crystallize what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri characterize as the “expansive tendency of the [U.S.] democratic republic” – that is its impulse to make every “limit of liberty” into simply another “threshold to pass through.” Imagined as just such a “limit,” Catholicism offered a way to transform U.S. imperialism – whether diplomatic influence or territorial annexation – into an expression and expansion of American democracy.

To consider the relationship between democracy and anti-Catholicism is also to rethink the relationship between American literature and religion. Though scholars have more recently undertaken a critical assessment of the religious cultures undergirding American literature, analyses primarily continue to rely on the assumptions of what Tracy Fessenden and Michael Kaufmann describe as one of our discipline’s abiding progress narratives – the secularization narrative, that teleological narrative that, in its many forms, locates the emergence of U.S. democracy and U.S. literary culture as formations born from the inevitable emancipation of religion. Theorists of secularism ranging from Charles Taylor to Talal Asad to Vincent Pecora have demonstrated the danger of relying on such simplistic
developmental narratives. Within American literary history in particular, one-dimensional conceptions of secularism, as Fessenden argues, have actually strengthened the hold of an unmarked Protestantism by positioning it in relation to “those allegedly irrational, regressive, or inscrutable forms of religious life – cults, sects, primitives, and so on – deemed foreign to democracy.” This is why “an avowedly secular United States is broadly accommodating of mainstream and evangelical Protestantism” and less so of other religious groups, Catholicism being one of them. In neglecting to interrogate conceptions of secularism, then, scholars have not only elided the powerful impact of religion on American literary culture; they have also elided the extent to which U.S. authors were complicit in the project of empire-building. By examining anti-Catholicism in American romance writing, “Sacred Dominion” demonstrates how narratives of secularization have helped to forward and idealize U.S. imperialism as a formation leading to political and religious emancipation.

The following pages trace the development of the partnership between Protestantism and U.S. empire as it was forged not only within the church pews and political arena, but also within the pages of nineteenth-century romance. Though anti-Catholicism made its way into a variety of cultural forms, romance, as “Sacred Dominion” argues, was particularly crucial in constructing the collaboration between Protestantism and U.S. imperialism. By “romance,” I refer to the tradition of American writing perhaps most definitively described by Richard Chase in The American Novel and Its Traditions: “In romance, ‘experience’ has less to do with human beings as ‘social creatures’ than as individuals. Heroes, villains, victims, legendary types, confronting other individuals or confronting mysterious or otherwise dire forces – this is what we meet in romances.”

Though most identified with the work of American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, elements of this conception of romance make their way into such a wide-range of textual forms that recent scholars have come to refer to romance as a “mode” rather than a tightly defined genre.
particular, romance’s escapist settings and its “penschant for the marvelous, the sensational, the legendary, and in general the heightened effect” provide a fertile ground through which to imagine U.S. empire-building. By transforming the encounter between Protestant and Catholic into a “confrontation” with a “mysterious” and “dire force,” romance urged readers to recommit themselves to the protection of their nation. This tendency toward exaggeration is why anti-Catholic literature, whether sermons or classic romance novels, depicts Catholicism through a series of extremes. Monstrous priests, “waves” of immigrants, deceptive nuns, and the mysterious interiors of the Catholic confessional offered tropes through which to imagine the consolidation and expansion of an American order founded on Protestantism. In this sense, the alliance between romance and anti-Catholicism mirrors, as Levine has suggested, the dialectical logic of the American jeremiad. Exemplified by John Winthrop’s 1630 “Modell of Christian Charity,” this foundational sermonic tradition, as Sacvan Bercovitch explains, reinforced belief in the U.S.’s divine mission by promoting anxieties about its impending doom. However, in this case, American romance writing draws upon a fear of Catholicism to urge readers both to reaffirm a communal commitment to Protestantism and pursue the U.S.’s foundational religious errand through territorial and political expansion.

While scholars of British and American literature have long recognized the partnership between romance and Catholicism, as I argue, it adopts new significance when read within the context of nineteenth-century U.S. culture. It is true that even from the colonial era forward, Protestants described Catholicism as the villain of American Protestantism. Referring to a series of colonial era Indian wars, Cotton Mather, for instance, cites the “war made against the country by both Pagan and Popish adversaries in the East” in his Magnalia Christi Americana as one of the “lamentable disasters” against which Puritan New England must reform itself. Born from tensions with natives, colonial rivalries with
Spain and France, and Old World Reformation politics, such depictions showcased
Catholicism as the enemy of the nation’s founding Protestant identity. But as nineteenth-
century Americans set out to produce a distinct literary tradition and the overlapping tensions
of immigration and expansion brought the simmering Protestant-Catholic conflict to a boil,
American writers deployed an emerging culture of romance to represent and debate the
religious consequences of empire-building. Catholic villains took the form of Mexican
soldiers and Irish immigrants, and the long-feared popish conspiracies against Protestantism
became part of an international plot to colonize the Western Hemisphere. In conjunction with
these elements, the often escapist settings of a bygone past, a picturesque local culture, or a
dream-like foreign terrain enhanced U.S. conceptions about the far-reaching fields of the
U.S.’s Manifest Destiny. Romance’s propensity for extremity and abstraction provided
nineteenth-century Americans with a rich ground upon which to represent the potential
dangers and gains that expansion posed to the U.S. nation.

In making this argument, “Sacred Dominion” invites critics to recognize romance’s
largely overlooked role in the formation of U.S. geopolitics. More often associated with a
turn inward to the imagination or, as Richard Poirier once said, a “world elsewhere,” romance has rarely been conceived as part of the U.S.’s rise to dominance in the world,
meaning the globe. Such silence derives from enduring assumptions that position U.S.
romance as a genre disconnected from historical and social “reality,” or, as Hawthorne himself outlines, a genre that has “a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with
any portion of the actual soil.” Chase argues:

The English novel, one might say, has been a kind of imperial enterprise, an
appropriation of reality with the high purpose of bringing order to disorder. By
contrast, as Lawrence observed in his Studies in Classic American Literature, the
American novel has usually seemed content to explore, rather than appropriate and
civilize, the remarkable and in some ways unexampled territories of life in the New World and to reflect its anomalies and dilemmas.\textsuperscript{37}

In other words, in constructing U.S. romance as disconnected from reality, Chase locates it within a story of New World innocence and exceptionalism that stands in contrast to Old World empire and tyranny. Such readings both elide the genre’s salience within U.S. history and its role within the story of U.S. imperialism, not to mention the existence of U.S. imperialism in general.\textsuperscript{38} And yet, the romance elements that pervade nineteenth-century depictions of Catholicism suggest not only that U.S. romance was shaped by contemporaneous social realities, but also that it was deeply rooted within ongoing religious and political debates surrounding U.S. imperialism. Indeed, as American authors were penning stories about Protestant heroes and Catholic villains located in far-off lands and timeless terrains, they were also grappling with concerns about the effects of absorbing real territories and interacting with real Irish, Mexican, Spanish, Haitian, and Filipino Catholics. Recognizing the weight of history and, with it, empire, “Sacred Dominion” reads romance in the same vein as more recent critics such as Teresa Goddu – as a “network of historical representation.”\textsuperscript{39} I highlight how romance’s sublimation of history and empire was crucial in simultaneously imagining U.S. imperialism and masking it beneath New World mythologies of Protestant exceptionalism and democratic freedom.

Demonstrating romance’s role in the formation of U.S. imperialism, this project’s five chapters chart anti-Catholic representations of empire from the height of American Romanticism and anti-Catholic fervor in the antebellum era, through Reconstruction, to the final years of the nineteenth century. Tracing anti-Catholicism’s influence upon literary and political culture, each chapter examines a historical moment of imperialism (the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S.-Mexican War, the attempted annexation of Santo Domingo) and a subgenre of romance (historical romance, romantic history, sensation fiction). This analysis
offers a genealogy of romance that tracks the rhetorical elements and tropes through which American writers expressed anti-Catholicism and reads them within the context of a series of historical events through which the U.S. consolidated its imperial power. Spanning a diverse array of materials, the following chapters read the work of classic romance writers alongside sermons, conspiracy tracts, and congressional debates. From the romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne, to the sermons of Lyman Beecher, to the regional lore of George Washington Cable, to the novels of Henry James, “Sacred Dominion” demonstrates how the romance elements that gave force to U.S. empire’s anti-Catholicism derived from and made their ways into a broad corpus of religious and literary forms.

To study the depictions of Catholicism offered by this primarily white, male lineup of romance writers is, in some ways, to be reminded of the gendered, classed, and raced discourses of U.S. imperialism. As I suggested in my opening pages, such formations have shaped the direction of U.S. empire studies. Acknowledging the significance of this work, “Sacred Dominion” purposefully focuses on religion, not because anti-Catholicism somehow stands outside of these discourses, but because it powerfully shaped each of them as well as the writings of a broad range of authors, which include women and people of color. Whether Leonora Sansay’s references to the corrupted priests of Haiti in her 1808 Secret History, Margaret Fuller’s 1850 declaration that “the Roman Catholic religion must go,” or even Sarah Orne Jewett’s 1900 description of a “foreigner” whose Catholicism “sets narrow minds against her,” American women writers were deeply involved in constructing conceptions of Catholic difference. 40 Similarly, writers from a diverse set of ethnic backgrounds cited Catholicism to challenge and, at times, bolster dominant narratives of U.S. nationhood. In 1845, Frederick Douglass, for instance, cited the writings of Irish Catholic leader Daniel O’Connell to argue for equal intellectual competency among whites and blacks. 41 To be sure, women and people of color were equally engaged with the questions of nationhood and
empire-building that Catholicism highlighted. Acknowledging the significance of such writings, “Sacred Dominion” nonetheless focuses on a specific set of primarily white male romance writers to capture the prevailing strain of anti-Catholicism through which the collaboration between religion and empire emerged. By calling attention to these critical coordinates, I show how a reconsideration of romance writing from the vantage point of anti-Catholicism challenges the generic boundaries that continue to structure American literary history and opens new pathways for considering religion’s impact on U.S. geopolitics.

Similarly, examining the role of anti-Catholicism in U.S. imperialism would seem to call us to consider the voices of immigrant and American-born nineteenth-century Catholic authors who responded, participated, and engaged in debates about the place of religion in U.S. domestic and international politics. Catholic writers such as Irish immigrant activist Thomas D’Arcy McGee, former Transcendentalist Orestes Brownson, and Chicana writer María Amparo Ruiz de Burton employed Catholicism to challenge dominant Protestant ideologies of U.S. nationhood and/or imagine their own alternative American empire. Though I cannot attend fully to these voices, this project recognizes that U.S. anti-Catholicism developed as part of a dialogue among diverse sects of American Protestants, Catholics, and other religious groups. At the same time, “Sacred Dominion” also acknowledges U.S. imperialism’s integration into a longer history of empire-building that includes competing and overlapping histories of Catholic imperialism in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, the following pages, especially chapters four and five, focus on how U.S. authors used histories of Catholic empire-building and oppression in the Americas to bolster, mask, and disavow their own empire. In this light, “Sacred Dominion” calls attention to the long partnership between religion and empire-building in the Western Hemisphere through which contemporary formations of global hegemony emerged. Put another way, this project highlights religion’s part in constructing, as Walter Mignolo describes, the
overlapping “global designs” of the “modern/colonial world system.” By considering how the work of American romance writers inflamed and responded to nineteenth-century Catholic authors as well as to historically and geographically far-reaching histories of religion and empire, it locates anti-Catholic U.S. discourses within a broader discussion about religion’s role in historical and contemporary geopolitical formations.

Starting with those years long associated with the rise of American romance and Manifest Destiny, “Sacred Dominion” opens by establishing the relationship between anti-Catholicism and westward expansion in canonical romance novels before turning in the second and third chapters to the earlier non-fiction and fiction forms through which this collaboration emerged. “Sacred Dominion” then charts the persistence of this romance tradition in the postbellum era. The final two chapters show how the imperial romance tradition established during the antebellum era continued to influence conceptions of overseas expansion and U.S. geopolitics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels. This organization not only illuminates romance’s powerful impact on the course of U.S. imperialism but also, in turn, reveals romance’s varied and protracted formation as it was shaped by the history of empire and religion.

Beginning with one of the founders of American romance, my first chapter, “The Scarlet Empire: Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Imperial Politics of Catholic Conversion,” illustrates how the interdependence between anti-Catholicism and U.S. imperialism was forged in the very crucible of American Romanticism. This chapter examines Hawthorne’s often-ignored obsession with Catholicism and the impact it left upon his national politics and the formation of his romances, not to mention on his daughter Rose – a Catholic convert, nun, and candidate for sainthood. Analyzing how Hawthorne infuses Catholic symbols into The Scarlet Letter’s (1850) seemingly unrelated tale of Puritan colonization, this chapter shows how Catholicism offered a site through which to imagine the potentially ruinous effects of
westward expansion and, specifically, the U.S.-Mexican War on national cohesion. Turning to The Marble Faun’s (1860) story of near conversion in Catholic Rome, I underscore how this vision of empire-building becomes increasingly gothic throughout Hawthorne’s career. Together, these texts illustrate Hawthorne’s participation in an imperial romance tradition, in which the Catholic represented empire-building’s threat to the U.S. national home and the expansion of the U.S.’s dominion. In laying the groundwork for the chapters to come, this analysis establishes how the foundations of American romance were shaped by an urgent question about the impact of empire-building on Protestant nationhood.

With this capstone literary figure of American romance as a starting point, chapter two, “(Re)forming the Empire: Catholic Captivity and Popular Romance,” uncovers the origins of the entanglement between romance, religion, and empire by looking back to a wildly unlikely beginning in the early non-fiction prose of Lyman Beecher’s Plea for the West (1835) and Maria Monk’s Awful Disclosures (1836). These religious tracts position westward expansion as a way to protect U.S. Protestants against the imagined perils of Catholic captivity. Responding to the symbiotic tensions of rising immigrant populations and developing ideologies of Manifest Destiny, these texts recreate medieval romance plots in which the U.S. – often depicted as a vulnerable child or a young Protestant woman – becomes the victim of physical and sexual violence enacted by tyrannical Catholic priests and abetted by ignorant masses of immigrants. Framed as part of a reformer’s rescue mission, westward expansion not only offers a way to relieve these pressures and occupy terrains that would otherwise be filled by Catholics, but it also provides an opportunity to expand the U.S.’s influence in the West – that “destined centre of civilization and political prowess,” as Beecher puts it. Tracing a genealogy from Beecher and Monk through the serialized romances of Ned Buntline’s The Convict (1851) and George Lippard’s New York (1853), this chapter tracks how this plotline became a stock feature of popular romance and sensation
fiction. In so doing, I demonstrate how the relationship between anti-Catholicism and U.S. expansion established in popular religious texts impacted U.S. culture so profoundly that it shaped the formation of American romance.

Turning from popular fantasies of westward expansion to the romantic histories produced in the decades leading up to romance’s heyday in the 1850s, chapter three, “Conquering the Catholic Past: Romantic History and Imperial Legacies,” argues that the anxieties about Catholic tyranny expressed in fictional works of romance underwrite the very origin stories through which the idea of “America” emerged in U.S. culture. Analyzing Washington Irving’s The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (1828), this chapter shows how anti-Catholicism factored centrally in constructing a U.S.-dominated conception of the Western Hemisphere. Produced less than a decade after Irving’s famous short stories, Columbus presents Spain as a despotic religious empire against which to justify the stories of hemispheric protection that emerged only five years earlier in the Monroe Doctrine. Exploring the kinship between Columbus and William Prescott’s History of the Conquest of Mexico (1843), this chapter illuminates how the collaboration between romance and anti-Catholicism in Columbus set a precedent for subsequent historians and became a powerful legacy for legitimizing expansion into Catholic Mexico.

When we recognize the foundational relationship between romance and empire established in antebellum depictions of Catholicism, we can see how postbellum narrative forms – even those seemingly removed from the outward gestures of empire – are part and parcel to the U.S. imperial project. Through an examination of George Washington Cable’s 1880 regional historical romance The Grandissimes, chapter four, “Reconstructing the Empire: Catholicism, Color, and Uplift in George Washington Cable’s The Grandissimes,” argues that postbellum depictions of Catholic otherness played a subtle but key role in redirecting U.S. energies from Reconstruction to overseas expansion. Though Cable’s
religion was proclaimed "loathsome" by none other than Mark Twain, his *Grandissimes* rehearses widespread postbellum debates surrounding U.S. involvement in Santo Domingo and the Philippines. Lauded by critics and readers as "the most remarkable work of fiction ever created in the South," *The Grandissimes*’s depiction of New Orleans as a racially hybrid Catholic terrain frames the South and similarly marked overseas territories as threats to U.S. nation. However, as I argue, this portrait ultimately helped to legitimize U.S. overseas expansion by positioning such Catholic terrains as opportunities for Protestant uplift. By examining Cable’s seemingly "local" narrative, this chapter demonstrates how anti-Catholicism helped to mediate anxieties about the integration of religious and racial difference, as well as helped to manage national ambitions for global dominance.

“Citizens of the World: Henry James, Catholicism, and Cosmopolitanism,” my closing chapter, charts the legacy of this long interdependence between anti-Catholicism, romance, and U.S. imperialism. What becomes clear is that this romance tradition so powerfully shaped early U.S. geopolitics that it set the tone for U.S. internationalism in the twentieth century. Examining *The American* (1876), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), this chapter demonstrates how James relies on longstanding conceptions of Catholic difference to imagine and ultimately to critique U.S. imperialism. By analyzing how his novels draw on anti-Catholicism to demonstrate the consequences of limitless expansionism, I show how the imperial romance tradition crystallized in James’s most central antecedent Hawthorne shaped Americans emerging conceptions of the U.S. as a global nation well into the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. Such readings elucidate the provocative ways in which a study of anti-Catholicism and U.S. geopolitics remaps the story of American literary and political history.

Turning from James’s anti-imperial critique to that of José Martí, my coda, “Beneath the Virgin’s Standard: Anti-Imperial Resistance and Pan-American Catholicism,” briefly
considers the ways in which Catholicism served as an imaginative site through which to resist U.S. imperialism. In so doing, this short coda recognizes that U.S. anti-Catholicism arose through a series of frictions and conversations with Catholics, some of whom critiqued the Protestant sway of U.S. politics from within national borders and others who protested the hegemonic persuasion of U.S. imperialism from beyond U.S. borders. I briefly analyze Martí’s “Our America” to gesture toward the ways in which a study of anti-Catholicism and U.S. empire-building opens out to a broader discussion about the multifaceted role of religion and geopolitics.

Analyzing this wide-range of romance forms across the eighty year period when American literature emerged as a national canon and the U.S. emerged as an imperial nation, “Sacred Dominion” illustrates how Catholicism inadvertently helped to constitute U.S. empire. It shows how those founding narratives of nationhood and religion impacted both the expansion and development of the nation and that of its literary culture. In rewriting the story of U.S. imperialism through a study of anti-Catholicism, this project illuminates the ways in which the formations of American romance and U.S. empire arose together through a commitment to the nation’s Protestant origins, and, in so doing, it calls into question the narratives of secularization that underwrite modern conceptions of U.S. empire. “Sacred Dominion,” therefore, not only tells an important story about the narratives and forms through which the U.S. emerged as a global force; it also tells a timely one about the alliance between religion and U.S. geopolitics that endures today.

18 This is Susan Harris's reading of "To the Person Sitting in the Darkness." See Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," in *The Portable Mark Twain*, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 591-613; and Harris, *God’s Arbiter*, 15.
28 Fessenden, Culture and Redemption, 2.
37 Chase, The American Novel, 4-5.
38 Amy Kaplan also notes this in “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Cultures of U.S. Imperialism, 11-2.
39 Goddu, Gothic America, 3.
41 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself with Related Documents, ed. David W. Blights (Boston and New York: Beford/St. Martin’s, 2003), 34.
43 Beecher, Plea, 117.
CHAPTER ONE

The Scarlet Empire: Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Imperial Politics of Catholic Conversion

A Christian girl – even a daughter of the Puritans – may surely pay honor to the idea of divine Womanhood, without giving up the faith of her forefathers.

– Hilda in *The Marble Faun* (1860) ¹

If he had not died in 1864, it might have surprised Nathaniel Hawthorne that just over thirty years after he published *The Marble Faun*, these words would come back to haunt him. After all, American literary history has enshrined him as the great mythologizer and critic of the Puritan past – a fabled story about the nation’s paradoxically dark but exceptional beginnings. And yet, the Catholicism that *The Marble Faun*’s Hilda both “honor[s]” and yet refuses in the above passage is the same faith that Hawthorne’s youngest daughter Rose embraced twenty-seven years after his death. Descended from Puritans and raised Unitarian, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop not only converted to Catholicism in 1891 but also, unlike her father’s character Hilda, relinquished her duty as a “household Saint” to become a real one (461). Indeed, the “soothing” feminine nature of Catholicism attracted Rose so profoundly – as her brother Julian said of her conversion² – that she left her husband and became a nun. In fact, she was such a model of Catholic charity that she was nominated for sainthood in 2003.

This story of Hawthorne’s lost Protestant daughter and its curious resonances with *The Marble Faun* could simply be read as an ironic biographical detail – evidence of the Hawthorne family’s Italian travels in the 1850s. However, when relocated within the context of her father’s novels, Hilda’s attraction to Catholic femininity – an attraction she shares with Rose – illuminates Hawthorne’s own career-long obsession with Catholicism. Even in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the simultaneous allure and fear of a powerful Catholic femininity
haunts the text from Hawthorne’s opening description of Hester as an image of “Divine Maternity” to his later characterization of her as a “Sister of Charity.”3 Scholars, however, have tended to dismiss these references to Catholicism.4 Located upon a seventeenth-century frontier and within a distant, seemingly timeless “eternal city,” The Scarlet Letter’s and The Marble Faun’s allusions to an effeminate Old World Catholicism appear relatively disconnected from nineteenth-century U.S. culture. Yet, the frontiers and Catholic femininities that these novels evoke were very much on the minds of Hawthorne and his contemporaries. As this chapter demonstrates, The Scarlet Letter’s and The Marble Faun’s depictions of Catholicism illustrate Hawthorne’s participation in a romantic Protestant imperial narrative, in which the Catholic represented empire-building’s threat to the U.S. national home and the expansion of U.S. dominion.

Canonized as some of the most iconic romances in American literature, these texts represent what I suggest is an enduring theme in nineteenth-century American romance. By submerging contemporary religious and political tensions into seemingly escapist narratives, they locate, to use Hawthorne’s own description of romance, the “legendary mist” of myth, “the picturesque effect” of local settings, and the “by-gone time”5 of the past in the service of a burgeoning global project. Despite the transnational turn of American literary studies, discussions of American romance – even those concerned with unearthing the genre’s historical significance – have tended to neglect its global and imperial contexts. The work of more recent scholars such as Amy Kaplan and Paul Gilmore offer some notable exceptions to this tendency,6 yet these critical models elide the fixation with Catholicism that so profoundly underpins Hawthorne’s romances. In so doing, they overlook how the formation of American romance and U.S. geopolitics developed through a mutual investment in the nation’s Protestant foundations – an investment that drew its strength from a pervasive anti-Catholic strain in U.S. culture. Hawthorne’s work illustrates how romance maintained this
commitment to Protestantism by simultaneously negotiating anxieties about the integration of religious difference and mediating the nation’s increasingly global ambitions. As I show in this chapter’s first section, The Scarlet Letter’s subtle references to the Catholic dangers of frontier colonization tentatively sanction U.S. expansion while simultaneously warning readers about empire-building’s threat to national unity. In the second section, I show how, set amidst a foreign Catholic terrain, The Marble Faun’s encounter between Protestant Americans and Catholic Rome demonstrates how such expansion threatens to dismantle the nation’s religious and political foundations.

In making this claim, the following analysis of Hawthorne’s treatment of Catholicism illustrates that nativism is not solely an intranational impulse. Scholarship on U.S. nativism tends to position anti-Catholicism as a discourse concerned with erecting U.S. borders against foreign influence rather than expanding them. But at the same moment that Americans were wrestling with an “invasion” of Catholic immigrants, they were also debating the consequences of absorbing foreign territories like those of Catholic Mexico. Some religious leaders, politicians, and print outlets saw westward expansion as a way to protect the nation from “a reckless mass” of Catholic immigrants and spread Protestant freedoms; others saw it as a venture that, in the case of the war with Mexico that ended only two years before The Scarlet Letter’s publication, would only further weaken the nation by adding “eight millions of men at war with us by race, by language, by religion.” In this latter sense, expansion represented what Kaplan describes as the “anarchy of empire,” wherein fears of foreign colonization turn “U.S. aggression abroad into a defensive protection of the home in view of the peril of America becoming foreign and unrecognizable to itself.” What Hawthorne’s romances reveal is that religious nativism was central to this vision of U.S. imperialism, because Protestant imaginings of Catholicism were crucial to constructing the very concept of “home” on which this fantasy of U.S. empire depended. By examining Hawthorne’s
construction of Catholicism in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun*, we can begin to see
religion’s pivotal role in the formation of U.S. imperialism and how such romances helped to
forge a long-lasting collaboration between Protestantism and U.S. empire.

This understanding of the collaboration between religion and empire transforms how
we see Hawthorne as a romance writer. Most often attending to the politics of slavery and
Indian removal, readings of Hawthorne’s imperialism have thus far tended to cite the
ambivalence of his national politics, often concluding that his romances – though seemingly
local and insular – contributed to the exceptionalist rhetoric of U.S. imperialism.\textsuperscript{11} Given his
“complacent”\textsuperscript{12} Democratic politics, his contributions to John O’Sullivan’s *Democratic
Review*, and his celebration of the U.S. conquest of Catholic Mexico in his 1852 *Life of
Franklin Pierce*, readings of Hawthorne’s work as imperialistic make sense. Yet, such studies
often gloss over questions of religion, either reading Hawthorne’s religiosity within “an
entirely secular framework” or associating it with Puritanism in acquiescence to years of
scholarship focused on his Puritan heritage.\textsuperscript{13} But in seeing Hawthorne as solely engaged
with the Puritan religious project or assuming it as the primary backdrop for his work,
scholars have missed out on how wide-spread concerns about Catholic difference also shaped
the longer arc of his romantic endeavor. When we recognize the anti-Catholicism underlying
his imperialism, we can see how *The Scarlet Letter*’s subtle references to the Catholic
dangers of frontier expansion are part of a longer experiment that becomes more overt in *The
Marble Faun*. In so doing, we not only see how the collaboration between religion and U.S.
imperialism powerfully shaped the formation of Hawthorne’s romance, but also how it drove
the U.S.’s imperial errand into a global wilderness.

An Office Undone: Catholic Conversion in America’s “Dim Wood”
At first glance, *The Scarlet Letter* appears to have nothing to do with nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism. Critics have tended to read it as both a criticism and exploration of Puritanism and the nation's inheritance of this foundational religious and political narrative. And yet, from the moment Hester Prynne puts on the scarlet letter and takes her stand upon the scaffold, Hawthorne depicts her through Catholic images and symbols:

Had there been a Papist among the crowd of Puritans, he might have seen in this beautiful woman, so picturesque in her attire and mien, and with the infant at her bosom, an object to remind him of the image of Divine Maternity, which so many illustrious painters have vied with one another to represent; something which should remind him, indeed, but only by contrast, of that sacred image of sinless motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world. (57-8)

This opening scaffold scene paints Hester as a corrupted Catholic icon. In describing her as an “image” of “Divine Maternity” for the imagined papists of the crowd, Hawthorne frames her as a representation of an effeminate Catholic Church, and, more specifically, the Virgin Mary. Simultaneously, he suggests that her seemingly holy beauty is an illusion that only serves to hide her sinfulness or, as he describes later in the text, her role as the Puritan colony’s “scarlet woman, and worthy type of her of Babylon” or Whore of Babylon (109), a term that often alluded to Catholicism in antebellum U.S. culture. Such contradictory allusions illuminate what Jenny Franchot describes as the antebellum Protestant obsession with the deceptive power of Catholic images. Most often represented through colorful icons and elaborate rituals, Catholicism became synonymous with an aesthetic of gothic romance that threatened to release forbidden passions. Here, Hawthorne configures Hester as a living image of this passion-provoking Catholic iconography. In “contrast[ing]” her to the “sacred image of sinless motherhood,” he illustrates how the “taint of deepest sin” resides in the “most sacred quality of human life” (58). Although he states that only papists will see this
connection between Hester and Catholic imagery, he situates her above the audience and provocatively suggests that the Puritans below stand in devotion to her sinfulness.

That Hawthorne represents Hester’s illicit feminine sexuality as Catholic was hardly a novel concept for his antebellum readers. In response to rises in Catholic immigration, depictions of domineering mother superiors, corrupted convent novices, and effeminate, yet sexually deviant priests proliferated starting in the 1830s. In fact, the success of sensational convent narratives like Rebecca Reed’s *Six Months in a Convent* (1835) and Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures* (1836) far outsold the likes of Hawthorne’s comparatively tamer works. The Catholic nuns of these texts were, at times, depicted as “poor helpless” women lured from the happy domains of Protestant domesticity into the convent. At other moments, they appeared as Catholic oppressors themselves – women who, according to the anonymously authored *Pope or President? Startling Disclosures of Romanism as Revealed by Its Own Writers* (1859), “turned a deaf ear” to the cruelty of licentious priests and even participated in their abuses. Indeed, the cloistered spaces and dark interiors of Catholic confessionals and convents offered rich sites through which to imagine the destruction of female innocence, Protestant domesticity, and American family life.

At the same time that nativists were literally rioting in the streets against these Catholic dangers, Americans also began exhibiting a growing interest in Catholicism’s exaltation of holy womanhood. Nineteenth-century writers often noted the beauty of Catholic rituals and its celebration of motherhood in the form of the Virgin Mary – that “idea of divine Womanhood” as Hawthorne describes her in *The Marble Faun* (54). While some Protestants viewed this figure with suspicion, others found that she complimented the realm of domesticity and the feminization of American religion occurring alongside the nativist movement. Quoting a British critic in his 1855 *Art-Hints*, for instance, James Jackson Jarves writes of Raphael’s Sistine Madonna, “there she stands – the transfigured woman […] an
abstraction of power, purity, and love.”¹⁷ To be sure, as a divine woman, the Virgin Mary appeared to epitomize the “angel in the house.” She offered a powerful feminine aesthetic that both bolstered Protestant ideals of femininity and also threatened the Protestant family by placing the mother in a position of dominance equal or even greater to that of the father. In this way, Catholicism, as Franchot notes, offered “a constellation of alternative femininities conspicuously excluded by antebellum theoreticians of the family who constructed, instead, a region of sentiment that, though run by women, was overseen by husbandly authority.” Whether through the homosocial communities of convents or the figure of a divine mother, such constructions of Catholicism helped to define the nation’s rising culture of domesticity and also “voiced anxieties about that domesticity.”¹⁸

As a text that has sparked long-standing debates about the nature of Hawthorne’s feminism/anti-feminism, it makes sense that *The Scarlet Letter* engages in these constructions of Catholicism.¹⁹ Such imagery represents, as John Gatta has more recently illustrated, Hawthorne’s ambivalent construction of womanhood – his “appreciation of godly women and feminized religion” as well as his “rank misogyny.”²⁰ Less obvious is the way in which these depictions of Catholicism illuminate the text’s colonial/imperial context. Set upon “the edge of the Western wilderness” (59), *The Scarlet Letter* tells a story about a Protestant community – both frontier colony and cornerstone of a future American nation – threatened by the alternative domesticities of Catholicism. The moment of colonization, as Laura Doyle notes, has already happened and yet the “city upon a hill” settlement – the “New England” that they are “here planting in the wilderness” (247), as minister Arthur Dimmesdale says – is an ongoing project always in danger of being subverted and undermined, whether by Catholicized immigrants like Hester, pagan natives, or the potentially Catholic sailors of the Spanish Main who pass through Salem. Scholars such as Doyle and Maria DeGuzmán have more recently begun to excavate this imperial history.²¹ The role of religion, however, has
tended to take a backseat to race in these readings, thus missing out on the ways in which Hawthorne’s narrative of Puritan colonization reflects concerns about the incorporation of Catholic difference. As the following section shows, *The Scarlet Letter*’s construction of Catholicism illuminates the equally powerful role of religion in Hawthorne’s vision of empire. As an extension of the Puritan colony’s “penal machine” (57), the “A” performs as a symbol of Protestant imperial power that sanctions U.S. imperialism and simultaneously warns readers about the threat it poses to the U.S.

So, how does *The Scarlet Letter*’s depiction of a seventeenth-century Puritan colony become a commentary about the dangers of nineteenth-century empire-building? Hawthorne begins by introducing his tale of Puritan colonization through a preface that implicitly recognizes contemporary tensions surrounding the relationship between expansion and national unity. Set within the nineteenth-century, the preface recalls Hawthorne’s political appointment to the Salem Custom House in 1846 under the Democratic administration of James Polk and his dismissal in 1849 after the election of Whig Zachary Taylor. Comparing his newly unemployed position to the “decapitated state” of “[Washington] Irving’s headless horseman” (45), Hawthorne stages *The Scarlet Letter* as a response to a period of personal upheaval and national change, one marked by shifts in national leadership as well as the U.S.-Mexican War and the acquisition of predominately Catholic territories. Signaling his search for stability amidst these changes, Hawthorne contracts the world of the novel inward toward Salem. With “the banner of the republic” flying high and the image of a mothering, but vicious “American eagle” protecting her grounds, the Custom House – a “civil […] post of Uncle Sam’s government” (7) – reminds us of Salem’s role in the founding of the nation. Old Salem comes to life again in the figure of Hawthorne’s ghostly, “steeple-crowned progenitor,” recalling how this once “wild and forest-bordered settlement” became “a city” – *the* Protestant city upon which the nation, his narrator, and the novel stand (11). Although
Salem’s wharves have begun to “crumble to ruin” and the Custom House itself is filled with cobwebs, Hawthorne’s narrator recalls its importance as both the nation’s and his own “natal spot” (7-8, 13). Attesting to the nation’s rootedness within Salem, he suggests that, even in light of growth and development, the city’s centrality remains – that “[t]his long connection of a family with one spot, as its place of birth and burial, creates a kindred between human being and the locality [...] It is not love, but instinct” (13). Though he refers specifically to his own family lineage here, this “instinct,” Hawthorne’s narrator suggests, is a national one that cannot simply be removed or left behind, but instead continues to guide the nation back to its original foundations.

But even as Hawthorne reminds us of the U.S.’s originary attachment to this spot, he suggests that both the nation and his once well-rooted family have, in the spirit of the Puritan errand, moved on to new ports and territories. As he has “dwelt much away from” Salem and anticipates that his children too will “strike their roots into unaccustomed earth,” the ships coming into harbor, the exchange and transfer of goods, and the “sounds of frequent feet” moving “briskly” upon the Custom House steps announce the health of an expanding, commercial nation (12, 14, 8). Salem has become only one node in an empire that extends outward to Boston and New York as well as South America and Africa. Through this expansion, Hawthorne suggests that outward movement away from this “natal spot” is perhaps a better tribute to his Puritan forbearers – a sign that the roots they struck upon the soil are strong enough for “frequent transplantation” and that their errand continues through new eras of empire-building that chronicle the “heroic enterprise” of northern, westward, and southern expansion. Just as his ancestor came with “his Bible and his sword” into the unknown wilderness (11), the new heroes of empire, whether “stalwart soldier[s]” of “wild Western territory” (22, 25), or new generations of explorers who pass through on their way to distant oceanic frontiers, continue this errand through new eras of empire-building.
Poised at this apex of nation and empire, Hawthorne’s narrator teeters between staying and going, between remaining attached to his “natal spot” and following the stream of goods and peoples that cross through Salem. In becoming “a citizen of somewhere else” both through his romance writing and his departure from Salem, the narrator participates in the expansions of empire even as he looks back at the “burial-place” of his forefathers (47). It is from this uncertain ground that Hawthorne introduces his romance of Protestant empire-building. As “The Custom House” locates the narrator between U.S. nation and its expanding empire, it also stages *The Scarlet Letter*’s tale of Puritan colonization as a romance between worlds, “somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and Imaginary may meet. Ghosts might enter here without affrighting us” (38). As both place and preface, “The Custom House” acts as a romantic terrain where these realms collide. Standing upon “the floor of our familiar room” within the Custom House, the narrator experiences the seductions of moonlight, “falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly, – making every object so minutely visible […] is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests” (38). Conceived as a “neutral territory” (38), the romantic allure of the Custom House, as DeGuzmán argues, allows Hawthorne to extend the story of nineteenth-century U.S. empire “in and over time, covering past, present, and future.” In so doing, this “medium” provides Hawthorne with a space to express his uncertainty about empire-building. Rather than face a nation drifting away from its Puritan origins through both territorial expansion and religious factionalism, Hawthorne defers to a romantic past where the primacy of Puritanism is unquestioned – or so it seems. As we find, however, such fears about empire-building haunt even the “city upon a hill.” Through this seemingly worldly and otherworldly space of romance, Hawthorne’s depiction of Catholicism, like the strangely clarifying, yet distorting lens of moonlight, makes
“distinctly” “visible” the nation’s imperial future even as it evokes those “ghosts” and “illusive guests” that may invade in the process.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the iconic scarlet letter that Hawthorne finds within the Custom House becomes his engine for staging the nation’s encounter with these ghosts and guests of empire-building. Hawthorne introduces the imperial context of the letter in the same scaffold scene in which the “A” outwardly marks Hester as Catholic. His opening portrait of her as a corrupted vision of the Virgin Mary is textured by references to her spectral nativeness or, as Renée Bergland describes, her internalization of “native consciousness.” Commenting upon her “rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic,” “dark and abundant hair,” and “deep black eyes,” Hawthorne frames Hester as an uncanny reflection of the Indian “in his native garb” who stands amidst the crowd beside the newly liberated Roger Chillingworth (83, 55, 61). Hester exudes a “wild and picturesque peculiarity” (55) that would allow her to easily recede into the “the pass of the dark, inscrutable forest open to her, where the wildness of her nature might assimilate itself with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that had condemned her” (79). By simultaneously identifying Hester as a native image and Catholic icon, Hawthorne conflates native wildness with Catholic passion and frames them as derivatives of each other. This conflation is only further emphasized by Pearl. A living personification of Hester’s scarlet “A,” Pearl appears as “one of those naughty elfs or fairies, whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry” as well as a figure in whom “mother-forest” and her “wild things” “recognized a kindred wildness” (109, 203). Such references not only emphasize Hester’s nativeness but also present her as a confusion of popish and pagan symbols. By framing her through these allusions, Hawthorne implies that the imagined papists of the crowd and the text’s ghostly natives are the same: religious outsiders in an exclusive Puritan society.
In marking Hester as both Catholic and native, the letter initially appears as a critique of empire-building that recognizes the oppressive politics of exclusion and dispossession in the course of colonization and expansion. It “had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and inclosing her in a sphere by herself” (55). This enclosure suggests that the letter performs its “office” as a nativist tool by imprisoning Hester in a figurative “sphere” of her own and protecting the community from her threatening influence. Although she is not “scourged out of the town” like the Quakers and witches to whom Hawthorne compares her, she resides on the periphery of the settlement amidst the extensive frontier wilderness that lies to the West (51). Represented as a descendant of the “sainted Anne Hutchison” (50), she appears an emblem of religious and political rebellion that conflates Catholic and Native American religious difference with the antinomian crisis in recognition of the Puritan state’s intolerance to religious otherness. By representing her as a figure of nonconformity, Hawthorne illuminates the histories of oppression that follow with expansion.

