

## Book Review

**Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow and the Cure That Shocked Washington City*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011. Pp. xii + 274. \$30.00. ISBN 978 0 300 1 1846 9.**

Nancy Lusignan Schultz has brought to life the intriguing story of Catholic widower Ann Carbery Mattingly (1784–1855), miraculously cured not once, but twice. The first cure, in 1824, occurred after seven years of intense suffering; a lump in her left breast had spread throughout her body causing putrid sores, paralysis and immense pain. This cure was mediated by a thaumaturgus (or miracle worker) Prince Alexander Leopold Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingsfürst. Seven years later, her swollen, infected and probably gangrenous leg healed after her direct prayers to the Virgin Mary. Schultz examines these cures, situating this story in the history of American antebellum Catholicism, pointing particularly to issues of gender, religion, class and race to argue that Mrs Mattingly's miracle altered the course of 'national attitudes towards Catholicism' (p. 20).

Methodologically, Schultz uses biography, and weaves together threads of data, examining and suggesting social connections and historical events to develop the lives of Mattingly and Hohenlohe using 'narrative reconstruction' (p. 21). Hohenlohe's life proved much easier to unravel. A Catholic priest from a noble family, he became a public figure when his miracle cures, occurring both in person and 'long distance', garnered international attention. Unearthing Mattingly's life story was more challenging despite the celebrity status that developed after her first cure. Schultz has done an admirable job tracing what personal writings and artefacts remain with the help of archivists, family historians and a rather serendipitous meeting with a Mattingly descendent. Disappointingly, these myriad sources are not brought together in a bibliography (though footnotes are detailed). Stylistically, Schultz's use of 'adumbrations', imaginative vignettes, were somewhat incongruous as they seemed only tangentially linked with the chapter content.

Mrs Mattingly became defined as 'Miracle Ann' by her first miracle. Schultz suggests her body took on an identity of its own; her 'self' became a 'shadow of her miraculous cure' (p. 20). It was Mattingly's family and clergy who requested Hohenlohe's miraculous prayers as a last ditch effort to save her life. Seven years later, again at death's door, Mrs Mattingly chose to control her own cure. She offered a novena, not through priest-healer Prince Hohenlohe, and not with the aid of the clergy, but direct to the Virgin Mary. This unmediated cure suggested more of Mrs Mattingly than it does of 'Miracle Ann' and incurred the ire of certain members of the clergy. The discourse of 'Miracle Ann's' self-sacrifice and passive resignation was publicised by a Catholic clergy who wished to tout Catholic piety and encourage conversions. Mattingly's own agency, though, was relevant to both cures.

Issues of class and religion are intermingled throughout this work. Catholic faith-cures were not an easy sell in nineteenth-century America. Despite the enthusiasm of the clergy surrounding Mattingly, Bishop Maréchal of Baltimore advocated a slow and targeted approach with regard to publicity. Prince Hohenlohe's reputation throughout Europe was ambiguous; he was feted and maligned. The American Roman Catholic Church

was not universally in agreement regarding this miracle, but the clergy close to Mrs Mattingly were eager to use 'Miracle Ann' to generate conversions to Catholicism. As a pious middle-class woman, sister of the mayor of Washington DC, Mattingly had strong respectable credentials. (Though all parties conveniently ignored her estranged, alcoholic and debt-ridden husband who died before the first miracle.)

Race was intertwined into this story via Mattingly's son, John, whose elopement with a 'coloured' woman estranged him from his family. The evidence that documents John Mattingly's life is scarce, so Schultz recreates, intimating his 'probable "pollution of vice"' (p. 184) and assuming 'he was under pressure to live up to Carbery expectations' (p. 183). We seem to be guessing a lot about John Mattingly, his feelings and his states of mind.

Schultz does not try to sway her reader with the validity of the miracle—she is more concerned about the social and cultural implications for Catholicism in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, miracle cures are an important means to understanding healing especially at a time when scientific advances in medicine were bound to offer significant competition. Unfortunately, Schultz does not delve very deeply into the medical history of the time. What did miracle healing say about the authority of medical practitioners and the efficacy of medical therapeutics?

*Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle* offers a detailed examination of Catholic identity in a changing American worldview that is engagingly written to attract a more popular audience. I am more sceptical about the claim that it altered the course of 'national attitudes towards Catholicism', however, it certainly offers readers, both academic and popular, an opportunity to consider Catholicism within antebellum America.

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