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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Marianismo and the Catholic Autobiographer: A Comparative Analysis

A Thesis Submitted by

Nina Jocelyn Lee

to the

English and Comparative Literature Graduate Program

April 2022

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Marianismo and the Catholic Autobiographer: A Comparative Analysis

A Thesis Submitted by

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Abstract:

As a version of femininity that derives from the figure of the Mother Mary, *marianismo* emphasizes the traditional roles of self-sacrifice, motherhood, spirituality, and nurturance. While *marianismo* is most often associated with Latin America, it can be traced back to Catholicism's origins in Europe. Early and medieval Catholic theologians, such as Saint Augustine of Hippo and Peter Abelard, demonstrate *marianista* beliefs within their autobiographical writings. As autobiography is purported to be the most intimate window into both the personal and larger social situations of a given time and place, the autobiographies of such Catholic male theologians provide insight into the source as well as perpetuation of *marianista* ideology. Through analyzing Augustine and Abelard's relationships with and descriptions of women, this thesis investigates the gender roles of women as they align with those of *marianismo*. Being distinctly Catholic autobiographers as well as members of the clergy, the respective works of these theologians underline the direct connections between *marianismo* and the institution of the Catholic Church, demonstrating how women are expected to emulate the Virgin Mary through their chastity, motherhood, and spirituality.

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

> She had been faithful to one husband, had made due returns to those who gave her birth. Her own flesh and blood had had first claim on her piety, and she had a name for acts of charity.
>
> —St. Augustine, *Confessions*

> A woman, being the weaker sex, is the more pitiable in a state of need, easily rousing human sympathy, and her virtue is the more pleasing to God as it is to man.
>
> —Peter Abelard, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*

Catholic ideology has long been criticized for its patriarchal structure. Between the hierarchy of saints, angels, priests, bishops, and popes, Catholicism is distinctly male-dominated, with few roles for women to occupy besides that of the dichotomous saint-like virgin or the sinning whore. In this epigraph from his autobiographical *Confessions* (1961/400 CE), St. Augustine, the Roman theologian and bishop born in 354 CE and laid to rest 430 CE, draws from the Bible itself to characterize the acceptable roles of women as he describes his own mother, basing her respectability on her patience with her abusive husband as well as her complete selflessness and passivity (I Timothy 5:4, 10). Continuity of this patriarchal notion is likewise found in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (1133), particularly in those written by Peter Abelard. Born in 1079 and buried in 1142, Abelard treats his former lover, Heloise, over whom he wields considerable power yet eventually disregards, as miniscule and disposable, retroactively claiming her to have merely been the object of his lust. Such sexist treatment by these figures toward the principal women in their lives reveals a pattern of attitudes informed by Catholic dogma and points to an adherence to a particular branch of Catholicized patriarchy: *marianismo.*

i. HISTORY OF A PATRIARCHAL ORDER

The origins of the Catholic Church reside in the teachings of Jesus Christ in the first century Roman-occupied Levant. Following Jesus of Nazareth's death, Catholic dogma considers the disciple Peter to be the first Bishop of Rome (a title which would later be known as the Pope).

Peter spread the new Christian gospel throughout the Roman world, and was later crucified in Rome by Emperor Nero in 64 CE (Kung 9). With what would grow to become an established institution in the heart of the Roman Empire, it is no surprise that the Catholic Church incorporated numerous Roman traditions, including a strong legacy of social and gendered hierarchy. With the eventual decline of the Roman Empire by means of overexpansion, internal socio-political turmoil, and foreign invasion, Rome split into eastern and western halves: the eastern Greek known as the Byzantine Empire and the western Latin known as the Western Roman Empire (Keen 1). From this geopolitical division later came a religious division in the 11th century known as the East-West Schism, in which the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches severed themselves from one another due to political and theological differences that had mainly developed from the initial geopolitical split of Rome (Keen 1). From this point, the Roman Catholic Church would continue to play a significant role in shaping the politics, culture, history, philosophy, and, of course, religion of the western world—a role which reverberates even within the current, largely secular era.

With its male-dominated pantheon of angels, saints, priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes, it is no surprise that the Catholic Church is a deeply patriarchal order. Accordingly, "the oppressive patterns in Christianity toward women and other subjugated people" predominantly derive from the patriarchal and hierarchical system of reading, presenting, and interpreting Christian texts and symbols (Reuther 83). Within Catholic theology, "women are said to have been both created second after the male and also to have been guilty of originating humanity's fall into sin," thus rendering them both lesser than and directly subservient to men (Reuther 85). As consequence of this original sin and transgression, women were barred from exercising any authority within the Church. As Reuther describes, the interpretations and dogma

foundational to Christianity, and by extent Catholicism, result from the "patriarchal slavocracies, the social system in which Christianity was born" (83). Indeed, while the Bible's Old Testament firmly advocates patriarchal beliefs and order, readings of the New Testament likewise affirm internal misogyny, such as Saint Paul's letter to Corinthians, in which he writes, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3). Similarly, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul states, "As in all the churches of the saints, women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14: 34-35). As a result, within the governance and organization of the Catholic Church, women were prevented from holding any offices of import, such as priesthood much less any rank above priesthood. Sainthood was the highest rung a woman could access, and the majority of women who did acquire this title did so by means of nunnery or sacrifice. Women who did not enter the abbey were expected to adhere to wifedom and motherhood, where their demeanor was to be demure, faithful, and patient. As the disciple Timothy writes, "Let woman learn silence in full submission. I permit no women to teach or to have authority over a man. She is to keep silent. . . . Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith, love and holiness with modesty" (1 Timothy 2: 12, 15).

ii. SEXISM

Biblical scripture is no stranger to determining idealized sexual scripts and gender norms. Particularly, traditional Christian scriptures and structures emphasize the division of genders and ideal behaviors which are assigned to the heteronormative genders and gender roles, beginning in the book of Genesis, the very first book in the Bible's Old Testament, with the story of Adam and

Eve. According to Freudian sexual script theory, the understanding of human sexuality is characterized by culturally prescribed "scripts" of behavior ("Madonna-whore complex"). These behavioral templates align with traditional gender roles, which determine men to be sexually and socially dominant, aggressive leaders, and women passive, submissive accommodators. In addition to placing heteronormativity as the assumed standard, these "scripts" normalize and validate the notion of the superiority of maleness and male bodies over that which is female. Therein, the relegation of human sexuality into scripted gender roles maintains patriarchy as it standardizes the male above the female. Men, being categorized as morally, sexually, and socially superior, are stereotyped as sexually eager, while women must be either demure or shameless ("Madonna-whore complex"). In accordance to Freudian gender scripts, *marianismo* likewise teaches that men are superior and women inferior. Naturally, these notions did not miraculously appear from a vacuum, but, like the Catholic Church itself, persevere as a legacy of Rome. The Catholic beliefs regarding gender which align with Freudian assertions of sexual scripts develop from a Mediterranean cultural trait that both transcends religion and is trans-religious. During the age of Rome, Roman law and culture infiltrated vast stretches of the Mediterranean via imperialism. Though time has passed and the empire has fallen, remnants of Roman cultural practice ripple into the present. Despite their differences in religion, language, and culture, modern-day countries which were once a part of this Roman world, like Algeria, France, Italy, Spain, and Morocco, continue to feel the reverberations of the past in the form of sexism and the emphasis on the "scripts" of virginity and motherhood. Furthermore, in spite of her unique ties to Catholicism, Mary is considered distinctive among Mediterranean goddesses for her *in partu* perpetual virginity (i.e., the belief that her "hymen remained intact during the birth of Jesus") (Breuner 68). In this way, Mary fulfills the *marianista* and Freudian role of being both virgin and

mother, miraculously and simultaneously. As Mernissi explains, a woman's body, and therefore sexuality, directly corresponds to her male relation's honor and moral code. As the inferior sex, her body and virginity exist as "a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries" (Mernissi 183). With virginity serving as the object of male honor, a woman's body no longer belongs to herself but merely as male asset. This distinct sexual script may even be gleaned by the Adam and Eve story, as Eve's body was created from Adam's rib for the sole purpose of being his wife (Genesis 2:22). Adam himself says before God:

> *This is now bone of my bones*
> *and flesh of my flesh;*
> *she shall be called 'woman,'*
> *for she was taken out of man*. (Genesis 2:23)

The purpose for which women were created, the order of creation in succession to men, and the naming of 'woman' as being in relation to men all infer that women gain their very personhood from men. In contrast to this common narrative, French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir provides an alternative interpretation, asserting "Adam was only a rough draft and that God succeeded in producing the human being in perfection when He created Eve" (25). Adam was the draft which God revised in Eve, God's final creation. Despite this argument's plausibility, the Biblical text is not commonly read or taught in this manner, instead having been historically touted to perpetuate the notion of male authority and superiority. In terms of the original sin of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Book of Genesis states that whereas God punished Adam to work "in the sweat of his face", God punishes Eve by assuring "I will greatly multiple thy sorrow and thy conception…and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:19, 16; Warner 53). The text itself purports that Eve shall live in subjugation to Adam—that women as wives shall live in inferiority to men, their husbands.

Theory also suggests that sexism "legitimizes the societal status quo, but also actively enhances the severity of the gender hierarchy" in which men preside superior over women (Brandt 1143). This has both helped establish and perpetuated the hierarchal difference between men and women, continuously affirming the notion that women are physically, psychologically, and morally inferior to men (Mercer 185). These differences "both reflected and supported patriarchy and gave powerful men what they considered to be excellent reasons to 'care for' and control women" (Mercer 186). Such reasons abound within Abrahamic religious systems and are often reinforced by Christian teachings and theology. For example, according to influential Christian encyclopedist, Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), "God made women inferior to men, because he intended for them to be subjected to men, lest lust drive men, when rejected by women, to desire a different form of satisfaction or seek out the male sex'" (Mercer 186). Women and female bodies within the church were subsequently reduced to objects that attained value from their relation to men or their adherence to sexual script. As a result of women's perceived moral inferiority and divinely ordained subjugation, female bodies were tied to male morality, the most prominent and persistent example of which resides in virginity.

Women within the traditionally patriarchal Catholic order ideally exist as vessels of virginal purity. Saint Augustine describes women as having the same capacity for spiritual salvation as men, but, at the same time, a greater propensity for sin. To him, they are "second in creation, first in sin" (Reuther 86). Davidson's interpretation of the Bible supports this sexist assertion, outlining "(a) man is created first and woman last (2:7, 22), and the first is superior and the last is subordinate or inferior; (b) woman is formed for the sake of man- to be his "helpmate" or assistant to cure man's loneliness (vss. 18- 20); (c) woman comes out of man (vss. 21-22), which implies a derivative and subordinate position; (d) woman is created from man's rib (vss. 21-22),

which indicates her dependence upon him for life; and (e) the man names the woman (vs. 23), which indicates his power and authority over her" (14).

Additionally, within the organization of Catholicism, the role of women has long been a supportive one. As women were not expected nor permitted to hold any substantial form of power within Catholic Church or society, the primary office of women resided in the ultimate goals of premarital virginity and motherhood—preferably both at the same time, as embodied by Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Also known as the Mother Mary or the Virgin Mary, Mary stands out as the most important female figure in all of Catholicism, yet her contribution to the religion mainly rests upon her divine motherhood and her virginity. She is, in fact, virginity deified and serves as queen of heaven above all the angels and saints. Accordingly, she is also one of the most venerated figures in Catholic spaces and images, with the famous "Hail Mary/Ave Maria" prayer dedicated to her. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (721-726), "through Mary, the Holy Spirit begins to bring men…into communion with Christ," signifying that she, as the holy virgin, is the vessel for mankind's spiritual and moral guidance ("Catechism of the Catholic Church"). This reflects that while women are generally inferior, they remain the corporeal vessels of male morality, honor, and even spirituality.

In accordance with the notion of male-driven sexual dichotomy, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, theorized the "Madonna-whore complex" to explain male anxiety towards female sexuality ("Madonna-whore complex"), in 1910 and summed it up as "where such men love they have no desire and where they desire, they cannot love." As the name suggests, this dichotomy categorizes women as either virginal, respectable "Madonnas" or licentious, shameful "whores". With these traits being mutually exclusive, Freud's theory suggests that women are either publicly proper, privately undesirable wives *or* publicly disparaged, privately craved sluts

(Ogu 3). There is no other option, and there exists no option in which a woman's body is not inextricably tied to male perception or control. As female sexuality is seen as "dirty and shameful", female ambivalence towards sex is therefore rewarded and propagated as an ideal gender role. This is particularly relevant in Catholic ideology, which "defines the sexual act as sinful if it is not for procreation" (Mernissi 184). Within a structure in which "femaleness is invariably subordinated to maleness," male-female relationships, such as those of sex, marriage, parenthood, and kinship, consequently "become subservient to social domination" (Cahill 118). In such a structure, sex and particularly female sexuality function as markers of social ethics and morality. The task of Christian social morality regarding sex "is to imbue sexual and reproductive behavior with the qualities of respect, empathy, reciprocity, and mutual fidelity" (Cahill 119). In other words, sex should be associated with the favored morals of the Church, not pleasure. Moreover, in a patriarchal "purity culture", or a culture in which groups and individuals alike are organized into categories of "pure and impure, clean and unclean," women are more associated with impurity (Cahill 129). The female body, and thereby female sexuality, becomes the bearer of social, moral cleanliness. In such societies, women and their association to the fluids of sex, menstruation, and childbirth, which are all seen as unclean, are made to represent the values of the society (Cahill 130). If a woman is "clean" and virginal, she is considered a Madonna. If she is "unclean" and sexual, she is a whore. Women's bodies embody the values of the patriarchal society, and as such the control of sex represents the maintenance of order and cleanliness.