At the same time that he unmasks and condemns this history of empire-building, however, Hawthorne also reaffirms its tyrannical impulses through the Puritan community’s interactions with Hester. As the meaning of the “A” oscillates throughout the course of the text, the punishment it enacts upon Hester transforms her Catholic difference into a more palatable, even alluring form for incorporation into the expanding nation. Like a “cross upon a nun’s bosom,” it marks her as an “able” nun or a “Sister of Charity,” seemingly defanging her of the spiritual and sexual threats she poses at the novel’s opening (160-1, 214). Instead of spite, she inspires the colonials to “sympathize” and the natives to perceive her as a “personage of high dignity” (161, 245). In fact, in her newfound role as nun, the colony allows her to penetrate the inner most recesses of Puritan domestic space. Transformed into a “self-ordained” “Sister of Mercy,” she enters the sick chambers of the colony’s vulnerable
members, and her maternal breast — regardless of its scarlet letter — becomes “a softer pillow for the head that needed one” — including the head of the illustrious governor John Winthrop (160). This shift from “whore” to “nun” yet again endows Hester with feminine divinity. The “A” “imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril” (161). By refashioning her into a holy maternal figure, Hawthorne suggests that the letter — despite its cruelty — has, in fact, fulfilled its purpose: it has reformed the Catholic for inclusion into the Protestant community. In so doing, it demonstrates that the Protestant nation can evacuate the threatening elements of expansion and convert the foreign religious other into a viable American citizen.

Yet, if the letter’s purpose is to defang Catholic threats in the course of Protestant empire-building, the final encounter between Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester in the “dim wood” of the surrounding forest makes clear that, indeed, the “A” “had not done its office” (199, 165). Hawthorne frames this forest meeting as a moment of conversion and romance, a scene of seduction that threatens to extend the sexual transgression that initiated Hester’s punishment. Though he, according to James Russell Lowell, originally considered having Dimmesdale confess his sins to a Catholic priest, it is not the wily confessor of convent tales who attempts to turn Dimmesdale Catholic but rather the promiscuous Catholic novice. Reflecting tropes of unveiling common to antebellum convent narratives, Hester literally lets down her hair from her nun-like cap and tosses aside the letter, unleashing her “sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty [...] from what men call the irrevocable past” (201). With this unmasking, Hawthorne suggests that Hester’s newly embraced role as the colony’s innocuous nun is nothing but an illusion. He stages her encounter with Dimmesdale as “the very hour” for which the “whole seven years of outlaw and ignominy had been little other than a preparation” (199). With her “deep eyes” and “magnetic power,” she almost turns toward mesmerism as she compels the “shattered and subdued” minister into
committing what would be perhaps his greatest possible transgression – flight from the Puritan colony into the “moral wilderness” of a Catholicized Hester (182). “Whither leads yonder forest-track? Backward to the settlement, thou sayest! Yes; but onward, too! Deeper it goes, and deeper, into the wilderness [...] There thou art free!” she exclaims (195-6).

Configured as freedom in a rejection of the Puritan colony, flight “into the wilderness” offers Dimmesdale a pivotal opportunity to leave behind the “bondage” of Puritanism and embrace Holy Mother Church (196). Vulnerable within an obscure wilderness, he concedes, unmasking the potential danger of empire-building: conversion.

Through this conversion scene, *The Scarlet Letter* questions the nation’s ability to withstand the threats of empire-building without destroying its Protestant foundations. As a leader within the Puritan community, the “godly Master Dimmesdale” symbolizes the promise of the Puritan mission in the New World and the future success of its expansion (62). As Hawthorne writes, “his most fervent admirers” consider him “a heaven-ordained apostle, destined, should he live and labor for the ordinary term of life, to do as great deeds for the now feeble New England Church, as the Fathers had achieved for the infancy of the Christian faith” (199). Framed as a founder with perhaps even more symbolic meaning than John Winthrop himself, young Dimmesdale is both a Puritan redeemer and Christ-like figure, one who will lead the nation toward a millennialist Protestant salvation. The community little suspects, however, that their savior is a Catholic threat himself. Baptized through the “consecration” of his coupling with Hester (194), Dimmesdale becomes the text’s closeted Catholic as he advances into Hester’s “moral wilderness” through his self-prescribed flagellations, “practices, more in accordance with the old corrupted faith of Rome, than with the better light of the church in which he had been born and bred” (182, 143). Indeed, Hawthorne insinuates that Dimmesdale’s conversion is nearly complete when, upon returning from the forest, he experiences “a total change of dynasty and moral code, in the interior
kingdom” (216). Although his Catholicism is invisible to his fellow Puritans with the exception of the equally monkish Chillingworth, Dimmesdale’s fall into Catholicism illustrates how empire-building not only threatens conversion but also, in so doing, can easily corrupt the foundations of Protestant nation.

Dimmesdale’s final confession serves as a prophetic warning about this possibility. Though he appears to have converted to Hester’s Catholic cult, his public confession after the election-day sermon simultaneously announces and denounces his Catholicism to the Puritan community. Standing upon the scaffold, he becomes like Hester in the novel’s opening scenes—an entrancing Catholic image. As he reveals the stigmata-like “A” upon his chest, he sinks down upon the scaffold into the arms of Hester, who “partly raised him, and supported his head against her bosom” (253). In this position, Dimmesdale, as Sacvan Bercovitch notes, offers a spectacle of Christ-like pain and passion that recreates the Catholic pietá for the Protestant witnesses beneath him, even incorporating Hester – the corrupted Divine Mother – back into the image. Through this final appeal to Catholic iconography, Hawthorne again illustrates the seductions of Catholicism as the crowd stands below with horror-filled “awe and wonder” (255). In revealing Dimmesdale as Hester’s fellow Catholic sinner, he demonstrates how the forbidden romance of Catholicism has stealthily corrupted and converted the heart of the Puritan nation despite attempts to guard against its threats. Catholicism, like the ghosts in the Custom House, has invaded nonetheless.

This ending might initially imply that empire-building will inevitably turn the U.S. Catholic and transform it into, as Kaplan describes of empire’s foreign absorptions, a haunted house—one ruled by Mother Church. Yet, the scene’s dénouement – Dimmesdale’s death – recalls the nation back to its Protestant origins in a jeremiadic style, offering his fall as both a warning about the consequences of empire-building and a testament to the Puritan errand. Prior to his confession, Dimmesdale presents his greatest sermon with “a spirit of prophecy,”
foretelling “a high and glorious destiny for the newly gathered people of the Lord” with “special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness” (247). The public declaration of Dimmesdale’s Catholicism in the wake of this prophetic announcement resubmits him to the Puritan law and reframes his near conversion as a call for redemption and conquest. Hawthorne illustrates how the Protestant nation and its Puritan fathers, like the Protestant “Word” of Dimmesdale’s sermon, conquer Catholic image and Mother Church. Declared before an audience that, like the crowd assembled on the day of Hester’s initial punishment, is filled with Protestants and pagans as well as presumably Spanish papists, Dimmesdale becomes a martyr in the cause of Protestant empire. He appears a glowing testament to its glorious destiny even as his fall warns Americans about the dangers of such an endeavor.

With Dimmesdale’s death and Hester and her daughter’s departure for Europe, the text’s ending insinuates that the nation can resume its Protestant mission of expansion in honor of Dimmesdale’s sacrifice. However, Hester’s return troubles this initial conclusion. Though it would seem fitting for her to remain abroad with her daughter, she again takes up the letter and her home upon the colony’s fringes. Bercovitch argues that this re-adoption of the “A” signifies a “conversion to the letter” in which Hester submits to the Puritan law and becomes an agent of it. And yet, the “A” in these final scenes looks much like it did when it signified her nun-like status. Though the Puritans no longer shame her, they still regard the letter with “awe” and “reverence too” (261). Similarly, while she gives up her rebellious role within the colony, she also encourages the community’s downtrodden women to await the day when “the whole relation between man and woman” will be revealed (261). In other words, they should wait for a time in which the love that arose in her forbidden romance with Dimmesdale will be acknowledged as “a new truth” (261). The resumption of the “A” under these terms suggests that Hester remains committed to her religious difference. She
reinscribes the threat of Catholicism back into the Puritan community and presents it –
through Hawthorne’s excavation of the “A” in “The Custom House” – as a legacy in a new
era of expansion. Though the letter continues to demonstrate Puritan tyranny, it
simultaneously gestures toward the dangers Catholic difference poses to the U.S. What arises
from this scene is a foreboding vision of empire, one that may not be Puritan but that, as The
Marble Faun will demonstrate, is clearly Protestant.

An Errand into the “religious heart of the whole world”

If The Scarlet Letter highlights the dangers of westward expansion, The Marble Faun
illustrates what happens when the Protestant errand goes global. Relocating the site of U.S.
empire to the center of Catholicism, The Marble Faun tells the story of two American artists’
encounters with the images, characters, and landscapes of Catholic Rome. Like the frontier
setting of the Puritan colony, Rome functions as a wilderness that offers both a dream-like
and nightmarish environment through which Hawthorne’s Protestant Americans confront the
Catholic other. Filled with a host of foreign characters ranging from deranged monks and
Italian fauns to “French soldiers,” “German artists,” and Jews, it appears as a mysterious
cosmopolitan Catholic terrain (87). But unlike the Puritans of The Scarlet Letter, The Marble
Faun’s Protestants cannot sanitize or relocate Catholicism; rather, it surrounds them as it
“jostles alongside by side with business and sport,” and is, in fact, part of their purpose for
traveling to the city in the first place (155). After all, American artists Kenyon and Hilda as
well as the mixed-race outsider Miriam journey to Rome to study the city’s “picturesque
decay,” “holy edifices,” “exquisitely carved figures,” “antique painted windows,” and
“sacred image[s]” because, as Hawthorne explains in the preface, art – like “Romance and
poetry” – needs “Ruin” to make it grow (153, 303, 18, 332, 3). As “isolated strangers” and
“barbarians from Gaul, Great Britain, and beyond the sea,” they represent an expatriate colony of American artists determined to acquire “Roman possessions” from the “native inhabitants” and establish “a peaceful usurpation” in Rome (132, 99).

Such depictions of Protestant tourism were fairly common during this era. In the same decade Hawthorne wrote The Marble Faun, travel to Europe had become increasingly easy for Americans wishing to indulge in the forbidden thrills of Catholicism. Like Hawthorne, many of these travelers hailed from the most Protestant region in the U.S. – New England. A particularly rich site for artists, writers, and cultural aesthetes, Rome offered American travelers an opportunity to increase their cultural currency through what Kariann Yokota describes as the antebellum geography of value, an economy of location wherein Americans accumulated worth by traveling to the Old World. As Protestant Americans recorded their observations of Rome’s beauty and gothic horror, they filtered this cultural value back into the U.S. and simultaneously fed antebellum appetites for all things Catholic. Paintings, sketches, and articles with titles like “The Catacombs of Rome,” “Italian Experiences in Collecting ‘Old Masters’” and “Holy Week at Rome” filled the pages of Harper’s and The Atlantic Monthly. These verbal and visual images both complimented and inflamed an American culture concerned with the absorption of Catholic territories and peoples. As Know Nothings openly campaigned against Catholics in U.S. cities and soldiers conquered foreign territories like Mexico, American travelers in Europe emphasized the exoticism of Catholic terrains and underscored the foreign threat that the assimilation of such spaces posed to the U.S. Put simply, Catholicism and Rome were “all the rage” in more ways than one.32

Though The Marble Faun certainly indulges in the allure of these Catholic images – even at times suggesting Hawthorne’s preference for certain rituals – the novel demonstrates the danger of consuming foreign and specifically Catholic terrains. Scholars have often noted this culture of Protestant consumerism and spectatorship in The Marble Faun. Many have
examined Hawthorne’s Rome as an aesthetic landscape that “challenged Americans to absorb the defamiliarizing power” of Catholicism as well as a site through which to recognize the political tensions back home. However, few see Hawthorne’s depiction of Rome as a revision of The Scarlet Letter’s commentary on empire-building. As a text that became a guidebook for American travelers, The Marble Faun substitutes The Scarlet Letter’s story of westward expansion for what John Carlos Rowe describes as “cultural colonialism.” This substitution makes explicit what is implicit in The Scarlet Letter – that movement outward into the world challenges conceptions of American domesticity and nationhood because it endangers the Protestantism on which those conceptions rely. Just as Hester comes to represent an equally alluring and fearsome form of Catholic femininity that endangers national cohesion, Rome poses as a maze of feminized Catholic images that threaten to convert the text’s Protestant “colonizers” into morally corrupt subjects of an imperial Catholic Church. Instead of celebrating empire-building’s triumphant expansionism then, The Marble Faun demonstrates its risks. In this regard, it offers, as Hawthorne proposes in the text’s introduction, “a thoughtful moral” (3), one that foretells a story of national conversion amidst an artificial imperial glory.

Hawthorne demonstrates empire-building’s potentially dangerous conversions or, as The Marble Faun was first entitled, “transformations,” through each of the four characters’ encounters with Rome. Though she is not an American Protestant, Miriam Schradder acts as the catalyst for Hawthorne’s commentary on the dangers of Protestant expansion. Much like his depiction of Hester and, for that matter, Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance (1852), Hawthorne frames Miriam as a form of threatening femininity. From the text’s opening, he presents her as racially ambiguous: a “rich Oriental character,” perhaps a “German princess,” the “heiress of a great Jewish banker,” or even – dare he say – “the offspring of a Southern American planter” who carries with her “one burning drop of African blood in her veins”
(22-3). Such racial uncertainty is accentuated all the more by Miriam’s questionable morals. Much like Hester, Miriam enters the space of the novel already have fallen. Hawthorne suggests that she committed murder or, at the least, a sin of political intrigue against the papal government that haunts her throughout the first half of the romance in the form of a deranged Capuchin monk. Through such tropes of racial and moral darkness, Hawthorne stages her downfall into Catholicism and sets her up to become like Hester – a personification of an aesthetically seductive Catholic empire, a woman “so beautiful, that she seemed to get into your consciousness and memory [...] holding your inner realm as a conquered territory” (47-8).

In this light, it is perhaps no surprise that Miriam is also the character who most attempts to master Catholic Rome and is consequently conquered by it. Unlike Hawthorne’s Protestant ideal Hilda, who analyzes the city’s paintings only to imitate them, Miriam seeks to fully comprehend the story behind them. In “closely examining” Hilda’s newest copy of Guido Reni’s Portrait of Beatrice Cenci, for instance, she becomes intensely mesmerized by the “mysterious force” of this legendary figure (64-5). Raped by her aristocratic father and executed by order of a corrupt Pope Clement VII, Beatrice came to signify the joint sinfulness of both Catholicism and its rebels. Hilda’s “magical picture” recalls this story and expresses to Miriam a “feeling” that she “cannot seize” (65). Driven by a desire to discern the image’s inner mystery, she speculates about the motives behind Beatrice’s sin, “passionately” stating, “‘if I could only get within her consciousness! If I could but clasp Beatrice Cenci’s ghost, and draw it into myself!’” (66-7). Hawthorne suggests that, indeed, Miriam does, for Hilda notices that “her friend’s expression had become almost exactly that of the portrait” (67).

In presenting this image as a commentary on Miriam’s transformation, the text hints at the dangers of Catholic terrains. Driven by the desire to absorb the mystery of images like
that of Reni’s *Beatrice*, Miriam attempts to conquer Catholic Rome with the help of Donatello by murdering the Capuchin monk who stalks her – an act that compels her and Donatello into a relationship stronger than the “marriage-bond” and which is, like Hester and Dimmesdale’s union, consecrated by sin (174). As Hawthorne suggests, Miriam internalizes the passions and corruptions of Catholic art to such an extent that she becomes like Beatrice, transforming into an example of the corruption shared by the Church and its rebels through a murderous scene of “frenzy and turmoil,” “wild joy,” and “unutterable horror” (172-4).

Noting *The Marble Faun’s* writing and publication during an era of post-revolutionary repression in Italy, Robert Levine argues that such actions make Miriam into a symbol of a revolutionary Protestant-republicanism that defies the tyranny of Rome’s artistic and religious fathers. Yet, in depicting Miriam in this way, Hawthorne also locates her as a part of Rome’s corrupted and sinful landscape. In a twist of dark irony, the very sin she commits against the Church baptizes her into Catholicism. This is why when she and Donatello pledge to live out their sin together, they stand beneath the statue of Pope Julius III in Perugia, who, “stretching out the hand of benediction over them, and bending down upon this guilty and penitent pair,” signifies their subservience to Catholic Rome (329). Despite her rebellion against the Catholic fathers then, Miriam becomes one of their subjects. By presenting her as a corrupted figure whose crime eventually subordinates her to the power of Catholicism, Hawthorne suggests that she too has been conquered.

Miriam is not the only character who warns American readers about the dangers of expansion into foreign terrains. An Italian aristocrat raised upon a distant Tuscan landscape, Donatello also is an outsider to Rome. Unlike his friends, he is fancifully innocent, simple, and child-like. Often compared to the Faun of Praxiteles sculpture, he represents a noble savage – a pagan creature of “woods and streams” who connotes an “innocent childhood, before sin, sorrow, or mortality itself” (13). During Donatello’s time in Rome, however, the
balance between his innocence and impulsivity shifts as his passion for Miriam develops. As he tells her, "Methinks there has been a change upon me, these many months [...] The joy is gone out of my life" (149). This transformation comes to a head at the same moment as Miriam’s decline into Catholic corruption. As Donatello holds the Capuchin monk over the precipice of a cliff, he turns to Miriam, who, like Hester in the New England wilderness, appears as a deceptively beautiful image that beckons him into the darkness of sin with her mesmeric gaze. "I did what your eyes bade me do, when I asked them with mine" he tells her after the monk’s death (172). Aroused by romantic devotion, he heeds Miriam’s mesmeric gaze and commits murder in a haze of sexual and violent passion.

"Was it horror? – or ecstasy? – or both in one?" Miriam asks (173). Hawthorne suggests that Catholicism harnesses the power of both to convert unassuming outsiders like Donatello. Dramatizing the Genesis origin story in a Miltonian fashion, Hawthorne frames the monk as a Satan-like persecutor and Miriam as both the temptress Eve and a representation of the Whore of Babylon. The sin "kindled him into a man; it had developed within him an intelligence [...] But that simple and joyous creature was gone forever" (172). This new "intelligence" paradoxically makes Donatello into a man only to subject his newly assumed manhood to the rule of Mother Church. Plagued by guilt, he turns to the rituals of Catholicism, dons white robes of penitence, and becomes one of the many "odd, questionable shapes [...] often seen gliding through the streets of Italian cities" (392). Through this turn to Catholicism, Hawthorne demonstrates how Donatello’s sin converts him into a conquered, feminized form of Rome’s landscape. Eventually subjected to the Church’s laws, he acts as an example of how an encounter with Catholicism can easily lead to conversion, corruption, and degeneracy.

While Miriam and Donatello’s shared descent into the corruptions of Rome offers an example of empire-building’s dangers, both characters are, as Kristie Hamilton notes,
doomed to extinction from the start.\textsuperscript{39} Marked as Jewish, pagan, African, and native, they quietly signal the violent path of empire-building while also highlighting the supremacy of Hawthorne’s Protestant Americans. Unlike Miriam and Donatello, Kenyon and Hilda resist the conversions of Rome through what Rowe describes as “an aesthetic of sublimation,”\textsuperscript{40} one guided by Protestantism. Kenyon has an aesthetic sensibility, for example, that enables him to distance himself from what Hawthorne presents as the dangerous feminized perversions of Catholicism. Unlike Miriam’s paintings, which are “too nervous, too passionate, too full of agitation,” his sculptures “turn feverish men into cool, quiet marble” (119). Indeed, his ability to witness and master Rome’s art, yet remain unconsumed by its transformative passions impresses Miriam to such an extent that when she sees his newest reproduction of a “Nubian lip[ped],” “voluptuous” Cleopatra, she asks him how Cleopatra’s “fury” and “love” did not “overcome” Kenyon (126-7). She excitedly exclaims, “‘Were you not afraid to touch her, as she grew more and more towards hot life, beneath your hand?’” In reply, he says, “‘It is the concretion of a good deal of thought, emotion, and toil of brain and hand” (127). Guided by not only “emotion,” but “thought” and “brain,” Kenyon can withstand the passions and images of Rome and, as suggested by the Africanized Cleopatra he sculpts, master its various racial and religious others. An admirer of foreign art and a proud sculptor of “the illustrious men of our own country” (118), he is the ideal American imperialist, one who can venture out beyond the borders of U.S. nation and remain impermeable to foreign conversions.

This is why when Kenyon directly confronts the overarching presence of Catholicism in Rome, he immediately unveils its allure and simultaneously warns Hawthorne’s Protestant readers of its dangers. While he journeys to Rome to witness Catholic grandeur alongside other American and international travelers, his keen Protestant aestheticism allows him to control and distance himself from the Catholic passions that consume Miriam and feminize
Donatello. For instance, when he walks through Rome’s streets and visits its cathedrals with Hilda, he marvels at the “magnificent structure[s],” but notes that:

Daylight, in its natural state, ought not to be admitted here. It should stream through a brilliant illusion of Saints and Hierarchies, and old Scriptural images, and symbolized Dogmas, purple, blue, golden, and a broad flame of scarlet. Then, it would be just such an illumination as the Catholic faith allows to its believers. But, give me – to live and die in – the pure, white light of Heaven. (366)

As Kenyon suggests, the colors, lights, saints, and excessive magnificence of Rome – epitomized in its stained glass windows – are nothing but an illusion. Unlike the moonlight of “The Custom House,” Catholicism filters light into a mesmerizing spectacle. It transforms daylight into entrancing blues and golds, and, in so doing, makes the city into a romantic fantasy that seduces onlookers. Hawthorne indicates that these brilliant colors mask the darkness that scintillates beneath the surface and that, for Kenyon, arises most clearly at the moment of Hilda’s disappearance into the captivity of the Catholic convent. As he walks through Rome’s streets in search of Hilda, Catholicism’s “broad flame of scarlet” becomes the reflection of “a priesthood, pampered, sensual, with red and bloated cheeks, and carnal eyes” (411). Like Hester’s “A,” Catholicism’s mercurial scarlet light transfixes even as it masks a deviant sexual power that lies beneath. “Looking through the darkly coloured medium of his fears,” Kenyon sees how the blues and golds veil the “crime” of Rome’s “crowded” streets, the “dark tide of human evil” that “swelled over it,” and its “ancient depravity” (411-2). Attesting to the “white light” of a purifying and redeeming American Protestantism, Kenyon not only resists these colors but also unveils their fatal allure and exercises his dominance over them. In this way, he signifies the U.S.’s capacity to successfully conquer the territories of Catholicism’s scarlet empire and withstand the corruptions of its ever-seductive imagery.
If, in his Protestant rationalism, Kenyon represents U.S. empire’s ability to inhabit foreign Catholic territories, Hilda both undermines and reaffirms this stance. Robed in white as an embodiment of the “white light” of Protestantism, this “fair-haired Saxon girl” and “daughter of the Puritans” recalls the U.S.’s Protestant origins (56, 54). Like her fellow artists, she travels to the city to study and admire the works of the “Old Masters” with “great power and depth of appreciation,” even tending to the shrine of the Virgin Mary, that most holy symbol of divine womanhood (57). In this admiration of Rome’s artistic fathers, she recalls Hawthorne’s wife Sophia as well as his eldest daughter Una during the family’s Roman holiday, even adopting Sophia’s nickname “the Dove.” Like these Hawthorne women, Hilda is “too grateful for all they [Rome’s great artistic masters] bestowed upon her – too loyal, too humble, in their awful presence – to think of enrolling herself in their society” (57). In contrast to Miriam, who internalizes the passion of Rome’s images and attempts to defy the masters, Hilda is contentedly a copyist. In fact, she is so in awe of Catholic images that the moment she steps into Rome she loses her “youthful hopes and ambitions” to create “great pictures.”

As with Kenyon, this aesthetic approach reflects Hilda’s Protestantism, but rather than rationalism, Hilda’s sublimation of Catholicism hinges upon a devotion to authenticity rather than artifice – “true” faith rather than its replications. She has a “deep and sensitive faculty of appreciation; she had the gift of discerning and worshipping excellence, in a most unusual measure” (56). This “faculty” allows Hilda to decipher and comprehend authentic talent from artifice, and this ability both endears the city’s Catholic images to her and allows her to resist their charms. When looking upon a painting of the Virgin Mary, for instance, Hilda quickly departs from it rather than bow down in worship because her “delicate appreciation of Art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert […] she saw that it was merely the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty, the wife, at best, of the artist” (347). Trained to discern
between authenticity and artifice, Hilda recognizes the profane template upon which this image of the Virgin was conceived and resists the allure of Catholicism even as she looks more deeply into its mystery. Guided by her devotion to the “faith of her forefathers” (54), Hilda can stand in distant appreciation of the passions, colors, and stories around her.

Hawthorne puts this “sensitive [Protestant] faculty” to the test when Hilda witnesses the murder of the Capuchin monk. Like Donatello, she encounters sin for the first time and feels “poignant anguish […] within her breast” (355), similarly seeking out Catholicism for solace. Entering St. Peter’s basilica, she sees the worshipers amidst the “multiplicity of ornament” (350) and decides to pursue the “conveniences” of Catholic confession, a ritual so attractive to Hawthorne that, as he says in his notebooks, it could be “compatible with a purified faith” like American Protestantism. He writes:

She went from one to another of the confessionals, and looking at each, perceived that they were inscribed with gilt letters; on one, PRO ITALICA LINGUA; on another, PRO FLANDRICA LINGUA; on a third, PRO POLONICA LINGUA […] In this vast and hospitable Cathedral, worthy to be the religious heart of the whole world, there was room for all nations; there was access to the Divine Grace for every Christian soul; there was an ear for what the overburthened heart might have to murmur, speak in what native tongue it would. (356)

In this scene, the confessional represents a global network of reconciliation whereby the Catholic Church permeates the minds and hearts of its followers across the world. The many languages of Catholicism suggest that perhaps she can find a home in the “religious heart of the whole world.” Employing the language of sentimentality and domesticity, Hawthorne suggests that the Catholic Church can offer solace to Hilda alongside the sinners of many nations, promising to embrace her into a global community of worshippers and respond to her “great need” (357). Indeed, it is this “need” for comfort and belonging in the midst of a
foreign wilderness that draws Hilda to Catholicism. A “motherless girl, and a stranger” far beyond the borders of her national home (359), she yearns for belonging and consolation. As Hawthorne writes, “If she had heard her mother’s voice from within the tabernacle, calling her, in her own mother tongue, to come and lay her poor head in her lap […] Hilda could not have responded with a more inevitable obedience” (357). Depicting St. Peter’s as a motherly home, Hawthorne implies that the powerful feminine aesthetic of Catholicism preys upon such vulnerability. Plagued by guilt and the promise of such maternal comfort, Hilda consequently seeks absolution for her “sins.”

While this confession, like Dimmesdale’s, initially suggests that U.S. expansion will turn the nation Catholic, Hilda’s final response offers a testament to American Protestantism and the U.S.’s ability to withstand the trials of expansion. When she enters the confessional and unburdens her conscience, a voice speaks “soothingly” to her from behind the veil, exhibiting a seemingly “great and tender interest” that, although issued from a male body, enacts a feminine “magnetism in attracting the girl’s confidence” (357). The priest’s tone transforms Catholicism into the motherly lap for which she yearns, not unlike Hester’s comfortable nun-like bosom in The Scarlet Letter. As Hawthorne speculates, “her [Hilda’s] inheritance of New England puritanism would hardly have protected the poor girl from the pious strategy of those good Fathers” (344). Yet, this is exactly what it does. Though Hilda confesses her sin, this action – like her art – is only imitative. Just as she stands in admiration of Rome’s paintings and the Virgin Mary’s shrine, her Protestant aestheticism allows her to appreciate the Catholic ritual without becoming a believer in it. This is why when the priest moves to absolve her, she adamantly declines, stating “‘Oh, no, no! I never dreamed of that! Only our Heavenly Father can forgive my sins’” (359). Drawn to the tenets of what Hawthorne depicts as a more authentic faith, Hilda’s conception of religion relies on an experience unmediated by Catholic rituals and images. “I love the white light, too!” she tells
Kenyon later (366). Even when the priest tenderly encourages her to “come home, and be at rest” as one of the Church’s “faithful children,” she denies him by stating, “I am a daughter of the Puritans” (362). Hilda reaffirms her national home through a reassertion of her Puritan parentage. In framing Hilda as a vulnerable, but resilient Protestant, Hawthorne suggests that, despite the dangers of empire-building, the U.S. has the power to resist its conversions. Locating Hilda within the global space of Rome, he demonstrates how Protestant America’s imperial destiny lies in conquering this global arena and becoming the next religious empire – one that can withstand the corruptions that swallowed Rome because it is exceptionally Protestant.

But even as Hawthorne argues that such devotion can protect the U.S. and forge an empire founded on Protestantism, he again offers a return narrative that troubles this ending. In the final chapters, the dangers of Catholicism go beyond those of conversion to captivity. In a reproduction of the escaped nun’s tale, Hilda becomes a prisoner in the convent of the Sacré Coeur until Miriam and Donatello publically acknowledge their crime. Although she resists Catholicism’s “kindly custody” by again asserting that she is a “daughter of the Puritans” (466), her near conversion by physical captivity suggests that the threats of moving and living beyond national borders have become too great. Hilda admits to Kenyon “‘We are both lonely, both far from home!’” Giving up her life of independence in Rome, Hilda retreats to the traditional boundaries of Protestant domestic space and becomes a “household Saint, in the light of her husband’s [Kenyon’s] fireside” (461). Ironically ending his gothic tale with one of domestic romance, Hawthorne reverts to the safety of Protestant domesticity and again re-erects borders against Catholicism and its corruptions. Hilda and Kenyon embrace marital bliss while Miriam, Donatello, and the Catholic Church with whom they became violently entangled remain figuratively and literally in Rome. Despite what Hawthorne presents as the U.S.’s ability to endure the foreign encounters and near
conversions of empire-building, this ending recalls his readers to the exigency of maintaining U.S. domestic space. The vulnerability of Americans on the nation’s continental and international frontiers suggests that empire-building has the ability to weaken, dilute, and, ultimately, transform U.S. nation into a home haunted by Catholicism.

At the close of *The Marble Faun* as well as that of *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne leaves us with a foreboding question about the possible pitfalls of empire-building. In Hilda and Kenyon’s return, *The Marble Faun* asks its readers, as Robert Milder says: “can Hilda and Kenyon truly return ‘home’? Can Hawthorne?” And even as Hawthorne seems to answer yes, Hester’s return reminds us of another question: whose home will it be when they get there? Just as Hawthorne suggests that the U.S. can reassert its Protestant foundations in the face of a foreign wilderness and stretch the Puritan errand to global dimensions, he warns his readers that this fantasy of imperial domination is always a vulnerable one. Both romances demonstrate that the U.S. can expand beyond its own borders, but, in so doing, must guard its true home – its “natal spot.” In this light, it is fitting that not even Hawthorne imagined the extent to which Mother Church could exert her romantic influence upon the American home – his home to be exact. With the sweetly dark irony of a Hawthornian romance, Hawthorne’s wife Sophia and eldest daughter Una – the two feminine incarnations of *The Marble Faun*’s vulnerable white dove Hilda – remained true to their Protestant upbringing while his Rose became a convert to the scarlet empire of Catholicism. Drawn to the “tenderness” and “feminine warmth” her father feared, she founded the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne. Currently awarded the title “Servant of God” in her path to Catholic sainthood, Rose became an unanticipated realization of her father’s fears and perhaps of his haunted hopes about the course of U.S. empire.

When we study Hawthorne’s romances within a secular or solely Puritan framework, however, we miss out on how religious concerns about empire-building shaped the arc of
Hawthorne’s romance. As shown in the preceding pages, the anxieties about the Catholic conversions of westward expansion that underlay *The Scarlet Letter* become more pronounced in *The Marble Faun*, illustrating how Hawthorne’s romantic vision of empire-building becomes increasingly uncertain and Protestant throughout his career. By recognizing how his romances of Catholicism offer both a cautionary tale and reaffirmation of the Protestant errand, we can begin to see the seemingly paradoxical logic through which religion and romance collaborated to produce his fantasy of Protestant global supremacy. Doing so complicates conceptions of U.S. imperialism that focus primarily on gender and race, and calls us to recognize how romance played a central role in voicing religious concerns about the nation’s imperial future. Rooted in the heart of the American literary canon, the anti-Catholicism of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun*, indeed, demonstrates how the alliance between romance and religion has shaped our ideas of home and empire. Perhaps this is why when Rose Hawthorne thought back upon her childhood visit to Rome in her *Memories of Hawthorne* (1897), she turned to her father’s words in *The Marble Faun* to describe her feelings: “‘The desolation of her [Rome’s] ruin’ does not prevent her from being ‘more intimately our home than even the spot where we were born.’”

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1 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 54. All references to *The Marble Faun* will be cited in text from here forward.
6 Traditionally, scholars have studied romance through questions of local and national culture, but more recently they have started to consider the transnational dimensions of romance. See Paul Gilmore, “John Neal, American Romance, and International Romanticism,” *American Literature* 84.3 (2012): 477-504; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002); Jesse Alemán, “The Other


Lyman Beecher, Plea for the West (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835), 39.


Amy Kaplan, Anarchy of Empire, 11, 3. Scholars have often overlooked religion in the study of U.S. imperialism. For one of the few studies to take religion and anti-Catholicism specifically into consideration, see Shelley Streeby, American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002).


Starting with Herman Melville and Henry James, critics have offered a variety of arguments regarding Hawthorne’s relationship to Puritanism, seeing it as theological, moral, intellectual, historical, psychological, philosophical, and even secular. For a detailed survey of critical scholarship surrounding Hawthorne’s relationship to Puritanism, see Michael Colacurcio’s The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne’s Early Tales (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984). Those few scholars who have studied Hawthorne within other religious contexts have considered his relationship to Transcendentalism and, a very few, to Catholicism.

13 For a survey of critical readings on the text’s interpretation of Puritanism, again see Colacurcio’s The Province of Piety. For scholarship on Catholicism in The Scarlet Letter, see Franchot’s Roads to Rome; 260-9; María deGuzmán, Spain’s Long Shadow, 92; Taylor, “Cultural Confessions.”


15 Pope or President? Startling Disclosures of Romanism Reveals by Its Own Writers, Facts for Americans (New York: R.L. Delisser, 1859), 117, 50.


17 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 120, 117.


20 John Gatta, American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture (New York: Oxford UP,
1997), 12.
22 Doyle, Freedom's Empire, 307; DeGuzmán, Spain's Long Shadow, 91.
23 DeGuzmán, Spain's Long Shadow, 97.
24 Ibid., 98.
28 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 262.
30 Kaplan, Anarchy, 6.
31 Bercovitch, Office, 3.
32 Here I refer to the mid-1850s political party founded on anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration policies.
36 Hawthorne hints at this "sin" throughout the novel as one of political assassination. Levine reads it as a commentary on the revolutions of 1848 and sees it as a reference to the murder of the pope's prime minister Pellegrino Rossi, an assassination that precipitated the Rome's republican revolution. See Levine, Antebellum Rome, 26.
37 This equally sympathetic and corrupt Beatrice is a common portrait popularized by Shelley's The Cenci (1819), which celebrates Beatrice's rebellion, but also frames her story as a cautionary tale. Reasons for the pope's lack of sympathy have been attributed to his fear of women's violence and increases in crime among the wealthy as well as papal greed. See Rowe, "Hawthorne and Transnationality," 101; Belinda Jack, Beatrice's Spell: The Enduring Legend of Beatrice Cenci, (New York: Other Press, 2005), 45.
39 Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, 162; Hawthorne, Marble Faun, 117.
40 Hamilton, "Fauns and Mohicans," 43.
41 Rowe, "Hawthorne and Transnationality," 102.
42 Franchot discusses the clarifying light of moonlight in "The Custom House" as well as the symbolic confusions of stained glass. See Roads to Rome, 186, 265.
44 Hawthorne, Marble Faun, 57.
47 Nathaniel Hawthorne, Marble Faun, 326; Lathrop, Memories of Hawthorne, 3.
CHAPTER TWO

(Re)forming the Empire: Catholic Captivity and Popular Romance

The following chapter begins where Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* ends. In the final pages of Hawthorne’s romance of Catholic Rome, his good Puritan daughter Hilda relays the circumstances of her disappearance to her American compatriot Kenyon. “I was a prisoner in the Convent of the Sacré Coeur [...] but in such kindly custody of pious maidens, and watched over by a dear old priest that — had it not been for one or two disturbing recollections, and also because I am a daughter of the Puritans — I could willingly have stayed there forever.” Alluding to what Hawthorne presents throughout *The Marble Faun* as the underlying corruption of Catholicism’s beautiful exterior, Hilda’s allusion to the “disturbing recollections” of the convent hint at what antebellum Protestants envisioned as the tyranny of the Catholic Church. Highlighting Hilda’s position as a former “prisoner,” Hawthorne suggests that the convent’s “kindly custody” and the “dear old priest” are but illusions that hide what lays beneath Catholicism’s seemingly holy exteriors – captivity.

The following chapter focuses on such narratives of captivity to uncover the origins of the entanglement between romance, empire, and anti-Catholicism. As we saw in chapter one, Catholicism served as an imaginative site for a canonical romance writer such as Hawthorne to debate the consequences of empire-building. *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun* position expansion as a process that threatens to dismantle and endanger national cohesion. But where Hawthorne’s romances take distant pasts and foreign terrains as the setting of their cautionary tales of Catholic conversion, the texts examined in this chapter are concerned with the riots and reform movements of a popular American present. Published during an era of increased Catholic
immigration, religious division, and popular activism, they frame fears of Catholic captivity as reasons for reforming and expanding the U.S. nation. While scholars have long acknowledged the relationship between the captivity narratives and romance writing, they tend to assume that the fictionalization of the captivity narrative paralleled the genre’s secularization.² Yet, as this chapter shows, religion continued to shape depictions of captivity even after its diffusion into a variety of fictional forms. Tracing a genealogy from Lyman Beecher’s A Plea for the West (1835) and Maria Monk’s Awful Disclosures (1836) through the popular romances of Ned Buntline’s The Convict: Or, The Conspirator’s Victim: A Novel Written in Prison (1851) and George Lippard’s New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million (1853), this chapter calls attention to the non-fiction and explicitly nativist roots of American romance writing. More specifically, it shows how popular romance writers like Lippard and Buntline adopt tropes of Catholic captivity popularized by nativist propagandists like Beecher and Monk. By illustrating how these texts depict U.S. expansion as a form of protection from the imagined tyrannies of Catholicism, I show how narratives of Catholic captivity turned U.S. imperialism into a popular sensation.

This chapter reads “sensation” as both a sensibility and a literary genre; both an affect³ of thrills that stimulates shock waves and that once-removed cousin of romance that the draws upon gothic conventions, illicit sexuality, and graphic violence to produce this sensibility.

