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SELF, INTENTION AND CONFESSION IN
CONFESSIONS, DELIVERANCE FROM
ERROR AND CIRCUMFESSION

MA Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The central concern of this thesis is to explore the different and similar ways in which three self writers (Augustine, Ghazali and Derrida), who lived in different times in history and belong to different religious traditions tackle the problems of “self portrayal” and “truth” in their confessional works: *Confessions* (397-398), *Deliverance from Error* (1090-1100) and *Circumfession* (1989-1990). The life stories seek to display the inner world and the intellectual concerns of their authors. Since the writers construct their stories on or around their respective belief systems and the role their beliefs play in the way they conceive of themselves, Christian, Sufi and Jewish mysticisms are discussed in a separate chapter of the thesis. In the chapters focusing on the texts of the authors, the similarities but mainly the differences in the way each writer approaches “religion”, “truth” and “world” are discussed.

The chapter on the *Confessions* analyzes Augustine’s self portrayal in the context of Augustine’s intentions and his commitment to Christianity. Here, the significance of God’s grace and other Christian dogma for Augustine are studied with references to the text. In the section on Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error* discussions concentrate on the performative nature of Ghazali’s writing and the way his intention erases the private self of the writer and gives the readers an account of the struggles of a Sufi believer on the way to Truth. Derrida’s *Circumfession* is shown to be a multilayer text in which Augustine’s *Confessions*, Bennington’s *Derridabase*, Derrida’s own interpretations of these texts and his own life as a text are written and rewritten as supplements of one another.

ÖZET

Bu tezin temel amacı, farklı zaman dilimlerinde yaşamış, farklı dini geleneklere sahip üç yazarın (Augustine, Ghazali, Derrida) itirafname türündeki eserlerini kendini anlatma ve doğruluk problemlerine olan yaklaşımları açısından incelemektir. Bu hayat hikâyeleri yazarların iç dünyalarını ve entelektüel meselelerini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Yazarlar hayat hikâyelerini inanç sistemleri ile ilintili olarak anlattıklarından, inançları kendilerini anlama ve anlatmada önemli bir etken oluşturduğundan ilgili sistemler; Hıristiyanlık, Sufilik ve Musevilikte mistisizm tezin ayrı bölümünde incelenmektedir. Yazarların eserlerini inceleyen bölümlerde ise, söz konusu yazarların din, doğruluk ve dünya görüşü açısından benzerlikleri, özellikle de farklılıkları irdelenmektedir.

Confessions üzerine olan bölümde, Augustine'nin kişisel anlatımı, yazarın amaçları ve Hıristiyanlığa olan bağlılığı açısından incelenmektedir. Bu bölümde Augustine'nin Tanrının lütufkârlığına ve Hıristiyanlığın diğer değerlerine verdiği önem eser ile bağlantılı olarak anlatılmaktadır. Ghazali'nin *Deliverance from Error*'ının incelendiği bölümde tartışmalar eserin sergileyici aktarımı üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır ve yazarın amacı uğruna öz benliğini nasıl yok ettiği ve okuyucuya bir Sufi'nin doğruya ulaşma mücadelesini nasıl aktardığı irdelenmektedir. Derrida'nın *Circumfession*'ı ise Augustine'nin *Confessions*'ının, Benington'nın *Derridabase*'inin, Derrida'nın bu eserlerle ilgili yorumlarının ve kendi hayat hikâyesinin birbirlerine eklenerek tekrar tekrar yazıldığı çok katmanlı bir eser olarak gösterilmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, autobiographical writing has been a topic of central interest for literary and cultural theoreticians. Linda Anderson in her *Autobiography* published in 2001 writes “autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it” (Anderson, 2001:1). On the other hand, Linda Marcus draws our attention to the fact that “autobiographical writing as a genre has proved very difficult to define and regulate” (Marcus, 1994:1). Autobiography is usually described as a “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Lejeune, in Anderson 2001: 2). According to Marcus, autobiography can be seen as a way of resolving oppositions such as those that are said to exist between subject and object (the “I” both writes and is written), selfhood and identity, private and public, thought and action, fact and fiction, past and present (Marcus, 1994: 2).

Augustine’s *Confessions* is often thought of as the origin of modern Western autobiography, both in the sense of marking a historical beginning and of setting up a model for other texts (Anderson, 2001: 18). The positing of Augustine’s *Confessions* as the first true autobiography has become inextricably linked with the view that autobiography is both an introspective story and one that is centrally concerned with the problematics of time and memory. To interpret Augustine’s *Confessions* in this context leads theoreticians to conclude that confessional writing is a subtext or subgenre of autobiographical writing and has a significant place in autobiographical criticism. Another important example of autobiographical/confessional writing is *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Even though Rousseau does not confess anything in this work, he names it as “confessions” and brings a new dimension to confessional writing. With him, we see that confessional writing does not have to be predominantly religious. Writing in the fourth century for example, Augustine states that the *Confessions* aims to tell its audience Augustine’s vital religious experience which he believes might serve as an example to others. Rousseau, on the other hand, claims that his writing is unique because it aims to portray his unique and true self. He sets out to win his reader’s sympathy for himself and to gain partisans who can compensate him for the misunderstandings which he feels he has been a victim throughout the long misery of

his life. His motto “Intus et in cute” (displaying what is inside and under the skin) is placed at the beginning of the *Confessions*. There his claim of depicting a unique self is also stated. A claim which is particularly interesting from the point of view of confessional writing since “confession” is supposed to be between God and man and not used for personal display or **apologia**. We read:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature and the man I shall portray will be myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world (Rousseau, 1953: 17).

In self writing, especially in confessional writing the writers have a tendency to reflect the belief systems and values they are exposed to. Most of the self writers or confessants tell about their life stories through references to the belief systems they follow. Some may even see themselves as spokesmen for these belief systems. In the *Confessions*, for instance, Augustine tries to write his story from the view of a converted Christian mystic and in the main part of his text he gives his readers an intellectual discussion concerning Christian dogma. Similarly, Ghazali in his confessional work *Deliverance from Error* annihilates his ego and adopts a universal self which can only be understood through Sufi philosophy. Yet other more contemporary writers like Derrida use their belief systems to act as a foil to their life stories. In the *Circumfession*, another confessional work, Derrida, for example, denies the possibility of disclosing himself and/or Truth in his or any confessional writing. It is my contention that such uses (the use of belief systems, religious views, values) are directly or indirectly associated with the “intention” of the writer. The writer is always behind the text, controlling its meaning and in a way s/he is “the guarantor of the intentional meaning or the truth of the text” (Anderson, 2001: 2). Intention, in autobiographical writing refers “not only to an authorial motive governing the production of the text, but to the ways in which the text should be received” (Marcus,

1994: 3). Therefore, if the self writer or confessant aims to praise or criticize a certain belief system, s/he can tell us her/his story by discussing or displaying the principles of that belief system and in this way s/he can affect the way we receive her/his text.

What makes the three confessional works, *Confessions* of Augustine, *Deliverance from Error* of Ghazali and *Circumfession* of Derrida interesting is that in all these works the writers not only construct their life stories according to their intentions but they also try to tell about the private, inner self through the public, religious dogma or traditions they are born into. While telling about their life stories each writer has a different approach to religion and each receives, defines, redefines or deconstructs religion in a way which is completely different from that of the other two. As stated earlier, throughout his narrative, Augustine describes his inner world from the point of view of a Christian mystic and tries to resolve his inner struggle concerning the Real, the True, the World and God with the help of God's grace. Ghazali displays his inner world through Sufi mysticism and tries to underline the importance of personal effort and actual practice in arriving at the Real and the True since according to him and all Sufis a person can not conceive of Truth without proper practice. In the *Circumfession* of Derrida, we see the interaction between the public and the private or the real as philosophically defined and psychologically experienced is depicted in a different manner. It is the religion he is born into that inscribes Derrida to a certain community and way of life. In his *Circumfession*, Derrida problematizes and challenges these impositions of religion, society and family by focusing on the act of circumcision in general and his own circumcision in particular. He portrays himself as a person who belongs and not belongs to a family, a way of life and a religion, a person who is "unpredictable" to everyone including himself.

Briefly, despite the fact that all the three texts are said to belong to the autobiographical or confessional mode, Augustine's *Confessions*, Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* and Derrida's *Circumfession* have significant differences which affect the way we receive these texts. These differentiations may be attributed to the dramatically different social, religious and intellectual communities the writers are born into, the different mystical traditions they are associated with as well as their distinct approaches to reality and self.

In this thesis, my central concern is to explore the similarities and differences that exist between Augustine's, Ghazali's and Derrida's confessional works. Chapter One focuses on confessional writing as a subtext of autobiographical writing. Here, different confessional modes are discussed through an analysis of Augustine's, Ghazali's and Derrida's texts. Chapter Two concentrates on the dominant mystical traditions that exist in the three main monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism and the way each writer approaches these traditions. In Chapters Three, Four and Five *Confessions* of Augustine, *Deliverance from Error* of Ghazali and *Circumfession* of Derrida are studied respectively as texts written by different confessants in different periods of history with different intentions in mind. In the conclusion, Derrida's *Circumfession* is taken as the contemporary critical approach which displays the fluid and supplementary nature of Truth and Self as well as "confessional writing" that tries to define them.

CHAPTER I

CONFESSIOAL WRITING

1.1. Confessional Writing and Autobiography

He does **confess** he himself feels distracted, but from what cause a will by no means speak. Nor do we find him forward to be sounded, but with a crafty madness he keeps aloof, when we would bring him on to some **confession** of his true state (Shakespeare, Hamlet Act 3, and Scene 1).

Just before the famous lines of Hamlet “To be or not to be, that is the question”, King Claudius, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Queen Gertrude are talking about the strange behaviours of Hamlet. They want to understand the causes of his strange behaviours and learn his true state. In other words, they all want Hamlet to confess why he is doing what he is doing. Shakespeare makes use of the idea of confession not only in Hamlet but also in many of his plays. It is evident that irrespective of the way confession has been perceived or applied, it has been a part of human life for ages. In time, confessional works with their emphasis on the representations of the self have been perceived as autobiographical writing. Today, confessional writing is seen by the majority of literary critics such as Linda Anderson and Laura Marcus as a subgenre of autobiography.

Before considering how confessional writing has entered literature as a subgenre of autobiography, I wish to discuss the etymology and different implications of the word “confession”. The word has Latin origins and has been derived from the words “confessare” or “confiteri” which mean to acknowledge. In Christianity confession connotes the act of a penitent disclosing or acknowledging his sins before a priest in the sacrament of penance in the hope of absolution. In law, confession is the term used to denote a written document acknowledging an offense and it is signed by the guilty party (www.wordreference.com). In literature, confession is a form of writing which tries to

narrate and to acknowledge one's ideas and way of behaviour. In other words, by writing a confession you make your self known to the others. You disclose your identity. In the beginning, the act of confession was performed orally. The idea behind this was the individual's desire to talk about oneself in everyday life. As time went by, people started to record their confessions. Finally, in 1215 the practice of confession was made compulsory by the Catholic Church ([www. word reference. com](http://www.wordreference.com)). Thus, in the Christian religion especially in the Roman Catholic Church, confession came to be seen as an act of telling God or a priest what you have done wrong so that you can be forgiven. In short, the idea of confession has different uses at different times and in different contexts.

One of the most striking examples of confessional writing is Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. In this work Augustine seems to fulfill the Christian imperative of the confessing of his sins. This work is also perceived by many critics of literature as the first example of autobiographical writing since it promotes a sort of consciousness of the self that is essential to autobiographical writing. The exposition of, or a process of self development or self awareness as well as a form of author – reader identification constitute the central part of confessional writing. Therefore, confessional writing presents itself as a sort of personal history that seeks to communicate or to express the essential nature of the truth of the self to its readers. How the truth of the self is presented is decided by the confessant himself, the confessant has his/her own limits or priorities in reflecting himself/herself. In her article *On Confession* Rita Felski tells us that autobiography develops as a literary genre out of religious confessional writing. Felski explains that “over the years there appears a gradual shift from a form of self – analysis which seeks out sin and transgression in the context of adherence to a religious orthodoxy to an exploration of intimacy, emotion and self understanding” (Felski, in Smith and Watson 1998:86-87). On the other hand, it is my contention that each writer focuses on the idea of confession from a different point of view. For example, for Rousseau confession is a means of showing his particular unique self not his self as an example of human species and by confessing he tries to justify his specific deeds.

I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will venture to say that I am like no one in the world. I may be no better but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mold in which she formed me, is a question which can only be resolved after the reading of my book (Rousseau, 1953: 17).

In Augustine's *Confessions*, the act of confession is not used in the same way as that of Rousseau's. Augustine is not after personal display or justification but he wishes to narrate his life story and his specific religious experiences as an example to others. Like Augustine, Ghazali in his confessional work the *Deliverance from Error* as a Sufi intellectual, uses confessional writing to guide others to truth, in a more religious sense. Derrida, a secular intellectual, in his autobiographical work the *Circumfession* seems to bring a new dimension to the act of confession. He uses the word circumfession instead of confession possibly to show the circularity of life as well as the circularity of this kind of writing.

1.2. Augustine

To begin with, I believe Augustine uses the term confession to connote not just one but many meanings: First of all, it is used in the sense of "confession of sins", the conventional notion of confession. Augustine confesses his sins to God and to his readers who also might be confused about divine reality. By confessing his sins and also his wrong doings which have kept him away from God, he tries to form an example to others. In other words, Augustine in a sense is born with the mission of converting non-believers to Christianity which he grasps later and he fulfills this mission by confessing. In addition, "confession" means for him the explanation of how he became what he was. Even the incidents trivial in themselves become representative moments in the growth of his personality. As a devoted Catholic, he simply tells the moments which are significant for his embracement of the Catholic belief.

He confesses again and again how he diverted from the path of truth: "You were there before my own eyes but I had deserted even my own self. I couldn't find myself;

much less find you (Augustine, 1961:92). While telling about his spiritual wanderings, he also stresses that turning to the outside world that is the material world of everyday life is wrong. Therefore, the outward journey which he pursued for years was a misleading, false activity. The only way to grasp divine reality was to look into yourself. In other words, outward journey has to be replaced by an inward journey. O'Donnell in his book *Augustine* tells us that “the confessions are not about Augustine but his God” (O'Donnell, 2005:63). He classifies the confessions in Augustine's story as confessions about Augustine and confessions about God. According to O'Donnell, however it is clear that all confessions of Augustine are directed to one ideal, to God, the ultimate reality. Augustine underlines the fact that it is human beings who create sin, not God. Thus, he accepts that he sinned a lot before the moment of his conversion:

And yet I sinned, O Lord my God, creator, and arbiter of all natural things, but arbiter only, not creator of sin, I sinned, O Lord, by disobeying my parents and the masters of whom I have spoken (Augustine,1961:31).

In addition, he admits that he committed all these faults to win the praise of others:

All this, my God, I admit and confess to you. By these means I won praise from the people whose favor I sought, for I thought the right way to live was to do as they wished. I was blind to the whirlpool of debasement in which I had been plunged away from the sight of your eyes (39).

The next dimension of “confession” in Augustine can be defined as the “confession of faith”. Since the *Confessions* is written after his conversion, he tells us everything from the point of view of a convert. According to Augustine, without real faith it is impossible to grasp truth and lead a peaceful life. Augustine, with a view to promoting his faith, also tells of other conversion stories such as that of Victorinus.

Indeed, there are so many conversion stories in the *Confessions* that the work appears to be a compilation of conversion stories. Furthermore, the faith of her mother plays a central role in Augustine's life and owing to this; the mother figure is very significant in his life story. The scenes involving Monica, his mother, are vivid and memorable: the solicitous mother concerned by her son's sexual maturation and encourages him to avoid married women, the pious mother hoping to win him for her creed by continually reminding him of ultimate truth, the apprehensive mother looking for a proper bride for his son with the hope of actualizing a good and pious marriage, of assuring the prosperity and social status of her whole family; and finally the pious and protective mother happy to leave this world once her son is won for her God. The most dramatic and climactic moments such as Augustine's ascent; union with God in Ostia takes place in the presence of Monica: Monica plays an important role in the *Confessions* not only because she is his mother but also because she symbolizes the Christian faith for Augustine. In other words, since his mother is also a convert and a devoted Christian, Augustine seems to appreciate and empathize with his mother throughout the narrative.

The story of Monica's birth, life and death ironically act as supplements to Augustine's confessions. Since Monica plays a large and striking part in the *Confessions*, it is not surprising that Augustine ends the confessional and autobiographical part of his narrative with the death of his mother in Book Nine. Starting with Book Ten, he comments on the scriptures with a view to showing his new understanding of life and his new goal in life. For him, the scriptural text itself is the visible form of the divine revelation. In this part he first philosophizes about the concepts of "time" and "memory" and sees himself standing in time facing eternal divinity:

O Lord, since you are outside time in eternity, are you unaware of the things that I tell you? Or do you see in time the things that occur in it? If you see them, why do I lay this lengthy record before you? Certainly it is not through me that you first hear of these things. But by setting them down I fire my own heart and the hearts of my readers with love of you, so that we all may ask: Can any praise be worthy of the Lords majesty?

(Augustine,1961:253)

Then, he focuses on the allegorical interpretation of the Genesis, through which he performs his sacrifice of praise and prayer. Here, he uses a sort of didactic tone which brings another dimension to the sense of confession. It is my contention that Augustine, through his confessions, aims to help many people who have difficulty in perceiving God as a spiritual being. People who do not possess spiritual faith may come to realize their great lack and attain inner peace by empathizing with Augustine.

Another use of the term “confession” in Augustine is to confess, to acknowledge the greatness of God and to sign his praises. Augustine says that he is confessing to praise God in many parts of the narrative: “Let me still confess my sins to you for your honor and glory” (71). Moreover, his confession becomes a way of displaying his eternal love and respect towards God:

Let my whole self be steeped in love of you and
all my being cry Lord, there is none like you!
You have broken the chains that bound me; I will
sacrifice in your honor. I shall tell how it was
that you broke them and, when they hear what I
have to tell, all who adore you will exclaim,
‘blessed be the Lord in heaven and on earth.
Great and wonderful is his name’ (157).

He also praises his devout mother and other converts by embedding their stories into his own life story.

Finally, James Olney in his work *Memory and Narrative* draws attention to the way Augustine structures his narrative: “pairs of verbs-**recordor et confiteor, recolo et narro**-were bound each to each by an internal, unbreakable bond of identicalness: remember-and-confess, recall-and-narrate, recollect-and-tell” (Olney,1998:5). According to Olney, Augustine associates the act of confessing with the act of remembering by using those pairs and then links the act of remembering that is recalling

with that of narrating, telling and confessing. In other words, confessing involves a circular act (remembering, narrating what one remembers and through self criticism telling the truth about what one remembers) and this circular act turns out to be a life long process. From this point of view, what Augustine confesses is indeed what he remembers about his life before conversion. Therefore, Augustine in his work remembers his past and confesses what he remembers of his past from the point of the new understanding he obtained through Christian belief. As Olney again explains, Augustine in a way weaves his confessions, his narrative, and his text, weaves it out of memories that are themselves in process and taking on new forms. He tells us his life story which is “altered, weighted, given entirely a new coloring by the experience of a life time” (Olney, 1998:21). Augustine himself uses the metaphor of “weaving” in his confessions:

There too(in the huge court of memory)I encounter myself what I have done ,when and where I did it and in what state of mind I was at that time .There are all the things I **remember** to have experienced myself or to have heard from others. From the same store too. I can take out pictures of things which have either happened to me or are believed on the basis of experience; I can myself **weave** them into the context of past and from them I can infer future actions, events, hopes and then I can contemplate all these as though they were in the present (Augustine,1961:215-216).

