

Marketing Mary: Synopsis

Marketing Mary is another of my linked stories which dramatize imagined characters whose lives are bound up and contend with Artificial Reproductive Technologies (A.R.T.). Mary (née Gallagher) Solomon used an anonymous sperm donor to get pregnant unbeknownst to her Jewish husband, Michael. Mary is a strong Catholic feminist, a marketing major in college with a religious studies minor, a woman who is between identities, negotiating different worlds: Catholic and Jewish, amoral, ruthless marketing professional and devout Catholic, using assisted reproductive technologies to conceive a child. All this despite her “better nature” that seeks to follow the Catholic Church’s condemnation of IVF as immoral.

Marketing Mary explores how the latest advances in Assisted Reproductive Technologies (A.R.T.) raise new but ancient questions about parenthood, lineage, and disclosure. It is a detective story with Mary investigating her own self, and how she could have made the choices she made to have a child. And it is a love story between Mary and Michael, a Catholic successful businesswoman and her playwright Jewish husband. It is about religion and science and about how we never quite know why we make the decisions we do.

We meet Mary when she is 79 years old, a successful, retired marketing executive, who is reflecting on her life and the moral crisis that still haunts her. Mary faces a *modern and moral crisis* of science vs. religion: should she tell her husband that 45 years ago she used a sperm donor to conceive their child, Hannah? Should Mary confess her “sins” to Michael after forty years in the wilderness of guilt, or will she continue to live in the shadow of her decision and concealment? And Father Ryan, now deceased, who was her confidante, mentor and “partner in crime,” who was he really? Father Ryan, who seemed to give her permission to use the sperm donor, going against the teachings of the Catholic Church, emerges as a kind of trickster figure.

It is an ancient post-modern tale that Mary tells us. How are we always selling ourselves to ourselves and to the people closest to us? Mary punishes herself for her lie, but also proudly defends her choice as a feminist one. Her older self has to live out the desires of her younger self.