Traditionally located beneath the canonical American Renaissance literatures and middle-class sentimentalism,⁴ these “vapid, silly, turgid, and incoherent” stories were synonymous with the antebellum working class and “the labor problem.”⁵ Each of the sensation texts examined in this chapter circulated widely throughout the urban laboring classes of antebellum New England and reflect popular, even violent responses to Catholicism. Monk’s Awful Disclosures, for instance,
sold 300,000 copies before the Civil War and riffs off the destructive Ursuline convent riot of 1834. Similarly, George Lippard’s New York, as his first biographer notes, “met with a prompt and extensive sale” and evokes the little-known Cincinnati riot of 1853. Such mass appeal and volatile reactions demonstrate how anti-Catholicism played a central role in disseminating the ideologies and justifications behind U.S. imperialism.

At stake in this examination of popular romance and empire is a revision of the terms and timelines by which we have studied U.S. imperialism. More recently, Shelley Streeby has analyzed the relationship between anti-Catholicism, reform, and empire in mid-century sensation fiction, arguing that “questions of nativism, anti-Catholicism, and white national unity were framed by imperial and inter-American conflicts.” This analysis, however, focuses on texts surrounding the U.S.-Mexican War and tends to study nativism, even in its specifically anti-Catholic dimension, as a facet of U.S. empire’s racial and classed formations. As the first section of this chapter argues, the reforms and imperialisms of late 40s and 50s sensation novels derive from earlier nativist, specifically anti-Catholic literatures that pre-date the U.S.-Mexican War. Through analysis of Beecher’s and Monk’s narratives, the first section of this chapter shows how anxieties over Catholic captivity operated as motivation for popular reform and national expansion even in the early decades of the nineteenth-century.

The following analysis of Catholic captivity narratives across a diverse range of nonfiction and fiction forms calls for a radically new idea of romance, a more capacious conception that recognizes and locates the genre’s murky beginnings in anti-Catholic nativism. Perhaps because of their purportedly non-fictional status Plea and Awful Disclosures seem an unlikely beginning for a study of popular romance. After all, literary studies of U.S. romance have traditionally been dominated by the novel. However, attention to how Beecher and Monk
stage Catholic captivity as a form of Protestant romance shows us that when we focus our studies solely on the novel, we sanitize romance from U.S. empire’s dirty tendency to veil its own history of commercial and territorial gain behind the imagined perversities and violence of Catholicism. As Christopher Looby has argued, the writers of antebellum popular romance, i.e. sensation literature, drew upon contemporary subcultures of criminality, debasement, and libertinism to produce what George Thompson in 1849 described as a “romance of the real.”

Whereas more traditional romance works such Hawthorne’s novels offer escapes into a fanciful world or a legendary past, “romances of the real” embrace and expose the dirt and grime of the “real” present to inspire the reformation and reaffirmation of normative boundaries. Linked by a shared confusion of fact and fiction, all four texts in this chapter claim to uncover the ugly Catholic truth of antebellum Anglo-America by exposing Catholicism’s corruption, conspiracy and especially captivity. This chapter, then, not only extends Streeby’s analysis of popular romance and empire, but also urges us to expand romance’s generic boundaries. My final section illustrates how Buntline’s and Lippard’s restagings of Catholic captivity plots draw upon the same logic as Beecher and Monk’s non-fiction works. Read as extensions of an earlier nativist tradition, they urge us to see that when we center our studies of empire upon mid-century, we elide the religious and literary landscapes through which U.S. nation forged its own imperial destiny and obscure the hybrid array of forms through which the romance tradition represented by canonical authors such as Hawthorne emerged. In so doing, this chapter relocates the nativist “non-fictions” of the 1830s as an origin point for romance and highlights anti-Catholicism’s pivotal role in the dissemination of U.S. empire.

Catholic Captivity and the Nativist Roots of Popular Romance
Beginning as a traveling sermon in 1834 and published in 1835, Lyman Beecher’s *Plea for the West* urges American Protestants to combat the invasion of “pauper emigrants,” foreign “Catholic powers,” and, above all, the “multiplying institutions, cathedrals of royal splendor, and colleges, and nunneries, and cheap schools” slowly pervading the Western Hemisphere.\(^{14}\) Although such sentiments circulated prior to Beecher’s notable performance, according to Ray Allen Billington, *Plea* popularized these sentiments.\(^{15}\) As one writer of the *Christian Review* confirmed, “We are glad the Plea is published […] we confidently believe, that every benevolent enterprise, by whatever denomination soever undertaken, will find the little rills flowing in to its aid, magnified as an indirect effect of this eloquent appeal.”\(^{16}\) So persuasive in its “eloquent appeal,” in fact, *Plea* not only inspired “benevolent enterprise,” but the Ursuline convent riot of 1834. Despite this popular reaction, it remains a largely neglected text within American literary studies. As Elizabeth Fenton has more recently shown, nativist texts like *Plea* developed from a longer and unrecognized narrative tradition which presented Catholicism as “the test case for emerging and expanding U.S. liberal democracy.”\(^{17}\) To be sure, nativist conspiracy tracts circulated alongside what we now consider the era’s canonical literature. Starting in the 1830s, shocking titles such as Samuel F.B. Morse’s *A Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (1834), Reverend C. Sparry’s *Papacy in the 19th Century; Or, Papery – what it is, what it aims at, and What it is Doing* (1846), and Horace Bushnell’s *Barbarism the First Danger* (1847) appeared in droves. If, as Richard Hofstadter once notably said, “anti-Catholicism has always been the pornography of the Puritan,”\(^{18}\) then antebellum Americans certainly had the opportunity to indulge themselves in forbidden thrills.

As an example of this wide-spread literary culture, *Plea’s* depiction of Catholicism illuminates the relationship between popular romance and U.S. empire-building. In this section, I
argue that nativist texts like Beecher’s establish a popular romance tradition that positions national reform and the expansion of U.S. nation as a safeguard against Catholic captivity. Perhaps its seems odd to identify Beecher’s sermon with a tradition of captivity narratives; however, as Richard Slotkin has argued, colonial captivity narratives were often presented in sermon-like form and, conversely, sermons, including those of Beecher’s Puritan forefathers, employ images of captivity to motivate action.\textsuperscript{19} As a popular genre long associated with fears of Catholic conversion on the frontier, the captivity narrative offers a fitting form for Beecher’s message of U.S. empire-building. By framing the development of Catholic schools and Catholic immigration as evidence of a globalized Catholic captivity plot, \textit{Plea} shows how the expansion of Protestant America and, specifically, Protestant education came to represent a form of heroic protectionism.

Posited as the source of nationalism and Protestantism, “[e]ducation, intellectual and religious” was, according to Beecher and many of his contemporaries, “the point on which turns our destiny, of terrestrial glory and power, or of shame and everlasting contempt” (187). However, as Irish and German Catholic immigrants deluged U.S. shores in unprecedented numbers in the 1830s and 40s,\textsuperscript{20} education crusader Horace Mann’s dream of a “nondenominational” public education system rooted in “a culture of our [my emphasis] moral affections and religious susceptibilities” seemed increasingly threatened.\textsuperscript{21} Foreign-speaking and poor, the majority of these immigrants arrived in U.S. cities desperate for work, flooding the market with cheap labor and recalibrating the social, ethnic, and religious structures of the nation’s burgeoning urban landscapes. Whereas during the 1820s the majority of Irish immigrants tended to be family groups of Protestant farm laborers, the 1830s saw a shift toward single, young Catholic immigrants. These immigrants tended to settle together in neighborhoods
where they established Catholic organizations and parishes. Their zeal for constructing parochial Catholic schools matched that of their Protestant neighbors, and became recognized as the cornerstone of American Catholicism. In the words of New York’s Bishop John Hughes, Catholics set out to “build the school-house first, and the church afterwards.”

This increase in Catholic immigrants and the proliferation of Catholic institutions inflamed Protestants and unified varying sects against Catholicism. Although initially resisted by Calvinist Protestants like Beecher, the complete disestablishment of church and state in 1833 aided this unification by reducing sectarian divisions and pitting Protestants against immigrant Catholics. In particular, Protestants saw Catholic requests for government funding and refusals to accept the Protestant bent of public education as a threat to the primacy of Protestantism within national culture, producing vitriolic media debates and violent riots throughout the 1830s and 40s. As the editor of The National Magazine noted even in 1853, Catholic requests for state funding were part of “a grand scheme, emanating from the Roman Church in this country, for the subversion of our common school system – the system which Romanists, as well as ourselves, know to be the strongest bulwark of both Protestantism and the liberties of the Republic.”

Set within this context, Beecher’s depiction of swarming Catholic immigrants, although xenophobic, is not baseless or uncharacteristic of mid-nineteenth-century Protestant writing. Plea demonstrates how Protestants configured westward expansion as a way to reform and protect the nation against the imagined tyrannies of such Catholics. Although tropes of Catholic captivity date back to colonial times, Beecher magnifies captivity to a global scale by highlighting the importance of the West for the nation’s and the world’s “religious and political destiny” (11). Like his contemporary romancers, Beecher imbues the West with all the promise of Manifest Destiny, arguing that “I have no doubt the time is at the door, when the abundance of her [the
West’s] means and enterprise will take the lead in those glorious enterprises which are to emancipate the World” (39). Despite this millenialist fervor, Beecher makes apparent that the West is also a vulnerable place – “a young empire of mind, and power, and wealth” that requires development and instruction because, after all, the “uneducated mind is educated vice” (11, 48). Personifying the region into a vulnerable child, he frames his call for the westward expansion of Protestant education as a sentimental plea for parental guidance and protection. However, this call becomes ever-more exigent when located within a plot of impending Catholic captivity and corruption. Catholicism, according to Beecher, threatens to stifle this dream of “evangelical light” and world emancipation and enslave the West and republic (12). “[I]n alliance with despotic governments it has swayed a scepter of iron, for ten centuries, over nearly one-third of the population of the globe […] and holds in darkness and bondage half the civilized world” (131).

While Plea draws upon a variety of evidence to depict the impending Catholic bondage of the U.S. and the West, his central “proof” lies in the growth of Catholic schools. “What are the motives of these Catholics in neglecting the education of their own children, and extending such cheap and even gratuitous facilities of education to protestants?” he asks (103). Explaining the “facts” behind this leading question (106), Beecher paints Catholic education as a form of captivity that corrupts and converts Protestants through Catholicism’s “perverted standard” (130). For instance, Beecher states, “Every day they [Protestant students] assist, – i.e. they unite in Catholic worship – engage in and comply with their [Catholic] forms and ceremonies – commit their catechisms, recite their prayers to the Virgin Mary” (96). Although a seemingly innocuous commentary on the quotidian tasks of Catholic school life, Beecher’s careful emphasis on “assist” signifies that there is more to this required participation than meets the eye.
Drawing upon what Jenny Franchot describes as “a crucial thematics of artifice,”\textsuperscript{25} he implies that the work of Catholic conversion and perversion underpins these rituals. As he says elsewhere in \textit{Plea}, Catholic ceremonies and rituals are “majestic and imposing,” “dazzling” by their “lights and ornaments, vestments and gorgeous drapery, fascinating by the power of music and the breathing marble and living canvas, and all the diversified contributions of art” (101, 132-3). Described as superficial forms, Catholic rituals, as Beecher suggests, are designed to captivate and compel by “dazzling” and “fascinating” viewers. By forcing Protestant pupils to “engage” with these ceremonies, Beecher suggests that these rituals act as a way to hypnotize onlookers, exposing Catholicism and Catholic education as “a system of corruption” and “debasement” that slowly “perverts” the “personal character” (131). Although he refers primarily to a type of spiritual, moral, and intellectual perversion, his emphasis on this term anticipates the forms of sexual perversion imagined in captivity narratives such as Monk’s \textit{Awful Disclosures} and later sensation romances such as Buntline’s and Lippard’s. Moreover, he posits these revelations as “extracts” or “disclosures,” suggesting that he relays secret, insider information to remind Americans that the outward promises of cheap Catholic education have been designed to “cover” a history of “enslaving and terrible” “deeds” (103-4, 134).

Beecher further emphasizes the impending dangers of Catholicism by suggesting that increased immigration stimulates the development of Catholic institutions and makes Protestants vulnerable to Catholic captivity. He frames increases in Catholic immigration as a form of physical entrapment designed to exert an “ascendant influence in the education of the young republicans of our nation” (134). While he offers his readers a series of statistical facts to provide “real” evidence about Catholic immigration, he locates these statistics around a series of
metaphors that depict Catholic immigration as a way to overwhelm and trap the Protestants of the U.S. For instance, he writes:

[...] since the irruption of the northern barbarians, the world has never witnessed such a rush of dark-minded population from one country to another, as is now leaving Europe and dashing upon our shores. It is not the northern hive, but the whole hive which is swarming out upon our cities and unoccupied territory as the effect of overstocked population [...] of crime and poverty. (69)

The sheer force of this statement arises from the extent of Beecher’s exaggeration. Not only does he locate this era of immigration within world history, his comparison to a beehive amplifies and textures his immigration statistics by framing Catholics as a unified front, benign in their individuality, but dangerous in large numbers. As he asks his readers, “But what if this emigration, self-moved and slow in the beginning, is now rolling its broad tide at the bidding of the power of Europe hostile to free institutions, and associated in holy alliance to arrest and put them down?” (50). In their “dashing” and “rushing,” these bee-like immigrants appear as a hyper-visible army. And, yet, as transporters of a foreign “hostile” power, they represent a paradoxically invisible force. This combination of contradictory images – slow-moving tide and rushing hive, overwhelming inundation and stealthy invasion – illustrates that the danger of Catholicism lies in its ability to slyly overwhelm, morphing into a shape-shifting nightmare that determinedly seeks an American setting. Moreover, Beecher’s emphasis on the “crime and poverty” of these Catholics as well as his use of animalistic metaphors paint them as subhuman, lower class bodies that threaten to pollute Protestant America. In so doing, he suggests that Catholic immigration as well as Catholic education threaten to not only enclose, but “pervert”
Protestants by enforcing a form of miscegenation, whether within the Catholic school or upon
the streets of the city.

Beecher takes this story of captivity one step further when he reframes the aims of
Catholic education within a hemispheric and even global context. By presenting education as
part of Catholicism’s effort to enslave the world, Plea globalizes the captivity narrative.
“Bounded on the north by a Catholic population, and on the south by a continent not yet
emancipated from their dominion” (109), the U.S. and the West appear as captives surrounded
by Catholic nations. Pointing to the Catholic presence in South America and Haiti, for instance,
Beecher identifies “the new enterprise of her [South America’s] Jesuit missionaries” and the
turmoil surrounding the Haitian Revolution as evidence of Catholicism’s attempt to retake the
hemisphere.26 Beecher’s reference to the Jesuits in particular links this global context to the
spread of Catholic education. Often framed as the most zealous expansionists of Catholic
schools, the Jesuits are, according to Beecher, figures that cannot be trusted “to form the minds
and young opinions” of the nation or the West (105). Their prevalence throughout other
American nations suggests that they spread Catholic institutions to conquer and capture the
Americas, all in an effort to entrap the U.S. – the destined center of civilization. “[T]he at present
successful conflicts of the Catholic priesthood to extinguish free institutions” (109), such as
those of the Protestant schools Beecher supports, only confirm this plot. Such references to the
geo-religious frames of Catholic education again impress upon his listeners and readers the
weighty stakes of his mission, aptly framing Catholic schools as prisons that threaten the U.S.’s
spiritual and political destiny. Magnified to global proportions, this depiction of impending
Catholic education frames the West as an imperial battlefield for national, hemispheric, and,
ultimately, global domination.
By linking Catholic education within the U.S. and the West to a larger global effort, Beecher posits the expansion of Protestantism and its schools as a way to reform the nation and free the U.S., the West, and the world from Catholic captivity. Framed as a narrative of protection that turns imperial, *Plea's* captivity narrative identifies the development of Protestant “schools, and colleges, and seminaries, and pastors, and churches” as the only way to ensure the West’s safety and the nation’s prosperity (13). As the safeguard of political and religious liberty, Protestant education promises to nurture the “perpetuity of republican institutions,” bind the nation and the continent into a tighter “alliance of blood, and political institutions, and common interests,” and even extend “evangelical light to the Catholic population” (23, 31, 70). Referring to Catholicism’s attempt to subvert “our institutions,” Beecher argues that “[i]f our light continues, their darkness passes away; and if our prosperity continues, their overturnings cannot be stopped till revolution has traveled round the globe, and the earth is free” (120). As Beecher suggests, the “continuation” of Protestantism’s “light” promises to free the world from “the darkness” of Catholic bondage through a process of revolution. By framing the growth of Protestantism and its schools in this way, he calls from the American jeremiad tradition and links U.S. expansion, in its quest to overcome Catholicism, to the Puritan errand, the American Revolution, and the anti-imperial revolutions occurring throughout the Western Hemisphere. In so doing, he frames the expansion of Protestantism as a way to secure the nation against the imagined captivities of a foreign Catholic empire.

This relationship between U.S. empire-building and protection poses as a way to mask the economic and territorial gains of expansion. As *Plea*’s depiction of Catholic captivity suggests, developing Protestant schools is not without its pecuniary perks. As Americans plant their institutions to protect the West from Catholic captivity, they will reap all the benefits of
such an “immortal harvest,” and this harvest is highly lucrative. “There is the territory, and there soon will be the population, the wealth, and the political power,” Beecher writes (35, 11). This territory is “most beneficent in climate, and soil, and mineral wealth, and commercial facilities” and “calls” Protestants to “cooperate immediately in this glorious work of consummating the institutions of the West” (33). As his description of the West’s resources suggests, the development of Protestant education promises to secure political and economic benefits for the U.S. Going so far as to describe the extension of Protestant schools as a form of “consummation,” Beecher suggests that protecting the West will procure immense and lasting progeny for the U.S. Through these schools, Americans will not only liberate the world and escape Catholic bondage – they will prosper and expand their own political and religious dominion.

As excavation of Plea illustrates, tropes of Catholic captivity allowed for Protestants like Beecher to mask U.S. expansion behind a romantic narrative of protection. By locating Catholic education and immigration within a global captivity plot, Beecher makes Protestantism a hero and posits its expansion as a form of emancipation. So incendiary in its message, this call for Protestant education and anti-Catholic empire-building inspired a mob of primarily Scotch Presbyterian bricklayers to burn the Ursuline convent in Charlestown following Plea’s performance at three Boston churches.30 The convent represented exactly what Beecher and other education reformers warned against – a Catholic school filled with Protestants. The majority of the convent’s pupils were Protestant girls from upper class, primarily Unitarian families, seemingly proving that Catholic education, indeed, targeted Protestant children.31 Although Christian media outlets eventually decried Beecher as a “pest”32 for his part in the riot, his narrative of Catholic captivity, paired with rumors about an allegedly escaped nun,
spawned a form of violent action that located working class Protestant men as protectors of Boston’s Protestant daughters. Described by Franchot as “arguably the most important political event in Massachusetts prior to the agitation surrounding the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law,” the Ursuline convent riot and the subsequent trial caught national attention. Newspaper articles, pamphlets, court proceedings, various narratives, and revised print versions of *Plea* rehearsed the motivations and consequences of the riot, positing Catholic violence upon American Protestants and, specifically, Protestant women as reason for action. Inspired by Beecher’s words, these events continued to engross public attention for years to come and set a precedent for public activism against Catholics that endured throughout 1840s and 50s.\(^{35}\)

Published just over a year later, Maria Monk’s 1836 *Awful Disclosures* confirms the sentiments underpinning the Ursuline convent riot and Beecher’s *Plea* by positing Monk’s “real,” first-person experience in a Canadian convent as proof of Catholic education’s malign intentions. Although rarely studied outside discussions of anti-Catholicism, *Awful Disclosures*’ purportedly autobiographical rendering of Catholic education was an international pop-culture hit, selling 20,000 copies within a few weeks.\(^{36}\) Yet, this story was by no means uncommon. Beginning in the 1830s, allegedly “factual” as well as openly fictionalized convent narratives appeared regularly. For instance, Rebecca Reed’s 1835 *Six Months in a Convent*, a tale that circulated prior to and after the Ursuline convent riot, as well as George Bourne’s 1834 *Lorette: The History of Louise, a Daughter of a Canadian Nun*, Charles Frothingham’s 1854 *The Convent’s Doom: A Tale of Charlestown in 1834*, and Josephine Bunkley’s 1855 *The Escaped Nun* also achieved popular acclaim, often directly or thematically rehashing the riot.

Like most convent narratives, *Awful Disclosures* opens with a declaration of authenticity regarding Monk’s experience in Montreal’s Hotel Dieu, one of Canada’s many convents ruled by
the Sisters of Charity. “I have given the world the truth, so far as I have gone, on subjects of which I am told they are generally ignorant.”37 Attesting to the real and truthful account of her experience, Monk attempts to convince her readers of the captivities of Catholic education. By providing an insider story about the Catholic convent, the text confirms Beecher’s vision of impending Catholic captivity and conquest, noting that the nuns were highly invested in converting the convents’ Protestant pupils and that “[c]ases in which citizens of the States were said to have been converted to the Roman Catholic faith were sometimes spoken of, and always as if they were considered highly important” (154). Framed as a global conspiracy against the U.S., Monk’s narrative reveals the captivities of the Catholic convent. She relays how she was brainwashed into Catholic conversion, imprisoned in subterranean cells, and subjected to rape, torture, and infanticide. In a desperate move to save her illegitimate child and escape her captivity, she eventually flees to the United States and falls in with a group of Protestant clerics,38 who not only promise to protect her from her Catholic captors, but also write and print her story.

Like Plea, this tale of imprisonment and daring escape calls readers to recognize the captivities of Catholicism and support the reform and expansion of Protestantism and, specifically, Protestant education; however, as suggested by its female narrator and emphasis on convent life, Awful Disclosures and the array of convent spin-offs were specifically tied to debates surrounding the development of women’s education. As Sarah Josepha Hale argued in response to the Ursuline convent riot, “The only way to prevent the increase of conventual seminaries, is to found Protestant Schools, which shall possess greater advantages than convents can offer for the education of young ladies.”39 Hale’s sentiments regarding convents, as Susan Griffin argues, “demonstrates how the story of an American girl’s education” combines
religious, national, and gendered loyalties in a “multi-leveled commitment to Protestantism” and
domesticity. Yet, such readings tend to assume that this domesticity is solely intranational
rather than caught up in the popular tensions surrounding U.S. expansion. As Amy Kaplan has
argued more recently, discourses of domesticity were “deployed to negotiate the borders of an
expanding empire and divided nation.” Rather than the “empire of the mother,” *Awful
Disclosures* offers the flip side of sentimental domesticity by imagining an empire founded on
the fallen woman and threats of corrupted domesticity. By turning the captivities of Beecher’s
*Plea* into an autobiographical story of female vulnerability and victimhood, *Awful Disclosures*
further illustrates how narratives of Catholic captivity both popularized and masked U.S. empire-
building.

Like Beecher, Monk presents Catholic education as a form of intellectual captivity that
intentionally blinds and brainwashes its students. She gains, as she says, “[a]ll the progress I ever
made” during her few months with “a Mr. Workman, a Protestant,” whereas her time in Catholic
schools produces intellectual darkness through illiteracy, superstitious rituals, and rigid
discipline. However, Monk turns this intellectual darkness into a physical reality by depicting
the Catholic convent as an actual prison. A close cousin of colonial captivity narratives like Mary
Rowlandson’s, the convent tale portrays the Protestant woman’s journey through Catholic
convent life as both a spiritual and physical journey from darkness to light. *Awful Disclosures*
continually refers to the convent’s subterranean cells and depicts scenes of torture and
incarceration, including Monk’s own. For instance, of one particular episode of physical
imprisonment, Monk writes: “The door was opened, and I was thrown in with violence, and left
alone, the door being immediately closed and bolted on the outside. The bare ground was under
me, cold and hard as if it had been beaten down even. I lay still in the position in which I had
fallen [...] I was almost in total darkness, there being nothing perceptible except a slight glimmer of light” (188). This depiction of Monk’s imprisonment employs details about the feeling of the “cold and hard” ground to emphasize the physical reality of the cell. However, her words frame this experience of physical imprisonment as an extension of the moral and intellectual darkness that Beecher attributes to Catholic schools. Juxtaposing images of darkness and light, her reference to the “slight glimmer of light” suggests that hope remains outside the convent. Transformed into an autobiographical account of physical captivity, Beecher’s allusions to the enclosures of Catholicism become sentimental pleas to liberate and protect Protestant women from the confines of the convent.

These depictions of physical imprisonment are textured by episodes of sexual enslavement that call American Protestants to protect women – at home or abroad – from the corruptions of Catholicism. From the outset, Monk depicts Catholicism as a form of sexual abuse upon the vulnerable: “I think I can still hear the shrieks of helpless females in the hands of atrocious men.”44 As the narrative continues, Monk unveils the details underlying these shrieks in near pornographic detail for her Protestant readers. What they find is a world of sex, violence, and tyranny focused on the mistreatment of women’s bodies. Monk relays how she was treated in a “brutal manner” by three priests and forced “to live in the practice of criminal intercourse with them” (62, 56). So licentious in their desires, these priests must take “‘holy retreats’” that are, as she alludes, temporary removals for the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (169). As the only pre-1860 text listed as “pornographic” in the Kinsey Institute’s collection of American erotica,45 Awful Disclosures voyeuristically magnifies the female body, locating it at the center of the exposé. This emphasis turns excessively violent as Awful Disclosures mingles sexual abuse with stories of infanticide, murder, and torture, including a particularly brutal
episode in which a fellow nun is crushed beneath a mattress by her gleefully sadistic sisters. Whether horrifying echoes of others’ experience or her own, Monk’s gruesome disclosures unveil Catholicism’s particularly insidious plot to capture and corrupt Protestant women. Through such salacious depictions, the text calls Americans to hear and heed the “shrieks” of helpless women like herself.

Monk’s eventual escape to the U.S. illustrates the links between her imprisonment in the Hotel Dieu and the growth of Catholic education in the U.S., and, in so doing, warns Americans to protect domestic space from Catholic captivity. When she makes her way to New York City, she presumes, as she says in the appendix to *Awful Disclosures*, “that I should find protection from my enemies, as I knew it was in a Protestant country” (274) Although this assumption establishes borders between American Protestants and foreign Catholics, Monk’s experience in the U.S. reminds Americans that Catholics have already invaded the nation. Receiving a “secret message” from an Irish, presumably immigrant woman, she is told that a Catholic priest by the name of Conroy awaits her. She writes, “he sent me word that [...] No matter where I went, or what hiding-place I might choose, I should be known” (224-5). Rather than send her back to Canada, Conroy offers to place her with a local branch of the Sisters of Charity, the very same group that guided her “education” in Canada. Through this rendering of Monk’s encounter with Catholics in the U.S., *Awful Disclosures*, like *Plea*, suggests that Catholics have infiltrated the nation to literally capture and imprison Protestants. In so doing, it presents the U.S. as a home/domestic space that needs protection against the captivities of Catholicism.

In this light, it is unsurprising that the pregnant Monk turns to Protestant Americans “Mr. S.” and the chaplain “Mr. T.” to escape her Catholic captors. Depicted as chivalric heroes in the reformist crusade against Catholic invasion, well-known Protestant pastors J.J. Slocum, Arthur
Tappan, George Bourne, and Theodore Dwight did, in fact, help make Monk’s narrative public, even conveniently ghost writing part of it themselves. In framing these anti-Catholic reformers as the heroes of her story, Monk locates safety in Protestantism and, simultaneously, idealizes a specifically nativist masculinity. Yet, her Canadian origins suggest that protecting innocent maidens and reforming education goes beyond simply exposing the captivities of Catholic education. Rather, the text offers U.S. imperialism as a remedy against Catholic captivity. It invites an invasion of Canada by urging Americans to verify Monk’s story and investigate the Hotel Dieu themselves. For instance, Monk writes, “Whoever shall explore the Hotel Dieu Nunnery, at Montreal, will find unquestionable evidence that the descriptions of the interior of that edifice, given in this book, were furnished by one familiar with them” (12). Indicative of tensions surrounding women’s speech and entrance into the public sphere, these continual affirmations of authenticity and testaments to Monk’s “unquestionable” evidence locate the verification of her autobiography as a responsibility of the American public. In so doing, Awful Disclosures provokes Protestant readers to play out that which the text enacts – an exploration and unveiling of the Catholic convent.

Even more indicative of the text’s underlying romantic imperialism, Monk’s call for protection locates the emancipation of the Hotel Dieu’s captives as a responsibility of Protestant America. From the beginning of her narrative she prompts readers to finish the story and free others from the Hotel Dieu, writing, “There are witnesses I should greatly rejoice to see at liberty; or rather were. Are they living now?” (13). Just as Protestants “Mr. S” and “Mr. T” become the protectors of Monk, such questions locate Protestant America as the heroic protector and liberator of Canada’s women. By placing the responsibility of the Hotel Dieu’s captives with U.S. Protestants, Awful Disclosures simultaneously extends U.S. dominion into Canada and
reaffirms national borders against Catholicism. It suggests that the U.S. is accountable for protecting not only Protestant women within the U.S., but also women throughout the hemisphere. In so doing, the text confirms what Kaplan has described as U.S. empire’s impulse to simultaneously contract and expand, but goes further by locating religion and, more specifically, fears of Catholic captivity as a driving force behind these impulses.

Responding to Monk’s cry for protection and liberation, *Awful Disclosures* did, in fact, provoke a counter invasion of the Hotel Dieu. Protestant reactions to its blending of romance and reality fueled the embers of popular activism and channeled such volatile energies outward. In an attempt to discern the “truth” of Monk’s narrative and uncover the captivities of Catholicism for themselves, both Protestant and Catholic advocates called for an investigation of the Hotel Dieu. After several refusals from the convent, two Protestant clergymen were allowed to explore its interior, returning to report Monk’s fraudulence. Declaiming these clergymen as Jesuits in disguise, Protestants again rallied around Monk and called for further inspection. Eventually, Protestant Colonel William L. Stone, editor of the New York *Commercial Advertiser*, took a turn. Confessing that he entered the convent with “strong” “prejudices against the Catholic faith,” Stone again decried Monk’s “wretched inventions” only to be castigated by the Protestant press in *Evidence Demonstrating the Falsehoods of William L. Stone* and a lengthy poem entitled *The Vision of Rubeta, an Epic Story of the Island of Manhattan*. Despite these various unveilings of Monk herself, nativists throughout the U.S. continued to support her statements and called for additional search committees headed by even more adamant Protestant crusaders. So influential, *Awful Disclosures* spawned a series of spin-offs, reprisals, and nun’s tales that continued to reiterate the dangers of Catholic captivity and the need for Protestant heroes. The enthusiasm with which American readers consumed these texts importantly
illustrates the popular uptake of romantic expansionist narratives and, as the following section will show, illuminates how the romance fictions of mid-century originated from earlier fantasies of Catholic captivity and U.S. expansion. In the following decades, writers of pulp fiction transformed this nativist plotline into a stock convention of U.S. pop literature and, thus, demonstrate how popular romance played a central role in disseminating U.S. imperialism.

Protestant Sensations and Popular Imperialism

Only a decade after the publication of Beecher and Monk’s works, writers of city-sensation novels began to relocate this imperial romance narrative from the nation’s western and northern frontiers to the city by infusing their tales of urban corruption with the older sensations of Catholic captivity and conspiracy. Like *Plea* and *Awful Disclosures*, the writers of mid-century sensation fiction were obsessed with unmasking the Catholic villains who threatened to capture Protestant America. Continuing increases in Catholic immigration from Ireland, the U.S.-Mexican War, and national fractures surrounding debates over slavery further inflamed Protestants and motivated additional conspiracy theories that posited Catholicism as the source of the nation’s problems and a reason for expansion. Even a brief look at the texts of popular writers ranging from the little known A.J. H. Duganne to more canonical authors like Edgar Allan Poe demonstrates what Susan Griffin describes as anti-Catholicism’s “peculiar” and “representative” place within both British and American sensation fiction.52 Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” for instance, draws upon a narrative of captivity and torture similar to Monk’s *Awful Disclosures*. Set during the Spanish Inquisition, this short story tells of another “subterranean world of darkness” where “black-robed judges” preside over the gruesome torture
of non-Catholics. On the brink of death, the captive narrator is, like Monk, saved by religious emancipation, this time Napoleon’s. This conflation between Catholicism, physical enslavement, and spiritual captivity made its way into a broad spectrum of novels, texturing Herman Melville’s rendering of slave uprising in *Benito Cereno* (1855), Cassy’s enslavement in Catholic Louisiana in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), and even years later, the convent’s separation of American and French lovers in Henry James’s *The American* (1877).

While scholars have certainly recognized the tropes of captivity and conspiracy linking fictions like “The Pit and the Pendulum” to earlier nativist texts, their studies neglect how these conventions disseminated a popular thematic of Protestant empire-building. As I suggest, popular U.S. writers adopted and adapted the Catholic captivity narrative into their more secular fictions of city life, and, in so doing, played a key role in spreading Protestant imperialism.

In his 1856 *The Convict*, Ned Buntline, a.k.a. E.Z.C. Judson, offers an example of this dissemination. *The Convict* has received little critical attention and Buntline has more often than not been left to the literary wayside; yet, he produced a variety of crime novels and international romances that were incredibly popular throughout the nineteenth-century. A spin-off of the city-mystery genre, *The Convict* follows the life of Ernest Cramer – reformer, writer, and Protestant hero. Often disguised as a foreigner or in some version of blackface, Cramer infiltrates the darkest dens of New York City to observe and later expose the city’s vices in the name of temperance, education, and urban reform. During his subterranean adventures, he discovers a Catholic plot to make “this continent [...] one vast empire of Popery,” and identifies it as the reason behind the city’s social problems and the 1849 Astor Place Riot (22). Although the riot was largely a product of class tensions, *The Convict* presents this violent display as a product of Catholic corruption for which Cramer, a stand-in for Buntline himself, is unfairly imprisoned. To
protect the nation from such eruptions of popular corruption and violence, Buntline calls
Americans to reform and emancipate the city, the nation, and the hemisphere from Catholicism.

This pairing of reform and Catholic captivity as well as the text’s underlying
autobiographical context echoes the blurring of fact and fiction illustrated by Beecher’s and
Monk’s fantasies of Protestant empire-building. Rather than see Buntline’s depiction of
Catholicism as only a symptom of mid-century tensions surrounding Mexico or even Cuba, I
contend that The Convict is an extension of an earlier, generically diverse, anti-Catholic literary
tradition and that its repurposing of this tradition illustrates religion’s pivotal role in campaigns
for U.S. westward expansion. Although written more than twenty years after Beecher’s and
Monk’s allegedly non-fiction works, The Convict’s captivity plot employs a similar logic: it
exposes and distorts fears of captivity to popularize a reform agenda that predictably entails
national expansion. Like Beecher and Monk’s ghostwriters, Buntline was an adamant activist in
temperance, land, and urban reform movements, and continually attempted to combine his
nativist and reform politics in his writing. In its rehearsal of Catholic captivity, The Convict
highlights the anti-Catholic roots of his romance and posits empire-building as a way to reform
and protect the nation from Catholic tyranny.

Like Plea and Awful Disclosures, The Convict cites education as a form of Catholic
captivity; however, the majority of this city-mystery novel centers on how Catholicism imprisons
New Yorkers by indulging their vices, specifically gambling and alcohol. Through Cramer’s
excursions into the seedy underbelly of the city, Buntline illustrates how Catholics “gain the
upper hand in this country […] by corrupting our citizens” through the “the gambling hells and
dens of robbery and putridity in our cities.” “You will find yourself surrounded by respectable
people: by judges, lawyers and men who rank high as gentlemen and statesmen!” (22, 12, 47).
Orchestrated by the Jesuit “his Eminence” and his gang of corrupted followers, these gambling “hells” act as entrapments through which Catholics capture the city’s leading Protestant citizens. As with Beecher, this vision of entrapment suggests spiritual and intellectual captivity. However, the threat of racial miscegenation also informs this sense of Catholic corruption. Located in the Five points, these gambling hells are populated by “paupers imported from foreign climes” (11), presenting immigrant neighborhoods as spaces of both religious and ethnic mixing. In fact, when Cramer descends into these hells, he even goes so far as to paint his face brown so as to look the part of a foreigner. Such scenes portray Catholicism as a form of spiritual captivity and ethnic mixing, and, in so doing, locate it as a prime site in which to address the nation’s problems.

This narrative of captivity adopts imperial dimensions through Buntline’s reinvention of the nun’s tale. When the Protestant Irene is imprisoned by Catholics, Buntline makes clear that her capture and conquest are central to the aims of an expanding Catholic Church. Although she is at first saved and transported back to her mother, his Eminence’s followers eventually infiltrate her home, poison her mother, and take her captive yet again. Like the convent novices of Awful Disclosures, Irene is subjected to the sexual abuses of Catholic priests, which Buntline describes through a series of hauntingly gruesome details. The “red spots of blood” that mark the “pearl-white skin” of her shoulders not-so-euphemistically suggest the violent loss of her virginity. As his Eminence prepares to again “kiss that beautiful bosom,” she awakens from a drugged sleep and, in despair, kills herself while “red blood sprang, as if from a fountain, up into his [Eminence’s] face” (354). The gore with which Buntline relays Irene’s seduction and death are followed by a cold statement from his Eminence: “It is well, her fortune is now ours – a false will and document stating that she has retired to a European convent for life, will settle all legally” (354). In this version of convent captivity, Buntline similarly posits Catholicism as a
form of sexual enslavement; however, in a new twist, he also configures Irene’s captivity as a form of territorial and commercial conquest for an invading Catholic empire. As he describes early in the text in a well-timed evocation of the Ursuline convent riot, Irene is one of the many “young ladies” brought “into the Convent of St. Ursula, whose families have immense influence in the land” (195). Representative of both commercial and landed gain, Irene’s inheritance is the central reason behind her capture and imprisonment. By framing the conquest of her body as a conquest of territory, Buntline reproduces tropes of Catholic sexual and religious captivity and presents them as sympathetic pleas for Protestant protection.