When all these are considered we are likely to think that “confessional writing” is a sort of weaving in which you recreate or alter experiences you have in life to serve your intentions. Augustine most probably intends to compare his inner life before and after his embracement of Christianity, that is of God. According to Augustine, our remembrance of things are colored and weaved differently in time, the change occurs not once but many times indeed and this change is part of a continuing process. His example of the recitation of a psalm proves his point. He says that each time the recitation takes place, the reciter is involved in a new orientation toward the contents of

the psalm and its meaning and significance changes as a result of the reciter's changing understanding of God or spirituality:

Suppose that I am going to recite a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my faculty of expectation is engaged by the whole of it. But once I have begun, as much of the psalm as I have removed from the province of expectation and relegated to the past now engages my memory, and the scope of the action which I am performing is divided between the two faculties of memory and expectation, the one looking back to the part which I have already recited, the other looking forward to the part which I have still to recite. But my faculty of attention is present all the while, and through it passes what was the future in the process what was the future in the process of becoming the past. As the process continues, the province of memory is extended in proportion as that of expectation is reduced, until the whole of my expectation is absorbed. This happens when I have finished my recitation and it has all passed into the province of memory what is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part (Augustine, 1961:278).

Similarly, a confessant can load different meanings to his/her confessions because of the changes in his/her life or because of the changed conception of it just like Augustine. Augustine tells of the early part of his life from the perspective of a convert therefore weaves his story accordingly. O'Donnell in his biographical work *Augustine* tells us that in his confessions Augustine "not only reports but also sculpts the story of his life to create his intentional and teleological story" (O'Donnell, 2005:41). In short while discussing the *Confessions*, it is important to keep in mind that the confessant,

Augustine, puts the remembered incidents of his life together with a sort of weaving, recreating or recoloring which constitute his confessional mode.

1.3. Ghazali

As I have mentioned before, confessional writing or autobiographical writing has certain limits. When narrating, we narrate according to how we want to present ourselves, how we want to see ourselves or how we want others to see us. As a result, how we confess or what we confess as well as what we mean by confessing has different implications. Ghazali seems to have used the confessional mode in a way similar to that of Augustine. However, because of their differences in time, religion and understandings of divine reality, their practice of confession differs in a number of points.

Ghazali in his autobiography the *Deliverance from Error* explains why he renounced his brilliant career and turned to Sufism. He says, it was due to his realization that there was no way to certain knowledge or conviction of revelatory truth other than Sufism (Ghazali, 1980:77-8). In his account of his life, in other words, in his confessions, he describes his education and intellectual crisis which leaves him so paralyzed by doubt that he decides to give up his academic pursuits and worldly interests and becomes a wandering ascetic. One of the most striking differences between Augustine and Ghazali is that Augustine is not a believer before his soul's mystical transformation while Ghazali is a sort of believer with a lot of doubts in mind before his conversion to Sufism. In addition, what Ghazali seems to have lacked was total spiritual commitment and he seems to arrive at this state through Sufism. Owing to these factors, his confession follows the steps subscribed by the Sufi belief.

At the beginning of the *Deliverance from Error*, Ghazali uses the practice of confession in the conventional sense, as confession of sins and wrong doings. This could be why he gives his narrative the title *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal (the Deliverance from Error or What Saves from Error)*. As a curious young scholar, all Ghazali wants to do is to "inquire just what true meaning of knowledge is" (Ghazali, 1980: 55). However, while searching for truth, he finds himself in a state full of "unsubstantial fancies" (57). He criticizes himself and finds himself guilty because he used to believe in the things

which he could obtain through sense data. Therefore, he could not envision and appreciate the existence of spiritual things. This is one dimension of his confessions. He confesses that he looked for truth in wrong seas and made use of wrong methods. Thus, he was diverted from the path of truth.

Secondly, like Augustine Ghazali confesses his wrong doings in order to set his own story as an example to other people who have similar doubts in mind. His tone and purpose are didactic; therefore he does not give all the details and historical accounts of his life. Probably, his confessions are written to fulfill the mission of a real Sufi teacher. Sufi mystics believe that a real teacher should enlighten his students by guiding them to truth, to God; the ultimate reality. In addition, Sufi mystics believe that the needy should be helped. Ghazali seems to think that other perplexed people need to learn how he was converted, how he tackled with various problems and how he got rid of the confusion that diverse doctrines created in his mind. Thus, in a way, as a Sufi mystic, he fulfills this mission to help the ignorant and the needy:

You have asked me, my brother in religion to give you the account of my daring in mounting from the lowland of servile conformism to the highland of independent investigation. Convinced of your sincerity of your desire, I am losing no time in answering your request (Ghazali, 1980:53).

The third connotation of the term “confession” in Ghazali might be “self criticism and analysis” since self criticism is an essential activity for Sufi mystics. Ghazali confesses his mistakes, criticizes himself as he displays to his audience how he diverted from the path of truth and how after a long and difficult mystical journey, he reached truth and was converted to Sufism. In some parts of the narrative, Ghazali criticizes himself so harshly that he tells us that everything he did before he took the mystical path, including his academic life at Nizamiyya School was full of faults:

I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage to the hereafter. Then I reflected on my intention in my public teaching and I saw that it was not directed purely to God but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige so I became certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank and already on the verge of falling into the Fire, unless I set about mending my way (79).

In brief, since self search and self criticism are essential intellectual activities to a Sufi mystic, it is natural to assume that Ghazali is using the practice of confession to fulfill these requirements.

In the *Deliverance from Error* Ghazali again like Augustine seems to use “the confession of praise”. For the Sufi mystics, the love of God is the most important thing in life. Consequently, the love of God is at the center of Ghazali’s confessional writing.

We beg almighty God to count us among the men of His predilection and choice whom he directs to truth and guides, whom he so inspires with remembrance of Him that they never forget Him, whom he so preserves from their own evil that they prefer none to Him, and whom he so attaches to Himself that they serve none but Him alone (Ghazali, 1980:98).

Ghazali thinks that he is cured of his corrupt state through “divine inspiration” and after this; his aim in teaching, in life is totally changed. All Ghazali now wants is to serve God. Therefore, he praises God in most of his accounts: “Praise be to God, whose praise should preface every writing and discourse” (53). By praising God, he fulfills yet another requirement of Sufi teaching “Zikr” which means remembrance of God by calling his name or by praising him. Ghazali associates his state before conversion with a sort of sickness and believes that “God, most High, his kindness and abundant generosity cured [him] of this sickness” (58). In most of his confessions, he tries to

refute the doctrines of Orthodox Islam such as “Kalam” to prove the purity or superiority of Sufi mysticism. To illustrate, Ghazali in his description of science of “Kalam” tells his readers that Kalam’s aim is “simply to conserve the creed of the Orthodox for the Orthodox and to guard it from the confusion introduced by the innovators” (59). Therefore, Kalam is not sufficient for the ones, who like Ghazali, are in search of real knowledge, “divine reality”. He also adds that these people, people who follow the science of Kalam, “relied on premises which they took over from their adversaries, being compelled to admit them by uncritical acceptance or because of the communities consensus” (59).

1.4. Derrida

Jacques Derrida in his autobiographical work the *Circumfession* not only gives his life story but also rewrites or deconstructs Augustine’s *Confessions*. In addition, the text is in the form of a reply to Geoffrey Bennington’s *Derridabase* which is Bennington’s account of Derrida. Each page of the work is split into two, at the top of the page there’s Bennington’s text and at the bottom, there is Derrida’s response to Bennington giving excerpts from his life and thought. This is why the work is written in dialogic manner. Some of Derrida’s passages in the *Circumfession* are said to be written for his mother, Georgette Derrida. Here, Derrida seems to reclaim his name from Bennington in order to give it back to his mother, but a mother who no longer recognizes him:

I am writing here at the moment when my mother no longer recognizes me, and at which, still capable of speaking or articulating, a little, she no longer calls me or for her and for the rest of her life I no longer have a name...I am writing for my mother, perhaps even for a dead woman and so many analogies or recent analogies will come to the readers mind even if no, they do not hold those analogies, none of them, for if I were here writing for my mother, it would be a living mother who does not recognize her son (Derrida,1993:25).

Throughout the work, Derrida in a way tries to postpone the death of his mother by deferring his confession or by playing with language. As Anderson explains in a sense “the mother’s death is unthinkable because it is she who underwrites his name with her body, who guarantees his name by providing him with his ground or being” (Anderson, 2001:85). When all these are considered, it seems likely that Derrida brings a new dimension to the practice of confession and in a way he problematizes it. Moreover, Derrida tells that he is not only trying performatively to challenge Bennington’s powerful account of what he has been doing, he is also “waiting without waiting” for the death of his mother which is unpredictable to him (Derrida ,in Caputo 2005: 21).

When we think of the practice of confession in Derrida, we are likely to be bombarded with numerous connotations and numerous ways of interpreting that act. The title of the work points to an invented term “circumfession” in calling his autobiography. By that name Derrida may be implying that such narratives or confessional writing are all performative and have a circular structure. The word “circumfession” seems to have been created out of two words; “circumference” and “confession” or “circumcision” and “confession”. These words may be pointing to the border between life and text and the circularity of life which always defers meaning and comprehension. According to Derrida, in this endless chain, life or its meaning is ceaselessly deferred or postponed, so it becomes quite impossible to obtain any determinate meaning. Therefore, in the *Circumfession* it seems impossible to expect Derrida to confess to talk about “final” or “real” experiences since “reality” and its expression is likely to be continually deferred or postponed. Confession is impossible; the word should be erased, replaced by circumfession. It is also important to note that through the text, Derrida seems to focus on the practice of circumcision:

I have been accumulating in the attic, my sublime documents that I’ll never do anything with, about circumcisions in the world, the Jewish and the Arab and the others and excision with a view to my circumcision alone, the circumcision of me the unique one, that I know perfectly took place, one time, they told me (Derrida,1993:60).

Time and again Derrida makes use of the ritual of circumcision which seems to have left an important mark on his memory. According to the Jewish tradition, it is by circumcision that a little boy is initiated into a community whether he wants it or not. This happens to him as a child and it leaves a mark, a sort of signature on his body. Here, Derrida's relationship to his Jewish background and "circumcision" is ambiguous. While Derrida does not situate himself within a living tradition, his use of such elements like "circumcision" is part of a strategy of unsettling or deconstructing the traditional borders between society and individual. According to Caputo "circumcision is what makes Derrida write, the writing that is incised on his body and inscribed on his soul" (Caputo, 2005:104). Briefly, "circumcision" marks Derrida's Jewish identity which seems to have given rise to most of his philosophical thoughts: "The unforgettable circumcision has carried me to the place I had to go" (Derrida, 1993: 14). Caputo also quotes Derrida to tell us about Derrida's claim that "Circumfession has nothing to do with confession, the history of confession but with the history of circumcision and the link between circumcision and excision" (Derrida, in Caputo 2005:32). In a way, the practice of circumcision appears to have replaced or erased the practice of confession in Derrida. Since Derrida dislikes naming or labeling things and since circumcision is a form of labeling, naming in the Jewish tradition, the purpose of the narrative may also be to erase, cut off, that is to circumcise the practice of "circumcision".

Another point to be considered in the confessions of Derrida is how he tackles with the *Confessions* of Augustine. Derrida, while dealing with *Confessions*, has a performative manner which can even take Augustine down to paths that Augustine will not travel himself. First, he questions the association between remembering and narrating in confessional writing. He asks "whether there is any sense in confessing anything to God when he knows everything in advance" (Derrida, 1993: 18). He then points to the link between confessing and asking for forgiveness:

When I ask, when I confess, I'm not reporting a fact. I can kill someone. I can hijack a plane and then report; it is not a confession. It becomes a confession only when I ask for forgiveness and,

according to the tradition ,when I promise to repent ,that is, to improve, to love, to transform my hatred into love, to transform myself, and to do so out of love (Derrida, in Caputo 2005: 23).

Derrida then explains that “confessing or asking for forgiveness is not a matter of making the other know what happened but a matter of changing oneself, of transforming oneself” (Derrida ,in Caputo2005: 23). Accordingly, Derrida claims that confession can never be made since it is continuously revised renewed, recreated or deferred. Consequently, the process of confession goes on eternally and the ultimate confession can never be reached. This is probably why Derrida says: “My confession is subject to endless revision, retirement. As time unfolds the meaning of the transgression, I find that I have more to confess or have to confess otherwise” (Derrida, in Caputo2005: 41). In a way this might be why he rewrites the *Confessions* of Augustine in the *Circumfession*. He may have wanted to produce an event of “transgression” that “deforms” or “reforms” the text of Augustine so as to surprise the reader and Bennington the critic of his life and thought.

Throughout the text Derrida avoids saying “I confess” instead he says “when one confesses” and seems to build his autobiographical work on this phrase. On the other hand, Augustine and Ghazali repeat the expression “I confess” freely. Derrida’s terminology allows him to move away from the conventional role of a confessant which is supposed to perform both the deed that is confessed and the confession expressed. He explains that the two are not one and the same:

One confesses the other. Even if I confess myself, if I confess having done this and that, I am confessing another one. That’s the structure of confession. I can not confess myself. If I confess that I did so and so, that is the other. That is already the other I’m confessing I make the other confess the crime; otherwise I couldn’t confess. There is this division, this divisibility of the confession which structures the confession, so that I never confess myself. A confession is never mine. If it were mine, it wouldn’t be a

confession. It is always the other in me who confesses (Derrida, in Caputo 2005: 25).

This is probably why Derrida puts his mother at the center of his confessions, in this way he confesses the other, his mother's son: "I'm already mourning here while she is not dead yet. I'm confessing her" (Derrida, in Caputo 2005: 25). In other words, for Derrida "I confess" to some extent means "I confess my mother". Finally, what Derrida says about his confessions in Caputo's work *Augustine and Postmodernism* is particularly interesting. It is obvious that he tries to diverge from the conventional, the Christian sense of the term confession:

The confession or the circumfession, which is not a Christian confession, this strange thing I call circumfession, this hybrid of Judaism already a strange sort of Judaism and Christianity is a monstrosity. But what this monstrosity is about is not the confession of prior "I", but the circumfession trying to constitute an "I", as if it were possible (Derrida ,in Caputo 2005:32).

What he seems to be underlining is that a "self" or an "I" is created, constructed in at the time of each confessional narration. His work is not a confession but a philosophy of confession performatively presented .To sum up, Augustine, Ghazali and Derrida seem to have used the confessional mode in their autobiographies. However, it is my contention that each sets different limits to reflecting their life stories and each has a different understanding of the term and act of confession.

CHAPTER II

MYSTICISM

Augustine's *Confessions*, Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* and Derrida's *Circumfession* are significant milestones in the history of autobiographical writing due to the different approaches they display to the problems of "identity" and "self expression" as well as mysticism. The works of Augustine and Ghazali are steeped in the mystical thought and belief systems of their times. Therefore, it will be beneficial to comment on what mysticism is and how it is practiced in the three monotheistic religions namely Christianity, Islam and Judaism before we analyze the *Confessions*, the *Deliverance from Error* and the *Circumfession* in terms of their respective "self expression" and reflection of "identity" of their authors. Although Derrida claims that his work has nothing to do with mysticism, it is clear, as I will argue in the coming pages that the Algeria born French deconstructionalist expresses himself through his Jewish background and reflects and erases the traces of Jewish and Christian mysticism he was exposed to through his mother and Augustine's *Confessions*.

2.1. Mysticism in Three Monotheistic Religions

Mysticism in general refers to a direct and immediate experience of the sacred or the knowledge derived from such experience. When we study the emergence of mystical traditions in the three of the monotheistic religions we see that the interpretation of scriptures and their literal as well as their metaphorical meanings often results in perplexing people who seek to apprehend spiritual reality in phenomenal terms. As Karen Armstrong tells us in her work *A History of God* people who have problems with complicated passages in scriptures which imply that God "sees", "hears" and "judges" like human beings are more likely to follow the mystical path. Therefore, all three of the monotheistic religions develop a mystical form of thinking which enables them to qualify God and find solutions to complicated questions such as those afore mentioned (Armstrong, 1993:209-210). According to Armstrong, mystical experience of God has certain characteristics that are common to all faiths. First, it is a subjective experience that involves an interior journey, not a perception of an objective

fact outside the self. Second, it is usually fulfilled through the image making part of the mind, often called the imagination, rather than through the logical faculty. Finally, mystical experience can be realized through certain physical and mental exercises. The final vision does not come upon ordinary people, “unawares”. Only those who can purify themselves from the illusion of the material world and annihilate their egos can enjoy a “vision of God” (Armstrong, 1993:218-219).

As I have told before, mysticism refers primarily to an experiential awareness or knowledge of the Divine Mystery or the Sacred. Armstrong tells us that Christian mysticism is based on the belief that Christian faith, trust and love can be attained only by surrendering of mind and heart totally to God who has revealed Himself to man through his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of God can only emerge as the fruit of desire and love rather than intellectual study. Consequently, mysticism refers to a way of life engendering from this knowledge. First of all, a Christian mystic is required to turn away from sin in perpetual repentance and through self criticism arrive at self knowledge. Then, s/he should learn to practice Christian virtues actively which will lead her/him to a sort of illumination of the soul. Finally, it is essential for a Christian mystic to have both external and internal purification which hopefully ends in mystical revelation. In Christianity, the experience of the divine usually takes the form of a vision of the Divine or a sense of union with God which is reminiscent of Augustine’s vision at Ostia. Furthermore, in the Christian tradition, it is believed that the mystical experience is only possible through God’s action in persons which often results in that person’s realization of the unmerited grace s/he has been granted from union with God (Armstrong, 1993:209-211).

All in all, everything appears to lead a Christian mystic to one ideal: to adore and glorify God. For adoration to be absolute, the mystic has to annihilate his/her self, his/her ego. This is one of the reasons why Augustine ironically does not give priority to “self expression” in his spiritual autobiography the *Confessions*. In other words, Augustine does not try to put himself at the centre of his narrative or he does not try to justify his deeds instead in telling his life story he tries to show how he has learned to annihilate his ego and see the vision of God.

When the Islamic mysticism that is the Sufi tradition in Islam is considered we again see that absolute deliverance of the self to God and an unquestioning belief in God are the prerequisites to mystical experience. Idries Shah, a prominent Islamic mystic, tells us that Islamic faith has six pillars which can only be understood through revelation. These are: that God exists; that God is one; that there are angels; that there are prophets; that there is a day of judgement and restoration; that there is fate (Shah, 1980:283). The Sufis, like the Christian mystics, are after a sort of personal knowledge that leads them to Divine Revelation. However, it is not possible for an ordinary believer to obtain this knowledge through studying the Koran. Idries Shah quotes Ghazali in explaining who is able to attain divine revelation:

A child has no real knowledge of the attainments of an adult. An ordinary adult can not understand the attainments of a learned man. In the same way, a learned man can not understand the experiences of enlightened saints or Sufis (Ghazali, in Shah 1980: 26).

Moreover, Sayed Najmuddin, another prominent Sufi mystic, reminds us that “knowledge is generally confused with information because people are looking for information or experience not knowledge” (Najmuddin, in Shah 1980: 267). Therefore, most believers adopting Sufi way of life do not arrive at real knowledge which requires pure and spiritual understanding. Absolute rejection of material life and unremitting commitment to all that is spiritual is the remedy for the seeker of divine knowledge. If the individual realizes how far s/he is from real knowledge because s/he has been paying attention to the material world, s/he can heal himself. According to Idries Shah, Hazrat Ali has explained this point when he wrote:

The world has no being except as appearance; from end to end its state is a sport and a play. Your medicine is in you, and you do not observe it. Your ailment is from yourself, and you do not register it (Hazrat Ali, in Shah 1980, 224).

Since the only remedy is in the individual himself/herself, the Sufi mystic in this spiritual path should learn to approach the core of his/her personality, have a deeper understanding of himself/herself so that nothing can stand between God and himself/herself. Everything s/he understands as “self” will melt away. In other words, by annihilating the self s/he will unite with God. Al-Hallaj, another leading Sufi mystic, explains this in one of his poems in a way which is sacrilegious for Orthodox scholars of Islam. In trying to depict his experience of uniting with God he says:

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I: We are two spirits dwelling in one body. If thou seest me, thou seest Him, and if thou seest Him, thou seest us both (Armstrong, 1993:228).

