Stories of Belonging

Female Memoir in the Eighteenth Century and Today

An Essay by
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Browsing through a bookshop during the last months, one might well have come across *Monica's Story*[1], and tempted by an all-too-human curiosity one might even have looked briefly at the cover text. Although not written by Monica Lewinsky herself, the book is obviously authorized by and based on taped interviews with her, and it is advertised to be

> Astonishingly candid, ... [to be] surprising, not so much because its subject is an unusual one-off character, but because what happend to her might have happened to any American girl who found herself in the right place at the wrong time. (Monica, cover text)

The one surprsing word in this advertisment is the word "surprising", since what this book is about, what it motivates, what it drives, and how it works is a twohundred year old story.

As I will argue in this essay, some of the earliest female texts of autobiographical content besides the religious conversion narratives, namely the so-called scandalous memoirs, were motivated by the same insistance on belonging, on acceptance and understanding by society, as *Monica's Story* is. Moreover, the principal transgressions of moral or social boundaries which led to the loss of this belonging still fall into the same moral categories now as they did then. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the means and patterns these eighteenth-century texts employ to regain the belonging of their authors to their societies are virtually identical to the structures and methods used by Andrew Morton.

To show the similarities of content, style, conduct of argument etc., I will concentrate on two authors, Charlotte Charke[2], and Mary Robinson[3], but their is evidence that my conclusions should hold for other eighteenth-century female memoirs as well.

One thread common to all these texts is that all the women experience some loss of belonging. Charlotte Charke, the daughter and youngest child of the

[1] Andrew Morton, *Monica's Story*, (Michael O'Mara Books: London, 1999), in the following text the book is quoted as Monica with pagenumbers in paranthesis.

[2] Charlotte Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, written by herself. Facsimile Reproduction of the second edition ,1755, (Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints: Gainesville, Florida, 1969), in the following text the book is quoted as Charke with pagenumbers in paranthesis.

[3] Mary Robinson, *Perdita: The Memoirs of Mary Robinson*, edited by M.J. Levy, (Peter Owen Publishers: London and Chester Springs, PA, 1994), in the following text the book is quoted as Robinson with pagenumbers in paranthesis.

not much less controversial Colley Cibber, was an actress, writer, and a cross dresser. It was her generally outrageous lifestyle which at some point caused all contact with her father to cease. Right at the beginning of her narrative, she exclaims "I ſhall, with Pride and unutterable Tranſport, throw myſelf at his [her father's] Feet, to implore the only Benefit I deſire or expect, his BLESSING, and his PARDON." (Charke, 14) The loss of belonging for Charke lies within the social environment of her family, while the one of Mary Robinson, also an actress, a poet, writer, and seminal beauty, is of a more public nature. As she attempted to become a serious and acknowledged artist during her lifetime, "she was a public personage whose comings and goings were reported in the daily press."[4] Hence, her affair with the Prince of Wales sooner or later came to public attention with all the devastating social consequences, leading her to write "I mean not to write my own eulogy; though, with the candid and sensitive mind, I shall trust succeed in my vindication." (Robinson, 46) Similarly, Monica Lewinsky feels a loss of belonging to society when her affair with President Clinton is scrutinized in the public raising questions of her own moral integrity. Therefore, all three women find themselves in very comparable situations, all are considered to be 'fallen', judged to have transgressed certain moral or social boundaries centering around (female) sexuality. It is worth noting that Monica's affair with a married man and oral sex are obviously still considered as morally transgressing, indicating that today's moral code regarding female sexuality is not so much different from the one in the eighteenth cenury – at least in parts of our society and our consciousness.

Having established that all three women feel a certain loss of belonging to their environment, since they are judged by the opinion of family members or the public to have transgressed social boundaries, the next common thread to recognise is that they all feel victimized. This means that they do not consider the opinion to be just, they feel misrepresented. At several points in the *Narrative*, Charke blames the malicious gossip of Mrs. Brown, her step-mother or one of her sisters, for losing her father's approval. She does that so strongly, even full of anger, that she writes in her own summary

> His [her father's] being too much governed by Humour, but more ſo by her whom Age cannot exempt from being the *lively Limner of her own Face* ; which ſhe had better neglect a little, and pay Part of that Regard to what ſhe ought to eſteem THE NOBLER PART, and muſt have an Exiſtance *when her painted Frame is reduced to Aſhes.* (Charke, 273)

