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*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*  
and the Eighteenth Century English Society

MA Thesis

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## PREFACE

Charlotte Charke was born on 13 January 1713, as the eleventh and last child of Katherine Shore and Colley Cibber - actor, playwright, theatre manager and poet laureate. Charlotte makes her stage debut as Mademoiselle in Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* at Drury Lane on 4 February 1730. During her career as an actress, she plays female parts, and breeches parts, as well as male parts written to be performed by men only. Alongside acting, Charke writes two plays and for a short while establishes and runs her own company. The Licensing Act of 1737 cuts Charke's acting career short, and in order to survive she begins seeking menial jobs such as working as a valet, oil woman, and sausage higgler. Around 1746, she becomes as a strolling player, traveling the English countryside with a number of different companies.

The year 1755 marks a turning point in Charke's life and career. She returns to London and publishes her autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*. Her autobiography and her notoriety create great interest in Charke's writing and gives her writing career enough impetus for her to publish four novels, or novellas. Charlotte Charke dies in 1760 in Haymarket at the age of 47. Her obituary, appearing in *The British Chronicle*, and providing a brief summary of Charke's life, emphasize her social class, notoriety and the circumstances she was reduced to. It reads: "Died, the celebrated Mrs Charlotte Charke, in the Haymarket, daughter of Colley Cibber Esq; the poet laureate; a gentlewoman remarkable for her adventures and misfortunes" (*British Chronicle*, qtd. in Rehder li). As Robert Rehder remarks, even in death Charlotte's fame is linked to that of her father's (li). Since the publication of Fidelis Morgan's biography of Charke in 1989, Charlotte Charke's autobiography has been brought to public attention and we can maintain that she has been acclaimed as an author in her own right.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to display the struggles of the women of eighteenth century England to have a profession, a self and a life of their own. Charlotte Charke's autobiography portrays these problems in ways which are on the one hand very contemporary (depicting the psychology and the socio-cultural and economic concerns of its writer), on the other very traditional and dated since it follows the eighteenth century male autobiographical writing practices, reflecting the artistic, religious, class and sexual biases of its age.

Accordingly, the thesis first discusses the important aspects of autobiographical writing. It is followed by a brief panorama of the autobiographical practices from its origins till the eighteenth century. Then, it seeks to examine the ways in which the socio-cultural events of mid-eighteenth century have changed Charke's life and contributed to her self-fashioning and the self we find in her autobiography. The changes that are mentioned and discussed are: a redefinition of the middle class and middle class consciousness, the value given to arts and letters, the decline of royal patronage, how bookseller-publishers replace the aristocracy in financing literary productions, the way women are perceived in eighteenth century English society, the split between the public and private spheres, and the rising levels of literacy and its effects on the education of women.

By giving such a lengthy discussion of the eighteenth century English society, the thesis hopes to highlight the significance of Charlotte Charke's autobiography in displaying the struggles of the women of her society to have a respectable self and a profession through which they can survive.

## ÖZET

Bu tezde, on sekizinci yüzyıl İngiltere’inde kadınların kendilerine özgü bir kimlik, bir meslek ve bir yaşam elde etme çabaları mercek altına alınmaktadır. Charlotte Charke’nin otobiyografisi özelinde incelendiğinde, kadının karşı karşıya kaldığı sorunlar, bir yanda son derece güncel – ki yazarın psikolojik, sosyo-kültürel ve ekonomik kaygıları dile getirilmektedir – öte yanda ise geleneksel ve yazıldığı dönemin damgasını taşıyan bir biçimde gözler önüne serilmektedir, çünkü Charlotte Charke’nin metni on sekizinci yüzyıl erkek otobiyografi yazarları geleneğinin bir uzantısı olup, döneminin sanatsal, dinsel, sınıfsal ve cinsel önyargılarını taşımaktadır.