In the *Deliverance from Error* Sufi mystics’ experience of the “self” and “God” seems to have played an important role in shaping Ghazali’s understanding of “selfhood”. While telling his life story it is obvious that Ghazali’s central interest is to show how he fared in his attainment of spiritual knowledge. He does not intend to give all the details of his everyday life. In some parts of the narrative, the ideas of the Sufis who save him from ignorance and error, descriptions of their union with God and their perception of “Divine Reality” seem to replace questions of personal choice and experience which are pivotal to autobiographical and confessional writing:

Those who are so inspired with remembrance of Him that they never forget Him, they never prefer none to Him and whom He so attaches to Himself that they serve none but Him alone (Ghazali, 1980:98).

Contrary to the Sufi tradition, Jewish mystics as Armstrong indicates seem to emphasize the Gulf between God and man. They imagine God as a mighty king who can be approached at the end of a difficult, long journey through the seven heavens. However, this journey is never taken literally but is always seen as a symbolic ascent

taken in mysterious regions of the mind. Therefore, reality is a kind of pilgrimage and the seeker is a traveler towards his/her home in God. In addition, Jewish mysticism shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form of organic life. In this way of life, self-discipline and self development are essential for the mystic apprehension. Jewish mystics believe that each of us is created in the image of God and each of us is an expression and manifestation of God. Therefore, there is no such thing as an individual soul or self, independent of the universal soul; God (Armstrong, 1993:240-244).

Enlightenment philosophy tells us that self actualization is generally understood to mean: I take care of myself, become fully me, use my talents to their utmost and succeed in my evolution towards individuality. For the Jewish mystics, however if you interpret self actualization in this way, you alienate yourselves from the true self. The mystical path to self actualization or self perfection “focuses on the inner core of the person”, which is “a core of nothingness” since “wisdom is found from nothing” (Lancaster, 1993: 98). Therefore the mystic should attempt to “transcend the world of ‘somethingness’ which is ruled by the self ego and approach ‘nothingness’”. Only in this way may one be truly open to the divine wisdom” (Lancaster, 1993:98). Moreover, Jewish mystics believe that true self is an individual expression of the soul of other Jewish people, the world and God. This is probably why Derrida writes of himself through the other and talks about his Jewish origin rather than his evolution and attainment of himself in his confessional work the *Circumfession*.

Finally, one of the most important characteristics of Jewish mysticism is how mystics communicate mystical experience. Armstrong tells us that Jewish mystics tend to use a lot of complicated images to explain the nature and the effect of their experiences (Armstrong, 1993:216). With the language they use to convey their mystical messages, they try to emphasize the typicality and superiority of the mystical experience. In short, Jewish mystics think that “Jewish mysticism is paramountly, a mysticism of language” (Lancaster, 1993: 112). They value the Hebrew language as a “holy language which was created by God and therefore contains an inner wisdom and spiritual power” (Lancaster, 1993: 110). In most of the Jewish mystical texts, there is no attempt to describe the mystical process realistically. The mystics do not express

themselves in a direct simple language; instead they prefer to use a complicated language which is full of symbols and imagery. The purpose here is to give their experiences of facing the divine a sort of overwhelming holiness (Armstrong, 1993:216-217). This may be again the reason why in Derrida's *Circumfession*, we are faced with pictorial depictions of past incidents which convey clear and intense emotions but which do not convey a realistic view of the world and are not connected by a story line.

2.2. Augustine

Augustine in his spiritual autobiography the *Confessions* mingles his life story with mystical elements. Born at Thagaste in North Africa in A.D 354, the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, Augustine spends his early years questioning conflicting faiths and world views. His parents are of sufficient means to give him a formal education. He studies law, philosophy and rhetoric which affect the way of his life. Among the influence of the learned man of Thagaste, an ancient city of intellectuals, his thirst to know the truth and hunger grow. The death of his pagan father leaves him dependent on the persistence and prayers of his devoted Christian mother, Monica. He has a great talent for rhetoric. His ability to teach rhetoric to the rising young public grows day by day. Despite his success and fame, the young scholar is still unsatisfied. Owing to this, he turns his attentions to the mastery of theology. Then, he embraces Manichaeism by disdaining the Orthodox Christian Church with its mysterious scriptures. At this point, Augustine wants to find a solution to the problem of evil in the world so, the first solution that attracts him is that provided by the Manichees, the followers of Mani. They think that redemption can be achieved through esoteric knowledge and the group believes that the world is a manifestation of a great battle between two equally powerful divine principles, one good and the other evil. During the course of their war; bits of the good god (the god of light) becomes mingled with bits of the evil god (god of darkness). In addition, the secret and special knowledge that has been revealed to Mani is how to liberate goodness and eliminate evil. Those who listen to Mani and thus learn to liberate good are the elect (Solomon and Higgins, 1996: 122-123). At first, Augustine finds the Manichean doctrine appealing as an explanation for human evil. Moreover, this doctrine both fulfills his longing to believe

in the presence of a Divine Creator and allows him to continue his sensual life style. But soon he again grows restless and dissatisfied:

My soul fell sick. It broke out in ulcers and looked about desperately for some material worldly means of relieving the itch which they caused... In the midst of joy I was caught up in the coils of trouble, for I was lashed with the cruel, fiery rods of jealousy and suspicion, fear, anger and quarrels (Augustine, 1961: 55).

So, he starts to find Manichaeism unsatisfactory. Even Faustus one of the leading figures among the Manichees is unable settle the deep seated questions that perplex his mind. The persistence of his own problem with the Manichean definition of evil haunts him. He thinks he has “no hope of profit from their false doctrines and becomes indifferent and inattentive to Manichean theories” (104). In time he makes up his mind to leave them.

As a young man Augustine has a formidable, demanding intellect. He is not easily satisfied with the answers he finds in different teachings or doctrines including the Manichean doctrine. Then, he devotes his life to teaching and pursuing his studies in Neo-Platonism and gives most of his attention to works of Plato and Plotinus. While he is in Italy, Saint Ambrose, the bishop of Milan is able to convince him that Christianity is not incompatible with Plato or Plotinus. Through the sermons of St. Ambrose, he realizes that the scripture is not always to be understood in a literal sense. In this way, he manages to get rid of some of his false beliefs concerning Christian doctrine. However, he still has difficulty in thinking of God as a spiritual being: “I could imagine no kind of substance except such is normally seen by the eye” (Augustine, 1961:33) and as stated earlier he also has difficulty in finding satisfactory explanations for the presence of evil in the world. For a brief period, he is influenced by the Platonists of the time. Finally, confronted with the realization of scriptures and their author, God, Augustine abandons his sensual life style, embraces Christ and his faith and decides to be baptized. His conversion, as Armstrong tells us is a kind of “rebirth for him” (120).

When we study the conversion story of Augustine closely, we see that it follows the steps that lead to a mystical experience, the fulfillment of which ends in the perception of the Divine. The mystical aspect of Augustine's life story is supported by many conversion stories that are either told to Augustine or that he sees for himself. He hears the conversion of Victorinus, the translator of Plotinus, by Simplicianus. Victorinus' conversion is very significant for Augustine who is also interested in the ideas of Plotinus and Augustine believes that his being told the story was not by chance. In the *Confessions* it is presented as part of the divine plan: "When your servant Simplicianus told me the story of Victorinus, I began to glow with fervor to imitate him. This; of course, was why Simplicianus had told it to me" (Augustine, 1961: 164). When he heard the story, we are told that he was still confused that he was still questioning "Divine Reality":

The words of your scriptures were planted firmly in my heart and on all sides you were like a rampart to defend me. Of your eternal life I was certain, although I had only seen it like a confused reflection in mirror (157).

Owing to the story told by Simplicianus, his mind starts to settle and he is about to take the final step in the process of conversion. Augustine also believes that it is by "God's inspiration that it seemed a good plan to go and see Simplicianus" (Augustine, 1961:157). In other words, something mystical guides him so that he can benefit from it in the path of conversion. At the time that he listens to the story of Victorinus' conversion, he hears how two officers of the emperor's court are converted by reading the story of Antony, the Egyptian monk. After he hears these stories, he starts to feel closer to God: "O Lord, you were turning me around to look at myself. I could see how sordid I was, how deformed and squalid, how tainted with ulcers and sores" (169). He realizes that there is no place he could escape from God, the ever present and divine reality.

Next, the child's chanting voice that brings the final decision to convert is as significant as the conversion stories. After hearing the mystical conversion stories,

Augustine goes to the garden of his house where he hears a child's chanting words which he takes as a divine message to himself.

I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrong its pitiful secrets from it and when I mastered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a deluge of tears I stood up and left Alypius so that I might weep and cry for my soul's content, for it occurred to me that tears were best shed in solitude (177).

In this condition, he starts to feel sorry for his hesitation about conversion: "I was still the captive of my sins... How long shall I go on saying tomorrow, tomorrow? Why not now" (177)? While he is asking these questions and weeping with sorrow in his heart, he hears the singing voice of a child in a nearby house. The child is chanting the phrase "Tolle, lege": "Take it and read" (177). Taking this as an oracle, Augustine leaps, and rushes back to his friend Alypius and snatches up the New Testament. When he opens it, right in front of him appears St. Paul's words to the Romans:

Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries, rather arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites (178).

The message of this epistle is yet another sign for him to give up his worldly desires and be converted. He does not need to read more to accept this divine message: "I had no wish to read and no need to do so" (178). Thus, the struggle is over. Augustine explains this miraculous moment in the lines:

For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was though the light of confidence

flooded into my heart and all darkness of doubt was dispelled. I marked the place with my finger or by other sign and closed the book (178).

After his mystical experience, Augustine accepts that it is God who has converted him. In addition, he underlines the fact that his mother saw him as a convert in his dream was also a divine message sent to him long before the conversion which at the time he was not able to read.

Another mystical element that we find in Augustine's *Confessions* is the "image of ascent". Karen Armstrong tells us that the image of the convert's ascent to heaven is very common in stories pertaining mystical religions: "the ascent to heaven is a symbol of the furthest reach of the human spirit, which marks the threshold of ultimate meaning" (Armstrong, 1993:17). Augustine experiences such an ascent to God with his mother at Ostia. Before the ascent, he explains his sincere feelings towards God:

You had pierced our hearts with the arrows of your love, and we carried our words with us as though they were staked to our living bodies. Ranged before our minds, so that our thoughts were full of them, were the examples of your servants whose darkness you had made light and whose death you had changed to life (Augustine, 1961:182).

With these it becomes more evident for us that he is ready to unite with God. While he is talking with his mother about the spiritual life of saints with great admiration, he reaches the conclusion that:

No bodily pleasure, however great it might be and whatever earthly light it might shed lustre upon it, was worthy of comparison, or of even mention, beside the happiness of the life of the saints (197).

At this climactic point, a journey, sort of a mental ascent starts and the mystical experience of God is finally attained. We read:

As the flame of love burned stronger in us and raised us higher towards the eternal God, our thoughts ranged over the whole compass of material things in their various degrees, up to the heavens themselves, from which the sun and the moon and the stars shine down upon the earth. Higher still we climbed, thinking and speaking all the while in wonder at all that you have made. At length we came to our own souls and passed beyond them to that place of everlasting plenty, where you feed Israel forever with the food of truth (Augustine, 1961:197).

In short, as Armstrong attests “the symbol of an ascent indicates that worldly perceptions have been left far behind” (Armstrong, 1993:218). A new life has begun for Augustine. He has been successful in removing the obstacles between him and the spiritual world through meditation and prayers.

At last, the use of light and darkness is also worth considering since these elements dominate the whole of the *Confessions*. As Armstrong indicates, Christian experience of God is characterized by light. Light represents tranquility or interior silence (Armstrong, 1993:220). In telling his mystical experience Augustine associates his early period of life which is moved by worldly desires with darkness whereas he associates divine reality, the love of God with light: “I lost myself in many kinds of evil ways in all of which a pall of **darkness** hung between me and the bright **light** of your truth, my God” (Augustine, 1961:47). In other words, the imagery of light and darkness that is used in Augustine represents the two conflicting worlds; the world full of sensual desires and the spiritual world in which the individual can face the ultimate reality of God.

When Augustine's full account of conversion is considered, it is clear that Augustine comes to see the relation between God and the human soul as the central concern of religion because the soul is created in the image of God and due to this; self knowledge is the means through which man comes to know God. This emphasis on personal and inner life is wide-spread in all mystic traditions. "The phrase 'I think, therefore I am', famously attributed to Descartes in fact appears in Augustine twelve centuries earlier" (Solomon and Higgins, 1996: 123).

2.3. Ghazali

Just as Augustine considers self knowledge to be indispensable for the knowledge of God, a deeper understanding of the self, one defines the self through God, forms the basis of Islamic mysticism, Sufism. Sufis believe that "He, who knows himself, knows his lord" (Litvak, 1984: 21). Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* is the story of another spiritual journey, the journey of an Islamic mystic. In his words Ghazali's task is "the description of his venture in climbing from the plain naive and second hand belief to the peak of direct vision" (Watt, 1953: 19). Therefore, the work of Ghazali is both autobiographical and explanatory of his belief system. In other words, the life of Ghazali forms the background of the *Deliverance from Error*. On the other hand, how a person can reform himself through Sufism, the process of his spiritual conversion which is to be an example to others forms the core of the story. Since the methodology of Sufism occupies the most significant place in the work, it is essential to have an understanding of what Sufism is and how it is practiced. In the process of his conversion, Ghazali searches different forms of knowledge such as the science of Kalam and his final destination is the embracing of Sufi teaching. Ghazali knows that "One must not be satisfied with knowing, one must do" (Litvak, 1984: 85). As a result, he decides not only to be satisfied with soul and intellectual searching but to live according to the requirements of Sufism. Sufis insist that "Sufism is not to be studied but should be lived" (Watt, 1953: 10). In the *Deliverance from Error* Ghazali explains what he does and why he does them in the following words:

I brought my mind to bear on the way of the
Sufis I knew that their particular way is

consummated only by knowledge and activity. The aim of their knowledge is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul and to rid one self of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God (Ghazali, 1980: 77).

In short, Ghazali decides to fight with the obstacles that prevent him from embracing “Divine Reality”, in this process he expects help from Sufi thought and tradition. In his confessions the Islamic mystic explains that he sometimes achieves ecstasy and experiences revelation. The account of his heroic and courageous undertaking of the Sufi way displays his desire to share his enthusiasm for such ecstatic experiences. Ghazali believes that the Sufi practice is in many ways unique and purist: “I knew with certainty that the Sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God Most High, their way the most direct of ways and their ethic the purest” (Ghazali, 1980:81).

Like Augustine, Ghazali has a restless temperament that makes him struggle with truth; he refuses to be content with an easy, conventional answer. In the *Deliverance from Error* he explains this aspect of his character saying: “The thirst for grasping the real meaning of thing was indeed my habit and it was an instinctive, natural disposition placed in my make up by God” (54). Again like Augustine, for years he has given importance to fame and public opinion but in time he has come to realize that these are only misleading him and contributing to his satisfaction with distorted reality. Idries Shah attests in his book *The Way of the Sufi* that according to the Sufi belief there are two kinds of understanding, the greater understanding and the lesser understanding. “The lesser understanding is the shadow of greater understanding. Like a shadow, it is the distortion of reality, preserving only a part of the original” (Shah, 1980:286). Moreover, Ghazali feels that his mind is conquered by so many false beliefs that he can not help distorting reality in his daily life as well as in his profession. Thus, he decides to get rid of this distortion of the truth and arrive at (or struggle to attain) ultimate reality which is the spiritual acceptance of God, the Maker. His starting point is his desire to find what confuses his mind: “the perplexed person must specify what perplexes him” (Ghazali, 1980: 76). In this search, he leaves Baghdad and his

profession at Nizamiyya School, the most distinguished academic post of his day and goes to Damascus and lives there for about two years. Next, he goes to Jerusalem and shuts himself up in order to annihilate his ego and unite with God.

As Solomon and Higgins tell in their work, *A Short History of Philosophy*, the Sufi mystical practice requires various stages of self-perception in the quest to reach the ideal condition which is complete absorption in God. Obedience to Islamic law is the basic stage of spiritual practice. The next stage is the renunciation of the things of this world, the willful acceptance of poverty and the suppression of desire. The third stage involves the elimination of one's ego and in this stage, a Sufi experiences moments of ecstasy in which s/he becomes one with God and grasps the full truth (Solomon and Higgins, 1996:133-34). We can see all these stages clearly in Ghazali's spiritual autobiography in which he aims to tell how he reaches the final moment of apprehension. He takes the first step in this process by questioning his present condition:

I attentively considered my circumstances, and I saw that I was immersed in attachments which had encompassed me from all sides. I also considered my activities and saw that I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage (Ghazali, 1980:78-79).

Owing to this realization, the process of awakening or illumination which would result in the mystic revelation starts.

As Williams C.Chittick underlines in his book *Sufism a Short Introduction*, the goal of a Sufi is none other than God himself and there are signs of God everywhere in the universe and in man himself. In order to reach this goal, the mystic should realize the importance of "fruitful experience", direct experience (Chittick, 2000:3-5). In his work *Sufism*, Stuart Litvak also tells us that "fruitful experience", direct experience of divine reality is essential if one is to be successful in the path of Sufism. He also adds that one can be an expert in something, such as the knowledge of apples and can know

everything about them without tasting. However, this knowledge is not worthy since it is obtained indirectly. When one tastes the apples herself/himself, s/he can feel the real more obviously. Thus, s/he is more likely to carry herself/himself to higher states of knowledge (Litvak, 1984:95-96). By taking this example of Litvak, we can understand the importance of direct, “fruitional experience”. Ghazali makes use of this idea in his work and underlines the importance of “fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way” of knowledge and he says: “there is a difference between your knowing the true nature of things and your actually practicing” (Ghazali, 1980:78). He also adds that to be illuminated, it is essential to practice things on your own because the knowledge you obtain without practicing is dangerous and may lead you to wrong directions.

“Sufism helps man to be increasingly aware of his purpose of life, namely unflinching service to his lord and creator” (Chittick, 2000:6) says Chittick in his book *Sufism A Short Introduction*. Ghazali by perceiving this is able to deliver himself from the narrow confines of the material world into limitless reality of a spiritual life, where he can experience divine spark which will eternally shine within him. Another important requirement of Sufism as Williams tells in his book *The World of Islam* is the remembrance of God. The Sufis live with an ever increasing awareness of God and one aspect of this is the practice of “zikr”. Briefly, zikr means remembering God usually by pronouncing His name and this brings satisfaction and comfort to a man’s heart (Williams, 1994:109-110). Ghazali in his spiritual autobiography uses the name of God many times almost as a form of zikr, I believe. He even starts his conversion narrative with the name of God: “In the name of God Most Gracious and merciful” (Ghazali, 1980: 53), and continuously emphasizes the importance of “remembrance of God for the purification of the heart” (81).

When the whole process of mystical apprehension is considered, the most important requirement of all is the purification of the soul and this process is a very long and difficult one. Chittick draws attention to the three major steps of this process (Chittick, 2000:1-15). The first stage is the one in which one struggles against the “carnal soul” or “nafs-al ammara” as it is called by the Sufis. In this stage the individual learns to struggle with all conditions that may lead to the tendency to disobey God. S/He keeps away from evil deeds and thoughts such as pride, selfishness, vain talk or

gossip. Therefore, as Chittick explains it is important to purify the body, tongue, mind and heart at this stage. In the *Deliverance from Error* Ghazali, not only mentions but exemplifies this attitude while narrating his life story and explaining the significance of his belief system. When he goes to Damascus where lives for about two years, he realizes the importance of the purification of the heart and from then on his sole aim becomes its achievement.

I entered Damascus and resided there for nearly two years. My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of the soul and the cultivation of virtues and cleansing my heart for the remembrance of God Most High (Ghazali, 1980:80).