This is by no means the only source of distress in her life, as she comments on numerous occasions where "my Enemies have not always too ſtrictly adher'd to TRUTH, ... to perpetrate the Ruin of a hapleſs Wretch, whoſe real Errors

[4]Eleanor Ty, 'Engendering A Female Subject: Mary Robinson's (Re)Presentations of the Self', *English Studies in Canada*, 21:4 (1995) 407-431, p. 407.

were ſufficient, without the Addition of MALICIOUS SLANDERS," (Charke, 24) which spoils her image in the eyes of the public and of her father. Similarly, Robinson claims that "indeed the world has mistaken the character of my mind" (Robinson, 46) "because there have been malevolent spirits who, in the plenitude of their columny, have slandered me, by suspecting my fidelity." (Robinson, 62) Although the last third of the memoir seems to be a contribution by a "friend" (her daughter and editor) based on a letter of Robinson, it may well have been written by Robinson herself. In any case, the no longer strictly autobiographical form allows for even stronger statements, such as:

> Among those persons who have at various periods attracted the attention of the public, there are few whose virtues have been so little known, or whose characters have been so unfairly estimated, as the subject of the preceeding Memoir. (Robinson, 108)

The cause for this is seen in malicious gossip, as expressed in Robinson's letter within her memoir, where she writes of the "envy of my own sex" and that "every engine of female malice was set in motion to destroy my repose ... Tales of the most infamous and glaring falsehood were invented." (Robinson, 117) It is evident that both women feel similarily betrayed by gossip, in both cases initiated by other women, as Monica feels betrayed by Linda Tripp, who taped her private conversations and passed them on to Kenneth Starr's investigators.

All three texts do not deny the respective transgressions their subjects are accused of. Instead, in all cases the transgression is seen as a result of circumstances, in particular youth and its follies, inexperience, innocence, unusual or inappropriate education, wrong upbringing, an increased vulnerability caused by strong sensibility, and an unsuitable husband or partner. The important point is that these circumstances were either experienced passively, without control over them, or imply passivity and lack of control when dealing with possibly transgressive situations. Meyer Spacks observes that the eighteenth-century memoirs "display a tendency to stress what has been done to the protagonist more intensely than what she herself has done – even when she has done a great deal."[5] Monica summarizes this too when she says "We were both responsible, we both wanted it. It was wrong because he was married, but *I was young.* It was a mistake, but *it happened.* I realize that I put myself in a situation where *I had no control.*" (Monica, 12, emphasis mine)

Indeed, Robinson starts her memoir by commenting on her childhood that "the early propensities of my life were tinctured with romantic and singular characteristics" and that "every event of my life has more or less been marked by the progressive evils of a too acute sensibility." (Robinson, 21) She goes on to mention several of these "romantic and singular characteristics" as roots of her sentimental "natural bent of mind" (Robinson, 22) which remained unchanged

[5]Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, and London, 1976), p. 73.

since. It is interesting to note that her memoir often progresses in the language of the sentimental novel and invokes romantic imagery such as the gothic scene on her arrival at Tregunter. She also provides examples that she was exposed to society completely unprepared and too young as proof of her inexperience:

> I was just a child, and wholly unaquainted with the manners of the world ... at an age when girls are generally at school, or indeed scarcely emancipated from the nursery, I was presented in society as a wife. (Robinson, 54)

According to her memoir, she suffered much neglect und humiliation from her husband and his infedilities in a marriage, where she "has never known one year of happinies" (Robinson, 91) and where she had to live in a family "who had neither sentiment nor sensibility". (Robinson, 69) She stresses frequently that this marriage, together with the numerous "temptations" and advances by other men due to her public life challanged the "purity" of her soul to the impossible.