Within Christianity at large, Freud's Madonna-whore complex applies to the dichotomous female figures of Eve and Mary—the binary, heteronormative standards by which women can be judged. Whereas Eve, alongside a host of other unideal women such as Jezebel, Delilah, Herodias, and Salomé, represents what a woman should not be (curious, sexual, powerful, power-seeking,

intelligent, cunning), Mary fully represents what a woman should be (modest, giving, unassuming, virginal) (Greer 6). Therefore, Mary serves as a foil of sinful Eve and the idyllic example of womanhood. Eve, being the first woman and an archetype of Biblical femininity, is culpable for the sins of humankind for being tempted by Satan and eating forbidden fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. For Fathers of the Catholic Church following Augustine, the unmarried, "impure" woman is the legacy of Eve and is subsequently regarded as the temptress, the accomplice of Satan in tempting Adam to eat forbidden fruit; she symbolizes "women's fatal and all-powerful charms and men's incapacity to resist" (Warner 59). By contrast, Mary assists in saving humankind by giving birth to Jesus while simultaneously being a virgin. Accordingly, Eve represents the sinful "whore" while Mary represents the saintly "Madonna."

iii. MARIANISMO

With sexism and patriarchy embedded into Catholic thought, these ideologies often manifest themselves in the form of *marianismo*. Initially introduced by the political scientist Evelyn Stevens, *marianismo* describes women's subordinate position in Catholic cultures, typically those of Latin America (Castillo et al. 164). According to Stevens, the *marianista* woman is "virtuous, humble, and spiritually superior to men" while also "submissive to the demands of men, withstand[ing] extreme sacrifices and suffering for the sake of the family, and expected to be like the Virgin Mary who is viewed as virginally pure and non-sexual" (164). Paralleling Freud's "Madonna-whore complex", the theory of *marianismo* similarly exists on a dichotomy that aligns with traditional heteronormativity. In fact, the very word *"marianismo"* translates to "the quality or act of being like Mary," the mother of Jesus. Despite the prevalence of this interpretation of the Holy Mother, some Latin American women strongly identify with Mary for alternative reasons. One study in Quito, Ecuador discovered that a group of middle-aged Catholic women of varying

socio-economic backgrounds viewed Mary as a role model, protector, mother, and empowered women defined by bravery and faith (Muñoz 59). According to the interviews conducted, their image of the Virgin "contrasts with the Church's views that emphasize [Mary's] obedience and sexual purity," becoming a symbol of resistance of male-imposed Catholic rules (Muñoz 59). However, the alternative notion that the Virgin Mother may be a symbol of resistance contrasting the more-widely-accepted version of herself as a bearer of patriarchal values demonstrates the rule rather than the exception. Within popular Catholic canon, Mary is presented as embodying "the Church's ideal feminine characteristics: obedience to God, chastity and a complete dedication to motherhood" (Muñoz 58). As a symbol embedded in the cultural and social norms of the Catholic world and Latin America in particular, Mary represents "the quintessential role model for Catholic women," (Muñoz 59). In turn, *marianismo* directly relates to Catholic notions of women and sexuality.

Catholic notions of gender and sexuality are global because Catholicism is global. In the first place, Christianity is the largest religion in the world, including over two billion adherents—or one-third of all major religious groups ("Global Christianity"). As the only religion in the world "with a major presence in every continent," Christianity and its influence has strong influence in numerous arenas across various countries, such as in politics, culture, philosophy, and social norms (Fisher). Catholicism is the largest branch of Christianity, encompassing 50% of the global Christian demographic ("Global Christianity"). As such, Catholic views weigh significantly across global cultures. Within broader Catholic world, which includes Mediterranean countries such as France, Italy, and Spain, Catholic populations have represented more than 60% of each demographic in the 21st century. According to the Pew Research Center, 40% of the world's Catholic population resides in Latin America. In 2014, 69% of the entire Latin American

population identified as Catholic, while 84% were raised Catholic. Data suggests that "for most of the 20th century, from 1900 through the 1960s, at least 90% of Latin America's population was Catholic" ("Religion in Latin America"). Yet, despite the historical prevalence and origin of Catholicism in Western and Southern Europe, *marianismo* is mostly attributed to Latin America, where the Catholic faith was actively spread through Spanish and Portuguese imperial colonization—European empires whose crowns were staunchly Catholic. According to Ehlers, the colonizing forces "fostered a nontemporal, spiritual, and therefore secondary, role for women with laws and social codes limiting women's rights and defining women as subservient" (3). Although many "had resisted domination in Latin America from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century" and continue to reject *marianismo* as a gender script, it remains a highly Catholicized branch and example of sexism (Navarro 258).

Some argue that the reason for the Church's heavy emphasis on virginity lies in the notion that, in remaining abstinent, "one is concerned not primarily with the sexual, but with the process of birth and death, the wheel of becoming and decay" (Balthasar & Albaric 325; James 3:6). Additionally, some such as the historian Peter Brown argue that the historical reasoning for the emphasis on virginity did not so much arise out of a "negative" attitude toward sex but "as out of a commitment to communal solidarity and a rejection of the hierarchical and state-controlled functions of the patriarchal family" within the Roman context (Cahill 152). By extension, Christian celibacy was not a symbol of conformity to gender scripts, but in fact a resistance to them with celibacy as "a bodily symbol of resistance to the pagan state and family," particularly among young women, who were incredibly vulnerable (Cahill 171). While virginity may have been empowering for women in the time of Christ and Rome, its use following the rise of the Catholic Church throughout the subsequent centuries has connotated something entirely different as the social and

political structures have changed since Rome. Ironically, what had once been a symbol of power had changed into a tool of subjugation. In the contemporary context, virginity underpins unequal expectations between men and women. Because women are directed to emulate Mary, they must balance the paradox of fulfilling the 'mother' role as well as upholding the traditional value of chastity—that is, not only bodily purity, but also "purity of mind and heart" ("The Evangelical Counsels"). While men are encouraged to follow the virtue of chastity, they are not asked to emulate "Mary, Our Lady…the woman who kept a pure heart for God so that God could pour into her whatever grace he willed" ("The Evangelical Counsels"). This idea of the woman as an empty vessel of purity, chastity, and submission aligns with the concept of *marianismo*, which points out that women are expected to be containers of untainted, holy virtue.

Marianismo exists from Catholicized patriarchy, but also exists in correspondence with *machismo*. Because gender is starkly dichotomized, both *marianismo* and *machismo* exist as exaggerated versions of femininity and masculinity (Stevens 90). Just as *marianista* women are expected to be demure, submissive, self-silencing, self-sacrificing, obedient, spiritual, family-oriented, and chaste, *machista* men—the *marianista*'s counterpart—are expected to be physically aggressive, courageous, chauvinistic, womanizing, controlling, authoritative, powerful, and sexually potent (Ingoldsby, 3; Morales & Rojas Perez 247). The dichotomy is highly heteronormative, as *machismo* denigrates all things associated with the feminine. The goal of the *machista* man is sexual conquest, and as such directly conflicts with the *marianista* value of virginity and chastity while simultaneously enforcing the virtues of subservience and elevated spirituality as a result of suffering (Castillo et al. 164). This violence against women is "justified" by the notion that "a woman's accumulated pain is transformed into sainthood"—that her pain brings her closer to holiness (Ehlers 3). As a result of these stakes, men, who are expected to be

aggressive and voracious, have little to lose, while women are divided into two categories based on their adherence to *marianismo* concepts: virgins or whores.

Marianismo itself does not act as a script to which women should commit themselves, but points to the attributes imposed and lauded in Catholic spaces, allowing us to investigate how femininity is imagined and constructed in terms of religious figures, namely the Virgin Mary. As the original "Madonna", the characteristics of the Holy Mother align closely to those prescribed by Freudian sexual scripts. The Madonna is a figure of motherhood, virginity, and patient compassion, suffering in silence while gaining spiritual righteousness for her suffering and her silence. According to *marianista* (and consequently) *machista* values, women who do not adhere to this ideal are the unspiritual *others* whose bodies are relegated to the sins of lust and pleasure. Conversely, the women who do emulate the spiritual Madonna do not have any association with sex, apart from being married. As a result of the curse of Eve in the Garden of Eden, all women either fall in the likeness of the sinful Eve or the blessed Madonna, while the notion of woman's subjugation remains tied to "her role as a mother and as a tempress" (Warner 60). This divide between the spiritual and the corporeal is significant, because it undercuts the individual's complex interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, consigning them to a one-dimensionality that is easily accessible and abusable.

Thus far, no analysis has been made linking the popular concept of *marianismo* to canonical Catholic figures despite its prominence and relevance within the order. Moreover, no analysis has concentrated on medieval Mediterranean writings, as the focus tends to be skewed towards the misogynistic *marianismo* found in the media of contemporary Latin America. Some scholars criticize the purported correlation between *marianismo* and *machismo* because it asserts that marianismo is the "complement to machismo, where the passive, long-suffering woman acts

in response to male irresponsibility; without marianismo, machismo could not exist" (Ehlers 1). However, this does not account for the direct relationship between *marianismo* and Catholicism, allowing *marianismo* to be viewed as its own misogynistic entity to be understood on its own. Other scholars, such as historian Silvia Marina Arrom, criticize Evelyn Stevens's assertion that the virtues identified in *marianismo* resemble "the Victorian 'cult of womanhood' found in the United States and Great Britain" (Navarro 257). This, she argues, essentially projects Western issues onto Latin America while white-washing and generalizing the diverse, complex histories of Latin America (Navarro 257). This thesis intends to respond to arguments such as these by asserting that *marianismo* is not solely a Latin American phenomenon, but one which may be applied to the broader Catholic world, particularly the Mediterranean/European context out of which Catholic thought historically developed. Because Catholicism is not isolated to Latin America alone but exists as the largest sect of the largest faith in the world, this thesis intends to argue that *marianismo* inhabits Catholic theology at large. By examining some of the most prominent theological works in the history of the Catholic Church, this thesis will delve into the personal and the societal through the autobiographical medium of two critical theologians, whose writings helped develop the very foundation of Catholic thought. In examining that which is intimate, this thesis aims to investigate that which is common: namely, the presence of *marianista* thought as it shapes and is shaped by Catholicism through the pen of the Catholic autobiographer.

In beginning this investigation, the first chapter of this thesis will discuss the role of autobiography, its significance as a medium to unravel the personal as well as the societal, and its deep relation to Christian practices and theology, identifying the nuances of each autobiographer's particular style of autobiographical writing. The second chapter will explore the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the author of the West's very first canonical autobiography, and analyze

his treatment of key women in his life. Similarly, the third chapter will investigate the autobiographical writings of French medieval philosopher Peter Abelard, principally evaluating his treatment of and relationship with his mistress, Heloise. Finally, the concluding chapter will compare the *marianista* attitudes of these authors, how autobiography plays a critical role in their discussion, and ultimately how Catholicism informs their dichotomous views on women.

II. CHAPTER ONE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEDIUM

I beseech you, God, to show my full self to myself.

—St. Augustine, *Confessions*

As a stringing together of the past and personal memories, the autobiography stands as one of the most insightful forms of literature for analyzing identity. It is the introspection of the self and simultaneously the narrative of identity itself. As Fivush and Haden assert, "the *self* is many things, but *identity* is a life story," and nowhere is that life narrative so evocatively or personally told than in the autobiography (187; emphasis in original). Originating from the Greek *autos* (self), *bio* (life), and *graphe* (writing), autobiography refers to the genre in which people write accounts of their own life stories (Smith & Watson 1). In this way, the autobiographer is situated in their momentary present, while their narrative is situated in the past. Due to the nature of time and human mortality, the autobiography is never truly complete, "only ended," just as individuals never "arrive" to any particular identity but are perpetually in the act of "becoming" and "being" (Fivush & Haden 216; Satchidanandan 7). This is a direct result of the autobiography existing as more than a history of the past, but "a monument of the self as it is becoming" (Satchidanandan 8). Through self-awareness and introspection, the autobiographical delves *within* in order to explore, understand, and weave together the moments that culminate in the author's present.

Apart from the common themes of self-reflection and personal narrative, the autobiographical genre is most commonly identified by the use of "I", as the author is one and the same as the narrative voice. This use of the first person secures the language of the text with the identity and the self, contributing "to the sense of 'the unity and internal coherence' of the story" (Saito 255). This first-person self exists as simultaneously "present and absent to itself: present in the retrospective gaze of the narrator, who can see his past life as forming a narrative whole; and

absent in the eyes of the self in the narrative whose destiny is visible in only a completed reading, that is, a completed life" (Rothfield 212). Because the author-narrator reflects upon their past self with present understanding, they are both observing as well as participating in the transformation of their narrative identity. Time and space are distorted and woven into the narrative of the autobiographer's self-reflective journey, all while the reader, a silent bystander to the narrator's thoughts and reflections, witnesses this transformation unfold. In this space of presence and absence from the text, the author straddles "the world-beyond-the-text and the text" as the bridge between the two (Lejeune 11).

As with any genre of literature, there exist numerous sub-genres in which autobiographical writing may be categorized. According to Philippe Lejeune, what each of these sub-categories commonly share is the notion of the *autobiographical pact*, in which "the author does not have a name in the narrative, but the author has explicitly declared in an initial pact that he is identical to the narrator" (Lejeune 17). Classic autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, confessions, testimonies, and *Bildungsromane* all share this *autobiographical pact*, but differ in theme, tone, and style. For instance, memoir and autobiography overlap in many characteristics while differing in scope, since autobiography is "self-life writing that attempts to do for the author what a biographer would do: write the whole life" (Couser 23). Whereas "*autobiographies* are generally more comprehensive—in chronology and otherwise; *memoirs* are generally more focused and selective," focusing on a single dimension of life rather than the course of life itself (Couser 24; emphasis in original). In this sense, Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* is indeed an autobiography, because it spans the multi-faceted record of Augustine's life, covering his intimate partnerships, relationship with God, familiar ties, and the transformation of his spirit. Augustine's transformation of the "self" is the purpose of his narrative, rather than the socio-historical

reflection on a particular stage of his life; for this reason, his journey is an autobiographical one. Though we may consider Augustine's story under the autobiographical sub-genre of the confessional due to the name of the text and its highlighting of Augustine's personal "confessions" to God, *Confessions* is, ironically, more of a conversion tale (Couser 39). Augustine's reason for writing the text is to record his transformational journey, a spiritual conversion of the self to Christianity. Whereas Augustine's *Confessions* falls under the sub-genre of the autobiographical conversion story, Abelard's *Letters* follow the legacy of life-writing. With its common connotation of domesticity, forms of life-writing such as diaries and letters are typically associated with women. As such, they are frequently considered less notable and are "rarely considered worthy of publication" (Couser 42). Nevertheless, letters as a form of life-writing exist as their own autobiographical sub-genre, maintaining a general "impulse toward catholicity" in their impulse to divulge personal intimacies, such as thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Couser 42). While they deal with the interaction between the "self" and an external "other", there remains the notion of the transformation of the "self" in response to the "other."

i. A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

One fundamental element of autobiography is the presence of transformation, which originates in the "destabilising and destabilised relationships between reader, writer and text" (Saito 261). This destabilization allows for the reconstruction of "the relationship between the self and language" (Saito 257). If all autobiography involves some sort of movement or transformation, then "narrative can be thought of as the space within which this relocation occurs" (Rothfield 212). Thus, the *narrative* is the outcome of this destabilization, the centerpiece of the transformation. Autobiography itself as a genre "is about change, about a series of transformations" (Barros 1). This ties to the notion of the individual *becoming* as opposed to *arriving* to an identity. Throughout

their autobiographical work, the author may indeed arrive to a new understanding of themselves and the world, but the core emphasis of the narrative is not this arrival, it is the transformation. After all, "a person's evolving and dynamic life story is a key component of what constitutes the individuality of that particular person (Fivush & Haden 187). Although "the creation of multiple and contradictory self-images" may be seen as a flaw in the autobiographical narrative—a flaw that may be politically, personally, or socially advantageous to the author, these self-images, collected at various points of time and from varied perspectives, allow for the nuanced, sometimes contradicting narrative that reflects the very condition of the individual: one that is nuanced, complex, layered, and subjective (Berryman 74):

> Through examining autobiographical narratives, we gain access to individuals' construction of their own identity. What individuals choose to tell, what information they select to report, provides converging evidence of how individuals conceptualize their selves. But importantly, these narratives are not static entities; autobiographical narratives and self-identity are fluid and dynamic, changing both developmentally as well as situationally. (Fivush & Haden 149)

Through the dynamic transformations of personhood and thought which it depicts, the autobiographical narrative delves into identity and ideology formation. Because this transformation does not occur in vacuum, it illustrates, and sometimes even parallels, changing norms and attitudes in wider society. The autobiographer undergoes an individual change and catalogues their personal journey. Plucked from a moment in the recorded continuum of time and space, the autobiographer's internal metamorphosis becomes representative, indicative, reportative of that moment. The autobiographies of figures such as Malcom X, Frederick Douglass, Anne Frank, Nelson Mandela, and Michelle Obama each evoke not only a personal narrative, but the larger social, political, and ideological spaces they inhabited. For each, the autobiography both depicts the author's personal journey and represents their larger historical moment. For example,

one cannot think of Frederick Douglass' autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, without recalling the context of slavery in the United States. In describing his own journey from enslaved to free person, Douglass' narrative details the names, places, and events of the time he was enslaved. His story is a personal microcosm of the larger social context of enslavement as well as a manifestation of the broader social question of slavery. For these reasons, the autobiography is considered the point of entry to the broader social context.