Such sensationalized scenes of Catholic captivity serve to justify the text’s nativist reformer Ernest Cramer and posit U.S. empire-building as a form of heroic protection for Protestant America. Although Cramer begins as an emasculated sickling slaving over his pen for the good of the people, he turns into a romantic, albeit, tragic hero as the story continues. It is he who saves Irene from her original captors, and it is to him that despairing Protestants turn when one of their loved ones has been corrupted by Catholic vice. “To the rescue! To the rescue!” Buntline writes as Cramer swoops in and rescues Irene from her original Catholic captor (176). Yet, Cramer’s quest for anti-Catholic reform is like Beecher’s and Monk’s – imperialist in its narrative of rescue and protection. For instance, during one of his speeches to the Order of Americans, a leading nativist organization in the nineteenth century, Cramer begins by praising the U.S.’s exceptional past and warning his fellow Americans against the “dark, threatening and clouded” “night which enveloped Rome and Greece.” This dark picture of Catholic invasion offers an opportunity to take “an imaginative glance at the prospective career of America” and envision its expansion (42). Buntline writes:
[...] our Ship of State, with a true and trusty crew and experienced helmsman, sails on, she will meet and safely breasts the storm which lowers in the horizon, gaining more and more power and influence, each day, until she will be able to dictate terms of friendship to every land under the sun, to defy all monarchs, and extend a helping hand to any and all people who seek freedom on their own soil. To say to a Hungary, Strike, brother, strike boldly, we will back you; to tell a struggling Italy, Fight on, and faint not, America to the rescue, you shall be free! To say to Canada on the North and Cuba on the South, Come, children, to the arms of a mother ready and willing to adopt ye and treat ye as her own! (42)

In his call for reform and protection, Cramer frames the U.S. as a global liberator from the hands of despotic Catholicism. “America, to the rescue”! Although Protestantism is typically fashioned as the safeguard of religious and civil liberty within anti-Catholic discourse, Buntline transforms this rescue narrative into a reason for empire-building. Just as the U.S. will “defy all monarchs” and give “a helping hand” to beleaguered Catholic nations, it will “extend” itself to anyone fighting Catholicism. Yet, this “extension” has an underlying meaning. Buntline’s paternalistic rhetoric masks the slippery slope between liberator/reformer and imperialist, using a narrative of hemispheric family-building to assert control over the “younger” nations of the hemisphere. Framed as children to a Protestant mother, he posits Catholic Canada and Cuba as international adoptees that the U.S. generously offers to take into the American fold. Importantly, these spaces are not American, but rather potential satellites that the U.S. will “treat [...] as her own,” but yet are not her own. Through this family metaphor, Buntline posits the threat of Catholic captivity as a justifiable reason for empire and frames nativist reform as a method for extending U.S. power.
This vision of reform and empire-building not only propagates U.S. exceptionalism, but also seeks to generate action. At the end of his speech, Cramer not-so-subtly urges his fellow Americans to “do your part” in this imperial reform mission. “Each of you possesses a certain degree of power and influence – where would our floods and swelling rivers come from, were not each drop of dew and rain collected and joined together – use that influence wisely and unitedly, and America will yet be Queen of the earth” (44). Identifying the U.S.’s queenly ascension as the responsibility of powerful Protestants, Buntline calls his readers to unite against Catholicism and, importantly, to support empire! Oddly reminiscent of Beecher’s description of Catholic immigration, his use of “flooding” and “swelling” rivers emphasizes excess, infusing a similar sense of exigency into his rhetoric. This urgency is made all the more poignant through The Convict’s cliffhanger ending in which Cramer himself is unfairly convicted and imprisoned by a Catholic-infested jury for instigating the Astor Place Riot of 1849. In these final scenes, Buntline makes his hero into the victim of Catholic captivity. Yet, in a move of marketing prowess, he promises readers that in the text’s sequel, “The Convict’s Return; or Innocence Vindicated,” they will find that “friends and foes shall yet learn that ‘Truth crushed to earth, will rise again’” (257). As with any good romance, this cliffhanger suggests that our hero will triumph in the end, but only if we buy Buntline’s sequel and read on. In so doing, it frames readers and literary consumers as not only liberators, but empire-builders. By buying “The Convict’s Return,” they too can “do their part” in the course of national reform and expansion. Thus, the text itself not only imagines the glorious reaches of U.S. dominion and its emancipatory mission, it also compels its popular audience to participate.

If The Convict illustrates the dissemination of the Catholic captivity narrative into popular romance, then George Lippard’s New York demonstrates how the enclosures of
Catholicism offered a form of imperial imagining even for Americans who scorned the nativist movement. An obvious selection for a study of antebellum sensation fiction, Lippard’s work has been studied as an example of immoral reform, American porno-gothic literature, and “working class ideologies of republicanism and socialism.”60 Perhaps because Lippard was not an outspoken nativist, it has rarely been taken up in studies of anti-Catholicism. In fact, he often championed the Catholic immigrants derided by nativist writers. In his most famous work The Quaker City (1844), for instance, Philadelphia’s nativist clergymen are the criminals. Published the same year as the Philadelphia Bible riots,61 the text condemns the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment surrounding debates over national education. Lippard sets the text in the infamous Monk Hall, a place rumored to have been used as “a Nunnery, as a Monastery, or as a resort for the Sisters of Charity.”62 In this once sacred Catholic place, villains gamble, drink, and assault the city’s vulnerable virgins. This time, however, the villains or “monks,” as the patrons call themselves, are not Catholics, but rather the “pious of the Quaker city” (135). A near caricature of Beecher, the Reverend F.A.T. Pyn of the Universal Patent Gospel Missionary Society, for example, rails against the city’s Catholics: “Down with the Pope – up with fire and brimstone; up with toleration; up with the Bible!” (257). Despite his alleged piety in the name of “toleration,” however, Pyn frequents Monk Hall and even tries to rape his own stepdaughter within its walls. Through him, Lippard makes apparent that Philadelphia’s nativists are as corrupted as the Catholics they deride. Always a champion of the nation’s poor, he unveils Pyn, his society, and the Protestant clergy at large to expose what Fenton has shown to be the paradox of antebellum Protestantism and U.S. nativism: its willingness to accommodate difference as long as it is not Catholic.63
For this reason, Lippard’s sensational depiction of Catholicism in his later 1853 *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* is a fitting example of the close ties between Protestant empire-building and popular romance. Despite his virulent critique of nativism in *Quaker City* and his championing of immigrant laborers throughout his works, Lippard’s sprawling *New York* centers upon an international Catholic conspiracy to capture New York City and the Western Hemisphere. When the character Gulian Van Huyden purportedly kills himself on Christmas Eve of 1823, his immense estate becomes vulnerable to the captivities of an imperial Catholic Church as well as the remaining Van Huyden descendants, who, with the exception of mechanic-reformer Arthur Dermoyne, are a motley crew of cheaters, philanderers, and murderers. Vying alongside these seven, a conniving Catholic prelate and a Jesuit papal legate seek to advance the Catholic Church’s imperial agenda by gaining the estate. Like Beecher, Monk, and Buntline’s works, Lippard posits this Catholic interest in American lands and institutions as another global captivity plot. The acquisition of the Van Huyden estate is simply one more step in the Catholic Church’s plan for “temporal dominion of the whole human race […] for the temporal subjection of the world.”

Lippard’s seemingly contradictory treatment of Catholicism in *Quaker City* and *New York* is likely an example of the radical Protestantism found throughout his popular romances. In his romances of the U.S.-Mexican War, for example, Lippard often posits empire-building as a solution to the religious, ethnic, and labor tensions of eastern cities. Yet, as the first section of this chapter demonstrated, fictions of Protestant empire-building pre-date the U.S.-Mexican War. Although set in New York City, *New York*’s fictional depiction of a papal emissary invested in Western lands as well as its initial publication in Cincinnati evokes both a history of European revolutions of 1848 and the Cincinnati Riot of 1853, a violent response to papal emissary Nuncio
Gastano Bedini’s visit to the great western city. Associated with the papal suppressions of 1849, Bedini became a target of the nativist party during this era, and his visit to Cincinnati to discuss church property inflamed both post-1848 German immigrants and local Protestants. New York’s evocation of such mob violence reaffirms the symbiotic relationship between expansionism and anti-Catholicism. As I argue, Lippard’s treatment of Catholicism in New York is a reiteration of an emergent Protestant imperial narrative. His deployment of Catholic captivity tropes illustrates how Catholicism became a popular framework through which even anti-nativist reformers propagated empire.

Like the texts previously examined in this chapter, New York depicts Catholicism as an international church plotting to conquer and capture New York City, the U.S., and the Western Hemisphere. Lippard too exposes this plot through insider information, featuring intimate conversations between the Jesuit papal legate Gasper Manuel and New York City’s leading Catholic cleric simply named “the Prelate.” Laying his hand upon a map of the Americas, the Prelate emphatically tells Manuel: “The north, that is the Republic of the United States, will finally absorb and rule over all the nations of the Continent […] It is our true policy, then, to absorb and rule over the Republic of the North” (68). Like the conniving Catholics of Beecher’s, Monk’s, and Buntline’s works, the Prelate aims to capture and conquer the U.S. and the Americas. However, unlike his nativist contemporaries, Lippard makes a point to distinguish between Catholic immigrants and Catholic clergy. As he writes, prelates strategically “plant an eternal barrier between these men [immigrants], and those who are American citizens by birth,” preventing the immigrants from “mingling with the American People, from learning the traditions of American history, which give the dogma of Democracy” (68). Additionally, Lippard argues that the hierarchy purposefully provokes the ire of nativists to further its own imperial
ambitions, even going so far as to suggest that the Catholic Church strategically designed the more recent Philadelphia Bible riots of 1844 to “invest” Catholicism with “the light of martyrdom” and inspire sympathy from “tens of thousands of Protestants” (68). As this reconstruction of the Catholic conspiracy plot suggests, the Catholic Church blinds its own followers and deliberately inflames nativist-immigrant tensions to gradually imprison American Protestants. By distinguishing between Catholic immigrants and the Catholic Church, Lippard, like the era’s nativist writers, continues to depict Catholicism as the source of contemporary social ills, but exonerates the immigrant working class from his critique.

This notable distinction between New York City’s immigrants and the Catholic Church lays the groundwork for Lippard’s revision of the Catholic captivity narrative and his celebration of U.S. imperialism. Following from his socialist politics, Lippard paints capitalism as another form of Catholic captivity. As he suggests, the Catholic Church is a capitalist hierarchy—a version of the upper million that suppresses the laboring masses in its quest to conquer the world. For instance, when the conniving Prelate plans to acquire the Van Huyden estate’s California lands, Lippard suggests that this acquisition is part of the capitalistic imperialism through which Catholicism sets out to conquer the continent. He writes, these lands are “destined to exercise an influence upon the course of civilization” because they include enough “gold sufficient to affect the destiny of one-half the globe” (71-2). California has “gold, that employed in a good cause, would bless and elevate millions of oppressed, or devoted to purposes of evil, might curse the dearest rights of half the human race.” As Lippard suggests, California’s wealth has the power to further enslave the masses or liberate them from the dregs of poverty and tyranny. Above all, Manuel argues, this “gold is only valuable because it represents labor. All its value springs from that cause” (72). As a man who “despised the poor from whom he sprung” (69), the Prelate, with
his plan for Catholic domination, falls into the camp of capitalist oppressor rather than liberator. His plan to dominate the world and rise to the top portrays Catholicism as a fantastic force that threatens to deepen class divisions and exploit the power of labor in its tyrannical crusade for world dominion. In so doing, Lippard suggests that capitalism is another form of Catholic captivity designed to entrap the nation by harnessing its labor force.

The extent of Catholicism’s and capitalism’s joint conspiracies against the laboring classes becomes most apparent through the imprisonment and death of the character Alice. When the libertine clergyman Herman Barnhurst seduces and impregnates this “pure,” “innocent” girl (107), Lippard stages her imprisonment, forced abortion, and death as a Catholicized captivity made possible by captialism. At the home of the city’s most infamous abortionist witch-doctor, Madam Resimer, Alice meets her untimely demise in “[a] small apartment, with windows shut and sealed like the doors of a sepulcher […] Above the bed, from the darkly paper walls, smiles a picture of the Virgin Mary” (127). While the apartment’s darkness certainly recalls the subterranean settings of the gothic convent, the picture of the Virgin Mary more grossly invokes the alliance between Catholicism, female imprisonment, and corruption. This Catholic symbol of holy motherhood located in a place of death enhances the shocking combination of the sacred and profane already suggested by Barnhursts’s immoral behavior. One of New York City’s beloved clergyman and an inheritor of the Van Huyden estate, he is a reinvention of the licentious priest figure, except that Lippard reconstructs his abusive behavior and Alice’s resulting abortion and death as a commentary on the captivities of Catholicized capitalism. As he tells readers, Barnhurst’s behavior and Alice’s death are made possible by “[a] bad social state, based upon enormous wealth and enormous poverty, a social state that gives to the few the very extravagancies of luxury, and deprives the countless many of the barest rights […] finds its
natural result in the existence of this Madam Resimer" (127). Failed by the state, Alice performs as a tragic symbol of economic disparity while Barnhurst and Madam Resimer jointly signify the Catholicized captivities of capitalism. Through this reproduction of the convent-captivity narrative, Lippard criticizes contemporary social injustices and locates Catholicism as a site for national reform.

Falling into line with his nativist contemporaries, Lippard reframes these anti-Catholic reforms as an imperial mission to save the Van Huyden lands and the working classes from Catholicism's and capitalism's overlapping captivities. The text highlights U.S. empire as a protector and savior through the unmasking of the papal legate Gasper Emanuel, who reveals himself to be Gulian Van Huyden during the final moment of the estate's liquidation. At first, Van Huyden explains his Catholicism, asserting the existence of a "higher mightier Rome" that will act as "an instrument of Human Progress" (277). In the spirit of reform, he takes his American principles of democracy and progress back to Italy to liberate Catholics from "the absolutist party" in the Vatican (283). Yet, this brief moment of hope in the Catholic Church does not last long, for as Van Huyden finds, the "crowned and mitred miscreants" of Rome have "crushed the last spark of liberty in the Old World" and turned their eyes to the New World (283). Perhaps a symptom of Lippard's anger over the role of Catholic Rome in the European revolutions of 1848, this twist on the anti-Catholic plot is notable in that it initially proposes conversion to Americanism as a way to reform the Catholic Church. Van Huyden, after all, hopes to make the Pope "the Washington of Italy" (283). This vision suggests that Protestant empire-building goes beyond simply acquiring lands in the Western Hemisphere, but also moves toward extending U.S. influence in the Old World. Despite this moment of evangelization, Lippard quickly acquiesces to the paradoxical old plotline: Rome is doomed and its next target is
the New World. “Away to the New World then; if the battle must come, let us, let the friends of humanity, strike the first blow!” (283). Lippard’s reiteration of this nativist logic suggests that his dreams of converting Europe to the democratic principles of Protestant America quickly take second place to his hopes for U.S. imperial expansion. In other words, he cannot save or convert Rome, but he can save America!

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this mission to save the Americas means westward expansion. American soldiers stand ready to answer Van Huyden’s call and fight the Catholic or capitalist foe in the New World. “Away from the eternal city, - to the New World, - to the boundless horizon and ocean-like expanse of the prairies” (283). Under this romantic expansionism, three hundred mechanics march west, led by working man and reformer Arthur Dermoyne, a socialist Natty Bumpo “in the prime of young manhood, dressed in the garb of a hunter, with a rifle on his shoulder” (284). As a former admirer of Alice, he is “the face of her avenger” and the self-proclaimed enemy of her seducer (129). In his mission to end the class inequalities that victimized Alice, he stands as an embodiment of Lippard’s labor politics and a mouthpiece for his socialist philosophy. He proudly acclaims, I “gain my bread by the work of my hands, and by the hardest of all kinds of work.” A modern-day Moses, he leads a new American exodus: “O! Thou of Nazareth, go with the People in this their exodus [...] their hard way to the Promised Land!” (284). Reconfiguring the Protestant errand, Manifest Destiny, and the Jewish exodus into his vision of a utopian community founded on socialist reforms, Lippard employs Dermoyne to paradoxically envision an empire rooted in the idea of a “free home” and imagine a socialist form of Protestantism founded on a belief in Christ as “the workman’s God” (129). His final depiction suggests that the battle for global domination against Catholicism and capitalism will not be won in the “savage civilization of the Atlantic cities,” but in the West – in the idealized
promise of empire-building. Conflating westward expansion with liberation from Catholicism, he writes, “Thus far toward freedom!” (284). In a vision that returns us to Beecher’s Plea, Lippard illustrates how U.S. empire-building came to mean freedom and protection from all the captivities of Catholicism, be they the school, the convent, gambling, or capitalism.

It becomes clear in this final vision of westward expansion that Lippard’s imperialism is not all that different from his nativist predecessors and contemporaries. Although he disdained such sentiments, New York similarly exposes the “truth” about Catholicism and posits its fearsome captivities as reasons for Protestant expansion. As the preceding pages have shown, such a text, like Plea, Awful Disclosures, and The Convict, demonstrates how depictions of Catholicism mingled fact and fiction to posit U.S. imperialism as a romantic Protestant hero in a battle for global emancipation from Catholicism. As Beecher and Monk wrote their concerns of Catholic captivity on the page, they created an imaginative framework that led to the next generation of romance writers. Read alongside The Convict and New York, their works show that the rise of U.S. romance is one that has its origins in both political concerns about Catholicism and a hybrid array of non-fiction forms. But, when we read sensational romances like Buntline’s and Lippard’s outside the context of these earlier nativist texts, we obscure the diverse literary landscape through which romance developed and conceptions of empire grew. In this sense, this chapter suggests that we read romance through what Susan Gilman and Kirsten Silva Gruesz have described as a “text-network,” a grouping that allows for an analysis of “worlding” or a “multi-sited, dynamic process of analysis”67 that takes into account the many directions of literary formation. In so doing, we can come to better understand the anti-Catholic roots and hybrid generic origins through which U.S. imperialism and romance came to constitute each other.

2 Critics Richard Slotkin and Roy Harvey Pearce discuss how the captivity narrative became an increasingly secular genre throughout the nineteenth-century. In his seminal 1947 essay “The Significations of the Captivity Narrative,” Pearce argues that by mid-eighteenth-century, “religious concerns came to be incidental at most” (6). He shows how the captivity narrative was slowly sensationalized during the late eighteenth-century and became a blurring of fact and fiction. This fictionalization, as he suggests, paralleled its secularization. Scholars like Christopher Castiglia trace the captivity tradition from its origins as a religious document to sentimental pulp fiction. While Castiglia continues to cite the role of religion in the sentimental captivity tradition, he assumes that these romances are no longer religious documents, but romances. Such readings tend to elide the religious logics linking captivity and Anglo-American imperialism. See Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 2; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middleton CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); and Pearce, “The Significances of the Captivity Narrative *American Literature* 19.1 (1947): 1-20.


4 David Reynolds outlines these three tiers; however, as he shows throughout *Beneath the American Renaissance*, these genres greatly overlapped. See Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: the Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).


7 More information about these riots will be explained in the body of the chapter.


10 While scholars have recognized the pervasive anti-Catholic discourse within the antebellum reform culture, they tend to focus on questions of class and denominational difference. For more information on antebellum reform culture, see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon P, 1957); Lois Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of Interpretation,” *Journal of American History* 60.1 (1973): 23-41; Bruce Dorsey *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002).


12 Most notably, Richard Chase and Leslie Fiedler define romance in relation to the novel. See Chase’s *The American Novel and its Tradition* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1957); and Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Dalkey Archive P, 1997). Recent discussions, such as Reynolds’ *Beneath the American Renaissance* and Teresa Goddu’s *Gothic America* reconsider the literary landscapes through which romance developed and argue for a broader discussion of what romance entails. See Reynolds’ *Beneath the American Renaissance* and Goddu’s, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

13 Looby’s argument about sensation fiction is similar to Robert Levine’s argument on conspiracy and romance as well as Reynolds discussion of “immoral reform” literature. Each of these scholars discusses the ways in which romance often produces a countersubversive logic. See Looby’s “George Thompson’s ‘Romance of the Real’: Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction,” *American Literature* 65.4 (1993): 651-672; Robert S. Levine’s *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brocken Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); and David Reynolds’ *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 55.

Plea made a significant impression, garnering support from various Protestant sects. It caught the attention of major religious print outlets, such as The Christian Review, Observer, Christian Spectator, and The American Protestant Vindicator. See Billington, The Protestant Crusade, n48, pg. 138 for more information about Plea’s uptake.


Beginning in the 1820s, Irish and German immigrants began to trickle into the U.S., totaling a mere 260,000. However, during the late 1840s, Ireland’s Great Famine sent over one million people to the U.S. ushering in a watershed moment in U.S. immigration history. See Jay P. Dolan, The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 128-9.


Billington’s The Protestant Crusade; James W. Fraser’s Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1999); Tracy Fessenden’s Culture and Redemption; and Lisa Oliverio’s unpublished dissertation chapter “The Hope of the Church and the Republic”: Mary Anne Sadlier and the Cultivation of Catholic Sentimentality,” in “Lines of Spiritual Motion: Realizing American Catholic Fiction, 1845-1965” (PhD, diss. University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 136, 263. Prior to the Civil War, the number of schools in U.S. cities grew quickly in response to the immigrant population. In New York, for instance, 75 percent of the parishes had schools by 1865. For more information on the growth of Catholic schools in major U.S. cities, see Dolan’s chapter “Schools.”

Fraser and Fessenden cite disestablishment, the bible wars, and Catholic schools’ requests for government funding as particular moments that produced a unity between Protestantism and the U.S.’s “secular” public education. Disestablishment began in the 1830s, inspiring many of Beecher’s comments regarding Protestant unity. During the debates surrounding Connecticut’s disestablishment, Beecher was a leader in the resistance movement against the separation of the state and its Congregationalist religious establishment. However, only two years later, he described it as one of the “best things” to happen to the state, recognizing how the separation minimized animosity between sects. For more on disestablishment, see Steven K. Green, The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 128-131; and Fessenden, Culture and Redemption, 64.

“Popery and Our Common Schools,” The National Magazine (July-December, 1853), 556. Such responses pervaded national journals and magazines as well as popular print outlets like penny papers and pamphlets, making education into a battlefield against Catholic immigrants and schools.

Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome, 162.

Beecher, Plea, 108-9. Because Beecher was an abolitionist, this threat more likely pertains to the island’s Catholic missions rather than its history of slave revolt. Beecher suggests that the resurgence of the Catholic priesthood is part of European nations’ attempt to reassert imperial power over Haiti.


Fenton, Religious Liberties, 6.

As Fenton notes, the Catholic stands as a site of what Sacvan Bercovitch describes in The American Jeremiad as the “continuing revolution,” a rhetorical mode by which “the American Revolution ceases to be a particular historical event and becomes a symbol of national continuity and consensus.” See Fenton, Religious Liberties, 5.


At the time of the riot, only one-eighth of the girls at the Ursuline Academy in Boston were Catholic. The primarily Unitarian population of the convent reflected the divide that ensued between Congregationalists like Beecher and Unitarians during the antebellum period. See Franchot, Roads to Rome, 138.

From an 1834 volume of The Christian Examiner quoted in Schultz’s Fire & Roses, 166.
33 The rioters were tried and acquitted.
38 Aware of the sensationalism linking convents to female education, Hale even published her own convent narrative "The Catholic Convert" in 1830. For this quote, see Sarah Josepha Hale, "How to Prevent the Increase of Convents," *American Ladies Magazine* 7 (1834): 520.
41 Monk, *Awful Disclosures*, 20. Monk for example cites that they were occupied with mundane tasks rather than writing, arithmetic, and geography. She notes how most books were unavailable to them. See 21-22, for examples.
42 See Franchot's *Roads to Rome* for more information about the thematic and narrative similarities of these forms.
44 Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 65.
45 According to Billington, Monk likely came to New York through the work of Reverend William K. Hoyt, president of the Canadian Benevolent Society. Her rescuers Bourne, Slocum, Tappan, and Dwight participated in various nativist societies, and Bourne eventually published an additional convent narrative set in Canada entitled *Lorette: History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun* (1833).
49 A detailed account of the responses and investigation surrounding *Awful Disclosures* can be found in Billington’s *The Protestant Crusade*, 103-8.
50 For example, see *Awful Exposure of the Atrocious Plot Formed by Certain Individuals Against the Clergy and Nuns of Lower Canada, through the Intervention of Maria Monk* (New York: Jones and Co. of Montreal, 1836); and Lizzie St. John Eckel Harper, *Maria Monk’s Daughter; An Autobiography* (New York: United States Publishing Co., 1875).
54 *The Convict* was written during Buntline’s imprisonment for his own part in the Astor Place Riot. The riot began as a squabble between rival Shakespearean actors, American Edwin Forrest and Englishman William Macready. Supported by upper class Anglophiles, the British actor represented a foreign intrusion to laboring class nativists. For more on the Astor Riot, see Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), 74. For information about Buntline’s role, see Monaghan, *The Great Rascal*, 170-80.
55 Strebee argues that Buntline’s romances about Mexico, Cuba, and Catholicism exhibit the “intimate, volatile relationships among working-class culture, nativism, and empire.” She notes that his depictions of empire-building were often ambiguous because, in the case of his U.S.-Mexican War romances, they often meant the incorporation of large numbers of Catholics. In this reading, I am not suggesting otherwise, but rather locating Buntline within a longer nativist tradition of empire-building. See Strebee, *American Sensations*, 139.
56 Buntline continually attempted to combine his interest in nativism with his interest in working-class politics, supporting organizations like the Order of United American Mechanics, the Order of United Americans, and the
Daughters of America. He saw his fiction as part of his reform efforts, and, like other reform discourses, combined stories of moral uplift with melodrama. For more information, see Monaghan, *The Great Rascal*, 146.

59 Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*, ix.
61 Also known as the Kensington Riots, these riots occurred during the summer of 1844 and reacted to rumors regarding Catholic attempts to remove the bible from public schools.
CHAPTER THREE
Conquering the Catholic Past: Romantic History and Imperial Legacies

[...] I have found myself unconsciously taking up ground which he was preparing to occupy. It was not until I had become master of my rich collection of materials that I was acquainted with this circumstance; and, had he persevered in this design, I should unhesitatingly have abandoned my own, if not from courtesy, at least from policy; for though armed with the weapons of Achilles, this could give me no hope of success in a competition with Achilles himself.

— William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (1843)

The great Achilles of history to whom William Prescott refers is none other than the U.S.’s own romantic folklorist Washington Irving. Fascinated by “dear old romantic Spain,” Prescott sought out Irving’s loudly acclaimed 1828 Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus as a model for his own history of Spanish empire. “Though I cannot see you bodily, however, I am sitting under the light of your countenance,” he writes in an 1839 letter to Irving. Despite this apparent admiration, we have tended to separate Irving and Prescott, declaring the former a progenitor of American romance and the latter an initiate of U.S. historiography. Yet, Prescott drew heavily from the styles and themes of Irving, and both eventually narrowed in on the same epic of Spanish history – the discovery and conquest of the Americas. Where Irving’s Columbus mythologizes the great navigator and traces the history of Spain from its Mediterranean roots to its colonization of the Americas, Prescott’s 1843 Mexico dramatizes the story of Cortés and his epic conquest of the Aztec empire.
On the one hand, Irving’s and Prescott’s works appear as further proof of the U.S.’s enduring fascination with Spain and its growing investment in Latin America. Viewed in a different light, however, these texts call attention to an overlooked commonality that links these two authors—a fascination with the hemisphere’s Catholic origins. Among the “high spirited cavaliers,” “ambitious” navigators, and “keen speculators” of *Columbus* and *Mexico*, a “pale missionary” stands “anxious to extend the dominion of the church.” His presence and that of other Catholic figures, rituals, and spaces permeates *Columbus* and *Mexico*, calling attention to the religious logics that bind Irving’s and Prescott’s works. Although members of “a class of writers” that, as an 1829 article in the *Christian Advocate* describes, “seem afraid of deep and serious piety, lest it should spoil their minds and vitiate their tastes,” Irving’s and Prescott’s depictions of Catholic Spain’s history of imperialism resonate with what I have thus far shown to be the increasingly anti-Catholic persuasion of nineteenth-century American romance writing. Read within the context of anti-Catholicism and early U.S. imperialism, *Columbus* and *Mexico* rehearse the hemispheric expansion of nineteenth-century Protestant America through a reconstruction of sixteenth-century Catholic Spain’s discovery, conquest, and colonization of the Western Hemisphere. Forged through the messy overlap between history and romance, these texts claim the hemispheric history of Catholic empire-building even as they distinguish nineteenth-century Protestant America from it.

*Columbus’s* and *Mexico’s* seemingly conflicted reenactment of the hemisphere’s Catholic history highlights the overlooked religious dimensions of U.S. imperialism. As I argue in the following pages, Anglo-Protestant imaginings of the hemisphere’s Catholic past drove the exceptionalist ideology underpinning early U.S. imperialism. By imagining the hemisphere as a space shaped by a history of Catholic tyranny, Irving and Prescott stage the ascension of U.S.
empire. Whereas in chapter two I showed how romance writers position expansion as a form of national protection against Catholic captivity and tyranny, the romantic histories of this chapter take this narrative of empire to a hemispheric scale. Drawing upon the same emergent culture of romance writing and anti-Catholicism, Irving and Prescott frame the history of Spanish Catholic conquest in the Western Hemisphere as part of a legendary story that ultimately leads to the rise of U.S. power in the Americas. Constructing epic plotlines and heroic characters that, as Prescott says, speak more to “the air of romance rather than sober history” (5), *Columbus* and *Mexico* highlight what Teresa Goddu describes as the “network of historical representation” undergirding U.S. romance. Rather than the dark history of U.S. slavery, however, *Columbus* and *Mexico* call attention to the threat of Catholic tyranny as another specter that not only haunts U.S. nation, but also motivates its expansion. By depicting Spain as an empire corrupted by Catholic despotism, these texts turn the hemisphere’s Catholic past into the pre-history of a more enlightened U.S. empire. In so doing, they recalibrate the archive through which we tend to study American romance. When read within the context of U.S. imperialism, *Columbus* and *Mexico* illuminate another text of empire – Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s 1855 *Catholic History of North America*, a little known, Catholic-authored history that directly responds to Irving’s and Prescott’s works. *Catholic History* illustrates how the Catholic past served as an imperial legacy that blurs the lines between romance and history. By reading these texts as a continuum, we can see how the hemisphere’s Catholic history acts as a discourse for imagining and idealizing U.S. expansion.

The following analysis of how Irving, Prescott, and McGee interweave history and romance provides a timely story about religion and empire. With the election of the first Latin American pope and calls for the Catholic Church’s speedy entrance into 21st-century conceptions
of modernity, Irving’s and Prescott’s anti-Catholic romanticization of a more progressive rational
North and retrograde Catholic South calls for us to reexamine the geopolitics of religious
discourse. Although scholars have (re)turned increasingly to questions of transnationalism and
religion, studies of U.S. imperialism have tended to focus on race, class, and gender.11 Yet,
religion is a prime category for studying nineteenth-century transnationalism and, as Toni Wall
Jaudon has recently argued, for rethinking the assumptions of transnational American Studies.12
So, why not empire? Perhaps because of the shaky, but continuing predominance of the
secularization narrative, we assume that the development of U.S. imperialism parallels
secularization. As scholars of “secular studies” have noted, however, the assumption that
“secular” means the absence of religion neglects how the term has enabled historically specific
ways for experiencing space and time.13 Within nineteenth-century U.S. culture in particular, as
Tracy Fessenden illustrates, secularism tended to strengthen the hold of a conservative Protestant
strain in U.S. culture against religions deemed irrational, ritualistic, and anti-progressive. Thus,
when we neglect religion in the study of nineteenth-century U.S. empire, we miss out on how a
Protestant-oriented secularism consolidated the growth and development of U.S. empire against
those traditions deemed “religious,” in this case Catholicism. Columbus’s and Mexico’s anti-
Catholicism demonstrates how an increasingly secular U.S. Protestant culture propelled the
expansion of U.S. empire by demonizing a seemingly more religious Catholic other.14

By reading Columbus and Mexico as texts that illuminate a tradition of anti-Catholic
imperialism, we can see how the Catholic past became a legacy for writing and rewriting the
hemisphere into an U.S.-centric narrative. Given Irving’s and Prescott’s treatment of Catholicism
as a retrograde religious form, Jenny Franchot’s argument that romantic histories like Prescott’s
Mexico “provided a crucial rationale for [...] the superiority of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ in particular New
England culture, over the racially mixed cultures of the south"\textsuperscript{15} clearly links the rise of mid-century anti-Catholicism to U.S. continental expansion. Yet, if we read this anti-Catholic imperialism as an isolated incident rather than a long-standing imperialist discourse inculcated within American romance writing, we elide the religious logics that link Irving’s and Prescott’s works, and in so doing, obscure texts like McGee’s \textit{Catholic History} that attempt to rewrite this tradition. As overlapping, conversant works, Prescott’s less popular \textit{Mexico} revises Irving’s romance of Spanish Catholic imperialism in \textit{Columbus} and, in turn, McGee’s \textit{Catholic History} responds to and rewrites both Irving’s and Prescott’s romantic histories. By reading these three texts together, we see how the hemisphere’s Catholic past became a discourse for imagining the rise of U.S. empire.

Converting Columbus

American literary history has most often recognized Washington Irving as the charming voice behind “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” rather than the loudly acclaimed historian of Spanish and American history. His 1828 \textit{Columbus}, however, popularized the story of Columbus for nineteenth-century American audiences. Unlike earlier Columbus-related works, \textit{Columbus} combines the romantic prose style of Irving’s popular \textit{The Sketchbook} with serious attention to historical research, and, for the first time, frames Columbus’s discovery as a glorious accident.\textsuperscript{16} Presenting the navigator as a visionary destined by heaven to stumble upon the Americas, Irving treats the discovery of the Western Hemisphere as an event integral to a U.S. culture in the midst of national consolidation and hemispheric expansion. Published in the same decade as the Monroe Doctrine and only two years after the Panama Congress, Columbus’s
life and discovery were of “so interesting and national a kind” that when U.S. minister plenipotentiary Alexander Hill Everett invited Irving to translate Spanish historian Martin Fernández de Navarrete’s five-part collection of Columbus-related documents, he considered it a task he simply could not “abandon.”17 As Irving states in the preface to Columbus, Mr. Everett “expressed an opinion that a version of the work into English, by one of our own country, would be peculiarly desirable. I concurred with him on the opinion” (9). As Irving here intends and the publication of more than a hundred Columbus editions indicate,18 Irving’s biography transformed Columbus’s hemispheric legacy into a national mythology and converted Columbus into a romantic American hero whose story continues to reverberate throughout contemporary U.S. culture every October 12th.

In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising to claim that Columbus exhibits the overlap between U.S. romance and early U.S. imperialism. After all, recent scholarship has recurrently turned to Irving’s Spanish and western adventure narratives as works indicative of early U.S. attitudes toward expansion.19 It is less common, however, to argue that Irving’s history inaugurates a tradition of romantic historiography that positions U.S. empire in contradistinction to Catholic tyranny. While scholars have examined Columbus as a work that illustrates early U.S. expansionism, questions surrounding the role of religion in Irving’s imperialism have gone unasked and, consequently, unanswered. Although Columbus’s 1828 publication coincides within one of the most tumultuous eras of anti-Catholicism in U.S. history, scholars rarely attend to the text’s religious politics and, when they do, they more often describe Irving’s Columbus as a secular character. Even during its initial years of publication, nineteenth-century critics paid little attention to the disparity between Columbus’s Catholic background and his American enshrinement, often praising the success of Irving’s project while quietly criticizing him for
“underrating the merit” of Columbus’s unspecified “high religious enthusiasm.” Despite this silence, Columbus is not without religion, nor is it without Catholicism.

So, how did a Catholic Italian who “discovered” a hemisphere become a national hero for an increasingly anti-Catholic U.S. audience? By presenting him as a “secular” romantic character befitting Protestant America, of course! Rather than neglect the subject of Columbus’s Catholic upbringing, Irving converts Columbus into a U.S. hero by detaching him from the markers and histories of Catholicism. As Elizabeth Fenton and Tracy Fessenden note, “secular” during this period meant without Catholicism, embedding a nonspecific Protestantism within notions of a secular U.S. culture. As a marker of superstition, irrationality, and especially tyranny—Catholicism was unfit for the annals of U.S. history and any hero that might grace its pages. Thus, as Irving evacuates Columbus’s Catholicism and converts him into a secular hero, he simultaneously offers a series of arguments through which to distinguish the U.S. from the history of Spanish empire. In so doing, he reappropriates Columbus and his hemispheric discovery within a U.S. national narrative that stages U.S. imperialism as a form emancipation from the European colonial empires of the past. Attention to Columbus’s anti-Catholicism relocates what we have assumed to be a secular Irving within the nineteenth-century U.S. religious landscape, and highlights the religious logics driving early U.S. empire.

As a text that foregrounds Columbus and his hemispheric discovery as a national mythology, Columbus both links and distances the U.S. from its European Catholic past. Irving’s biography charts its hero’s progress from his European origins to his American discovery. Beginning with the story of his upbringing among the “hardy encounters and trying reverses” (14) of the Mediterranean and his eventual sponsorship by the Spanish Monarchy, Irving locates Columbus in the battles of the Reconquista. Rather than deny his Catholicism, Irving
acknowledges Columbus's Catholicism as part of a legendary history. Depicted as an adamantly religious character, Irving's Columbus reflects the crusading spirit of Isabella and Ferdinand's holy war against Boabdail, the last monarch of the vanishing Moorish empire in the Iberian Peninsula. Like the legendary Christian and Moorish knights of Irving's later The Alhambra, Columbus bears "an honourable part" in "one of the most glorious [battles] of the War of Granada" as he waits for Isabella and Ferdinand to turn their attention westward (56). "[F]illed with those devout and heroic schemes, which in the time of the crusades had inflamed the thoughts, and directed the enterprises of the bravest warriors and most illustrious princes" (162), he establishes his valor in the battles of Spanish conquest, distinguishing himself as a chivalric soldier participating in a Christian holy war.

In this depiction of a romantic Catholic Columbus, the text positions the history of European Catholicism as part of the history of the Western Hemisphere and the U.S. As Irving tells us, the story of Columbus's "troubled life" acts as a "link which connects the history of the old world with that of the new" (10), and simultaneously reappropriates this history within a U.S. imperial narrative. Describing Ferdinand and Isabella's final victory at Granada, for instance, Irving frames Columbus as a witness to the final moment of Reconquista victory. Watching the "chivalry," "magnificence" and "solemn procession" of Boabdil's "memorable surrender," Columbus stands nearby, "feeding his imagination in the corners of the antichambers with the pompous project of discovering a world" (62). Employing various accounts of the final Catholic victory, Irving reframes the history of the Reconquista around Columbus's later discovery. As he shows, Columbus symbolizes the conflict between Spain and the Moors, the encounters between Spanish colonizers and American natives, and the conflict between nineteenth-century U.S. culture and Catholicism. Located within a territory ravaged by religious discord and conflict, he
links the trials of Catholic Spain to U.S. nation, suggesting that the religious conflict and sectarianism brewing amidst nineteenth-century U.S. nation is an analogous prelude the rise of U.S. empire.

By presenting Columbus as a link between the Reconquista and the U.S., Irving fashions the Catholic victory over the Moors as the pre-history to America’s discovery and presents the U.S. as a teleological endpoint descended from Catholicism as well as Islam. Although brief, the text’s account of the Reconquista recalls distant times and places and, in so doing performs a type of temporal lengthening. This elongated narrative of U.S. nation constructs what Wai Chee Dimock describes as “deep time” by “threading the long durations of those cultures into the short chronology of the United States.”

The history of the Moors and Spanish Catholicism extend the narrative of U.S. nation and simultaneously provide a foundation for the ascension of U.S. power, presenting it as a more western descendant of Islamic and Catholic empire. Catholicism in particular plays a crucial role in constructing this teleology. As Jenny Franchot and David Levin show, the history of Catholicism corroborated Protestant conceptions of nationhood by presenting Catholicism as part of America’s primitive past. Columbus’s journey from Europe to America and his eventual U.S. nationalization represent the movement of Christian empire westward. In this way, the discovery of America appears as the expansion of Christian Empire initiated in Catholic Europe. Similarly, Spain’s era of Moorish conquest and the subsequent Catholic Reconquista appear as epics in this narrative, bolstering long-standing American religious and national narratives that present the U.S. as a promised land and the ascension of Protestant America as an unfolding of sacred history.

Catholicism emerges from this story of Columbus’s Reconquista beginnings as a temporal and geographic register through which to stage U.S. expansion – a romantic interlude
or escape wherein readers can envision the rise of U.S. national power in the same hemisphere Columbus discovered. Indeed, Columbus’s “romantic enterprise” of empire-building becomes part of the U.S.’s (re)discovery of the Western Hemisphere as Americans watch Columbus and his followers spread civilization Westward by “introducing new races of animals and plants, or building cities, extending colonies, and sowing the seeds of civilization” (182, 212). In this way, *Columbus* prefigures the adventures of Irving’s later western travel narratives and reflects a growing body of nineteenth-century romance literature that employed the past as a canvas from which to debate contemporary questions of expansion. Rather than the “West,” however, *Columbus* calls attention to a global frontier – a “beautiful but savage world” awaiting discovery and exploration by the hardy frontiersman (212). Through this romanticization of the Catholic past, *Columbus* (re)opens the hemisphere and, more specifically, the Caribbean to narratives of imperial power without contradicting the concepts of anti-colonialism and anti-empire expressed only five years earlier in the Monroe Doctrine.