Even more elaborate is the exposition of Charke, who documents her childhood and her education in great detail, emphasizing that her education "might have been ſufficient for a Son inſtead of a Daughter" and that she "was never made much acquainted with that neceſſary Utenſil which forms the houſewifely Part of a young Lady's Education, call'd a Needle." (Charke, 17) She calls her education "genteel" and "liberal", mentioning that she learned several languages including Latin, and sciences such as Geography, but notes that she "cannot think it was altogether neceſſary for a Female." (Charke, 26) Her upbringing and further education encompass more masculine realms, as she writes of her passion for shooting, her stay at Thorly where she was more interested in stable work and in the "Phyſick" of the there practicing Dr. Hales than in perfecting her housewifely qualifications, her own "Practice" and its failure, her gardening, etc. Although the recall of her childhood is full of fondness and amusement, it also condemns the resulting estrangement from other girls in order to defend her later life, as is pointed out by Wanko, who notes that "such inconsistencies pervade the text".[6]

Monica's education and upbringing brought disadvantages too, as Morton is eager to point out: Living in glamorous Beverly Hills without coming from a glamerous family herself, being an intellectual over-achiever though in part emotionally immature for her age at school, her continuous weight problems were reasons for Monica to feel excluded, not beloning to her school mates or peer group. The divorce of her parents figures as an important external – and hence passively endured – event whose psychological and emotional aftermath set her further apart, which is equally true for Mary Robinson. Charlotte Charke, on the other hand, claims that her birth, her mother then being 45, was conceived by her family as an intrusion. Charke's and Robinson's bad husbands are replaced

[6]Cheryl Wanko, 'The Eighteenth-Century Actress and the Construction of Gender: Lavinia Fenton and Charlotte Charke', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 18 (1994) 75-90, p. 83.

by Monica's difficult first serious relationship. Finally, Morton does not fail to hint at Monica's sensibility and romantic nature when he mentiones, for example, her love for poetry and her emotionality, connecting the latter with her studies of psychology. All this makes Monica "this young, innocent creature," (Monica, 187) as her mother characterizes her.

THE PATTERN WHICH emerges here is that on the one hand certain circumstances are invoked as an explanation for later occurances of transgressive behaviour, but that on the other hand these circumstances are not so special as that they could not have happened to any other (female) reader. It is this balancing act between exception and commonplace which is so important to gain the understanding and even empathy of the reader which causes the impression of inconsistencies. However, keeping this balance is essential for the main argument of all these texts: that their subjects do indeed belong to their societies, because every women would have behaved in the same way under the same, not that far fetched circumstances.

To support this *thesis of belonging*, all memoirs make use of one particular tool, namely the documentation of numerous occasions where their subject's behaviour was admissible, even exemplary within the available moral codes. Thus, the reader finds many examples for the high virtuousness of the memoirists, their decency and modesty, their insight and repentance, their being a good daughter or a good mother, their overall morality. A prominent virtue in the eighteenth century was domesticity, and Robinson writes extensively about her flawless domestic performance and her respectable ancestry. As her story progresses, she tries to keep the balance by juxtaposing her fall from chastity to infedility in her role as wife with the acceptable "feminine plot, that of the good mother and daughter who faithfully cares for her family".[7] Charke's life does not provide her with many opportunities to show conduct of domesticity, but she repeatedly assures her reader of her awareness of this virtue which she only misses because upbringing and unlucky circumstances deprived her of it. Her husband, "had he entertained a reciprocal Affection," would have had the "Power to have moulded my Temper," (Charke, 78) meaning that Charke was willing to be a virtuous wife to a fond husband. In this respect, I differ from the reading by Moore, who sees "Charke's sometimes exultant, sometimes self-hating insistence on her lack of fit with the culture" as a "profound distance between her self-representation and the norms of bourgeois subjectivity,"[8] being closer to Wanko who argues that Charke's often ridiculing and ironic self-scrutinity has at its core the aim to create "regret for the unconventionality that sets her apart from other women."[9] Mackie interprets even her cross dressing in terms of "manifold allegiance to the

[7]Linda Peterson, 'Becoming an Author: Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* and the Origins of the Woman Artist's Autobiography', in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, edited by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1994, pp. 36-50), p. 43.

[8]Lisa Moore, ' 'She Was Too Fond of Her Mistaken Bargain': The Scandalous Relations of Gender and Sexuality in Feminist Theory', *diacritics*, 21 (1991) 89-101, p. 94.

[9]Cheryl Wanko, 1994, p. 83.

patriarchy", showing that "although she is transgressive in her momentary effect, she is not subversive in her aims."[10] Therefore, it is highly interesting, but perhaps no wonder, that Morton introduces his subject Monica sitting "in an armchair ... knitting", talking "about her childhood, her needles clicking as she chats." (Monica, 9-10) Monica, asked about her future, wishes to be a good wife to a husband, and a good mother to children she wants to have, in short, to be domesticly virtuous in the outgoing twentieth century.