Having written what is the first autobiography in the Western canon, and perhaps even in the world, it is no accident that Augustine understood and highlighted the importance of the metamorphosis. After all, Augustine studied under Platonist philosophers and theologians, whose notions of the ideal divine and of the soul as an infinite, indivisible being can be found in Augustine's illuminated autobiography. Augustine's transformation of the soul, which goes from indulging in limited, physical pleasures and sins to being devoted to God, the One, the Almighty, demonstrates the role of change in realms of that which is mortal or divine. This emphasis on transformation is perhaps best demonstrated by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written in 8 AD, which asserts that humans are part of a world that is constantly metamorphosing. Having been written three centuries before Augustine's *Confessions*, it is likely that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* likely had at least *some* influence on the saint's autobiographical work.

Augustine's personal transformation stands as the central point of his *Confessions*. The text, consequently, is not separated from the author's personal journey, but a central figure of that journey. In other words, the text "is not a separate artifact that can be understood apart from the author, but rather a 'monument of the self,' and the world is no longer a neutral object to be viewed scientifically, but instead something created through perception: 'One creates from moment to moment and continuously the reality to which one gives a metaphoric name and shape, and that

shape is one's own shape'" (Berryman 78). Moreover, to Augustine, like many other Christians, the "transforming force," the "dynamis of his life" lies in God (Barros 14; Mathien & Wright 32; Rothfield 217). After all, Augustine's *Confessions* detail his own spiritual metamorphosis from pagan to Christian, and for men like Augustine, Christianity itself was "continuous with, and the ultimate expression of, the introspective metaphysics developed by Plotinus and by Porphyry" (Fredrikson 90). Alongside his journey from paganism to Christianity, Augustine at the same time establishes "a literary genre, the confession, or narrative of the self" (Freccero 17). In documenting his sins those thousands of years ago, Augustine created the genre in which the individual most intimately examines the self "to seek dialogue with an unapproachable God, and to reflect on the centrality of memory to spiritual salvation" (Smith & Watson 85). Though we are thousands of years removed from Augustine, this examination of the self through the narrative journey of transformation remains the distinguishing focal point of the autobiographical genre.

ii. THE MEDIUM AS THE MESSAGE

With this emphasis on transformation, the medium of autobiography easily aligns with the Christian religion, the core principles of which emphasize the resurrection of Christ, the redemption of the soul, and the conversion of the mortal body to the immortal spirit upon death. The autobiographical genre itself illustrates "the death of the self as character and the resurrection of the self as author" (Freccero 17). Common themes such as these continue to traverse across genre and faith. For instance, a parallel may be drawn between the acts of prayer and confessing in relation to the autobiography, as each rely on self-reflection and internal contemplation. In the example of Augustine's *Confessions*, the saint expresses "'in full rhetorical splendor' the Christian imperative to the confession of sins," thus promoting "that inward-turning gaze which is the origin and basis of autobiography" (Anderson 18). Christian practices involve "a strong element of

critical self-evaluation," such that they "can only take place from a position of relative enlightenment" (Mathien & Wright 23). Arguably, it is this relative enlightenment which allows the autobiographer, like the faithful precant, to view themselves from a removed position of self-hood in order to reflect. Herein lies the conversion of the self to the outsider peering in. In theological terms, this conversion is "the separation of the self as sinner from the self as saint…a separation between the self as the object and the self as the subject when the two are claimed to be the same person" (Freccero 17). The individual, as both subject and object, as both sinner and saint, must consolidate their narrative of identity through the reflective account of metamorphosis.

As a self-informing and self-identifying form of literature, autobiography presents a direct interface between the author and the revelation of their self-perception. With no presence of a narrator-medium, the author may reveal their inner thoughts in a way which, in the case of Augustine and Peter Abelard, resembles the act of ritual confession. As a specifically Catholic tenet, confession describes "a genuine attempt of an individual, to be honest with him/herself" (Harmon 7). Though this is traditionally done behind the lattice screen of the confessional, separating the confessor from the listening priest, autobiography resembles this ritual. However, instead of an anonymous priest, the confession is directed to the unknown reader, to the separated lover, or to God himself. The autobiographical text, particularly those written by Catholic figures such as Augustine and Peter Abelard, parallels Catholic confessional tradition. With its emphasis on self-reflection and solitary introspection, the autobiography, like the confession, has the potential to reveal thought, action, and belief on the most personal scale—including biases and prejudices.

Through the medium of autobiography, Augustine explores and introspects in a way that consolidates the paradigms of Christian practice. His 'self' as an author is synonymous to his 'self'

as the subject, allowing the reader an intimate portrait of an internal, spiritual journey. In this way, the autobiography acts as a mirror, which projects an image of the self to the self and to the wider world. The image serves as a projection of memory sought to display one's personhood—in this case, a journey toward God:

> Augustine saw his as a search for his true life, his true self, and conceived of autobiography as a quest for true memory, for reality. For Augustine, one's true life is that which has been given us by God and Providence, and narrative's inherent and unique orderliness reflects the natural form of memory, the form truest to Providence—given being. True memory mirrors the real world, and Augustine accepted narrative as its medium. (Fivush & Haden 216)

The autobiographical format is integral to Augustine's search, demonstrating on a personal level "how God's grace works to convert him by changing what inspires him" (Mathien & Wright 35). Because the text inspects Augustine's very personal transition from sinner to saint, the format of the *Confessions* as autobiography is as revolutionary to Western canon as it is necessary to the telling of the metamorphosis. Just as Augustine delves into his own spiritual relationship with God, he likewise demonstrates the *possibility* of transformation within the Christian doctrine. After all, according to Christianity, Jesus the Christ died for the sake of forgiving mortal sins for the sake of our immortal souls. As much as the *Confessions* is a personal reflection, it is also a religious analogy for the possibility of redemption and change. For this reason, it can be said that the very format of the *Confessions* as autobiography relates to its impact as a work of theological and spiritual literature.

The possibility of transformation is not only embedded in the format of autobiography, but it can also be its very message. In the case of the *Confessions*, Augustine demonstrates that his journey was more than a personal transformation; it is an experience that may be transformative for the broader audience. While the autobiographical format of the *Confessions* might seem to

entail the notion that the journey is strictly personal and individual, the importance of the communal cannot be overlooked, especially in regard to early Christian tradition. In the first place, Augustine did not write the *Confessions* as a journal or diary, which are typically meant for the individual author's eyes, but as an autobiography meant to be read by the literate. In particular, he wrote it for the Christian community—who may have read Augustine's journey the same way they would read a parable in the Bible, as an example of how Christians should live. For the Christians of Augustine's time, this translates to the understanding that "the importance of the individual is nothing when weighed against the communal experience of religious practice" (Leech 115). One such example is communion. The term "communion" itself entails a number of meanings: acting as the verbal action of receiving the Eucharist (the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the form of bread and wine in respect to the night before his crucifixion) as well as participating in spiritual union with the Church upon baptism (alongside a pantheon of saints). These notions of communion and community are exemplified by the last lines of the Apostles Creed:

> *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.* ("Catholic Prayers")

Within these lines, the significance of the communion of saints and reverence to the Catholic Church is equivalent to the core tenets of the Christian faith: the forgiveness of earthly sins and the spiritual ascension of the immortal soul to Heaven in the afterlife. This is further underscored by the first line of the original Nicene Creed of 325 which declares "*We believe in one God*," again emphasizing that communion with others "is a way to access a relationship with the divine" ("The Nicene Creed"; Leech 122). As a priest and theologian of the 4th century, born nearly 30 years after the establishment of the Nicene Creed, Augustine would have been no stranger to this emphasis on community. As such, it is pertinent to read the *Confessions* as a story to be shared,

even though it is addressed to God, not only as a journey of the self, but as an example for others to move closer to God.

The timing of *Confessions* correlates to its importance as a multi-faceted text. As "the origin of the modern Western autobiography, both in the sense of marking a historical beginning and of setting up a model for other, later texts," *Confessions*, which depicts a personal transformation, embodies a historical period of change (Anderson 18). According to the historian Peter Brown, early Christians, particularly those in the Roman Empire, had been "overshadowed by death" due to the illegality of Christianity as imposed by the Roman Senate soon after the death of Jesus of Nazareth and infamously enforced by Emperor Nero, whose stories of martyring Christians still echo within Church canon ("Religious Tolerance and Persecution in the Roman Empire"). According to historian Peter Brown, by the time of St. Augustine, persecution had subsided and "the Christian's worst enemies could no longer be placed outside him: they were inside, his sins and his doubts; and the climax of a man's life would not be martyrdom, but conversion from the perils of his own past" (152). By the time the *Confessions* arrived, nearly one hundred years after the reign of Constantine I, the Roman emperor who famously introduced Christianity to the Roman Empire and moved the capitol of "New Rome" to Constantinople, had passed (Pohlsander). At the time of Augustine's writing, Christianity was the dominant religion of the Roman state. Although the modern conception of autobiography began with the *Confessions*, it came to be regarded "only in the modern era for what it is: not simply the life of a saint, but also the paradigm for all representations of the self in a retrospective literary structure. This monument of Western Christianity paradoxically achieved its literary significance at the beginning of a distinctly more secular age" (Freccero 17). While Augustine's masterful autobiography appeared as a Christian text in the Christian phase of the Roman Empire, the concept of documenting a

personal spiritual reckoning was not new. In fact, prior to Augustine's writing of the *Confessions* at the end of the fourth century, "pagan philosophers had already created a tradition of 'religious autobiography'" (Brown 152). Even though this tradition was historically oral and scattered across the Mediterranean and North African region, it nonetheless existed, setting a context for Augustine's introduction. This situates autobiography as having had a context of personal, thoughtful reflection that may be associated with spiritual awareness or reckoning. By virtue of precedence and norms of this highly religious era, medieval authors, like Augustine and Abelard, invoked the spiritual quest in their writings, deploying, for example, "a rhetoric of self-reference in their quests for salvation" (Smith & Watson 87).

For Abelard, the rhetoric of self-reference primarily manifests in the form of the letter. As a form of autobiography, the letter uses the first person "I" as the subject, combining the author and subject as one. Similar to how autobiography is often considered the point of entry to the larger world, scholars contend that letters encompass transformation and communication (Meyer 79). Like autobiography, the letter encapsulates change as well as the conveyance of that change. However, the letter departs in its existence not as an introspection into personal transformation, but as a dialogue between "self" and "other", and sometimes even between "self" and "self". The letter is more of an attempt at communicating, rather than a journey of self-reflection:

> He who is writing the letter and she whom he describes in the letter - that is always also the attempt to speak of oneself. To the extent to which one sends oneself in a letter, one also expedites one's own self-delivery, which corresponds with the primary divisibility of the letter and wishes to be taken along. Not by a carrier of meaning, but, very simply, by a carrier of letters. (Meyer 86)

Because of the nature of the letter, it is reasonable that Abelard chose it as his specific medium of autobiography, as it provides him a form of explanation and self-determination.

While scholars may retrospectively understand his series of letters with Heloise were

initially meant to be a personal, private correspondence, his *Historia calamitatum* was not. Abelard's *Historia* is a public lamentation of his sorrows and trials—a far cry from the intimate dialogue of his later letters with his former lover. Yet, his declaration of personal calamities is very much an open letter speaking to an unspecified "you" while recounting the tribulations of an anonymous "friend" who, in actuality, is Abelard himself (Mathien & Wright 22). By the end of the letter, Abelard concludes that suffering in life is a part of God's greater plan and that certain hardships are signs of the world's hatred for the truly pious (Mathien & Wright 22). Due to the publishing of the *Historia*, it is possible to deduce that this message is not merely personal but intended for the wider public. Scholars speculate that he wrote this particular letter to defend his reputation plagued with intrigue, rivals, and scandal. The letter was written after Abelard had been publicly renounced and castrated upon the discovery of his secret affair with Heloise. The general tenor of his story seems "much less consoling than militant," as if "written by someone who must have caused a great deal of controversy as a defense, an apology" (Mathien & Wright 22). In being a defense, this positions Abelard's letter as a dialogue between an imagined recipient ("you") who substitutes as us, the reader and himself. Abelard's letter is thus complex as it is both an autobiographical work in which he reflects upon earlier events (an investigation of the "self" by the "self") *and* a dialogue between the "self" and the "other" through the voice of the second person ("you"). He is "at once its author and subject", the victim of calamity and its historian (McLaughlin 488).

iii. GENDER AND THE GENRE

Though Abelard's letters are well-known examples of autobiography in the Western canon, they constitute part of a greater historical tradition of male domination in literature, specifically in the realm of autobiography. Historically, what constitutes an "autobiography" has largely been

determined by male academics researching, studying, and critiquing the autobiographical works of other men (Jay 50). Interestingly, the literary forms that typically constitute "autobiography", such as diaries, letters, memoirs, and personal journals, are also associated with the literature produced by women. This is a result of women's historical exclusion from the "public spheres" in which literature was produced, read, and circulated and relegation to the "private sphere", hence their association with more personal forms of writing (Jay 50). The impact of this exclusion must be considered in tandem with the notion that "autobiography is the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life comes before us" (Dilthey 221). If male-written autobiographies dominate the genre, it is not a far cry to assume that, consequently, our understanding of life itself is skewed in favor of the male experience, meaning that all others, particularly women, are excluded from relaying their own narratives. By excluding women from their personal narrative, they are erased from the collective memory. After all, it is through autobiographical acts that "we give shape to and remake ourselves through memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency" (Smith & Watson 81).