Bu çerçevede, tezin giriş kısmında bir yazın türü olarak otobiyografinin önemli yönleri irdelenmekte, ardından ise otobiyografinin ilk ortaya çıkışından, on sekizinci yüzyıla kadar verilen örnekler kısaca özetlenerek, kadınların ve erkeklerin yazdıkları otobiyografik metinlerin farklarına dikkat çekilmektedir. Tezin gelişme bölümünde ise, on sekizinci yüzyıl İngiltere’inde meydana gelen yapısal sosyo-kültürel değişiklikler ve bu değişimlerin söz konusu metinde yapılandırıldığını gözlemlediğimiz kadın kimliğini nasıl etkilediği incelenmektedir. Bu bağlamda sözü edilen ve tartışılan yapısal değişiklikler: orta sınıfın ve kendine özgü bir orta sınıf bilincinin oluşumu, sanat ve edebiyata atfedilen değer, kraliyetin yazarlara verdiği desteği geri çekmesi ve bu boşluğu gideren hem kitapçılık, hem yayıncılıkla uğraşan yeni bir sınıfın ortaya çıkması, on sekizinci yüzyıl İngiltere’inde değişen kadın algısı, özel ve kamusal alanların birbirinden ayrılması, artan okuma yazma oranları ve bunun kadınlara sağlanan eğitim olanakları üzerindeki etkisi olarak özetlenebilir.

Bu tezde on sekizinci yüzyıl İngiliz toplumunun detaylı biçimde analizini yapmakla amaçlanan, Charlotte Charke’nin otobiyografisinin, yaşadığı toplumda kadının saygın bir kimlik ve bir meslek edinmek için göğüs gerdiği güçlükleri sergilemekteki başarısının altını çizmektedir.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### I. 1. Defining Autobiographical Writing

Autobiography has become a generic term signifying a variety of autobiographical practices which can broadly be referred to as self-writing, self-narration or life-writing, all of which illustrate a process of construction of the self in writing. Although it is possible to argue that autobiographical writing has existed for thousands of years, it was written for disparate purposes and in various forms during different periods, serving diverse functions.

In spite of its long history, the word autobiography itself is a relatively new coinage. It is even difficult to pinpoint the exact historical moment when its use was first recorded. According to Robert Rehder, “the word autobiography only comes into use after 1796 when Coleridge needs to invent a word to refer to Wordsworth’s ‘divine self-biography’ in 1804” (Rehder vi). In trying to establish the first usage of the term autobiography, Laura Marcus argues: “the first recorded usage of ‘autobiography’ in fact occurs in 1797, when the reviewer of Isaac d’Israeli’s *Miscellanies* – thought to be William of Norwich – writes in a discussion of (sic) d’Israeli’s use of the term ‘self-biography’” (Marcus 12). Marcus also draws our attention to the fact that in its very first usage, the term “self-biography” did have negative connotations and was rejected the moment its usage was proposed. Marcus goes on to explain that the hybridity of the term, believed to be partly Saxon, partly Greek, was in fact very appropriate since the genre itself was a hybrid, a conceptual category “... on the borders between art and life, inner self and outer world, fiction and history” (12).

Felicity Nussbaum refers to multiple possibilities for the initial usage of the term “autobiography”. She makes note of the way the word “self-biography” was used with reference to d’Israeli’s work. She points out that “the editor of a German collection entitled ‘Selfbiographies of Famous Men’, assigns the inspiration for the concept to Johann Gottfried Herder, though apparently Herder did not use the term ‘selfbiography’ himself” (Nussbaum,



*Autobiographical Subject* 1). Nussbaum further suggests that “the English term is usually associated with Robert Southney’s usage in the *Quarterly Review* of 1809...” (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 1) and we learn from Linda Anderson that Robert Southney was using the word “autobiography” with reference to the work of Francisco Vieuira, a Portugese poet (Anderson 7). Nussbaum maintains that the term “autobiography” may well have been used for the first time in the English title of W.P. Scargill’s book *The Autobiography of A Dissenting Minister* (1834) (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 2).