He also explains that the purification of the heart is an antidote to evil deeds and thoughts:

The ignorance of God is the heart's deadly poison, disobedience to God is its incapacitating malady, knowledge of God most High its quickening antidote and obedience to him by resisting passion its healing remedy; that the only way to treat the heart by removing its malady and regaining its health lies in the use of remedies just as that is the only way to treat the body (87).

His reasons for leaving his career are also presented as a step towards his purification. As a rhetorician, he concentrates on the questionable truth; therefore, he uses his tongue to alter truth. The tongue can only be purified by restraining it from backbiting, gossip, and most important of all by using it to alter truth. So in order to stop distorting reality, he decides to leave his career. Avoiding eating and talking, which by many are

considered as signs of nervous breakdown, can contribute to the process of purification as well.

Chittick points out that another stage in this purification is the “reproaching soul”, “nafs al-lawwama”. It is the “nafs al-lawwama” which reproaches the individual for his/her evil deeds and impels him/her to act with mercy and generosity. It is clear that this stage is based on self scrutiny and self criticism both of which we can see in abundance in the confessions of Ghazali. The third and the last stage is “nafs al-mutma’inna”. At this stage, the Sufi develops to the fullest tendency to obey God and to act in perfect harmony with His commandments. According to Williams, “the soul finds perfect satisfaction in being governed by the heart, the divine spark in man” (Williams, 1994:109) and due to this, the mystical search is over, the combat is over and it is time to enjoy the union with God. Likewise, Ghazali experiences all these and gains his battle against error and ignorance. He can see everything in the light of his new understanding. From then on, sense perception is no longer his only guide. He realizes that: “Beyond intellect there is another stage and in this another eye opened, by which beholds the unseen” (Ghazali, 1980:83). Moreover, he starts to value rational beliefs as “unsubstantial fancies” (57). Briefly, he reforms himself or becomes a firm believer which is essential not only in Sufism but in all mystical traditions for arriving at truth. Once reformed, Sufi mystic should be ready to help others in their journey to truth (Litvak, 1984: 113-114). Ghazali’s autobiography is also written with this Sufi mission in mind. He says outright in his confessions that he is writing his own account of conversion or spiritual acceptance to enlighten the others, “to communicate [to them] the secrets of sciences and the dangerous and intricate depths of different doctrines and views” (Ghazali, 53).

For Litvak, perceiving the difference between a true teacher and a false one is a prerequisite for the Sufi tradition since the true teacher invites man to God whereas the pretender invites man to himself/herself (Litvak, 1984:113-114). In Ghazali’s case, first, the rhetorician gives importance to fame and praise of public. In rhetoric, the teacher tries to persuade his students to the questionable truth and many times the distortion of truth is inevitable. In other words, as a rhetorician Ghazali invites people to himself and his belief. After his apprehension of Truth, his intention as a teacher changes. He aims

to invite man to God. He is filled with mercy, kindness and the burning zeal to help others. As we can see clearly in Ghazali, the mission to help others is fulfilled with writing his own experience of arriving at truth and most important of all his own experience of spiritual acceptance.

2.4. Derrida

Derrida in his autobiographical work the *Circumfession* gives excerpts from his life and thoughts and when he is asked how he has produced the *Circumfession*, he responds in a strange manner, which surprises the reader:

Circumfession is under the law of interruption. I didn't know and this is true I didn't know while I was writing "circumfession", after having read the "Derridabase", whether my mother would die before the end and interrupt me in the middle of a sentence. I was just expecting and not expecting an event which wouldn't, couldn't depend on me so this experience of the event, precisely, which defeats the conservative was the rule of writing of "Circumfession" (Derrida, in Caputo 2005: 140).

In a way, Derrida puts his mother at the centre of his life story and the special bond between him and his mother seems to be expressed all through the work. This bond is almost mystical. His mother is in her deathbed while he is trying to write his confessions.

Still alive at the moment I'm writing this, but already incapable of memory, no longer recognizes me, she no longer calls me and for her and therefore for the rest of her life I no longer have a name that is what is happening (Derrida, 1993: 22).

Though his mother is incapable of expressing anything, the way she conceives of her son is pivotal for Derrida's conception of himself. In other words, she seems to guide Derrida's attempts at self understanding through writing from the outside, she is his creator and the person with whom he must write in order to understand himself.

Esther Georgette Derrida would come to sculpt the writing from the outside, give it its form and rhythm from an incalculable interruption never will any of my texts have depended in its most essential inside as such a cutting, accidental and contingent outside, as though each syllable, and the very milieu of each periphrasis were preparing itself to receive a telephone call the news of the death of one dying (207).

Another mystical element in the work of Derrida is the way he structures his narrative, his language. Jewish mystics believe "no words or concepts could represent the reality to which the name pointed. Again the experience of pushing language to its limits can create a sense of the otherness of God" (Armstrong, 1993:216). Like the Jewish mystics, Derrida uses a complex language in his confessional work. His text is full of words which perplex our mind as far as their normal connotations go. As a result, again like the Jewish mystics, he pushes language to its limits, creating a sense of otherness not from God but from the so-called objective world.

In the *Circumfession* Derrida talks insistently about the ritual of circumcision in general and about his own circumcision in particular which can be interpreted as another reference to the Jewish mystical tradition. As Brian Lancaster tells us in his work *The Elements of Judaism*, for the Jewish mystics "circumcision is instrumental in bringing about a correct conformation between higher and lower worlds" (Lancaster, 1993:71). Circumcision is thought as a way of holiness or a way of reaching the Sefirah, an emanation of God in the Halakhah (Jewish law). Thus "the physical act of circumcision (a sort of uncovering) is understood as having an effect on the higher world of God's emanations" (Lancaster, 1993:72). Derrida, in a way, plays with this

idea, the mystical dimension of the act of circumcision through references to his own circumcision.

As Lancaster tells us the use of the metaphor of a “circle” is also very common among Jewish mystics. Lancaster explains that “the mystical path is usually illustrated by conceiving the individual as a ‘circle’ and the ‘circumference’ brings one into relationship with others and with the world of objects and events; the centre depicts one’s essence” (Lancaster, 1993:98). This may be one of the reasons why the terms and the metaphors of “circle”, “circularity” or “circumference” are central to Derrida’s thought. He even creates the title of his work; “circumfession” through the play of these terms and metaphors-of the words “circumference” and “confession” , “circle” and “confession” or “circumcision” and “confession”.

Moreover Derrida writes his own life story *Circumfession* over Augustine’s spiritual autobiography *Confessions* which upholds a mystical conception of God. Accordingly, he makes frequent use of some of the mystical passages in Augustine’s text but all along he claims that he does not follow a mystical path. In fact, Derrida argues that he deconstructs Augustine and his text.

No doubt. I’m at the some time full of love and sympathy for Augustine, but at the same time I reject everything coming from him. I try in my own way to deconstruct a number of Augustine’s assumptions in this text (Derrida, in Caputo 2005:142).

In addition, in his interview with F. Rötzer on a German radio channel in 1986, Derrida explains briefly how he sees mysticism and this interview is important in displaying why Derrida is so different from Augustine and Ghazali in his treatment of mysticism:

At any rate, fortunately and unfortunately as you like it, I’m not mystical and there is nothing mystical in my work. In fact, my work is a deconstruction of values which found mysticism.

Not just personally I am not mystical, but that I doubt whether anything I write has the least trace of mysticism (Derrida qtd. www.hydra.umn.edu).

What Derrida is doing in the *Circumfession* is deconstructing mysticism. As Linda Anderson in her work *Autobiography* explains “deconstruction attempts to undermine reliance on a fixed centre or presence. It questions any claims towards a moment of pure origin or essence” (Anderson, 2001:134). In other words, it is a sort of philosophical skepticism about the impossibility of coherent meaning in language. Derrida, in the *Circumfession* as in most of his works inverts and dissolves every tradition that attempts to establish grounds of certainty and truth by repressing the limitless instability of language. Therefore, Derrida does not want to call himself a mystic or align himself with mystical thought.

All in all while Augustine weaves his text with Christian mysticism and Ghazali with Sufi mysticism Derrida, in a way transgresses Jewish mysticism in the *Circumfession*:

The disfiguration reminds that you do not inhabit your face because you have too many places, you take place in more places than you should and transgression itself always violates a place, an uncrossable line, it seizes itself, punishes, paralyzes immediately, topology here both being and not being a figure, and if it is a figure, and if it is a disfiguration, that is the trope I’ve just been hit right in the face with for having violated the places, all of them, the sacred places, the places of worship, the places of the dead, the places of rhetoric, the places of habitation, everything I venerate, not the unpredictable event I have supposedly written, myself, namely sentences fit to crack open to the geologic program, no, that took place outside the writing that you’re reading in my body if you prefer, this conversion ought to be the surprise of an event happening to myself (Derrida, 1993: 124).

CHAPTER III

AUGUSTINE

Augustine's *Confessions* is a diverse blend of autobiography, philosophy, theology and critical interpretations of the Bible. The form of the work seems to correspond to its aim. Its content is about the return of the created, to God, its creator, and the author aims to inspire others to actively seek this return. Thus, the work takes the highly original form of a direct address to God. At a simple level, the *Confessions* tells us the story of Augustine's conversion to Christianity which involves a process of spiritual and physical wandering as Augustine charts his development from boyhood to manhood a journey which takes him from his birthplace in Thagaste, in North Africa, to Carthage where he taught rhetoric, then to Rome and finally to Milan where his full conversion takes place. Anderson notes that "his wanderings should also be read as the tribulations of error" (Anderson, 2001:20) and his *Confessions* should be read as a way of expressing how he saves himself from error. We read:

The god I worshipped was my own delusion and if I tried to find it a place to rest my burden there was nothing there to uphold it. It only fell and weighed me down once more, so that I was still my own prisoner, unable to live in such a state get powerless to escape from it. Where could my heart find refuge from itself? Where could I go, yet leave myself behind? Was there any place where I should not be a prey to myself ... so from Thagaste I went to Carthage (Augustine, 1961: 78).

Augustine, sinner and saint, the celebrated theologian who served as bishop of Hippo from AD 396 until his death in 430, is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in the Western world. Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa in AD 354. The son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he was brought up as a Christian and at the age of sixteen went to Carthage to finish his education for the law. In 375 on reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, he became deeply interested in philosophy.

Then, he was converted to the Manichean religion, a popular form of thinking of his time. At the same time, he became a teacher of rhetoric at Thagaste. In 383, at Milan he was offered a professorship and came under the influence of Platonists and of the preaching of Saint Ambrose. While he was trying to free himself from his spiritual crisis, he experienced a chain of mystical events which led him to renounce his unorthodox beliefs and finally he was baptized in 387 (O'Donnell, 2005: 5-7).

The *Confessions* seems to unfold two parallel paths. One represents Augustine's journey towards God. While Augustine is narrating the events of his life, he continually analyzes his motives and his approach to life. Here, he uses his travels as a means of exposing the fallibility of human nature and tries to affirm the ultimate authority of God. Augustine insists that divine knowledge is beyond the individual's grasp and that without God's grace and direct intervention, it can not be attained. The other path he pursues is to expose the presence of God during the course of his journey. We read:

Clearly the wicked do not know that you are everywhere. But you are not bound within the limits of any place. You alone are always present, even to those who set themselves apart from you. Let them turn back and look for you. They will find that you haven't deserted your creatures as they have deserted their creator (Augustine, 1961:92).

Simply, Augustine tells us that he in a way deserts himself by deserting God:

But where was I when I looked for you? You were there before my eyes, but I had deserted even my own self .I could not find myself; much less find you (92).

In these lines appear two paradoxes. The first one is the possibility of one straying away from someone who is always present and the other one is the possibility of one

departing from oneself. According to C.C.Martindale, Augustine resolves these paradoxes not by denying God's presence within him but by denying his own presence within himself (Martindale, 1931: 84-86). By doing this, Augustine shows that without God's presence and illumination his being has nothing worth discussing. Therefore, by putting God and the love of God in the centre of his life story, he means to show that his life has no value without Him. He is recreating himself in the image of God and wants others to do the same. In short, he uses himself as an example; the example of a sinner who converts, who arrives at divine reality and recreates himself by his apprehension of the only truth, God.

The things which you have created, so that we may be lifted up to you from our weakness and use them to help us on our way to you who made them all so wonderfully. And in you we are remade and find true strength (Augustine, 1961: 91).

As stated earlier, the second paradox is the possibility of one departing from oneself. In the course of the *Confessions*, Augustine depicts his early years as a period in which he continually fails to grasp the true meaning of life. The sins he describes and confesses can all be viewed as forms of straying away from God: "My sin was this that I looked for pleasure, beauty and truth not in Him but in myself" (40). Augustine strays from God because he strays from himself. He explains this in his own words briefly: "You were more inward than my most inward part and you were within while I was on the outside and seeking you there" (61). Although Augustine sometimes gives the impression that he was an extraordinarily wicked child, it is clear on a closer reading that he takes himself merely to exemplify the human condition. In other words, everything that he narrates or constructs through weaving in his confessional work is done with the purpose of presenting to humanity an example of a common sinner and to encourage or to persuade all sinners or skeptics to become true believers. In addition, by drawing a negative picture of his past, his life before conversion, and by comparing his life before with his life after his conversion, he seems to emphasize the essentiality of his final position. Moreover, by describing his earliest years, he tries to show that the

original sin has infected even infants, he says in the *Confessions*: “the feebleness of infant’s limb is innocent, not the infant’s mind” (28). According to Augustine, human beings are corrupt from birth; they often grow to be worse and can improve only with the help of God. This self improvement or self transformation is pivotal to the self portrayal of Augustine. The narrative focuses on the stages of this process and leads his readers to experience the same path. In this on going process, Augustine actually undergoes several conversions. In other words, before climactic conversion which takes place in Book Eight, he goes through various stages. The first is his acceptance of Manichaeism; the second is his pursuit of truth with Cicero’s *Hortensius* that is the period of skepticism. The third is his intellectual certainty and the fourth stage is his moral and emotional acceptance of the Christian Faith. However, while he is narrating these stages, he gives the impression that the author, protagonist is not just Augustine but God in Augustine. James O’Donnell goes so far as to claim that “Augustine sometimes fades from the narrative” (O’Donnell, 2005:45). He further maintains that in the *Confessions* “the human story is gradually erased, with all its confusion and mystery and perplexities and contradictions and divine story, serene and bright emerges behind it” (O’Donnell, 2005:72). According to O’Donnell every story which is embedded in the *Confessions* turns out to be the same story: “The story about God, not about Augustine” (O’Donnell, 2005:72). He says that “the whole book which is addressed to God is written as if the humans are seated in the balcony and ignored by the performer on the stage” and he adds that “no human reader was capable of telling whether Augustine spoke true or not. God always comes between Augustine and his fellow humans, even in this, his most intimate work” (O’Donnell, 2005:77). Indeed, if one counts the lines or words that tell about Augustine and compares them with those about God he will be astonished to find that even the account of Augustine is full of God and His presence in Augustine.

There are numerous passages in the *Confessions* which praise and glorify God so that others can learn to praise and thank God for His mercy as well. For example, Rousseau’s *Confessions* tries to emphasize the greatness of Rousseau and by justifying his wrong doings Rousseau praises himself and debases his so called friends and community. Augustine, on the other hand, in line with his purpose praises God and God alone. We read:

Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty. How magnificent his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! Man is one of your creatures; Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he can not be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you (Augustine, 1961: 21).

I believe Augustine weaves his life story by focusing on certain themes all of which lead to divine truth. "Providence", "illumination" and "grace" seem to keep the story together and throw mystical sparks on the autobiographical work. Augustine first writes to underline God's provident influence on the course of events. Throughout the narrative we encounter some events which display God's providence. God using Faustus to reveal the faults of Manichees, God leading Augustine to Saint Ambrose, God planning for Augustine to encounter books of the Platonists before studying scripture, and God leading Augustine to Simplicianus are some of the events which are presented as signs of God's providence. In his own words, through such events Augustine tells about the guiding power of God. He says: "for the steps of a man are directed by the Lord and he chooses his way" (99). Another theme is "illumination" by way of divine inspiration. In the course of the *Confessions*, Augustine constantly invokes divine illumination. He tells of the way he is illuminated and he wants to illuminate others by igniting divine sparks in their hearts through writing his account. It is God who lights the fire in him and now it is his responsibility to light the fire in the hearts of others with the help of God. In other words, according to Augustine it is God who guides his confessional work. As a result, by writing his account of conversion, he fulfills his mission of helping other perplexed people who can not find the Truth that is God or who look for Truth in wrong directions. At the same time, Augustine serves God by praising and thanking him for his mercy and by acting as his missionary which results in other people's emotional acceptance of the Christian Faith:

The mind needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth. You'll light my lamp Lord .For you are the true Light which enlightens every soul born into the world (Augustine, 1961: 86).

“Grace” another significant theme of the *Confessions* is presented as a remedy to human being’s weaknesses to his inability to do the things he knows he ought to do. Augustine suggests that the most important lesson to be drawn from the *Confessions* is the role of God’s grace in one’s life:

Physician of my soul ... You have forgiven my past sins and drawn a veil over them, and in this way you have given me happiness in yourself, changing my life by faith and your sacrament. But when others read of those past sins of mine, or hear about them, their hearts are stirred so that they no longer lie listless in despair crying ‘I can not’. Instead, their hearts are roused by the love of your mercy and the joy of your grace, by which each one of us, weak though he be, is made strong (208).

Briefly, as a Christian mystic who has left all worldly desires behind, Augustine seems to avoid concentrating on himself. He is able to do this by attributing each event, each attitude and each emotion related to his life to God and this makes his confessional or autobiographical writing unique. Thus, Augustine discloses and at the same time resists disclosing himself in the presence of God.

As mentioned before, the structure of the *Confessions* is interesting because it is quite different from other autobiographical works. According to Olney, the structure of the book brings to the foreground the question “how life is to be narrated”. Since the *Confessions* seems to consist of “the stories of so many things” (Olney, 1998:10) which

Augustine interweaves with his own story, it is not surprising to find in this narrative “self-revelation” intermingled with “self concealment”. The first nine books of the *Confessions* appear to be written in the form of autobiography proper but at the start of Book Ten autobiography breaks off and Augustine’s philosophical interpretations of the Bible begin. The ten years between Augustine’s conversion, baptism and the beginning of the writing of the *Confessions* is left untold. This lack constitutes the most important gap in Augustine’s life story.

Book Ten focuses on the nature and the role of memory in learning and understanding the world and God. Here, Augustine underlines the relation between time and memory, between omnipresence and presence which he links with the present state of his soul. In Book Eleven, he starts with an explanation of the first verse of *Genesis*: “In the beginning God made heaven and earth; God created the world in His word alone” (Augustine, 1961:256), and therefore by the words ‘in the beginning’, we must understand the word of God. Then, Augustine successfully links this verse with the discussion of “time” and “eternity”. The two chapters; Books Twelve and Thirteen include a meditation on the creation narrative of the *Genesis* which seems to contribute to the mystical tone of the narrative. O’Donnell, the biographer of Augustine, thinks that the Christian Doctrine is the miracle of the *Confessions*. He maintains that “after the Christian doctrine becomes the miracle, there is an explosion in (Augustine’s) literary production that scarcely let up for the rest of his work and life” (O’Donnell, 2005:141). Augustine ingeniously adapts scriptural texts to his life story. In my view, he offers an implicit conclusion to his story by leaving his story on a threshold. He hopes that eternal life in heaven will be the end of his life story on earth and he wishes to fill the hearts of his readers with the same hope:

By the gift of your grace some of the works that we do are good... after them we hope that we shall find rest, when you admit us to the great holiness of your presence. But you are goodness itself and need no good besides yourself. You are forever at rest, because you are your own repose. What man can teach another to understand this truth? What angel can teach it to a man? We must ask it of you, seek it in you; we must knock

at your door only then shall we receive what we seek; only then will the door be opened to us (Augustine, 1961:347).