One example of the importance of female autobiographical narrative confronting the accepted male standard may be found in Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. With its story centering on the complex growing pains of girlhood, her journey is not a movement towards religion, but away from it, focusing on all the doubts, insecurities, and questions on her shaky trajectory toward adulthood and away from faith. Beginning shortly after her parents die in 1918 from the flu epidemic in the United States, the story delves into Mary's inner world as she moves in with her strict, Catholic aunt and abusive uncle. At this point, she recounts how her aunt unresponsively watches while her abusive uncle beats her in the name of saving her soul. As she grows older, she encounters more instances and beliefs that challenge her to question her faith,

which eventually altogether dissipates as she becomes a closet atheist. Many have pointed out that McCarthy's autobiographical journey contrasts Augustine's; whereas she moves away from faith as she grows older, he moves toward it. Similarly, her personal reflections question her motives and faith in a way that opposes Abelard's assertions which defend his motives and reasoning in the name of God. She reckons with Catholicism, its systems of hierarchy, its messages, becoming more dissatisfied with it, as opposed to embracing or preaching it. While each author deals with Catholicism, McCarthy noticeably stands apart in reflecting on her perspective as a woman living within its toxically patriarchal structure. Her feelings of shame, experiences of abuse, and encounters with bigotry all illuminate the intimate face of omission.

These pressures that McCarthy experienced are not new, as they reflect the same "pressures and strict structures put on the female voice and on female identity in a medieval love text," such as that of Abelard and Heloise's love letters (Calabrese 1). These letters particularly demonstrate how women and their narratives are heavily shaped by male characterizations, specifically "how a Christian culture, obsessed with the problems of love and power, shapes the gendered voices of desire and authority" (Calabrese 1). In medieval Europe, this was especially concerning as many male authors puppeteered female voices and characters, creating female caricatures that ventriloquized the sexist biases and prejudices of their authors. This silencing stood as "a constant threat produced by the dominant culture, especially one that gendered language as thoroughly as medieval religious and amatory discourse did" (Calabrese 3). However, unlike the "ventroliquists" so popular in this era, Heloise was a real person who engaged in real, recorded dialogue. Throughout the letters, she is complex, layered, vocal, and even sometimes contradictory. In short, she is a fully-fledged person, not merely a one-dimensional character as male authors would have certainly categorized her. Her voice is unique in that we, the audience separated from her letters

with Abelard by time and space, actually have the opportunity to hear it.

III. CHAPTER TWO: SAINT AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

I tell my story for love of your love.

—St. Augustine, *Confessions* Book IX

Aurelius Augustinus of Hippo was born in 354 AD in Thagaste, a Northern African provincial territory of the Western Roman Empire, or modern-day Annaba, Algeria (Gronewoller 266; Bowersock 17). Born to a pagan father and a Christian mother, Augustine was brought up as Christian, though describes that he remained atheist throughout his young life despite his faithful mother Monica's persistent influence. At the age of sixteen, he moved to the "cauldron of sex", the city of Carthage, to pursue his education in law, building upon his prior study of grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy (Bowersock 17). At the age of eighteen, he lived with an unnamed mistress for what many scholars speculate to have been at least over a decade. This first mistress would later bear him a son, who remains Augustine's only known child, named Adeodatus, or "Gift of God" (Reuther 48; Tornau). During this time, in 373 AD, Augustine converted to Manicheism, a religion of Persian origin that, within the North African context, existed as a syncretic religion that included elements of Christianity as well as other religions, but was considered heretic by other Christians. For the following decade, despite Monica's disapproval, Augustine adhered to the Manichean religion until he moved to Milan in 383 and came under the influence of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan as well as the neoplatonically-informed Christian philosophy (Tornau). After a period of agonizing internal conflict, Augustine converted to Christianity in 387. As a Christian, he renounced all paganistic and unorthodox beliefs, left his common-law wife, and resigned from his professorship in Milan to (reportedly against his will) become an ordained priest in his hometown of Hippo, where he succeeded as bishop five years later (Pine-Coffin 11). He died August 28, 430 during the Vandal invasion of Hippo and was later

canonized—officially made a saint within the Christian dogma with his own annual feast day—by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 (Oestreich 189). While neither the most renowned, most learned, or most politically influential Christian of his time, Augustine would become the "colossus of early Christianity" (Bowersock 17).

With a vast collection of written works, Augustine's legacy as a prominent figure of the Catholic Church cannot be overstated. With his numerous works that have contributed greatly to the ideology of the Catholic Church as a religious and theological institution, Augustine is consider a doctor and father of the Church. Of his works, 113 books and treatises, over 200 letters, and more than 500 sermons survive (Pine-Coffin 11). Within the Catholic as well as larger Christian spheres, he is frequently referenced and revered as "perhaps the greatest Christian philosopher of Antiquity and certainly the one who exerted the deepest and most lasting influence" (Tornau). Though there are over 10,000 recorded saints of the Catholic Church, Augustine is easily among the most famous of them (Manning). Being both a scholar and saint, his theological authority in Western Christian tradition was "universally accepted" and "virtually uncontested" from the Latin Middle Ages to the nineteenth century (Tornau). To this day, Augustine remains one of the most important figures in Catholic as well as western philosophical and rhetorical history, "as important in the study of modern literature as he is for the study of Western Christendom" (Freccero 16).

Scholarly consensus regards Augustine's *Confessions* to be the first ever autobiographical work in the history of Western letters. Moreover, it also stands as one of the most important literary works in the Western canon, a "spiritual physical odyssey from heresy and debauchery to the serenity of the Catholic Church" (Bowersock 17). While some controversy over whether the *Confessions* is a "true" autobiography, given its interwoven philosophical aspects, theological debates (particularly against the Manicheans), and sometimes sparse autobiographical content, it

is still considered impactful in its rhetorical strength and introspective reflections (Fredriksen 87). Written at the end of the fourth century while Augustine was in his 40's, *Confessions* is not so much a complete autobiography, but an account of his early life (Harmon 2). It serves as a multi-layered innuendo, acting as a confession of his youthful sins, a confession of his faith in the Christian God, and, in the ancient Latin understanding of the root *confesio*, a "praise of God and gratitude" (Chadwick 1161). The text itself is composed of thirteen books, books one to nine being largely autobiographical, book ten focusing largely on memory, and books eleven to thirteen more exegetical as they concern the creation story of the Old Testament's Book of Genesis (Kotzé 146). At large, *Confessions* is written as a personal, intimate letter not directly intended to any mortal reader or audience, but to God. By addressing God on high, Augustine elevates his work as a model for Christians to maintain an intimate, personal relationship with divinity through spiritual exploration and reflective discourse. For this reason, Augustine's textual messages are critical in understanding the broader notions of how Christians should treat others, particularly women.

While the *Confessions* is highly regarded as a feat of rhetoric, insight, and faith, St. Augustine frequently marginalizes the women in his life. In the first place, women are almost never called by name. They are treated as minor side characters. They do not speak except in reaction to the actions or words of men. They are largely unheard and unimportant. When they do appear relevant, such as the rare cases of Augustine's mother and his unnamed mistress, they are either categorized as modest, pure, and submissive or lustful, sinful, and sexual. The former, his mistress and mother of his only known child, is only briefly mentioned and never known by name. Of her, he writes:

> In those days I lived with a woman, not my lawful wedded wife but a mistress whom I had chosen for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her. But she was the only one and I was faithful to her. Living with her I found out by my own experience the difference

> between the restraint of the marriage alliance, contracted for the purpose of having children, and a bargain struck for lust, in which the birth of children is begrudged, though, if they come, we cannot help but love them. (IV.i.72)

Despite having an open, monogamous, and what would have been acceptable common-law relationship in Roman society, the unnamed woman represents an object of his "lust" and "passions" (Reuther 48). The most obvious indicator of this is her lack of a name. Without a name, the woman both literally and symbolically does not possess any identity besides being "his mistress". This is especially clear in his omission of her from the majority of his autobiography, despite their 14 years spent together, the child they conceived and supposedly raised together, and what appears to be a physically and emotionally monogamous partnership. Because of her erasure, anonymity, and absence from his story, she exists in the autobiographical retrospect as merely a body on which to project his sinful longings and physical pleasures, and he portrays himself in relation to her as held in "bondage to sinful lust" (Reuther 48). Because she has no name, her identity is symbolically reduced to her role in relation to him. She has no identity or presence of her own except as his mistress, a body whom he later discards. Augustine clearly outlines this objectification, stating that when he first arrives to Carthage, he "was in love with the idea of [love]," and so "began to look around for some object for my love, since I badly wanted to love something" (III.i.55). She is the vessel of his sexual yearning, and indeed he "mentions his concubine wholly in terms of his own desires and responses, and of those he focuses on a sexual need so acute and unrelenting that it binds him according to his own testimony in a sort of 'slavery'" (Cahill 176).

Within the *Confessions*, the woman does not appear again until Augustine mentions his plans to marry in Book VI. "Acclaimed as a teacher by the highest circles of society," Augustine "was hoping to get married" and planned to elevate his station by getting engaged to the daughter of a prominent Milanese Catholic family—while still being in a relationship with the unnamed

mother of his child (Reuther 49; VI.xiii.130). However, there was an issue. The chosen bride was not yet twelve years old, being "nearly two years too young" at the time of their engagement for the legal age of marriage under Roman law (VI.xiii.130). It is not until this point, when the marriage had already been decided by all parties involved, including Augustine himself, that he mentions her again:

> Meanwhile I was sinning more and more. The woman with whom I had been living was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage and this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly. She went back to Africa, vowing never to give herself to any other man, and left with me the son whom she had borne me. But I was too unhappy and too weak to imitate this example set me by a woman. I was impatient at the delay of two years which had to pass before the girl whom I had asked to marry became my wife, and because I was more a slave of lust than a true lover of marriage, I took another mistress, without the sanction of wedlock. This meant that the disease of my soul would continue unabated, in fact it would be aggravated, and under the watch and ward of uninterrupted habit it would persist into the state of marriage. Furthermore the wound that I had received when my first mistress was wrenched away showed no signs of healing. (VI.xv.131)

Despite his claims of loving her dearly, Augustine, who "could not bear the delay of two years" waiting for his bride-to-be, hurriedly moves on to another woman, "not, of course, as a wife" (VI.xv.131). This second lover of two years also goes unnamed, reaffirming his established notion that she was merely an object of desire to his "slave of lust". Her role as mistress is quickly filled by another, rendering her disposable and subject to the whims of his "steaming cauldron of illicit love" (III.i.55). Contrary to the deep wound festering in his heart that he describes, the agony of internal conflict that he condemns but cannot escape, he still plans to marry the young girl—who also goes unnamed. After this instance, he does not mention his first mistress again.

Although he plans to marry, this is a time of inner turmoil, in which Augustine struggles to commit himself to the Catholic faith, "a decision that for him was virtually identical with the renunciation of sexual relations, including the jettisoning of his advantageous marriage and

resignation from his imperial appointment in Milan" (Reuther 49). He debates with his colleague Alypius on sex and marriage, which Alypius argues is counterproductive to their joint desire to live "devoted to the pursuit of wisdom" (VI.xii.128). Augustine counters by asserting that many intellectual men have married and have still remained faithful to God. This interaction reveals that the saint's strong sexual desires could "not find freedom of expression within the strict Christian sexual ethic," a sentiment which he himself would later withdraw from and instead assert that "the major purpose of sexual relations in marriage was the procreation of children. If Adam and Eve had not sinned in the garden of Eden, he came to believe, the desire to engage in sexual acts motivated only by lust would never have occurred: procreation would have remained the only purpose of sexual intercourse" (Clark 4, 5). However, to the reader of *Confessions*, Augustine intimately reveals he "was far from being the equal of these noble spirits" who could quell their physical wants, for he was bound by "the disease of the flesh" that is desire (VI.xii.128).

As opposed to every other woman mentioned or unmentioned in the *Confessions*, Monica, Augustine's Christian mother, is the only woman of import to his life identified by name throughout the entirety of the *Confessions*. It should be noted that the only other woman mentioned by name is the power-hungry seductress Empress Justina, mother of the boy-emperor Valentinian—and she is only cited once (IX.vii.191). Monica, conversely, plays a pivotal role in the religious upbringing and development of Augustine. She is a key, constant figure throughout his life. However, the first time Augustine calls her by name is when he speaks of her death in Book IX. Before then, she is simply his mother, "the idealized figure that had haunted Augustine's youth like an oracle of God" (Brown 158). Of her, St. Augustine writes:

> In the flesh she brought me to birth in this world: in her heart she brought me to birth in your eternal light. It is not of her gifts that I shall speak, but of the gifts you have to her. For she was neither her own maker nor her own teacher. (IX.viii.192)

In much of Augustine's characterization of Monica, she is a self-sacrificing, subservient, submissive figure, "conscientious in attending to her duties, correcting the children when necessary with strictness, for the love of God, and teaching them to lead wise and sober lives" (IX.viii.193). Monica is devoted to her son in both body and spirit, and this is made clear throughout the *Confessions* with "her incessant prayers for his conversion away from Manicheanism, his long resistance and spiritual return to Catholicism, and his suffering upon her death" (Cahill 176). In contrast to his mother, Augustine describes that his father was emotionally, verbally, and physically abusive to Monica, but that "her patience was so great that his infidelity never became a cause of quarreling between them" (IX.viii.194). She was so filled with grace and patience that she accepted the abuse and infidelity of the man "whom she served as her lord" (IX.ix.194).