Thus, before Romanticism the self-writings were given a variety of names, such as ‘confessions’, as in *The Confessions* of Augustine, ‘histories’, as in the *Historia Calamitatum* of Abelard, as ‘life-writing’, as in Giambattista Vico’s *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo*, or simply ‘narratives’, or ‘books’ such as in Charlotte Charke’s *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* and in Margery Kempe’s *The Book of Margery Kempe*. On the other hand, Linda Anderson in her critical work *Autobiography* argues that autobiography as a distinct genre has only been recognized since the late eighteenth century (Anderson 1). Anderson asserts that according to the Romantic notion of the self, which was formulated at the end of the eighteenth century but remained current well into the 1970s, it was believed that “... each individual possesses a unified, unique selfhood which is also the expression of a universal human nature” (Anderson 5). Hence, the focus of critics throughout the nineteenth and the most part of the twentieth century was that autobiographies belonged to a literary canon comprising of the life-writings of ‘Great Men’. The vocation of the critic was to create a set of rules by which to govern such writing. Through this process of establishing a canon of white ‘Great’ male writers, based on biases of class and gender, the life-writings of the others - people of middle or lower classes and particularly women - were left outside the canon, considered as non-existent. This prejudice turned out to be most obvious when forms of writing mainly associated with women, such as diaries, memoirs and epistolary collections, were being discussed by male critics.

Laura Marcus, in her *Auto/biographical discourses, criticism, theory, practice* dwells at length on this exclusive ‘Great Men’ tradition, emphasizing the fact that certain autobiographies have become ‘seminal’ works dominating the field of autobiographical criticism. Marcus remarks that *Confessions* of Augustine has been referred to as “... the first ‘true’ autobiography...” (Marcus

2). Thus, qualities appertaining to Augustine's *Confessions*, such as introspection and Augustine's problematizing of time and memory have come to serve the function of yardsticks against which other autobiographical practices and works were judged. Similarly, discussions of what constitutes an autobiography proper and the difference between autobiography and memoir - that autobiography represents life in its totality whereas memoirs are merely concerned with description of people and events - were considered to be factors that foreground the intention of the author. Marcus further argues that another point of differentiation was between the 'serious' autobiographies and those written for notoriety or with mercenary motives. Marcus moreover suggests that the nineteenth and early twentieth century critics of autobiography emphasized the notion of genius on the part of the autobiography writer. The twentieth century critics generally dwelt on the concept of 'inner necessity' as an inherent quality of autobiographical writing. Thus, "... oppositions between self and world, private and public, subjectivity and objectivity, the interior spaces of mind and personal being and the public world..." (Marcus 4) became important sites of discussion in late twentieth century criticism of autobiography.

All in all, Marcus emphasizes the hybridity of autobiography as a genre and claims that this hybridity is the main reason why it is not possible to name, classify or categorize autobiography. She explains that autobiography should not be conceived as a sub-category of history since history is "... an 'objective', 'documentary' approach to lives and events" (5). Autobiography however, intermingles life stories with psychological, philosophical as well as financial and commercial issues.

When tackling the problem of defining autobiography, Nicholas Paige in *Being Interior* remarks the diffuseness and variety of self-writing and its broad range of effects, on both low and high culture, and the fact that autobiography had radically changed the way people thought of themselves and their experiences, as reflected in their self-writing. Paige further suggests that because of this transformational nature of autobiographical writing, instead of trying to understand autobiography as a genre, it was better to approach it as a "... psycho-textual hybrid - a way of thinking and a range of material practices that mutually constitute one another" (Paige 6).

## I. 2. Charlotte Charke the Autobiographer

It is possible to suggest that the literary scene of the eighteenth century England was marked by an abundance of autobiographical writing. The fact that many fictional works produced in this period claimed to be autobiographical further attests to the popularity of the genre. One such example is Richardson's *Pamela*, in the 'Preface' of which the author poses as the editor of an authentic set of letters (Clery 98). Another indication of the eighteenth century craze for life narratives is the popularity of the testimonies of criminals and felons, which according to Langford "... have passed permanently into the vulgar literary canon of the age" (Langford 156). The idea behind this marked trend for life narratives was the belief that the author was the only one who is privy to one's own life and emotions and thus it was the autobiographer who could disclose the truth about any particular person. Similarly, in discussing eighteenth century autobiography in *The Autobiographical Subject*, Felicity Nussbaum posits that "... [the] eighteenth century autobiography... may be regarded as a technology of the self which rests on the assumption that its truth can be told" (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* xv). Thus it was expected that the author was truthful in his/her own account in self-writing. Furthermore, it was the duty of the author to reveal not only the truth about his/her character, but also his/her interiority in writing. Jean Marsden in discussing the autobiographical writings of Charlotte Charke, Colley Cibber and Theophilus Cibber, quotes a work entitled *An Apology for the Life of Mr. T\_\_ C\_\_, Comedian, Being a Proper Sequel to the Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian*. Marsden contends that the anonymous author, posing as Theophilus, complains that Colley Cibber's autobiography was not an apology proper on the grounds that it contained "... not a Syllable of his private Character; not a word for excusing, palliating, or defending the little foolish Acts which merely related to Religion or Morality" (*Apology for the Life of Mr. T\_\_ C\_\_,* qtd. in Marsden 71). This attack on Colley Cibber's autobiography reveals the expectations of the eighteenth century public from autobiographical writing. In other words, the autobiographer is expected to reveal his private character, and then apologise for his faults and flows. The anonymous author cited by Marsden also underlines the fact that the two topics that deserve most defence are one's acts regarding religion and morality. Approached from this perspective, in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*<sup>1</sup>, Charlotte Charke not only