In the last parts of the book where his public life ends or loses its significance, Augustine makes use of the two narratives of creation given in the *Genesis*, one a narrative of the simultaneous creation of all things, the other a narrative of creations spread out over six days. Then, a question rises in my mind and I am not alone in this; “Why does Augustine make use of these two narratives?” According to Olney and I completely agree with him about this issue:

It is simply because we who are bound to the wheel of time can not arrive at the meaning of scripture unless the narrative proceeds slowly step by step. And so Augustine’s own narrative proceeds in the same manner (Olney, 1998:41).

Augustine comes to the point of conversion slowly step by step. He surrounds his story with other stories as well as the story of God’s creation and His providence so that he can make his main point of being an example to humanity clear. In addition, I believe that the allegorical interpretation of the first chapter of the *Genesis*, leads Augustine and his readers to a place where the blessed rest eternally, where the sense of alienation does not exist and there is no place or reason for temptation, where all separation is erased and human kind is reunited with God.

In the last three books, as stated earlier, Augustine discusses the concepts of “memory” and “time”. He repeatedly uses the terms “huge court of memory”, “harbour of memory” or “treasures of innumerable things” with a view to telling about the significance of memory. According to Augustine, “memory” is a means of calling life to mind and to find God in life. In other words, memory serves his only aim in life, to arrive at God, the Truth. In the *Confessions*, he wants to explore the workings of his memory and to find God in it. When he examines the present state of his soul in Book

Ten, he confesses his sins, narrates his temptations and I maintain that he wants to tell us that his story is an unfinished one. He has not become perfect by being converted.

Augustine's discussions of memory, its nature, function and capacity brings to the foreground one of the most significant problems in autobiographical writing. One can not grasp himself fully despite the huge court of memory he possesses. Therefore, he can not reflect himself fully:

The power of the memory is prodigious, my God. It is a vast, immeasurable sanctuary. Who can plumb its depths? And yet it is a faculty of my soul. Although it is a part of nature, I can not understand all that I am (Augustine, 1961: 216).

When the *Confessions* is considered in its entirety we see that there are many different factors that contribute to the story of Augustine's life or the process he undergoes before his total acceptance of the Christian Faith. Other conversion stories, his mother Monica's life story and conversion, the stories about the teachings of the Platonists all seem to help to solve the puzzle in Augustine's life. All these stories are interweaved with the central story of his spiritual wanderings and each plays a crucial role in the reader's understanding of the meaning and implications of Augustine's "converted self". However, it is my contention that when the whole story is analyzed closely, the others' stories seem to occupy so large a place that Augustine's life story sometimes acts as a supplement to other stories. First of all, his mother Monica has an instrumental role in the *Confessions* since she is the one who leads him to conversion and also in the autobiography she symbolizes the "true believer", the "devoted Christian". Augustine presents his mother as a bridge between God and himself. His life is made up of the unity of the life of the mother and that of the son which leads to another unity; the unity of their life with God. The mother dies; the son who loves her so much goes on to "live", now upheld by a greater and wiser life. Interestingly, after his mother, Monica's life ends, a new life for Augustine begins. He is now determined to leave all the worldly desires and wishes behind. This is probably why Augustine does not display great sorrow after her death. Augustine tells his readers that it is his belief

that his mother has gone to a very special place and that he hopes that he will go there and experience the same eternal happiness one day as well. All through the narrative, Monica is presented as a mother tireless by praying Augustine's conversion to Christianity. When Augustine begins to spout heresies Monica becomes alarmed, and intensifies her efforts to bring him to Christ. Monica also contributes to the mystical tone of the story. Most of the mystical occurrences in the story are associated with her. We are told that Monica's dream narrated by Augustine foreshadows her son's conversion:

She dreamed that she was standing on a wooden rule, and coming towards a youngman. Who smiled at her in joy, although she herself was sad? He asked her the reason for her sorrow... When she replied that her tears were for the soul I lost, he told her to take her heart for, if she looked carefully, she would see that where she was, there also was I. And when she looked, she saw me standing beside her on the same rule (Augustine, 1961:68).

According to Augustine it is God who sends these mystical messages to the mother: "You heard her, for how else can I explain the dream which you consoled her" (68). Furthermore, after his conversion it is with Monica that Augustine shares a sublime and wordless vision of eternal life. He writes: "While we spoke of the eternal wisdom, longing for it with all the strength of our hearts, for one fleeting instant we reached out and touched it" (198). As Giovanni Pappini in *Saint Augustine* explains, after the mystical experience; surrounded by such peace, mother and son were now not only one in the flesh but one in spirit as well. "All the old barriers between this parent and child had been thrown down; with no other being would Augustine ever feel himself so entirely one as with his mother" (Pappini, 1930:122). In my view since Augustine writes his autobiography after his conversion and carries the intention of showing truth through his own example, it is not surprising that he includes a lot of his mother's story into his own. In a way, he sees himself as one with his mother since they are both believers in a miraculous creator.

To Monica the moment of supernatural ecstasy seems to bring a premonition of the end. Her mission on earth is accomplished and she is free to soar upwards and enjoy peace and happiness forever:

Son, for mine own part I have no further delight in anything in this life. What I do here any longer and to what end I'm here... One thing there I desired to linger in this life, that I might see thee a Catholic Christian before I died. My God hath done this for me more abundantly, that I should now see thee withal, despising earthly happiness, become His servant (Augustine, 1961: 198).

At this point a question may come to our minds: “Why doesn't Augustine tell about the father's story?” Although the mother's story, the way she dies is told in detail, the father's name, his death is not even mentioned until the end. But we should not forget that the *Confessions* in a way commemorate the mother and her faith. Infact, Augustine tells us outright that his motive in telling his life story is to praise his mother's faith, Christianity. He does not aim to write an autobiography in the manner of the writers like Rousseau, to justify his deeds. He tries to tell of the significant people and moments in his life that help him embrace the Christian belief. Thus, Augustine includes all the people and factors that contribute to the fulfillment of this act and leaves out all others, such as the pagan father, brother or other family members. All his concern is to portray his “converted self”, not to talk about all aspects of his life and self. He has learned that God is absolute, inviolable, beyond question and doubt. In other words, for him, God is timeless, unchanging, all powerful, existing at the extreme limit of what language can say. In the *Confessions* he struggles to tell about this infinite power with his finite, limited capacity to express. He writes everything from the point of view of a convert and leaves out all that is inconsequential to his new religion.

The other conversion stories that are embedded in Augustine's story are crucial in our understanding of the significance of the chain of events that lead to Augustine's ultimate embracement of Christianity. The tale of Victorinus told by Simplicianus displays to Augustine the role of God's grace in saving human beings from sin and

error. The story of young Alypius, Augustine's close friend who is "sucked in the whirlpool of bad habits" early in his life but who then converts to Christianity is interpreted by Augustine as a divine act which Augustine ought to take as a message for himself. Similarly, the other conversion stories in the *Confessions* all in different ways contribute to Augustine's realization of God as ultimate truth and lead to his conversion. Augustine hopes that his readers by reading his story of embracement of Christian belief will also convert to Christianity and help others to convert.

Before his conversion, Augustine is conscious of two conflicting views working within him simultaneously -his intellectual search and desire to reach a measured conclusion and his being surrounded by signs sent to him by God. By hearing of or witnessing others' spiritual acceptance, he seems to manage to get rid of this conflict. In short, as T.R Wright maintains "the conversion of Augustine is an extremely intertextual conversion which involves a complex chain of conversion narratives". Wright explains that:

The story of Ponticianus' conversion which precedes Augustine's own has itself been affected by reading the life of St. Anthony who was influenced by a passage from the Bible. If conversion follows conversion, we could equally say that story succeeds story in an endless act of reading and interpretation (Wright, 1988: 95).

Moreover, Platonists also hold a significant place in this spiritual autobiography since Platonists help him see the short comings of Manichaeism and lead him to realize that the scripture is not always to be understood in a literal sense. Therefore, Platonism constitutes an important step, a big leap towards his conversion. Platonists consider the transcendent, immaterial realm as the highest good and in this sense it draws Augustine's attention to the teachings of Christianity, particularly to its mystical aspect. In other words, Platonism is presented in the *Confessions* as a pagan philosophy closest to the Christian philosophy. It is through Platonism that Augustine conceives evil as an unreal substance, views which contradict Manichaeism. The problem of evil is one of

the biggest problems that perplexes Augustine's mind. But in this, he is helped by the refined spirit and high intellectualism of Platonists. According to O'Donnell the works of Platonists has a paradoxical effect on Augustine:

They set fire to his imagination, but that fire then kindled into a true blaze only when he took the ideas he found there with him to read the Christian scriptures (O'Donnell, 2005:122).

Augustine himself confesses that the Platonists and their works have a striking effect on his personal transformation and he believes its God who leads him to study the Platonist views on materialism before he begins to study His book, the *Genesis*. In other words, as a young man, reader of many books, searcher after truths, Augustine falls upon books that change his life or he lets them change his life with God's help.

You got for me books of the Platonists translated out of the Greek into Latin, and there I read, not to be sure in these exact words but in this sense all the same, with many and various arguments, that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and God was the word (Augustine, 1961: 144).

All these different views or people lead to one ideal; getting closer to God and helping others get closer to Him. According to Harold Bloom, Augustine emphasizes that we can not continue our spiritual flowering without the support of deep and prolonged reading (Bloom, 2002:83). Therefore, Augustine presents his own life story as an exemplary text to be studied closely before reading the ultimate text, God's text, the *Genesis*.

They read, they choose, they love. They read forever and what they read never passes away. In reading, they choose and in choosing, they love.

Their codex is never shut; their book is never closed; for God is their text in himself and eternally so (Augustine, 1961: 318).

Augustine has got powers of rhetoric because of his education and this time he uses his ability to flare his readers with the desire to attain his experience.

As stated in Chapter One, there is a certain pattern of the *Confessions*. The *Confessions*, in the first place is a confession of the writer's sins and errors, in the second place it is a confession of the recognition of God's goodness and truth. These two purposes are complementary to each other and suit the title of the book. In the third place, because he has been saved from error and the truth has been made clear to him, Augustine offers to praise God and thanks him for his mercy. At this level, he is led from the confession of sins to the confession of faith. Finally, he confesses in order to show God's glory to others and to get closer to Him:

So by confessing our own miserable state and acknowledging your mercy towards us we open our hearts to you, so that you may free us wholly, as you have already begun to do. Then we shall no longer be miserable in ourselves, but will find our true happiness in you...I fire my heart and the hearts of my readers with love of you, so that we may all ask: Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? (Augustine, 1961: 253).

The last words of the *Confessions* are also very significant in telling the intention of the whole story:

It was only after a lapse of time that we were impelled to do good that is after our hearts had received inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Before then our impulse was to do wrong, because we had deserted you but you, who are the one God, the good God, have never ceased to do good (346).

All in all, it is important for an autobiography writer to create a certain image of herself/himself in the minds of public. The writer usually limits the truth about herself/himself according to how s/he wants to present herself/himself. Thus, in autobiographical or confessional writing, the borderline between “the known” and “the knower”, “the knower” and her/his “acknowledged or unacknowledged intention” as well as their interaction with each other shape the course of the story. In the *Confessions* the image Augustine tries to create of himself or the character he wishes to adopt and portray is directly associated with his wish to persuade the reader to the correctness of his decision. It is quite clear for Augustine that by reading God’s book, the scriptures, he is enlightened and he now invites everyone, who lacks real faith to read and understand the *Genesis*. In other words, his book is expected to serve as a bridge between humanity and God:

In your great wisdom you who are our God speak to us of all the things in your Book, the firmament made by you. And you do this so that in the wonder of contemplation we may see all the things clearly, though we are still subject to signs, seasons, days and years (326).

CHAPTER IV

GHAZALI

Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) is generally acclaimed as the most influential thinker of medieval Islam. He is born at Tus in Persia. Ghazali is quite young when his father dies but he is able to receive a good education. After the young Ghazali spends some years of study under the greatest theologian of the age, al-Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn, his intellectual gifts are noted by Nizam al-Mülk, the all powerful vizier of the Turkish Sultan. Nizam al-Mülk appoints him professor at the university he founds in the capital. Thus, at the age of thirty three, Ghazali obtains one of the most distinguished positions in the academic world of his day.

Four years later, Ghazali faces a crisis in his life. Although it displays physical symptoms, it is primarily religious. He comes to feel that the one thing that matters most in life is avoidance of Hell and attainment of Paradise, and he realizes that his present way of life is too worldly to have any hope of eternal reward. After a severe inner struggle, he leaves Baghdad to take up the life of a wandering ascetic. Though he later returns to the task of teaching, mental and spiritual change that he undergoes during this crisis remains with him permanently. Ghazali becomes first and foremost a religious man and not just a worldly teacher of religious sciences. What saves him from error and depression during this crisis is the Sufi teaching. Among his writings the *Deliverance from Error* has a special place in displaying the intricacies of his Sufi mysticism (Bayraktar, 2005:209-210). Zwemer in *A Moslem Seeker after God* quotes Claud Field to display how Ghazali occupies a unique place in the history of Islam and Sufi mysticism:

Al Ghazali is celebrated both as an apologist of Orthodoxy and a warm advocate of Sufi mysticism. Intimately acquainted with all the learning of his time, he was not only one of the numerous Oriental philosophers who traverse every sphere of intellectual activity, but one of those rarer minds whose originality is not crushed by their learning. He was imbued with a

sacred enthusiasm for the triumph of his faith, and his whole life was dedicated to one purpose, the defense of Islam (Field, in Zwemer 1920:82).

The *Deliverance from Error* is an autobiographical text yet it is not exactly an autobiography which presents us with an intellectual analysis of Ghazali's spiritual growth in the manner of Augustine. It offers arguments in defense of a form of human apprehension higher than the rational, namely that of the prophet which is based on revelation and denial of all that is material and worldly.

4.1. *The Deliverance from Error*

The *Deliverance from Error*, confessions of Ghazali, seems to have three major dimensions. The first is the autobiographical dimension; the second is its psychological and intellectual dimension which records Ghazali's inner experience the third and final dimension is the investigation of religious and intellectual trends of its time.

In this work Ghazali tries to emphasize two points at once: his credibility as a person to lead the people from destruction to a pure life and a strong faith, his ability to show the method of deliverance from error. Therefore, he tries to link his life story; the climactic moments of his life which help him embrace Sufism with certain religious facts and the practice of religion. In his confessions Ghazali does not commit himself to one approach. The work starts by displaying one point of view and seems to be moving toward one goal but then goes on to explore different aspects of Islam, namely Kalam, Philosophy, Talimism and Sufism. As McCarthy, the translator of the work, states in his introduction to the *Deliverance From Error*, some critics such as Dr al-Baqari regard the work as a kind of Bildungsroman (a development novel) (McCarthy, 1980:24). Dr. al-Baqari claims that the work is not a full record of Ghazali's life and development but it is a fictional account of a life where Ghazali poses as the hero. In addition, Baqari says that the *Deliverance from Error* is neither a confession nor an autobiography, but a novel with a message. According to Baqari, Ghazali is trying to create a fictional image of himself in order to convey his message more dramatically (McCarthy, 1980:25).

It is my contention that the most important message that Ghazali tries to deliver in his confessions is that if one can make the individual voyage towards Beloved then s/he can be delivered from error and suffering. Ghazali explains:

The aim of this account is to emphasize that one should be most diligent in seeking the truth until he finally comes to seeking the unseekable. For primary truths are unseekable, because they are present in the mind; and when what is present is sought, it is lost and hides itself. But one who seeks the unseekable can not subsequently be accused of negligence in seeking what is seekable (Ghazali, 1980:58).

When Ghazali explains his spiritual and intellectual corruption and psychological maladies resulting from his ignorance and blind conformity to popular Orthodox beliefs, he also points to the problems that the Muslim societies face in his time. Therefore, Ghazali does not put his life story in the centre of his work. Instead by telling his own account, his own example of one who has been diverted from the path of truth, he tries to warn his readers against the possible dangers that lead them astray. As Zwemer tells us the struggle between science and orthodoxy was at its peak in the eleventh century for Islam (Zwemer, 1920:97). The Muslim society was divided into many sects and the most persistent and damaging was the teachings of the Batinites who claim to be unique possessors and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the infallible Imam. The Batinites at that time aimed not merely to spread their doctrine but to assassinate the major figures among their opponents (Zwemer, 1920: 97-99). Therefore, one of the aims of Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* was to warn his readers against the threat posed to Islam by Batinism. Infact, his own protector and patron Nizam al-Mülk was assassinated by a Batinite as were several outstanding men of the time.

During his own account, Ghazali talks about different doctrines that contribute to his spiritual growth, but for him the most excellent way is Sufism. The Sufis have "tasted and saw how sweet the Lord is" (Ghazali, 1980:77). Abu Said, a prominent Sufi

mystic says that “to be Sufi is to detach from fixed ideas and from preconceptions; and not try to avoid what is your lot” (Said, in Shah 1980:5). Therefore, Ghazali in his spiritual autobiography tries to tell us how he detaches from fixed ideas of Orthodox Islam and wants to help his reader to detach from the ideas that divert from the path of truth. Jalaluddin Rumi, another leading Sufi mystic whose book *Mathnavi-I Maanavi* is considered to be one of the world’s greatest books on Sufi mysticism tells his readers and followers: “Do not look at my outward shape, but take what is in my hand now” (Rumi, in Shah 1980:5). This saying seems to have become the motto of Sufi mysticism and has influenced a lot of mystics including Ghazali. Ghazali in his life story does not give a detailed and precise historical account of himself. Instead, he wishes to talk about “Divine Realities” as he narrates his personal experience. He explains at length his new understanding of life that is the Sufi way of life which is based on the idea that God is the one and only self-subsisting Reality.

A close study of the *Deliverance from Error* shows that “Ghazali does not always follow a strict chronology but has schematized his description of intellectual development” (Watt, 1953:12). As readers of autobiographical writing, we expect to see a proper chronology but Ghazali’s autobiography lacks this since his main concern is not to give us an account of his life but to convey his new understanding of life. He divides his story into stages which do not reflect the stages of his life but the stages of the process of his “purification of heart” which ends in total commitment to Sufism. In other words, he only speaks of the successive and gradual stages of his mystical ascent that is his becoming completely lost in God. Therefore, it is not surprising for us to see that he leaves out a major part of the historical events that make up his life story.

Hakim Jami, another important Sufi mystic underlines the importance of seeking Truth in non material things. He writes, “seekers there are in plenty but they are almost seekers of personal advantage. There are so very few seekers after Truth” (Jami, in Shah 1980:94). Ghazali, in his desire to follow the views and methods of Jami and other Sufis, devotes the first part of his confessions to the seekers of truth. In this part he classifies those who seek truth as Mutakallimun (the followers of science of Kalam), the Batinites, the Philosophers and the Sufis. According to Ghazali, these are some of the ideas or doctrines that people might come across in the quest for truth. He believes that

like him people may choose to follow this path. So by reading his account they may have an idea of these sciences and see the benefits and threats they pose. In addition, by giving these distinct categories of knowledge, Ghazali tries to prove to us that it is not easy to arrive at truth. According to him, it is time for everyone to question the doctrines that contain so many inconsistencies and divert human beings from the path of truth. He believes that truth can not be obtained by servile conformism. For him, only the ones who can get rid of the false doctrines that occupy their minds, hearts, therefore their lives can be purified:

When a man recognizes that, the glass of his servile conformism is shattered-an irreparable fragmentation and a mess which can not be mended by patching and piecing together: it can only be melted by fire and newly reshaped (Ghazali, 1980:59).

Ghazali obtains truth by questioning truth. In his confessions he tries to ask and answer the questions that he thinks may appear in the minds of his readers:

I lost no time in following the different ways of knowledge and making a thorough study of the views of these groups. I applied myself first to the science of Kalam, secondly to the way of Philosophy, thirdly to the teachings of the Batinites, and fourthly to the Way of the Sufis (Ghazali, 1980:59).