If Columbus’s Catholic European past constructs an historical and literary foundation from which to imagine the rise of Protestant America, it also acts as a way to dissociate the U.S. from what nineteenth-century Americans saw as the dark history of European and, specifically, Spanish imperial tyranny in the Americas. As the narrative moves between Spain and the Caribbean, Columbus becomes increasingly detached and, at some points, tragically dispossessed by the Spanish Catholic government that sponsored him. The violent history of Catholic Spanish colonization darkens and transforms his romantic Reconquista chivalry and religious devotion into evidence of Spanish corruption and tyranny. As Irving tells us, however, we cannot judge a “great man” so simply. Offering a methodology for analyzing history’s “great men,” Irving accounts for Columbus’s faults. “[H]e who paints a great man merely in great and heroic traits
[…] will never present a faithful picture” and, perhaps more importantly, misses out on their true greatness – a heroism that “arises from their struggles against the imperfections of their nature” (563). Rather than see Columbus’s faults as contradictory to ideals of romantic heroism, Irving acknowledges his hero’s “gross errors of conduct” and attempts to frame them within a particular historical context.26

Within this model, Irving navigates between Columbus’s Catholic European past and his American heroism. He recognizes Columbus’s Catholicism, noting that “his piety was mingled with superstition” (567, 49), but, subsequently mitigates this accusation by contrasting Columbus with a more bigoted Catholic hierarchy. For instance, as Columbus proposes his plan of westward exploration to the council of Salamanca, Irving locates his hero in opposition to Spain’s “clerical sages.” He writes, “Several of the objections of this learned body have been handed down to us […] they are proof of the imperfect state of science at the time, and the manner in which knowledge though rapidly advancing, was still impeded in its progress by monastic bigotry” (48-9). Such accusations of bigotry stem from long-time entrenched binaries between Protestant reason and Catholic superstition. As Irving notes in a biting tone, the Catholic Church “immured” the “treasures of learning” in monasteries where “the professors’ chair was exclusively filled from the cloister” (48-9). Reproducing the opposition between Protestant science and Catholic bigotry, Irving frames Columbus as a progressive figure of science, rationality, and education that stands in contradistinction to a bigoted, retrograde Catholic Church. In so doing, he displaces Columbus’s religious bigotry and refashions him as a progressive hero living in a Catholic time.

This distinction between Columbus’s progressivism and Catholic past adopts political dimensions in the text’s portrait of the Catholic Spanish state. As Columbus discovers, explores,
and colonizes the Caribbean, the Catholic Church disconnects him from the Spanish monarchs and acts as an impediment to what Irving considers as Columbus’s divine destiny of discovery (446). Consider, for example, Irving’s portrayal of Queen Isabella. Characterized as Columbus’s champion, her character “shines most illustrious” and her “fostering and maternal care was continually directed to reform the laws, and heal the ills.” Irving even goes so far as to call her one of the “guardian angels,” “appointed by heaven to watch over the destinies of empires” (43-4). However, the angelic Isabella is also guided by a troop of “ghostly advisors.” As Irving tells us, “the archbishop, being her confessor […] checked her dawning favour” for Columbus (63). As a particularly innocent and pure figure “peculiar[ly]” influenced by Catholic prelates (63), Irving’s Isabella recalls the gendered constructions of anti-Catholicism. Like the novices of the popular convent-captivity narratives that appeared in waves during the 1830s, Isabella is an innocent maiden seduced and blinded by her Catholic confessors. Irving suggests that her manipulative ecclesiastic advisors attempt to turn her against Columbus and, symbolically, against the project of America. Such depictions of Isabella reflect early American anxieties surrounding the separation of church and state, a debate intimately tied to anti-Catholicism during the early national period. By presenting Isabella as an angelic, yet blind Catholic, Irving frames Spain as a state overpowered by the will and rule of the Catholic Church.

However, Isabella is not the only misguided monarch in this story. Rather than a manipulated novice figure, Irving frames King Ferdinand as the epitome of religious despotism and representative example of Catholicism’s corrupting influence on national politics. He writes, “With him, however, religion was subservient to interest; and he had found in the recent conquest of Granada, that extending the sway of the church, might be made a laudable means of extending his own dominion” (67). Feeding into both Black Legend and anti-Catholic narratives,
such statements render Ferdinand a manipulative and power-hungry character, and associate his militant Catholicism with despotism and the Inquisition. Framing him as the villain of Columbus’s romance quest of American discovery, Irving fashions Ferdinand as a figure with “more bigotry than religion” and argues that “his policy was cold, selfish, and artful” rather than “magnanimous” or even misguided like Isabella’s (77-8). In his condemnation of Ferdinand, Irving critiques the overlap between religion and politics, and locates Catholicism in opposition to Americanism. Moreover, he fashions Ferdinand as what many nineteenth-century Americans saw in the Catholic Church – an institution obsessed with garnering power rather than inspiring true religious feeling. Unlike Isabella, the bigoted Ferdinand becomes an enemy of Irving’s Columbus and the progressive rationality he embodies. When Isabella dies, Ferdinand’s Catholic despotism and bigotry is let loose upon Columbus. Forgetting his “past services,” Ferdinand receives Columbus “with those cold ineffectual smiles, which pass like wintry sunshine over the countenance, and convey no warmth to the heart” (554, 556). Fettered and dispossessed by the Catholic government that sponsored him, Columbus tragically dies without proper restitution, recognition, or compensation for his great discovery. With all the persuasion of the sentimental heart, Irving pleads with his American readers to sympathize with the progressive Columbus and side against the bigoted Catholic Ferdinand, Spain, and the Church they represent.

Such oppositions locate Columbus against Catholicism and the Spanish state, rendering him a tragic hero divested of the dark markers of his Catholic past and the dark history of Catholic colonization in the Americas. As Columbus discovers America and interacts with the Caribs, Irving’s depictions of Catholicism displace Columbus from various moments of historical horror that haunt U.S. history. For instance, Irving excuses Columbus for his part in the persecution of native populations by highlighting Catholicism’s role in Spanish imperial
politics. Like other romantic writers of the era, he draws upon romanticized visions of American Indians as “noble savages,” characterizing them as characters endowed with “frankness” and “generosity.” Rather than place blame on his American hero for the loss of what he describes as their “primeval innocence” (122, 129), he argues that Columbus’s actions were part of a “pernicious tendency” toward “sophistry” through which “upright men may sometimes deceive themselves. Columbus feared the disappointment of the sovereigns in respect to the product of his enterprises […] the conversion of infidels, by fair means or foul, by persuasion or force, was one of the popular tenets of the day” (211). Rather than castigate his hero for enslaving and persecuting the natives, Irving presents these actions as emanating the will of a Spanish government controlled by a manipulative Catholic Church. In this way, Columbus becomes a product of his times – merely a soldier enforcing the tyrannical sway of religion and politics that guided the “mistaken view of natural rights prevalent during the day” (211).

As Irving turns to the history of slavery in the New World, Catholicism plays an increasingly important role in dislocating Columbus and the U.S. from any association with the empire-building of the Old World. Acknowledging slavery as a “foul stain” that sullies Columbus’s brilliant renowned, Irving argues that “the customs of the times […] must be pleaded in his apology.” As he tells his readers, the “traffic in slaves,” whether Native American or African, “had been sanctioned by the church itself; and the most learned theologians had pronounced all barbarous and infidel nations, who shut their ears to the truths of Christianity, fair object of war and rapine, of captivity and slavery” (286-7). While Irving recognizes what is, indeed, Catholicism’s violent part in early American history, he frames this history as a reprieve for Columbus. Furthermore, his indictment of Spanish Catholicism directs attention away from Protestant America’s ongoing history of Native American relocation and African enslavement,
and instead highlights Spain and Catholicism as the instigators of these practices. In so doing, he forwards an exceptionalist narrative by dissociating Columbus and the U.S. from this history of dispossession and European Catholic imperialism.

Columbus’s exoneration of Columbus refocuses the story of America’s discovery into a narrative that claims Columbus’s hemispheric legacy in the name of the U.S.’s exceptionalism. As a progressive character living in a Catholic time, he and his discovery act as gateways for (re)discovering the hemisphere and disavowing European and specifically Spanish influence in the Western Hemisphere. When we ignore how anti-Catholicism shapes Irving’s Americanization of Columbus, we miss out on how religion provided a series of representations through which to negotiate relationships between the U.S., Europe, and the Western Hemisphere. Attention to the anti-Catholic underpinnings of Columbus highlights the role religion played in propagating imperial ideologies such as those of the Monroe Doctrine. By highlighting the religious frameworks shaping geopolitical relationships of Irving’s era, we can see how Columbus’s romanticization of the heroic navigator maps a vision of U.S. imperialism onto the Spanish Catholic past. Such depictions of Catholicism and Columbus, however, not only shaped attitudes toward European nations like Spain; they also influenced how the U.S. perceived and interacted with Catholics within the Western Hemisphere. Just as Americans were digging up the history of Catholic Spain as part of an American past, they were contending with Irish immigrants as part of an American present and investing in Spain’s former hemispheric empire as part of an “American” future. As a text that transformed the Catholic past into a harbinger of U.S. imperialism, Columbus popularized a tradition of romantic historiography through which Americans sanctioned their own imperial rise amidst the ruins of a Catholic past that became ever-more present in Prescott’s Mexico.
If Irving’s *Columbus* distinguishes between the U.S. and Catholic Europe to claim the Western Hemisphere as a U.S. legacy, Prescott’s *Mexico* calls this legacy into question by reminding his readers of Catholicism’s long-enduring presence within the Americas. The text tracks Catholic Spain’s expansion into North America, framing Catholicism as an institution located at the heart of Aztec, Spanish, and Mexican civilizations. Like Irving’s depiction of European Catholicism, Prescott’s depiction of Catholicism’s transplantation to North America offers a series of representations through which to imagine and privilege U.S. hegemony within the Western Hemisphere. But where Irving distances the U.S. from the history of European Catholic empire-building, Prescott presents Mexico as an emblem of a hybrid, degenerate Catholicism that both legitimizes and challenges the expansion of U.S. borders. Published on the cusp of the U.S.-Mexican War, scholars tend to analyze this mixed portrait of empire as a reflection of Prescott’s ambivalent imperial politics.\(^{30}\) Indeed, nineteenth-century Americans considered *Mexico* such a knowledgeable representation of Mexican civilization and territory that it became a guidebook for the soldiers of the war and even caught the attention of General Winfield Scott, who asked Prescott to write the second conquest of Mexico – the Anglo-Protestant conquest.\(^{31}\) Yet, Prescott refused this proposal and openly opposed the annexation of Texas, providing insight into what scholars\(^{32}\) have regarded as *Mexico*’s hesitancy concerning empire-building or, more specifically, the assimilation of difference that accompanied it.

Reading *Mexico* as a sequel and revision of Irving’s depiction of Spanish Catholic Empire in *Columbus*, however, relocates this ambivalence within a romance tradition driven by the anti-Catholicism underpinning U.S. imperialism. While Jenny Franchot has demonstrated the
overlap between anti-Catholicism and U.S. imperialism in *Mexico*, she analyzes this imperialism as a symptom of mid-century anti-Catholic nativism rather than a tradition of imperial imagining that binds Prescott to earlier romantic writers like Irving. Following in the footsteps of his literary hero, Prescott turns the Catholic history of conquest into Protestant empire’s romance; yet, in *Mexico*, this history becomes increasingly gothic because it troubles Columbus’s romantic discovery of the hemisphere and the U.S.’s claim to this history. The Americas are no longer a romantic legacy of uncharted territory, but a Catholicized space that threatens U.S. nation and empire. The gothic, as Goddu argues, “registers its culture’s contradictions,” and Prescott’s anti-Catholic imperialism exposes the contradiction of U.S. empire, namely its tendency to simultaneously include and exclude or, as Amy Kaplan writes, contract and expand. Mexico locates Catholicism as part of a violent American epic whereby different gradations of barbarism – one Catholic and the other native – fuse into a hybrid, degenerate Mexican Catholicism that resides on the borders of U.S. nation. In this way, the text not only highlights what Jesse Alemán has described as the gothic inter-American history of U.S. empire; it also calls attention to the threat of racial and religious mixing that haunts U.S. imperial expansion. This specter of miscegenation, I contend, darkens Irving’s romanticization of Catholic history in *Columbus* and posits Catholicism as a living history that threatens to expand the empire at the cost of polluting the Protestant nation.

If Columbus threw “open” a door to “a new and glorious world,” then Prescott’s Cortés and his conquistadors walk in and make themselves at home. Despite Prescott’s ambivalence surrounding the expansion of U.S. borders, *Mexico*, like *Columbus*, is a ringing tribute to empire. The text glorifies the exploration, conquest, and colonization of Mexico as a “romantic enterprise” and “remarkable achievement” (907, 5). Rather than the story of the great navigator,
however, Prescott recalls the “life of the cavalier” Cortés and the noble, but comparatively
esmasculated Montezuma. Following along as the Spaniards bring about “the subversion of a
great empire by a handful of adventurers” (5), readers not only (re)discover the hemisphere –
they conquer it. Mexico records the trials, methods, and processes of colonization, urging readers
to travel with Cortés as he “discovers” Mexico, “marches” across the landscape, “resides” within
the Aztec civilization, is expelled from it, and eventually lays siege and conquers it.36

As Prescott shifts from his epic story into an analysis of the Aztec civilization, however,
this romantic depiction of conquest becomes increasingly gothic in light of what he presents as
the impurities of empire-building. Whereas Irving’s Columbus frames empire as a series of
explorations and discoveries, Mexico depicts empire as a process of intermixing that posits
nineteenth-century Mexico as a horrific distortion of religious and racial difference. This shift
occurs primarily through Prescott’s emphasis on the Aztec or native as a key character in the
story of Catholic colonization. Whereas Irving’s New World natives appear as primarily flat
characters – mixed tribes of innocent Caribs assaulted by Catholic conquistadors – Prescott
personifies the Aztec empire through his portrait of Montezuma and his attention to ancient
Mexican culture. With their intricate governing structures, ornate rituals, and cultural festivals,
the Aztecs represent a New World symbol of romantic antiquity that foretells the ascension of
Protestant modernity.37 Above the North American Indian races, but below the far advanced
civilizations of Europe, Prescott’s Aztecs signify a culture stalled by its remaining savagism.
“How can a nation, where human sacrifices prevail, especially when combined with cannibalism,
further the march of civilization?” Prescott asks (815). His answer: they can’t. Plagued by
barbaric and violent practices, the Aztec is a foregone conclusion, a vanished figure lost amidst
the rolling tide of history.
As a representative of a vanished, stalled civilization, the Aztec provides a foundation from which to highlight the various “degree[s] of civilization” achieved by Catholic Spain and Protestant America (44). In his description of Aztec ritual and ceremony, for instance, Prescott draws a comparison between Catholic and Aztec, characterizing them as religious cultures similarly invested in seductive, surface imagery. Contrasting the “fantastic idols” of Aztec paganism with the “beautiful forms” of the Catholic cathedral, he writes, “The Aztec worship [.....] prepared its votaries for the pomp and splendors of the Romish ritual. It was not difficult to pass from the fasts and festivals of the one religion to the fasts and festivals of the other” (851). Feeding into nativist rhetoric that imagined Catholicism as an “adulterous mixture,” Prescott suggests that the primitive practices of the Aztec underlie the Catholic faith, and that the Aztec religion naturally gives way to Catholicism because the two are uncannily similar. Rather than characterize Catholicism as a source of European influence as Irving does, Prescott highlights Mexico’s Catholic roots, suggesting that Aztec religion is an early precursor to the Spanish Catholicism that followed. Such references, as Franchot notes, act as both the argument and the confusion of Mexico, and shape depictions of what Prescott touts throughout his work as a superior Anglo-Saxon northern culture that stands in contradistinction to the racially and culturally mixed Catholic South.

By presenting the Catholic and Aztec as similar religious cultures that blur together through the processes of conquest and colonization initiated by Columbus and fulfilled by Cortés, Mexico lays a foundation from which to stage Catholic Mexico’s romantic primitivism. Consider, for example, Prescott’s depiction of Aztec and Catholic bigotry. Like Irving, he highlights Spain’s religious bigotry to present Catholicism as an institution opposed to science, education, and rationalism. This critique, however, functions through a relational comparison
that evaluates Catholicism against Aztec paganism. In its adherence to a priestly hierarchy, ritualistic traditions, and cannibalistic festival, Aztec culture “can only be explained as the result of religious superstition; superstition which clouds the moral perception, and perverts even the natural sense, till man, civilized man, is reconciled to the very things which are most revolting to humanity” (119). The “dark and bloody rites” of Aztec religion act as stark reminders of what happens when reason and religion do not reside in the same holy house (28). Although Prescott later mitigates this evaluation by arguing that such “habits and opinions” cannot be taken as “conclusive evidence” for the “actual refinement of a people” (119), he also continually calls upon images of superstition to present the Aztecs as a glorious civilization plagued and eventually conquered by their own irrational failings.

Such depictions of Aztec religion act as a stepping stone in Prescott’s critique of Catholic Mexico and the processes of empire-building. For instance, when analyzing the Aztec calendar, Prescott notes how the Spanish missionaries condemn it as a “work of necromancy, and the fruit of a compact with the Devil!” (91). Like Irving, he treats this belief as a sign of anti-progressivism that signals Aztec primitivism. Putting the Devil aside, however, he turns to evaluate both the Aztecs and Catholics. “One may doubt, whether the superstition of those who invented the scheme was greater than that of those who thus impugned it” (91). By criticizing the missionaries that at one time similarly criticized the Aztecs, Prescott’s commentary relegates both to the past, and reorients Irving’s critique of Catholic bigotry toward a denigration of hybrid Catholic Mexico. Through this act of historical metacommentary, Aztec and Catholic appear as only slightly different gradations of bigotry, transforming Catholic Mexico into a product of two primitive cultures.
Such examples of historical analysis mark the moment when Prescott’s historicism turns toward a romantic narrative of U.S. imperialism. Following in the footsteps of Irving, he positions Catholicism as a time and place antithetical to nineteenth-century Protestant America. Located temporally beyond and geographically above the bigoted Aztec and Catholic, Prescott, as a modern, Protestant historian, has the ability to see into the past and dispel its darkness. In an Irvingesque move, he asks that his readers judge such bigotry and violence within its historical context. “To the more rational spirit of the present day, enlightened by a purer Christianity, it may seem difficult to reconcile gross deviations from morals with such devotion to the cause of religion. But the religion taught in that day was one of form and elaborate ceremony” (913).

Congratulating his more enlightened readership, Prescott uses this moment of historical analysis to distinguish between the “purer Christianity” of nineteenth-century U.S. Protestantism and the diluted “deviations” of Mexico. As a more rational civilization, his American audience emerges as an advanced race. Through the foggy lens of history, the bigotry of the triumphant Catholic conquistadors and the defeated Aztecs move into the dim corridors of the distant past, and their respective gradations of bigotry merge into one category symbolizing religious difference.

As Prescott moves from an evaluation of Aztec and Catholic practices to Cortés’s conquest, his depiction of Mexican bigotry revises Irving’s critique of Catholic Spain’s colonial violence. Rather than present empire as a linear conquest whereby Catholic overrides Aztec, Mexico suggests that empire is a process of conquest and assimilation that reshapes both colonizing and colonized cultures. Like Irving, Prescott romances the “vanishing” of native populations and presents Cortés’s conquest as yet another of Spain’s holy wars. Yet, even as Mexico reaffirms Irving’s romantic narrative of New World innocence, it revises it: Montezuma and his followers may be noble savages, but they are also human-eating, head-chopping, blood-
drinking pagans. The pages of *Mexico* are filled with horrific visions of Aztec religious sacrifice and cannibalism, which Prescott dramatizes in voyeuristic detail for the more civilized Protestant reader. For instance, as the Aztecs attempt to repel the Spanish reconquista of Tenochtitlán in what Alemán describes as a haunting vision of indigenous resistance, Prescott paints Irving’s tropical New World Eden red. The Aztec priests – “Dominicans of the Old World” – “cut asunder the ribs” of Spanish captives, tear away their “hot and reeking” hearts, and throw their “mutilated remains” to the “savages beneath, who soon prepared with them the cannibal repast” (66, 774). By depicting the Aztecs as figures that reciprocally perform violence upon the Catholic Spaniards, Prescott revises Columbus’s depiction of empire-building and frames Catholicism and native paganism as forms that naturally bleed into each other by a literal shedding and mixing of blood. In so doing, he suggests that empire is a two-way process whereby Aztec and Catholic merge into volatile, hybrid Mexican form.

Like Prescott’s critique of religious bigotry, this revision of native-settler relations positions Aztec and Catholic on only slightly different levels of civilization that appear in stark distinction to a more rational Protestant America. In their similarity and overlapping history of violence, the two foretell the rise of Protestantism and the downfall of Aztec and Catholic cultures. Although an ambassador of Christianity, the Inquisitorial Catholic is only slightly better off in his metaphoric rather than literal flesh-eating. Through the distance of historical observation, Aztec and Catholic blend into the past, one a culture of “brutish superstitions” and the other a form of “fanaticism” (68-9). Both inevitably succumb to the dredging tide of history. Yet, “beneficently ordered by Providence,” the “benign flames of Christianity would still survive” and the Protestant would rise, “dispelling those dark forms of horror” (68-9). By presenting the Catholic and Aztec as part of a violent and horror-filled past, Prescott buries these
figures within a narrative of progress that presents the Protestant U.S. as the romantic hero of history – a rational and cultivated nation destined by Providence to drive out the specters of the hemisphere, be they Aztec or Catholic.

If the teleological sway of romantic history heralds the moment of Protestant ascension in the Americas, it also predicts the downfall of those spaces mixed and assimilated by the movements of empire – i.e. Mexico. Prescott frames this history as an explanation of nineteenth-century Mexicans. “Those familiar with modern Mexicans,” he writes, “will find it difficult to conceive that the nation should ever have been capable of devising the enlightened polity which we have been considering” (44). Employing racially charged language, he suggests that nineteenth-century Mexicans look like the Aztecs of the past – bound by a shared “blood” and ancestry, but lacking the same “hardy character” of their ancestors (45). Calling upon long-entrenched conceptions of Catholic tyranny, he argues that “ages of tyranny” have passed over the Aztec-Mexicans and transformed them into “a conquered race” (45). Reflecting a series of stereotypes that proliferated in the years surrounding the U.S.-Mexican War, Prescott employs the past to legitimize U.S. supremacy and simultaneously offer a warning against what Kaplan theorizes as the “anarchy of empire.”42 In the mixing of Catholic and Aztec, Catholic Mexico and, more broadly, the Catholic South emerge from this volatile mixture as a violent and distorted reflection that troubles Columbus’s claim to the Western Hemisphere by calling into question the cost of empire-building. If Irving evacuates the Catholic past and lays claims to the hemisphere, Prescott calls his readers to be careful what they wish for.

As we have seen, Mexico’s blurring of Catholic and Aztec highlights a recursive and anxious attempt to disenfranchise nineteenth-century Mexico and ever so hesitantly sanction U.S. expansion. Published on the eve of the U.S.-Mexican War, Mexico acts as a haunting
reminder of empire’s consequences. Rather than see this ambivalence as a marker of resistance to empire, however, the overlap between Columbus and Mexico exposes the movements of expansion and contraction through which U.S. imperialism stretched and defined its imperial muscles. When we read Prescott’s Mexico apart from Irving’s Columbus, we fail to see how U.S. imperialism was a legacy passed down and repurposed through U.S. romance writing. Locating Mexico alongside Columbus and, as we will see, Thomas D’Arcy MecGee’s Catholic History, helps us reconceive Prescott’s seemingly ambivalent imperialism as a historical shift within a broader tradition of anti-Catholic empire-building. Together, these three texts call attention to the religious logics driving U.S. empire and ask us to read the hemisphere’s Catholic past as a dynamic narrative, shaped, revised, and, as McGee shows, contested by the same forces it attempts to convert and conquer.

Imperial Revisions and Catholic Returns

Reading Irving’s and Prescott’s histories as romances of Protestant empire-building shines a light – so to speak – on an archive previously obscured. In their attempt to bury the hemisphere within a romantic Catholic past that becomes increasingly gothic in light of the U.S.’s developing imperial politics, Columbus and Mexico call into question the network of texts through which we have previously studied romance. If the hemisphere’s Catholic history becomes romance in the hands of Protestant writers like Irving and Prescott, then what would a Catholic-authored history look like? Consider Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s little-known 1855 Catholic History of North America. With a title like “Catholic History,” it is no surprise that this text is religiously biased and admittedly envisions an American Hemisphere united by
Catholicism—a history that, as he writes, is “every where present, and every where victorious.” Indeed, the text directly responds to the anti-Catholic sentiment that became increasingly vehement during the decades between Irving’s 1828 *Columbus*, Prescott’s 1843 *Mexico* and *Catholic History*’s 1855 publication. Beginning with the Spanish discovery of the hemisphere and ending with nineteenth-century Irish immigration to the U.S., McGee confronts those that call Catholicism a “stranger” and “intruder” and foregrounds Catholicism as the “oldest institution” in America (10).

Buried beneath more canonical histories, this Catholic-centric history remains an obscure work rarely studied and studied rarely for anything outside of U.S. nativism. When we locate McGee’s work alongside *Columbus* and *Mexico*, however, *Catholic History* illustrates the deeply entrenched relationship between religion and empire and, in so doing, exposes how Irving and Prescott transform the hemisphere’s Catholic past into a narrative of U.S. imperialism. If the uncanny, as Freud conceives it, is both that which is familiar and all that “ought to have remained secret and hidden, but has come to light,” then McGee’s obscure history acts as a zombie-like, “return of the repressed” narrative that sheds light on Irving’s and Prescott’s Protestant imperialism. In its indictment of U.S. anti-Catholicism and Protestant-dominated history, it directly responds to Irving’s and Prescott’s work, literally quoting from the pages of *Columbus* and *Mexico* to envision a Catholic American hemisphere.*Catholic History* demonstrates that Catholicism’s history of empire is uncannily familiar because both Catholicism and U.S. Protestantism empower and drove historically specific empires. But, where Irving and Prescott denigrate Catholicism to romanticize the rise of Protestantism, McGee in turn denigrates Protestantism and imagines a Catholic American empire with long-standing roots in the hemisphere’s past. By performing the same rhetorical functions as *Columbus* and *Mexico* in
the name of an openly religious cause, McGee shows how Irving’s and Prescott’s more “secular” histories stage the imperial ascension of Protestant America.

Rather than offer a “truer” vision of the past, Catholic History more specifically revises Irving’s and Prescott’s histories to glorify Catholicism. Beginning with the discovery of Columbus, for instance, McGee offers a correction to Irving’s work, arguing that “American and British works (even including the exquisite biography of Mr. Irving) do not bring out boldly the higher religious character of either” (14, 25), meaning Columbus and his enterprise. Mirroring the reviews of Irving’s critics, McGee highlights the secularization of Columbus within U.S. culture, but goes one step further by arguing for his specifically Catholic origins. He states this no more bluntly than when he writes, “The discovery and exploration of America were Catholic enterprises, undertaken by Catholics with Catholic motives, and carried out by Catholic cooperation” (9). When read as a revised addendum to Irving’s narrative, this declaration of Columbus’s “Catholic enterprise” stands in contrast to what both Irving and Prescott characterize as the “romantic enterprise” of Spanish empire-building. Read alongside McGee, we see how “romantic” not only celebrates the stories of Columbus and Cortés, but also stand in for “Catholic.” When juxtaposed, “romantic” and “Catholic” expose how Columbus and Mexico bury the Catholic behind the guise of romance. By insisting upon the Catholic specificity of Columbus’s enterprise, McGee calls for Americans to claim the hemisphere’s Catholicism rather than evacuate it.

Rewriting Columbus’s story to emphasize Catholicism, McGee confronts and reverses the rhetoric of anti-Catholicism through which Irving detaches Columbus from his Catholic past. For instance, he challenges anti-Catholic stereotypes that frame the Catholic Church and Spain as retrograde sources of bigotry that clash with Columbus’s more enlightened American character.
For example, McGee offers his own version of the council of Salamanca, writing, “The previous conference at Salamanca is often ridiculed for its want of cosmographical knowledge and denounced for its bigoted adherence to the letter of the Scriptures” (17). McGee continues this revision by acknowledging that some clerics resisted Columbus; however, he rationalizes this opposition by presenting Catholicism as a religion that “reconciles” scripture and science (17). To support his argument, he employs Irving’s history as his proof, writing “If the Spaniards were not before their age, they were at least not beyond instruction; for we are told that in this very conference Columbus ‘brought over the most learned men of the schools’ to his side.” \(^{47}\) The italicized section (my emphasis) is a direct quote from Columbus. Framing Irving’s words as proof of Catholicism’s reason, McGee contradicts developing narratives that detach reason and science from the Catholic Church, including Columbus’s. In so doing, he exposes how Irving converts Columbus to a secular American hero befitting Protestant America, and how the hemisphere’s Catholic past acts as a historical register through which to celebrate U.S. empire.

As Catholic History moves from discovery to colonization, it turns these moments of revision into a critique of U.S. expansion and empire. Like his allusion to Columbus, McGee’s references to Mexico act as evidence against accusations of Catholic cruelty. He admits that some conquistadors, such as Pizarro, exhibited brutality in their conquest of the Americas; however, he describes such figures as an “exception” and protests against accepting them as “a representative of the Catholic leaders of American discovery” (37). To draw attention away from Pizarro’s “sanguinary” ways, he references Mexico’s portrait of Cortés and describes him as an example of the more “naturally generous and merciful” part of Spanish Catholic imperialism (34, 36); however, he then uses this exoneration of Catholic cruelty to highlight Protestant America’s own dark history of expansionism. Calling attention to Protestant interference in the settlement
of Florida, for example, he argues that “Colonial warfare, inhuman traffic, and Protestant persecution at least blighted the growing good and effaced the glorious work so bravely commenced and so fearlessly carried forward in all the provinces of New Spain” (48). Just as Irving and Prescott employ the rhetoric of romantic historiography to celebrate Protestant America, McGee denigrates Protestantism to glorify Catholicism. As he argues with the history of Protestant persecution in mind, the Catholic Church offered the only “systematic attempt to civilize and Christianize” America’s indigenous populations and their survival stands as an example of Catholic and Spanish “humanity” (9, 35). By highlighting Protestantism’s role in native dispossession, McGee shifts blame from the Catholic to the Protestant. He applies and reverses the same rhetorical logic as Irving’s and Prescott’s histories, and, in so doing, his Catholic History employs Protestantism as a way to disavow Catholic imperial tyranny and envision a hemisphere circumscribed by Catholic history. In so doing, the text illuminates U.S. Protestantism’s imperial politics in what amounts to an act of rhetorical finger pointing!

As Catholic History turns toward nineteenth-century politics, McGee’s accusations become increasingly aggressive. Highlighting U.S. expansion into Texas and Mexico, he writes, “The whites in Texas are surely not blameless for the state of things as they are. The most distinguished of their number – General Houston – has assured me that the Indians ‘never were the first to break the treaties’” (47). Calling attention to an ongoing history of U.S. expansion and native dispossession, McGee critiques Anglo-America’s abusive imperial politics to exonerate Catholicism. While such moments certainly demonstrate McGee’s own biases, they also show how the Catholic past acts as a register through which to engage and rewrite the hemisphere into a U.S. narrative. In a move that uncannily mirrors Columbus’s and Mexico’s rhetoric, he reveals
how Irving’s and Prescott’s anti-Catholicism functions as a way to legitimize the rise of
Protestant America.

Most disturbing in these moments of intertextuality, however, is not McGee’s
exoneration of Catholicism or even his indictment of U.S. expansion. Rather his citation of
_Columbus_ and _Mexico_ highlights the ways in which the Catholic past haunts U.S. narratives.
Resurrected from the reappropriations, exonerations, and conventions of romance, the Catholic
returns to illuminate Irving’s and Prescott’s Protestant imperialism. In this light, it is not
surprising that McGee is a nearly non-existent, not even marginal voice in the American literary
canon. Fallen between the bindings of _Columbus_ and _Mexico_, there is little reason to recall
_Catholic History_ from the depths of Google Books, reifying what we have thus far perceived as
U.S. empire’s Protestant persuasion. After all, Irving’s _Columbus_ continued to be published
throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century in multiple languages and revised
editions. And while Prescott’s _Mexico_ did not achieve the same level of fame, it laid the
groundwork for the U.S. conquest of Mexico and scholars continue to read it today. Meanwhile,
_Catholic History_ remains another ghost of the past seemingly put to rest by Irving’s and
Prescott’s more rational romance.

Yet, when read these texts together, they challenge us to see how Catholicism became a
register for imagining a hemispheric empire. By calling attention to the constellation of
representations through which Americans debated the terms of expansion, these texts track the
development of U.S. imperialism and elucidate the ways in which anti-Catholicism served as a
discourse of Protestant imperialism. As the overlap between _Columbus_, _Mexico_, and _Catholic
History_ show, reading these texts as isolated moments of expansion or nativist crisis rather than a
continuum overlooks the centrality of religion within the formation of U.S. empire-building.
When we approach these writers separately, we see only historical moments of Protestant imperialism or Catholic self-assertion, and, in so doing, fail to see how religion and romance played a central role in both masking and propagating empire. Located as part of a foundational romance tradition wherein Catholic history becomes a legacy for imagining empire, Irving, Prescott, and McGee challenge us to see imperialism as a dynamic story intimately intertwined with the nation’s religious identity.

4 Few scholars have located these two authors together. In a chapter on Prescott, Eric Wertheimer begins with a reading of the two, noting that Prescott’s work was thematically and stylistically fashioned in the tradition of Irving. See Eric Wertheimer, *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).
7 Standing in contrast to the vehemently anti-Catholic crusaders of the 1830s and 1840s, Irving and Prescott appear as secular figures. Growing up in a strictly Scotch Presbyterian household, Irving refused the religion of his disciplinary father and embraced a more general Protestantism. He rarely commented on religion on either political or personal levels. Although raised in Unitarian Boston, Prescott identified as a religious liberal affiliated more with the principles of New England Brahmin intellectualism than with the Puritan discipline of his ancestors. See “An Estimate of the Writings of Washington Irving,” *Christian Advocate* 7 (December 1829): 508-13, 561-65 (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1829), 563.


16 Unlike Philip Freneau’s and Joel Barlow’s earlier Columbian poems, Irving treats Columbus as a historical figure. Irving was invited by Alexander Hill Everett to translate de Martin Fernández de Navarrete’s *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos, que hicieron por mar lose Spanoles desde e fines del siglo XV*. Joining the American embassy in Spain, he spent three years digging through the Jesuit Library of San Isidoro, the Royal Library of Madrid, and American consul Obadiah Rich’s well-known collection of Spanish texts. He was the first to take advantage of the Bartolomé de las Casas-Columbus accounts and also drew from the biography of Columbus’s son Hernando Colon. For a more detailed discussion of Irving’s sources, see Rolena Adorno’s great piece “Washington Irving’s Romantic Hispanism and its Columbian Legacies,” in *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, ed. Richard L. Kagan (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 48-105. As Adorno notes, Irving introduces the modern-day view of Columbus’s accidental discovery and has been cited by intellectuals of Latin American Studies such as Edmundo O’Gorman for playing a key role in the invention of America. See O’Gorman’s *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history* (Bloomingtom: Indiana UP, 1961).

17 Irving, *Columbus*, 3.

18 *Columbus* was highly acclaimed, receiving recognition from both Spanish and U.S. institutions. Its popularity eventually earned Irving the position of U.S. Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain. It was published in more than 116 editions throughout the nineteenth century, and the abridged version made its way into schools in both the U.S. and abroad. See Adorno, “Irving’s Romantic Hispanism,” 55.


22 Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 3.


26 Scholars have long debated Irving’s use of history and romance, seeing him as a writer that both critiques historical self-fashioning and yet feeds into models of literary nationalism. John Hazlett, for instance, sees *Columbus* as a text that manifests Irving’s ambivalence about historical writing, offering a narrative that meets the demands of
literary nationalism and yet recognizes the dark reality of colonialism. Paul Giles, on the other hand, has more recently conceptualized the doubleness of Columbus as another example of Irving’s self-conscious burlesque style. While Irving certainly recognizes Columbus’s errors and faults, he also pointedly frames this duality as part of his historical methodology. Levin notes that one of the central traits of nineteenth-century romantic historiography was the construction of a representative man. Historians emphasized the hero’s constancy and endurance. This does not necessarily mean that they failed to see fault, but that the faults of heroes like Columbus became less distinct in light of their greatness (61,177). See Richard V. MacLamore, “Postcolonial Columbus: Washington Irving and the Conquest of Granada,” Nineteenth-Century Literature 48.1 (1993): 26-43; John D. Hazlett, “Literary Nationalism and Ambivalence in Washington Irving’s The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus,” American Literature 55.4 (1983): 560-75; and Paul Giles, “Antipodean American Geography: Washington Irving’s Globular Narratives,” Oxford Handbook to Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies, ed. Russ Castronovo (Oxford, 2012), 11-26.


28 Fenton, Religious Liberties, 11.

29 In The History of New York, Irving more pointedly critiques the role of religion and particularly Catholicism in the conquest of the Americas. He sarcastically writes, “pious fathers of the Romish Church” and “whole troops of fiery monks” “purified them by fire and sword” to advance “the cause of Christian love and charity” so that in “a few years not one-fifth of the number of unbelievers existed in South America were found there at the time of its discovery.” See A History of New York: Beginning to the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, The Complete Works of Washington Irving, ed. Michael L. Black and Nancy B. Black (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 45.

30 According to John Eipper, perspectives on Prescott in recent scholarship have tended to fall into two camps. Hispanists tend to see him as manifesting an imperial ideology while scholars of U.S. history and culture more often highlight his ambivalence regarding expansion. See John E. Eipper “The Canonizer De-Canonized: William H. Prescott,” Hispania 83.3 (2000): 416-427.


32 Alemán, “The Other Country,” 84; Wertheimer, Imagined Empires, 98.

33 Kaplan, Anarchy, 12.

34 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 35-82.

35 William H. Prescott, Mexico, 160.

36 Prescott titles the different sections of his history along these lines. We follow Cortés’s “Discovery of Mexico,” “March on Mexico,” “Residence in Mexico,” “Expulsion from Mexico,” and the “Siege and Surrender of Mexico.”


38 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 44-45; Alemán, “The Other Country,” 78.

39 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 44.

40 Alemán, “The Other Country,” 77.

41 Ibid., 86.

42 Kaplan describes the “anarchy of empire” as the fear that incorporating other nations would introduce a chaotic difference into the U.S. and dismantle national cohesion. See Anarchy of Empire, 7.


46 Catholic History also has an appendix which includes several pages from Columbus.

47 McGee does not cite Irving in this passage, but he places these words in quotation marks. They are a direct quotation from Columbus. Irving in turn references a Spanish historian on the council of Salamanca. Thus, there are multiple layers of textuality at work. See McGee, Catholic History, 16; Irving, Columbus, 52.
CHAPTER FOUR

(Re)constructing the Empire: Catholicism, Color, and Uplift in George Washington Cable’s

_The Grandissimes_

[Y]ou will never, never divine, guess, imagine how loathsome a thing the Christian religion can be made until you come to know and study Cable daily and hourly. Mind you I like him […] but in him and his person I have learned to hate all religions.

