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The Pen and The Heart: Studies in Christian Latin Writing of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Rachel Abigail Hodes
Bard College

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The Pen and The Heart

Studies in Christian Latin Writing of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Language and Literature
of Bard College

By Rachel Hodes

Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

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“Sit finis libri, non finis quaerendi”

Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

Introduction

The word “autobiography” is a nineteenth century coinage, but the practice of life writing is ancient.¹ Julius Caesar writes his *Commentaries* on the Gallic Wars around 50 BC, describing his actions, strategies, and triumphs in the third person. Centuries earlier, confessional lyric poetry gave snippets of writers’ lives in first person. Inward-facing reckonings with writerly selfhood have been an aspect of countless literary genres for centuries. In the early days of Christianity in the Latin West, life writing emerged as a powerful tool for modeling and encouraging conversion. Engaging with the audience through the model of the self, life writing had the capability to depict a life influenced by religious conversion. Writing one’s life could be a devotional act in and of itself, and the autobiographer’s often dual audiences of mortal man and God came to reflect his desire to both affect conversion in his readership and create a prayerful offering out of his own life.

Hagiography blossomed alongside life writing in late antiquity, and also became a conversion tool in which a life was utilized didactically. However, there are crucial differences between the biographical and autobiographical mode. Where the saint’s life is a closed story, a paragon of morality and a model of best practice, personal life writing retains a sense of openness and a need to self-define within a world full of contradictory traditions. Autobiography, in other words, engages with the audience in its still-active sense of *becoming*. My study was motivated by a concern to understand how Christian autobiography makes use of this openness, and in what terms late antique Christian writers consistently defined themselves?

¹ “autobiography, n.” *OED*.

In this project, I explore three works of Christian life writing between the mid-fourth and fifth centuries: Augustine's *Confessions*, Proba's *Cento*, and Paulinus' *Eucharisticon*. These texts range from conventional to obscure, from prose to poetry. The inquiries into each text seek to define the fundamentals underlying the genre of Christian autobiography in antiquity, and to discern the markers that distinguish these texts from other literary practices. I ask: how do these texts locate themselves within Christian and classical traditions, and how do they make use of their position to achieve new goals?

Generally seen as the foundational autobiographical text, Augustine's *Confessions* is the focus of my first chapter. I work to define the act of confession as Augustine performs it throughout the text and describes it specifically in Book 10. Through close readings that deal with the inherently dual nature of his audience-facing confession directed towards God, I hope to arrive at a more complex understanding of the work Augustine is doing to merge private prayer with public autobiography. Confession directed towards God is deeply spiritual and ineffable and can only be represented to the reader through paradox and metatextual allusion. For Augustine, the textual confession to his readership is a kind of reflection of this confession to God--the work of the *pen* as it attempts to represent the actions of the *heart*. Even as it describes the confession of the heart, the pen nevertheless serves to locate Augustine within the ascetic tradition, as one who strives towards the scriptural and moves away from the classical. Inherent within the dualities of Augustine's confession is his ascetic ideology, pushing *Confessions* further into the tradition of scripture and distancing it from work of the Latin canon.

After Augustine, I move backwards in time to explore aspects of life writing within the *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi* written by Faltonia Betitia Proba in the 350s. I am also

moving from prose into poetry, an important link between this text and the work of Paulinus which I undertake in my final chapter. The Roman noblewoman's *Cento* utilizes Virgil's hexameters to retell the stories of the Old and New Testaments. However, she begins her introductory proem with original life writing, describing the Epic and pagan subjects of her earlier works: power hungry rulers, bloody battles, cities left deserted by war. The work of Proba represents an entirely different location of the self between classical and Christian subjectivities than that of Augustine, who seeks to align himself with as Christian a tradition as possible. Before presenting a poem that mediates Virgilian source into Biblical narrative, Proba reflects on her own life in verse, rejecting the Epic and violent themes of her work while nevertheless praising the Virgilian container, which she contends is capable of singing the pious deeds of Christ.

The last work of this study is the *Eucharisticon* of Paulinus of Pella, 616 lines of verse outlining the life of the Bourdelais writer and offering his thanks to God. Written in 459, Paulinus's work is a poem with a prose preface. Although the poetic form of this work seems antithetical to the strict Christian asceticism of Augustine, this chapter will discuss the ways in which the *Eucharisticon* inherits an Augustinian view of Eucharistic liturgy. Just as the sacrament is twofold in its *bread* and *body*, the *Eucharisticon* uses themes of duality to create tension between form and meaning. Like his predecessors, Paulinus is concerned with using his life story to locate himself in a world of many literary traditions. However, where Augustine and Proba expressed their own alignments with Christian and Roman ideals by engaging with and rejecting formal aspects of each tradition, Paulinus utilizes secular, classical verse form in performing his sacramental act. In reading the *Eucharisticon* as an act of sacramental poetry, I

ask what it means for a poem to express eucharistic liturgy, especially in its use of classical form towards Christian expression.

The works of Augustine, Proba, and Paulinus span about one hundred years: first, in the mid-fourth century, the *Cento*, followed by *Confessions*' publication between 397 and 400, and finally the *Eucharisticon* in 459. During these one hundred years, Christianity proliferated through the Roman empire and became among the most significant aspects of its culture. The Christian Latin modes of life writing that developed during this period served as tools that drew upon the past in order to inspire further conversions from readers. Each text placed itself within a matrix of Christian and classical references that gave it the power not only to reflect on the relationship between text and tradition, but also the changing Roman world as it negotiated the relationship between secular and Christian histories and ideals. Augustine, Proba, and Paulinus have presented themselves in texts that have differing levels of dependence upon the Christian and the classical, and their relationships to the religious and secular worlds mirror the ways in which Christianity was changing within the period between the fourth and fifth centuries. Their work shows how, in the autobiographical medium especially, Christian writers located and redefined the self in negotiations among different sets of literary and cultural traditions. Authorial and spiritual identities intertwined here. Imitation and appropriation, as well as rejection, of literary influences—scriptural, epic, militaristic—functioned crucially in framing and communicating the Christian self. These practices of imitation stimulated reading audiences to consider the significance of exemplarity and imitability in the texts and in themselves.

In what follows, I explore the distinct approaches that each of these authors have taken to self-definition and imitation as a means of locating themselves within a set of traditions: Proba

synthesizes the classical and the Christian into one mediated text, Augustine rejects the classical more forcefully and writes in prose that can easily move in and out of scriptural reference, and Paulinus places Augustinian ideas within a poetic container in order to create something that has a Eucharistic diversity of form and meaning. While each author offers a different approach to life writing, they all engage in a negotiation of form and meaning motivated by a desire for self-definition, seeking to locate themselves within the multiple literary traditions of the fourth and fifth centuries. These early autobiographies portray a *self* that is concerned with formal and literary questions, and the authors' identities are tied to the choices behind the construction of each piece of life writing.

Chapter 1: Augustine and the Confessional Model

I: Reading on Reading *Confessions*

The first words of Augustine's *Confessions* are taken from two Psalmic sources. He opens his introspective text "You are great, Lord, and strongly worthy of praise (Ps. 47:2): your power is great, and your wisdom immeasurable (Ps. 146:5)." ¹ These opening lines, a beginning of borrowings, lay out many of the paradoxes that preoccupy the whole of *Confessions*: a life story structured around biblical models and patterns, beginning with the description of a being outside of the narrator. Augustine straightaway positions himself in view of God's greatness. In a story of the self, he is neither glamorizing nor aggrandizing; rather he attempts to use the writing autobiography as an act of humility. *Confessions* often speaks to God directly as it does in its beginning. The use of biblical language is a crucial aspect of Augustine's engagement with his addressee. Augustine's close relationship with the *words* of scripture extend beyond *Confessions* to the last intimate moments of his life. As Possidius writes in his *Life of Augustine*, on his deathbed he requested the Psalms of David to be copied onto sheets and hung before him.² Even bedridden at the end of his life, Augustine's engagement with scriptural language is notable, and his desire to utilize scripture within his *Confessions* shows the extent to which he related to this material: the word of God could be systematically applied to, and could directly structure, the story of his life-and the lives of others. It is evident that for Augustine, the language of the Bible and the act of life writing are intertwined, but the question remains: to what purpose?

Augustine is his own first critic, and an important piece of context in reading Augustine's *Confessions* is his later work *Retractions*. Written towards the end of his life, *Retractions* surveys

¹ CSEL 33 ed. Knoll. 1.1; *Magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde: magna virtus tua, et sapientiae tuae non est numerus.*

² See *Vita Augustini*, ed. Weiskotten. Ch. XXXI.

Augustine's earlier work: "I am indicating, as if with a censorial pen, what offends me."³ When reflecting on the nature of *Confessions*, Augustine has rather little criticism for his work. The thirteen books "praise the just and good God with my good and evil acts, and excite the knowledge and affection of men for Him."⁴ The books still have this effect, writes Augustine, when he reads over them in old age. The act of confession, in reflection, drew upon life writing to two ends: his actions praised God, and provided a narrative that drew men in.

This chapter will explore the mode of autobiography operative within *Confessions*, by examining the ways in which Augustine both describes and utilizes the act of confession. Instead of classifying the work as a beginning to the autobiographical genre as is often done, I will explore the uniquely paradoxical and particularly personal nature of Augustine's confessional text, and renew inquiry into its engagement with audience and self. In explicating the innovative literary work Augustine does with the confession, I hope to offer an original sketch of his model of autobiography: one that emphasizes his reliance on the language of profundity, paradox, and metatextuality to represent for a readership the ineffable act of confessing to an all-knowing God.

In later chapters, after reclassifying and outlining the modes of life writing within *Confessions*, and challenging any notion of it as foundational or standard autobiography, I will investigate the ways in which Augustine's impulses towards writerly self-definition and location within scriptural tradition are aspects of life writing that pervade other autobiographers late antiquity. Other texts, such as Proba's *Cento* and Paulinus' *Eucharisticon* enact the work of autobiographical writing in ways that will interact with Augustine's confessional model by

³ Prol. 1; *quod me offendit, velut censorio stilo denotem*

⁴ II. 6; *de malis et de bonis meis Deum laudant iustum et bonum, atque in eum excitant humanum intellectum et affectum.*

engaging with the self and self-reflection. Ultimately, the duality of Augustine's confession as it relates both to God and to the mortal audience will come to mirror dualities within each subsequent text. As the tension between Christian and classical modes of writing moves each writer to locate himself in the context of tradition, the mediation of dualities becomes an important aspect of each text.

i: Summarizing Confessions by Book

Book 1	Augustine praises God, questions his physical nature. He considers his infancy and youth, reflects on the misguided nature of his schooling, which taught language to the end of inspiring students towards material success.
Book 2	Augustine's teenage years bring the force of lust into his life. He goes to school in Carthage. He details sins of lust and theft (specifically pear theft).
Book 3	Augustine takes a lover, studies law in Carthage, and enjoys the writings of Cicero. He reads but does not enjoy scripture, and begins to fall in with the Manichees.
Book 4	Augustine teaches public speaking and lives with his mistress. He grieves the loss of his friend, who had fallen ill, recovered, converted to Christianity, and ultimately died.
Book 5	Augustine loses interest in Manicheism. Against his Christian mother's protestations, he goes to Rome, where he falls ill and recovers, and debates with Manichees. He takes a teaching post in Milan, where he meets Bishop Ambrose.
Book 6	Monica comes to Italy, Augustine pursues Ambrose. Alypius and Augustine vacillate on converting, Augustine is held back by his refusal to become celibate. He becomes engaged and his mistress is sent back to Africa.
Book 7	Augustine continues to search for truth and struggle with his affinity for Christianity and his problems with a celibate lifestyle. He refers to neo-Platonist and Christian visions of divinity.
Book 8	Augustine continues to read scripture. Ponticianus tells Augustine and Alypius the conversion story of the monks at Trier. In the garden, Augustine hears the call "take it up and read" (<i>tolle lege</i>), opens up the Pauline Epistles, and finds a passage on forgoing lust in favor of Christ. Alypius also finds solace in a passage from Paul. Both men are ready to convert.
Book 9	Augustine retires from teaching, and he and Alypius are baptised along with Augustine's son by his mistress, Adeodatus. Monica dies a few days after the conversion and Augustine grieves.
Book 10	Augustine considers the world, the mind, and the senses, as well as memory. He follows a complicated line of inquiry: What do confessions do? Who do they serve? What does one love when one loves god? The world is perceived through senses-- images-- we use fact to register non image material. If you forget something, it's deep in your memory and you can try to access it again. Seeking God is a remembrance. God is truth, and seeking God is seeking truth.
Book 11	What is the nature of God and how did he create the world? What was there before the world? Augustine considers time and eternity. The past and future exist in our memory. Time measures the movement of things.
Book 12	Augustine imagines a world without form from which God created everything. He begins a close reading of the beginning of Genesis and muses on Moses' ability to write truth that nobody can reject.
Book 13	Augustine continues his exegesis of Genesis. All good things are made by God, and God engenders truth.

ii: *Critical Approaches to Confessions*

Critics of memoir have conventionally read *Confessions* as a landmark text designating the start of the autobiographical genre in western literature. This mode of interpretation also tends to read Books 1-9 as a complete story, with the conversion story of Book 8 as its climax. For these readers, Augustine's writing provides a model of self-description that involves cataloguing sin and laying it out before an all-powerful God. George Gusdorf, an early autobiographical theorist, utilizes Augustine's *Confessions* to explain the origins of autobiography as a particularly western genre created at the advent of Christian conversion. For Gusdorf, "The rule requiring confession of sins gives to self-examination a character at once systematic and necessary. Augustine's great book is a consequence of this dogmatic requirement: a soul of genius presents his balance sheet before God in all humility—but also in full rhetorical splendor."⁵ Gusdorf goes on to define the nature of all autobiography as a mirror, reflecting what the writer sees within his own image. He describes Christianity's mode of self-interpretation as a "deformed mirror" that accentuates sin and makes it central to the exercise of self-description. The central role of sin within this model prioritizes the first nine books of *Confessions*, while also emphasizing God's role as addressee in a way that disregards the performative nature of conversion writing, centered around its readership. The use of *Confessions* as a paradigmatic text at the outset of a genre pervades critical analyses of autobiography. Critics with this approach tend to see *Confessions* as a story told through the first nine books-- a "transformation of errors through values," as Stephen Spender describes in his "Confessions and Autobiography."⁶ Many theorists' treatments of *Confessions* are relegated to a

⁵ Gusdorf; ed. Olney 1980, 33.

⁶ Spender; ed. Olney 1980, 121.

brief introduction into the genre's history. In this paradigm, Augustine's text marks the invention of a clear-cut genre. Because this approach prioritizes a standard and uncomplicated view of life writing, it elevates the more traditionally autobiographical material of Books 1-9 while relegating 10-13 as unimportant. Often, these readings are also guilty of foregrounding of Augustine's retelling of sin to God as addressee. John J. O'Meara goes so far as to call *Confessions* "a badly composed book," as he sees the content of the first nine books as deeply at odds with that of the last four.⁷ Writing against Courcelle's theory, O'Meara argues that the more traditionally autobiographical material of the first nine books ought to be prioritized, and the rest of the material can be explained away by Augustine's haste, and his poor planning.⁸

One of *Confessions*' primary twentieth century interpreters, Pierre Courcelle, pushes back against the idea that autobiography is a primary goal of the text. Courcelle theorizes that Augustine originally meant to utilize less of his own life within the text, dwelling on personal experience only insofar as it would further the text's ability to relate to its audience-- a feature necessary to any conversion text. The autobiographical elements, in Courcelle's estimation, serve only to inform the later books' biblical exegesis. This view prioritizes the deeply internal, soul-searching and theoretical work of *Confessions*' later books.⁹ For Courcelle, there is always a tension between the impulse to teach through life narrative on the one hand, and, on the other, to utilize the life only insofar as it informs the exegesis. Courcelle sees Augustine's life writing as a strategic selection of the right stories. Augustine is able to control the narrative, and utilize his self-reflection as an informative and educational preamble to the complex exegesis of the later books. When the exegesis is prioritized as in Courcelle's reading, autobiography is not the

⁷ O'Meara, 13.