The import of Monica's role as mother in the *Confessions* is neither accidental nor inconsequential. Keeping in line with the Catholic notion of the Immaculate Conception, the narrative depicts motherhood as divine. The first time Augustine mentions women in the whole of the *Confessions* when he uses the phrase "the comfort of woman's milk" (I.vi.25) as a reference to God's will and mercy. Stating that "neither my mother nor my nurses filled their breasts of their own accord," Augustine goes on to claim that "it was [God] who used them" to give him the gift of life (I.vi.25). By discussing the "woman's milk" as related to God's life-giving powers, Augustine emphasizes the potentiality of women to nurture and provide as mothers under God. In this way, he both emphasizes the role of motherhood while describing his caregivers as merely "passive conduits through which God provides the food that gives him life" (McDuffie 99). To him, these women gladly and rightfully subject themselves to God's will, fulfilling the role of their womanhood in being passive, obedient, and unselfish conduits of life-giving and child-rearing.

Because this is the very first reference to women in the entirety of his autobiography, its significance cannot be overlooked, as it sets the ideal by which women will be perceived, identified, and described for the remainder of the text. In doing so, Augustine makes the role of women clear: you are, first and foremost a mother, and in being a mother you are but a vessel for the will of God.

The notion of woman as a vessel appears frequently throughout the text. Whereas the nameless mistresses represent vessels for Augustine's sinful, sexual desires, Monica's mother stands out as a vessel of Augustine's spiritual journey. Not only is she his literal, figurative, and spiritual mother, but she is also the rhetorical mother of the *Confessions.* It is Monica who catalyzes Augustine's path toward God with her death; it is Monica who resurrects her son's spirit as her own spirit passes into the realm of God. She is "the idealized figure that had haunted Augustine's youth like an oracle of God," who later prompted Augustine to sort out his complicated feelings on religion and God as he wrote the autobiographical introspection of his inner world (Brown 164). As such, Monica serves as the rhetorical mother of Augustine's autobiography, the catalyst who prompted him toward God and the vessel of his spiritual ascension. It is her life—centered on her death—that "provides him the narrative material out of which to conceive time and space, to frame the very cosmos" (Burrus & Keller 120). In being the beginning, center, and medium of his journey, Monica is Augustine's eternally unfinished business (Burrus & Keller 120). As Monica is the "mother" of his autobiography as well as the muse of its creation, she represents his literal and figurative Madonna (Bowery 74).

While St. Augustine clearly shows a degree of affection for each of these women, it is important to consider the framework by which he characterizes them as women. The roles which Augustine places on them are reminiscent of the contemporary concept of *marianismo*: the

idealization of the demure, unassuming, and self-silencing mother figure. According to *marianismo*'s definition, women either emulate Mother Mary or they do not, thus classifying women according to a strict definition of femininity in subordination to men. His mother Monica, as he writes so tenderly, is a figure to be respected and revered for her tolerance and patience of abuse by her husband, which only serves to elevate her spirituality and strength of her faith. Through St. Augustine's own description, Monica emblemizes each of the key values of *marianismo*; she is deferential, self-sacrificing, obedient, spiritual, family-oriented, and even chaste, as her husband lies with other women while they are married. Even though he commits this abusive behavior, she does not object to the actions of her husband, whom she considers "her lord" (IX.ix.194).

St. Augustine's mother emulates Mary, the original Madonna, while his mistress embodies the sinful woman, the whore. As the Mary figure in his life-story, he speaks of Monica with respect and admiration. She is a model Christian, able to "ascertain the will of God through her dreams, visions, and spiritual experience; and by describing her mediating presence at each discernable stage in his movement toward Christian conversion" (Bowery 70). She represents the ideal *marianista* woman in the Catholic vision of spirituality and feminine mercy, remaining patient and loving even in the face of cruelty, "for her purpose was to perform an act of piety, not to seek pleasure for herself" (VI.ii.112). In fact, Augustine describes Monica as defending patriarchal abuse against women who speak against it:

> For she looked to you to show him mercy, hoping that chastity would come with faith. Though he was remarkably kind, he had a hot temper, but my mother knew better than to say or do anything to resist him when he was angry. If his anger was unreasonable, she used to wait until he was calm and composed and then took the opportunity of explaining what she had done. Many women, whose faces were disfigured by blows from husbands far sweeter-tempered than her own, used to gossip together and complain of the behavior of their men-folk. My mother would meet this complaint with

> another–about the women's tongues. Her manner was light but her meaning serious when she told them that ever since they had heard the marriage deed read over to them, they ought to have regarded it as a contract which bound them to serve their husbands, and from that time onward they should remember their condition and not defy their masters…Those who accepted it (the idea that the women should submit wholly to her husband) found it a good one: the others continued to suffer humiliation and cruelty. (IX.ix.195)

From this text, Augustine describes what is clearly a patriarchal society which, at large, places more value on women who emulate *marianista* qualities. The burden of abuse, disfigurement, and humiliation is a cross for the women who do not accept their submissive status to bear, and the divine light of spirituality shines on those who accept their suffering with grace and silence.

While Augustine respects Monica for her submission and piety, it is only within the framework of her emulation of Mary. As an incarnation of the Divine Mother Mary, Monica is the container through which Augustine finds himself on the path of God. As the person who heavily influenced his transition to Christianity, Monica represents both Mary and the Church itself. She is Mary in her role as mother, and the Church in her function as the medium of conversion. This is made clear when Augustine directly likens his mother to the greater Church, begging "for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, urging it on the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church" (I.xi.17). The comparison between the Virgin Mary and the Church is unsurprising, as in Augustine's era Mary was typically associated with the Church and the Church with the Holy Mother—the body through which Christians found and practiced their faith (Bowery 74). Her tears, shed for the immortal soul of her sinful son, are reminiscent of holy water or even possibly the sacraments. These comparisons are pertinent as the Church is the body that administers these items and is thus most closely associated with them (Bowery 75). Monica, in her pursuit to save her son, bears the redemptive power of the Church: "This water to wash me clean, and to dry the rivers flowing from my mother's eyes which daily before you irrigated the soil

beneath her face'' (V.viii.15). Just as any Christian's path toward redemption would begin with their rebirth in the blessed waters of baptism within the Church, Augustine's own journey of redemption begins with Monica. Within the time frame of the *Confessions*, his spiritual resurrection specifically starts from the point of his "birth from his mother Monica's womb to her death, which had immediately followed his rebirth in the Church as his spiritual mother" (Vance 402). "Our spiritual mother," Augustine writes, is "the Catholic Church" (VII.i.133). His own mother, both spiritual and corporeal, is Monica.

Similar to how the Church is the birthplace and site of redemption for sinners' souls, Monica embodies the womb of his physical and spiritual births. As such, she resides in the center of Augustine's transformation as she is his mortal and spiritual mother who gave birth to his mortal body as well as guided his immortal soul to God. Augustine writes:

> You [God] rescued my soul from darkness because my mother, your most faithful servant, wept to you for me, shedding more tears for my spiritual death than other mothers shed for the bodily death of a son…You heard her and did not despise the tears which streamed down and watered the earth in every place where she had bowed her head in prayer. (III.ii.68)

Augustine's emphasis on the "bodily death" is no accident, for it directly juxtaposes his own spiritual death before his spirit and faith are later resurrected by Monica. Her tears invoke those the Virgin Mary shed over the untimely death of her son Jesus as she "stood weeping outside the tomb", just before Jesus appears before her, resurrected (John 20:1). Augustine's spiritual rebirth ties to his mother's Mary-like virtues of constant patience and suffering. Just as the larger narrative of the *Confessions* centers Augustine's "tortuous journey back to God", likewise does it center the connection of Monica and the Madonna (Anderson 20).

As the mother both in body and spirit, Monica serves as the divine catalyst of Augustine's arduous transformation. With her aspiration to resurrect his soul deteriorated by "*concupiscentia*

carnalis (desire of the flesh)" and "worldly ambition", Monica constantly attempts to bring Augustine back to God (Frederickson 91). Not only does she pursue Augustine "over two continents over more than a decade," but breaks up his longstanding "bond with his common-law wife (who was also the mother of his child) in order to procure for him" his pre-nubile fiancée, "a child who was still two years away from the legal age of consent" (Vance 402). As the legal age of Roman marriage was twelve years old, this would have made the child bride ten years old at the time of their engagement. The couple's engagement is inferred to be an attempt to both elevate Augustine's social status as well as quell his carnal desires, thus bringing Augustine closer to God. She acts as the voice who calls Augustine from the world of the flesh to the transitory realm of the spirit. Toward the end of the *Confessions*, Monica's life ends, while Augustine's spiritual journey toward conversion begins. She exists as the catalyst of the core transformation of Augustine's autobiography. As Anderson asserts, "after her death there is nowhere else to go; no further progress to be made," as Augustine transcends "bodily desires and attachments" and is reborn as a child of God (Anderson 26). As her own life ends, Augustine's begins, prompting his spiritual, autobiographical, and religious transformation.

It can be argued that Augustine's veneration of Monica only extends to her fulfillment of the *marianista* role, as she patiently and painfully attempts to guide Augustine to God. Her suffering and *misercordia* align her with the same qualities exhibited by the Mother Mary. For this, Augustine lauds her, testifying to her piety, humility, sobriety, generosity, and obedience to her husband and Lord (Bowery 79). In emulating the Holy Mother, she both rises above typical behaviors, which are coded as specifically female, and exemplifies the follies of womanhood. On the one hand, she is the model Christian "coming to your Church with unfailing regularity, taking no part in vain gossip and old wives' chatter, but wanting to hear you in your words and to speak

to you in her prayers” (V.ix.17). On the other hand, she feels intensely “jealous love for her son,” a maternal sorrow which is itself the mark of sin and “proof that she had inherited the legacy of Eve” (Burrus & Keller 128). Even while personifying the most glorified of all Biblical women, Monica is shown to demonstrate the seemingly inherent negative feminine qualities. Though she is understood to be the most pious and noble of women in the entirety of the *Confessions*, she is still but a woman, susceptible to the same weaknesses of her ancestor Eve.

Some may argue that the version of sexism prevalent in the *Confessions* is not *marianismo* but instead tied to Roman values and notions of gender. This argument is not baseless. The values, culture, and structure of the Catholic Church directly originate from those of the Roman Empire. When Emperor Constantine instituted Christianity as the state religion of Rome in the fourth century AD, he intertwined the cultures of church and state. From that point, “the Church was destined to be defined by the all-conquering violence, organization, and mindset of the cultural hegemon of its time: the Roman Empire” (Gay). It is no surprise that the Church, whose executive power and authority depended on the Roman ruling class, quickly adopted, or “mimicked”, the organization of the Empire itself. The Church assumed the same terminology that the empire used to organize and divide imperial governmental territories. These geographical provinces, called dioceses, are still used in the Church today to organize administrative boundaries (Gay). In addition to the structure of the Catholic Church, linguistic ties remain relevant. Latin was the main language of the Roman Empire and is still a critical language of the Church, as is exemplified by the Vatican’s continued use of Latin in administration and religious practice. The ties between the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church extend from administration, religion, and governance and into culture. Because the understanding of gender is shaped and imagined by the fluctuations of culture, ideas of how women and men were to be defined and treated carried over from structure

to structure. For instance, the practice of exclusively ordaining men as clergy members originates in the traditions of Roman politics, whose institutions of power, like the Senate, were exclusive to men (Gay). In fact, some speculate that the Catholic practice of cardinals voting for who will be the pope possibly stems from the democratic traditions of the Roman Senate. According to canon law, the council of cardinals of the Holy Roman Church is known as the senate of the Roman Pontiff and aid the pope as his chief advisors in the governance of the Church, not unlike the Roman Senate ("Code of Canon Law" CIC 230). It was the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, overseen by Emperor Constantine, which outlawed the ordination of women, effectively preventing women from holding any positions of influence or authority within the Church (Gay). This indicates that common practices regarding the marginalization of women transferred among these patriarchal organizations of power. The Catholic Church and the Roman empire are historically, structurally, and culturally linked. As a result of this transference, entrenched beliefs and stigmas regarding gender and gender roles within the Church are part of a legacy of the blood, battles, and biases of Rome.

Marianismo does not spontaneously appear out of the culture of the Catholic Church but has roots which can be traced to the Roman Empire's treatment of women. It is well-documented that Romans regarded women as belonging to one of two types: "virginal innocents who grow to be wives and mothers, or vengeful schemers" (Mosier-Dubinsky 2). From the stories of the virginal goddess Diana to the vengeful Carthaginian Dido, women's identities were categorized based on their adherence to strict gender-based stereotypes as well as their non-conformity to maleness. In Rome, the normative subject was "free, male, leisured, in the prime of life, healthy, and native to the geographical zones whose climates uniquely foster Greekness or Romanness," a body which, while being a statistical rarity, was the yardstick for everyone else (Holmes 161). Women were

violations of this norm. Considered to be “maimed men,” a notion which derived from the writings of Aristotle, women, as Seneca writes, were meant to “feel love passively” and “born to be penetrated” (Holmes 161; Dodson 359). During the nascence of the Christian movement, the early Church was regarded as a radical democratizing force which departed from the traditional Roman ideal that one was born into a caste without agency. Instead, a person had the ability to empower and transform themselves through conversion and become equal as children of God with equal opportunity to enter Heaven in the afterlife regardless of their wealth and privilege, “for God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:11). Jesus explicitly declares, “blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” and “blessed are you who are hungry, for you shall be satisfied” (Luke 6:20-21). However, the newfound freedom and agency would not fully extend to women. For example, when the women of Corinth removed their veils in celebration of the early Christian Church’s democratizing and empowering doctrine, Paul reprimanded them, stating, “a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the image of man…that is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head” (Corinthians I 11:5-16). Despite Christianity’s radical departure from Roman hierarchical norms, the new religion’s belief system subsumed existing Roman attitudes regarding women. Just as they could not participate in positions of public authority under Rome, women could not serve in positions of religious authority in the Church. Just as they could not directly rule as governors, generals, senators, or emperors, they could not act as priests, bishops, cardinals, or popes. Similar to Rome, women of the faith were expected to adhere to the conservative values of the hierarchical organization. The virginal and vengeful archetypes remained. Just as Roman women followed the virgin goddesses Diana and Minerva, so too did Catholic women emulate the Virgin Mary. Mary, the Madonna, venerated as one of the most important figures of the Catholic pantheon with her own set of prayers dedicated to her (from

"Ave Maria" in "Catholic Prayers"), is a descendent of Roman values and beliefs regarding the role of women. Her role as a virgin birthing a miraculous demigod-like son has drawn numerous parallels to the dozens of virgin births of pre-Christian Roman mythologies (Warner 36). In particular, the symbol of virgin birth as a shorthand "to designate a man's divinity," particularly that of the son (Warner 35). While it is difficult to discern whether the apostles Matthew or Luke were influenced by this Roman pagan tradition, "it is evident that the author of the Book of James was aware of it when he expanded on the theme" (Warner 35). Scholars assert that the Book of James drew from many pagan stories of demigods born of virgin mothers and divine gods, such as Perseus, the Gorgon-defeating hero born of the virgin Danae and Jupiter disguised as a shroud of gold, or Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome itself born of the Vestal Virgin Rhea Silvia and Mars. In addition to her connection to these virginal mythologies, Mary's role as the Virgin Queen "belongs to a classical tradition of personifying cities and institutions as goddesses, and as such, in the heart of Rome," embodying "the new Rome which is the Church just as the Dea Roma now on the Capitol represented the pagan city" (Warner 107). Just as Mary is connected to these Roman legacies and mythologies, *marianismo*, by extension, is connected to the Roman veneration of the divine, virginal goddess.

Throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine evokes the Holy Mother in Monica. As the "chaste and gentle widow" of great faith, Monica's status as the Mother Mary is further elaborated in her foil: Augustine's unnamed mistresses (V.ix.102). While Augustine claims to love these women, he does not respect or honor them, completely omitting their names and identities from his narrative. He hardly ever mentions them in the text, does not consider their feelings or reaction to departures, and does not discuss them except in the context of lust and sex. Therefore, it is evident that to him a mistress is a body, not a full person who merits consideration. While his mistresses

represent the physical body and the temptation of sensual pleasure, his mother represents the divine spirit—not quite a person, but a vessel to holy transformation. Whereas the Madonna-figure inhabits the realm of unpolluted divinity, a mistress exists outside of the *marianista* standard: the whore who fulfills his sinful, lustful desires—the unideal, sensual woman. In this respect, the two women are similar in that they both adhere to the predetermined roles for women conceived by *marianismo*. As one type of woman is held as superior to the other, the highly *marianista* and sexist notion that women must be compared in order to be seen as "good", "acceptable", or "respectable" ultimately maintains that women remain, by default, inferior. After all, Mary—the central figure of all *marianismo*—"was not created in God's image, but in man's, and as a woman she must remain subordinate to man" (Vance 407).

IV. CHAPTER THREE: PETER ABELARD'S *LETTERS*

My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love. I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love.

—Peter Abelard to Heloise, Letter V

Peter Abelard was born in Le Pallet, France in 1079. Born into a family of lesser nobility, Abelard renounced his inheritance and knighthood to study philosophy, familiarizing himself with the philosophical works of Greek and Latin canon and eventually establishing himself as a well-known lecturer, studying under preeminent philosophical thinkers and dialecticians such as Roscelin, Anselm, and William de Champeaux, each of whom later became fierce enemies (King & Arlig 2; Mathien & Wright 65; Guilfoy 1). Between 1108 and 1113, Abelard moved to Paris, deciding to pursue theology, gathering larger crowds with his theological debates and intellectual renown. There, he became scholar-in-residence at Notre Dame and was hired by a church canon named Fulbert to tutor his niece, Heloise (Mathien & Wright 66). While tutoring her, Abelard initiated an affair with the young Heloise. At that time, Abelard was in his late 30's, whereas Heloise is speculated to have been between 15 and 27 years old (Nehring). Soon after the start of their affair, Heloise became pregnant and gave birth to their son, Astralabe. The two lovers married in secret, but upon Fulbert discovering their affair, their romantic entanglement ended, leading to Abelard's dismissal (King & Arlig 3). At this point, Abelard asked Heloise to return to the convent of Argenteuil where she had studied as a child and had her take the veil "on the command of her husband and swear complete obedience to him" (Nehring). Abelard, meanwhile, entered the Benedictine monastery of Saint Denis (Mathien & Wright 66). As Abelard was residing in the monastery, Fulbert's friends forcibly castrated Abelard, cutting off "the parts of my body whereby I had committed the wrong of which they complained" in revenge for engaging in a secret marriage, getting Heloise pregnant, and forcing his niece into a convent (Nehring; *Historia calamitatum*, 17). During his time at Saint Denis, Abelard's style of dialectic philosophical

analysis began to challenge the traditional order, and so his writings were examined and condemned. Humiliated, Abelard was sent away to an unpopulated parcel of land until poverty forced him to return. Around 1126, he accepted an invitation to become abbot of the monastery of Saint Gildas de Rhuys in Brittany, where he then wrote the *Historia calamitatum*, or "The Story of My Misfortunes", and corresponded with Heloise in their series of famous letters (King & Arlig 4). In accordance with his reputation as a prominent theologian, Peter Abelard's students included kings, heads of state, philosophers, poets, politicians, theologians, monks, and three popes (King & Arlig 5). However, by the mid-1130s, Abelard faced off with Bernard de Clairvaux, who objected to some of his methods and conclusions, claiming that they were in some cases not orthodox. In 1140, the two met in public debate to settle their theological disagreements. Unknown to Abelard, Bernard simultaneously submitted Abelard's writings for clerical review on suspicion of heresy. Upon review, the Council condemned his work and "condemned him for heresy in his own century," a decision that was later upheld by the Papal Court (Nehring). He was ordered to silence and died in 1142. Though Abelard was an important philosopher, he never reached the heights of fame or prominence that Augustine did as he was neither a father nor doctor of the Church; his theological work, though important at the time, were not incorporated as influential pieces of Catholic literary tradition. Unlike Augustine, whose work heavily influenced Catholic dogma, Abelard's more well-known writings are his letters accounting the tragic love story between him and Heloise.

Before his castration, Heloise and Abelard are documented to have exchanged over one-hundred love letters (Nehring; Mews). After his castration, while Heloise was living in the convent, Abelard visited her, but his visits grew less and less frequent, prompting Heloise to write "You sadden my spirit" in the last of these lesser-known early letters. Eventually, he stopped visiting

altogether and stopped writing to her. However, once Abelard published his autobiographical *Historia calamitatum* addressed to an ambiguous "friend" in need of support during a difficult period, Heloise responded, prompting their famed exchange of letters. From Abelard's pen, both the *Historia calamitatum* and the letters are filled with sorrowful descriptions of his weary life, personal tragedy, and the incapacity to return Heloise's love after the long period of silence following their separation. In response to his arguments, Heloise probes him to mindfully respond to her questions and engage with her points of view, asking him to recognize her emotions, thoughts, and desires. Abelard, in reply, evokes his newfound emphasis on religiosity, reminding her that she is not his "love" but his "sister in Christ" (Letter III, 56). By the time Abelard wrote this "letter of consolation," he had been in the miserable abbot of Saint Gildas de Rhuys for some seven years (1125-1132), meaning that by this time about fifteen years had passed since he last met Heloise (McLaughlin 464). Despite this passage of time, he writes, "I was still a slave to the pleasures of carnal desire and could rarely or never bear the absence of the woman I had once loved" (*Historia calamitatum*, 36). Throughout Abelard's autobiographical *Historia* as well as his and Heloise's correspondence, the pair discuss topics of morality, ethics, love, pain, loss, and unfulfilled desire.

During the events of *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard was at the peak of his philosophical and dialectic career when he decided to turn his attention to the conquest of a young woman, Heloise, the beautiful and intelligent niece of Fulbert (Nye 1). In order to seduce her, Abelard convinced her uncle to allow him to tutor her. Wielding his power and influence as an important philosopher of his time, Abelard, "Like many male philosophers throughout history…was willing, with some ulterior motives, to take on a woman student" for the purpose of having sexual relations with her (Nye 2). He describes his first encounter with Heloise in eroticized terms, emphasizing

his attraction to her:

> There was in Paris at the time a young girl named Heloise, the niece of Fulbert, one of the canons, and so much loved by him that he had done everything in his power to advance her education in letters. In looks she did not rank lowest, while in the extent of her learning she stood supreme. A gift for letters is so rare in women that it added greatly to her charm and had made her most renowned throughout the realm. I considered all the usual attractions for a lover and decided she was the one to bring to my bed, confident that I should have an easy success; for at that time I had youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation to recommend me, and feared no rebuff from any woman I might choose to honour with my love. (*Historia calamitatum*, 10)

In his own words, Abelard was "all on fire with desire for this girl" and subsequently successful in his seduction (*Historia calamitatum*, 10). From this point, the two accidentally conceived Astralabe, whom Heloise gives birth to in secret. However, throughout his calamitous story, Abelard hardly refers to the child, instead focusing on the source of his miseries: "two diseases, lust and pride"—one caused by the enticing flame of desire for the youthful Heloise and the other by the weight of his own supreme eminence (McLaughlin 470). After using subterfuge to gain access to the household of Fulbert and thereby Heloise, he pursues the seduction of his student (Calabrese 16). Caught in the passion of "carnal desire" for Heloise, Abelard succumbed to the burning, sinful pleasure which he attributes to his downfall (*Historia calamitatum*, 10). Indeed, it is not the possible "grooming" of his own student which he laments, but the sin of excessive lust for a woman. By attributing his losses to lust, Abelard allows himself to remove at least part of the blame from himself, instead opting to identify his weakness to the temptation of a woman of "supreme" learning and looks that "did not rank lowest" (*Historia calamitatum*, 10). Accomplishing his seduction with "youth and exceptional good looks as well as my great reputation," Abelard also accredits his miserable state to his own pride, as he "considered himself the greatest philosopher in the world" (*Historia calamitatum*, 10; Radice 1viii). Though this world

was limited to Catholic, Romanesque Europe at the time of his life, he nonetheless bemoans his own standing as the preeminent philosopher as the cause of his many enemies and troubles. Yet, despite the years that passed between the time of his writing the *Historia calamitatum* and his fall from grace, he does not change his patronizing and paternalistic view of women, stating "After much reflection I decided to do all I could to provide for the sisters of the Paraclete, to manage their affairs, to watch over them in person too, so that they would revere me the more" (*Historia calamitatum*, 39). Based on his insights regarding his own lust and pride, it can be inferred that Abelard maintains a view of women as submissive to men. Whether they are bodies to conquer or instruments of reverence and acclaim, Abelard uses women as tools by which to achieve his personal aspirations.

In their letters of correspondence following Abelard's initial *Historia calamitatum*, Heloise urges Abelard to consider her perspectives on marriage and morality, asks him to take responsibility for her feelings, and criticizes his selfishness and silence. As one New York Times critic writes, "When Heloise entreats him to take pity on her loneliness, he sends her a set of prayers to say for him. When she serenades their love, he moans about the trouble he's having with the other monks at his abbey" (Nehring). He largely ignores and even minimizes her concerns, claiming Heloise to be of "the weaker sex" and unable to discipline her mind, attributing her "deficiencies" in argument and speech "to a special weakness of the female sex" (*Historia calamitatum*, 39; Nye 3). In the face of Heloise's admission of continued devotion and love for him, Abelard rebukes and rejects her, reminding her that "My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love. I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love" (Letter V, 86). In doing so, he affirms that their affair was nothing more than sinful pleasure, as lust, like pride, was considered one of the deadly sins of Abelard's time

(DeYoung 9). Additionally, by defining their experience as merely lust and not love, Abelard distances himself from the consequences of his inaction and silence in regard to Heloise, furthering her into the role of his submissive and passive romantic conquest.

Despite Abelard's attempts to distance himself from their affair as well as push the narrative of Heloise as the hapless object of his lust, Heloise asserts her own beliefs and perspective in their exchanges. For instance, Heloise, as Abelard points out in his *Historia calamitatum*, rejected the prospect of a secret marriage. As Abelard explains, she hoped to avoid "the risk involved and the disgrace to [him]," for what honour could she win "from a marriage which would dishonour me and humiliate us both?" (*Historia calamitatum*, 13). In her follow-up letter to his autobiographical text, Heloise explains her reasoning for not wanting to marry. For her, it is the principle of the marriage itself that she rejects, considering it to be a sham as opposed to a pillar of their love, especially the particular circumstances under which they would have been married. After all, it is clear that their purpose for marrying would have been to cover the public scandal of Heloise having a child out of wedlock as well as to appease her uncle. Heloise rejects this premise, insisting that she would rather be tied to Abelard through their shared love. Abelard, of course, rejects this premise by claiming that what he felt for her was not love at all and that a man such as himself should not lower himself to stay with one woman alone. After all, he writes in reference to Heloise's argument, "it would be a sorry scandal if he [Abelard'] should bind himself to a single woman and submit himself to such base servitude" (*Historia calamitatum*, 70). Despite his assertions, Heloise communicates her values and beliefs. In this way, she indirectly contrasts Abelard's inference that she was merely his sexual conquest.

Although Abelard removes Heloise of her agency in his descriptions of his seduction of her, there is no doubt that she herself shared in the desire. Whereas Abelard was a physically and

spiritually changed man upon entering the monastery, Heloise was not, initially feeling "no vocation for convent life, and was tormented by frustrated sexual love" (Radice xxvi). She makes this clear in a voice "of furious sexual desire" throughout her letters to her former lover (Calabrese 2). In no uncertain terms, she yearns for Abelard spiritually, emotionally, and physically. She reminds him that "I have finally denied myself every pleasure in obedience to your will, kept nothing for myself except to prove that now, even more, I am yours" (Letter II, 54). Throughout the letters, she engages with Abelard in attempting to have him recognize and accept her lingering feelings of love and desire after years of silence and separation. Heloise "remembers and longs for an *incestus, furiosus* love, and her intense reveries create an implicit opening for a *remedia amoris*," but receives no recognition or release (Calabrese 19; emphasis in original). She speaks of the pleasures they shared which she still yearns for:

> But if I lose you, what is left for me to hope for? What reason for continuing on life's pilgrimage, for which I have no support but you, and none in you save the knowledge that you are alive, now that I am forbidden all other pleasures in you and denied even the joy of your presence which from time to time could restore me to myself. (Letter IV, 65)

Meanwhile, Abelard does not acknowledge these desires of hers. Instead, he "plays the role of the male lover engaged in other pursuits who refuses to recognize, validate, or satisfy female desire" (Calabrese 16). Instead, Abelard remains steadfast in his characterization of their affair as a lustful conquest and seduction for which he has been divinely punished. In doing so, he retroactively maintains control of the definition and nature of their relationship, assigning himself as the assertive male lover and her as the passive body.