In reading Ghazali's analysis and evolution of these different doctrines, we understand that Ghazali knows human psychology very well. He investigates each doctrine but does not totally reject them. He seems to try to bring to the foreground some of the questionable arguments in three of these approaches and leaves the decision to his readers. He himself has a "freedom of choice" in the path to truth. So, he lets his readers have the same "freedom". In the *Deliverance from Error* Ghazali wishes to give

some tips to those who face problems like his own in the search for truth. In addition, he believes that those who try to arrive at truth by just listening to others' ideas are likely to be diverted from truth. I believe that he also tries to give a message to those people who have accepted religious doctrines without questioning. We read:

The dim-witted men know the truth by men and, not men by the truth. The intelligent men, on the contrary, follows the advice of the master of the Intelligent, Ali-God be pleased with him! Where he says: "Do not know the truth by men but rather know the truth and you'll know its adherents. The intelligent man, therefore, first knows the truth, and then he considers what is actually said by someone. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker be wrong or right in other matters. Indeed such a man will often be intent on extracting what is true from the involved utterances of the erring, since he is aware that gold is usually found mixed with dirt (Ghazali, 1980:68)

Moreover, when Ghazali warns his readers against the dangers set forth by philosophers unwittingly, he aims to show to them the thin border line between "truth" and "error": "The close proximity of the true to the false does not make the true false, as it does not make the false true" (70). In telling his story, he displays again and again that truth can be obtained only by patience and care.

In the part Ghazali devotes to the criticism of the Batinites, the doctrine of Talimism, he emphasizes the importance that ought to be given to "personal effort" and "personal judgement" in arriving at truth, God. His discussion on the identification of "qibla" (the direction to be faced when one is performing one's prayers in Islam) is a good example that expresses the importance Ghazali attributes to the role of "personal effort" ought to play in religion:

A man who has a problem about the qibla has no recourse but to perform his prayer in accordance

with his personal judgment. For if, he were to journey to the Imam's town to learn about the qibla, the time for prayer would elapse... so it is in all cases involving personal effort (70).

Therefore, in his confessions Ghazali tells us about his personal efforts in reaching truth. He not only tries to show his readers the correctness of his decision to seek truth but he also wishes to persuade them to follow his example by taking a step towards God, the ultimate Truth. Throughout the text, however Ghazali explicitly refrains from directing his readers in their choices. He simply aims at encouraging them to seek God because for him personal judgement is instrumental in one's journey to Truth. Ghazali gives his readers an account of his real or imagined life story, but it is the readers who will judge his account.

Throughout the *Deliverance from Error*, Ghazali also refers to his other works such as *the Correct Balance*, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *the Marvels of the Heart*. Just as Augustine sees other conversion stories complementary to tell his own, Ghazali sees his other works as complementary in depicting his message fully. We read:

I have mentioned the way to remove disagreement in *the Book of the Correct Balance* so study it that you may know that it is true and would definitely abolish disagreement existing among them (Ghazali, 1980:74).

Furthermore, by giving those works as references he seems to underline that no text other than the Koran can be sufficient in depicting truth, in explaining "unlimited cases". Ghazali says that "limited texts can not exhaust unlimited cases" (78). Thus, the *Deliverance from Error* is not comprehensive enough to tell his life story or deliver his message. By referring to his other books, however, Ghazali breaks the textual and chronological structure of his story. His other books are not autobiographical in nature and by inserting them into an autobiographical account; Ghazali tries to show to us that

his aim in the *Deliverance from Error* is not “self-expression” or “justification of deeds” but the portrayal of God as the only “guarantor” of Truth.

The most significant part of the book is the one which is devoted to the explanation of the Sufi belief. Infact, Ghazali narrates each aspect of his life from a Sufi point of view. He explains how he is steeped in Sufi thought, with its emphasis on “fruitional” (direct) experience. Since “fruitional” experience is the most crucial prerequisite of Sufi mysticism, Ghazali does not devote a large space to theories that explain Sufism. Instead, he tries to display how one can practice the Sufi way of life by telling us his own “fruitional” experience of the Sufi tradition. As a devoted Sufi mystic, who seems to annihilate his ego by getting rid of all worldly pleasures, it is not surprising to see Ghazali sometimes fading away from the narrative, from his own life story. As pointed out earlier, Zwemer tells us that Ghazali in his confessions does not try to seek glory or honor for himself but for God and Islamic mysticism; Sufism. In other words, he tries to fulfill the aim which the Sufis set before them:

To free the Soul from the tyrannical yoke of the passions, to deliver it from its wrong inclinations and evil instincts, in order to purify the heart so that there should only remain room for God and for the invocation of His holy name (Zwemer, 1920:225).

When Ghazali ends his public life, his career at the Nizammiyya School in Baghdad, he starts a new life. In this life he shuts himself up and wishes to keep away from all the worldly desires. We read: “My only occupation was seclusion, solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of my soul” (Ghazali 1980:80). He then leaves everything behind; all his family, friends, students and wealth. He does this because he knows that: “a Sufi student must reduce to the minimum the fixing of his attention upon customary things like his people and his environment, for attention-capacity is limited” (Shah, 1980:53). Ghazali is determined to abandon the world and begin his quest as a Sufi pilgrim. His travels seem to take him from Baghdad to Damascus, from Damascus to Jerusalem and Hebron, then from

Hebron to the birthplace of the Prophet, Mecca. However, as Zwemer also tells us, in his life story Ghazali does not give us any details about his wanderings (how he succeeds in going to such distant places when it was excessively difficult to travel long distances or what kind of problems he must have encountered on the way) (Zwemer, 1920:108). In the narrative his wanderings are presented only as tools in his explanation of the battle he conducted. It is my contention that the details of his pilgrimage are not given since they do not contribute to Ghazali's aim of displaying Truth. Similarly, Ghazali hardly talks about his family. He does not tell us about the members of his family, what they do. For example, we read that during his stay in Damascus "certain concerns and appeals of [his] children" (Ghazali, 1980:81) cause him to return to Baghdad but we neither know what they are or what he does in Baghdad before he returns to Damascus again. It may be because this period is not worth discussing since it constitutes an interval in his search for Truth. It is clear that he sees this period as an obstacle between him and God, an obstacle that prevents him from going on his journey to God. Thus, Ghazali as the creator of his own life story leaves these details out and includes only the parts that are necessary in depicting his conversion to Sufi belief.

According to Idries Shah, "those who are regarded as believers or religious people, and who are incapable because of habit from behaving in any other manner, may be called religious but can not be regarded as having faith" (Shah, 1980:231). Ghazali, in his confessions shows us clearly that he is aware of this reality and that he too did not have real faith before his commitment to Sufism. While he is criticizing himself, for not having "real faith", he is also criticizing others who have "slackness of faith" and advises them "to act wisely in the quest for faith and look into the cause of [their] hidden unbelief" (Ghazali, 1980:89). Moreover, criticizing very significant figures like Farabi and Ibni Sina, he wishes to show that even very popular and influential figures may have "slackness of faith". He believes that such people have deceived many not because of the strength of their arguments but because of the inadequate arguments of their opponents.

Such is the faith of those philosophers who pretend to have faith! Many, indeed, have been deceived by them and their deception has been

intensified by the weak arguments of those who opposed them (Ghazali, 1980:90).

Thus, Ghazali is trying to bring strong arguments against the doctrines that divert people from truth. In his confessions, he gives his readers advice as to how they should question themselves and arrive at truth. He believes that the Sufis are the “doctors of [his] heart” (87). They have cured him with the examples they have provided him with. Indeed, Sufis have enlightened his mind and heart and helped him to get rid of his ignorance of God, his heart’s deadly poison. The Sufi tradition which he sees as a quickening antidote to disobedience or ignorance of God, has taught him that “the only way to treat the heart by removing its malady and regaining its health lies in complete obedience to God by resisting passion” (87).

Ghazali’s return to teaching is as significant as his moment of conversion. Junaid of Baghdad, an important Sufi mystic, tells us that:

The Sufi has: liberality such as that of Abraham acceptance of his lot, as Ishmael accepted, patience, as possessed by Job; capacity to communicate by symbolism, as in that case of Zacharias; estrangement from his own people, which was the case with John; woollen garb like the shepherd’s mantle of Moses; journeying like the travelling of Jesus; humility, as Mohammed had humility of Spirit (Junaid, in Shah 1980:226).

Ghazali shows us how he fulfills these requirements one by one throughout his confessions. He isolates himself from his environment, faces the difficulties of his inner voyage with great patience and in the end succeeds in becoming a modest Sufi mystic. After his total embracement of Sufism, he is ready to continue his career as a teacher. At this point, he emphasizes the change in himself by saying: “I know well that, even though I have returned to teaching, I have not really returned. For returning is coming back to what was” (Ghazali, 1980:92). Ghazali tells us that it is God who reforms him

and makes him write this account and now it is his mission to help others to convert and reform. According to Ghazali, to accomplish this, the love of God is the only source of inspiration.

Like Augustine's last words in the *Confessions*, Ghazali's last words in the *Deliverance from Error* are significant in showing once more to his readers the real intention of the writer. Again like Augustine, Ghazali closes his confessions with a striking warning to humanity:

For true learning is that which leads to the knowledge that sin is a deadly poison and that afterlife is better than this life. And anyone who knows that will not barter the better for something inferior. This knowledge is not the fruit of the various types of knowledge with which most men busy themselves. Hence the knowledge they acquire only makes them bolder in disobeying God Most High. True knowledge, on the other hand, increases its possessor's reverence, fear and hope and this stands between him and commission of sins, save for those slips from which, in moments of weakness, no man is free. But this is not a sign of weak faith, for the believer, is tried but continually repentant, and he is far from stubborn impenitence (Ghazali, 1980:98).

It is my contention that, this is not the end of a life story, but a summing up of a message a true man of learning who once was a sinner, as he courageously tells us, wishes to convey to his readers.

Shah quotes Ajmal of Badakhshan, a Sufi mystic in his book *the Way of the Sufi*. With this, Shah tries to explain the principles of Sufi philosophy.

There are three ways of presenting anything. The first is to present everything. The second is to present what people want. The third is to present

what will serve them best. If you present everything, the result may be surfeit. If you present what people want, it may choke them. If you present what will serve them best, the worst is that, misunderstanding, they may oppose you. But if you have served them thus, whatever the appearances, you have served them, and you, too, must benefit whatever the appearances (Ajmal, in Shah 1980:224-225).

In the manner that Ajmal of Badakhshan suggests in this confessional work Ghazali seems to serve his people rather than present everything about himself or present what people want. He appears to be delimiting the story of his life by constructing a “self” that can serve his particular purpose which is to be an instrument in one’s quest for Truth, God. Ghazali seems to have confusion about the Divine Reality and he is a part of a society in error. In the *Deliverance from Error*, he is exploring the way to set his foot on the right path, looking for the kind of character that is likely to choose the right. In addition, he seems to consider the famous Sufi belief: “If you can not find in a man an appropriate example of dedication, study the lives of the Sufis” (Shah, 1980:56). I believe Ghazali, as a Sufi mystic, wants his readers to study his life, his text which shows how one may be purified from false doctrines and be steeped in Sufi belief.

4.2. The Similarities between Augustine’s and Ghazali’s texts

As expressed by their authors, the *Confessions* of Augustine and the *Deliverance from Error* of Ghazali are written with similar intentions in mind. Both writers aim to warn their readers against the misleading beliefs of their time and to display the greatness and magnificence of God embraced in accordance with their respective belief systems. Augustine warns his readers against “Manichaeism”, a popular doctrine of the era. Ghazali warns his readers against the beliefs and acts of Batinites that threaten his society. Through their personal experiences both Augustine and Ghazali try to show to their readers divine realities and by presenting the problems they have encountered and overcome in detail, they want to persuade them to the possibility of righteousness of their way.

In the *Confessions* we see that Augustine puts the love of God in the centre of his life story and he tells us that he is writing with the help of God, with His inspiration. Thus, he wants to praise God while confessing his sins. Ghazali seems to be doing the same. But for him, expressing his love for God comes out as more important than narrating the details of his life story:

Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's Majesty.
How magnificent His strength. How inscrutable
His wisdom (Augustine, 1961:21).

In the Name of God Most Gracious and
Merciful... Praise be to God, whose praise
should preface every writing and discourse
(Ghazali, 1980:53).

As mentioned earlier, Ghazali and Augustine seem to share similar destinies. They are both born in cities which were centers of learning in their time. Augustine is born in Carthage, an ancient city of intellectuals, Ghazali in Baghdad, the acclaimed center of Islamic Philosophy. Therefore, the places they are born must have contributed to the formation and development of their form of thinking and belief systems which we follow very closely in their autobiographies. Both Augustine and Ghazali display sceptical dispositions: "I exhausted myself in depravity in the pursuit of an unholy curiosity" says Augustine (57). "The thirst for grasping the real meaning of things was indeed my habit" explains Ghazali (54). It is also clear that their sceptic natures were reinforced by their environments and all contributed to their tireless search after truth.

Augustine and Ghazali have similar careers. They were respected teachers and famous rhetoricians of their time. Furthermore, as a result of their respective spiritual crisis both Augustine and Ghazali decide to leave their careers when their fame is at its peak and become wanderers who seek truth or who wish to avoid error.

Another important similarity between Augustine and Ghazali is that they both tell us their stories from the point of view of a convert. Their life stories are held

together by their performative descriptions of how they are converted. The display of the “converted self” enables us to follow the transformation they undergo step by step and their autobiographies are indeed the stories of their spiritual growth and maturation.

Augustine’s *Confessions* and Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error* are full of philosophical questions. They both seem to devote a large space to the philosophical sciences and the philosophical parts of their stories reveal how they see themselves and the world around them. Augustine’s *Confessions* is written predominantly in the form of Socratic dialogue. Augustine poses philosophical questions such as “Who is this Being who is so far above my soul?” (Augustine, 1961:213) or “What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?” (262) and then he tries to answer them in the Socratic manner. Ghazali also poses philosophical questions throughout the *Deliverance from Error*; “How then do we give up the certain because of the uncertain?” (Ghazali,1980:89) but how he uses these in his own narrative is different from that of Augustine since the form of his writing is not Socratic though it seems as Socratic on surface.

As discussed in Chapter Two, “Mysticism” is a dominant element not only in Augustine’s *Confessions* but also in Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error*. In weaving their life stories, Augustine and Ghazali narrate the remembered incidents of their past from the point of their respective mystical world views. Augustine’s story reflects some striking characteristics of Christian mysticism whereas Ghazali’s story reflects the characteristics of Sufi mysticism.

Images of light and darkness seem to appear in both the confessional works. Light represents “conversion”, “spiritual acceptance” whereas darkness represents “error” and “being diverted from the path of truth”. As stated in Chapter Two, Augustine associates spiritual reality with light. We read:

All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the wisdom of eternal truth. I began to climb out of the depths, darkness to which I had sunk, in order to return to you. O light of my heart, my God how I burned with longing to have

wings to carry me back to you, away from all earthly things (Augustine, 1961:59).

Like Augustine, Ghazali also associates light with everything that comes from God. Moreover in line with Sufi mysticism, he associates darkness with everything that puts an obstacle between God and Human beings. He writes:

God Most High created men in darkness, and then sprinkled on them some of His light. From that light, then the unveiling of truth must be sought. Moreover, that light gushes forth from the divine liberality at certain times, and one must be on the watch for it (Ghazali, 1980:58).

Another similarity between Augustine and Ghazali is that in their autobiographical works writers talk about and concentrate on “moments of time”. For them certain moments of time are important in illuminating them and leading to their embracement of God. Therefore, they give extensive accounts of these moments in their past but do not talk about other events in their personal history. In both the autobiographies “the moment of mystical revelation” “the moment of conversion” and “the moment of spiritual apprehension” are elaborated and they keep the stories together.

All in all, the *Confessions* of Augustine and the *Deliverance from Error* of Ghazali are autobiographical narratives and theological treatises at the same time. They both intend to serve and glorify God by helping other non-believers or sceptics to see truth and be converted after reading their accounts. These stories are meant to be exemplary to those who are first blind or confused or in sin but who eventually attain light and embrace truth.

4.3. The Differences between Augustine's and Ghazali's texts

Despite their many similarities, Augustine's *Confessions* and Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error* also have a number of differences. Initially, they differ in their explanations of how one can arrive at knowledge of God, since Augustine comes to understand and appreciate God through Christian mysticism, whereas Ghazali through Sufi mysticism. In other words, the belief systems they try to build their life stories on are different.

In addition, Ghazali is a believer of Islamic religion before his conversion to Sufi mysticism whereas Augustine is a non-believer before his conversion to Christian mysticism. He is just a sceptic with a lot of questions in mind but after he witnesses a number of spiritual revelations he decides to be converted and be baptized. Furthermore, Ghazali becomes a Sufi mystic before he begins to experience revelations from God. In other words, after he decides to try the way of the Sufis in arriving at truth, he starts a sort of training which includes meditation and prayer. Owing to these, he is able to experience revelations from God. Augustine, on the other hand, experiences a number of mystical revelations which lead him to be converted to Christianity or rather to Christian mysticism.

Another difference between Augustine and Ghazali's confessional works is how they structure their narratives. Augustine's life story is embedded in other supplementary stories such as other people's conversion stories and his mother's life story but Ghazali does not refer to or give an account of other people's stories.

As mentioned earlier, the *Confessions* is divided into two parts. There is the autobiographical section which ends with Augustine's conversion and his mother's death. Here, the life story of a convert ends. Then, there is the Biblical part which begins with the interpretations of the concepts of "time", "memory" and "eternity". In this section we are given the allegorical interpretations of the scriptures. In the first part, Augustine succeeds in changing his understanding of life and reality, in the second part he explains successfully to his readers those parts of the Bible that call for allegorical interpretations. We are told that he would not be able to interpret the scripture if he had

not seen the spiritual reality. On the contrary, there is no such division in Ghazali's life story. The book starts on an autobiographical tone and ends in the same tone. Like Augustine, Ghazali analyzes the scriptural text but he does not spare a separate part for this. Instead, he spreads such interpretations of the Koran over his whole story.

Furthermore, throughout his life story Augustine gives some details about his family in particular his mother. In some parts of his narrative Augustine even talks about his sexual life. We read:

In those days I lived with a woman, not my lawful wedded wife but a mistress whom I had chosen for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her...Living with her I found out by my own experience the difference between the restraint of marriage alliance, contracted for the purpose of having children, and a bargain struck for lust (Augustine, 1961:72).

However, Ghazali's story is written in a more didactic tone and is far from containing such details. Ghazali strictly avoids talking about such issues.

For Ghazali, as mentioned before, "fruitful experience" (direct experience or practice) is very significant and this seems to determine the way he structures his narrative. He, in away, gives us the steps of "purification of heart" one by one and he does not exhaust us with theoretical discussions. Ghazali concentrates on explaining to his readers how he practices different ideas in the way to truth. It is my contention that Ghazali does not try to tell us his life story but wishes to give us the practical steps of reaching truth in the Sufi way. In Augustine's *Confessions*, on the other hand, accounts of "miraculous experiences" replace the "fruitful experiences" of Ghazali.

In brief, the *Confessions* and the *Deliverance from Error* are two autobiographical works that try to display the existence of God and praise God as the originator and guarantor of Truth. In these works, Augustine and Ghazali also tell us about the important moments of their life in their own style. Ironically, even the

confessional nature of the works can not overcome impossibility of depicting a transparent self since here too the selves portrayed are constructed with certain intentions in mind-both in the *Confessions* and the *Deliverance from Error*, writers wish to use their own stories as examples to non-believers or sceptics.

CHAPTER V

DERRIDA

Autobiography is not to be in any way confused with the so-called life of the author, with the corpus of empirical accidents making up the life of an empirically real person... The autobiographical, cuts across the body of the work and the body of the real subject. The autobiographical is thus the internal border of work and life, a border on which texts are engendered. The status of the text-if it has one-is such that it derives from neither the one nor the other, from neither inside nor the outside (Derrida, 1988:41)

Jacques Derrida, Algerian born French literary critic and philosopher of Jewish descent is mostly recognized as the founder of “deconstruction”. In most of his works, Derrida challenges the borders set by many writers, critics or philosophers in the Western world. I believe, Derrida not only forces a rethinking of the nature of reading and writing but calls into question basic assumptions about ourselves and our world by distancing himself from the various “philosophical movements” or “traditions”, simply “borders”.