⁸ Passim, O'Meara's Introduction.

⁹ Courcelle 1968, 23-24; 27. See Olney 1998, 29-30 for a discussion of this theory.

goal of *Confessions* but the means to understanding the text's more philosophical ending, as a method for selectively teaching through self-narrative.¹⁰

Many scholars have sought to explore the goals of *Confessions*, and not all of them have been as autobiographically inclined as Gusdorf and O'Meara, or as intent on forefronting the text's exegetical ending as Courcelle. Georg Misch, often considered the ur-scholar of autobiography, sees Augustine's model of autobiography as essentially at odds with modern spiritual autobiographies, which focus on individuality. Instead, Augustine is concerned with his mind and his internal life, how it has developed and what it is capable of doing. Misch notes that Augustine's writing highlights his "spiritual development, and had worked out with unprecedented versatility the method of comprehending that development from the steps taken in it."¹¹ As his analysis of *Confessions* comes within the last hundred pages of his 700-page chronologically arranged *Autobiography in Late Antiquity*, it would certainly be wrong to say that Misch views Augustine's work as the first of its genre. Nevertheless, he does see the text's spiritual and self-reflective qualities as the precursors to "the great autobiographical documents of the eighteenth century," works such as Rousseau's *Confessions*, which bears Augustine's title. Other critical theorists such as James Olney follow Misch in emphasizing Augustine's need to look holistically at the development of his spiritual, and therefore internal life. Olney recognizes that what lies behind Augustine's inquiry into mind, memory, and understanding is his presupposition about the human mind's status as a likeness of God: "What can it possibly mean... to say that God made humankind to his own image and likeness? It took Augustine many thousands of pages to chew the cud of this narrative properly... what else the story of his

¹⁰ See Courcelle 1968's chapter "Le Schéma Théologique des *Confessions*" for his argument.

¹¹ Misch, 635.

life, but this very chewing and rechewing of the cud of narrative thrown up by his memory for endless rumination?"¹² For critics like Misch and Olney, who aim to use *Confessions* comparatively in order to trace a narrative theory of autobiography as a genre, the text is taken without question as a piece within the timeline of life writing, to which other pieces of disparate life writing can be compared. Although they certainly leave room to explore the nuances of Augustine's writing, Misch and Olney both classify the text as autobiography without question, and therefore rely on the traditional view of the text which elevates the more fact-driven and narrative-driven first books of *Confessions* over the theoretical musings of the later ones.

For a critic like Gusdorf, who sees the the act of confession as a rhetorical balance sheet, which accounts for sin in the eyes of God, it is easy to focus on *Confessions*' first nine books as a whole life story in and of themselves. Following Courcelle's idea that the autobiographical elements of the text act in service to a broader and more philosophical narrative, elevating the first nine books would ignore the complex metatextual work that pervades the entire text, beginning with an opening that borrows language from the Psalms. It similarly ignores the central paradoxes that underlie the text. No confession can come as surprising to Augustine's all-knowing God, who has no need for a catalogue of his followers' sins. Finally, this reading ignores the profundity captured within the act of confessing itself. Augustine reaches towards the language of depth and vastness to express the work of confession, which is never as simple as cataloguing sin for a higher power. In light of this, *Confessions* is not a balance sheet, but a complex theory of a man, a knotted and circular attempt to depict for a mortal audience the confession that is performed to God: vast and silent, deep and totally ineffable. In reading a

¹² Olney 1998, 75.

complete *Confessions*, I am looking to present a vision of Augustine's confessional mode in light of its metatextuality and engagement with its own form. In this model the climax of conversion in Book 8 becomes a pivot point, from which Augustine is allowed to explore the internal and metatextual aspects of interpreting the self. Augustine's pivot to the internal, and to less traditionally autobiographical material, speaks to the text's engagement with the act of confession. Confession allows Augustine to present his mortal audience with a theory of himself as a man and a believer by sketching the contours of the act of confessing to God. Confession propels the text away from traditional autobiographical material and into an exploration of the writer's soul and mind.¹³ Augustine is writing not just a story of himself, but forwarding a theory of himself in the acts of prayer, composition, and confession.

II: Reading Conversion in Confession

Another of the great paradoxes of *Confessions* comes from the conventional interpretation of the work. While critical theory makes Augustine a benchmark at the beginning of a new genre, Augustine sees himself as participating in the middle of a tradition of Christian reading and written and lived response. As much as the book is addressed to and written for God, it also interacts with an audience of early Christians, for whom life stories, hagiographies, and conversion stories were a common tool.¹⁴ With ascetic Christian practice spreading during the late 4th century, *Confessions* serves its audience. The ascetic Christian sees discipline as central to expressing faith, and is committed to restriction from desire as a way of living a life that is true to God. For ascetics, *Confessions* provides a model of a life lived-- a model that welcomes

¹³ Brown 1967 describes the text as "the story of Augustine's 'heart,' or of his 'feelings'-- his *affectus*." 163.

¹⁴ See Brown 1967's chapter on *Confessions* (esp. 152-3) in his biography *Augustine of Hippo*.

people who have sinned and are willing to devote themselves to God. With the ascetic audience in mind, *Confessions* draws on themes of reading and acting in metatextual ways that nod towards the work's place in early Christian conversion stories and further works to encourage conversion.

Book 8, which tells Augustine's famous conversion story, is one example of *Confessions'* recurring chain reactions of reading and responding that result in conversion. First, Ponticianus comes to speak with Augustine and Alypius for a reason Augustine can no longer recall. Ponticianus notices a book of the Pauline Epistles on Augustine's gaming table. Ponticianus, a devout believer, is surprised by Augustine's interest in the text, as he assumes Augustine busies himself with secular philosophical texts. After Augustine indicates that he has studied Paul at length, Ponticianus tells Augustine and Alypius about Anthony, an Egyptian monk. Astonished that the men are not versed in the story of Anthony, his speech continues to a recollection of his time as a member of the secret police in Trier. One day when the emperor is occupied, Ponticianus and three colleagues go for a walk, wandering in two sets of pairs. The first set come upon a house of poor monks living in ascetic devotion to God. There, they find a copy of the Life of Anthony. Upon reading it, both men decide to forsake their secular lives and motivations, as being a friend of God is easier, less dangerous, and more fulfilling than befriending the emperor. Ponticianus and his companion come upon the pair of their former colleagues, and, though they choose not to join them, offer their congratulations and prayers.

Hearing this story, Augustine is faced with the realization that he can no longer hide from his own iniquity. He longs to find truth in God, but has been unable to commit himself to a life of chastity. In a struggle with himself, he runs into the garden. While battling his inner turmoil,

Augustine hears a child chanting “Pick it up and read.” He runs to retrieve the Pauline Epistles, remembering that Anthony was present at a reading of the gospel, and, inspired by a command to follow Christ, was immediately converted. Augustine flips to a random page, and reads to himself silently: “Not in revelries and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and immodesty, not in struggle and competition, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no providence for the flesh in its lusts.”¹⁵

With this direct engagement with scriptural word, Augustine is finally ready for conversion. His companion Alypius follows suit and is also bolstered into conversion by his own selection of a random verse from the Pauline Epistles. In his piece “Conversion and the Language of Autobiography,” Geoffry Galt Harpham explores the ways in which the repeated reading and reacting of Book 8’s conversions make a metatextual gesture towards the Early Christian tool of the conversion story. He describes the conversion narrative as a literary act that takes its form from lived experience, and textually represents the imitation and repetition of other lives. “This stacking of models continues even beyond this episode, driving conversion... Augustine’s conversion is intended to produce conversion in its readers.”¹⁶ Not only does Harpham present the Augustine’s conversion as a link in a chain that the reader is invited to join by reading and receiving the text, but he also describes *Confessions*’ life writing as an interpretation of Scripture, where Augustine, as the interpreter, writes autobiography as a way of bringing his own language to scriptural text.¹⁷ Anchored in the stability of self-reflection,

¹⁵ 8.12; Rom. 13:13-14; *non in comissionibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et inpudicitis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum, et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis.*

¹⁶ Harpham, ed. Olney 1988, 43-44.

¹⁷ See Harpham, ed. Olney 1988, especially 44-46.

Augustine builds upon the model of Scripture with his life writing-- both developing a conversion story and writing the end to his own conversion.

Augustine's conversion story presents a chain of readers and reactors whose message eventually reaches the writer. In this way, the literary act shows itself to be imitative and repetitive. As repetitive as it is, however, it is also meant to be *repeatable*. The act of writing autobiography gives narrative shape to the conversion story, and creating the narrative serves to enact the conversion itself. A conversion narrative is a vehicle for conversion in that it can carry both its writer and its audience towards piety. It imitates, and invites imitation. Both of these facets of Augustine's conversion story in Book 8 point towards the mechanics of *Confessions* as it interacts with tradition and audience. Viewing *Confessions* as a piece that takes on conversion narrative rather than an early landmark of the autobiographical tradition allows the confessional model to find its place within the historical context of conversion stories.

III: Reading Confession

The primary act of this story is confession. Despite its titular role in the work, this mode of writing is not self explanatory. In his biography of Augustine, Peter Brown writes that the word *confessio* "summed up his attitude to the human condition: it was the new key with which he hoped, in middle age, to unlock the riddle of evil."¹⁸ The act of confession, although addressed to God, allows Augustine to lay out his personal but also deeply philosophical inquiry for his readership. In this way, Augustine uses confession as a vehicle for explicating a theory of himself as a Christian and a man.

¹⁸ Brown 1967, 169.

Nevertheless, the word's meaning is less than obvious, though *confiteor* appears almost immediately within the text, in 1.6 : “Do you laugh at me asking these things, you who command me to praise, and to confess to you what I know?”¹⁹ This usage of *confiteor* in an address to God is typical of the first four books of *Confessions*, where Augustine often demonstrates confession without telling the reader what it is. From this first appearance, the act of confession is intertwined with praising God. Again in Book 4 he leans on confession as a tool of praise: “Nevertheless I will confess my shameful acts to you, in your praise.”²⁰ In *confiteor*'s first occurrence, Augustine is ordered to praise God, and he can do so via confessional writing. The verb's frequent closeness to *laus* (praise) indicates a tight relationship between the acts of confession and commendation of God, but the specific connection between praise and confession is not more fully defined by Augustine until the beginning of Book 5.

In the Book's first chapter, Augustine implores God to accept his confessions. Augustine's God is all-knowing, and therefore nothing can be confessed to him which he does not already know as truth. Nothing, he writes, can be *hidden* from God. To write confession is a celebration of a life affected by God: “My soul praises you so that it may love you, and let it confess its pity to you so that it can praise you.”²¹ In this passage, Augustine reflects upon the personal benefits he reaps from the act of confession. In order to seek the salvation of God, he must take responsibility for his actions, and acknowledge that only the intervention of God's grace is capable of saving him.²² This speaks directly to the relationship between the soul and God. Augustine describes the benefits of confession in stages: to confess sin leads to praise, and

¹⁹ 1.6; *an irrides me ista quaerentem, teque de hoc, quod novi, laudari a me iubes, et confiteri me tibi?*

²⁰ 4.1; *ego tamen confitear tibi dedecora mea in laude tua.*

²¹ 5.1; *sed te laudet anima mea, ut amet te, et confiteatur tibi miseratuoones tuas, ut laudet te*

²² See Brown 1967, 169-170.

praise expresses love. The act of confession is the soul's mode of affirming the role of God as a powerful force that affects lived experience. Confession, then, is fundamental to the soul's praise of God. The act of confession allows the soul to express its love through narrative. If confession is a prerequisite to praise, and entails the narrative expression of the life story, then confession equates to a mode of praising God that involves describing the way in which the life has been altered by interactions with God. In this way, the confession to God is not a *reveal* of sinfulness, but a narrative and prayerful form of acknowledgement, augmented through the acts of writing and admission. The story itself becomes the praise and the prayer, so that the expression of a relationship with God can be articulated through action and life story.

The act of confession does not exist between Augustine and God alone, since the text has been written and distributed to a mortal audience as well. Confession, then, is taking place on two planes within the text, aimed at two distinct audiences. Augustine often refers to the benefits his readership can receive by hearing his confession. In 10.3, for example, he poses the question himself: why should he feel concern for the men who might hear his confession? To hear God speak about oneself is to know oneself. If men refuse to hear the truth of *themselves* from God, why should they demand to hear Augustine's truths on *himself*? "Thus, I also confess to you so that men hear me, to whom I cannot demonstrate that the things I confess are true; but they believe me, those whose ears are open to me because of love."²³ The audience who shares in Augustine's love of God will be able to hear his confession. As Augustine points to love of God as a product of praise in 5.1, the human audience is encouraged to participate in the machine of confession as believers, whose ears are opened by the love of God. This passage makes clear

²³ 10.3; *ego quoque, domine, etiam sic tibi confiteor, ut audiant homines, quibus demonstrare non possum, an vera confitear; sed credunt mihi, quorum mihi aures caritas aperit.*

who, among the mortal audience, can hear Augustine's confession as truth directed from God; but what is Augustine's work doing for the human audience? The ubiquity of *confiteri*, and its titular role in the book, mandates scrutiny. What does the act of confession entail for Augustine? In what follows, I will track the relationship between confession and the impulse towards literary autobiographical action and practice, especially in light of *what* is being confessed, to *whom*, and *why*. With the goal of explaining the nature of confessional life writing, I will specifically explore the ways in which confession interacts with its dual audiences: God himself, and potential converts to Catholicism. Augustine engages God in a way that is so complex he can hardly put the relationship into words. At the same time, he directs his confession into a conversion story that can be replicated by those he has inspired. The relationship with God is based in the profound, deep, and ineffable. Augustine cannot portray this inarticulable relationship for the human audience, but he can mimic its effect with elements of metatextuality, paradox, and depth.

i: Looking to Book 10

I propose that Augustine offers his clearest insights into, and most comprehensive view of confession not in the first nine books, so often stressed as comprising the first Western autobiography, but in Book 10. Harpham pointed to the metatextual elements of the conversion story in Book 8, where Augustine locates himself within the chain of readers, reactors, and convertors by reading Paul and listening to the readers of Saint Anthony's life. In Book 8, reading leads Augustine to react with his own conversion. With *Confessions*, Augustine completes the act of conversion fully by *writing* his conversion, allowing for others to use his

experience as a source text for their own reactions. Augustine positions himself as both an *imitation* of the earlier sources that led to his conversion, and an *imitable* model upon which future converts can base their own trajectory. His history as an imitator goes back to Ponticianus, Saint Anthony, and the monks of Book 8, to his interactions with Paul, as well as his direct engagement with the language of scripture throughout his writing, which becomes the basis upon which he is able to write his confessional self-reflections. The fact that Augustine's writing is imitative in regards to multiple sources, including the Bible itself, seems meant to encourage imitation in the form of conversion for his readership. This highly reflective treatment of text is not unique to Book 8, and there is a similar deep literary self-awareness undergirding Augustine's reflections on memory and confession in Book 10 as well. The text mirrors Augustine's own spiritual conversion, and its self-awareness as an imitative piece of writing is both referential and reflexive. The relationship that the writer has with reading, receiving text, and writing is still at issue in complex ways throughout Book 10, which deals heavily with the mechanics of memory, the mind, and the relationship between God and the internal world of the believer. Book 10 shows Augustine also working through what the confessional form is capable of conveying, and because it is such a central theme of the book, forms of *confiteor* are used almost twice as often as in any other book of *Confessions*.²⁴ Through a complicated thought-experiment about the mind's ability to conjure and conceptualize God, Book 10 presents a mechanics of confession that hinges on both external audience and internal reasoning.