The actual list of images of moral integrity and virtuousness, of decency and modesty, painted by the memoirists is endless. Charke rushes to assure the reader of her best intentions for all her failed projects, or of her troubled conscience when she owed money which she, as she never forgets to tell, paid back in all cases. As a good mother, she nearly breaks down in emotional distress when her daughter becomes seriously ill and she believes her dead at some moment. Robinson, on the other hand, writes that "for myself I cared but little; all my anxiety was for Mr. Robinson's repose and the health of my child," (Robinson, 78) explaining how seriously she takes her task as mother, "resolved never to expose an infant of mine either to their [the servants'] ignorance or inattention." (Robinson, 77) Her mother role is so picture-perfect that she works on her poetry with her child sleeping "in a small basket near my chair ... every thing around me presented the mixed confusion of a study and a nursery." (Robinson, 77) Another of her virtues is her strong religiousness, and her memoir is enriched by detailed remembered childhood scenes in churches or during religious events. Finally, Monica is depicted by Morton to perform very well in her jobs, for once showing a small deviation from the modes available in the eighteenth century. But her strongest exhibited virtue is her loyality, certainly already a virtue in the eighteenth century – for which she has to pay a terrible price when all the turbulences of the prosecution by Kenneth Starr take off.

These proofs of virtuousness are supplemented by attempts to counterbalance the negative effect of less acceptable character traits to convince the reader of the protagonist's belonging. There is, for example, the duality between the passivity of the victim with its implied innocence and the activity Charke's and Robinson's course of life displays. Often, the texts transform this duality of passive experience and active agency into a combination of unfavourable circumstances and honesty, acknowledging less than perfect active behaviour to show a capability of self-criticism. The reader is then directly asked to learn a moral lesson from this, as the protagonist has done, or active endeavours are clearly stamped and ridiculed as follies of youth, or are explained as motivated by higher moral principles. Mackie observes[11] that Charke links even her cross dressing to a mysterious obligation towards her deceased lover to which she is bound by "all the Vows of Truth and Honour." (Charke, 89 & 139) This serves several purposes; firstly

[10]Erin Mackie, 'Desperate Measures: The Narratives of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke', *ELH*, 58 (1991) 841-865, p. 842, 843.

[11]Erin Mackie, 1991, p. 845.

to increase the impression of authenticity and credibility, secondly to create an atmosphere of intimacy and trust with the reader, and thirdly to assure that the protagonist – in spite of everything – shares the readers' moral values. In adopting the values of the 'social gaze', the memoirs underline the decency of their protagonists.

The importance of the 'social gaze' cannot be overemphasized, and Robinson stresses that herself when she says "I wished to remain, in the eyes of the public, deserving of its patronage." (Robinson, 93) The memoirs have to comply with the expectations of the 'social gaze' as much as possible in order to depict their subjects as belonging to society. This results in a female identity which "describes herself as others would have seen her."[12] Modesty and decency are such expectations of the gaze, ambition, sexuality, and well developped intellect are not. One might think that this has changed since the eighteenth century, but for Morton that does not appear to be true. He still finds an "underlying misogyny" where, "as far as modern moral America is concerned, for her [Monica] to be female, young, confident, well groomed, at ease with her sexuality – and loved – constitutes some sort of crime." (Monica, 266) And, because she is overweight, she is deemed not to have sufficiently met the expectations of the 'social gaze'. Thus, the book explains how Monica tried hard and several times to control her weight. Here, Monica is depicted closer to Charke, who "admires her own spirit of constant endeavor but cannot esteem what she does since she invariably fails."[13]

As I will support further in the following, all three women put a great deal of work into their memoirs in order to diminuish any special status attributed to them, or to prove at least its insignificance for their conduct in their private life, thus lessening the distance between them and the common reader. This is especially true for any special status deriving from professional accomplishments of Charke and Robinson. Both resolve the conflict between their accomplishments and the expectations of the 'social gaze' in the same way, by becoming ill while pursuing their projects, which are described as being born more out of necessity than ambition. When Robinson takes up writing to gain some independence, she notes