Derrida has brought a unique understanding to confessional or autobiographical literature with his radical and challenging views. For him, writing is always a “supplement” of a supplement. In the *of Grammatology* he says: “ If supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement par excellence since it proposes itself as a supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign” (Derrida, 1975: 281). Therefore, when we take this idea of Derrida into consideration, we see that autobiographical or confessional writing is the supplement of other self writings “the body of work”, and the supplement of the “empirically” real person, the self writer. In addition, Derrida in most of his works points to the fact that every writing is a ring in a chain of writing and to attribute a specificity or a meaning to anyone text is a futile

effort. The meaning of every text is deferred and this “endless chain” goes on as long as the life goes on. Derrida suggests in the *Dissemination* that it even goes on after the death of the writer. We read:

There is nothing but text; there is nothing but extratext, in sum, an “unceasing preface” that undoes the philosophical representation of the text, the received opposition between the text and what exceeds it. The space of dissemination does not merely place the plural in effervescence; it shakes up an *endless* contradiction marked out by the *undecidable* syntax of more (Derrida, 1981: 43).

According to Peggy Kamuf, a critic and editor of Derrida, it is not easy to understand Derrida’s texts and in order to understand him it is essential to “read between the blinds” or “open the shutters and the blinders of thought to what comes from its others beyond and any one language or idiom”. In addition, we should “let [our] language play in the slanting rays” (Kamuf, 1991: xIii)

In the *Glas*, Derrida in a way summarizes his policy in writing:

Let us space. The art of this text is the air it causes to circulate between its screens. The chainings are invisible, everything seems improvised or juxtaposed. This text induces by agglutinating rather than by demonstrating by coupling and uncoupling, gluing and ungluing rather than by exhibiting the continuous, and analogical, instructive, suffocating necessity of a discursive rhetoric (Derrida, 1986:75).

These ideas of Derrida have to be kept in mind in our analysis of the *Circumfession*, his own confessional or autobiographical writing or his display of the impossibility of confessional or autobiographical writing. It is my contention that the *Circumfession* has

three distinct dimensions. The first one is Bennington's account of Derrida, the *Derridabase* which seems to represent the readers' response to Derrida. The second one is Derrida's deconstruction of Augustine's *Confessions* and the last one is Derrida's own confession which is ceaselessly deferred due to the "slipping" and "sliding" or the "play" of language (created by Derrida). In this chapter first Bennington's role in the *Circumfession* will be discussed. Then, how and why Derrida deconstructs Augustine's *Confessions* will be studied. Finally, Derrida's *Circumfession* will be analyzed as a text written by a "confessant" or a "self creator".

5.1. Geoffrey Bennington's role in the *Circumfession*

The *Circumfession* is written as a "friendly bet" or "contract" between friends in which Bennington dares Derrida to let himself be exposed by an essay "circumscribing" his thought, an account so systematic that it would even anticipate whatever Derrida might write in the future. Derrida reads it afterwards, writes something escaping from "the proposed systematization, surprising it" (Bennington, in Derrida 1993: 1). Bennington's *Derridabase* circumscribing, restricting or putting borders to Derrida in this way, is published in large print, on the upper page and occupies two thirds of the page. Derrida's circumfessing (confessing) attempts to talk around the *Derridabase* is in a smaller print below, as befits the position of the humble penitent trying to formulate his confessions. As explained in Chapter Two, the confessions of Derrida is in some ways mystical. One of the prerequisites of self perfection in the Jewish mystical tradition is humility (Lancaster, 1993:97). It is my contention that in the *Circumfession* this requirement is fulfilled or exemplified by Derrida in the way his writing relates to that of Bennington's. Furthermore this relation in a way is a mirror image of the relation Augustine has with Christ in the *Confessions*. Derrida himself explains this as he writes:

Geoff who remains very close to God, for he knows everything about the logic what I might have written in the past but also of what I might think or write in the future... so that I should have nothing left to say that might surprise him still and bring something about for him, who you would be tempted to compare to Augustine's God when he asks whether there's any sense in

confessing anything to Him when He knows everything in advance (Derrida, 1993: 16).

Moreover, Caputo in his introduction to *Augustine and Postmodernism* tells us that “by embedding Bennington’s *Derridabase* and Derrida’s *Circumfession* in this different Augustinian context, an unexpected displacement occurs”. According to him, in a way, Derrida protests against Bennington’s attempts to control him. “Bennington becomes God and to attack the omniscience of the divine Bennington, who has everything about Derrida, predestined, Derrida can find his salvation through unpredictability and undecidability” (Caputo, 2005:14).

In escaping Bennington, Derrida is again trying to “circumvent” the “circumference”. This “circumference” is, according to Derrida, “the one that has always been running after [him], turning in circles around [him]” (Derrida, 1993: 4). Here, “circumference” that sets borders to Derrida’s identity is a sign of his Jewishness, which since his childhood, both his parents before him and then he himself has been trying to hide.

They wanted to hide me like prince whose parentage is provisionally concealed to keep him alive...My parents never talked to me about it, I never asked them about it. It remains secondary and occupies so much space here only because of the thread I have chosen to follow (90).

“Circumference” is also Bennington and his text from which Derrida intends to break away that is what puts limits, boundaries to his life and his work. Bennington’s *Derridabase* at first seems to be an attempt to provide a comprehensive explication of Derrida’s work. However, Derrida’s *Circumfession* among other things intends to show how Derrida’s work exceeds all explications-limits. This may be one of the reasons why Derrida challenges Bennington by using expressions like; “I wonder if Geoff can have found” (Derrida, 1993:13) or “I wonder if Geoff knows” (6) throughout his work. In the

Time for the Truth, Bennington explains that Derrida's work has exceeded his own explication:

Circumfession is openly and explicitly written against my ability to read not just against my ability to read in so far as I might be the figure of any reader or aspirant reader of Jacques Derrida, but against my ability to read, addressed explicitly to me as unreadable... I knew what was coming but I never expected this (Bennington, in Caputo 2005: 54).

In other words, by surprising and circumventing Bennington, Derrida also surprises and breaks away from the borders that have been and that might be set by his present and future readers.

All of Derrida's activity in the *Circumfession* seems to relate to Geoffrey's astonishing interest in him, his desire to write about him, his "circumcising" or "circumscribing" him in an idea. Moreover, the text of the *Circumfession* and Derrida's relation to Geoffrey Bennington is nothing other than a metaphor for Derrida's whole life. Derrida seems to have a "G" filled life; God (in English translation), Georgette, his mother who is partly the mirror image of Augustine's mother, Monica, and Geoffrey. In the *Circumfession* Derrida moves back and forth among these "G"s neither "winning nor losing" (Derrida, 1993:44). He's waiting, he writes for "the great pardon, the unique moment which has not yet happened in [his] life" (55). In addition, he tells us that "the great pardon" is continually postponed in this vicious circle of life: "no point going round in circles, so long as the other has not won back that advance I shall not be able to avow anything" (56). Ironically the pardon is associated with all the three "G"s. Here Derrida seems to place his life in the context of prayer and tears:

I am addressing myself here to God, the only one I take as a witness, ... God, take God and not only do I pray, as I have never stopped doing all my life and pray to him, but I take him here and

take him as my witness, I give myself what he gives me (56).

By addressing God, Derrida produces the surprise that Bennington says he intends all along to “provoke and welcome” (Bennington, in Derrida 1993:1). In other words, the surprise is shown to us by Derrida in the narration of his relationship to Judaism and in the narration of the scenes relating to his circumcision, an event through which he is inscribed into the Jewish community:

I have been going round in circles, trying to witness not to see myself being seen but to remember myself around a single event...my circumcision alone, the circumcision of me, the unique one (Derrida,1993:59).

The readers of Derrida have not known about his religious struggle, about his struggle with his religion without religion and without religion’s God:

My religion about which nobody understands anything, anymore than does my mother who asked other people a while ago not daring to talk to me about it, if I still believed in God but she must have known that the constancy of God in my life is called by other names so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language (155).

By confessing his religious position in this way or by writing a text which, while it remains consistent with his previously published thoughts, it also comments on them or opens them up to others, Derrida demonstrates the inadequacy of attempts such as Bennington’s to circumscribe his thoughts, acts or life, that is to imprison him within the confines of a predictable system or method.

One can imagine Derrida as very modest ... One can also imagine him, on the contrary, as immodesty itself, forcing these same old texts to say something quite different from what they had always seemed to say... He is one or the other, you have to choose... but something like only Derrida can give us the means to understand this situation (Bennington, in Derrida 1993:7-8).

In the *Derridabase*, we see how difficult it is to tell about one's inner world, about all his thoughts, beliefs and acts. In Derrida's part, the *Circumfession* this idea is reinforced by showing how even the person himself/herself can not disclose his/her inner world. Derrida resists the disclosure of the self by consistently playing with language and deferring his confession which is what his readers expect him to do. We read:

They will understand it as they like the fire I'm here playing with is playing with me again, I'm no longer the same, I know I'm not the same face, the same persona, I seem to have seen myself near to losing my face, incapable of looking in the mirror at the fright of truth, the dissymmetry of a life in caricature, ... you have too many places, you take place in more places than you should and transgression itself always violates a place, an uncrossable line... (Derrida, 1993:123).

Bennington tells us that he never quotes Derrida directly and for this reason "in order not to say the same thing as Derrida, [he] is obliged to go in for reconstruction" and "exposes [himself] to the necessary risk of making mistakes" (Bennington, in Derrida 1993:13). His work Bennington says is built on the law of repetition: "What repeats must be the same but can in no case be identical" (13). What Bennington seems to say here is really true not only for Derrida's autobiographical writing but for all self writings. Derrida or any writer of autobiography, in a way, repeats the story of his/her life while putting it into words but the narrated story is never identical with the story as

lived. A “border”, “circumference” is always imposed on “the text” and “empirical life”.

Bennington also claims that it is impossible to have an exact “beginning” or an “end” since when the text begins “everything had already begun” (Bennington, in Derrida 1993:15). Bennington explains that “you always start somewhere, but that somewhere is never just anywhere” (16). Therefore, one who is writing his/her life story faces with this problem which is faced by all writers. A self writer, just as s/he is constructing a “self”, is also constructing a beginning and end to his/her life story. Such a construction, however, strengthens rather than weakens the borders set to disclose the self.

In the *Derridabase*, Bennington focuses on the term “différance” which connotes “deferral”. In other words, the meaning of a text is always postponed that there is never a moment when one can say meaning is attained. According to Bennington, to understand the significance of “différance” is necessary to our understanding of Derrida and the way he structures his narrative. Bennington explains:

Différance is never pure. One can not make it into an absolute. It is always in between or in-the-process-of, never itself, never present. Let us attempt provisionally to think of it as a force, as Derrida appears to in his texts, the force that produces and shakes up form (Bennington, in Derrida 1993:80).

Therefore, I believe by concentrating on Derrida’s “différance”, Bennington reminds us that we, the readers of Derrida’s autobiography or confession should not expect to see an “empirical self” in or behind the text.

According to Linda Anderson, Bennington’s role in the *Circumfession* is very significant because his presence and his text bring to the foreground one of the major problems of autobiographical writing, that “there is no singular text of the self or no autobiography which is only one’s own” (Anderson, 2001: 84). Derrida’s text, his life

story continually interacts with that of Bennington, as well as that of Augustine. Derrida writes and tries to preserve the “unpredictable”. In other words, his challenge is to return to the “undecidable” or the “unpredictable” which is absent in Bennington’s text. We read:

I write here improbable things which destabilize, disconcert, surprise in their turn G’s program, things in short he, G, any more than my mother or the grammar of his theologic program, will not have been able to recognize, name, foresee, produce, predict unpredictable things to survive him... It must be unpredictable, the salvation of a backfire (Derrida, 1993: 31).

Bennington is the critic of Derrida’s texts and the creator of a “theological” program with which he reads them. Therefore, in his capacity as the controller and creator of both his texts and his identity, he is like God to Derrida. In this relationship, he also resembles Derrida’s mother who has created Derrida’s “empirical self”, named him and had him circumcised. Furthermore, the power struggle between Bennington and Derrida or the *Derridabase* and the *Circumfession* serves to display the impossibility of depicting a comprehensive and consistent self. In my view, Bennington’s text has tempted Derrida to create a self that is “unpredictable” or “undecidable” and while Derrida is trying to “dismantle G’s program” (Derrida, 1993:305), his ultimate confession is postponed and is never finalized.

How Bennington ends the *Derridabase* is also very significant in showing us his role in the *Circumfession*:

We have absorbed Derrida, his singularity and his signature, the event we were so keen to tell you about, into a textuality, in which he may well have quite simply disappeared. Every one of Derrida’s texts is an event... This book will be of no use to you others, or to you, other, and will have been only a hidden pretext for writing in my

own signature behind his back (Bennington, in Derrida, 1993:316).

It is my contention that Derrida has accepted to enter into a power struggle with Bennington because he is ready to write another text, his own life story (the *Circumfession*) which is best written on or through a text concerning his thought. In the *Circumfession*, he seems to deny the possibility of reflecting a self that is “real” and “consistent”. The violent transgression between the two texts only ends in the creation of an “unpredictable” or “undecidable” self.

5.2. How and why Derrida deconstructs Augustine’s *Confessions*

In discussing Augustine’s *Confessions* and Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error* or the critical texts about them, I have mostly referred to the critical corpus published on autobiographical writing. However, I had to follow a different method while analyzing Derrida’s *Circumfession*. The *Circumfession* problematizes boundaries between different kinds of discourses, the personal, autobiographical and the critical. Here, Derrida successfully brings together his life story with the life story of Augustine and the critical writing on *Confessions*. The *Circumfession* like the *Confessions* is an autobiography involving a declaration of a kind of religious faith, an attempt at reconciliation with the past in which that faith, so far as it is Jewish, was received. Like *Confessions*, it is a part of a quest for the great pardon. However, unlike Augustine, Derrida ceaselessly postpones “the ultimate confession”, “the great pardon” because he believes one can not confess the truth. Truth, like writing is subject to infinite “supplementarity”, therefore a confession can not disclose truth; it has in Derrida’s words “nothing to do with truth”:

Ecstasy between the inside and outside, of house and country, of source and mouth, of river and our Mediterranean, on this shore of introjection and incorporation from which even God, on the day of his death will not be able to deliver us, but I would also show , in the same state as I half his face on the other side of life, hoping to die before

the mother, my obsequent, dreading it too and weeping for the unavowable truth, in other words, you will have understood in the end that a confession has nothing to do with truth (Derrida, 1993: 107).

By deconstructing Augustine, Derrida in a way tries to challenge or problematize the typical explications made about the *Confessions*. In a roundtable discussion which is presented in Caputo's work *Augustine and Postmodernism*, he claims that he does not know why and how he starts writing about Augustine:

I'm not lying now. I do not remember why, at the beginning when I started writing this (*Circumfession*). After having read Geoff's text, I had chosen Saint Augustine. I do not remember why. I swear. The fact is that I have always been interested in Saint Augustine, at least superficially and in a discontinuous fashion... I came back to St. Augustine many times in my life, but why I have chosen St. Augustine at that time, I do not remember. Once started, then everything followed (Derrida, in Caputo 2005: 30).

Although Derrida presents his choice of Augustine as accidental, I believe it has to do with a number of significant similarities between Augustine's life and his own. In reading the *Circumfession*, we are made aware of these personal connections: They are both born in Algeria, Derrida's mother, Georgette is a kind of Jewish Monica, they both undergo a period of youthful rebellion, they both experience the compromises and the troubles of a provincial person aiming for success in the metropolis etc.

Derrida's *Circumfession* seems to have been written as an analogy to Augustine's *Confessions*. As far as historical facts go Augustine is born in Numidia, a kingdom in North Africa (Thagaste) that is today called Algeria. We are told that Derrida is also born in Algeria and two months after he is born, Derrida's family move

to a house which is located on the rue Saint-Augustine (Derrida, 1993: 5). In other words, Derrida is not only born in the same place with Augustine but he even lives on a street which gets its name from Augustine.

Another important similarity between Augustine and Derrida is the role of their mothers play in their lives. Derrida writes his own confessions while his mother is dying. Therefore, the mother figure is very instrumental in his narrative. It reminds us of the role Monica plays in the *Confessions*. One of the prevalent themes of the *Confessions*, one that Derrida invokes is the concern of Monica for Augustine's soul, his ultimate salvation. In the *Circumfession*, Derrida's mother is also worried about her son. She is worried whether Derrida still believes in God but she does not dare to ask him (Derrida, 1993: 154-155). In addition, the theme of "death" that both Augustine and Derrida focus in their writing is not their own death but that of their mothers. In return, both writers present themselves as "sons of tears", sons who cry and weep for their mothers. Derrida writes while his mother is dying. The death scene of the mother in the *Circumfession* is presented as a slow one with the old woman suffering from running bed sores, having blank, unrecognizing eyes:

I have not yet closed her eyes but she will not see me again, whereas I see her eyes wide open, for my mother can no longer see, I had forgotten to say so, she can hardly see now, one can't really tell, her gaze no longer focuses, scarcely following the direction of the voices, less and less everyday (61).

Derrida's mother seems to be guiding the *Circumfession* from outside even though she no longer recognizes her son. In the *Confessions* although Augustine narrates his life story after his mother's death, unlike Georgette, his mother Monica seems to guide him all along. Derrida further emphasizes the analogies between his life and that of Augustine by including into his text some photos about Augustine taken from the books with the titles, *Saint Augustine with His Mother*, *The Ecstasy of Saint Augustine* and *The*

Death of Monica. In the *Confessions* Augustine tells his readers that he stole pears as a boy of sixteen:

The crime of theft which I committed that night as a boy of sixteen... to my shame I loved it. I had no beauty because it was a robbery. It is true that the pears which we stole had beauty, because they were created by you ... But it was not the pears that my unhappy soul desired. I had plenty of my own, better than those, and I only picked them so that I might steal (Augustine, 1961:49).

Similarly, Derrida admits in the *Circumfession* that he stole grapes when he was young:

Claude and me, we were eight or nine, over to the police after his warden had caught us with our hands on the grapes, and there was a nervous burst of laughter when he let us run off (Derrida, 1993:160).

In other words, both Derrida and Augustine confess that they were once involved in theft not because of the love of crime but just for crime's sake. Interestingly, Derrida also tells us that since his own involvement in theft he has followed "the confessions of theft at the heart of autobiographies" (160).

In the *Confessions*, Augustine uses the metaphor "sponge" when he tries to find answers to questions that perplex his mind. This metaphor seems to be used to explain the relationship between the creator, God and his creations, human beings:

It was as though there were sea everywhere, nothing but an immense, an infinite sea and somewhere within it a **sponge**, as large as might be but not infinite, filled through and through with the water of this boundless sea. In some such way as this I imagined that your creation,

which was finite, was filled by you, who were infinite. I said to myself “Here is God and here is good, utterly and entirely better than the things which he has made”. But since he is good, the things that he has made are also good. This is how he contains them all in himself and fills them all with his presence (Augustine, 1961:138).

Likewise, in the *Circumfession*, Derrida first refers to the metaphor “sponge” in discussing Jewishness and circumcision, and then he deconstructs it to tell Bennington and us about his own circumcision which marks and as a sponge erases his Jewish identity:

The wound of circumcision in which I return to myself, gather myself cultivate and colonize hell, this escarre is the sponge G, listen it **sponges** endlessly the blood it expresses...SA accuses and praises god for being that monster mother, the infinite sea containing an immense but finite **sponge**, measure the difference, G, and for what **sponge** these tears weep (Derrida, 1993:103).

In addition, Derrida makes use of the metaphor sponge in talking about memory, death and truth. An autobiography writer, like a sponge is likely to absorb part of the truth so that the ultimate truth can never be reached:

The S.A.’s immense finite **sponge pregnant like a memory** with all the abandoned and held back tears of *Confessions*... in the same state as I half his face on the other side of life, hoping to die before the mother, my obsequent, dreading it too and weeping for the unavowable truth, in other words, you will have understood in the end, that a confession has nothing to do with truth (Derrida, 1993:107).