From the very opening of Book 10, Augustine begins to develop a theory on the internal and external dynamics of confessing. He articulates a crystallized view on the dimensions of

²⁴ Forms of *confiteor* are used 113 times throughout *Confessions*, with Book 10 producing 24 of the occurrences. Books 11 and 13 tie for second most occurrences, with 13 each.

confession in one sentence: “I want to do this, in my heart before you in confession, and in my pen before many witnesses.”²⁵ With his heart, Augustine’s confession faces God. With his pen, it faces potential converts. The act of confession is twofold in terms of its audience, and in terms of the specific purposes confession serves for each of these audiences. These two aspects of confession, which I am calling the *heart* and *pen* confessions respectively, represent the multifaceted engagement that Augustine reaches towards when he confesses.²⁶ Augustine muses on the dual audiences of his confession in 12.6: “If my voice and pen should confess all to you, whatever you unknotted for me in this question, what reader would have the patience to understand it?”²⁷ The deeply personal and profoundly abstract nature of confession as it relates to God is unable to be articulated for a mortal audience. Rather, as he addresses God, Augustine’s confession is a personal, labyrinthine piece of laudatory engagement, and lacks the swift narrative power that would be important in driving a text meant to inspire conversion. The profound nature of confession to God cannot quite be replicated for the human audience. As much as the heart confession is ineffable, the pen confession strives to express this ineffability. By mirroring the ineffability of the relationship between Augustine and God, the text draws attention to the spiritual dynamics that Augustine wishes to espouse. What the reader receives is wrought with complexities that attempt to convey the deep profundity of heart confession, which is both silent and vast, unable to be written on the page.

²⁵ 10.2; *Volo eam facere in corde meo coram te in confessione, in stilo autem meo coram multis testibus*

²⁶ Brian Stock also briefly discusses these separate audiences as they relate to Book 10 (213-215). Stock adds to this that the positions of those receiving and engaging with the information are also important: “For Augustine, the life to be interpreted is recorded in his personal memory; for his readers, it is a life transcribed in writing, which is a type of artificial memory” (215). As far as confession is directed to an all-knowing God, the content of the act must be personal, whereas, when the pen faces an audience, the memory is indeed an artificial one.

²⁷ 12.6; *et si totum tibi confiteatur vox et stilus meus, quidquid de ista quaestione enodasti mihi, quis legentium capere durabit?*

ii: Pen Representing Heart

The divergent natures of the heart confession and the pen confession run deeper than respective audiences. Because what we receive as the written text of *Confessions* is directed towards the human audience, the result is a pen confession that attempts to represent the nature of the tacit heart confession. Implicit in this idea is a hierarchy of confessions, in which part of the pen confession's goal becomes emulating the ineffability of heart confession. Like the Pauline tension between flesh and spirit, the distance between the mystical and the material, the heart and the pen represent a dualistic ideology that Augustine will be forced to balance. Where the heart confession represents a reception and synthesis of scriptural material, the exploration of his interior life in dialogue with God, the pen confession constitutes an effort to put himself within a chain of readers and reactors to Scripture, the kind outlined by Harpham in his reading of Book 8. Augustine's heart confession produces the vision for the pen's materialization of a story that other potential converts can digest and to which they can respond. On the one hand, he enacts confession from his heart to the ears of God. This confession is internal, deep, knotted, and difficult to display for an audience, so much so that we can only receive writerly techniques that attempt to represent it. On the other, he enacts confession from his pen to a waiting readership. The heart is subtextual, and hinted at by the pen's deep dynamics of metatextuality, reliance on paradox and allusions to depth. At the same time, the pen confession both reflects upon the nature of conversion stories and places Augustine within that tradition by producing something imitative and imitable.²⁸ The confession from the pen draws upon metatextuality

²⁸ See Courcelle 1968, 20-24 for a discussion on the ways in which Augustine uses confession as a way to teach his readers how to lead a pious life. Courcelle sees *Confessions* as a text modelled on catechism texts that intend to edify their readers. The life writing is, in this view, a *precursor*, and an introduction that allows the reader to more fully understand the content of the end of *Confessions*, the exegesis on Genesis that Courcelle sees as the most important part of Augustine's text.

rather than the depth and profundity of a direct relationship with God. In this way, it engages with Augustine's place within the conversion story through the act of writing.

The narrative and prayerful aspects of confession hint at the internal reach of the act, with Augustine developing a topography of inner-self based in the use of *confiteor* as it deals with the heart, directed towards God. In the passage from 5.1 quoted at the outset of this section, the *anima* enacts confession. In the above 10.2 passage, it is the *cor*. Both words point to the deep engagement of internal self that is important to Augustine's heart-to-God confession. The heart confession looks into internal depths to link the confessor to the profound. Language of depth and profundity pervades Augustine's descriptions of God, as he attempts to describe the way in which man relates to the higher power. In 10.6, he tells God "*More deeply*, you will have mercy for the people for whom you will have mercy, and you will show pity to the people for whom you will have pity."²⁹ If this were not the case, Augustine goes on, then people praying to God would be speaking their praises on deaf ears. The remainder of this chapter explores the physical nature of God, following the question "What do I love, when I love you?" From the outset of this exploration, *altius* gestures towards the magnitude of the relationship to God, whose power runs so deep that it is hard for Augustine to express what actually occurring. When Augustine confesses with his heart to God, he engages with the ineffable depth of this relationship. Abyss and vastness are constant in Augustine's discussions of heart confessions to God. "To your eyes, God," he writes in 10.2, "the abyss of human consciousness is laid bare."³⁰ As Book 10 continues to explore the depths of the human mind and memory, the powerful internal force through which God becomes accessible, inwardness and vastness become a recurring theme.

²⁹ 10.6; *Altius autem tu misereberis, cui misertus eris, et misericordiam praestabis, cui misercors fueris.*

³⁰ 10.2; *et tibi quidem, domine, cuius oculis nuda est abyssus humanae conscientiae*

Sensory actions are done “inwardly,”³¹ within the “court of my vast memory.”³² The power of memory is great: “so great, God, it is a vast and infinite interiority.”³³ This interiority, vastness, and depth show Augustine reaching towards a description for *how* he confesses with his heart towards God. Yet, as it is written down for reception by a readership, this serves as an *image* of heart confession, painted in an effort to explain to potential converts something that is beyond description.

Sometimes, the pen confession’s description of the heart reaches towards emotions so overwhelmingly strong that they can hardly be put into words. Instead, they come out as paradox. Augustine refers to the benefits of confession to God in 10.2, when he muses on the nature of confessing to a God who is all-knowing. He explains that he has already written on the benefit (*fructus*) that he receives himself from the act of confession. To confess an evil deed is to displease himself, and conversely to confess something pious does not grant Augustine his own piety. After making this distinction, Augustine begins to describe the act of confession in more detail: “my confession, God, in your sight is made silent and not silent. It is silent in respect to noise, but it cries out with its affection. For I do not say anything that is right to men which you have not first heard from me, and you do not hear such a thing from me which you have not earlier said to me.”³⁴ The benefit (*fructus*) of confession is not about revealing what is hidden, but about using personal narrative and the act of writing to drive prayer. What the reader encounters is only one level of the confessional act, once again gesturing towards the depth of

³¹ 10.8; *intus*

³² 10.8; *in aula ingenti memoriae meae*

³³ 10.8; *magna nimis, deus, penetrare amplum et infinitum*

³⁴ 10.2; *Confessio itaque mea, deus meus, in conspectu tuo tibi tacite fit et non tacite. Tacet enim strepitu, clamat affectu. Neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus, quod non a me tu prius audieris, aut etiam tu aliquid tale audis a me, quod non mihi tu prius dixeris.*

the autobiography by distinguishing the confession from the heart to God as a more profound and deep act than the confession from pen to convert. The confession is silent in God's *sight (in conspectu)*. This crossing of sensible bounds illustrates the multidimensional nature of heart-to-God confession: deep, profound, even practiced in silence. Augustine can reach beyond traditional autobiographical elements in an effort to describe the profundity of this relationship, which pushes up against the very limitations of language and verges into paradox.³⁵ The depth of the confession, and its inability to truly articulate itself, speaks to the nature of the text as an inquiry that is far more elaborate than simple autobiography. Through confession, the writer pushes himself to define the indefinable, to praise through expression of pity, and to represent the mystical through the material. The result is a holistic theory of Augustine as one who praises God, as a writer, and a Catholic. Because of this, Augustine's confessional autobiography lies as much in his intellectual exegesis and theoretical musings on memory as in his factual life story.

iii: The Pen and Its Audience

While the heart confession looks inward to create a link to God, the pen confession looks out upon its mortal audience. As Book 10 goes on, the nature of confession becomes more complex. Part of the *fructus* of confession is derived from a more external audience, as explained in 10.4, where Augustine describes a wish to confess "not just in your presence... but in the ears of the believing sons of men, my companions in joy and in mortality, citizens and pilgrims with

³⁵ Archambault approaches this idea in a different way. He writes that Augustine prioritizes the "interior" to the "exterior" (27), and goes on to quote Augustine on memory in Book 10, imploring the audience to examine the *vastness* of their memory as opposed to the vastness of the natural world in their search for God. The locus of God within the mind is another important aspect of Book 10, and the search for God also relays messages of a vast and deep power, albeit an internal one: memory, which man must utilize in his search for God.

me-- those leading and those coming after me, and the companions of my life.”³⁶ The satisfaction (*fructus*) Augustine experiences as a result of confession comes from the act of sharing his story with an audience. The drama of a redemption story is important in Augustine’s explanation of audience through 10.3 and 10.4, noting that “Good people delight in hearing of their past wrongs, those who are now free from them, not because they are wrongs, but because they were so, and now no longer are.”³⁷ It is human inquisitiveness that Augustine hopes to use to his advantage, but at the same time he hopes that the carefully constructed conversion narrative will urge readers to correct their own sins. The effect of this is that Augustine’s work to promote conversion is successful with a limited audience: his reader must be sympathetic, and self-reflective in regards to his own narrative.

The confession of the pen plays upon human curiosity and dramatic narrative in order to create an effective tool for conversion. This facet of confession is performative, working with the script of successful conversion stories and putting Augustine within the conversion narrative by insisting on the language of the pen. Augustine is writing himself into a chain of conversions by creating a story that is meant to convert-- building off of the metatextuality of Harpham’s argument, the language of the pen completes Augustine’s conversion story by allowing him to affect further conversions to Christianity. At the same time, Augustine expresses a genuine delight for the opportunity to confess upon the ears of fellow men: people who will convert, have converted, and converted with him. In this way, the narrative of confession is also a self-satisfying story. Aside from furthering the conversions of others, it allows Augustine to

³⁶ 10.4; *hoc confitear non tantum coram te... sed etiam in auribus credentium filiorum hominum, sociorum gaudii mei et consortium mortalitatis meae, civium meorum et mecum peregrinorum, praecedentium et consequentium et comitum viae meae.*

³⁷ 10.3; *Et delectat bonos audire praeterita mala eorum, qui iam carent eis, nec ideo delectat, quia mala sunt, sed quia fuerunt et non sunt.*

complete his own conversion, closing the chapter that began with his reception of scriptural texts, was furthered by the story of the monks reading Saint Anthony, and pivoted the focus of *Confessions* with his decision to convert. The force of the pen as it relates to the intended audience shows Augustine's intent to further the conversion story. The act of confession is not simply an attempt to write a narrative of prayer, but to enact something imitative and tropological for an audience-- to provide a story that is both a repetition and a repeatable model of selfhood.³⁸ The result is a deeply metatextual engagement with the act of writing as it happens, drawing attention to the way in which Augustine purposely situates himself within the tradition of conversion writing. This act must be mirrored and recaptured in future converts, and he is creating in his own story a model that can be digested and received in the same way that he received Paul, or the monks received Saint Anthony.

iii: Remembrance and Confession

As Book 10 goes on, Augustine's conception of confession and self-description grows more multidimensional through its line of inquiry. After establishing that his confessional acts serve a greater audience than God alone, he begins to wonder *what* he loves when he loves God. God, he decides, is accessible through the mind.³⁹ The world is perceived through the senses, and God enacts the body to utilize the senses. In order to ascend to God, the mind uses the memory, which has a vast and internal power. The memory is capable of holding profound things that have never been perceived by the body, and the act of remembrance brings the

³⁸ Stock affirms the idea that there is an element of desired imitation, and specifies: "What takes place in the hearer's or the reader's heart is a type of mimesis: not the imitation of outer action, as in a set speech, a rhetorical debate, or a dramatic performance, but, as proposed in Books 7 and 8, the recreation of the self from within, by which an already existing narrative, one's past life, is traced over by the shape of another, a life to come" (214).

³⁹ 10.8-9

confessor towards truth, and thus, towards God. Confession is a written act of remembrance. Much of Book 10 is spent searching for the locus of God within the memory. At 10.24, Augustine remarks on the inquiry he has followed, noting that God exists throughout his mind and memory, not outside of it. “I do not find anything about you which I have not remembered, from the time when I learned of you. From when I learned of you, I have not forgotten you. For where I found truth, I found my God, truth itself, which, from the first time I learned it, I have not forgotten.”⁴⁰ Truth and God are stored within the memory. In the act of writing his memories, and then writing about *how* and *what* he remembers, Augustine expands the act of writing confession. The written memories are followed by the written exploration of memory itself, as Augustine concerns himself with the mechanics of remembering as it pertains to his ability to write confession.⁴¹ To *remember* for an audience, to write out what God already knows, is to form a narrative conversion story. For Augustine, the act of confession is innately aimed towards utilizing the power of memory in an effort to foster conversion just as much as it expresses the deep complexities of bearing one’s heart before an all-powerful God.

The layers of *confiteor* are manifold insofar as Augustine enacts confession to his dual audiences. Throughout Book 10, the complexities of *confiteor* sketch out a complex scheme of the ways in which the confessional model works as a multidimensional way of utilizing life writing to the ends of creating prayer and affecting conversion. Augustine is often writing about

⁴⁰ 10.24; *Enim aliquid de te invenio, quod non meminisse, ex quo didici te. Nam ex quo didici te, non sum oblitus tui. Ubi enim inveni veritatem, ibi inveni deum meum, ipsam veritatem, quam ex quo didici, non sum oblitus.*

⁴¹ Nightingale makes a similar point in her discussion of Book 10 by noting that we see an explanation of memory that directly follows the more traditional life writing of Books 1-9, allowing the theories of memory and confession of Book 10 to be utilized in light of the explorations of memory that Augustine has just spent nine books retelling (62). Taken with Courcelle 1968’s point on pages 20-24, that the life writing should be seen as an explanatory preface to the later material of *Confessions*, this perhaps presents a view that prioritizes the more theoretical work of the last few books.

writing, and writing about writing about the self, in ways that mirror the paradox and complexity with which he addresses God. The confessional prioritizes metatextuality and depth as a way of positioning the writer in regards to both of his audiences. Book 10 shows the theory behind the confession and allows the text to be aware of its own writerly preoccupations, positioning *Confessions* as the autobiography of a man writing an autobiography.

IV: The Work of The Confessional Model

Augustine's *Confessions* contains many paradoxes: the possibility of an author and its text to be both imitative and imitable, addressed to God but facing a mortal audience. In criticism, *Confessions* has similarly engendered a kind of paradoxical treatment, inviting readers to handle it as paradigmatic autobiography while also confounding them with its innovations and idiosyncrasies, especially in its own self-reference. In the case of *Confessions*, positioning the text as conventional is itself another paradox, as there is no convention for Augustine to work off of.

To the extent that Augustine creates a genre, it is not the standard autobiography, but the confessional model. The confessional model is obsessively multidimensional, metatextual, and concerned with a depth and profundity that extends from God to the confessor himself. Confession requires the writer not only to admit to their sin, but to examine their memory, to understand the locus of an immaterial God within the mind, and to utilize the act of remembrance as a way of understanding. While people eventually look to Augustine as the inventor of autobiography, many autobiographical experiments of the following century are

working with similar preoccupations with the writerly act and the form that self-examination can take-- creating other equally valuable models of autobiographical acts in late antiquity.

