

Faithful Passages: American Catholicism In Literary Culture, 1844-1931 - James Emmett Ryan

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Roman Catholic writers in colonial America played only a minority role in debates about religion, politics, morality, national identity, and literary culture. However, the commercial print revolution of the nineteenth century, combined with the arrival of many European Catholic immigrants, provided a vibrant evangelical nexus in which Roman Catholic print discourse would thrive among a tightly knit circle of American writers and readers. James Emmett Ryan's pathbreaking study follows the careers of important nineteenth-century religionists including Orestes Brownson, Isaac Hecker, Anna Hanson Dorsey, and Cardinal James Gibbons, tracing the distinctive literature that they created during the years that non-Catholic writers like Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson were producing iconic works of American literature. *Faithful Passages* also reveals new dimensions in American religious literary culture by moving beyond the antebellum period to consider how the first important cohort of Catholic writers shaped their message for subsequent generations of readers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps most strikingly, Ryan shows that by the early twentieth century, Roman Catholic themes and traditions in American literature would be advanced in complex ways by mainstream, non-Catholic modernist writers like Kate Chopin and Willa Cather. Catholic literary culture in the United States took shape in a myriad of ways and at the hands of diverse participants. The process by which Roman Catholic ideas, themes, and moralities were shared and adapted by writers with highly differentiated beliefs, Ryan contends, illuminates a surprising fluidity of religious commitment and expression in early U.S. literary culture.

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