– Letter from Mark Twain to William Dean Howells, February 27, 1885 ¹

A descendant of northern Puritans, devoted Presbyterian, and Sunday-school teacher for most of his career,² George Washington Cable infused religion into his life and work to such an extent that he drew this biting comment from Mark Twain. But while Twain satirically accuses Cable of inspiring a hatred of “all” religions, in his 1880 local color romance _The Grandissimes_, Cable makes clear that it was only one religion he wanted readers to “hate” and that religion was Catholicism. It is this underlying dislike that caught the attention of one of New Orleans’s local Catholic priests. In his anonymously published _Critical Dialogue between Aboo and Caboo on a New Book: Or a Grandissime Ascension_ (1880), Adrien-Emmanuel Roquette argues that Cable is “a pert, waggish, flippant, somewhat bold upstart […] who supplied the Northern literary market with that sort of adulterated, but gratifying, stuff.” Particularly, he chastises him for his “scornfully” conceived treatment of New Orleans as a “HYBRID CITY” plagued by a “fusion and confusion” of “diverse colors.” He even goes so far as to accuse Cable of an interracial liaison and of being “a High-Priest of Negro-Voudouism.” In contemplating the reason for what he saw as a betrayal, Roquette notably highlights Cable’s Protestantism. “It is the finical
refinement of disguised puritanism, assuming the fanatical mission of radical reform and universal enlightenment.” While these critiques were largely ignored by the broader, primarily northern spectrum of American literary culture and clearly exhibit a prejudice of their own, Roquette’s attention to Cable’s Protestantism suggests that The Grandissimes not only provoked anxieties about Creole racial purity, but that, in so doing, it also evoked long-seated Protestant-Catholic tensions about New Orleans’s religious and moral institutions. As this chapter will show, The Grandissimes’s depiction of a racially hybrid “local” Catholic culture was Cable’s way of demonstrating Catholicism’s threat to the U.S. national project and a way of containing that threat.

Celebrated as “the most remarkable work of fiction ever created in the South” and “a novel wholly Southern in locale,” The Grandissimes provides an example of what I suggest is a persistent theme in local color writing on the U.S. South. Drawing upon the escapist settings and exoticism that antebellum romance writers such as Hawthorne and Irving associated with Catholicism, it puts the particularities of New Orleans’s “local” Creole culture in the service of the U.S.’s ongoing expansionist national project. Despite the increasingly transnational turn of American literary studies, most scholars continue to perceive local color as exactly what it appears to be – a “local” genre that, although “ministered especially effectively to the imagination of acquisition,” primarily represents literary efforts to preserve and capture specific intranational, regional terrains. There have been some notable exceptions in the more recent work of scholars such as Jennifer Rae Greeson, and yet critical models like this tend to follow the lead of much literary scholarship on local color on the U.S. South by attending to questions of race and overlooking those of religion. But in focusing so fixedly on the “color” of Cable’s work, we elide how local color was shaped by a national commitment to Protestantism – a
commitment that drew its force from the long-standing anti-Catholic discourse popularized and propagated through antebellum romance writing.

As we have seen in previous chapters, antebellum American romance writers relied on anti-Catholicism to imagine and justify U.S. expansion. For Hawthorne, anti-Catholicism offered a site from which to envision the consequences of U.S. expansion, while for antebellum religious crusaders and popular romance writers fears about Catholic captivity offered a way to validate U.S. empire-building. In the romantic histories of Irving and Prescott, we saw how anxieties about Catholic tyranny and difference came to underwrite the very origin stories through which U.S. writers narrated their nation’s hegemony within the Western Hemisphere. This chapter charts the persistence of this romance tradition in the postbellum era, showing how when we recognize the foundational relationship between romance and empire established in antebellum American writing, we can see how postbellum narrative forms – even those as seemingly “local” as Cable’s *The Grandissimes* – are part and parcel to the U.S. imperial project. *The Grandissimes* demonstrates the ways in which local color maintained the antebellum commitment to Protestantism by simultaneously mediating concerns about religious difference and managing national ambitions for global dominance. As I will demonstrate in the first section of this chapter, *The Grandissimes*’s depiction of New Orleans as a space marked by Catholicism frames the South and similarly marked territories as threats to U.S. nation. However, as I show in this chapter’s second section, this portrait of local culture ultimately helped to legitimize the U.S. imperial project by positioning such spaces as opportunities for Protestant uplift and conversion. In this sense, local color does exactly the opposite of what we have long assumed. Rather than conserve lost ways of life, it opens these terrains to the possibilities of nationalization and
assimilation. Rather than represent the essence of local culture, it represents the homogenizing impulses of U.S. empire-building.

At stake in *The Grandissimes’s* depiction of a racially diverse Catholic terrain is a bigger question about the role of anti-Catholicism in postbellum U.S. imperialism. At the same moment Cable was writing *The Grandissimes*, Americans were engaging in a lively debate about Catholicism and empire-building, particularly in those historical moments surrounding the potential annexation of tropical southern territories. Scholars studying the cultures of U.S. imperialism, however, have tended to bypass the role of anti-Catholicism and religion more broadly in these debates – perhaps because concerns over slavery began to edge Catholicism out of the national spotlight starting in the 1850s.⁷ Despite this displacement, Cable’s 1880 depiction of New Orleans suggests that anti-Catholicism reemerges in the postbellum era as a powerful rhetorical tool for managing the fears and ambitions of U.S. overseas expansion. Some Americans saw annexation – like immigration – as a harbinger of miscegenation that endangered, as Susan Harris argues of the U.S.-Philippine War, the U.S.’s exceptional “religious and racial composition.” In contrast, others perceived it as an opportunity to civilize the racially and religiously darkened others of the world.⁸ In this sense, anti-Catholicism illuminates what Amy Kaplan describes as U.S. empire’s “double vision” – its tendency to protect national borders and simultaneously pursue “boundless” expansion.⁹ What *The Grandissimes* reveals is that this religious discourse began to resurface, not in the final years of the nineteenth century when the U.S. was actively waging war for territories like Cuba and the Philippines, but in the crucial postbellum years when Americans were debating the moral aptitude of the nation’s newly freed black people. Read alongside contemporaneous debates about U.S. overseas expansion, it demonstrates how the Catholic represented both the threat of incorporating such individuals as
well as the U.S.'s ability to contain and control such threats in the course of national expansion. By locating *The Grandissimes* within these debates, we can begin to see how local color played a central role in creating this collaboration between religion and empire and how in turn this collaboration shaped both “what” and “whom” we see as “local.”

Catholic Color

On the surface, *The Grandissimes* appears to be almost entirely about race and Reconstruction and very little about religion and empire-building. Typically read as an allegory for post-Civil War politics—a “romance of reunion” so to speak—10 it chronicles the clash of North and South through an encounter between Creole Latin and Anglo-American civilizations. Set in New Orleans during the days surrounding the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, the novel tells the story of the prominent Creole Grandissime family, a vast array of black, white, and mixed-race characters who are ostensibly Catholic and occasionally voudou practitioners. The novel’s action turns upon the arrival of Joseph Frowenfeld, a German-American immigrant from the North who befriends the Grandissime family head Honoré and uses his superior moral prowess to ease the family’s transition into the new American order. Over the course of novel, he slowly unravels the family’s haunting legacies of slavery and miscegenation through the stories of Honoré’s half mulatto brother also named Honoré, the mulatta voudou priestess Palmyre, and the legendary slave Bras-Coupé. Emphasizing the need for progress and justice, Frowenfeld helps the white Honoré confront these legacies by ending a family feud and recognizing his half brother. Though the novel ends with the deaths of Honoré, f.m.c. (free man of color) as well as the dispersal of the novel’s central black and mixed-race characters, Cable makes clear that it is through
Frowenfeld’s influence that the family sheds its oppressive racial politics and leaves behind its history of tyranny for the privileges of American citizenship. And in addition to being progressive and racially liberal, northern and white, it is no accident that Frowenfeld is also Protestant.

Though the South’s legacies of slavery certainly lie at the center of this story, Frowenfeld’s Protestantism amidst a tropical, racially hybrid, Catholic culture suggests that the novel’s story of assimilation goes beyond critiquing race relations in the South. Written during an era when the freshly reunited U.S. turned renewed attention to overseas endeavors, The Grandissimes illuminates an ongoing narrative of U.S. imperialism that began with antebellum anti-Catholicism and coalesced in postbellum debates surrounding Reconstruction and U.S. overseas empire-building. While concerns about Catholic difference and racial heterogeneity had motivated debates about expansion since the age of Federalism, in the decades following the Civil War these anxieties erupted anew as Americans contemplated the prospect of incorporating Catholic territories into a nation already struggling to assimilate large populations of Catholic immigrants and newly freed African Americans. Less than ten years before Cable published The Grandissimes, for instance, these issues came to the forefront of discussions about the annexation of Santo Domingo. Where Americans like President Grant saw Santo Domingo as a way to acquire lucrative resources, find a “congenial home” for the newly “emancipated race of the South,” and bring the U.S. to a “happy unity,” others saw it as a place that would only add to the U.S.’s existing problems. “And then fancy ten or twelve tropical States added to the southern States we already [my emphasis] possess,” argued Senator Charles Schurz, one of the central anti-annexation protestors. The people of Santo Doming were, after all, as Nation editor E.L. Godkin described, “ignorant Catholic Spanish Negroes” — “people of the Latin race mixed
with Indian and African blood” that had been degraded by the overlapping tyrannies of slavery and Catholicism. As abolitionist Lydia Maria Child explained in her defense of Dominican and Haitian self-government, Catholicism had “dwarf[ed] the souls of the people by keeping them from thinking for themselves” and consequently relegated them to “ignorant subjection.”

Concerned with the prospect of “absorbing semi-civilized Catholic states,” protesters asked, in the words of Schurz, “[I]s the incorporation of that part of the globe and the people inhabiting it quite compatible with the integrity, safety, perpetuity, and progressive development of our institutions?”

Ultimately, Congress as well as many Americans decided “no” – Santo Domingo was not “compatible” with American institutions – and largely because of its Catholicism, as much as because of race. There would be “no annexation in the tropics,” so the slogan became. Three decades later, however, many Americans would change their tune when confronted with the prospect of annexing the Philippines. Certainly, for some, the non-white, primarily Catholic Filipinos, like those of Santo Domingo and the Creoles of The Grandissimes, riled fears about racial and religious contamination. As virulent segregationist and anti-annexationist Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina argued, “Why do we as a people want to incorporate into our citizenship ten million more of different or of differing races, three or four of them?” For others, however, the Philippines offered a strategic trading position with China, a place to yet again relocate the nation’s newly freed black population, and an opportunity to fulfill what Americans were increasingly seeing as the U.S.’s heavenly ordained obligation. Influenced by the popularity of a social gospel movement that emphasized Protestants’ social responsibility to the nation’s African Americans and impoverished populations, many Americans came to see overseas annexation as what President McKinley described as a duty to “educate the Filipinos,
and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them.” Predominantly Catholic and racially hybrid, Filipinos, like those of Santo Domingo, were practically pagan according to McKinley, and needed a healthy dose of Protestant progress to bring them out of their Catholic darkness. Indeed, the “uplift” of non-white Catholics not only justified annexation – it demanded it.

So, how could U.S. empire be a form of moral uplift and contamination? How could the U.S. see annexation as both a danger to white, Protestant dominance and an extension of it? Published between these two events, Cable’s *The Grandissimes* illustrates that the overlapping religious and racial concerns surrounding Santo Domingo and the Philippines were not isolated anxieties, but flashpoints in a longer, protracted narrative of empire-building. This development is one that scholars of Cable’s work have generally neglected, often seeing the novel’s discussion of religion as a peripheral byproduct of intraregional or sectional tensions. And yet, *The Grandissimes* introduces us to a world that is uncannily similar to the extranational terrains that policymakers and Americans were contemporaneously considering for annexation. Upon descending into the South alongside Joseph Frowenfeld, readers encounter the “strange names, places and events” of a local setting that, as more recent scholars have noted, is remarkably global and legibly tropical. Indeed, “[f]ields of sugar cane” and “orange or magnolia groves” dot the landscape, “mighty willow-jungles” provide “deep shade,” and even the “whirligig of jubilant [and disease-carrying] mosquitoes” can be heard buzzing about the pages of the novel as Cable luxuriously indulges in Louisiana’s “tropical gorgeousness.” To be sure, nineteenth-century Americans saw New Orleans as what Cable’s friend Lafcadio Hearn described as “the gate to the tropics,” and *The Grandissimes* makes this so strikingly clear that following its
publication the *Century* asked Cable to collaborate on an illustrated travel account of the West Indies.²⁴

But beyond these setting details, *The Grandissimes*’s evokes the religious politics of contemporaneous debates over annexation by presenting New Orleanian Creoles as exactly what Americans saw in Santo Domingo and the Philippines – non-white Catholics. This is why when Cable recounts the genealogy of the Grandissimes and their rivals the De Grapiions for the newly arrived Frowenfeld, he highlights Catholicism as the source of Louisiana’s racial and religious backwardness. Tricked by French royal agents, the De Grapion family matriarch arrives in the New World only to learn that the colonial government requires her to marry a French soldier and convert to Catholicism. A Huguenot by birth, she refuses and after several months in New Orleans’s Ursuline convent, the nuns give up, protesting to the colony’s Grand Marquis De Vaudreuil that “she would neither marry nor pray to Mary” (26). Cable cites the Marquis’s “tone” about religion as the reason “why Louisiana has grown up so out of joint” (26).

Will you take a little advice from an old soldier? It is one word – submit. What is inevitable, submit to it. If you want to live easy and sleep easy, do as other people do – submit […] A little hearing of mass, a little telling of beads, a little crossing of one’s self – what is that? One need not believe in them. Don’t shake your head. Take my example; look at me; all these things go in at this ear and out at this. Do king or clergy trouble me? Not at all. For how does the king in these matters of religion? […] Do you know that all the noblesse, and all the savants, and especially all the archbishops and cardinals, - all, in a word, but such silly little chicks as yourself, - have found out that this religious business is a joke? Actually a joke, every whit; except, to be sure, this heresy phase; that is a joke they cannot take. (26)
In the above passage, Cable identifies Catholicism as the reason behind the South’s degeneracy and a context for understanding what he describes as the region’s central problems: “slavery […] or rather caste” (154). Calling Catholicism a “joke” that even its hierarchy upholds, he associates it with not only artifice, but also tyranny. Rather than a religion of moral righteousness and true faith, he suggests it is a religion of outward spectacle, hierarchy, and “submission,” even going so far as to divorce it from religious belief itself – “one does not have to believe in them.” Such statements suggest that Catholicism is weak in its ability to generate true religious belief, but oppressively powerful in terms of the political and, as the Marquis’s final veiled threat suggests, violent consequences it can enforce. Founded on such tyranny and blasphemy, it is no surprise that when Cable later recalls the rebellion of black characters Palmyre and Bras-Coupé, it is a “jovial divine, with a fat smile” who argues that “castigation would help” the “case […] the whip is a great sanctifier” (188). Indeed, the novel evokes a relationship between Catholicism and slavery, suggesting that, in a culture developed through the corruptions and tyrannies of the Marquis’s Catholicism, the Creoles whom Frowenfeld meets are naturally prone to other forms of oppression. Slavery and caste are simply the results of what happens from places pushed “out of joint” by Catholicism.

That the site of Cable’s critique of southern racism is an identifiably Catholic culture was hardly a new concept for postbellum readers and those Americans contemplating the consequences of annexation. During the antebellum period, Catholicism became increasingly tied to concepts of slavery through the nativist emphasis on Catholic tyranny. It was, in the words of Protestant crusader Lyman Beecher, the “most skillfull, powerful system of corruption to those who wield it and of debasement and slavery to those who live under it.” Like race slavery, Catholicism made its followers so “ignorant in mind” and “debased in morals” that they
became merely part of a “reckless mass of infuriated animalism.”25 "We are in danger, first, of something far worse than Romanism, and through that of Romanism itself. OUR FIRST DANGER IS BARBARISM – Romanism next,” Horace Bushnell argues in his 1847 Barbarism the First Danger.26 In the years leading up to the Civil War, abolitionists capitalized on this rhetoric by emphasizing, as Jenny Franchot argues, the “Romanish iniquities of the South.”27 Plagued by tyranny and slavery, the South appeared in antislavery writing as a region rife with the same moral laxity, degeneracy, and ignorance that antebellum American travelers criticized and at times celebrated in Catholic nations throughout Latin America and southern Europe. In this light, it makes sense that, in addition to making his Creoles Catholic slaveholders, Cable also describes them as “sired by superstition,” “savage,” and “heathen” (185, 189, 229), not unlike the racially blackened heirs of an “African savagery” they live among (251). Indeed, through their Catholicism and race tyranny, the novel suggests that the Creoles are as barbaric as the people they enslave and oppress. Such characterizations, Tracy Fessenden explains, highlight the difference between “Protestant New England and a discursively Catholicized South” and render “slaves and their owners continuous in their difference, potentially figured as both religious and racial, from the Protestant North.”28

It is through such conflations that local color writing teases out the interconnections between race and religion in postbellum debates surrounding annexation and insists on the centrality of religion to the U.S. imperial project. Indeed, such renderings encouraged readers to see Catholicism as a hue of race and, conversely, perceive the racial blackness of the South’s African descendants as a color of Catholicism. In marketing the South as a racially diverse Catholic world, local color writers ranging from Cable to Grace King to Lafcadio Hearn and travel writers like Henry Castellanos and Edward King wove this conflation into their depictions
of the South’s “peculiar” local culture. For example, in his popular 1872 *Great South* series, Edward King – the man who discovered Cable on his journey to rediscover the South – verbally and visually associates Catholicism with blackness as he describes New Orleans’s St. Louis Cathedral:

> See! a black-robed woman, with downcast eyes, passes silently over the holy threshold; a blind beggar, with a parti-colored handkerchief wound about his weather-beaten head, hears the rustling of her gown, and stretches out his trembling hand for alms; a black girl looks wonderingly into the holy-water font; the market-women hush their chatter as they near the portal; a mulatto fruit seller is lounging in the shade.  

Demanding his readers to “see,” King, not unlike Protestant tourists writing of Catholic Europe, paints Catholicism as an aesthetically attractive and foreign world of brilliant, mixed colors.

Most often represented through the iconic stained-glass windows that tourists traveled to see in Rome, “[c]olor and Catholicism,” Franchot argues, “jointly embodied the contamination of matter; Protestantism, whether through purgation or its successful blend of abstractions […] enjoyed the privileged domain of ‘white light.’”

King’s depiction of the cathedral evokes these tropes, but rather than simply aesthetic or metaphoric, he racializes Catholic “color.” The “black-robed woman,” “black girl,” “mulatto fruit seller,” and the impoverished figure clothed in a
“parti-colored handkerchief” all locate southern Catholicism as a racially mixed world that lures in practitioners through its shallow aesthetic attractions. In particular, figure 1 underscores this idea. With lips open, a young black girl looks “wonderingly” and even dumbly into the holy water font, highlighting the relationship between Catholic and African ignorance. Such images cast Catholicism and St. Louis Cathedral in particular as harbors of blackness and race-mixing that, through the touristic lens of local color and travel writing, emphatically repurposes the South as a Catholic spectacle for a voyeuristic Protestant North.

While such depictions of Catholic blackness permeated a wide array of local color writings on the South, the most popular and perhaps most obvious of these iterations was voudou.31 As scholars have long-noted, voudou recalls not only the South’s involvement with the African slave trade, but also the blending of African and European races and religions that occurred through the often violent encounters of New World colonialism. Recognizing this history, local color writers highlight voudou’s compatibility with Catholicism, often including both verbal and visual sketches that frame voudou as evidence of the South’s racial and religious corruptions.32 This is not to obscure the unique history of voudou that scholars like Karen Brown33 have unearthed or the violent oppression of African religious culture that voudou also illuminates, but rather it also shows how local color works blur and blend the distinctions between these forms through a process of myth- and folklore-making. In his 1895 New Orleans as it Was, Henry Castellanos, for instance, provides a chapter on “The Voudous” that, like antebellum critiques of Catholicism, renders voudou a religion of tyranny and barbarism. Although clearly African in origin, it is a “system of domination, on the one hand, and of blind submission on the other” that professes a “stupid creed” and “bestial rights” (90-91) and that, like Catholicism, “conform[s] to the worship of the Virgin and of other saints. To idolatry, they
add blasphemy.”34 In addition to highlighting this similarity to Catholicism, writers conversely recognized Catholicism’s similarity to voudou. For example, Grace King – one of Cable’s local critics and a Protestant educated in Catholic schools – reinforces this conflation in her 1895 New Orleans: The Place and People, including a chapter on New Orleans’s all black convent, underneath which she offers subsections on “African Creole Songs,” “Quadroons” and “Voudou Meetings.”35 Such details emphasize the similarity between Catholicism and blackness and frame the South as a messy mélange of religious and racial darkness.

The relationship between blackness and Catholicism similarly underwrites Cable’s depiction of voudou in The Grandissimes. Throughout his work, Cable described voudou as an offshoot of an equally ignorant, superstitious, and violent Catholicism. At the same time, he saw Catholicism as a religion blackened by its interaction with African religious practices. For instance, in one of his notebooks, he notes of Acadians in western Louisiana, “All Roman Catholics […] Very superstitious (the lower class) get many absurd beliefs from African contact; Gris, Zombis, Orangas.”36 Similarly, the Creoles of The Grandissimes are a population derived from such “absurd” confluences. As Franchot notes, “Mulattoes, Creoles, full Africans – virtually everyone in The Grandissimes except for Anglo- and German-Americans – practices voudou and often together”37 and, conversely, most of these characters participate in Catholic practices and culture, even if only for show or by force. Consequently, the two sets of beliefs blend together for Cable’s readers, who untangle and witness these confusions through the eyes of the northern Protestant Frowenfeld. Much like the “weird, drowsy throb of the African song and dance” that Frowenfeld hears reverberating from the cathedral and convent bells, voudou and Catholicism ring similar within the context of local color writing (96).
Characters like *The Grandissimes*’s mulatta voudou priestess Palmyre la Philosphe embody this mixture of religious and racial difference, and it is this blend that makes her both powerful and feared by other characters. Often seen as a fictionalization of New Orleans’s famous Catholic voudou queen Marie Laveau, Palmyre is known in the world of *The Grandissimes* for “the efficiency of her spells and the sagacity of her divinations, but most of all for the chaste austerity with which she practised the less baleful rites of the voudous” (60). And yet, as Cable shows, Palmyre’s voudou is not incompatible with Creole Catholicism. Indeed, Creole men like those of the Grandissime family fear her and the same women who contemplate convent-living flock to her for cures and spells. Moreover, she too abides – willingly or not – by the practices of a tyrannical Creole Catholicism. When she marries Bras-Coupé, for example, she feels compelled to honor the rites of Catholic marriage, moaning “away whole nights heaping reproaches upon herself for the impulse […] which had permitted her hand to lie in Bras-Coupé’s and the priest to bind them together” (183). In addition to symbolizing Catholicism’s compatibility with African religious forms, Palmyre is also of mixed descent. Perhaps an illegitimate child of the Grandissime patriarch Agricola Fusilier, she is, as Cable describes, a Creole “type,” one marked by “a barbaric and magnetic beauty” that could “have sprung only from high Latin ancestry on the one side and – we might venture – Jaloff African on the other” (59-60).

Through the relationship between religion and race exemplified by Palmyre, Cable recognizes that the South is linked to places far beyond the U.S. – places like the West Indies – that, as he states in his history *Creoles of Louisiana*, are bound to the South through the “ties of a common religion, a common tongue, much common sentiment.” As scholars have long noted, voudou recalls the South’s proximity to the Catholic nations of the Caribbean, and local color
and tourist writing on the South invokes this geographic proximity. Henry Castellanos, for example, notes that voudou’s “peculiar idolatry” drifted “into this country and the West India Islands with the constant influx of the Slave Trade.”341 Similarly, Grace King notes that “Among the African slaves, under any application or assumptions of Christianity, there was always Voudou superstition” and that it made its way into the South through the “the immigrant St. Domingo slaves.”342 By calling attention to this history of circulation, such renderings frame voudou as a Catholicized form that highlights the history of religious and racial mixing binding the South to other nations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Cable’s depiction of voudou in The Grandissimes draws upon this connection to the West Indies. It is this recognition of religion as a powerful driver in U.S. expansion that shapes The Grandissimes. For example, in his revision of Louisiana’s famous Bras-Coupé legend, Cable underscores the potentially violent reverberations of incorporating more racially and religiously different territories like the South. When enslaved African prince and voudou priest Bras-Coupé – meaning “the Arm Cut Off” – strikes his Spanish-Creole master Don José Martinez, he initiates a “voudou malediction” in “the wrathful words of his mother tongue” that immediately recalls the ties between the South, the West Indies, and, more specifically, Haiti (181).343 Cloaked in “red and blue regimentals” that, as Katharine Burnett notes, allude to common portraits of Toussaint L’Ouverture,344 his curse against his Catholic oppressors – followed by a declaration of independence in the swamp – specifically invokes the voudou ceremony reported to have initiated the Haitian Revolution. Indeed, it inspires an “instant expectation of insurrection, conflagration and rapine” in the Creoles (181), who, “[s]ired by superstition,” believe themselves to be “bewitched” and consider fighting “the devil with fire” through what Cable describes as the equally irrational rituals of Catholic exorcism (184-5). Cable makes this connection all the more
clear when Palmyre adopts Bras-Coupé’s insurrectionism as part of a voudou revenge plot, noting that “She had heard of San Domingo, and for months the fierce heart within her silent bosom had been leaping and shouting and seeing visions of fire and blood” (184). While critics like Barbara Ladd have noted this interaction between Bras-Coupé and the Creoles as the centerpiece of the novel – a “catalyst for Cable’s double-edged satire on white complacency or a locus for a stream of black disaffection and defiance that runs throughout the text,”45 – it also demonstrates the potential inter racial violence and upheaval of territories plagued by religious and racial tyranny.

Indeed, Cable underscores the impending danger of incorporating such spaces into the U.S. through Bras-Coupé’s death and the legacy of violence that it inspires. In the Calaboza next to the cathedral no less, “they strapped Bras-Coupé face downward and laid on the lash” and according to the “old French code,” shear his ears and sever the tendons behind his knees (190-91). His insurrectionism and violent death become the dark history that haunts the family’s past and signifies its long-attachment to institutions of slavery; however, this haunting does not end with Bras-Coupé. Rather, Palmyre makes him the “the gigantic embodiment of her own dark, fierce will, the expanded realization of her lifetime longing for terrible strength” (175). She adopts his insurrectionism as part of her voudou revenge against her possible father Agricola Fusilier – a man whom Cable describes as “strong with the praise of the ‘superior liberties of Europe,’ – those old, cast-iron tyrannies” (84). With the help of the black rice cake-maker Clemence, Palmyre employs a charm in the shape of a miniature arm – a bras coup – to initiate a curse that eventually leads to both Agricola’s death and the gruesome murder of Clemence. In framing such interracial violence as the product of the region’s racial and religious mixing – its multivalent legacies of tyranny – Cable demonstrates the dangers of annexing more territories
like the South. He illustrates how regions founded on both slavery and Catholicism allow for a society that, as Bryan Wagner shows in his analysis of the Bras-Coupé legend, perpetuates and normalizes racial oppression and racial defiance.  

Perhaps this is why when the Creoles finally catch, torture, and kill Bras-Coupé according to the laws of the Code Noir, Cable stages his death as a rebellion against both Catholicism and slavery. Though Bras-Coupé had “kept beyond the reach alike of the lash and of the Latin Bible” (188), he nonetheless – in his final moment – tells Palmyre “you must get the priest” (193). When the priest arrives, he asks: “Do you know where you are going?” With his dying breath and an “ecstatic, upward smile,” Bras-Coupé whispers “‘To – Africa!’” (193). Ladd analyzes this moment as one in which a melodramatic conversion story nearly displaces that of insurrection. Indeed, Bras-Coupé’s final plea for “Africa” is circumscribed within a Catholic deathbed ritual unexpected for an African-born voudou prince. But as Ladd notes, this near conversion is not followed by “peaceful coexistence between black and white.”  

In a blasphemous reversal, Cable inverts conceptions of Africa as a dark continent filled with devilish paganism by framing it as a stand-in for “heaven” and posits Catholic Louisiana – in light of Bras-Coupé’s torture and enslavement – as comparatively hellish. In so doing, he stages Bras-Coupé’s final rebellion and – if only symbolically – his liberation from slavery as freedom from the South’s Catholic bindings. At the same time, he underscores the scene’s spiritual confusions and weaves Bras-Coupé’s death and legacy into a powerful account of Catholicism’s threat to U.S. nation.

Uplifting the Empire
But Cable’s literary project does not end there – he depicts how an expansionist project can emerge from such seemingly threatening religious forces. Like many Americans, Cable saw religion and education as intimately intertwined institutions that provided the necessary intellectual and spiritual instruction to expel ignorance and promote moral uplift. “Religion and Education,” he states in *The Grandissimes*, are “[t]wo great forces [that] may ultimately do it,” meaning (re)incorporate Creole Louisiana into the U.S. (95). In his non-fiction writings in particular – many of which were published in religious missionary print outlets – Cable identifies this collaboration as the crucial step for assimilating the South back into the U.S., “Americaniz[ing] her upper class,” and elevating the newly freed African American population. He argues that even southern Protestants are “disqualified for the work” and that – in the population of freed blacks – there “never were seven million people waiting for the Christian missionary with so little paganism to unlearn.” Identifying “citizenship and Christian manhood” as the central objectives of “American” education in his address “What the Negro Must Learn,” Cable charges those of the “adult American and Anglo-Saxon Protestant worshiping population” with the task of evangelizing the more “pagan” South. Much like President McKinley would suggest two decades later, Cable makes clear that education and Protestantism are the central ways to turn religious and racial others into viable American citizens.

Such narratives of uplift were common during the postbellum period and, as Peter Schmidt argues, played a central role in linking Jim Crow at home to U.S. expansion abroad. As Cable’s depiction of blackened southern Catholics in *The Grandissimes* suggests, however, this narrative developed not only through debates surrounding the uplift of American blacks, but also through long-seated tensions between Protestants and Catholics. In the decade prior to *The Grandissimes*’s publication, nativists revived the antebellum crusade against Catholic schools,
reminding Americans that, “[e]ducation, intellectual and religious” as Beecher argued in the 1830s, is “the point on which turns our destiny, of terrestrial glory and power, or of shame and everlasting contempt.” However, as Catholic immigrants continued to arrive in large numbers and freed African Americans began seeking the rights of citizenship in the 1870s, Horace Mann’s dream of a public school system rooted in Protestantism was once again endangered. Concerns surrounding Catholic requests for government funding and the use of the bible in public schools shared the public stage with rising anxieties about racial integration. As northern missionary organizations and the Freedmen’s Bureau began sponsoring black schools, radical Republicans in the North proposed a public school agenda that aimed, as Ward McAfee argues, to “transform both African Americans and Catholic Irish along the cultural norms of Protestant New England.” But when the Republicans lost the majority to Democrats in 1874 over issues of racial integration, they reenergized their campaign with anti-Catholicism by aligning southern racism with Catholicism’s foreign influence. In view of these alignments, Protestantism once again became the savior of the nation—a way to redeem the U.S. from both black ignorance and Catholicism.

Cable attends to these concerns in *The Grandissimes*, and it is in the character of Joseph Frowenfeld that we can see most clearly how he envisions solving the problem of religious integration in an expanding nation. To the Creoles, Frowenfeld initially represents the American “invader” or, as one priest says of the city’s recent influx of Americans, the “wickedness of the times generally and their Américain-Protestant-poisoned community in particular” (157, 252). But to Cable and his nineteenth-century American and especially northern readers, Frowenfeld appears as an instrument for both hastening the South’s (re)incorporation back into the U.S. and simultaneously purging the region of its religious and racial difference. Critics have often seen
him as a voice box for Cable himself as well as an “unrealistically and unappealingly wooden” character. Indeed, he offers an example of what Cable in a drafted piece on Protestant educational missions in the South outlines as the “American type”: “We know it is the people of American and largely Anglo-Saxon race that rule this vast land of ours not by an arrogated supremacy, nor by monopoly of office but by the natural weight and power of intelligence, knowledge, virtue and wealth, and the principles of universal liberty and justice which they maintain. They make the American type.”56 “A scientific man” and “Professor” (47), Frowenfeld fits this mold, embodying the “natural weight” of Protestant virtue, empiricism, and Anglo-Saxonism.

Representing all the necessary traits of a superior American morality, Frowenfeld signifies the U.S.’s ability to not only protect itself against Catholic threats, but to contain and control them. For example, when Agricola Fusilier quarrels with another Grandissime kinsman, it is Frowenfeld’s superior morality and intelligence that convinces him that he should defer from participating in the traditional duel and heroically overturn that which is even “stronger than government” – “conventionality” (230). Moving through a series of rational explanations that emphasize the shared familial and cultural bonds binding Agricola to his enemy, “Professor Frowenfeld,” as Agricola calls him, impresses upon the old Creole the irrationalism and barbarism of such outmoded institutions as well as his own superiority as an American. With a “pacifying hand,” he finally begs Agricola to “stop” in the name of God to which Agricola acquiesces, seeing “in Frowenfeld’s eyes a spirit so superior to his dissimulation that the smile quite broke down and gave way to another of deprecatory and apologetic distress” (231). Highlighting Frowenfeld’s superior “spirit” as that which ultimately convinces Agricola, Cable presents the assimilation of Catholic territories as a romantic story of benevolence, progress, and
even redemption. Through the superior abilities of Frowenfeld’s Protestant morality and rationalism, he shows how the U.S. can enlighten and teach even the most trenchant of Creoles.

But this story of education does not end with the temporary uplift of one crotchety old Creole, albeit an influential one. Rather, Cable suggests that such superior moral capabilities not only enable, but obligate Americans like Frowenfeld to undertake such educational uplift as a national mission. He asserts this duty when Honoré Grandissime explains the Creole antipathy toward Americans. As Frowenfeld learns, the Creoles see him as a figure who “advocates measures fatal to the prevailing order of society” (152). In response, he asserts the U.S.’s national authority in the newly acquired territory, replying, “that is the very thing that American liberty gives me the right – peaceably – to do! Here is a structure of society defective, dangerous, erected on views of human relation which the world is abandoning as false” (152).

Reappropriating progress and “liberty” as moral attributes of Protestantism and Americanism, Cable frames Frowenfeld as both a liberator and harbinger of religious uplift. He suggests that it is exactly his superior morality that authorizes his attack upon the structures of Creole society. Though Honoré later chastises him for asserting this right, he soon retracts his critique, pleading with Frowenfeld to educate his kinsmen: “you – if any one – could teach my people […] teach them the value of peace” (223). This plea for “peace” paradoxically echoes Frowenfeld’s statement that, indeed, his Americanism gives him the “right” to “peaceably” upend southern society and, in turn, positions such an undertaking as a duty – indeed, a white man’s “burden” – to change and transform Creole culture. Such rhetoric illuminates what Jonathan Daigle describes as Cable’s social gospel realism, emphasizing “one’s moment-by-moment responsibility to emulate Christ as it naturalizes leading white races’ relationship to civilization.”57 At the same time, this social gospel message forwards an imperialist narrative
much like President McKinley’s comments on the Philippines. It is an entire society – not just one or two old Creoles – that needs to be uplifted out of their Catholic ignorance, and it is the U.S.’s job to undertake this task.

What follows from Frowenfeld’s assumption of this duty is a crash course in Protestant morality that begins with Honoré Grandissime himself and, indeed, ends up overturning the “prevailing order of society.” Though more progressive than many of his kinsmen, Honoré too remains tied to Creole institutions by, as he tells Frowenfeld, “our dead father’s mistakes,” which must be “revered” in order to maintain the most sacred Creole “principle” – family unity (219, 221). But when faced with the changes brought about by the Louisiana Purchase and the Grandissime-De Grapion feud, this “principle” becomes an obstacle to ensuring the family’s prosperity. To end the feud, Honoré must return the De Grapion lands, which, as one of the Grandissimes’s only remaining stable sources of income, will jeopardize their social and economic position within the new American order. The voice of “abstract” “theorizing,” Frowenfeld takes this opportunity to guide Honoré through this “moral issue” by reminding him of “Divine Justice.” “[G]asping for moral breath, speaking the right word as if in delirium, doing the right deed as if by helpless instinct” (278), Honoré returns the once confiscated lands to the De Grapions’s remaining impoverished descendants. In a letter, he writes, “Not for love of woman, but in the name of justice and the fear of God” (262). As his note to the De Grapion women suggests, Honoré is an apt student of the Protestant Frowenfeld. Moreover, this act encourages him to defy the South’s retrograde religious and racial institutions by going into business with his mulatto brother to offset the family’s financial losses. Thus, in addressing one family legacy, Frowenfeld has inspired Honoré to “right” the many other wrongs of his forefathers. “Contact with Frowenfeld,” Cable writes, “had robbed him of his pleasant mental
drowsiness” (279). As Honoré’s “gasping” moral breath suggests, the U.S. – through the benevolent workings of figures like Frowenfeld – has the ability to not only contain and convert Catholic ignorance, but in so doing, shift the very foundations of society.

Indeed, this shift serves to morally uplift the Grandissimes and create a domino effect that conveniently expunges the family of its religious and racial difference. Despite the more progressive Honoré’s willingness to embrace the justice of Protestant America and confront his family’s dark past, Cable paradoxically suggests that there is little room for either religious or racial difference within the boundaries of American citizenship. Toward the novel’s conclusion, Agricola learns of Honoré’s business contract as well as the increasingly upsetting changes of the U.S. session and proceeds to “construct an engine of offensive warfare which would revenge him a hundred-fold upon the miserable school of imported thought which had sent its revolting influences to the very Grandissime hearth-stone” (316). Entering Frowenfeld’s shop to initiate this warpath, Agricola confronts the consequence of this “revolting influence” in the form of Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c. – the very figure of “mixed blood” who “has asked for equal rights from a son of Louisiana noblesse” (283). The resulting brawl that ensues from this confrontation concludes with the death of Agricola and the flight of Honoré, f.m.c to France, a fitting location for a mixed-race Catholic. As Agricola melodramatically fades with “Louisiana Forever!” (328) on his lips and Honoré, f.m.c leaves behind his newly acquired social standing within the family,

The Grandissimes reveals how the process of uplift also means purification. The text demonstrates that the “advancing light of progressive thought” is not only enlightening, but religiously and racially cleansing (315).

This becomes all the more clear through the additional exile and death of the novel’s remaining voudou characters. When Palmyre and the town rice-cake maker Clemence attempt to
curse Agricola prior to his death, the Creoles catch and murder Clemence in a haunting scene that outwardly indicts the South’s continuing history of racial violence and yet also indirectly signals the violence that follows with the “peaceable” process of Americanization. Forced to flee as a result of her actions, Palmyre joins Honoré, f.m.c. in France, who, in unrequited love for the voudou priestess, kills himself in a hasty revision of the tragic mulatto plot. Thus, in one fell swoop, the process of education initiated by Frowenfeld has both converted the South to the more enlightened religiosity of Protestant America and purged the region of its religious and racial darkness. The novel’s central characters of color, voudou, and Catholic tyranny – Agricola, Bras-Coupé, Palmyre, Clemence, and Honoré, f.m.c. are violently expunged along the pathway of American assimilation and empire. With the death and departure of the family’s phantoms, Cable demonstrates the ways in which the U.S.’s “new-fangled measuring-rods of pert, imported theories upon moral and political progress” (302) not onlyallow the nation to expand outwards without contaminating itself, but simultaneously make this expansion into a form of purification.