As a mode of life writing, it is important to view the confessional model within the context of its priorities, namely tropological imitation and engagement with scripture as a way of expressing a life story. With God as addressee, Augustine can utilize his relationship to a higher power as a call to action for potential ascetic Christians, who are primed to see the life story as a model for ways in which they can engage with God. With prose as his medium, scriptural quotation is a seamless act within *Confessions*. The text is written with the language of scripture in mind-- language that, although sometimes not altogether entertaining, speaks to a wide audience in simple terms. In comparing the speech of the Bishop Ambrose to that of the Manichaean Faustus, Augustine writes “I delighted in the sweetness of his speech, more learned, although less lively and soothing than that of Faustus, in terms of the manner of speaking.”⁴² Augustine, a rhetorician by trade, uses confession in a way that pays mind to the measured speech of his forefathers in the Church. While portraying the complex and almost indescribable act of confessing to God, he still writes within the framework of biblical writing, religious prose, and speech for the growing Christian community. His prose is not always simple, but it does work towards the singular and clear goal of creating a text that can be read and put to use within his community. With scriptural prose as its container, Augustine’s mode of writing is able to move between quotation and confession smoothly, blending the two into a single act of deference, praise, and encouragement.

⁴² 5.13; *delectabar sermonis suavitate, quamquam eruditioris, minus tamen hilarescentis atque mulcentis, quam Fausti erat, quod attinet ad dicendi modum.*

Chapter 2: Christian Roman Self-Identity in Proba's *Cento*

I: Optimism and the *Cento*

i: Historical Setting

Going forward, I will discuss early Christian autobiographical writing as it appears in poetic (and later, hybrid prose/poetic) forms. This shift of focus requires an initial step backwards in time, from the 390s of Augustine's *Confessions* to perhaps the 350s where we find Faltonia Betitia Proba composing her *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*. Proba's peculiar Christian writing project is rarely if ever conceived of as an experiment in life writing. The cento form uses verses of hexameter from Virgil's corpus to compose a work that uses Virgilian language but tells a new story. Ausonius, the fourth-century Bordelais poet and rhetorician whose grandson Paulinus is a later subject of my project, describes the cento form in a prose preface to his *Cento Nuptualis*: "It is an affair for memory only, to collect scattered pieces and to make whole the torn up pieces, and you are more likely to laugh at it than to praise it."¹ While Ausonius thinks of the cento as a light form, more a game for the mind than an art form deserving of praise, Proba elevates the form by centonizing the stories of the Old and New Testaments in her 694 line poem. With the verses of Virgil, Proba rewrites a scriptural source with classical material. For the purposes of this study I will focus on the confessional and autobiographical language that Proba uses within the proem to her *Cento*. Before she uses classical source material to retell a scriptural story, Proba uses her own writerly history to locate herself between Roman and Christian traditions. Once again, life writing draws upon the tensions of duality to express a sense of self-definition between traditions.

¹ Ed. Schenkl; praef. *solae memoriae negotium sparsa colligere et integrare lacerata, quod ridere magis quam laudare possis*

This chapter looks to understand not only the evolution of confessional *language* from Proba to Augustine, but also its relationship to their respective literary projects and goals, which explore in different ways the possibility of harmony between Christian and classical traditions. Proba's work lies in creating the appearance of a seamless intersection of classical Latin and Christian narratives, blending Virgilian hexameter into a retelling of the Bible. Within fifty years of Proba's Christian and classically-minded life writing, Augustine writes his *Confessions*-- a text that not only renounces certain aspects of the classical Latin canon and Virgil specifically,² but also forsakes poetic form in an effort to imitate Scripture on a formal level.

ii: Proba and Augustine

This chapter will explore an element of life writing that occurs within the proem to Proba's *Cento*. The introductory proem consists of the first 55 lines of Proba's own verse, and the proem begins with Proba's life writing. She recounts the subjects of her earlier works: battles, kings, and wartorn cities. In her only use of the verb *confiteor*, she closes out the description "I confess, I wrote these things. It is enough to remember the evils."³ Then, she turns to God, begging that her heart be opened "so that I, Proba, can tell all mysteries of the poet."⁴ She rejects classical imagery--princes, Penates, tripods wreathed in laurel--and declares that she will relate the story from its beginning, praying for God's aid in her task. Once again, she returns to the material of her earlier works: "For, I shall say, I used to sing about spectacles of silly things, always horses and arms of men and battles, and I wanted to work with zeal on that empty

² See *Confessions* 1.13

³ CSEL 16 ed. Schenkl. l. 8; *confiteor, scripsi: satis est meminisse malorum*

⁴ l. 12; *arcana ut possim vatis Proba cuncta referre*

task.”⁵ However, she writes, a greater plan arrived to her, and she began to work on something much more profound. Here, the proem ends, as Proba implores her audience to gather and listen to her Virgilian retelling of scripture.

Throughout the proem, Proba is not yet centonizing the work of Virgil but creating her own verse. The most autobiographical elements of the work occur here, in a space where Proba can truly claim authorship and control over a text that otherwise appears to be completely Virgilian. Her description of her past work is immediate within this passage, opening her *Cento* by describing the content of her early writings:

Long ago, [I wrote] about leaders who dishonored sacred treaties of peace, wretched men held by a dire lust for rule, countless murders, bloody wars of kings, kindred battle lines defiled by the blood of a parent, and distinguished shields, and trophies from no enemy, triumphs sprinkled with blood borne by their fame, cities often deprived of innumerable citizens.⁶

It is striking that, when Proba discusses features of her life in this passage, including the themes of her past work, she does with an eye to her status as a writer. Where Augustine writes the autobiography of a man writing an autobiography, Proba’s life writing is that of an author exploring her own story and the meaning of an emergent composition through the previous work she has produced. Both Augustine and Proba privilege their authorial status in defining and presenting themselves. Both self-consciously attend to their own writing as a facet of autobiography. But each writer contends with their identity as an author in different ways. As I have shown, Augustine’s metatextual descriptions of the complexity and profundity of writing allow him to use his pen as a vehicle for expressing the deeply personal and paradoxically

⁵ l. 47-49; *namque—fatebor enim—levium spectacula rerum / semper equos atque arma virum pugnashque canebam / et studio incassum volui exercere laborem.*

⁶ l. 1-7; *Iam dudum temerasse duces pia foedera pacis, / regnandi miseros tenuit quos dira cupido, / diversashque neces, regum crudelia bella / cognatasque acies, pollutos caede parentum / insignis clipeos nulloque ex hoste tropaea, / sanguine conspersos tulerat quos fama triumphos, / innumeris totiens viduatas civibus urbes*

ineffable act of confession. Proba, on the other hand, is concerned with explaining the *content* of her previous works as opposed to utilizing the act of writing as a metatextual reference. For Proba, metatextuality is not an allusion to the vehicle of the pen, but an exploration of her writerly history, describing her past in terms of her previous work as a writer. The scope of Proba's life writing is therefore quite different from that of Augustine. As opposed to the 13 books of prose produced in *Confessions*, autobiography is contained to the proem of the *Cento*, and the life writing concerns Proba's history as a writer and a Christian.

As different as the life writing of the *Cento* is from that of *Confessions* in respect to form, these two examples of Early Christian autobiography both contain certain threads that will run through the genre. Both texts deal with the ideas of imitation and imitability, for instance, and to a common instructive purpose. While the *Cento* and the *Confessions* work from a model of scripture, and, in Proba's case, Latin poetic canon, they also use the act of life writing as a call to encourage further imitation from potential converts.

An element of duality is also central to both texts, which represent a synthesis of two seemingly disparate ideas. At the center of Augustine's project are interworking confessions of the pen and the heart, representative of his interior and outward-facing act, moving spiritually inward while also locating Augustine along the ascetic tradition of scriptural reference. For Proba, the *Cento* is a product of dual hypotexts-- each representing a traditional type of writing, one biblical, the other epic. As she balances scriptural and Virgilian hypotexts, Proba creates a piece of writing that locates itself within the ideals of each respective source, using that duality to express the optimistic convergence of Roman and Christian literature. By synthesizing both hypotexts into one poem, Proba is affirming her allegiances to both traditions, and beckoning her

reader to do the same. In stark contrast to Augustine, whose prose is laden with scriptural reference and freely admonishes secular poetry, Proba begins in dual source texts, builds her poem out of the stuff of Virgilian hexameter, and constructs the meaning of her story from scripture. While acknowledging an appreciation for the material form of Virgil's writing—going so far as to use the poet's own words—Proba creates the content of her piece from scriptural sources. These dynamics of her composition compel the reader to revere and demonstrate Proba's reverence for an aspect of each hypotext.

II: Imitation and Duality

As discussed in the previous chapter, Augustine's form of confessional life writing depends on multiple levels of imitation. He imitates scriptural language as he prays to God and describes his past, but also frames his conversion experience as a performance of imitation of the life of Saint Anthony, and upon the act of conversion itself. Proba's *Cento* also uses imitation to situate itself within a tradition, although it locates itself in a world that is less black-and-white than Augustine's engagement with scripture and reaction to scripture. With both Bible and Virgil as hypotext, the *Cento* expresses the confluence of Christian and Latin traditions.⁷ Ascetics such as Augustine will work against the tradition of Virgil, arguing instead for fully Christianized literature.⁸ Proba's project, in contrast, is to show that Virgil "sang the pious deeds of Christ."⁹ By balancing the Epic and the Christian, Proba eschews the extremism of ascetic rejection and

⁷ For a discussion of hypotext and hypertext within the *Cento*, see Cullhed, 15-16.

⁸ Augustine is critical of Virgil, questioning why he bemoaned the death of Dido when he himself was dying, and maintaining that the *Aeneid* is a vain study, because it is untrue. See 1.13. Augustine is not the only opponent of literary forms that blend Roman and Christian traditions. In a letter to Paulinus of Nola, Jerome critiques a centonist who may be Proba herself. See Jerome Ep. 53.

⁹ l. 23; *Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*

instead invites Virgilian readers into a reimagined vision of both hypotexts as inextricable from the other, acknowledging the high status of each by centonizing one into a story of the other. Where Augustine's imitative tradition is straightforward and practical, placing the writer within the ranks of fellow Christians by relying on the power of scriptural text to invoke religious conversion, Proba's imitation situates her in a much more complex literary position. Augustine, the ascetic, operates from a tradition of Christianity alone, and writes a conversion text that has purely religious focus. However, Proba's dual hypotexts juggle the Roman and the Christian, creating a confused and questioning form of double imitation. Instead of writing herself into a solely Christian tradition, the use of Virgil to rewrite scripture allows Proba to express the view of a person who is not willing to disavow or devalue either their spiritual beliefs or their non-Christian literary heritage. As a tool that places the author within their desired tradition, imitation is an especially authorial act, because it shows Proba as a writer who is not ready to sacrifice her belief in literature for her belief in God.

Aside from the use of dual hypotexts, Proba's proem, which deals with some specifics of her own life and her history as a writer, confronts questions of autobiography as it interacts with form. In close readings of Proba's life writing and addresses to her audience, I am hoping to engage with questions of poetic form and voice. What does Proba's use of hexameter do for the genre of life writing? And then, what does her dependency on poetry written by someone else do to her ability to tell her own life story? Drawing upon the framework of confession that I built within my previous chapter, I will use Proba's work in counterpoint to that of Augustine. While her imitative nature serves to situate her complex ideas on the Christian and Latin worlds, her confession itself is simple, addressed to the reader, and unique within the poem. When Augustine

writes his *Confessions* in a much more straightforward imitative tradition and more intricate view of confession years later, he pushes Christian life writing away from Proba's inclusive confluence of Roman and Christian ideals.

III: Imitability and Confession

i: Recusatio

Proba's only use of *confiteor* comes at a crucial moment in her *Cento*. The text's introductory proem is the only section of the piece that is not written in centonized Virgilian verse. Here, in her own words, Proba speaks of the themes of her earlier work: "leaders who dishonored sacred treaties of peace,"¹⁰ "countless murders, the bloody wars of kings,"¹¹ and "cities often deprived of innumerable citizens,"¹² among other descriptions of bloody battle and lust for power. Proba's self-reflection is not only a picture of the time in which she was writing, but also an authorial analysis of the content of her work.¹³ Like Augustine, the sense of her life writing is concerned with the practice of writing itself-- where Augustine writes his own conversion into a tradition of religious action based in reading and writing, Proba's confession comes following this recounting of her own writerly preoccupations. Written in her own words, she describes her previous work in terms of distinctly epic themes. Already, the relationship between classical and Christian has become complex: these epic characteristics are written in *recusatio*, and yet Proba will move forward using epic language as a vehicle for Christian storytelling. While she rejects the content of the epic, she embraces its language and form as a

¹⁰ l. 1; *temerasse duces pia foedera pacis*

¹¹ l. 3; *diversasque neces, regum crudelia bella*

¹² l. 7; *innumeris totiens viduatas civibus urbes*

¹³ Cullhed describes the events of these eight lines as referring to a conflict between Constantius II and the usurper Maxentius, in which Proba's husband Adelphius was involved, 115.

container for a biblical story. Yet, these first several lines of the proem are not sourced from Virgil but written by the author. The *recusatio* is not a rejection of Virgil formed from his own words. Instead, Proba touches on epic by conjuring images that are common to the style: battle, political crisis, lust for power. She is, however, writing about the struggles that were themes of her previous work, reminding the reader of her history as an author and touching upon events of the recent past. Although she emulates epic in content, the language of these lines is her own.

Because this is the only section of the *Cento* in which Proba is not writing in Virgilian hypotext directly, and also the most specifically autobiographical piece of her work, the proem presents Proba's most authentic engagement with writing her life in her words. And in her words, she is able to forsake the content of classical epic while clinging to the effectiveness of its traditional hexameter form. While she is quick to distance herself from Virgil in respect to theme, she does not move far from him in language or style. Where Augustine rejected the secular and classical world at the level of language itself, Proba makes a distinction between form and content that allows her a more lenient position. She can write a Christian text in a classical container, because she has articulated a relationship with Latin canon that is based in formal and poetic construction and while it presents the content of the canon in *recusatio*.

As the *recusatio* shows, Proba is capable of incorporating classical language and form as a container for her work, while keeping a distinctly Christian story. The cento is an excellent tool for distinguishing between form and meaning, and allowing Proba to take formal elements from the canon while maintaining a message that moves the classical into the Christian. Within the *recusatio*, Proba is conjuring themes of Epic, and then using her writerly past to distance herself from them. Her life writing then becomes a tool by which she can locate herself between

traditions, situating the narrator between the Epic and the Christian before allowing the plot of the *Cento* to progress. In this way, Proba's life writing within the proem grounds the central theme of mediation between the dual hypotexts, by placing the storyteller's own life between the crux of these opposing traditions from the outset of the poem. Not only does the text express a sense of complex affinity for dueling customs, but as a narrator Proba's life itself lies between two, seemingly conflicted traditions of both writing and practice. In order to make sense of her place in each tradition, Proba uses her own writerly past as a means of reconciling the Epic and the Christian in her life, before moving forward to use this duality as a fundamental aspect of the poem that follows. Here, Proba's life writing is the foundation for the complex confluence of tradition that overwhelms the poem as a result of its multiple source texts. Before ever using Virgilian verse to tell a biblical story, Proba uses her own life to ground and locate the narrator as someone whose life has also been marked by engagement with the classical and the Christian.

ii: Confession

After these eight lines detailing Proba's life as a writer, she confesses directly to the reader: "I confess, I wrote these things: this is enough recollection of evils."¹⁴ Proba's confession is deeply metatextual: it deals with the near-epic content of her previous work, and recants its themes, before she moves into a story that will utilize epic language to a Biblical end. The balancing of epic story in Proba's writing, and Biblical story in epic writing, go back to Proba's place within her own, less than ascetic tradition, blending Latin cannon and Christian practice. However, this confession also marks another essential aspect of the conversion story:

¹⁴ l. 8; *confiteor, scripsi: satis est meminisse malorum*

imitation. Augustine invited imitation by demonstrating the act of confession for his readership. In contrast, Proba's confession is not addressed to God, but is written plainly for the reader. Her confession is not an act for the reader to observe and imitate, but an admission made *for* and *to* the audience. In many ways, this confession is the simplest act of Proba's self-reflective poem, which is so heavily invested in weighing the Virgilian and the Biblical to express the complexities of moderation as opposed to asceticism.