> How little did I know either of the fatigue or the hazard of mental occupations. How little did I forsee that the day would come when my health would be impaired, my thoughts perpetually employed, in so destructive a pursuit! At the moment that I write this page I feel in every fibre of my brain the fatal conviction that it is a destroying labour. (Robinson, 85)

Equally, Charke's puppet-show would have solved her current cashflow problem, if she had not "through exceſſive Fatigue in accompliſhing it, acquired a violent Fever." (Charke, 82) Arguably it is the most problematic for Charke to satisfy

[12] Eleanor Ty, 1995, p. 409.
[13] Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1976, p. 73.

the expectations of the social gaze. She is the most open about her activities, priding herself on her self-will, as Meyer Spacks points out, and insisting on her remarkableness.[14] But equally strong is the element of self-condemnation, ridicule and apology for her character and career, thereby giving in to social judgement. This leads Meyer Spacks to suspect that "her compulsive failure in life declares the division of impulse that also informs the writing of the autobiography,"[15] at once striving for and repressing accomplishments. Of course, professional accomplishment is nowadays part of the public image of a socially acceptable women, and in this respect Morton's text deviates the most from its eighteenth-century predecessors.

The attempt to dismiss the impression of unacceptable character traits involves more aspects than diminishing personal accomplishments in order ot avoid ungainly ambition. Such an issue is anger. All three women have good reasons to be angry, all three feel betrayed or at least abondoned by men. But open anger would be a contradiction to virtuousness. Therefore it is redirected against the gossip, and thus women, since gossip is considered by society's gaze to be bad. The redirection is also used to shift the source, and thus responsibility, of the anger. Meyer Spacks notes on Charke that "the hostility, she declares, does not truly belong to her. Other people ... have created the antagonism between father and daughter."[16] Moreover, open display of anger is softened by the 'appropriate' female reaction, namely to become sick instead, as Charke does after the rejection of her letter by her father, "this SHOCKING CIRCUMSTANCE! has ſince confined me to Bed." (Charke, 118) Similarly, Robinson shifts the balance away from the Prince's of Wales lack to stand by her towards the gossip about the affair, and Monica concentrates her anger on Linda Tripp keeping loyal to the President. The eighteenth-century texts show also more indirect means to express anger, in particular the use of irony.

ALL THESE STRUCTURAL similarities between the memoirs are not accidental, because they serve the same goal, "to vindicate publicly the apologist from the charge"[17] of transgression. Space does not permitt to compare more common grounds such as the use of portraits or photos, inclusion of authentic material such as letters or tape transscripts, naming of witnesses, allusions or references to acknowledged literature, etc. Furthermore, the same patterns determine other texts, such as Morton's memoir on Diana, Princess of Wales, which is not precisely a 'scandalous memoir' since Diana does not defend a social transgression, or fictional texts like Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* as discussed by Simmons.[18] However, what I have gathered so far is ample indication that all

[14]Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1976, p. 76.

[15]Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1976, p. 77.

[16]Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1976, p. 75.

[17]Felicity A. Nussbaum, 'Heteroclites: The Gender of Character in the Scandalous Memoirs', in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, edited by Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, (Methuen: New York and London, 1987, pp. 144-167), p. 151.

[18]Philip E. Simmons, '*John Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*: Literary Voyeurism

three texts are

> apologies in the classical sense of defense or justification without admission of guilt ... The purpose is actively persuasive; the memorist serves as an historian who compiles and relates the facts and encourages the reader to be judge and jury.[19]

This metaphor is often invoked directly. For example, Charke starts her memoir with the words "I therefore humbly move for its having the common Chance of a Criminal, at leaſt to be properly examin'd before it is condemn'd," (Charke, 11) and continues to refer herself "to the ſuperior Judgment of thoſe who read my Story" (Charke, 77) at several points during her narrative.

The 'case' of the charge is rejected on the grounds of victimization which left the defendant no real choice. As I have demonstrated above, the credibility of the defence relies crucially on the acceptance of the *thesis of belonging* by the reader, i.e. the jury. The discussed structural elements in the texts are meant to convince the reader that the subject is not really different from them, not outside the boundaries of society. Therefore, the reader would presumably have acted similarly in a comparable situation so that the transgression could not follow from an a priori and deliberately not-belonging of the subject to society. The hope of all three women is that the reader follows this argument to the conclusion that the actual transgression cannot be seen as sufficient reason to deprive them of their belonging to society: Neither has it been done deliberate, nor does it imply a bad character. On the contrary, the transgression is a tragic result of innocence, inexperience and virtuousness of an otherwise completely normal individual in circumstances imposed on her by others and the outside world whithout her consent. In this way, the self-representation can (again) be brought into agreement with socially admissable identities.