In retracting his prior love for Heloise on the basis that she was no more than a fulfillment of his carnal, unholy pleasures, Abelard simultaneously rejects Heloise's own autonomy and consent in their romantic relationship, frequently boiling down the intentions of their actions to

mere lust. She explicitly reminds him that she is a sensual being who takes pleasure in the act of love. "Men call me chaste," she declares, but "they do not know the hypocrite I am" over having "lewd visions" of the pleasures she shared with him during Catholic Mass (Letter IV, 69). In spite of her confession of these "sins", and admission that they are sins, she remains committed to her "freedom in love" (Mathien & Wright 68). In according with her expressions of love, freedom, and sensuality, she declares:

> I never sought anything in you except yourself. . . . I looked for no marriage bond. If Augustus, emperor of the whole world, saw fit to honor me with marriage and conferred all the earth on me to possess forever, it would be dearer and more honorable to me to be called not his empress, but your whore. (Letter II, 51)

Clearly, Heloise has no intention of abiding by the traditional, conservative sense of demurity that was so expected of the women of her time. She goes as far as to remind Abelard:

> It was not any sense of vocation which brought me as a young girl to accept the austerities of the cloister, but your bidding alone… I can expect no reward for this from God, for it is certain that I have done nothing as yet for love of him… I would have had no hesitation, God knows, in following you or going ahead at your bidding to the flames of hell. (Letter II, 54)

Committed to her lover and to the freedom of love itself, Heloise asserts herself, though self-disparagingly, as a "whore", a woman who desires the forbidden—one who would go all the way to hell to follow her lover. By chastising her assertions, Abelard emphasizes the expectation that she be pious, demure, passive, and obedient. In short, he rejects her complexity and ignores her autonomy in the relationship they shared, asserting that she merely ignited his own desire and disregards that she might have had lust of her own.

Abelard further rejects and reduces Heloise's feelings of love and desire through his manner of address throughout their exchange of letters. Whereas Heloise calls him "her only love," Abelard replies to her as "his dearly beloved sister in Christ" and "the bride of Christ,"

characterizing their relationship as strictly platonic and religious in nature and omitting their shared history (Letter II, 55; Letter III, 56; Letter IV, 84). He portrays her as "irrevocably trapped in her situation and in her emotions," and proceeds to push the emotional labor and consequences onto her, absolving himself of responsibility and proceeding as though it were her fault for loving him in the first place (Nye 5). He claims, "If since our conversion from the world to God I have not yet written you any word of comfort or advice, it must not be attributed to indifference on my part but to your own good sense, in which I have always had such confidence that I did not think anything was needed" (Letter III, 56). Abelard directly confirms Heloise's realization that "it was desire, not affection which bound you to me, the flame of lust rather than love" (Letter II, 53). In other words, he tells her that he never truly loved her, but instead thought of her as a body for him to consume. Accordingly, it is clear that "Abelard never loved, but was driven by a selfish craving for genital satisfaction, [marrying her] to ensure his exclusive possession of the object of his craving; when the seat of the craving, his genitals, was removed, so was his lust" (Nye 7). He openly tells Heloise that lust is degrading, dirty, and sinful (Letter V, 86). He beseeches her:

> Say no more, I beg you, and cease from complaints like these which are so far removed from the true depths of love! Yet even if you are still offended by this, I am so critically placed in danger and daily despair of life that it is proper for me to take thought for the welfare of my soul, and to provide for it while I may. Nor will you, if you truly love me, take exception to my forethought. (Letter V, 81)

Here, Abelard brushes off the idea that what he and Heloise shared could truly be called love. In doing so, he dismisses her, declaring that she should not be "offended by this" and instead think of the welfare of his soul, which her impious love and lust contaminates.

Throughout their exchange, Abelard underlines that his current state of detriment and disgrace is a divine punishment for his sins. He reminds her of the events that transpired between them and their overwhelming thirst to sacrilegiously make love during the season of the Passion

or in the convent at Argenteuil. These, as he points out, were episodes which called for just, divine punishment, in which God freed them both through separation, allowing them to divorce themselves from the overpowering desires of the flesh. In doing so, Abelard explains how their separation provided a path toward higher enlightenment. Instead of focusing on their earthly, carnal desires, they were free to think only of God's love. Abelard beseeches Heloise to understand the righteousness of his silence and separation from her, for in this way she could become closer to her true husband, Christ:

> You say I suffered for you, and perhaps that is true, but it was really through you, and even this, unwillingly; not for love of you but under compulsion, and to bring you not salvation but sorrow. But [Christ] suffered truly for your salvation, on your behalf of his own free will, and by his suffering he cures all sickness and removes all suffering. To him, I beseech you, not to me, should be directed all your devotion, all your compassion, all your remorse. (Letter V, 86)

By assuring his former lover that his disappearance and abandonment were for the sake of the salvation of Heloise's immortal soul, Abelard deflects responsibility from himself and transforms his actions (or inactions) into supreme, divine will. He situates himself as the authority on the matter and asserts that the ethical and emotional issues she brings before him should be addressed to God, not he.

By positioning himself as both a figure of authority without responsibility as well as a lover without love but lust and conquest, Abelard demonstrates himself as highly *machista*. In tandem with these qualities, he flattens Heloise's dimensionality and personal complexity, enclosing her into a highly *marianista* role in which she is the sexual conquest, chaste nun, and spiritual superior all at once. Subsequently, Heloise is boxed into the *marianista* ideal, and many of Abelard's criticisms of her center on her deviance from that standard. Unlike the pure and passive *marianista* woman, Heloise frequently voices her desire for sex and love and demonstrates over and over that

she gladly consented to their relationship. In response, Abelard implores her to renounce her desires and direct them instead to God. After all, he emphasizes that women, though physically weaker, are meant to be spiritually stronger than men. This, of course, aligns with the *marianista* notion of the spiritual and passive female who serves as a vessel for masculine will and object of impure desire. In Abelard's eyes, women are "the weaker sex" in need of "help of the stronger", thus necessitating that men be the leaders who "must always be over the woman" (*Historia calamitatum*, 39). As the woman's "head" or decision-maker, the man must demonstrate his superiority and authority by ordering her to always "have her head covered" (*Historia calamitatum*, 39). Abelard further elaborates on this *marianista* thinking by proclaiming that "women make even the wise forsake their faith" (Letter V, 83; Ecclesiastes 19:2). Invoking the Biblical story of Solomon, who bed countless women despite being "the wisest of men", women become the simultaneous objects of sexual conquest and the beacons of holy spirituality because of their supposed absence of lust (Letter V, 83). Women, Abelard implies, "are capable of greater feeling, greater love and greater self-sacrifice than men" (Brewer 51). As weaker in body yet stronger in spirit, women receive a special grace from God. In particular, those who "could live in chastity and devotion" in accordance with *marianista* ideals, possessed "a special reward waiting in heaven" (Brewer 51). While the ideals which Abelard promotes and propagates may seem contradictory, such is the nature of *marianismo* itself. Just as Abelard seeks Heloise as his object of lust, he later presses her to renounce her physical wants and direct her love and distress to God. Effectively, he asks her to fulfill his sexual desire, adhere to strict celibacy, demonstrate religious and spiritual superiority, and defer to his wishes all at the same time. The contradictory and impossible ideals which he projects indeed parallel the contradictory and impossible ideals of *marianismo* itself.

In response to Abelard's declarations, Heloise is not a puppet merely ventriloquizing the thoughts of a man; she was a real woman who authored her own writings. Unlike so many female characters in medieval European literature, she was not a woman manufactured by a man, but a real person (Calabrese 4). She uses her own voice and wields her own ideas. Yet, this is what makes Heloise a complicated figure and her own sexist and *marianista* assertions more impactful. Even though she makes clear in her letters that she did not wish to be married to Abelard and desired her own autonomy in love and sex, she nonetheless reveres him as the ruler of her heart and "the sole possessor of my body and my will alike" (Letter II, 51). While her assertions might be written off as being like the final gasps of air in a drowned love, frenzied and overwhelmed, this would remove her clear autonomy as well as patronizingly minimize the state of her emotions which she so clearly expresses. As such, the reader can only accept her descriptions as true to her state of being at that time. After all, Heloise makes it apparent over and over the attachment she still felt for Abelard and indicates his complete power over her:

> You alone have the power to make me sad, to bring me happiness or comfort; you alone have so great a debt to repay me, particularly now when I have carried out all your orders so implicitly that when I was powerless to oppose you in anything, I found strength at your command to destroy myself. (Letter II, 51)

She goes on to describe:

> I would have had no hesitation, God knows, in following you or going ahead at your bidding to the flames of Hell**.** My heart was not in me but with you, and now, even more, if it is not with you it is nowhere; truly, without you it cannot exist. (Letter II, 54).

In any case, Heloise is clearly no feminist icon, going so far as saying she would destroy herself for the man who abandoned her. Her reference to following him to the flames of Hell implies that she would have gladly committed numerous sins and perhaps even have died for him. Her own heart, perhaps a metaphor for her mortal existence, does not exist without him and can only be

fulfilled by this man. Each of these examples and inferences describe her own belief that she cannot truly be alive without him, a dedication and dependence which has survived many years of silence. While it is understandable that she would have been upset at the disappearance and loss of her lover, her letters suggest that women depend on men to achieve personhood and fulfillment. Though this is in line with the prevailing sexist ideology of medieval Europe, Heloise solidifies her own *marianista* notions of female weakness and dependency. She goes on to describe that "it was the first woman in the beginning who lured man from Paradise, and she who had been created by the Lord as his helpmate became the instrument of his total downfall" (Letter IV, 67). Similar to how Abelard assumes women as bodies of corporeal desire and pure, religious devotion, Heloise believes that women are instruments of sin as ancestors of the original sinner, Eve. She articulates her point by mentioning the sins of Biblical women like Delilah, who seduced Samson and forced him to cut his hair, the wife of Job, who urged her husband to curse God, and the harem of Solomon, who distracted the great king despite his God-given wisdom. Her sexist notions solidify the *marianista* standard that Abelard articulates, particularly the foundational belief that women are inherently inferior.

Based on his characterization of and responses to Heloise, Abelard does not respect his former lover, his wife, his sister in Christ, Heloise. Though he is obviously attracted to her and even goes as far as insinuating that their romantic involvement was the natural result of him being near a desirable woman, he does not truly regard her beyond the designated role of "female" (Duran 42). Generally, he seems to think of male-female relations as not having any particular value other than the sexual, which, in his case, is evident in his description of the time he and Heloise spent together (Duran 41). He continuously calls upon arguments of what women are and what they should be, as opposed to recognizing Heloise and her unresolved emotions as nuanced

and important. On one hand, he initially admires her for "her piety and wisdom, and her unequalled gentleness and patience in every situation"—traits that associate to traditional ideas of proper femininity (*Historia calamitatum*, 36). On the other hand, he criticizes her for "being the weaker sex" (*Historia calamitatum*, 36). Hence, Abelard lauds Heloise for her adherence to femininity yet chastises her for being a woman. This treatment aligns with *marianismo*, as Heloise is expected to emulate these specific, confining qualities while remaining deferent to Abelard; she is extoled when she does but rebuked when she does not. In keeping with *marianista* sentiments, Heloise herself perpetuates these notions by affirming her own beliefs of the inferiority of women and their natural dependence on men. In this lens, Abelard refuses to recognize the full complexity of Heloise beyond the *marianista* qualities he expects of her. In failing to do so, he thereby refuses to acknowledge her complex humanity, ultimately dehumanizing and objectifying her by ignoring her arguments, thoughts, and emotions. This aligns with the idealized version of womanhood perpetuated by *marianista* thought, in which a woman cannot be recognized as respectable without emulating ideal qualities. It also parallels the notion that women who do not conform to the standard are merely objects of sexual desire.

V. CONCLUSION: COMPARATIVE *MARIANISMO*

Marianismo is a legacy of the Catholic Church, particularly Catholicism's veneration of the Virgin Mary as one of the most important figures of the divine pantheon. Indisputably, Mother Mary stands as the greatest of the communion of Christian saints, second in exaltation only to her son, Jesus Christ. Revered as the divine mother of God's mortal incarnation, Mary has not one but three Catholic prayers to her: *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen), the Litany of Mary, and *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary)—which is one of the three prayers Catholics must recite when praying with a rosary ("Catholic Prayers"). Her importance cannot be understated both within the Catholic faith and in broader culture as she is sometimes even referred to as the Queen of the Universe. More commonly, she is known by many titles which include Saint Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, the Holy Mother, the Morning Star, Mother of Mercy, Mother of the Church, Mother of Christ, Queen of Angels, La Virgen, or simply the Virgin Mary. Many of these names indicate the integral role of virginity and motherhood as the central focus of her divinity. After all, in the Catholic context, the virgin represents "motherhood in its fullness and perfection," rendering Mary the most complete and perfect mother of them all (Warner 195). Because these aspects are regarded as the most significant to her being the Mother of God incarnate, they are also the roles which are most sought for in women, who are expected to emulate her. Mary, "full of grace", is blessed among women for the principal reason of her virginity and "the fruit of thy womb, Jesus" (from "Ave Maria" in "Catholic Prayers"). As a virgin at the time of the Immaculate Conception, Mary was able to demonstrate the qualities of purity, virtue, and grace, which thus allowed her to be chosen as the Holy Mother. Because "the physical fact of virginity indicates spiritual valor," it is made clear that chastity and motherhood are the attributes which all Catholic *marianista* women should aspire to (Young 474). This is explicitly stated in the Litany of Mary:

Holy Mary, pray for us.
Holy Mother of God, pray for us.
Most honored of virgins, pray for us.
Mother of Christ, pray for us.
Mother of the Church, pray for us.
Mother of divine grace, pray for us.
Mother most pure, pray for us.
Mother of chaste love, pray for us.
Mother and virgin, pray for us.
Sinless Mother, pray for us.
Dearest of Mothers, pray for us.
Model of motherhood, pray for us.
Mother of good counsel, pray for us.
Mother of our Creator, pray for us.
Mother of our Savior, pray for us.

Virgin most wise, pray for us.
Virgin rightly praised, pray for us.
Virgin rightly renowned, pray for us.
Virgin most powerful, pray for us.
Virgin gentle in mercy, pray for us.
Faithful Virgin, pray for us. ("Catholic Prayers")

Mary, though being a virgin, is the literal "model of motherhood". Yet, despite her overwhelming importance and reverence within the Church, her importance as a figure in Catholicism is contingent upon her relationship with male figures in her life, namely her son Jesus and God the Father of all things. While Mary herself is important, she maintains a deferent role in relation to men as her entire divinity is focused on her being the womb of God's will and the mother of God's mortal, demigod son. The centrality of men in women's lives, which are marked by their physical and spiritual service to men, carries over into *marianismo*, which stipulates that women are secondary, submissive, and obedient to their male relatives, namely their fathers, husbands, and sons. This stipulation relates to Mary herself, who observes the will of God the Father, her husband Joseph, and her son Jesus. It is important to note that Mary was initially unconscious of her being the chosen bearer of God's mortal incarnation until she received word from the angel Gabriel, demonstrating that Mary had no autonomous role in the Immaculate Conception:

> God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. The virgin's name was Mary. (Luke 1:26-27)

The significance of Mary's virginity, motherhood, and deference to male authority directly correlates to *marianismo*'s stress that the female is as not an autonomous entity belonging to a woman but a vessel.