When she confesses, Proba speaks not to an omnipotent God but to her desired reader; someone who understands Virgil well enough to recognize her careful intertextual centonization, and who holds religion in high regard at the same time as admiring the language of Virgil and further, the Latin canon. Her direct address reaches towards this ideal audience, performing an act of admission as a way of welcoming them into her dual tradition of Roman poetry and Christian conversion writing. Instead of beckoning her audience by inviting them to observe, Proba reaches towards her audience personally, and invites them to sort through two literary traditions which ascetic thinkers have determined to be at odds. This direct engagement with a readership reflects the inherent confusion of being a reader of Virgil during the rise of ascetic practice in the later fourth century. Proba's ideal audience is questioning the relationship between canon and Christianity, and her confession straight to the reader is a powerful acknowledgement of their shared confusion, and an invitation for the reader to reckon with the hypertext as Proba has, with the goal of seeing something Christianizing in the language of Epic. As much as Proba's life writing serves the purpose of conversion, its concern with direct engagement highlights the work of the text as an intermediary between two traditions that have

been declared as disparate. When she confesses to the reader, Proba actively welcomes this kind of experimentation and questioning in a way that Augustine would have disregarded.

The simplicity of Proba's use of *confiteor* is compounded by its placement in the poem, where Proba is still writing in her own words as opposed to centonizing those of Virgil. The centonization begins in earnest around line 24, after Proba has declared the purpose of her project: "I shall say that Virgil sang about the pious deeds of Christ."¹⁵ First person narration does not disappear when the Cento itself begins, but under the cloak of Virgil's language Proba begins to cultivate the storyteller persona through which she will embody the poet's words. Audience address will also continue to appear, although confession remains absent in Proba's manipulation of Virgilian text. Under the layers of Virgil, Proba's subsequent engagements with her audience lack the simplicity, and therefore, the authenticity of the confession she writes at the outset of her poem, in her own words. As she moves away from both her own words and the contents of her own life, Proba's selfhood as narrator of the text becomes more complex. She will beckon her readership to listen to her story, but it is a story that she is not present within, and one written through the words of another poet. The distance between Proba and her audience after her confession serve the confusion of her authorial narrative. Where can we find the authorial self within a narrative that draws upon multiple hypotexts? This complexity is at the heart of Proba's complex location, between Roman and Christian worlds.

¹⁵ l. 23

IV: Audience Address in Virgilian Voice

i: Intratextuality

In contrast to Proba's *confiteor, scripsi* is her engagement of the audience in lines 54-55. She has explained her purpose, and, concluding the personal and autobiographical aspects of the poem, she begins to launch into biblical retelling. Addressing the potential audience for her own work, she beckons "All, quiet your mouths, and turn your happy minds, mothers and men, boys and unmarried girls."¹⁶ Whereas her previous simple confession connected to the reader by allowing him to become the audience for her confession, the command in these lines is addressed towards a prospective audience, who is described and implored to listen to Proba's tale. In the voice and the persona of a classical (even mythological) poet, Proba moves away from confession and into biblical narration colored by Virgilian language. In the borrowed lines of the *vates*, the *matres atque viri pueri* will become Proba's own shorthand for her own audience. The phrase itself comes from *Georgics* IV l. 475-6. Within the context of its source, this line refers to Orpheus' audience of souls listening to him perform in the underworld. This means that on a purely intertextual level, this passage seems to draw a parallel between the audience that meets Jesus in Jerusalem and the audience that listens to Orpheus in the underworld. Both are prophetic and semi-divine; they are even occasionally conflated in some early Christian art.¹⁷ Clearly, the intertext here can be taken at face-value, linking Jesus and Orpheus as prophets by uniting their respective audiences.

¹⁶ l. 54-55; *laetasque advertite mentes / matres atque viri innuptaeque puellae*.

¹⁷ For more on parallels between Christ/Christianity and the Orpheus myth in art, see Friedman 1967 on the Jerusalem Orpheus Mosaic and Jefferson 2014, who explores Orpheus as a possible reference point for Christ the Good Shepherd.

While this is a strong intertextual link, the *Georgics* reference does more for the *Cento* than simply parallel two divine figures. The *Georgics* IV line that Proba utilizes for this passage is a source that she will draw upon later in the poem, to describe the audience waiting for Christ upon his arrival in Jerusalem. She writes: “Mothers, men, and children threw under him many of their familiar garments, and they rejoiced to touch the ropes with their hands.”¹⁸ Proba’s equation of her own audience with those who met Christ in Jerusalem shows the higher level of complexity in her audience engagement after the proem. Not only is Christ’s audience parallel with Orpheus’ audience. It is also, through the use of the repeated *Georgics* phrase, parallel with Proba’s audience. Proba, the *vates*, turning away from the epic themes of her prior work to perform the religious act of writing piously, has now used a moderating phrase to put herself in conversation with Jesus— or, at least, to equate their audiences. I am calling this moderated self-referentiality an act of intra-intertext. A shorter work such as Proba's is often denied the privilege of drawing upon itself to create its own terms of referentiality and dynamics, and its basis is instead a lexicon of intertextuality drawn from earlier texts: Virgil and the Bible, in this case. However, through deliberately moderated use of her source material, Proba is able to create a mode of referentiality that exists *within* her poem, by relying on her poem.

While the intratextuality of *Georgics* allows the *Cento* to equate its audience with that of Jesus, the movement from proem to poem also occurs after Proba’s address of her readers in line 55. Once the audience has been acknowledged, the piece shifts from autobiography and devotional dedication to God into Biblical retelling, beginning in the creation story of Genesis. This movement in the text, from life writing to scriptural narrative, presents a formal moment of

¹⁸ l. 563-565; *cui plurima circum/ matres atque viri, pueri velamina nota/ subiciunt funemque manu contingere gaudent.*

conversion. Proba has renounced her past as a secular writer, and now she is prepared to shape her Virgilian language into a Biblical story. Echoing Proba's conversion into a Christian writer is the conversion of her text: from her own words into Virgil's, and from her own life into that of Christ. Proba's reliance on multiple literary traditions allow for this formal moment of conversion, where the narrative makes a change in subject and structure that mirrors the Christian conversion it hopes to inspire. This formal conversion comes just after Proba's address of her audience, beckoning her readers to join her right at the critical point of movement within the text.

ii: Hierarchy in Proba's Addresses

Having explored the complexities of address as they develop after the proem, I will return to the simpler address of Proba's writing in her own words to make some distinctions in regards to direct address. Early in the proem, Proba will turn to God as addressee, begging that he accept her sacred song "in order that I, Proba, may retell all the mysteries of the poet (*vatis*)."¹⁹ Another possible reading places *vatis* in the nominative, changing the sense of the line: "in order that I, Proba, a prophet, may retell all mysteries." Proba is undoubtedly aware of the double meaning within her writing, and uses this introspective passage to engage God in her authorial preoccupations. As a writer, and a person who writes about her own life, she becomes prophetic only once she has begun to address God directly. Post-confession, this passage unravels the relationship between Proba and her hypotexts. With the invocation of God, she is able to allude to her own status as a Christian writer by gesturing towards the possibility of her voice as a

¹⁹ l. 12; *arcana ut possim vatis Proba cuncta referre*. For a discussion on the multiple meanings of this passage, see Cullhed, 119-120.

prophetic one. In Proba's act of confession, which invoked the audience as addressee, she was merely "recollecting" (*meminisse*) the past. Her *recusatio* of epic themes, and of her own pre-Christian writing, can be remembered and retold for an audience. Once she is in direct conversation with God, praying that he accept her *carmen*, she gains a subtle prophetic power through the double meaning of line 12, and she gains the power to "retell all mysteries."

Although she confesses directly to her audience, Proba nevertheless gains the ability to tell her story from her engagement with God. While Proba is interested in incorporating Latin cannon into religious writing, this distinction makes it clear that she is not elevating Virgil to a place of religiosity, but utilizing his language as a way of signifying the cannon's literary and cultural importance. Virgil is an essential piece of Roman literary history, and as a Roman writer, Proba works to acknowledge that. At the same time, the religiosity of her act is a product of her relationship with God. The Virgilian and scriptural hypotexts to the *Cento* are therefore each given merit in their own place: Proba takes the literary, cultural, and historical from Virgil, but her ability to tell a story in the first place comes from God. Therefore it is not just the piety of the action, but the action itself, that stems from a place of Christian devotion.

V: Tradition and Audience

Imitation represents the writer's position within a tradition of writing-- for Augustine, this prioritizes purely Christian conversion writing, and for Proba, it devises a balancing act between the religious and the literary. In the sense that imitation looks backward in time to situate the text, imitability looks forward by asking the audience to respond to life-writing by utilizing it to inform their lives. With imitation and imitability as two core concerns of Early

Christian conversion writing, it becomes clear that as much as conversion-driven texts are geared towards an audience, they are also filled with the writers' preoccupations with *how* this kind of text ought to be written. Life writing is by definition a self-selective process, as are the choices the writer makes in order to sharpen their life story into a conversion tool.

Not only is the content of life writing self-selective, but in Proba's case, so is the location of this life writing at the outset of her poem, in her own verse. By using the *recusatio* to place herself within the crossroads of the Christian and the classical, Proba enters the poem as a poet who has the autobiographical experience to further build upon the relationship between these dual sources. Proba is using her life writing to comment upon the duality that surrounds her. Duality is another essential aspect of the Early Christian autobiographical act, and Proba's contribution stands in comparison to Augustine's use of life writing to distinguish between the heart and pen confessions respectively, a practice that often delves into paradox and verges upon the ineffable. Where duality drives Augustine into complex descriptions of the indescribable, Proba commits her text to producing one document that reconciles seemingly opposing traditions. Proba's introductory life writing allows for this kind of mediation, where duality is synthesized into a singular account.

Viewed against the background of the rise of asceticism in the late fourth century, Augustine's conversion-driven, thirteen book text and Proba's 600 line centonization of Virgil into Biblical text clearly come from different writerly impulses, priorities, and methods of inviting conversion. Although quite different in process, both are texts that invite the reader to respond with an increased religious conviction. As two Early Christian conversion texts from roughly the same time period, they show the importance of self-reflection and lived experience

as a model within the mid-to-late fourth century. As Christianity rises in popularity and asceticism booms, it becomes important for the audience to see an example of a life lived within the texts that seek to convert them. That life may be confused and muddled like Proba's, or placed within a simple tradition and expressed in a complex way like Augustine's. Either way, the example is a life that engages with both literary tradition and conversion, in order to invite the same from the reader.

Chapter 3: Eucharisticon as a Sacramental Act

I: Dualities-- Material and Spiritual

i: Augustinian Legacy

In a sermon on the symbolism and meaning of the Eucharist, Augustine writes “These are called sacraments, brothers, because one thing is seen in them and another is understood. What is seen has a physical likeness, what is understood has spiritual fruit.”¹ In the Eucharist, what is *seen* is the bread, and what is *understood* is the body of Christ, and further, the body of the church. The sacramental act contains both the physical (*quod videtur*: what is seen) and the spiritual (*quod intelligitur*: what is understood). As I discussed in the previous chapter, Augustine explores a similar tension between the material and the mystical through his life writing using the tool of confession to God: while he confesses with his heart in an ineffable, complex way, he also represents confession on the page for an audience to absorb and enact for themselves. The Pauline tension between *flesh* and *spirit* pervades the work of Augustine, and this embodies the duality of sacrament, as he refers back to Paul within this sermon in order to explore the church as the body of Christ: “If therefore you are the body and limbs of Christ, your own mystery is placed upon God’s table. You receive your own mystery. You respond “Amen” to what you are, and by responding, you subscribe.”² The sacrament of the Eucharist embodies this essential Pauline duality through Augustinian analysis. This tension manifests in *Confessions* as the interrelated operations of the *heart* and the *pen*. However, the mystical and the material also hold a place within sacramental acts, as described in the sermon.

¹ PL 38 ed. Migne. Sermon 272; *Ista, fratres, ideo dicuntur Sacramenta, quia in eis aliud videtur, aliud intelligitur. Quod videtur speciem habet corporalem, quod intelligitur fructum habet spirituale.*

² *Si ergo vos estis corpus Christi et membra, mysterium vestrum in mensa Dominica positum est: mysterium vestrum accipitis. Ad quod estis, Amen respondetis, et respondendo subscribitis.*

In Augustinian terms, *form (speciem corporalem)* and *spirit (fructum spiritualem)* are dual aspects of ecclesiastical sacraments that would also appear to map onto his vision of autobiographical composition. For this study, the question remains whether Augustine's late antique heirs in life writing are as concerned with these same Pauline tensions and dualities of flesh and spirit, pen and heart.

This chapter will pursue this line of inquiry through an investigation into Paulinus of Pella's *Eucharisticon*, written in Latin in 459 (about 60 years after the *Confessions*).³ In 616 lines of verse, Paulinus--a Roman nobleman writing from Bordeaux--details the events of his life in thanks to God. The *Eucharisticon* reveals itself as a poem of thanksgiving from its very title, but as I will show in this chapter, it also contains elements of the Eucharistic duality between what is *seen* and what is *understood*, a duality that maps onto the difference between the words on the page and their spiritual significance. I argue that Paulinus performs a sacramental act in creating a poem of spiritual thanksgiving (*εὐχαριστία*) out of what appears to be ephemeral material (*ephemeris*). In Paulinus' phrasing, the *carmen* becomes an *obsequium*, an act of earthly learning functions as a devotional offering to God (praef). This chapter will track a number of dualities that appear in Paulinus's text and that complement the central tension between form and meaning: opposition between various descriptions of the poem's form within the preface, between Greek and Latin,⁴ and other allusions to duality as they relate to the history of Paulinus' education. These "duplexities" may be particular to Paulinus's text, but as I claim, they are also representative of a wider writerly preoccupation with the tension between form and meaning that is heightened in Augustinian autobiography, where it manifests in the symbols of pen and heart.

³ See Moussy, 17-18 for dating of the poem.

⁴ i.e. the *doctrina duplex* at l. 81

Paulinus' participation in an Augustinian tradition of life writing, which stresses a duality between the fleshly and spiritual word, calls attention to among the most central oppositions in his project: the fact that he has chosen to pattern his autobiography around Augustine's prose *Confessions*, but to do so in verse. This chapter therefore offers an answer to the question of what is special about the poetic form of Paulinus's work: versifying his life-writing becomes the ultimate mode of engaging with the questions of material and mystical that preoccupy Augustine. Paulinus is able to carry fundamentally Augustinian ideas within a text that appears, due to its form, to have little to do with Augustine's manner of writing. Because the *Eucharisticon* holds the duality of what is *seen* and what is *understood*, the tension of opposites is central to the text. Poetry in its artificiality and worldliness seems to represent the opposite of the sincerity and the spirituality that Paulinus intends to convey. The *quod videtur* of the poem is its poetic, non-biblical form, which includes an erudite and bilingual vocabulary as well as intertextual references. The poem's meaning is its *quod intelligitur*, which pursues Augustinian ideas of sincerity and spirituality, and the acknowledgement of God's grace. The distance between Paulinus' form and meaning produces other themes of duality throughout the work, including discrepancies in descriptions of form within the preface, engagement with both Latin and Greek, as well as references to dual paths throughout Paulinus' education.