In a conference at Villanova University, Derrida is asked why and how he deconstructs Augustine's *Confessions* and the answer Derrida gives is striking:

If I had to summarize what I am doing with St. Augustine in *Circumfession*, I would say this. On the one hand, I play with some analogies that he came from Algeria that his mother died in Europe, the way my mother was dying in Nice when I was writing this and so on. I am constantly playing, seriously playing with this and quoting sentences from the *Confessions* in Latin, all the while trying, through my love and admiration for St. Augustine... I have enormous and intense admiration for him to ask questions about a number of axioms, not only in his *Confessions* but in his politics too. So there is a love story and deconstruction between us (Derrida, 1997: 20-21).

Thus, in the *Circumfession* Derrida constantly plays with the *Confessions*, with Bennington's *Derridabase* and mingles their writings with his own story which tells about his Jewish identity, his circumcision, the role of his mother etc. In this way, Derrida is able to "disengage confession or avowal from the control of the concept of truth" (Bennington, in Caputo 2005:55). He rapidly and characteristically radicalizes this to the point where he can claim that confession has nothing to do with truth.

It is my contention that there is more similarity between Derrida and Augustine than presented by the historical and geographical analogies that I have discussed so far. By deconstructing Augustine's *Confessions*, Derrida also tries to problematize all the great concepts prevalent in Western philosophy such as "knowledge", "identity", "truth" and "meaning". Augustine of the *Confessions* comes to know God, himself, good and evil and by way of this knowledge is converted. Augustine conceives of his becoming, all becoming within Divine mystery and defines his relation to it. This knowledge is for him a necessary precondition for being able to interpret the *Genesis*. Unlike Derrida, in his *Confessions* Augustine is not trying to circumvent divine knowledge and predestination and knowledge but rather to

demonstrate the power of divine logic which moves all things, to praise it, to confess it. He writes:

Those who look for the Lord will cry out in praise of him, because all who look for him shall find him; and when they find him they will praise him. I shall look for you, Lord, by praying to you and as I pray I shall believe in you, because we have had preachers to tell us about you. It is my faith that calls to you, Lord, the faith which you gave me and made to live in me through the merits of your son, who became man, and through the ministry of your preacher (Augustine, 1961: 21).

Derrida's *Circumfession*, on the other hand, intends to do the opposite. He seems to build his writing on Augustine's text. But in his *Circumfession* he endeavors to deconstruct Augustine's presuppositions concerning knowledge and order. Derrida is aware that his writing, the *Circumfession* goes nowhere, does nothing, it ends where it begins just like life with its "circular" movements. Derrida knows that Augustine is addressing the beauty of God whom he eventually learns to love and praise but according to Derrida what Augustine tries to tell us in the *Confessions* can not be limited to certain topics or themes. For Derrida, what Augustine tries to tell us in the *Confessions* "remained and will remain secret since there are a lot of things in the text, not only in his text but in every text-a lot of such things that bear witness to something for which one can not bear witness" (Derrida ,in Caputo 2005:22-23). He also accepts that he will never know Augustine enough since hidden meanings will always exist in Augustine's text just like in all other texts including his own.

All in all, by deconstructing Augustine's *Confessions* or "deforming" and "reforming" the text, Derrida tries to show to us the performative nature of autobiographical or confessional writing. For him, self writing is bound to be endlessly "deformed" and "reformed" not only by the writers themselves but also by their readers. While playing with language to make it serve his/her specific intention, the self writer is always ready to distort reality or leave part of it out just as the readers, with their

different interpretations, can load various meanings to different life stories and in this on going process, the meaning of the text or the truth it is supposed to reveal is always deferred. In this “endless chain” of “reconstruction” or “deconstruction” the narrated event will be “unpredictable”.

5.3. Derrida as a “confessant”, a “self creator”

In the *Circumfession*, Derrida does not put himself in the centre of the story. Instead, he puts the *Confessions* of Augustine, his mother’s life story and Geoffrey Bennington’s account of him in the centre. In this way, he is able to resist disclosing himself, drawing a self portrayal and get rid of the typical role of a “confessant”. In the *Circumfession* Derrida creates a self that consistently deconstructs things which have a tendency to repress the limitless possibilities in life or in life writing.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Derrida’s text carries certain traces of Jewish mysticism. Lancaster tells us in *Judaism* that “Jewish mysticism is characterized by its fascination with the dynamics of the hidden worlds through which God’s creative power unfolds” (Lancaster, 1993:101). Likewise, Derrida’s works, including the *Circumfession* are characterized by their fascination with the dynamics of the hidden meanings embedded in texts. Derrida is trying to underline the possibilities of meaning in a text probably by writing a text full of secrets and gaps. In other words, he writes from “the invisible inside” (Derrida, 1993: 10). By doing this, he seems to “erase”, “cut off” or “circumcise” the conventional notion of “confession”. His law in the *Circumfession* is to “reinscribe and reinvent” (33) and when he confesses he writes “the story of [his] stories” (75).

When Derrida is trying to “confess” he does not come out as a religious person or a believer, a pious or a believing Jew or religious in the conventional sense. He tells us in the *Circumfession* that he has married outside Judaism, exposed his sons to the impropriety of not being circumcised, and that he himself “quite rightly pass[es] for an atheist” (146-155). In his *Circumfession* Derrida deconstructs or reinvents the significance of “circumcision” or “religion” by playing with these concepts. We read:

My uncircumcised sons, objects of my infinite compassion, not that my compassion be extended to any uncircumcised but to my own, without religion apparently having anything to do... like someone, me who would be capable of inventing circumcision all alone, as: I am doing here and of founding another religion, refounding all of them, rather playfully... a dissymmetry that nobody will believe except me (221-222).

In the *Circumfession* Derrida, “re-members” or “reconstitutes” (75) himself. In other words, he transforms or better constructs himself. Therefore, he not only creates a “text” but also a “self” that is unpredictable and can always surprise the readers. He often emphasizes the gap between the “knower” and the “known” which is deliberately created by the self writer:

If this book does not transform me through and through, if it does not give me a divine smile in the face of death, my own and that of loved ones, if it does not help me to love life even more, it will have failed, whatever signs there may be of its success,... reconstitute everything in detail... the text read does not suffice, will remain absolutely secret. I am talking about conscious secrets, carried by what is known, as known, and not about the unconscious one, has not yet said anything about the secret as known (77-78).

In her article *Three Women's Texts and Circumfession*, Spivak tells us that the part of the *Circumfession* Derrida talks about his brother is very significant since it is full of clues about Derrida's self portrayal. In his narrative, Derrida not only searches himself, his Jewish identity but also the identity of his mother and according to Spivak his brother, Norbert Pinhas, who died as a child, -the almost double (Spivak, in Hornung and Ruhe 1998:15).

This time for a singular period, yes here, I am... with the living death of the mother, the mother to whom here I am giving things to eat and drink like a baby,... we will have had to wait for her to be 88 and me 59 for this living death “Who am I?”... I imagine her protesting in silence, impotent, impatient faced with the incorrigible narcissism of a son who seems to be interested only in his own identification but, no, that of his double, alas, the dead brother (Derrida, 1993: 138).

In short, in his confessions Derrida seems to express himself through the other, through his mother, Augustine, Bennington and even through his dead brother. In other words, he reconstitutes himself in others and others in him and in this way he creates a sense of “non knowledge” about himself and others. Thus in the *Circumfession* Derrida portrays a “confessant” who refuses to limit himself with the burden of conveying his truth. We read:

Non knowledge is the only interesting thing, the best condition for having a great time like a lunatic... for in drawing non knowledge from the future of what happens, I find it no where other than in the confession of my memory (142).

Throughout the text, Derrida also confesses that his readers will not have known enough about him since he is likely to exclude certain details of his inner world: “What related me to Judaism, What am I...the circumcised...that’s what my readers won’t have known about me” (154). As stated earlier, throughout the *Circumfession*, Derrida intends to disclose himself and at the same time resists this disclosure. As he begins to depict his inner world, he suddenly breaks off this self portrayal and start quoting either from Augustine’s *Confessions* or from his other works such as the *Glas*. He always points to the discrepancy between the “I” that lives and the “I” that writes.

I'm to disinterest myself from myself to withdraw from death by making the "I", to whom death is supposed to happen, gradually go away, no, be destroyed before death come to meet it, so that at the end already there should be no one left to be scared of losing the world in losing himself in it... I'm still doing nothing here other than destroying the world on the pretext of making truth (Derrida, 1993:190).

Derrida is also aware that a "confessant" "is changing skin every minute to make truth, to confess" (233) but because s/he does this consciously, deliberately, her/his confession can not be accepted as true. Derrida thinks that "like a gift, a confession must be from the unconscious" (233). I have already discussed in Chapter One that self writers or writers of confessions inevitably try to use their texts to serve their intentions. They manipulate their life stories and display a tendency to divert truth in order to fulfill their aim. However, the majority of self writers (confessants) assert with Rousseau that their accounts are true and unique. Unlike them, Derrida courageously confesses that an autobiography writer or a confessant can not possibly tell the truth.

As Spivak observes in her article *Three Women's Texts and Circumfession*, how Derrida ends his story is also very interesting. His final description of himself is one "floating like a toy". We read:

You are less, you, less than yourself, you have spent your life inviting calling promising, hoping sighing dreaming, convoking invoking provoking, constituting engendering producing, naming assigning demanding, prescribing commanding sacrificing, what, the witness, you my counterpart, only so that he will attest this secret truth... you alone whose life will have been so short, the voyage short... you the **floating toy** at high tide and under the moon, you the crossing between these phantoms of witnesses who will never come down to the same (Derrida, 1993: 314-315).

Spivak says that “the protagonist of *Circumfession* is sometimes ‘you’ and sometimes ‘I’” (Spivak, in Hornung and Ruhe 1998: 16). In the end, we see this division between “you” and “I” so much so that the “I” of the *Circumfession* becomes “you”. In this way, Derrida once more brings to the foreground not only the discrepancy but also the fluidity between the “known” and the “knower” or the “public self” and the “private self”. In addition, he proves to us that he is not a typical confessant or autobiography writer who puts himself in the centre of his story. In the *Circumfession* by deconstructing the generic qualities that define “life writing” or “confessional writing”, Derrida, in a way makes “a coup d’état” in this performative genre and transgresses all the limits which set borders to or repress the creativity of a self writer.

CONCLUSION

Despite the dramatic time difference that exists between the production of these texts and the different religions and mystical traditions that they are associated with the *Confessions*, the *Deliverance from Error* and the *Circumfession* display similarities which can be explained by the specificities of the autobiographical or confessional mode to which all three belong. All the three texts are shaped by and can be meaningfully discussed with reference to the intentions of their respective writers. All three writers, directly or indirectly seem to be addressing God but they still seek to present their inner world, their beliefs and the forms of their behaviour not to God but to their fellow men. The life stories are very broadly speaking in the “confessional mode” and each writer tries to display his inner world through his respective belief system. However, each has a different conception of religion, truth and the world and the narrative of each is widely different from that of the other two.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine tries to display his inner world from the point of view of a convert. He repeatedly tells us that his conversion is based on his discovery of the mystical power of Christianity. Augustine, the convert sees that without God’s grace and direct intervention “Divine Knowledge” is beyond an individual’s grasp. Therefore, throughout the narrative he tries to tell us that it is God who helped him to be converted and be baptized. In addition, since depicting the love and the magnificence of God is more important than his life story proper, throughout the *Confessions* self-denial rather than self justification turns out to be the predominant mood of the narrative. Augustine does not wish to disclose himself but to talk about the presence of God in him. As discussed in Chapter Two, “mysticism” plays a crucial role in the way Augustine structures the *Confessions* and expresses himself. In the narrative we are given descriptions of various mystical occurrences that lead him to embrace Christianity. It is my contention that Augustine uses the mystical events he himself experiences in his quest for “Truth” to show the superiority of Christianity and make his story more convincing to his readers.

After Chapter Eight, the chapter in which Augustine’s conversion takes place, Augustine hardly tells us anything about his life. He has fulfilled his mission of

displaying “Truth” to those who are blind or confused or in sin. All through the text, Augustine tries to show his readers over and over again that there is always a possibility to attain light and embrace truth. At this point, the autobiographical or rather the confessional mode ends and gives its place to Biblical Interpretations. In this way, Augustine displays to us that he could not interpret the scriptures if he had not seen spiritual reality first. Moreover, he proves by his own example that those who can not understand the allegorical parts of the Bible should not give up or divert from Christianity. They should instead appeal to God to help them to be converted. Therefore, his own account of conversion is quintessential in understanding the dynamics of arriving at “Truth”. It is important to note here that as Augustine emphasizes in the *Confessions* without God’s help and presence, Augustine could never deliver his messages to his readers. In other words, he could not have written his conversion story without God’s inspiration and grace. As readers of autobiographical writing, we know that the writer is always behind the text, controlling its meaning-he is the guarantor of the truth of the text. However, here, Augustine in a way presents God as the “guarantor of his meaning” or the “truth” of his text.

The *Deliverance from Error* of Ghazali is written with similar intentions in mind. Both Augustine and Ghazali warn their readers against the misleading beliefs of their time and display the magnificence of God embraced in accordance with their respective belief systems. Like Augustine, therefore Ghazali does not give us the details of his life in his narrative. He tells us everything that relates to his new understanding of life, the Sufi way of life because he wishes to use his own story as an example to non-believers or sceptics. Unlike Augustine, we see that Ghazali attains “Divine Knowledge” through “personal effort”. As mentioned in Chapter Two, “personal effort” is central to self perfection according to Sufi tradition. Therefore, Ghazali’s life story tells us the significance of “fruitful experience” which leads to self perfection, a prerequisite of “Divine Knowledge”. In this way, Ghazali aims to help non-believers or sceptics to purify themselves from worldly desires and embrace Sufism, the best way of arriving at “Truth”.

We understand from his text that Ghazali becomes a Sufi mystic before he begins to experience revelations from God. But Augustine experiences a number of

mystical revelations which lead him to be converted to Christianity or rather to Christian mysticism and this difference is reflected in the way they present themselves in their confessional works. In the *Confessions* we are faced with the life story of a convert who was once a sceptic, a Manichean scholar torn between conflicting realities. This non-believer comes to turn away from his youthful ideas and licentious life style with the help of the mystical signs sent to him by God. In the *Deliverance from Error*, Ghazali presents himself as a believer who is unable to attain spiritual reality in its totality. He decides to follow the Sufi way in order to arrive at absolute Truth. He tells us how he accomplishes to get rid of the appetites of this world through his intimacy with God or “Zikr” (remembrance of God). According to him, the best way to attain Truth is to convert to Sufism and throughout his narrative he gives us the steps of the process of purification in Sufi tradition, the purification of the mind and the heart. In this way, he builds his narrative on the Sufi philosophy just like Augustine builds his story around Christian mysticism.

In the *Circumfession*, on the other hand, religion is not in the foreground but in the background standing as a foil to Derrida’s ideas and beliefs. Here, Derrida appears as a theoretician, an autobiography writer, a confessant and a critic. He constructs and deconstructs religion, himself and reality. As Derrida examines the different events, people and traditions that constitute his identity, he duels with Geoffrey Bennington, who tries to comment on him and his works, and he deconstructs Augustine’s *Confessions*. In this way, Derrida gets rid of the limits that are imposed on a self writer or a confessant.

Like Augustine’s *Confessions* and Ghazali’s *Deliverance from Error*, the *Circumfession* of Derrida displays a kind of religious insight. His work as stated in Chapter Two carries the traces of Jewish mysticism but Derrida’s approach to religion is completely different from that of Augustine and Ghazali. He works through religion and mysticism not to confirm their system and values but to deconstruct them. Furthermore, Derrida aims to disengage confession from the control of truth. He shows that there is no meaning or truth in reality or in writing. The aim of Augustine and Ghazali, on the other hand, is to display truth, the truth of their respective belief systems: Christian and

Sufi mysticism. In this way, they try to persuade their readers to the correctness of the lives they lead.

Augustine and Ghazali try to reflect the problems of their age in their confessions. They warn their readers against false doctrines that perplex the minds of their people and while doing this, they try to praise their own mystical belief systems. In the *Circumfession* Derrida also tries to bring to the foreground the intellectual and socio-cultural problems of his age. He exemplifies how the modern society exhausts people with certain impositions by telling us about his own circumcision which inscribes him into the Jewish community. Derrida again and again presents his own circumcision as something that happens to him as a child before he can speak, before he can sign, before he has a name. This happens to him and leaves a mark, a scar, a signature on his body, irrespective of his will, choice.

What Derrida does in the *Circumfession* is to exemplify the nature of a self writer by underlining the challenges s/he may face. In Derrida, we do not see a “transparent self”; instead we see a “self” surrounded by “supplements”. According to Derrida, all the texts, including his own can only operate by opening themselves to transgression. He maintains that an event of confession is not a one time event but a repetition. As Augustine and Ghazali show so beautifully, the self is spread over time and according to Derrida can be discussed repeatedly depicting it and transgressing what is depicted. By writing over a text written about him (*Derridabase*), by deconstructing Augustine’s *Confessions* and by interweaving certain events from his life, mainly the story of his imposed Jewishness with these, Derrida shows that confession or self writing is subject to endless refinement, revision and transgression. In time, the confessant has more to confess or the readers find more to be confessed. Due to this, the meaning is always postponed and to attribute a specificity or a meaning to a text is a futile effort.

Derrida almost always expresses himself through the other. He reconstitutes himself in others (his mother, Augustine, his brother etc.) or others in him (Augustine, Bennington). From time to time, in the *Confessions*, Augustine does the same. He too expresses his views and values through the other, through his mother or other converts. On the other hand, since Ghazali does not reflect the particularities of his life in his text,

we do not see other people or their views acting as a foil or as an example to him. The references that Ghazali gives in *Deliverance from Error* are only to his own theoretical texts on Sufism. His confessions therefore are in themselves the one and only performative act of displaying his belief system, its values and its superiority.

In the above mentioned three works, “freedom of choice” appears as a significant element in determining how the writers present themselves. “Freedom of choice” is central to Augustine’s and Ghazali’s thought and belief system. Ghazali is able to choose the Sufi way because he is convinced that it will lead him to unite with God and experience absolute “Truth”. Augustine wishes to find “Truth” but he is able to do so only after the Christian God, according to him, decides that he is ready to embrace Christianity as a revealed religion. Therefore, in Augustine “freedom of choice” goes hand in hand with God’s grace. Accordingly the confessions of these two writers are written in a manner which leaves the final decision to the reader. To illustrate this point, we see that in the *Confessions* Augustine has two choices. He can choose either his father’s (paganism) or his mother’s (Christianity) religion. In the end, he decides to be a Christian. For Ghazali, there are numerous choices such as Batinism or Kalam and Ghazali chooses Sufism as the most suitable remedy for his malady. On the contrary, in Derrida’s work there is no “freedom of choice” because there are no consistent, predictable and consistent systems or norms.

In short, self writing or confessional writing with its claims of depicting the self transparently and its hope of setting the record right, is a form of expression which lies at the intersection between history, sociology, psychology and narratology. As I tried to point out, the issue of transparency is debatable and it is my contention that self portrayal is primarily constructed in line with the intentions of the author. The self writer weaves his life story with a motive which leads to the emergence of a self that is created performatively. Therefore, in this performative, slippery genre, there is no one truth. Having analyzed the *Confessions*, the *Deliverance from Error* and the *Circumfession*, we come to understand that self writers construct their life stories when recording them since each remembered mental event is guided, delimited or deformed by an “intention”. The “self” as Derrida clearly shows to us in the *Circumfession* is also recreated each time its story is interpreted by the readers. Therefore, all confessional

texts are inevitably “formed”, “deformed” and “reformed” not only by their writers but also by their readers who interpret them.

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