This is perhaps why the novel ends in a tightly woven narrative of domestic romance. With the family’s phantoms dislocated, dead, and dispersed, the U.S. can happily embrace and (re)domesticate the South within the racially and religiously purified boundaries of marriage. Frowenfeld marries the newly-minted De Grapion heiress Clothilde and promises to become her financial advisor, saving Clothilde, her mother, and their money from the confines of a convent. Meanwhile, the white Honoré marries Clothilde’s mother, safely resecuring the De Grapion family money for the Grandissimes. This doubly conciliatory “romance of reunion,” then, not only infuses wealth back into the white downtrodden South, but also into Protestant America, demonstrating that in a new era of Reconstruction and expansion the two forces – whiteness and
Protestantism – (still) go hand-in-hand. Ending his novel within the safe harbor of marital
romance and Protestant domesticity, Cable idealistically reiterates the ways in which American
empire-building can reconcile and redeem the South as well as overseas territories comprised of
similar religious and racial differences. Racial justice achieved and voudou dispelled, empire-
building, he suggests, will literally enrich U.S. nation, elevate the barbaric masses of the tropics,
and expel any residue of ignorance through the benevolent forces of white Protestantism.

Despite *The Grandissimes*’s portrait of New Orleans as a space rife with moral and racial
darkness, it is in the character of Frowenfeld through whom Cable drives home the immense
power of the U.S. to purify Catholic territories that are peripheral but proximate to the expanding
nation. Notably, this imagined answer to the problems of Reconstruction and empire-building
received primarily celebratory reviews. *Scribner’s Monthly, Atlantic Monthly, Harper’s, Nation*
– the gamut of national newspapers and magazines – praised *The Grandissimes*: “a contribution
of permanent value to American literature”; “a diversion in favor of old romance” that has “in
effect broken new ground”; “a spirited reproduction of the manners, customs, social life, and
institutions of the early French colonists and their descendants.” 58 Indeed, Cable’s message was
well-received by those in the North as well as those in the South looking for a literary spokesman
who could represent the region on a national level. But, while such reviews would launch Cable
to national stardom and make him the spokesman for the South, the locals whom Cable painted
in *The Grandissimes* felt quite differently, eventually sparking enough hostility that he moved his
family to the North in 1884. As suggested at the beginning of this essay in Roquette’s *Abou and
Caboo*, Cable’s novel was seen as slanderous, insulting, and part of a Northern, Protestant,
reformist agenda. Such reactions suggest that Roquette and other locals understood the purposes
to which Cable’s local color was being put – to critique the South’s racial politics, certainly, but
also to forward a national project that ultimately sought to rid the nation of the very religious and racial peculiarities that Cable popularized and contained under the rubric of “local color."

When scholars approach local color as an intranational form only concerned with preserving the nation’s regional pasts, however, they miss out on the pivotal ways in which works like Cable’s perpetuated and revised a longstanding tradition of romance writing to mediate and manage the nation’s imperial future during a new era of overseas expansionism. Years after publishing *The Grandissimes*, Cable stated, “I meant to make *The Grandissimes* as truly a political work as it ever has been called.” If we take seriously this statement, then we must consider not only the text’s “political work” in discussions of race and Reconstruction, but also its message within debates on religion and empire-building. In so doing, we can see how McKinley’s dream to “educate,” “uplift,” “civilize,” and “Christianize” the Philippines is but a revision of Frowenfeld’s mission to teach and assimilate the dark, Catholic South. Moreover, when placed alongside earlier political debates such as those surrounding Santo Domingo, Cable’s text shows how even anti-imperialist rhetoric contributed to this construction and how U.S. imperialism developed through a set of political and social frictions driven as much by anxieties about protecting the nation’s Protestantism as its whiteness. By calling attention to the ways in which postbellum writers fuse religious and racial difference in their representations of “local” spaces, Cable’s text shows how local color, despite its regional roots, became part of the homogenizing forces of U.S. empire-building. When we recognize the intertwining discourses of race, religion, and empire, we can see the ways in which representations of religious and racial others as “local” served to disavow such difference at the national level. In so doing, *The Grandissimes* asks us to read local color writing – in the words of one its reviewers – as a “local story with national relations,” one that speaks not only to the nation’s legacies of civil war and
racial “color,” but also to the expansionist ventures and religious missions that came to define its global future.

2 Several scholars on Cable mention his Puritan roots and passion for religion. Arlin Turner argues that Cable became less orthodox throughout his life and that he was actually tolerant of other religions, including Catholicism. Despite this interest, most scholars tend to note the largely negative portrayal of Catholicism throughout Cable's works. See Turner, *George Washington Cable: A Biography* (Durham: Duke UP, 1956). For other commentary on Cable's religion, see also John Cleman, *George Washington Cable Revisited* (London: Prentice Hall International, 1996); and Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *George W. Cable: The Life and Times of Southern Heretic* (New York: Pegasus, 1969).
16 In this piece, Child argues against those who think Santo Domingo and Haiti are incapable of governing themselves, suggesting that Haitian and Dominican inferiority is not inherent, but a product of slavery and Catholicism. See “Dominica and Hayti,” *The National Standard*, 28 January 1871, p. 4-5.
19 Qtd. in Harris’s *God’s Arbiter*, 69.
28 Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 118, 122.
31 When I speak of voudou, I am referring to the actual Afro-Haitian system of beliefs, but also the popular versions, myths, and folklore that grew up around it during the postbellum era.


Acadian Notebook, *George Washington Cable Papers, 1810-1987*, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, Box 97, 163.


Journalists and local color writers— including Cable— described Laveau as an awe- and terror-inspiring persona of mulatto beauty, voudouism, and Catholicism. Her widely-publicized death in 1881— only months after the publication of *The Grandissimes*— offered an opportunity to elaborate on this legend and launch Cable's fictional depiction of Palmyre as not only a Creole type, but a stock image of the U.S. South. Newspapers lauded Laveau's Catholic devotion to "strengthening the allegiance of souls to the church." At the same time, they emphasized her mixed race heritage and reported how "She knew all the secrets of Voudoism, including the charms, the influences and rites." Through this dual perspective, Laveau became another version of Cable's voudou priestess. In fact, one of her obituaries describes her as such, noting that "Cable has endeavored to portray her in the character of Palmyre, in his novel of the 'Grandissimes.'" Though Cable denied using Laveau as a model for Palmyre, his novel nonetheless played a major role in bringing voudou to national prominence and thus popularizing conceptions of Catholic territories as religiously and racially contaminated. See "Death of Marie Laveau - A Woman with a Wonderful History," *Daily Picayune*, 17 June 1881, 8; "The Departed Voudou Queen," *Times*, 24 June 1881, 3; "The Dead Voudou Queen," *The New York Sun*, 23 June 1881, 2. For more on Laveau, see Carolyn Marrow Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2006).


Castellanos, *New Orleans as it Was*, 91.

Grace King, *New Orleans; the Place and the People*, 341.


Burnett, "Moving Toward a 'No South,'" 35.


For examples of this type of rhetoric, see the writings of education crusader Horace Mann, "Lecture III: The Necessity of Education in a Republican Government," 1839, *Lectures on Education* (Boston: W.M.B. Fowle and N. Capen, 1845).


Cable wrote this in an essay entitled "My Politics" in 1888-89; however, the work was deemed too personal to print at the time. See George Washington Cable, "My Politics," in *The Negro Question*, 14.

Atlantic Monthly, 13.
CHAPTER FIVE

Citizens of the World: Henry James, Catholicism, and Cosmopolitanism

No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches, no great Universities nor public schools – no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no nobles, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class – no Epsom nor Ascot!

– Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879)\(^1\)

An attempt to “enumerate the items of high civilization […] which are absent from the texture of American life” (34), this famous passage from Henry James’s 1879 work of literary criticism on Nathaniel Hawthorne relays the difficulty of American writers to create art on par with their European counterparts. Among the absences that make this the case, James spends a considerable amount of space on the U.S.’s dearth of religious culture – and not just any religious culture. While houses of Protestant worship are certainly noted in the passage, the “clergy,” “cathedrals,” and “abbeys” to which James refers most palpably allude to Europe’s Catholic heritage and, more importantly, Hawthorne’s own attention to Catholicism throughout his career. This consideration of Catholic culture becomes all the more clear when we realize that James begins this list of lacks with the following passage from *The Marble Faun*: “No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear
native land.” Directly quoting from Hawthorne’s most explicitly obsessed romance of Catholic Rome, these words and James’s revision of them with a singular attention to religion not only remind us of the long-seated collaboration between anti-Catholicism and romance forged in the antebellum period; they also reveal how this partnership continued to shape conceptions of literary form and U.S. transnationalism for an author often characterized as “realist” and “proto-modernist.” Indeed, in the same breath that James reappropriates Hawthorne’s sentiments on Catholic Rome to render the U.S. culturally inadequate and provincial, he simultaneously reaffirms American exceptionalism by juxtaposing its newness and innocence with the old and ruinous, albeit inspirational forms of Old World institutions like Catholicism. As the following chapter shows, this long-embedded construction of Catholicism as “worldly” underwrites James’s “international theme” and reveals how it was implicated within a longstanding project of Protestant empire-building in U.S. writing.

Traditionally identified by critics as the inheritor of Hawthorne’s romance tradition,3 James’s attention to Catholicism, I argue, demonstrates the long interdependency between romance, Protestantism, and U.S. imperialism, and the powerful ways in which it came to shape early twentieth-century understandings of U.S. internationalism. By drawing upon long-seated conceptions of Catholicism as an alluringly, dangerous aesthetic form, James shows how the Catholic represented the contentious relationship between national loyalty and global expansion that lies at the heart of twentieth-century U.S. cosmopolitanism. Over the last two decades, scholars have produced a plethora of critical work analyzing and critiquing the possibilities of a “global James.”4 But among these analyses, religion has rarely been featured as a critical category. This elision most likely arises because scholars tend to consider James nominally Protestant and primarily secular.5 Despite his lackluster church attendance, however, James’s
oeuvre, as Edward Fussell has shown, is peppered with references and allusions to Catholicism that reveal the religious discourses underlying his international theme.\textsuperscript{6} To be sure, analysis of James’s depiction of Catholicism not only illuminates his attention to religion, but also reveals that his continuous portrayals of Americans abroad rely on longstanding conceptions of Catholic difference to highlight the distinction between New and Old Worlds. As the first section of this chapter will show, James’s well-known early novels *The American* (1876) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880) depict the consumption and assimilation of Catholic difference as the limit of a burgeoning U.S. cosmopolitanism. But by the turn of the century when James assumes his so-called “master” phase and the U.S. attempts to expand its own mastery into Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the assimilation of Catholic difference comes to signal the transformation of U.S. cosmopolitanism into U.S. imperialism. As I will show in a second section on *The Golden Bowl*, the Catholic serves as a site through which to both imagine and critique the limitless expansion of the U.S.’s growing dominion.

Anti-Catholicism’s capacity to serve as a discourse for imagining the boundaries of U.S. cosmopolitanism is of urgent concern at this critical moment as recent scholars have undertaken to interrogate the complex conceptions of religious difference that continue to shape the relationship between the U.S. and the globe.\textsuperscript{7} While such studies more broadly emerge from inquiries about the global formations of religion,\textsuperscript{8} scholars have yet to fully consider how religion helped to forge a relationship between U.S. cosmopolitanism and empire-building. James’s work operates as a case study through which to illuminate religion’s influence as it was implicated in these overlapping transnationalisms at the turn of the twentieth century. His international romances occur in the same years when Americans began traveling outside the U.S. in unprecedented numbers, wrestling for control over historically Catholic-dominated territories
in the Western Hemisphere, and institutionalizing programs for the assimilation of newly
immigrated and annexed "aliens," a process James anxiously describes in *The American Scene.*
As shown in the previous chapter, concerns about Catholic difference shaped this
assimilationism by transforming empire-building into a form of Protestant uplift. What James’s
work further elucidates is how anti-Catholicism also authorized the conceptions of
cosmopolitanism through which such assimilationism emerged. Catholicism’s transformation
from an unassimilable to assimilable foreign commodity not only reflects the U.S.’s increasing
prominence on the global stage, but it also reveals how this new era of U.S. empire-building was
profoundly rooted in old concerns about religious difference. In other words, James’s novels
draw upon the collaboration between anti-Catholicism and U.S. imperialism established in
antebellum romance writing to make good on the words of Hawthorne’s narrator in *The Scarlet
Letter*’s preface – to transform the once well-rooted American into a “citizen of the world” and
simultaneously transform the “world” into the U.S.’s domain.

Marking the Limit: Provincial Protestants and Catholic “Cages”

Set in the postbellum era in which James writes, *The American* follows the travels of
newly wealthy American Christopher Newman as he encounters the history, art, and conventions
of the Old World for the first time. “[S]tepping forth in his innocence and might” like “The Great
Western Barbarian” (68), Christopher exemplifies American provincialism and naiveté as he
travels about Europe, Baedeker in hand, demanding to see everything – the “People, places, art,
nature, everything! […] the tallest mountains, […] and the most beautiful women” (58). The
novel turns upon Newman’s pursuit of one particular “beautiful woman” – Claire de Bellegarde
— whose aristocratic, yet impoverished Parisian Catholic family begrudgingly concedes to Newman’s suite. What follows is a series of encounters that make apparent to James’s readers that the American man does not quite fit the contours of European society. Plagued by a “commercial” quality, Christopher poses as such an embarrassment to his future in-laws that they eventually refuse to allow his marriage. Falling into a sensationalist plotline similar to that found in the popular romance works examined in the second chapter of “Sacred Dominion,” the novel concludes with Christopher’s discovery of a dark family secret that offers him the opportunity to blackmail the family and save Claire from life in a Catholic convent. Unable to bring himself to exercise this power, he reverts back to his “remarkably good nature” (57), allowing his love to falter in the face of European tradition and convention. James makes clear that the American, despite his quest to be “clever” like the well-traveled American expatriates and Europeans he meets (55), ultimately yields to his exceptional American innocence.

A prime example of James’s “international theme,” *The American* highlights the longstanding anti-Catholicism that shaped James’s cosmopolitanism. Specifically, I argue that through the consumption and assimilation of Catholicism, the text reveals the religious discourses underwriting what James saw at this time as the irreconcilable conflict between American patriotism and global engagement. Only a year after he published *The American*, James voiced these concerns in his short 1878 piece “Occasional Paris.” Rather than an intentional global project, James describes cosmopolitanism as an “accident” that occurs as “we move about the world” and consequently engage in practices of cultural comparison (128). The “cosmopolite,” is an individual who, on the one hand, sees “many lands and feel[es] at home in none” and, on the other, reaches a moment when “one set of customs, where it may be found, grows to seem [...] as provincial as another” (129). Simply put, to be cosmopolitan is to be
without a home and without the prejudices that belong to that home. Anticipating what scholars such as Martha Nussbaum describe as the conflict between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, James describes this state as an “uncomfortable consequence” (128). Highlighting the struggle and alienation that comes with seeing and assimilating a multiplicity of “lands” into one’s purview, he admits that the “ideal” is to be a “concentrated patriot,” but concedes that in the end cosmopolitanism is “good” because it frees one’s “generalisations” from the “sphere to which a discriminating Providence has assigned you” and helps one to “think well of mankind” as a whole (128-29). Framing cosmopolitanism as that which lends itself to utopian possibilities of universalism, James nonetheless expresses the conflict that such a state creates: it severs individuals from their home nations. Cosmopolitanism, he suggests, cannot be achieved while national loyalty remains. It is “accidental” and “good,” but nonetheless not “ideal.”

This conception of cosmopolitanism is one that stands in contradistinction to longstanding conceptions of the “American” as the cosmopolitan identity. Though conceived in its earliest iteration as an engagement with a single unified world community, the idea of cosmopolitanism for the American, as Jared Hickman has argued, emerged from a particularly “nationalist cradle.” Since the years of the early republic, cosmopolitanism in the American tradition has been imagined as part of the “multicultural transnationalism of revolutionary North America,” offering “Americanity” as “the original vehicle whereby abstract universalist humanism was translated into concrete planetary humanism.” After all, America is, as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur writes, a place where “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.” Antebellum Americans similarly adopted this perception of the cosmopolitan American, infusing it, as Ralph Waldo Emerson does, into a nationalist concept that saw the U.S. as a nation inspired by universal ideals – the first “nation of men [who] will for
the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."

In the postbellum period during which James publishes *The American*, this term adopts an added historical and cultural significance in light of the increased travel and what I discussed in my last chapter as the overlapping tensions of immigration and expansionism. Rather than highlight the conflict of global and local loyalties, cosmopolitanism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, as Jessica Berman argues, resolves this conflict by conforming to the nationalistic tenor of the Gilded Age. Often featured as part of an upwardly mobile identity wedded to transnational travel and appreciation of the exotic, cosmopolitanism emerges as “an enlightened national identity” concerned with both incorporating and managing diversity and difference.

Christopher Newman’s encounter with Catholicism in *The American* not only highlights the unwieldy tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in postbellum American culture, but it also demonstrates how such tensions drew their force from longstanding anxieties surrounding the assimilation of Catholic difference. This is something that James scholars have generally neglected, seeing James’s depictions of Catholicism as a vehicle for the text’s commentary on American masculinity or an example of James’s ponderings on conversion.

And yet, *The American* stages the American encounter with Catholic Europe through the eyes of a character that represents exactly the type of “cosmopolitan” that Americans had long envisioned themselves to be. A Civil War veteran and wealthy entrepreneur of the West, Christopher Newman is “a physically, fine man” and an unknowingly “muscular Christian” (34) of Protestant origins who pursues the world with unmatched curiosity. He exudes “a sort of air [...] of being thoroughly at home in the world” (141). Despite this way of being at “home” in the world, James suggests that Christopher’s American cosmopolitanism is oddly provincial and
patriotic compared to that of Europe’s worldliness and experience. From his devotion to his Baedeker guidebook, to his rampant tourism, to his “remarkably good nature” (57), James presents Christopher as naïve and inexperienced. Ironically, it is this inexperience that urges him to see the world as a type of “entertainment.” As he tells an old friend of his plans for Europe, “I want the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get” (58).

The Catholic figures in this “entertainment” as an alluring representative form of European otherness for American consumption. For instance, James opens The American’s story of transatlantic encounter with an episode that distinctly draws upon and revises discourses of Protestant tourism popularized by antebellum romance writers like Hawthorne. Standing in the Louvre staring at “Murillo’s beautiful moon-borne Madonna” (33) – one of the many images that have thus far “strained” and “dazzled” his eyes (33-4) – Christopher happens upon the coquettish painter Noémie Nioche and expresses an immediate desire to own the copy of the Murillo she paints. Though Christopher expresses little religious enthusiasm for the subject, he nonetheless sees the Catholic image as a piece of cultural value that he must possess. Believing it ““Very pretty, splendide,”” Christopher tells Noémie, ““The Madonna, yes; I am not a Catholic, but I want to buy it”” (37). Driven by the immediate desire to possess the image and entranced by what he sees as the beauty of the seemingly foreign Catholic form, Christopher purchases the painting. Though we discover later that Noémie is an admittedly horrible painter and the Murillo copy the worst of her work, Christopher sees only the painting’s foreign aesthetic and “beautiful subject” (37). Depicted as provincial and ignorant about European art, James suggests that Christopher cannot discern the difference between the authentic painting and its imitation or, perhaps more tellingly, that he does not care. Instead, Catholic culture simply figures as an exemplary artifact to showcase Christopher’s growing appreciation of exotic and worldly culture.
Like the "some four hundred and seventy churches" (126) he boasts of visiting, he foolishly sees the Madonna painting as a marker of his newly acquired taste and his superior ability to assimilate difference.

This American investment in Catholic culture extends not only to paintings and churches, but also to people and, more specifically, Claire de Bellegarde, a devotee of a unique Old World brand of Catholicism and a descendant of a longstanding noble family. As we find, the Bellegardes are supporters of the Catholic Bourbonist pretender to the throne of France as well as of Ultramontanism, a specific form of Catholic religious belief that became associated with the expansion of papal power during the second half of the nineteenth century. So adamantly as a family in their loyalty to this Catholicism, for instance, the Bellegardes even send their dandy-like youngest son Valentin to fight for the pope. In other words, they recall a type of feudal Catholicism that American Protestants considered both dangerous in its associations with religious despotism and yet also alluring in its rarity. Much like his attention Noémie Nioche’s imitation Murillo, Christopher does not understand this history. Rather, James suggests that he is simply drawn to the romantic aesthetic it represents.

For instance, Christopher expresses admiration for young Valentin’s crusade-like errand to fight for the pope, describing it as an example of:

tradition and romance, so far as our hero was acquainted with these mystical influences. Gallant, expansive, amusing [...] a devotee of something mysterious and sacred to which he occasionally alluded in terms more ecstatic even that those in which he spoke of a pretty woman, and which was simply the beautiful though somewhat superannuated image of honour. (143)
In other words, Christopher is attracted to the Bellegardes’ romantic Catholic aesthetic—their longstanding devotion to the “mysterious” and “mystical” as well as a tradition of honor and reverence. Though he acknowledges such a sense of religious devotion as outdated, he nonetheless finds it “simply beautiful.” As one of the “superb white flowers […] that could bloom in Catholic soil” (359), Claire embodies this romance of Catholicism, and Christopher’s marriage—as with many of James’s fictional marriages—offers an opportunity to assimilate this exotic difference into Christopher’s Americanism.

In emphasizing the American desire to assimilate Catholic difference, James highlights the latent imperialism beneath U.S. cosmopolitanism. In the case of Christopher, this imperialism arises through, as Hickman argues, a specifically “acquisitive” character.19 When Newman receives his copy of the Murillo, for instance, James writes, “It glittered and twinkled in the morning light, and looked, to Christopher’s eyes, wonderfully splendid and precious. It seemed to him a very happy purchase, and he felt rich in the possession of it” (82). Though Christopher’s mesmerized reaction to the Madonna echoes antebellum concerns about the seductive power of Catholic images and allows Noémié to swindle him into an exorbitant price, it also kindles within him a desire to “possess” it, a term that, as Stuart Burrows argues, signifies an underlying discourse of colonialism in James’s later work.20 Similarly, this Protestant imperialism drives Christopher’s pursuit of Claire. When he describes his qualifications for a wife to his friend Mrs. Tristram, he states, “I want to possess [my emphasis], in a word, the best article in the market” (71). Offering his own marriage market theory, he elaborates, “I am not afraid of a foreigner. Besides, I rather like the idea of taking in Europe, too. It enlarges the field of selection” (73). Combining his successful capitalist business sensibilities with his seemingly good-natured acceptance of difference (he even mentions that he would “marry a Japanese, if she pleased
Christopher decides to “take” Catholic Europe via marriage. (359). In so doing, he reveals how “good natured” American cosmopolitanism easily turns to imperialist ends. James suggests that for the American there is no leaving behind national loyalty for a global community, but rather simply an impulse to consume that community.

Yet, if Christopher’s pursuit of Catholic aesthetics exposes the imperialism underlying American cosmopolitanism, The American’s thwarted love story suggests that cosmopolitanism—imperial or not—is impossible for Americans. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this impossibility arises as a product of Christopher’s Protestant innocence. Indeed, the same naiveté and ignorance that drives his desire to consume and possess Catholicism, as Rowe argues, is exactly what prevents him from actually doing so. As the knowledge of Christopher and Claire’s nuptials become increasingly public, the Bellegardes rescind their permission for Claire to marry. Citing a technicality, they explain to Christopher that they had only promised not to “persuade” Claire to reject him. “Commanding” her to break her engagement, however, is not off limits (316).

Recalling longstanding associations of Catholic artifice and tyranny, James frames the Bellegardes’ exertion of familial “authority” (315) as a deceptive ploy and an anachronistic exercise of Catholicism’s feudal despotism. This is why when Claire attempts to explain why she has chosen to submit to her family, all she can say is, “Mr. Newman, it’s like a religion” (353), meaning that her submission to her family is as serious and deeply entrenched as her Catholic faith. Unable to comprehend this “religion” as a result of cultural and religious difference, Christopher expresses only dismay. Such confusion surrounding Claire’s lived and metaphorical religious devotion implies that Christopher’s provincial Protestantism prevents him from understanding the full extent of either Claire’s Catholic devotion or her family’s Catholic artifice.
James underscores the U.S.’s inability to fully assimilate Catholic difference through what nineteenth-century American Protestants saw as perhaps the most emblematic form of Catholic tyranny – the convent. When the Bellegardes finally veto Christopher and Claire’s marriage, Claire decides to endure her submission to family authority within the cloister of the Carmelite nuns, of which there is “no rule so strict” (396). The convent’s homosocial bindings prevent the happy home Christopher had envisioned, barring, in other words, his full assimilation of Catholic difference and the domestication of his foreign “possession.” He responds to this “dark and horrible” prospect with shock and confusion. James writes, “He had never let the fact of her Catholicism trouble him […] But it was one thing to be a Catholic, and another to turn nun – on your hands! There was something lugubriously comical in the way Newman’s thoroughly contemporaneous optimism was confronted with this old-world expedient” (359). Paradoxically, James suggests that it is Christopher’s refusal to let Claire’s Catholicism “trouble” him that makes him a victim of the Bellegardes’s Catholic artifice and deception. A provincial Protestant despite his cosmopolitan leanings, Christopher’s inability to look past the romantic surface allure of the family’s aristocratic and Catholic history prevents him from recognizing the deception and tyranny that lies beneath. It is only when he stands outside the Carmelite convent where Claire plans to be “buried alive” (375) that he confronts what James presents as the underlying menace of Catholicism. “[I]t was not a reality to him. It was too strange and too mocking to be real; it was like a page torn out of a romance, with no context in his own experience” (402). A relic of the past and the antebellum romance writing of James’s predecessors, the convent illuminates the unassimilable darkness beneath Catholicism’s seemingly beautiful outward aesthetic. This is why when Christopher attends the mass where Claire and her new sisters sing behind closed doors, their voices sound like “a wail and a dirge” and the Catholics around him transform into
“aids and abettors” in what he sees as the loss of his happiness (404). As it was for so many American Protestants before him, the convent becomes a source of disillusionment, simultaneously unveiling the Catholic artifice that thwarts his love and the limits of his American cosmopolitanism.

This disillusionment serves as a form of growth from which Christopher sheds some of his American naiveté. But even in the final pages of the novel, James underscores the irreconcilable nature of a truly cosmopolitan engagement for the American. When Christopher acquires a piece of evidence that will publicly reveal the Bellegardes’ dark family history, he burns such evidence instead of submitting it to the authorities. As he tells his American friend, he believes his mere possession of such a secret has thoroughly punished the family. In response, his friend reminds him that this final action is nothing but a testament to his “remarkably good [American] nature,” a nature that the Bellegardes likely depended upon all along (449). With this conclusion, James demonstrates how the innocent American is not capable of comprehending the conventions and tactics of its Old World Catholic counterpart. In so doing, he suggests that American cosmopolitanism – even that which is driven by a latent imperialism – can only go so far. Despite attempts to assimilate Catholic difference and pursue an enlightened national identity through worldly travel, the American, James dramatically illustrates in these closing pages, is incompatible with an Old Catholic World and, conversely, Catholicism is unassimilable with the New World.

If The American’s depiction of Catholicism demonstrates the difficulty for Americans like Christopher Newman to fully assimilate worldly difference, Portrait of a Lady highlights the dangers of doing so. Following the travels of Isabel Archer, Portrait offers another story of American encounter with the history, institutions, and art of the Old World. Rather than a
“specimen” of American manliness, however, James employs a vulnerable American girl to offer a warning about the assimilation of Catholic difference. With her “meagre knowledge, inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference,” Isabel Archer epitomizes American innocence and naiveté.22 Though she is not quite “the daughter of the Puritans” that Hilda represents in Hawthorne’s *Marble Faun*, “[t]he Old Protestant tradition” never fades “from Isabel’s imagination” (508), and she pays tribute to ideals of purity and chastity that James associates with Puritanism (413). As with Christopher, this innocence drives Isabel’s burgeoning cosmopolitanism, a form that, while inquisitive rather than acquisitive, is equally voracious and imperialistic. A romancer of sorts herself, as Richard Chase argues,23 Isabel pursues the world with “great passion for knowledge” (42), transforming it into a place “of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action” (47), eventually leading her to marry expatriate American Gilbert Osmond who stands as a representative figure of such worldly knowledge. What results from this idealistic romantic impulse is a story of artifice, deception, and betrayal that culminates in the loss of American innocence and a severing of national ties.

Catholic aesthetics and history similarly serve as a site for testing the extent of Isabel’s American cosmopolitanism. Though she begins her European sojourn in England and travels extensively, it is Italy and, specifically, Rome where her imperial quest for knowledge finds its greatest worldly treasure. The Eternal City offers “a person of her freshness and her eagerness” an ideal cosmopolitan experience (272), one that illuminates, as Elziebeta Foeller-Pituch says, a “panorama of myth, history, and high art, the possibilities of esoteric knowledge and universal human truths.”24 Among the attractions that represent such possibilities, Rome’s Catholic culture figures as a central moment in Isabel’s quest for worldly truth. Rome’s churches, local rituals,
“dark altar-pictures,” and “clustered candles” (495) represent the form of ancient and slightly “unfamiliar” knowledge that she seeks (45). However, it is in St. Peter’s – “the greatest of human temples” (281) – where Isabel comes metaphorically face to face with the magnitude of the world. As James writes,

She had not been one of the superior tourists who are “disappointed” in St. Peter’s […] the first time she found herself beneath the far-arching dome and saw the light drizzle down through the air thickened with incense and with the reflections of marble and gilt, of mosaic and bronze, her conception of greatness rose and dizzily rose. After this it never lacked space to soar. She gazed and wondered like a child or a peasant, she paid her silent tribute to the seated sublime. (279-80)

Describing Isabel as a “child” and “peasant,” James draws upon the romantic notion of the sublime in this passage to fashion St. Peter’s as a symbolic intrusion of the world that impresses upon Isabel her smallness. The basilica’s aesthetics – its “far-arching” dome, shining marble forms, and thickened air – both raise and expand her conception of the world to “dizzying” heights. In this way, the church becomes a fitting prelude to what Homi Bhabha diagnoses as Isabel’s “unhomely” moment later in the novel – the moment when “the world first shrinks for Isabel and then expands enormously.”²⁵ In St. Peter’s, James presents this moment as one of universal transcendence in which the awe-inspiring aesthetic of Catholicism seemingly erases the contentious nature of difference altogether. In her child-like position, Isabel becomes merely one of the “different figures and groups, the mingled worshippers and spectators” who “follow their various intentions without conflict or scandal” (280).

As with Christopher, Isabel’s attraction to the worldly aesthetic of Catholicism goes far beyond her visit to St. Peter’s – it compels her into a disastrous marriage with Europeanized
American Gilbert Osmond. Unlike the French Bellegardes, Osmond himself does not profess an adherence to Catholicism; however, he figures in Portrait as a thoroughly Catholicized character, meaning a figure who James frames through longstanding tropes and plotlines associated with Catholicism. For instance, Osmond not only conveys appreciation for the convent where his daughter Pansy receives an education, but also expresses an admiration, even envy for the position of the pope. But perhaps most importantly, James depicts Osmond as a living embodiment of the same awe-inspiring Catholic aesthetics that Isabel witnesses in St. Peter’s Painter, mock aristocratic, and collector of “old curtains and crucifixes” (242), Osmond represents a world of “art and beauty and history” (249) that Isabel associates with Rome’s antiquity and religious sublimity. James makes this connection most obvious when Isabel ambles about St. Peter’s only to be “confronted” by Osmond, who approaches her “with all the forms – he appeared to have multiplied them on this occasion to suit the place” (280). Emerging from the “afternoon light, silvered by clouds of incense that seemed to mingle with the splendid chant” (280), Osmond appears a composite form of Catholicism’s worldly aesthetic, one whose presence overwhelms Isabel in the number of impressions it creates. Combined with his indeterminable origins, “foreign, traditionary look” (217), and preference for “the old, the consecrated” (412), his seeming “harmony with other supposed divined things, histories within histories” (263) renders him symbolically Catholic. As such, he becomes to Isabel a worldly figure to whom marriage signifies her willingness to assimilate Catholic difference and engage in a community of cultured aesthetes who, like Osmond, appear as those clearly “living in the open air of the world” (410).

Isabel’s attempt to assimilate this Catholicized difference via marriage not only underscores religion’s pivotal position within U.S. conceptions of cosmopolitanism, but also
serves as a site through which James demonstrates the danger of such engagements for the Protestant American. Replicating tropes of unmasking popularized in the anti-Catholic plotlines of antebellum romance, James reveals Osmond to be a figure of Catholic conspiracy and artifice. Describing the “stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind” beneath his “love of harmony and order and decency” (410), Isabel finds that beneath Osmond’s beautiful exterior lies that which is “hideously unclean” (413). Though she “was not a daughter of the Puritans” (an exact phrase from Hawthorne’s The Marble Faun), she nonetheless recalls her Protestantism and believes “in such a thing as chastity and even decency” (413). As James suggests, it is Isabel’s Protestant sensitivity to Catholicized artifice that eventually – though too late – allows her to recognize Osmond’s corruption. Moreover, these revelations are explicitly linked to her disillusionment with Catholic Rome. For instance, after Isabel recognizes that Osmond is a gold digger, she attempts to console herself by visiting Rome’s beautiful attractions. While she certainly continues to express admiration for the city’s Catholic beauty, she also begins to “think of it chiefly as the place where people suffered.” The “starved churches” and “musty incense” denoting “long-unanswered prayers” (495) become symbols of her disillusionment. Rather than the landscape of freedom and expansion which she romantically saw in the novel’s beginning, Rome transforms into the site of her lost innocence.

As with The American, this unveiling of Catholic artifice in Portrait becomes most apparent through James’s depiction of the Catholic convent. Drawing on poplar narratives of Catholic captivity, James frames the convent as a symbol of Osmond’s depravity and despotism. Though Isabel initially sees the convent as a place of charming innocence and tradition where Pansy receives her education, after her husband reveals his true colors it becomes a site of punishment where Pansy must remain until she bends to her father’s will. Examining the
convent’s settings, for instance, Isabel notes “the clean and cheerful” rooms and the “good women” who inhabit them, while simultaneously painting it as a place of captivity – “a well-appointed prison” much like “one of the great penal establishments” (524, 529). “[I]t was not possible to pretend,” James writes, that “Pansy was free to leave. This innocent creature had been presented to her in a new and violent light” (524). As James implies, the convent is a place of profane tyranny and female submission rather than a site of sacred devotion. Indeed, the nuns’ religious benevolence comes to “represent the surrender of a personality; the authority of the Church” rather than a form of sacred devotion (529). Locating Pansy as part of this “surrender,” James notably blurs the authority of the Church with that of Osmond – the same man who expresses his envy for papal power – and positions it as a central site through which to showcase worldly depravity. Perhaps more importantly, the convent illuminates Isabel’s own feelings of captivity, serving as a reminder of the “rigid system,” “darkness and suffocation” of her marriage that, though filled with “pictured tapestries” and the “stately music” of “unknown periods,” forces her once “free” step to align with her husband’s tyrannical “processional” (412). It serves, in other words, as the realization of her cousin Ralph’s prophecy that Osmond would “‘put [her] into a cage’” (326). James suggests that such captivity and disillusionment is the potential cost of worldly knowledge and experience, that to engage in a worldly endeavor is to risk imprisoning oneself in an unhomely sphere of Catholicized worldliness.

The version of cosmopolitanism that James offers in Portrait is one in which the distance between local and global loyalties cannot be reconciled. Isabel’s return to Italy at the end of the novel after her cousin’s death implies that to assimilate Catholic difference is not only to fracture ties with one’s homeland, but – for the American – to “surrender” the innocence that so definitively marks the U.S.’s exceptional difference from Europe. Like the American, Portrait
suggests there is a limit to U.S. cosmopolitanism, one in which neither the inquisitive nature of the American girl nor the acquisitive character of the American man can entirely subsume without consequence. By constructing Catholicism as that which serves to delineate this limit, James highlights Protestantism’s continuing centrality to the U.S. national project. The religious difference that prevents Christopher Newman’s marriage to Claire and catalyzes Isabel’s captivity demonstrates the ways in which the nation’s Protestant origins continue to define the metaphorical and geopolitical borders of the American worldview. And yet, twenty years later when these same borders are being actively and aggressively challenged through the violence of overseas conflict, James returns to this same question of Catholic difference to imagine a limitless form of American cosmopolitanism and demonstrate the irreparable consequences that occur when the American becomes a citizen of the world.

“The Catholic” Empire and the Fall of the American Adam

The Golden Bowl is often described as one of the great culminations of James’s career—a triumph of his “international theme” and the “richest of all his creations.”[^27] Set in London, it tells the story of wealthy American Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie, whose burgeoning cosmopolitanism, much like that of their American predecessors Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer, functions as the catalyst for staging the loss of American innocence. Not-so-subtly symbolized through Adam’s name, the Ververs appear to epitomize American naïveté in all the Edenic symbolism that R.W.B. Lewis attributes to it;[^28] they are “good children” and “awfully quaint,”[^29] as worldlier Europeans and American expatriates describe them. As with The American and Portrait, this innocence becomes the centerpiece of the novel as Maggie and
Adam too begin to consume European culture, whether by collecting rare objects for Adam’s American museum or by marrying the worldly Prince Amerigo and Europeanized American Charlotte Stant. The perils of these worldly ventures, however, come to a head when these same spouses resurrect a love affair that threatens to destroy the family. Climatically revealed through the overt symbolism of the golden bowl – that fatally flawed object around which the novel turns – this incestuous affair serves as a catalyst for Maggie’s disillusionment that, as with James’s earlier novels, highlights the conflict between Old and New Worlds.