Paulinus draws attention to his own discomfort with his poetry, a reckoning with the act of writing itself which calls to mind the pen and heart dichotomy of Augustine's *Confessions* as I described in my first chapter. However, the discomfort with poetry goes further than simply alluding to Augustine's formal struggles in writing about his life, as Paulinus is also utilizing the form of his piece to further Augustine's vision of the twofold act of the sacrament. If this piece is

capable of using the duality of form and meaning to represent Eucharistic liturgy, what does it mean for a poem to be *eucharistic*? By putting forth something that is poetic and secular in form, but Christian and Augustinian in nature, Paulinus gives his readers something that is *seen* and something that is *understood*.

ii: Summary of the Eucharisticon

Prologue	Paulinus explains his intention to write a poem of thanksgiving addressed to God in the style of <i>ephemeris</i>
ll. 1-50	Paulinus is born at Pella, his family travels to Carthage for his father's work under a Prefect. The family visits Rome and Bordeaux, where Paulinus meets his grandfather Ausonius.
ll. 51-112	Paulinus, who speaks Greek with the servants, begins his bilingual education, reading Homer, Virgil, and Socrates.
ll. 52-154	Paulinus falls ill, his education is put on hold and he develops a distaste for study. Because of his ill health Paulinus' father allows him a life of leisure which includes hunting and horse racing.
ll. 155-175	As he grows older, Paulinus has sexual relationships with servants, and becomes the father of a <i>spurius</i> who dies soon after birth.
ll. 176-225	Aged twenty, Paulinus is married to an heiress. He takes control of her estate and lives lavishly.
ll. 226-267	When Paulinus is thirty, his father dies. Barbarians invade and wreak havoc on Paulinus' estate. While grieving his father, Paulinus contends with his brother's desire to contest their father's will, which included benefits for Paulinus' mother. His own fortune is left vulnerable by rumors of his wealth.
ll. 268-327	Paulinus regrets not having escaped to the East at this point, where he owns estates. Paulinus' own home is exempt from hosting Gothic intruders into Gaul. He is also given an empty title by the usurper Attalus, a puppet ruler set up by Alan king Athulf. However, when the Goths retreat, they torch the city. The Gallo-Romans place blame on Paulinus as an officer of Attalus, and he is exiled from Bordeaux.
ll. 328-405	Paulinus and his family move to Bazas, which is soon besieged by Alans. A slave rebellion begins within the city walls, and as a nobleman Paulinus as a target of the mob although he remains unharmed. Paulinus, still considering Athulf a friend, and believing that he had reluctantly seized Bazas, met with the king. Athulf tells Paulinus that he cannot offer him protection, and that, in order to break free from Gothic influence, he is considering handing Paulinus over to the Goths, who are still looking to harm the Bordelaise. Paulinus offers instead to protect Bazas from the Goths himself, with Alan aid from outside the city walls. Eventually the Alans retreat, although Bazas nevertheless escapes the clutches of the Goths.
ll. 405-488	Paulinus considers moving to family property in Greece and Epirus. Freed from material wealth, Paulinus begins to appreciate immaterial goodness, praising God's grace. He experiences conversion and receives the sacrament. Wanting to move to his Eastern properties, he is hindered by his wife's unwillingness.
ll. 489-516	Paulinus' mother, mother-in-law, and wife die. His sons return to Bordeaux in hopes of recovering some of the family's property amid the Gothic settlers. One son, a priest, dies suddenly, and many of Paulinus' possessions are stolen by Goths. The other son becomes friends with a king, although he soon angers the ruler.
ll. 517-581	Paulinus settles in Marseille on a family estate. As he ages and his health worsens, so do his fortunes. He considers returning to Bordeaux but remains in Marseille. He relies on aid from his wealthy sons, alternately lamenting his poverty and thanking God. Suddenly a Gothic settler offers

	to pay Paulinus for an estate of his, freeing him from poverty and dependence on family.
ll. 582-616	Paulinus ends by praising God for rewarding his devotion and prays for God to aid him when he confronts the prospect of death.

iii: Approaches to Paulinus

Critical approaches to Paulinus' poem have not yet seen the *Eucharisticon* as a work based in the Augustinian and Pauline duality of the Eucharist. In his classic literary history of ancient autobiography, Georg Misch sets a standard for viewing the *Eucharisticon* as a work of more historical than literary value: "The contents are what matters, and as they are of value as history the autobiography becomes of greater importance than its author."⁵ Following Misch, studies of Paulinus have focused almost solely on the poem as a primary historical source rather than as a piece of literature. Many seem to concur with Misch that the work is "without any sort of greatness or passion" and relegate it to simple recollection of fact.⁶ Misch goes so far as to state that "in considering his autobiography [Paulinus] thought neither of Augustine nor of Paul,"⁷ and instead focused on the "distinguished men" whose work he describes in his prologue.⁸

Following in this tradition, twentieth century scholars will continue to discuss the historicity of the *Eucharisticon* without delving into its poetics. Pierre Courcelle notes that Paulinus places himself within the tradition of Augustine by drawing parallels between the events of their lives. Focusing on the events of the first half of the poem, both Courcelle and more recently Altay Coskun have connected Paulinus' journey with that of Augustine within

⁵ Misch, 676.

⁶ Misch, 672. See also Coskun, Osgood, McLynn.

⁷ Misch, 673.

⁸ *Inlustres viri*. I will discuss the idea of these "distinguished men" and the extent to which Paulinus is emulating their work later in this chapter.

Confessions. Paulinus is born in Pella, but his family travels to Carthage and Rome, as well as Bordeaux where Paulinus meets his famous grandfather, the poet and rhetorician Ausonius. Coskun and Courcelle both argue that Paulinus' path between the beginning of his education around line 50 until the arrangement of his marriage around 200 parallels specific events that occur in Augustine's life-writing as he chronicles his younger years. Both Augustine and Paulinus focus on their childhood troubles with school and learning, face their own lust as an obstacle to conversion, and become fathers out of wedlock, although Paulinus' *spurius* dies several days after birth. Coskun draws parallels between the concern of the authors' parents for their respective children's educations, and sees Paulinus' childhood dislike of Latin as an echo of Augustine's distaste for Greek.⁹ These parallels exist mainly on the first half of the poem, as the detail with which Paulinus accounts the subsequent years of his life will wildly vary, from the specificity of his communications with Athulf while protecting the city of Bazas from Gothic control, to the relative ambiguity of his reports of old age, in which he appears to rely on his sons and extended family for financial support.

While Courcelle is willing to concede the parallels between the early lives of Paulinus and Augustine, he does not see the *Eucharisticon* as a text worthy of further literary analysis. He writes "While he pretends to paint his inner life, Paulinus is barely capable of aligning successive events."¹⁰ Even Claude Moussy, who produced the critical edition *Paulin de Pella: Poème D'Action de Grâces et Prière*, notes that Paulinus has a "*saveur particulièrement augustienne*" while adding "it must be recognized, Paulinus' poem is only a pale imitation of Augustine's

⁹ Coskun, 296

¹⁰ Courcelle 1963, 211; *Tout en prétendant peindre sa vie intérieure, Paulin est tout juste capable d'aligner des événements successifs*.

autobiographical work.”¹¹ Although his work on Paulinus has been more recent, Altay Coskun has also neglected any critical analysis of Paulinus’ poetry, preferring instead to provide event-by-event comparisons between *Eucharisticon* and *Confessions*.¹² While the comparisons of experiences in the two autobiographical texts opens our eyes to Paulinus’s intimate familiarity with Augustine’s autobiography, such analysis falls short of appreciating the complex methods in which Paulinus draws upon Augustinian ideas to create an exploration of poetry and autobiography as sacramental acts-- one that stresses the distinction *what is seen* and *what is understood* to express the essential duality of material and mystical that is essential to both texts and to the developing understanding of Christian life they espouse.

II: Reading the Eucharist

i: Preface: Tensions between form and function

Eucharistic liturgy depends on the duality of the bread and body, and Paulinus constantly deploys dualist motifs in order to invoke the sacramental act through the composition of his poem. From its opening prose preface, his work introduces correlatives of narrative and meaning, form and content, Latin and Greek that set up the pervasive theme of duality that will become a key component of Paulinus’ project. In what follows, I offer a close reading of the preface with the goal of explaining how Paulinus lays out there some of the fundamental tensions of form and meaning by relying on pairs of words from different linguistic traditions to express his distinct spiritual and material writerly intentions. In short, Paulinus attempts to define his work bilingually: he uses Greek words to explain what his work will do in Latin. By defining the

¹¹ Moussy, 20-21; *Mais, il faut le reconnaître, le poème de Paulin n’est qu’une pâle imitation de l’oeuvre autobiographique d’Augustin*

¹² See especially 295-299.

parameters of his literary task in terms of Greek categories, while choosing to compose his poem in Latin, I argue that Paulinus creates tension between the form and function of his work.

Throughout the preface, Paulinus describes his poem generally as an *opusculum*, but more specifically as a *eucharisticon*, a poem of thanksgiving. Although this Greek loan word as a small history in the Latin language (cite whatever it is), the language of *eucharisticon* is more prominently related to the Greek New Testament and emergent liturgical practices. If this mode of literary prayer accounts for the function of the ensuing poem, Paulinus has different words to say about its form. He says that it has been written “within the narration of a diary.”¹³ It will come in the form of an *ephemeris*-- a form he attributes to “illustrious men” who, because of their virtue, have “handed down for posterity a diary written in their own words.”¹⁴ This type of text is mentioned twice in Plutarch in conjunction with the diaries of famous men. In *Alexander*, he writes that the ruler “often, for entertainment, hunted fox and birds, as can be gotten from his diaries (*ἐφημερίδων*).”¹⁵ Plutarch also refers to Caesar’s *Commentaries* as an example of *ἐφημερίς*.¹⁶ Undoubtedly these are the types of texts Paulinus is referencing when he points to the diaristic writing of famous men, left for posterity. It is possible he also has Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* in mind here, a similarly personal journal of sorts that begins by giving thanks to people who influenced the emperor’s life.

¹³ CSEL 16 ed. Brandes. Praef. 1; *sub ephemeridis meae relatione*

¹⁴ Praef. 1; *ad perpetuandam... ephemeridem... conscriptam memoriae tradidisse.*

¹⁵ *Alexander* XXIII, ed. Perrin. πολλάκις δὲ παίζων καὶ ἀλώπεκας ἐθήρενε καὶ ὄρνιθας, ὡς ἔστι λαβεῖν ἐκ τῶν ἐφημερίδων.

¹⁶ Referring to a battle fought on the Rhine: “Concerning the battle that was happening with them, Caesar writes in his diaries (*ἐφημερίσι*)...” *Caesar* XXII; *περὶ δὲ τῆς πρὸς τοῦτους γενομένης μάχης ὁ μὲν Καῖσαρ ἐν ταῖς ἐφημερίσι γέγραπεν...*

Paulinus is distinct from these “illustrious men,” he insists, because he is writing for a different reason altogether.¹⁷ Although his “little work” (*opusculum*) will be similar in subject (i.e. it will contain data about his life), he writes to show a life shaped by the influence of God’s grace. Already, Paulinus places his project within a different realm from the great memoirs of famous men and, as a result, takes on a paradoxical quality: his *opusculum* will *look* like a narrative diary, but will be simultaneously at odds with *ephemeris*. What is more, Paulinus ultimately will not produce a work that looks like the *ephemerides* that he describes in the preface, since he will write in verse.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Paulinus states that his *opusculum* is written in the form of an *ephemeris*, but that he is utilizing the form in order to create a work with a different purpose: “I, who bore in mind that I owed my whole life to God, should show that all my doings of my life are also devoted to his inclinations.”¹⁹ The *subject* of Paulinus’ little work diverts from its classical *form* through the distinction between his goals and his construction.

In the preface, then, Paulinus creates a complex lexicon of types of writing and categories of discourse (*eucharisticon*, *ephemeris*, *libellus*) in an effort to define the work that his poem will do. These words, classicizing and Christian, Greek and Latin, align Paulinus’ poem with multiple canonical traditions, and provide competing, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory frames for interpreting the functions of the ensuing piece. In this way, Paulinus’ apparently disparate and bilingual descriptions of the form and the objective of his life-writing are suggestive of a writerly tension that parallels Augustine’s heart and pen motif, or Paul’s flesh-and-spirit lines of thought. His writing may *seem* to correspond to the daily diaries of

¹⁷ Praef. 1; *A quorum me praestantissimis meritis tam longe profecto quam ipsa temporis antiquitate discretom non utique ratio aequa consilii ad contexendum eiusdem prope materiae pousculum procavit*

¹⁸ I will explore further the tradition of *ephemeris* in poetry later in this section.

¹⁹ Praef. 2; *totam vitam meam deo debere meminisssem, totius quoque vitae meae actus ipsius devotos obsequiis exhiberem*

militaristic and political heroes, but in fact it contains a spiritual message (the true content of his *opusculum*) about the grace and divine mercy that are typical of the developing tradition of Latin Christian life writing.

Diving more deeply into the individual histories of and relationships between *ephemeris* and *eucharisticon* reveals the ways in which these words further exemplify the correlatives of *form* and *meaning* within the landscape of Paulinus' poem. The impermanent, fleeting *ephemeris* has secular and imperial standing, as well as history as a foreign form to the Latin poetic tradition. For a handful of classical poets, it represents quintessentially unpoetic type of writing, a simple report of facts written on wax tablets that stands in opposition to the complex and emotional expressions of verse. Propertius, an Augustan-era Latin elegist, uses the word to describe the ledgers of an avaricious man. Musing on what may have happened to a set of misplaced wax tablets (*tabellae*), presumably intended for love poems, he writes: "Now some greedy man is writing his accounts on them and putting on them his unrefined ledgers (*duras ephemeridas*)."²⁰ The *rationem* that makes up the contents of this *ephemeris* contrasts with the lustful, poetic messages that Propertius attributes to the tablets when he was their owner.

The word finds its place within poetry as a type of distinctly unpoetic writing again in Ovid's *Amores*. Ovid also contrasts his own writing on wax tablets, lovely and poetic, with a type of *ephemeris*. Where he once wrote his loves upon these "troublesome tablets" (*difficiles tabellae*), they "more fitly would hold a chattering bail-bond of wax, which some judge would read in unrefined tones, and better they should lie among ledgers (*ephemeridas*), in which a greedy man weeps for spent wealth."²¹ Again, the type of writing associated with *ephemeris* is *durus*--

²⁰ Prop. 3.23, ed. Hayworth; *his aliquis rationem scribit avarus/ et ponit duras inter ephemeridas.*

²¹ Ov. Am. 1.12, ed. Kenney; *aptius hae capiant vadimonia garrula cerae,/ quas aliquis duro cognitor ore legat/ inter ephemeridas melius tabulasque iacerent,/ in quibus absumptas fleret avarus opes*

an unrefined work done by greedy (*avarus*) men. In the language of Golden Age poetry, an *ephemeris* is impermanent, inconsequential list-making pitted at odds with the making of poetry.

Paulinus then chooses a word with poetic resonance to describe his efforts in verse, but one that the poetic tradition had used to define its antithesis, that is plotless, list-like reporting. By employing the language of *ephemeris* within the preface to describe his ensuing poetic memoir—a form that could not be expected from this description of the work— Paulinus suggests again that a certain contradiction of terms, a distinct duality, underwrites his project. It is superficially poetic, and yet fundamentally unpoetic. When Paulinus tells his reader in the preface that his *eucharisticon* will come masked (*sub relatione*) as an *ephemeris*, he suggests that a bland report in prose will follow and yet, what he provides is no mere list, and in fact hundreds of lines of classical verse. The central paradox to appreciate from this confusing subversion of the *ephemeris* form is that Paulinus considers his text both poetry and not.