As prominent theologians and authors (and in the case of Augustine, priest), Augustine and Abelard were indicative of the prevailing notions of their Catholic contexts. In particular, Augustine wielded and has continued to wield the ability to shape the narrative of Catholicism as one of the religion's most prominent saint, scholar, and author. Through their autobiographies, both demonstrate an ideal of womanhood which centers *marianismo*. Their opportunity to shape the narrative understanding of what a woman should be was no accident. As men within the Catholic religion, Abelard and Augustine both benefited from an organization whose structure amplifies male voices. While women in Catholicism may be revered for the sanctity of their virginity and motherhood, they hold no structural authority or voice. This placement of women as revered but dependent upon men to receive meaning and identity directly mirrors *marianismo*, which celebrates obedience, chastity, and submissiveness in women and maintains women's status as inferior to men. Whereas women hold positions of assistance and inferiority regarding men, men possess exclusive roles which shape the understanding of Catholicism itself, namely as popes, priests, missionaries, theologians, and authors. In fact, Catholic priests are known as "Fathers", which has Biblical roots dating back to Abraham, who worshipped the "God of the fathers/ancestors" (Haskins 100). Through examining their autobiographical works, it is possible to glean an understanding of their personal gender biases as informed by the larger theology of Catholicism. Because autobiography is considered the personal entrance point to broader social context, the autobiographies of these theologians shed light on their own personal *marianista* attitudes as fractions of the larger *marianista* religious doctrine rooted in Catholicism. From their

combined autobiographical works, similar themes appear, namely the emphasis of the female body as object of conquest or pleasure, the defining role of physical and spiritual motherhood, and women as catalysts for male transformation.

Though *marianismo* emphasizes the role of female virginity, neither Augustine nor Abelard heavily stress it. Instead, when taking their vows upon entering the clergy, they both underscore their own struggles in maintaining their own celibacy, and in the case of Abelard, relaying that Heloise, like Abelard, keep her oath to God (Letter V, 72). Following the writings of theological Fathers Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine, sin and desire were linked with but few and subtle distinctions (Warner 52). In line with this thought, Augustine in particular underscores the importance of virginity, denoting how sexuality represented "the gravest danger and the fatal flaw" with "virginity as its opposite and its conqueror" (Warner 51). Augustine praises his mother Monica's own "chastity" while she herself was still married to his father. Though she clearly would not have been a virgin at this point in her life, it is important to consider the implication of her chasteness as she was regarded by Augustine as spiritually superior. By that point in her life, when Augustine was already an adult, Monica would likely have been too old to safely bear any more children. According to traditional Christian doctrine, the absence of the possibility of child-bearing meant the absence of the need to have sex; since sex was considered "sinful if it is not for procreation," rendering Monica "chaste" as Augustine mentions—and in her motherhood and chastity akin to the Virgin Mother herself (Mernissi 184). Frequently, Monica is compared to Mary throughout the text, Augustine implicitly connects her chasteness to her spirituality while simultaneously explicitly comparing Monica to Mary. This in itself presents the paradox of the female body as both an object of honor and desire: the proverbial Madonna and whore. This paradox reveals itself in Augustine's *Confessions*, as he venerates chastity while taking on

consecutive mistresses (V.ix.102). While the issue of chastity itself is not apparent in the text, it is Augustine "to whom is attributed the most lasting influence both in defining Christianity's positive doctrine of marriage, and in surrounding sex with an aura of shame and danger from which celibacy serves as an escape" (Cahill 175). We know nothing about these women, except that they satisfied his physical wants and engaged in long-term romantic and sexual relationships with him. He does not reveal even their names, demonstrating that they were merely bodies of pleasure, "object[s] for my love," unworthy of recognition or reverence (III.i.55). Abelard takes a similar stance to Augustine in his pursuit of Heloise. While he does not mention the importance of chastity until his later letters, he nonetheless upholds the notion that the female body is a vessel of lust, stating to Heloise, "My love, which brought us both to sin, should be called lust, not love" (Letter V, 86). She was once his lover, he reminds her, but that did not mean that she was more than a body with which he took his full in pleasures. However, Heloise openly contradicts his statement by asserting her own complexity, yearning, sexuality, and consent to their physical entanglement. As such, she counters his notion that the female body is a passive object, underscoring his own *marianista* beliefs by overturning them. In either text, there is no virgin present, no model to point to except the Mother Mary, perhaps underlining the implausibility of the standard and demonstrating that the notion of intact virginity is as unattainable as divinity itself.

Like chastity and virginity, motherhood maintains a central position in *marianismo*, as it is one of the main attributes of the Mother Mary. However, the role of motherhood is multi-faceted as the woman is both the physical and spiritual bearer. As mothers, women must remain devoted to their husbands and children, mirroring the Holy Mother who remained devoted to God the Father, her husband Joseph, and her son Jesus. Both Augustine and Abelard support this stance, perpetuating the notion that women are more inclined to the sacrifice, suffering, and spirituality

needed in motherhood. Notably, Augustine espouses Monica as the model of motherhood—comparable to the Madonna herself. Monica is spiritual, submissive, tolerant of male authority and abuse, chaste, and devoted. A "chaste and gentle" woman of great faith, Monica acts as the mother of Augustine's physical body as well as his spiritual journey, nurturing him as he passes into both mortal life and the immortal afterlife (V.ix.102). Throughout the *Confessions*, she constantly serves as the spiritual anchor of Augustine's story, unwavering in her dedication even in the face of suffering—only for her suffering to greater exemplify her elevated faith (V.ix.102). While there is no mother figure in Abelard's autobiographical letters, he sustains, similar to Augustine, that women are more spiritual in nature, "capable of greater feeling, greater love and greater self-sacrifice than men" (Brewer 51). They are "the weaker sex," feebler in body and mind but stronger in spirit (*Historia calamitatum*, 39). This emphasis on the strength of the female spirit that surpasses that of the carnal, dominant man mirrors Augustine, and indicates that women have a greater spiritual fortitude. Because of their greater spiritual fortitude as well their higher propensity for self-sacrifice, women are deemed to possess a greater capacity for suffering. This is key as suffering is viewed as redemptive in Catholicism; Jesus suffered to redeem the sins of the world while Mary suffered the loss of her son. As the Apostles Creed states, Jesus was "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried" ("Catholic Prayers"). In tandem with this divine suffering and sacrifice, Catholic belief asserts that the path to righteousness is through suffering. These beliefs around women's greater spirituality and greater tolerance for pain allow for the *marianista* notion that women, who suffer the pain of childbirth, are well-suited for the toil and grief of physical and spiritual labor that is motherhood.

It may be argued that tolerance in suffering, spirituality, devotion, and other *marianista* values may be viewed in their own right as powerful, the roles of lover and mother as influential,

and the figure of Mary as empowering in an otherwise male-dominated religion. It is clear in each of the texts that Monica, the unnamed mistresses, and Heloise wield influence in the minds, hearts, and worlds of these male authors. Consequently, one may argue that in the same way that these women who emulate Mary are treated as secondary, their influence may be overlooked. Mary the Queen Mother herself is often seen as a supportive figure to God the Father and Jesus the Son, but she holds her own power and prominence within the Catholic religion. For instance, while the Church may promote a certain version of Mary in theory, women may identify with their own interpretation of Mary in practice. For instance, some feminist liberation theologians interpret Mary in a way that does not center her sexual purity or motherhood, instead focusing on Mary as "a fighter against injustices" and "an agent of change" (Muñoz 61). Accordingly, the Immaculate Conception, despite popular narrative, did not occur as a result of Mary's chastity, but of her having been born free from the original sin of Adam and Eve (Warner 53). In the Catholic tradition, it is believed that Mary was born incapable of sin, "wholly free from concupiscence, the 'incentive to sin,' and therefore unburdened by a single sinful desire," including sex (Warner 242). In being the chosen daughter of Eve and descendent of Abraham, "God had elected her…from the beginning of time and predestined her to be the mother of his only begotten son," making her "the most perfect created being after Jesus Christ" (Warner 242). This status elevates Mary to the Queen of Heaven, seated beside Jesus and God the Father in the holy kingdom of eternity. However, while her reign might appear mystical and powerful, it underscores the impossibility of emulating Mary even outside of virginity and motherhood. Even if a woman does not emulate Mary in practicing these tenets of abstinence and child-bearing, she cannot plausibly emulate being God's destined, chosen daughter. In this way, Mary does represent a power that exists outside of *marianista* values, but her is a power that was given to her by God the Father and is unattainable to all others. Whether

as queen, mother, or virgin, Mary inhabits a role that is given to her by male authority; her power is ultimately limited to her relationships with the masculine-coded God and her son Jesus. Similarly, while the influence which the women of Augustine and Abelard's autobiographical works is clearly present, it is limited to their roles as mother or temptress—roles which continue to be both undervalued and subservient to those of men.

For both autobiographers, women are not only considered vessels for male desires and virtues, but they are also the catalysts of their transformative journeys. The women in Augustine and Abelard's lives serve as the sources and catalysts of their personal transformations and autobiographies. Both are on a journey toward God which had been set in motion by a woman. For Augustine, Monica's faith catalyzes his redemptive journey while her death prompts Augustine to write the *Confessions* documenting his path to God. For Abelard, when his relationship with Heloise was exposed, he entered into monastic life where her uncle castrated him in revenge, leading him to later document his woes and his journey to God in the *Historia calamitatum* and subsequent letters. In a very real sense, the women in Augustine and Abelard's lives are responsible for their autobiographical narratives and spiritual conversions. However central or peripheral to the story, the women of these autobiographers' journeys are at least one of the following: catalyst or vessel. They are at the conception of the narrative; they are the reason it exists or happens; and they are the medium through which it occurs. Yet, even when women act as initiators or mediums of spiritual transformation for men, the element of the body remains, as women uphold the *corpus* of the Catholic Church both literally and figuratively—literally as women form much of the ranks of churchgoers and figuratively through "the fruit of thy womb" (from "Ave Maria" in "Catholic Prayers"). It is no coincidence that Augustine's mother Monica is compared to "our spiritual mother" the Catholic Church, as women, akin to Monica as well as

Mother Mary herself, possess the womb of creation and conversion. Just as a woman may birth children through the waters of the womb, the Church itself bears transformations of the soul through the waters of baptism. Like the Church, women's bodies become the "house" of God through which men may access higher spirituality (VII.i.133). Theirs is the womb that births man and spirit—that tantalizes flesh and possesses a bottomless capacity for suffering.

As Abelard and Augustine demonstrate through their treatment of women as both catalyst and vessel, Madonna and whore, virgin and mother, the woman is the womb. With the womb as an object of creation as well as transformation, womanhood, accordingly is imagined as a state of perpetual servility passed down from father to husband to child. Because childbirth is deemed woman's special function and its pains God's punishment after the Fall, the virgin is "stained by sin from the moment of [her child's] conception" (Warner 59); she devolves from the untouched, pure womb to the womb tainted by the sin of sex and burdened by God to endure the pain of childbirth. Resulting from God's punishment for original sin, women become the bearers of virtue, pleasure, and pain and the " evils of sex [are] particularly identified with the female" as "woman was womb and womb was evil" (Warner 59). Having originated in the worship of Mary as the primary female figure of Catholicism, *Marianismo* propagates the notion that women, like Mary, should serve as the mediums of male authority and dominance, servicing their physical and spiritual wants. Mary's titles, like the Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, and the Virgin Mother, indicate the centrality of the womb in her deification. The paradox of simultaneous virginity and motherhood establishes an impossible expectation for the women taught to emulate her—which is to say, all Catholic women. Though separated by differing centuries, locations, and cultures, Augustine and Abelard both share *marianista* values, which can only point to the pervasive and widespread nature of these ideals within Catholicism. Mary is celebrated as a vessel of male will,

namely the will of God, and so teaches women that they too should be objects of service, subservience, and spirituality for the sake of men. Together, these autobiographers' characterizations and self-professed expectations regarding women provide insight on the ideal woman: she who emulates Mary. In their autobiographies, Abelard and Augustine both perpetuate the most central tenet of *marianismo*: the notion that a woman can and should be reduced to the mystical, transformative, and divine utility of her womb as both a source of holy virtue and carnal pleasure—a vessel of man's physical and spiritual birth.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The aim of this endeavor was to examine the connection between *marianismo*, Catholicism, and Catholic autobiography as written by men in order to reflect how personal narrative perpetuates, shapes, and is informed by broader social structures. While this investigation has not been the first to connect *marianismo* to Catholic or Christian principles, it sought to examine two autobiographies that have occupied the popular consciousness for centuries, namely Augustine's *Confessions*, which is regarded as a literary, theological, and philosophical masterpiece, and Abelard's (and Heloise's) *Letters*, which is known as a famous and tragic love story. With this goal in mind, the body of work which this study covered was limited to the most well-known autobiographical writings of each respective author. This was based on the understanding that the most famous writings would, as a result of being well-known and well-read, be the most canonically influential. Similarly, the authors reviewed were limited to influential male Catholic figures who wrote autobiographies. However, further possibilities for the exploration or comparison of Catholic ideology regarding the role of women and *marianismo* from a female perspective could be found in Saint Teresa of Ávila's *The Life of Teresa of Jesus* (1581), Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul* (1898), or—for a female voice from Latin America, the continent that typically comes to mind when discussing *marianismo*—research could be done on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *A Woman of Genius* (1701) or *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea* (1691). An examination on *marianista* ideas or reflections that counter *marianismo* would be especially pertinent to continue researching the widespread understanding and effects of *marianismo*, particularly among women writers. Further research could also involve Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), though it should be noted that this Enlightenment Era work deals less with the role of the religious transformation and focuses more on the themes of exile, government, and identity. Another gap that surfaced in the research was the omission of the cache of 113 letters

between Abelard and Heloise that had been discovered in 1980 by Constant Mews (Nehring). Published as “The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard”, these letters contain their exchanges from the time before Abelard’s castration and disappearance from Heloise’s life. Alongside the later exchange of letters between the former lovers, these more recent discoveries could also be examined to more fully investigate each author’s understanding of *marianismo*.

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