And yet, Adam and Maggie possess one notable difference from James’s earlier Americans that, as I argue, demonstrates the maturation of his cosmopolitan vision – they are Catholic. “Loosely willing always to let it be taken for his” religion (147), Adam Verver not so much practices, but affiliates himself with a lackadaisical Anglo-American Catholicism. In contrast, Maggie is considerably more pious. She visits shrines, attends church, and maintains a confessor, often sponsoring “local rites” that “flourish[]” under her “munificence” (531). Unlike their American counterparts whose nominal Protestantism strongly tints their European excursions, the Ververs’ religiosity is notably more aligned with Europe’s Catholic persuasion. Perhaps more importantly, James implies that they are the product of Catholic conversion, a term that he notably uses interchangeably with “assimilation” in his description of the merging of immigrants and U.S. culture in *The American Scene*.30 While Adam attributes his uptake of Catholicism to his wife, we learn that Maggie possesses “some reference in her American blood to dusting and polishing New England grandmothers” (430), suggesting, as Fussell states, that she descends from a line of American Puritanism that turned Catholic somewhere along the way.31 Such conversions position the Ververs’, then, as products of assimilation and Catholic conversion themselves.
On the one hand, this shift to Catholicism might suggest that James’s international theme has outgrown the old Protestant-Catholic divisions that shaped *The American* and *Portrait*. On the other hand, if we read Maggie and Adam’s Catholicism as a revision of these earlier novels, we see how the erasure of religious difference produced by the Ververs’ assimilation of Catholicism signals the transformation of American cosmopolitanism into U.S. imperialism, an imperialism that Americans were actively pursuing in the Spanish-American and American Philippine wars during the years James wrote and published *The Golden Bowl*. Though often cited for his disdain of the jingoistic rhetoric fueling these events, James nevertheless saw such wars as a “spectacle” and “drama of great interest,” one of annexation and assimilation that *The Golden Bowl*’s characters play out through a story of meta-museum collection and international marriage. Such discursive analogues offer a form of cosmopolitanism in which, as Thomas Peyser argues, James’s “vigorous aestheticism” becomes “an imperial dream of infinite expansion and endless assimilation.” What an analysis of *The Golden Bowl*’s treatment of Catholicism further reveals is that the Ververs’ imperialism hinges upon both the assimilation and erasure of religious difference to imagine, but also critique U.S. imperialism. *The Golden Bowl* suggests that to achieve an American empire, Americans must create their own “universal” or “catholic” faith that ultimately betrays the nation’s foundational exceptionalism – its innocence. James’s vision of an American empire, then, is one that relies on steadfast conceptions of Catholic difference to warn Americans about the consequences of empire-building.

The Ververs’ cosmopolitan engagement starts off in much the same way as that of Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer. The “romantic disposition” of their American innocence inspires their desires to consume, know, and “see” “the world, the beautiful world” (48). Indeed,
their cosmopolitanism centers upon the “acquisition and appreciation” of European history and art. Exuding “the spirit of the connoisseur” (139), Adam prides himself on his ability to know which “great marks and signs […] to look for in pieces of the first order” (139). In other words, the Ververs’ pursuit of Europe is a reiteration of Christopher’s and Isabel’s acquisitive and inquisitive cosmopolitanism. Powered by American “millions,” Adam and Maggie are “a pair of pirates” seeking out “treasure” in Paris, Italy, Spain, and London (50, 44), all of which goes to further “the work of his [Adam’s] life and the motive of everything he does” (49) – his museum back in “American City.” It is this construction of a museum – a recurrent theme in James’s work that, as Adeline Tintner shows, underscores the way “things are absorbed, digested, assimilated, and used with originality as narrative devices”35 – through which the Ververs practice their cosmopolitanism. The museum serves as a way to literally showcase Adam’s appreciation and absorption of difference and highlight his acculturated tastes at a great “Patron of Art” (146).

At first glance, the Ververs’ Catholicism appears to make little difference in this cosmopolitan project. Much like James’s earlier American characters, they pursue Europe’s Catholicism as an exotic artifact. With an expressed desire to consume the religious culture of the Old World – even contemplating how best to relocate an entire church back to American City (147) – Adam, for instance, shows a characteristic American attraction to Europe’s Catholic art forms, whether paintings or people. Adam’s wife Charlotte Stant, for instance, epitomizes the Catholicized worldliness of Gilbert Osmond. A worldly traveler and former convent-flower, she offers to help the Ververs engage in a worldly community, which is exactly why they “brought her in […] to do the ‘worldly’ for them” (264). However, it is Maggie’s husband Amerigo whose Catholic and aristocratic heritage most explicitly brings out “the particular sharpened appetite of
the collector” in Adam (139). Much like the Filipinos and Cubans whom the U.S. was attempting to control, Amerigo represents a combination of both religious and racial difference. He is not only an Italian prince “full of his race” and the “last” of his kind (52, 320), he is also the descendant of a long line of Catholic Italian ecclesiastics. His Catholicism is so pervasively part of his character, in fact, that James allegorizes him as a “Palladian church,” a living embodiment of the church Adam wants to relocate to his museum in American City (135). This Catholicism, as Maggie explains, makes him a “representative precious object,” a particular form of knowledge that “can only be got over here [Europe] […] a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price” (49). This difference becomes the “basis for his [Adam’s] acceptance of the Prince’s suit” (139), because it adds a unique piece to his collection. As with Claire de Bellegarde and Gilbert Osmond, Amerigo appears as a form of Europe’s romantic, even vanishing Catholic past for inclusion in the Ververs’ American museum.

However, it is in the Ververs’ ability to distinguish exactly how rare Amerigo is that their Catholicism serves as a significant factor. Unlike James’s earlier characters, the Ververs’ demonstrate a knowledge of Catholic history and aesthetics that reveals their own Catholicism. They are similarly attracted to the romance of Amerigo’s exotic Catholic background, but not by the mystery of it. Indeed, James makes a point of highlighting the Ververs’ familiarity and knowledge of Amerigo’s history. As Maggie explains:

‘Oh I’m not afraid of history!’ She had been sure of that. ‘Call it the bad part, if you like – yours certainly sticks out of you. What was it else,’ Maggie Verver had also said, ‘that made me originally think of you? It wasn’t – as I should suppose you must have seen – what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste – the wicked Pope, the monster
most of all, whom so many of the volumes in your family library are all about. If I’ve read but two or three yet, I shall give myself up but the more – as soon as I have time – the rest. Where, therefore’ – she had put it to him again – ‘without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?’ (47)

As Maggie’s response here indicates, the Prince’s particular brand of Catholicism makes him a rare item to the Ververs. “Most of all,” the monstrous pope who holds such a strong place in the annals of his family history makes him “stick out.” However, this same background that marks him as unique is also that with which Maggie expresses a familiarity. In other words, the knowledge of Catholicism that Newman lacks and which ultimately prevents his marriage to Claire is exactly that which the Ververs’ possess. This is why Maggie tells Amerigo that it is not his “unknown quantity” that attracts her, but exactly what is known. Indeed, she revels in the stories of Catholic “crime,” “plunder,” and “waste” that go unseen by James’s earlier Americans. Such a reaction suggests that her own familiarity with Catholicism allows her to recognize the nuanced value of Amerigo’s Catholicism for her father’s museum project in the ostensibly Protestant “American City.” As Maggie says, “You’re not perhaps absolutely unique, but you’re so curious and eminent that there are few others like you – you belong to a class about which everything is known” (47). Though we later learn that Maggie does not, indeed, know “everything” about Amerigo, James suggests that her familiarity with Catholicism nonetheless drives much of her passion for Amerigo. It makes him both desirable and easily assimilable to the Verver’s cosmopolitan project.

This erasure of religious difference notably marks the transformation of American cosmopolitanism into explicit imperialism. Without the religious difference that once deceived Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer, Adam’s project of museum acquisition blossoms into
one of colonialist possession and conquest. Indeed, it is in contemplating the value that Amerigo adds to his museum that Adam dreams up a vision of his own empire. He imagines himself a discoverer of untapped “worlds.” Reappropriating America’s Catholic past as part of an American imperialism – much like that of Washington Irving and William Prescott in their Catholic histories – James positions Adam as a conqueror of “Amerigo” analogous to the conquistadors of the New World. James writes,

[…] the aspirant to his daughter’s hand showed somehow the great marks and signs, stood before him with the high authenticities, he had learn to look for in pieces of the first order […] He had, like many other persons, in the course of his reading, been struck with Keats’s sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific; but it was probably that few persons had so devoutly fitted the poet’s grand image to a fact of experience. It consorted so with Mr Verver’s consciousness of the way in which at a given moment he had stared at his Pacific that a couple of perusals of the immortal lines had sufficed to stamp them in his memory. His ‘peak in Darien’ was the sudden hour that had transformed his life, the hour of his perceiving with a mute inward gasp akin to the low moan of apprehensive passion that a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried. It had been a turning of the page of the book of life – as if a leaf long inert had moved at a touch and, eagerly reversed, had made such a stir of the air as sent up into his face the very breath of the Golden Isles. To rifle the Golden Isles had become on the spot the business of his future […] (140)

Framed as an extension of Adam’s desire to “collect” Amerigo, James presents Adam’s aestheticism as a form of epic empire-building that, as Burrows shows, reverses the “trajectory of colonialism.”36 Alluding to John Keats’s 1816 sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s
Homer,” James posits the “grand vision” of possession and conquest behind Adam’s museum as a reversal of Hernán Cortés’s conquests. Just as the Spanish Cortés looked upon the Pacific as part of the New World, Adam looks upon Europe at large as his field of conquest. Europe stands as a place through which to engage and embrace the world and worldly as well as one through which to conquer and, in the case of Adam, collect the treasures of European empires, as suggested by the “loot of far-off victories” that Maggie, Amerigo, and Charlotte discover in London’s shops (43). Just as the Darien Peak symbolized the Spanish quest for New World riches, Europe appears as a storehouse of precious objects – “fine eminent ‘pieces’ in gold, in silver, in enamel, majolica, ivory, bronze” (139). Adam’s expansive aestheticism here expresses a colonialist possession underneath which lies a subdued power and even violence. Describing Adam’s process of acquisition as a “rif[ing]” of European goods, James suggests that his vision operates through dispossession as well. Like his earlier business ventures, which functioned through a “transcendent calculation” hinging on the “creation of interests ‘interests’ that were the extinction of other interests” (142), this “business of his future” reveals the capitalist imperialism underwriting Adam’s museum project. In so doing, it makes collecting, commerce, and conquest the subtexts of his American cosmopolitanism. Without the religious difference that limited Christopher Newman’s global possibilities, the “American Adam” can, indeed, become the Catholic Cortés.

While the erasure of Catholic difference allows the American Ververs to integrate the European other into their expansive American vision, it also provides them with a means for managing and maintaining such others. James suggests that Maggie’s Catholicism ultimately allows her to not only recognize, but also circumvent the Catholic artifice that betrays earlier Protestant Americans like Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer. Similar to the long-
expatriated Americans of *Portrait*, James frames Amerigo and Charlotte as figures of worldly Catholic artifice. Describing the continuing “sense” of Amerigo’s affection for Charlotte as a “precious medal – not exactly blessed by the Pope” (252), James presents their forbidden love as an old, but holy form artfully arranged so as to fool the innocent Ververs’. Left to themselves as a result of their spouses near incestuous love for each other, Amerigo and Charlotte revive their previous affair into something that is “too beautiful” and “sacred” (259), taking meticulous pains to create a deceptive exterior of aesthetic and familial harmony. For instance, when the two decide to pursue their affair, they carefully mask their intentions with an artfully arranged tourist visit, to a cathedral no less! Primarily through Charlotte’s well-laid plans, they discuss and carefully arrange their veiled tryst to the last detail including the placement of their luggage and their departure times. They even discuss the lies they will tell the woman originally set to host them. As Charlotte, Lady Castledean “knows” that “we like cathedrals; that we inevitably stop to see them, or go round to take them in, whenever we’ve a chance; that it’s what our respective families quite expect of us” (294). Constructed as a type of conspiracy against both friends and family, Amerigo and Charlotte’s love affair appears as a living enactment of Catholicism’s seductive aesthetic attraction, a “spell” that for Amerigo is “terrible” and yet filled with “mystery” and “charm” (294). With such carefully arranged lies, James fashions Amerigo and Charlotte as Catholic connoisseurs of deception. Their wherewithal to turn the sacred cathedral to a profane purpose presents them as inheritors of worldly Catholic artifice, performers of a “sacred” sin not unlike that of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale’s “consecrated” adultery in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

As with *Portrait*, James presents this deceptive Catholicized aesthetic as that which leads to the victimization of the American girl, engendering a loss of innocence that slowly and
painfully illuminates Maggie’s consciousness. Yet, Maggie is not like Isabel Archer in the way she manages this loss. Unlike James’s early American girl, who becomes the unknowing captive of Catholicized artifice, Maggie instead becomes a master of it. Though James frames her as one of his classic, seemingly innocent American girls, he hints from the novel’s beginning that a sense of Catholicized duplicity underlies her character. Adam, for instance, understands Maggie’s dualistic and easily shape-shifting form. Similar to the corrupted Catholic novices of antebellum convent tales, she is both “nymph” and “nun,” expressing both a “shyly mythological” form that is graceful and playful as well as a “prim” outward demeanor. She represents both the antique nymph’s “association with nobleness in art” and appears with her “hair down very straight and flat over her temples” as a nun-like figure (172). Her ability to encompass both forms – both the image of artful myth and prim seriousness – frames her as a mercurial figure, one who, despite her innocence and ignorance at the novel’s beginning, possesses the hidden talents to play her own game of “arrangement.”

And play she does. Maggie’s loss of innocence is accompanied by an expansion of her father’s imperial vision, a dawning “sense of possession” (339) manifested through her own increasing aptitude for performance and spectacle. For instance, when she perceives the deception beneath Amerigo and Charlotte’s cathedral sojourn, she foregoes her usual visit to her father and waits for Amerigo at their home. By locating herself where Amerigo does not expect her and yet “superficially” performing an act that is “the most natural act in the world,” she takes a small, but pivotal “step” (331). Though seemingly inconsequential, such a purposeful design of arrangement – of consciously placing herself and her husband in key spots so as to create an impression – demonstrates her growing power of artifice. As James writes, “[t]hese were small variations and mild manoeuvres, but they went accompanied on Maggie’s part, as we have
mentioned, with an infinite sense of intention” (331). James even goes so far as to describe this intention as a shift from “playing with blunt and idle tools, weapons that didn’t cut” to a “bare blade” (331). Indeed, Maggie’s increasingly skillful performances serve as a form of management, a way to control and “arrange” the figures of worldly difference within her family and ensure the success of her father’s imperial vision.

This underlying capacity for Catholicized artifice becomes all the more apparent when Maggie reveals her aptitude for deception to family friend Fanny Assingham. Having set herself through a “whole sum of perplexities and duplicities” (399), the most recent of which is to “infernally” promote another of Amerigo and Charlotte’s weekend tourist visits, she intentionally invites Fanny to a lunch to find out the extent of her husband’s adultery. “I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit are my own” (401), she dramatically tells Fanny. James presents this revelation of “miracles” as an unveiling of inner character akin to a revelation of religious faith – as a window, in other words, to Maggie’s private inner world. Falling back on anti-Catholic tropes of masking and unmasking, he analogizes Maggie’s hidden “concealed” “character” to the Catholic cross she wears beneath her clothing. Realizing Maggie’s knowledge and wily ways, Fanny says to her:

‘I hadn’t made out much more about it, and should have been vague above all as to where you carried it or kept it. Somewhere under, I should simply have said – like that little silver cross you once showed me, blest by the Holy Father, that you always wear, out of sight, next your skin. That relic I’ve had a glimpse of [...] But the precious little innermost, say this time little golden personal nature of you – blest by a greater power I think even than the Pope – that you’ve never consentingly shown me.’ (402)
Drawing upon long-seated understandings of Catholicism as a religion of ever-mysterious interiors, James suggests that Maggie’s cultivated exterior and her “miracles of “arrangement” are artful expressions underneath which lies her “true” self. Like the cross she wears, this inner Catholic self lies beneath the outer accoutrements of the saint-like demeanor expressed through her “absolutely good and sweet and beautiful” behavior (401). James suggests that her act of artifice is, in fact, as “precious” as a religious “relic,” a sacred remnant of a saintly body, that even intimate friends such as Fanny, not to mention her husband Amerigo, have rarely “glimpsed.” Paradoxically, it is Maggie’s artifice – her performance of ignorance and naiveté – that reveals what lies beneath or, as James emphasizes, “under.” By framing Maggie’s revelation of her own talent for “arrangement” as a revelation of her inner “golden” nature, James presents it as a form of Catholicized artifice. In so doing, he positions the increasing sense of imperial possession that such performances enact as a conflation of the sacred and profane and locates Maggie’s Catholicism as the site of this imperial power.

Taken as a revision of The American and Portrait’s limited cosmopolitanism, Maggie’s acts of Catholicized arrangement, paired alongside her father’s imperialistic conquest of Europe, offer a vision of American empire founded on the continuous assimilation of religious difference. This is why, for instance, it is not ultimately Amerigo who is Adam’s most prized possession, but rather the Italian Prince’s child with Maggie who is the “ripest genius” of the family (274). Created through the process of continued assimilation, the “principino,” as he is called, is the symbol of an increasingly new and increasingly global Americanism that is literally and symbolically “catholic.” Indeed, Adam and his daughter achieve their universal American empire in and through their Catholicism. And yet, if the U.S. must adopt the artifice and conquests of Catholicism to achieve limitless expansion, James suggests that such an empire
comes at too high a cost. For in fully assimilating and enacting Catholicism, Maggie is simultaneously corrupted by it. This is why when she learns the full extent of Amerigo and Charlotte’s deception – that their affair began long before her marriage – and prepares to use this knowledge to master Amerigo, James renders her an image of Catholic excess. Though typically neat in her appearance – a remnant of her “passion for order and symmetry” inherited from her “polishing New England grandmothers” (430) – Maggie becomes at this moment “bedizened.”

As James describes her through the eyes of Fanny Assingham, she is “all attired and decorated, like some holy image in a procession […] Her friend felt – how could she not? – as the truly pious priest might feel when confronted, behind the altar, before the festa, with his miraculous Madonna” (430). Describing Maggie as a holy image, James implies that her “miracles” of arrangement have, in fact, turned her in a “miraculous” Catholic image, one that is notably “overcharged,” “multiplied to extravagance, almost incoherence,” and even “monstrous” (430). In so doing, he frames Maggie’s newfound knowledge and the power it yields her as corrupting to her remaining American “New England” simplicity.

Ironically, this corruption and assumption of Catholic power, James suggests, is also why Maggie eventually leaves behind her innocent devotion to Catholic rituals to embrace the same insincere Catholicism of her father. James suggests as much when he highlights how Maggie frees herself from her Catholic confessor. Though she believes that she will eventually confess her crimes to the “good holy hungry man” Father Mitchell (531), she becomes conscious of “having found her way without him” and “perversely” “dispensed with him” (531). Having accumulated worldly knowledge, Maggie becomes less like an innocent novice or ignorant follower and more like the wily and “wicked” ecclesiastics that she so admires in her husband’s lineage. In presenting Maggie’s performance of Catholic artifice as that which paradoxically
severs her from true faith, James renders her a figure who embodies what many nineteenth-century Americans had long seen in the Catholic Church – an institution that relinquishes true religious faith for the worldly seductions of power.

James condemns the consequences of such corruption by demonstrating how the expansion of imperial power quickly topples into tyranny. Upon discovering the full extent of her husband’s affair through her purchase of the golden bowl, Maggie experiences a rush of power that ultimately leads her to fully participate in her father’s imperial vision. “There was a phrase that came back to her from old American years: she was having, by that idiom, the time of her life – she knew it by the perpetual throb of this sense of possession, which was almost too violent either to recognize or to hide” (469). With Adam’s assistance, Maggie exercises this final and violent “throb” of power by sending Charlotte back to American City and thus separating the adulterers – an act that ultimately allows her to reclaim her own husband. In a reversal of Isabel Archer’s captivity in Portrait, this “innocent” American girl turns tyrannical Catholic captor as she relegates her husband to a life without his former lover. Disempowered and separated from the object of his desire, he appears to Maggie as “caged” in a “monastic cell” (559), demonstrating, as Margaret Sabin argues, his “conversion” to the Ververs’ American order as well as the extent of Maggie’s domination.37 Similarly, James describes Charlotte as entombed within a “gilt” cage, once opened but ceremoniously closed again by the Ververs’ “arrangements” (484, 521). In this way, Maggie’s mastery of Catholic artifice enables her to not only deter her husband’s and mother-in-law’s affair, but to exert more power over them, to place both in a form of metaphorical “captivity” (559). Such enactments of imperial power transform them into enshrined captives within Adam’s American museum, while Maggie and Adam remain collectors, curators, and conquistadors.
Through the triumph of the Catholic Ververs, James positions the assimilation and erasure of difference as that which promises to expand U.S. power. By absorbing a longstanding religious other, he shows how the U.S. can create its own catholic or “universal” empire. As a revision of *The American* and *Portrait*, this vision of empire demonstrates the Protestant impulse of U.S. imperialism. Though Maggie and Adam are not Protestants, their imperial museum project is one that nevertheless transfers the goods and peoples of other nations back to an increasingly diverse, but nonetheless culturally Protestant “American City.” Charlotte and Amergio become objects on display for viewing by an American nation rooted in Protestantism. Yet, in offering this vision of empire, James also suggests that such power is dangerous. Maggie’s corruption and tyranny demonstrates that limitless expansion and assimilation creates the conditions through which the dream of New World innocence becomes a nightmare of Catholic excess and despotism. In this sense, the assimilation of Catholic difference upon which James’s conception of cosmopolitanism turns imperial is one that ultimately leads to the corruption of that very facet of Americanism highlighted as exceptional in his *Hawthorne*—innocence. If to become an empire is to be become “Catholic,” then *The Golden Bowl* contends that such an endeavor comes as too high a price. By deploying anti-Catholicism to not only imagine, but also critique U.S. empire, James demonstrates how the powerful Protestant impulse that governed U.S. conceptions of nationhood and expansionism in the antebellum era continued to shape discourses surrounding U.S. imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century. His metaphorical construction of a Catholic American empire illustrates how U.S. conceptions of imperialism continued to rely on Catholic difference to define and redefine the boundaries of American statehood.
Perhaps this is why, when James returned to the U.S. in 1904 – the same year The Golden Bowl was published – it is to Catholicism that he again turned to portray the awe-inspiring power of the U.S. state. Of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., James writes in his travel book The American Scene:

 […] I was again to find the capitol, whenever I approached, and above all whenever I entered it, a vast and many-voiced creation […] The ark of the American covenant may strike one thus, at any rate, as a compendium of all the national ideals, a museum, crammed full, even to overflowing, of all the national terms and standards, weights and measures and emblems of greatness and glory […] The analogy may seemed forced, but it affected me as playing in Washington life very much the part that of St. Peter’s, of old, had seemed to me to play in Roman […] The Washington dome is indeed capable, in the Washington air, of admirable, of sublime, effects; and there are cases in which, seen at a distance above its yellow Potomac, it varies but by a shade from the sense – yes, absolutely the divine campagna-sense – of St. Peter’s and the like-colored Tiger.

But the question is positively of the impressiveness of the great terraced Capitol hill […] And if the whole mass and prospect ‘amuse,’ as I say, from the moment they are embraced, the visitor curious of the democratic assimilation of the great dignities and majesties will least miss the general logic. (346-47)

Taking a page from Adam Verver’s book, James fashions the Capitol as a glorious Catholic museum. Like St. Peter’s in Rome, it induces “sublime” effects through the “vast” and “many-voiced” multitude that it represents. Through its “democratic assimilation” of “great dignities and majesties,” it urges upon the visitor – as St. Peter’s did upon Isabel Archer in Rome – the impression of a single, “general logic.” In other words, the U.S. Capitol building is the “one” that
brings together “the many,” a universal home for the sprawling, heterogeneous American masses. And yet, as with The Golden Bowl, James suggests that the “glory,” “greatness,” and sublime nature of this great imperial museum is costly. Just as Maggie transforms into an image of Catholicized excess, the Capitol is “overflowing” and “crammed full.” The processes of assimilation through which it finds its power have turned it into, as James writes earlier in The American Scene, a “monstrous form of Democracy” (53). Indeed, its overflowing “terms” and “weights” are but figurative embodiments of the immigrant “terrors” – many of whom were Catholics from Southern Europe – that James observes throughout his American visit. While the assimilation and overflow of such collectibles has made the U.S. increasingly diverse and “cosmopolitan,” James argues that it has also transformed his native land into a scene of “immense promiscuity” (100) and “crude” trade propelled by “the new, the simple, the cheap, the common, the commercial, the immediate, and, all too often, the ugly” (65). Indeed, the “many-voiced” nation over which the Capitol presides may be vast, glorious, and universal like that of the Catholic Church, but James suggests that such a state is inherently and increasingly corrupt. In James’s world, it turns out that Adam’s “American City” is, after all, the American City, and that the only “Catholic” empire that Americans need to worry about is their own.

1 Henry James, Hawthorne (Ithaca NY: Great Seal Books, 1956), 34.


9 James states that seeing how the “alien” invaded the U.S. changed his relation to his native land and placed a “chill in his heart.” See Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907), 83, Reprint, Kirtashooks.


16 Berman provides a helpful historicization of the concept of cosmopolitanism in her chapter on James. See *Modernist Fiction*, 37, 32.


21 Rowe, “Nationalism and Imperialism,” 248.


30 James, *American Scene*, 120.
34 Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis*, 141.
Beneath the Virgin’s Standard: Anti-Imperial Resistance and Pan-American Catholicism

“Bearing the standard of the Virgin, we went out to conquer our liberty” (291), writes José Martí in “Our America/Nuestra América.” In his famous call for Pan-American collaboration and resistance to U.S. empire, Martí offers the Virgin Mary as a herald of Latin American and, in this specific passage, Mexican independence from imperial tyranny. Standing as not only a marker of liberation and assertion, she appears as a central figure of defiance against the increasingly threatening “seven-league boots” of the “Other America” that threaten to “crush” and subordinate the Latin American republics of the American hemisphere (288). Mother of the Catholic Church, she is, in other words, a symbol of Pan-American religiosity, independence, and anti-American protest that directly locates Latin America in opposition to a Protestant North.

Such an allusion might initially suggest that Martí offers his protest as an expression of his Catholic faith. And yet, Martí had a contentious relationship with his Catholic upbringing. He openly criticized Catholicism’s hierarchy as a corrupt and immoral institution complicit in Spanish tyranny and colonialism. “I want to educate a country that will save a drowning man and never go to Mass,” he wrote in 1871. Envisioning Cuba as a nation free of what he saw as the rigid bindings of the church and its history of colonial oppression, he instead proffered a religiosity that was “secular” in its freedom from organized religious institutions and spiritually cosmopolitan. Indeed, he imagined a “new church” in which “will sit the Catholic Christ and the Hindu Christ, flanked by Confucius on one side and Wotan on the other, where there will be no clergy other than the sense of duty, nor candelabra other than the sun’s rays, nor incense burners
other than the chalices of flowers.” As such a passage suggests, Martí did not envision Pan-American collaboration as an explicit expression of institutional Catholicism.4

So, how do we understand Martí’s deployment of Catholic imagery and history in “Our America”? Rather than a declaration of his Catholic faith or even a testament to Catholicism’s centrality in Latin American independence, Martí’s Catholic allusions in “Our America” act as a testament to and protest against the Protestant imperative of U.S. imperialism that I have plotted in this dissertation. While anti-Catholicism served as an imperialist discourse through which a tradition of U.S. romance writers ranging from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry James justified and, at times, critiqued U.S. imperialism, such expressions of U.S. empire-building were not one-sided. They arose through a series of frictions and dialogues with Catholics, some of whom critiqued the Protestant sway of U.S. politics from within national borders and others who protested the hegemonic persuasion of U.S. imperialism from beyond U.S. borders. While an analysis of such Catholic responses is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Martí’s “Our America” offers a key example that opens up new areas of investigation about the longstanding Protestant tenor of U.S. foreign policy and the Catholic responses it inspired. In urging his compatriots to “form ranks” and “block” the expansion of U.S. power (289), Martí offers a Pan-American declaration of resistance that calls Latin Americans to “attend closely to the reality” (290) of their own homelands and create ways of being, thinking, and governing that derive from the particular milieu of their own nations. As he argues, “[t]o know the country and govern it in accordance with that knowledge is the only way of freeing it from tyranny” (291), and to “know” the republics of Latin America, Martí’s allusion to the Virgin Mary demonstrates, is to know and recognize its history of Catholicism. Such allusions, I will briefly argue, illustrate the Protestant-Catholic cultural differences shaping U.S.-Latin American relations and also demonstrate how
Catholicism at times served as a site of resistance to expressions of U.S. imperial power. By locating Catholic history and culture within his call for Pan-American awakening and unity, Martí highlights the role religious difference played in not only expanding U.S. power, but also in defying it.

Martí’s distinction between Catholic America and Protestant America hinges upon his romantic account of Latin American history. In presenting the history of the Latin American republics as a courageous battle for independence and self-governance, Martí recognizes and even lauds the role of the Catholic clergy within revolutionary movements against Spanish colonial rule. For instance, in offering examples of Latin America’s determination to enter “the community of nations” and “conquer liberty,” Martí recalls the history of the Mexican War of Independence, citing the role of the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla in initiating the country’s revolutionary movement in 1810. “A priest, a few lieutenants, and a woman built a republic in Mexico upon the shoulders of Indians. A Spanish cleric, under cover of his priestly cape, taught French liberty to a handful of magnificent students who chose a Spanish general to lead Central America against Spain” (291-2). In citing the role of Catholic clergy in such histories, Martí defies assumptions about Catholicism’s innate tyranny by locating Catholic clergy as harbingers of liberty. In contrast to antebellum Protestant crusaders such as Lyman Beecher and romance writers such as Ned Buntline, he illustrates Catholicism’s spiritual and moral capacity for political liberty and intellectual enlightenment. Such a history counteracts longstanding assumptions about Catholic despotism and instead suggests that the Church can, at times, facilitate a politics of freedom.

In illuminating this Catholic history of Latin American liberation, Martí by no means glosses over the complex and tight-knit relationship between the Church and Spanish colonialism
in Latin America. On the contrary, in “Our America” and throughout his writings, he critically highlights instances in which Catholicism corroborated and enforced Spain’s colonial tyranny. But rather than see such historical moments as evidence of a Catholic South’s cultural and moral inferiority, his romantic history of Latin America contradicts Protestant-authored accounts such as those of Washington Irving and William Prescott by highlighting the struggle against Catholicism as evidence of Latin American self-determination. “And in what patria can a man take greater pride than in our long-suffering republics of America, erected among mute masses of Indians upon the bloodied arms of no more than a hundred apostles, to the sound of the book doing battle against the monk’s tall candle?” (289). Positioned within a history of Latin American anti-colonialism and violent native dispossession, the “monk’s tall candle” – a symbol of the church’s longstanding intellectual, spiritual, and moral dominion – demonstrates Latin America’s capacity to overcome the darkness and blindness of religious tyranny. As he proudly writes, “[t]he republics have purged the former tyrannies of their inability to know the true elements of the country” (290). Positioning Catholicism as part of the region’s history through which Latin American nations emerged as “real” men in “real times” (293), Martí frames the longstanding power of the church within the history of Latin American progress. The battle between the intellectual enlightenment of the European “book” and the “monk” are examples of the “disparate factors” through which Latin America emerged and produced its own romantic story of revolutionary struggle (289-90). In this way, Martí’s depiction of Catholicism serves to present Latin America with a narrative of independence equal to that of the U.S.’s “exceptional” Puritan forefathers and yet uniquely specific to the history of the region.

Martí locates Catholicism within this particular history of Latin American awakening not only by positioning it as part of the political struggle for independence, but also by presenting it
as the foundation of Latin American multiculturalism that he urges his compatriots to proudly claim. Unlike the “continent’s light-skinned nation” that all too often abuses its natives and “disseminates opposition or hatred among races” (296), the “American man” of Latin America must embrace all aspects of his religious and racial heritage according to Martí. “Our feet upon a rosary, our heads white, our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations,” he argues (291). Again referencing a devotion to the Virgin Mary, Martí offers a Pan-American cosmopolitan vision of “our America” that frames Catholicism as the metaphorical ground upon which a racially and culturally diverse body of nations stand. Offering this “motley” body as the physical manifestation of a cosmopolitan spirituality, Martí portrays the region’s Catholicism as the umbrella or “standard” that merges Old World devotions to the Virgin with the pagan rituals of the native who “went to the mountaintop to christen his child” (293). Indeed, such religiosity provides a home for “[t]he soul, equal and eternal” that “emanates from bodies that are diverse in form and color” (296), and highlights the overlapping histories of the “Indian” who “circled about us,” the “black, pursued from afar,” and the “campesinos, the men of the land” (293). This Whitmanian celebration of difference locates Catholicism not only as a central part of Latin American identity, but also as a unifying principle through which to defy the “jumble of peoples” to the North who have been corrupted by “ideas and habits of expansion, acquisition, vanity, and greed” that could “cease to be latent national preoccupations and become a serious threat to the neighboring, isolated and weak lands that the strong country declares to be perishable and inferior” (296). As Martí implies, Latin Americans must embrace their mixed histories of religion and race both to proudly claim their entry into a global community and to resist the claims of their northern neighbor. As a foundational form of such unity, Catholicism, he suggests, is central to such resistance.
Though but a glimpse into the Catholic responses to U.S. imperialism, Martí’s “Our America” demonstrates how Catholic-Protestant difference offered Latin American writers an imaginative discourse through which to resist U.S. imperialism. Despite Martí’s own criticisms of the Catholic Church, Catholicism nonetheless stood as a marker of cultural distinction, one that not only shaped U.S. conceptions of expansion and annexation throughout the nineteenth century, as this dissertation has aimed to demonstrate; but that also influenced how Catholics both within and outside the U.S. responded to the Protestant hegemony of U.S. culture. Just over a decade later, for instance, Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío would draw on a similar rhetoric in his “A Roosevelt/To Roosevelt,” proclaiming the power of “Catholic America and Spanish America” to defy the “powerful and strong” claims of the Roosevelt Corollary. Moreover, such criticisms of U.S. imperial power – including both the tendencies of “expansion” and “greed” that Martí cites – find a distant cousin in Pope Francis’s recent critical description of unfettered global capitalism as a “new tyranny.” While the work of scholars such as Jenny Franchot, Paul Giles, and James Emmet Ryan, not to mention a plethora of Catholic historians, have certainly called attention to this political and cultural history of Catholic writing, this dissertation’s analyses of U.S. empire-building urges us to rethink Catholicism’s role in early and contemporary U.S. international politics and, perhaps even more so, asks us to interrogate the Protestant-oriented secularism that drives U.S. geopolitics today: How has Catholicism resisted the aims of U.S. imperialism? How has it been complicit in them? How does the history of Protestant empire-building compare with that of Catholicism’s own history of empire-building in the Americas? These questions and a host of others urge us to think more deeply about the interacting histories of empire and religion and consider how they continue to shape our contemporary moment.
3 Jose Marti, in Marti on the USA, trans. Luis Alejandro Baralt (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1966), 186.
4 Laura Lomas argues that Marti adopted a form of secular criticism similar to that which Edward Said describes. In light of recent critiques in secular studies, however, what “secular criticism” means in terms of Marti’s work deserves further exploration. See Laura Lomas, Translating Empire: Jose Marti, Migrant Latin Subjects, and American Modernities (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 180.
CONCLUSION

U.S. Imperialism and the American Romance Tradition

At the annual National Prayer Breakfast in February of 2015, President Barack Obama offered a statement about the role of religion in the contemporary world that sparked immense critique. Turning to the recent acts of violence committed in the name of religion such as those perpetrated by the extremist organization ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), the president offered a series of historical comparisons to demonstrate how “professions of faith [have been] used both as an instrument of good, but also twisted and misused in the name of evil.”

“Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history,” he explained, “And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ.” To this comparison – especially surrounding the role of Christianity in the Crusades and the Inquisition – critics responded in outrage. Accusing Obama of historical inaccuracy and anachronism, commentators engaged in historical debates about the Crusades – whether these long-past religious wars were a response to earlier Muslim invasions or an attempt by a Christian empire to reclaim holy territories. Just as nineteenth-century U.S. writers continually drew upon the enduring rivalry between Catholicism and Protestantism in debates surrounding U.S. empire-building, such contestation over the Crusades placed the history of Muslim-Christian conflict at the center of contemporary U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

The ire sparked by Obama’s comment, then, illustrates how religion continues to govern our understanding of contemporary geopolitics. Despite our abiding tendencies to locate the U.S.
and the West at large within a secularization narrative, such backlash demonstrates the
significant and pervasive ways in which religion remains a forceful and influential discourse in
international and domestic politics. Moreover, the outrage sparked by Obama’s comment shows
how the relationship between religion and geopolitics today is fundamentally tied to the
narratives we tell about the past. In examining how conceptions of Catholic difference shaped
the formation of U.S. empire, “Sacred Dominion” has illuminated one of such narratives by
calling attention to the religious discourse that has been particularly crucial to the formation of
U.S. geopolitics. Whereas scholars of U.S. empire have tended to see religion as a facet of race,
class, and gender, this project has shown not only how religion played a significant part in
shaping the U.S.’s rise to global power but also how it fundamentally influenced each of these
discourses. By recognizing the ways in which Americans relied on imaginings of Catholic
difference to justify and contest U.S. expansion, we can come to understand the dynamic
collaboration between Protestantism and national politics that continues to drive U.S. geopolitics
today.

Equally important, “Sacred Dominion” has shown how American literary romance
played a central role in this project, the proof of which is perhaps nowhere more evident than in
the rhetoric espoused in the days following 9/11. In his 2002 State of the Union address, for
instance, President George W. Bush offered a speech similar in its message and rhetoric to
President John Adam’s 1826 discussion of the U.S.’s moral influence in Latin America as well
as to President William McKinley’s 1899 divine plan for the Philippines. Reflecting the
longstanding collaboration between romance and political rhetoric, Bush positioned U.S.
involvement overseas as a confrontation with a dire and perilous force – an “axis of evil, arming
to threaten the peace of our world.” Framed through a rhetoric of conspiracy in addition to a
diplomatic and barbarism, Bush highlights Iraq in particular as “a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.” He draws on images of impending doom and constant vigilance that recall the jeremiadic foundations of romance. “America is no longer protected by vast oceans. We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home.” Perhaps most importantly, Bush reminds Americans that “God is near” in such hard times, framing his call for U.S. involvement abroad as a divinely blessed endeavor assigned by “history” for the advancement of liberty: “History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight.”

Such comments, as Susan Harris argues, demonstrate how “military operations in the Middle East were packaged for the American public as the furtherance of a peculiarly American global trajectory, one enacted under the auspices of a divine plan”; however, they also show how the tropes and plotlines popularized through American romance played a central role in this “package[ing].” Put simply, Bush’s comments illuminate the impulse to romance that underlies U.S. empire and its divine mission. Tracing this impulse from the romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne to the sensation novels of George Lippard to the local color writing of George Washington Cable, this project gestures toward the diverse ways in which nineteenth-century conceptions of Catholic difference set a precedent for such contemporary narratives of religion and U.S. geopolitics. As suggested most strongly in my final analyses on Henry James and José Martí, Catholicism became the locus of a dialogue about the implications of U.S. imperialism. By attending to the romance tradition that popularized this dialogue, we see how the genre was central to the U.S.’s expansionist project. Moreover, we can perceive how the movements of empire and religion shaped romance’s formation. Tracing this romantic tradition from the height of American Romanticism and Manifest Destiny to the turn of the twentieth century, such
readings more broadly demonstrate the conservative foundations of U.S. literature and how U.S. authors were complicit in perpetuating narratives of religious intolerance. When we recognize the religious roots of romance and empire, we can perceive the Protestant foundations through which U.S. geopolitics and American literary culture became deeply entangled.

Whether Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Lyman Beecher’s *Plea for the West*, or James’s *The Golden Bowl*, “Sacred Dominion” illustrates how Catholicism inadvertently helped to forge U.S. imperialism. As this project recasts the story of U.S. imperialism through the Protestant-Catholic conflicts of nineteenth-century U.S. culture, it reveals how religion powerfully influenced the formation and direction of U.S. geopolitics. In so doing, “Sacred Dominion” offers a timely story about the histories and forms through which Americans imagined, celebrated, and contested the U.S.’s global rise; it also, I hope, opens further questions about the role of religion in U.S. foreign policy that can help us better understand and critically address the religious narratives that have characterized our past and continue to shape our present.

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