While *ephemeris* emphasizes thoughtless listing of action, Paulinus describes the true essence of his work as a *eucharisticon*-- a poem of thanksgiving. The language of *eucharisticon* deepens an association between the true *content* of Paulinus' work and the themes of grace and mercy that are prevalent in Augustine.²² Although also a formal and Greek word describing the

²² Augustine's relationship with giving thanks within *Confessions* is described in terms of *gratia*-- thanks for God's gifts, as in I.20: "My God, I give thanks to you for your gifts, but keep them safe for me. Thus you will keep me safe, and what you gave to me will be augmented and perfected., and I myself will be with you, because you gave to me the fact that I exist." *deus meus, gratias tibi de donis tuis: sed tu mihi ea serva. ita enim servabis me, et augebuntur et perficientur quae dedisti mihi, et ero ipse tecum, quia et ut sim tu dedisti mihi.* Within the body of the poem, Paulinus will switch from a language of *eucharisticon* to one of *grates* in expressing his thanks to God. Forms of *gratia* appear in the 616 lines of *Eucharisticon* 9 times, while the word *eucharisticon* does not make any appearances within the body of the poem (nor do any related Greek forms). In its first use, Paulinus writes "Therefore let it be permitted for me to set down your gifts in verse, and with words to pay thanks (*grates*), which, even when shut within the heart, we know lie open to you." 17-18; *Sit mihi fas igitur versu tua dona canentem/ pangere et expressas verbis quoque pendere rates.* Once he has moved from prose preface into the body of the poem, Paulinus moves past his efforts to define the efforts of his *opusculum* with Greek categories, and instead is able to utilize more Augustinian language to promote the more Augustinian concept of owing thanks for God's grace.

intentions of the poem, *εὐχαριστία* is a word with more Christian associations than *ephemeris*. The Christianizing form maintains a tension with the more classical poetics of *ephemeris*. Forms of *εὐχαριστία* are used fifteen times within the New Testament, and show a foundational link between thanksgiving and offerings to God. In a passage from Paul's 2 Corinthians on the generosity of God, *εὐχαριστία* is used to describe something given to God. God provides and multiplies both seed and bread, and in doing so multiplies the "fruits of your righteousness" (*τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν*). "In all ways enriching you to all sincerity, which achieves through us thanksgiving (*εὐχαριστίαν*) to God."²³ Once again the Eucharistic roots of Paulinus' poetic act come to the fore with the juxtaposition of *ephemeris*-- a poetic description of impermanent and unrefined writing, and *εὐχαριστία*, a Biblical expression of the act of giving thanks to God. *Ephemeris* recalls great men of militaristic order in classical prose, while the notion of poem as *eucharisticon* causes the reader to approach the poem with almost a contradictory set of expectations, indicating a Christian prayerful text. Integrating the two sets of expectations outlined by these words is an essential aspect of Paulinus' project. In reading Paulinus' poem as an expression of the poetics of the Eucharist, the juxtaposition of these contradictory forms shows the author's reckoning with the form of his work through multiple categorizations of the poem that will follow. If the dualities of the poem aim to create a discernably eucharistic work, where *what is seen* is at odds with *what is understood*, what set of expectations does a eucharistic text entail?

Critics have not given enough thought to the connections between this word and the liturgical sacrament of the eucharistic in the context of Paulinus's poem. In my view, it is

²³ 2 Corinthians 9:11 ed. Nestle Aland; *ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα, ἧτις κατεργάζεται δι' ἡμῶν εὐχαριστίαν τῷ Θεῷ*

productive to critique Paulinus's *Eucharisticon* as an act of sacramental poetry that expresses the duality of *form* and *spirit* that preoccupy Augustine's concept of confession. In her work *The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul*, Lisa Kaaren Bailey describes the Eucharistic liturgy as "an idealized expression of the consensus and the fellowship of the Christian community."²⁴ Performing the sacrament by participating in a community liturgical service highlights the essential duality of form and meaning that Augustine explores in the sermon with which I began this chapter. The Eucharistic mass enacts duality because the community itself *is* the body of Christ: by performing the sacrament, they confront their place at the center of both the *quod videtur* and the *quod intelligitur* of the Eucharist.

If the sacramental act of the Eucharist in Late Antiquity was widely acknowledged to have been rooted in this duality, the writing of a Eucharistic poem is likely also to have been concerned with the ways in which the text's form and meaning are in conversation. While critics have long viewed Paulinus' *Eucharisticon* as a simple retelling of a life, or as a 616 line shadow of Augustine's 13 book *Confessions*, the poem is deeply concerned with locating itself within the traditions of poetic cannon and Early Christian life writing by creating questions of form and content as they relate to Paulinus' predecessors in both Latin and Christian literature.

ii: Beginning of Poem: Dualities of form and action

As the poem itself begins, Paulinus begins to express a sense of duality within his life story. The overarching duality of form and meaning is echoed by the recurring dualities within Paulinus' subsequent life writing. The poem opens with Paulinus, who writes directly to God,

²⁴ Bailey, 105.

explaining the work of retelling the events of his life: “Preparing to retell the seasons of my life glided by, and to draw out the series of past days through which I have run with wavering (*ambigua*) fortune.”²⁵ Straightaway, duality is at the forefront of Paulinus’ description of the story he will tell, as his fortune is modified by the adjective *ambiguus*-- wavering or uncertain, but also twofold, or moving in two directions.²⁶ Indeed, his fortune (*sors*) has been twofold, as he has experienced both wealth and poverty, joy and suffering; but these dualities of the life story Paulinus will only serve to accentuate the greater role of opposing dualities within his narrative: those of form and function, Latin and Greek, prose and poetry, which concern the entirety of the work. As his fortune is twofold, so is the sacramental act of composing this poem, in which the idea of moving in two directions is central. Paulinus will create a narrative that highlights the ways in which he ran through his days with a twofold fortune by leaning into the *ambiguus* features of his life story. In this way, Paulinus’ construction of his life story into a narrative that dwells in the duality is his sacramental act: the *ambigua sors* expresses the Eucharistic nature of the work almost immediately with the switch from prose to poetry.

After establishing a fundamental duality at the outset of his verse, Paulinus continues to distinguish the disparate natures of his material and mystical goals. He writes “I implore you, Almighty God, be gentle to me, and breathing in my work, be favorable to an undertaking agreeable to you, granting me accomplishment (*effectum*) in my writings (*scriptis*), and success (*profectum*) in my prayers (*votis*), so that by your aid I may be worthy to traverse your gifts.”²⁷ Paulinus wishes to be granted two things from God with the production of his autobiographical

²⁵ ll. 1-3; *Enarrare parans annorum lapsa meorum/ tempora et in seriem deducere gesta dierum/ ambigua exactos vitae quos sorte cucurri*

²⁶ “*ambiguus, -a, -um.*” TLL.

²⁷ ll. 4-7; *te, deus omnipotens, placidus mihi, deprecor, adsis/ adspiransque operi placita tibi coepta secundes, / effectum scriptis tribuens votisque profectum, / ut tua te merear percurrere dona iuvante.*

poem: *effectum scriptis* (accomplishment in writings) and *profectum votis* (success in prayers). Reference to the written word and to prayer respectively highlight the pen and heart, flesh and spirit duality that Paulinus is expressing here.

The chiasmic line *effectum scriptis tribuens votisque profectum* emphasizes the interrelated nature of *effectum scriptis* and *votis profectum*, as does the rhyme between the participles that begin and end the phrase. Paulinus writes that these two accomplishments are the desired outcome of his interaction with God through this poem. Once again, the dual goals he presents paint a larger picture of Paulinus' balanced ideas of his material writing (*scriptis*) and the deeper meaning it inspires (*votis*). The correlative nature of *effectum scriptis* and *profectum votis* lies more in the indirect than the direct objects.²⁸ The substantive participles, with their shared root and sonic similarities, form similar canvasses onto which the nature of their respective nouns paint different pictures using the same color. Paulinus desires a sense of accomplishment in respect to both the words written on his page and the prayers that lie behind them. In much the same way that Augustine's sense of confession contained both pen and heart, delving into paradox as a way to express the complicated and interrelated nature of these ideas, Paulinus wishes to distinguish these dually important aspects of his own work. He hopes for some success in his material *writing*, which will hinge upon his use of form and the poetic nature of his work. His other goal for his writing has nothing to do with the way it looks or sounds, but the meaning it carries and its reception by God, his addressee.

The duality of *poem* and *prayer* becomes sharper within the opening lines of the poem when Paulinus makes the distinction "Therefore let it be permitted for me, singing, to set down

²⁸ *Effectum* and *profectum*, from *efficio* and *proficio* respectively, not only share a root, but *TLL* also uses *effectum* in its entry defining *profectum* (1676).

your gifts in verse, and also to pay thanks expressed in words.”²⁹ On the one hand, he refers to the material and poetic output of his work, which is sung (*canentem*) and prepared in verse (*versu*). On the other, Paulinus leans on his need to give thanks (*grates*), essentially contained not in the ornament of versified language but simply in words (*verbis*). Paulinus’ offering is therefore both something sung in verse, and something expressed simply in words. Once again the form and the nature of his *Eucharisticon* seem to be both *poetry* and *not poetry*.

iii: Paulinus the Student: Double Learning, Double Truths

Perhaps the most literal duality of Paulinus’ life writing comes in his remembrances of his early studies. Raised in large part by servants, Paulinus’ first language was their native Greek tongue. The language of his parents, however, and of the Gallo-Roman nobility from which he is descended, is the Latin that he begins to learn only once his studies commence. In relating his studies of both Latin and Greek, Paulinus explores the ideas of dual learning and reports how he ultimately abandons scholarly pursuit in favor of a life of leisure. While Paulinus is able to eventually leave behind the *doctrina duplex*, the duplexities of his narrative, down to a fundamental linguistic level, serve the grander Eucharistic tension of his sacramental poetics. Greek is his first tongue, the language he speaks with the servants, but Latin is the language of his noble family. While Paulinus writes his *Eucharisticon* in Latin, his reach towards familiar Greek terms as a means of defining the form of his literary production is a testament to his close relationship with the language.³⁰ While it has been clear from the start that Paulinus reaches towards Greek to define the *form* and *meaning* of his writing (both *ephemeris* and *eucharisticon*

²⁹ ll. 17-18; *Sit mihi fas igitur versu tua dona canentem / pangere et expressas verbis quoque pendere grates*

³⁰ See Moussy, 37-38

fall into this category), the locus of this impulse is now rooted within his life story. Paulinus' tension between Latin and Greek can serve a Eucharistic purpose of emphasizing duality while also serving as a fundamental product of his life experience as he has written it. Constantly highlighting the dualities of his lived experience within his autobiography brings the sacramental act of producing this poem closer to the Augustinian model of contrasting what is seen with what is understood.

Early on, Paulinus is made to learn the “doctrines of Socrates,”³¹ the “war-like images of Homer,”³² and the “wanderings of Ulysses.”³³ The works of Virgil, however, bring the first mention of difficulty for Paulinus as a student: “I toiled as a boy, I acknowledge, this was too great a task for me, to understand the eloquence of books (*librorum*) in an unknown tongue.”³⁴ Where Paulinus has consistently used language of the book, its pages, and writing in order to speak to his own material writerly preoccupations, his reference to Virgil’s *liberi* stands out as something different from the diminutive *libellus* that often describes his own work. The *material* takes on a different scope within the juxtaposition of Latin and Greek in Paulinus’ years as a student. While he has often used the duality of the two languages to highlight a tension between form and function, the exploration into his studies shows the ways in which Paulinus’ autobiographical details link him to both Greek and Latin, and the incorporation of each language ties him to the traditional language of his family while still deferring to the speech of his pre-scholarly youth. This is apparent as much from the content of this section as it is from the language of previous ones: where Paulinus shows no distaste for his studies as they begin in the

³¹ l. 72; *dogmata Socratus*

³² l. 72; *bellica plasmata Homeri*

³³ l. 73; *erroresque... Ulixis*

³⁴ ll. 79-80; *unde labor puero, fateor, fuit hic mihi maior, / eloquium librorum ignotae apprehendere linguae.*

Greek authors, it is the appearance of Virgil that frustrates him, as the “unknown tongue” (*ignotae... linguae*) is difficult for him to learn. Again, the idea that Paulinus is more comfortable with Greek than with Latin brings back the form of the text that he has produced, which is written in the language of his parents and his noble relatives. His grandfather Ausonius also wrote poetry in Latin, and the composition allies him with tradition that is not just canonical but also familial. While Latin represents tradition on multiple levels, Greek remains the foundational native language of the writer. The convergence of the two tongues expresses a duality that is inherent to Paulinus himself-- a Roman elite raised by Greek servants, and a product of both environments, with deference to each.

Aside from explaining the origins of a linguistic duality within Paulinus’ own history, the passage that deals with his studies continually refers to twofold ways of life, and continuously maintains that Paulinus himself is not cut out for the *doctrina duplex*. In reference to the person skilled in their double study, Paulinus writes “This dual learning, as it is apt for those more powerful in mind and furnishes those who are skilled with a twin radiance.”³⁵ But Paulinus is not suited for the dual skill, and much like the promise of an *ephemeris*, an unpoetic and ephemeral recounting of his life, Paulinus seems to write that he falls short of the duality that he describes, while continuing to emphasize occurrences of this duality throughout his text. Just as he has shown himself to believe his text to hold two forms at once (poetry and not poetry), Paulinus seems to see himself in two lights (with and without the capability for *doctrina duplex*). The duplexity of this description is obvious, and once again points to an understanding of duality within the sacramental act.

³⁵ ll. 81-82; *Quae doctrina duplex sicut est potioribus apta / ingeniis geminoque ornat splendore peritos*

Although much of this section deals with the dual uses of Greek and Latin, Paulinus also returns to the descriptions of the physical book which dominated the preface. Paulinus begins to describe the shortcomings of his page: “Now even though I am unwilling my page produces these things, inconsiderate indeed, which I set out freely to be read, but not, I hope, shameful to me in matters of which I am trying to weave a notice in writing.”³⁶ The materiality of this language, in which the page itself (*pagina*) is responsible for the writing that Paulinus has produced, speaks to the especially writerly and formal concerns that overwhelm Paulinus’ writing.

While his page produces the story despite an unwilling author, Paulinus admits that he himself is attempting to create a *notitiam scriptis*. This notice, or idea, written in words (*scriptis*) is an apt expression for Paulinus, a writer pulled in two directions. In order to convey his idea in writing, he will have to reckon with the difficulties of expressing meaning through form. Just as Augustine sought to represent his heart-to-God confession through the writings of his pen, it is necessary for Paulinus to deal with the way construction and meaning work as a central tension of the text that depicts a relationship between the narrator and God for the public to observe and imitate. With regard to Paulinus’ poem, where the distance between form and meaning have been underscored from the prologue on, for the author to put his *concept* into *writing* is an expression of the dual nature of the sacramental act. At the same time, to express the *mystical* through the *material* is a confounding experience, and can result in a paradoxical logic as I have shown through Augustine in my previous chapter. Here instead of paradox, Paulinus forces us to dwell

³⁶ ll. 85-88; *Quod nunc invito quoque me haec mea pagina prodit, / inconsulta quidem, quam sponte expono legendam, / sed mihi non rebus, quantum confido, pudenda, / quarum notitiam scriptis contexere conor*

within the tension of two truths. He holds both the idea and the writing, acknowledges the tension, and creates a *bread* and *body* out of his work.

III: Paulinus in Context

i: Paulinus and Augustine

By placing Paulinus' *Eucharisticon* within the theological tradition of Augustine, I am aiming to draw some conclusions about the nature and trajectory of Early Christian life writing. When considered on a formal level the *Eucharisticon* may seem to be *Confessions*' opposite: a short poem in verse compared with 13 books of prose laden with biblical references and quotations. The key to understanding the relationship between these texts is the fundamental duality that is inherent to *Eucharisticon*, which has been overlooked in critical analyses.

Augustine's reckonings between text and meaning took the form of complicated paradox and descriptions of the ineffable, as his pen reached to describe for his audience the feeling of the confession as it exists between the heart and God. The same fundamental duality drives Paulinus to formulate his life writing in a way that draws attention to the opposition of form and meaning. His form and language reach towards the canonical and traditional, while his true meaning aligns the poet with Augustine and expresses deeply held Christian ideals of thanks and grace. Paulinus specifically acknowledges these dualities even down to the title he gives his text, which aligns his thinking with Eucharistic liturgy. In this way he calls attention to the tension that is inherent to a sacramental act, while putting forth a work whose construction is inherently based in the duality of sacrament.

ii: Paulinus and Proba

Tracing the lineage of Early Christian life writing to its pre-Augustinian roots, it is also important to establish a link between Paulinus and Faltonia Betitia Proba. While both writers worked in Latin verse, Paulinus includes a prose prologue while Proba's preface is also poetic. As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, Paulinus' use of form is related to his Augustinian understanding of the sacrament, whereas Proba's use of verse is a matter of the confluence of Roman and Christian traditions, which were able to coexist in a Proba's non-ascetic practice of faith. Therefore the authors arrive at poetry with different intentions, and the form of their life writing has different implications with regard to the overall meaning of their work, where Proba expresses the confusing and multitradeational landscape of the early fourth century and Paulinus, influenced by more ascetic Augustinian practice, arrives at poetry as a formal expression of duality.