To support this kind of defense, the memoirists introduce tropes for their subjects which are immediately understood by every reader, and which make identification with the protagonists easier. These tropes are mainly the 'good daughter' and 'good mother' image, biblical or otherwise extremely well-known archetypes, or the image of the sentimental heroine. Robinson, with her high moral standards shaped by the strong Quaker influence on her education, makes particular use of the trope of the good mother. As for the archetypes, scandalous memoirs often use the metaphor of the 'Prodigal Son', implicitly generalizing it to include daughters as well. Evidently, as Charke puts it, if "the Prodigal, according to Holy Writ, was joyfully received by the offended Father : Nay, MERCY has even extended itſelf at the Place of Execution, to the notorious Malefactors," (Charke, 120) then her partially involuntary and in comparsion minor transgression can be forgiven as well. Monica at one point compares her situation with *The Diary of Anne Frank*, (Monica, 198) but Morton also introduces biblical metaphors

and the Technique of Novelistic Transgression', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3 (1990) 43-63.

[19] Felicity A. Nussbaum, 1987, p. 151.

such as the "sacrificial lamb" (Monica, 13) and "Daniel thrown into the lions' den" (Monica, 274) for Monica, or a "latter-day Judas" (Monica, 18) when the betraying Tripp tries to embrace her.

The strongest and most central trope is the sentimental heroine, which is perhaps best exhibited in Robinson's memoir which most resembles the style of a sentimental novel. This trope encompasses all the elements such as a strong sensibility, involuntariness, virtuousness, inexperience, innocence, passivity, forced circumstances, etc. I have identified earlier, and transforms them into a "mythology of her victimization."[20] Straub observes that "the role of a novelistic, sentimental heroine is one means of containing within recognizable cultural models the threat implicit in public displays of feminine sexuality,"[21] which is exactly the case with Monica too. It is worth noting here that Morton stresses numerous occasions where Monica suffers emotional breakdowns when she tries to deal with difficult experiences, for example the humiliating interrogations of the Kenneth Starr investigation. Employing this trope, the transgression is represented "from a point of view that allows for ... voyeristic pleasure in and, to a limited extent, identification or, at least, empathy with the feminine transgressor as 'heroine' of her story."[22] The tragedy of the heroine lies in the "fate of an unprotected innocent"[23] which makes the transgression inescapable.

It is important to note that the described strategies are not able to make their case in a completely successful way. Inconsistencies pervade the texts, as has already been pointed out. These inconsitencies are a consequence of the protagonists' situation and cannot be resolved. Charke and Robinson were actresses and writers, and both tried actively to control their public image by writing their memoirs. The first two properties alone were sufficient in their time to render them suspicious.[24] The act of writing their own memoirs was even more dubious. That might be the reason, why Robinson's text makes use of a third person reporting the more delicate parts of her life, and why Monica decided right from the beginning to let her memoir be written by someone else, notably a man. Apparent contradictions, such as the sentimental heroine which puts herself on public display, are necessary or unavoidable to let the text function in its mainly intended way.

The aim of the text, to establish belonging, is put at risk by the very act of doing it publicly. On the other hand, the memoir as a form of gossip about the self can be seen as an attempt to achieve an atmosphere of intimicy and trust. The trust building of gossiping and gossip-like techniques in eigtheenth-century texts have been explored in some detail in Meyer Spacks' book *Gossip*.[25] where she

[20]Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1976, p. 73, refering here to Charke.

[21]Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1992), p. 97.

[22]Kristina Straub, 1992, p. 108.

[23]Kristina Straub, 1992, p. 115.

[24]Cheryl Wanko, 1994, p. 79.

[25]Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip*, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1985).

states that "gossip ... demands a process of relatedness among its participants; its *I*'s inevitably turn into a *we*."[26] Once the reader becomes part of this 'we', she is caught in voyerist complicity and cannot easily deny the protagonist her central claim she is insisting on: that she is not really different from the reader, that she belongs to the same society as the reader does, that she belongs.

[26]Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1985, p. 261.

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