Nevertheless, Proba represents the early seeds of duality within Christian life writing, and Paulinus inherits this tradition. Metatextual allusions to the process of writing are an important aspect of Proba, Augustine, and Paulinus, who is constantly concerned with defining his *opusuculum*, describing the *libellus*, and even, as in the above passage, personifying his page (*pagina*) as a discerning author itself. Clearly a foundational aspect of these texts is their need to calculate the position of the writer as someone who both puts forward a story of their own life and presents their writing as a religious act. Like Proba, a large part of this calculus for Paulinus lies in the relationship that the writer has to poetic form. Proba's goal is to reconcile two seemingly disparate source texts, creating a mediated product from the duality of hypotexts. While the correlatives of her work may be biblical source material and the traditional Latin

canon, Paulinus balances a loftier set of pairs by pairing poetry and religious confession, commenting on the relationship that *what is seen* has with *what is understood* on a broader level by encouraging a multiplicity of dualities within his writing.

In the case of Proba, the balancing of two texts produces a text that is influenced heavily by an optimistic view that the writer could make Virgil “sing the pious deeds of Christ.”³⁷ When Paulinus takes on the tradition of duality within Christian life writing, the conclusions that can be drawn about the writer’s personal relationships to poetry and religious or Scriptural writing are less evident. Instead of creating a text that serves to comment on the religious landscape of his time, Paulinus devotes himself to utilizing the form of the poem to further a sacramental act: his work is both poetry and not poetry, echoing the bread of the Eucharist. For Paulinus, the composition of the poem is itself the sacramental act, forming a complex and balanced set of dualities that express an understanding of Augustinian Eucharistic liturgy. In this way, his focus on tension within the text changes the way in which duality can be used within the context of Christian life writing. Where Proba’s dual forms were mediated into a single poem that could comment on the writer’s relationship to both of the source, Paulinus’ dualities simply exist in tension with each other, commenting on the abundance of confounding truths that he and his reader must accept in order to properly enact the sacrament.

Like Proba, Paulinus also moves from preface to poem, transitioning from his attempts to define his own work into the larger autobiographical narrative of the text. As I discussed within my chapter on Proba’s *Cento*, her movement from the original verses of life writing of the poem to the centonized Virgil of the poem itself was a conversional moment, and the text created a

³⁷ l. 23; *Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*

formal conversion that echoed the author's rejection of secular writing and transition into Christian work. In Paulinus, the shift from prose preface into poem has a similarly conversional feel, and allows the beginning of the poem to become a point of conversion within the text. For Paulinus, who subverts classical form with Christian meaning, the conversional note in his movement from prose into poetry creates another gesture towards faith through formal structure. While the Eucharistic poem builds tension between what is *seen* and what is *understood*, the shift from prose to poetry also alludes to religious conversion on a deeply formal level.

iii: Going Forward

Paulinus' *Eucharisticon* has furthered the ways in which duality can work within the context of Early Christian life writing. His poem invokes the Eucharistic bread and body, acknowledging the tension between form and meaning. As life writing enters the late antique and medieval world, the forces of duality, metatextuality, and Augustinian influence will become the foundation for Paulinus' heirs. These threads, which have been woven through autobiographical writing as early as Proba, will shape the ways in which life writing continues and thrives as Christianity cements itself in the centuries that follow Paulinus.

Conclusion: Towards a Model of Early Christian Life Writing

I: The Ascetic Intermediary

Over the century that encompasses Proba, Augustine, and Paulinus, Christian literary practice rose in popularity and blossomed across the Roman world. In this project, by focusing on one segment of developing Christian Latin literature—namely, life writing—I have tried to show that this process was not a simple one. Rather, it involved a host of complex negotiations around such topics as the relationships between flesh and spirit, form and content, Virgil and the Bible, and writing and prayer.

The Christian writers studied within this project all worked creatively to locate themselves within, and to separate themselves from, a world of multiple literary traditions. They used the composition of their texts to present their own balance of the classical and the Christian, and in the process, to present something of themselves. In my view, there is more to explore about how and why these authors use autobiographical literature to posit new visions of Christian subjectivity within new ideas about classicizing Christian culture.

These authors were hardly the only late antique figures experimenting in articulating new Christian identities and alternative Christian cultures in and for text. Monks, saints, and their hagiographers were part of this larger cultural movement as well. Model lives were an important aspect of the early proliferation of Christian practice, and many types of narratives used the course of a person's life in religious and moral ways, with the goal of encouraging the imitation of the reader. In order to distinguish the work that life writing does from that of biography and hagiography, it is necessary to look further at the ways in which stories of lives have different motives and impacts when they are told autobiographically.

In his piece “Constructions of Power in Asceticism,” Valantasis writes about the textualized performance of asceticism as an audience-driven construction of an imitable character.¹ He writes about the ways in which asceticism is performed by the subject, always in movement, striving towards an ideal. The ascetic is in a state of constant change, between “the deconstructed and constructing identity... in motion towards a new subjectivity.”² Neither participating in the abandoned popular subjectivity nor fully attaining its opposite, the ascetic writer places himself within this duality of what has been left behind and what is desired. The ascetic perspective locates itself within the terms of these dual worlds. The effect, writes Valantasis, is that within ascetic writings, “the ascetic figures as the hero, the divine guide, the miracle-worker, the superhuman enemy of the Enemy. This figured subject elicits either positive or negative modalities from the observer depending on the affinity experienced with the goal and direction of ascetical practice.”³ The observer’s reaction to the portrayal of the ascetic will also depend upon his own location between the dual subjectivities. The ascetic is an intermediary, operating between traditions and expressing this duality.

Asceticism and Life Writing

While Proba, Augustine, and Paulinus all exist to some extent within and around the ascetic expression of these dual subjectivities, they do not tend to depict themselves, as Valantasis writes, as heroes. Proba and Paulinus do not even portray themselves as traditional ascetics—but go out of their way to represent themselves in quite different religious roles as prophetess, on the one hand, pious layman (unfit for monastic service) on the other. Still, it is

¹ Valantasis, 797-799

² Valantasis, 801.

³ Valantasis, 801.

useful to think about the ways in which their experiments in life writing differ from the textual performances of hagiographical composition, and yet still embrace the duality of asceticism and make space for a negotiation between former and future self, and between spiritual and secular life, among other significant cultural dichotomies.

In contrast to a saint depicted by a third party in hagiography, who would be painted as a hero in the battle between subjectivities, when these Christian writers compose about their own lives, the valorized image of the victorious saint falls away. Authenticity and personal reflection produce a different effect than hagiography, modeling the flux of dueling subjectivities without definitively conquering them. The duality, instead, becomes mirrored within the ascetic's representations of their own life: the pre and post-conversion self, the classical and the Christian, become correlatives through which the ascetic seeks to identify himself. The material represents a process of *becoming*, which is left open and unterminated. When the life in question is the writer's own, there is something inherently active in the negotiation of dualities that is being represented. Because of this, the reader is left with a less concrete sense of the figured subject as a clear-cut literary model. He is still an intermediary, although his narrative is affected by the *openness* of writing about oneself. Life writing can never be the *full* life story, but gives the reader an authentic and personal piece of the story. The unending nature of life writing prevents the writer from being categorized in a definitive way.

By considering the duality inherent to asceticism in the context of the open, unbounded nature of life writing, I am hoping to give some framework through which the common threads I have found through my three chapters can be considered. Augustine, Proba, and Paulinus present texts in which they use their personal histories to locate themselves between two subjectivities.

The dualities that occur within my readings, as well as the writers' reliance on imitation of earlier Christian and classical traditions, are a part of their endeavor to produce works, and self-depictions, that do justice to their position and movement between different subjectivities. As much as these authors work to create pieces that show the conjoining of literary traditions in process, they also utilize their own personal histories to model the fluid dynamics of conversion and its developing effects on self-presentation. The ascetic intermediary is telling his own story, one without a definitive ending. Although the living writer cannot close the arc of his narrative, he is able to retell his own past through the post-conversion lens. Instead of presenting the audience with a valorized saint whose life is a model that reaches towards the attainment of an otherworldly subjectivity, the autobiographer puts forth his own life and relates his past in light of his eventual conversion. The lived experience and the act of conversion push the writer towards the ascetic ideal. At the same time, the autobiographer, like the ascetic, is always in motion: there is no definitive end to these stories, allowing for the author to continue living and perfecting his practice. Early Christian life writers make use of the personal in order to present a negotiation of the subjectivities of their time, using the self as a template for expressing the tensions they feel between the spiritual and secular worlds.

II: Moving Forward

I have proposed a number of readings that emphasize the tendencies of Early Christian life writing towards a sense of duality that places the author between subjectivities, drawing upon imitation of Christian and classical traditions as well as expressing personal history through a post-conversion viewpoint in ways that locate the author on a spectrum of traditions and

encourage the same identification from the audience. In order to gesture to how this sense of negotiated/fluid/transitional/overlapping subjectivities may develop and remain in play in the post-Roman centuries that follow I am applying the same set of arguments to a reading of the beginning of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Written about sixty years after Paulinus' *Eucharisticon*, the *Consolation* embodies the same search for a definitive locus between subjectivities, using its form and life writing to establish the writer's place and further expound on the relationship between dueling traditions.

Boethius

From its first lines, the *Consolation* concerns itself with a metatextual reckoning of writerly history. Augustine's metatext expresses the complex depth of confession, Proba's preoccupations with her past as an author both recall and renounce the themes of Epic, and Paulinus' preoccupations with referring to the form of his work emphasize the *Eucaristicon's* nature as a text divided between what one *sees* and what one *understands*. At the outset of his opening poem, Boethius calls upon "Poems, who I once executed with blossoming zeal."⁴ Boethius immediately recalls his past as a poet and, as Shanzer writes, the Virgilian intertextualities of these beginning lines point to Boethius' history with bucolic poetry.⁵ In a way that I have shown to be traditional for Early Christian autobiographers, Boethius is immediately preoccupied by his writerly past, and his life writing is innately concerned with retelling a writer's history.

⁴ CSEL 67 ed. Weinberger. 1.1; *Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi*.

⁵ Shanzer, 329-330.

Boethius' last work, written during his imprisonment for treason in the reign of Ostrogothic King Theodoric, opens with poetry. The muses bid Boethius to compose through his grief, and the poet beckons death to rescue him from pain and misery. Fortune has forsaken him, and the poem ends in Boethius' misery. What follows, in prose, is the intervention of Lady Philosophy. As he moves into prose, the writer describes her appearance while he writes the opening poem: "Using a pen I set down this tearful complaint, there seemed to be a woman standing over my head, her face filled me with awe."⁶ She becomes angry when she sees the Muses, who have encouraged Boethius' poetic complaints: "'Who,'" she asked, 'allowed for these theatrical harlots to come upon this sick man? They do not tend to his pain with any remedies, rather they cultivate the pain with their sweet poison.'"⁷ For Boethius, a man "nurtured by Eleatic and Academic studies,"⁸ the Muses are fatal sirens. Lady Philosophy casts them aside, and asserts that only *her* Muses will be capable of tending to the dejected Boethius.

There are several echoes of Augustine in this passage, and Chadwick calls the *Consolation* a text "written on the consciousness of Augustine standing behind the author's shoulder."⁹ The appearance of Philosophy personified recalls the appearance of Chastity at the moment of Augustine's conversion in Book 8 of *Confessions*: "For from the place in which I had turned my face, and where I trembled to go across, there was the pure worthiness of Chastity, calm and not carelessly cheerful, with virtue coaxing that I come and not hesitate."¹⁰ For

⁶ 1.1; *querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem, adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus*

⁷ "Quis," inquit, "has scenicas meretriculas ad hunc aegrum permisit accedere quae dolores eius non modo nullis remediis foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis?"

⁸ *Eleaticis atque Academicis studiis innutritum*

⁹ Chadwick, 249.

¹⁰ 8.11; *aperiebatur enim ab ea parte qua intenderam faciem et quo transire trepidabam casta dignitas continentiae, serena et non dissolute hilaris, honeste blandiens ut venirem neque dubitarem*

Augustine, who is struggling with the idea of celibacy, Chastity's encouragement toward conversion leads to the religious awakening at the heart of Book 8. The personified virtue pushes a more formal kind of conversion when she appears in the *Consolation*. Boethius' exchange with Lady Philosophy propels him from poetry into prose, converting the nature of the text and, by doing so, juxtaposing its content with the introductory poem that opens the text. Lady Philosophy proclaims that poetry and art not only be unhelpful to Boethius, but will further weaken him. Instead, only philosophical engagement will nurture his spirit.

The shift between proem and poem in Proba's *Cento*, as well as prose preface and poem in Paulinus' *Eucharisticon* dealt with ways in which formal transformation in the text can recall conversion. Proba's movement from her own verse into centonized Virgilian hexameter moved her from life writing and personal example into her lofty goal of making Virgil sing the deeds of Christ. For Paulinus, the shift from prose to poetry coincided with a departure from his overwhelming obsession with describing the form that his work will take. His engagement with the Eucharistic transforms with a description of the formal into an attempt to create the spiritual. There are similarly conversional undertones in the movement between forms in the opening of the *Consolation*. As the form changes, the content changes as well: Boethius moves from calling upon the muses and reflecting upon his past as a poet into the power of philosophy alone to cure his sickness. The poetry associated with the Muses, "theatrical harlots," is lethal even in its sweetness-- an opinion that Augustine often expresses in regards to the dangers of the secular poetry that encompassed his education.¹¹

¹¹ See Bouton-Touboulic, 198-199; "On a souligné la vigueur avec laquelle les Muses 'catins de scène' sont renvoyées par la philosophie, pour la rapprocher de la vivacité des attaques d'augustin contre le goût de Licentius pour la poésie."

Formal duality and self-conscious references to form are central to Boethius' *Consolation*, and align him with his predecessors in the field of life writing. Just as the writers of the previous century build unique relationships to textual tradition, the *Consolation* also uses form to locate the writer in a multitradeational world. None of the subjectivities of Boethius' text are explicitly Christian, although there is a distinctly Augustinian lens that can be applied to the work. Nevertheless, there is something inherently intermediary within the text's negotiation of tradition and ideals, which aligns the *Consolation* with the ascetic as defined by Valantasis; a figure constantly in transit and locating himself between the subjectivities of the culture of the masses and its opposite.

Because Boethius is a figure with massive influence throughout the Medieval and Renaissance worlds, it is possible that the dualities of form within *Consolation* allow for the traditions of Early Christian life writing to move into these later eras. Continuing to chart the impact of Early Christian modes of autobiography on Boethius' work would in turn allow for the central themes of formal duality and tension, metatextuality, and conversion through form to be surveyed in much later literature as well.

III: Bridging Close Readings and Historical Research

There are common themes that span the century in which Proba, Augustine, and Paulinus all write, which have been the focus of my three chapters. Each text utilizes, to some extent, intertextual allusions to authorial craft, tension between dualities, and concern with form. The ways in which the writers' dependence upon these themes vary speak to the diverse locations of the texts between mass culture and the ascetic ideal of anticulture. Proba's optimistic mediation

of Christian and classical hypotexts represents an ideal of Roman values within Christian practice: an optimistic convergence of tradition that comes before the peak of ascetic practice. Augustine, motivated to push his text towards an anticultural ascetic ideal, writes in a prose that aligns his work more with Scripture than with the Latin canon. The tension of his text lies in the performance of confession to God as an indescribable act that can only be approximated in paradox, profundity, and metatextual preoccupations. Motivated by ascetic predecessors such as Augustine, the lay Christian Paulinus is able to express the inherent duality of the Eucharist by creating something with ascetic ideals within the classical container of Latin verse. As Christianity becomes more widely practiced and ascetic practices are disseminated, remaining to some extent still cloistered due to their solitary nature, the ways in which life writing interacts with the convergence of traditions in Late Antiquity changes between the time of Proba and Paulinus, although the goal of the texts to rely on imitation of text and encourage imitation from their audience remains.

Autobiography is a genre that lacks definitive endings of hagiography or biography. Instead, when the author reflects upon their own life in engagement with the audience, he makes a model of his own conversion, but leaves the narrative open. When the Christian writer uses his life as an example, implicit within the shaping of his narrative is a need to present himself as a figure in flux along the divergent lines of multiple cultural traditions that exist and evolve within the Late Antique period.

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