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* will be hereafter cited as *A Narrative*.

duplicates the shortcomings of her father, but she even refuses to name, let alone reveal the true nature of her transgressions. Thus, in Charke's autobiography, even the depiction of dramatic incidents that cause Charlotte to change the course of her life are left in the dark, as she neither confesses, nor apologizes for them.

The persona constructed for public consumption by Charke in *A Narrative* is multifaceted. In Jean Marsden's words, "... Charke herself leaves the line between performance and life undrawn, creating an identity that is fundamentally performative" (Marsden 74). However, in her autobiography there is one consistent persona that Charke adopts, that of a reformed self, which exhibits itself as the repentant daughter. In a gesture which affirms her statement that she cannot "...be match'd, in Oddity of Fame" (Charke 5), Charke addresses herself and writes a dedication in which she says: "Your two Friends, PRUDENCE and REFLECTION, I am inform'd, have lately ventur'd to pay you a Visit; for which I heartily congratulate you, as nothing can possibly be more joyous to the Heart than the return of absent Friends, after a long and painful Peregrination" (6). By this statement Charke is pointing to the existence of a reformed self, which is looking back at her old, rebellious and notorious self and writing. Likewise, Joseph Chaney argues that this dedication "...formally marks the end of her resistance to social conventions. The dedication effects a split in her subjectivity, dividing an unwise past self from a reformed present self..." (Chaney 208). As for the characters in her life drama, it is fair to argue that they are not even sketchily drawn. In *A Narrative*, Charke's family and friends are like actors and actresses, appearing on the stage for a brief while and then disappearing.

A stylistic analysis of Charlotte Charke's autobiography attests to the fact that her prose has been informed by eighteenth century drama. She freely quotes from plays in narrating her life, and she refers her audience to various plays starting from the table of contents of her autobiography. Her chosen epigraph for the autobiography is from the Prologue to *The What d'ye Call It*, by John Gay, and it reads:

*This Tragic story, or this Comic Jest,  
May make you laugh, or cry --- As you like best.* (Emphasis Charke's) (Charke 3)

Her epigraph proves once and for all that drama was Charke's element. However, drama is not the only source Charke draws upon in writing her autobiography. It is possible to argue that *A Narrative* is not only an intertextual hybrid, but also a patchwork of Charke's other writings. Into her prose narrative, Charke inserts two of her poems, the full text of her letter to her father, and a number of quotations from her two plays.

Seen in its entirety, it is possible to argue that *A Narrative* follows a linear time sequence with digressions. For instance, in her autobiography Charke starts relating the details of the oil vending trade she had taken up, then talks about her split with her husband and his frequent unfaithfulness, then narrates the breach between herself and her father, and then complains about her former mother-in-law. Soon after that, she informs her readers of her own mother's death that took place a year ago, proceeds to tell of her mother's and father's courting, not forgetting to complain about her uncle's marrying his maid, and then resumes the linear narrative by explaining how she ran a puppet show, and relates her views on the oratorical skills expected of actors. Charlotte ends this section of her story by mentioning the name of the famous actor David Garrick (40-44). Here, the readers have the sensation of following Charlotte Charke's stream of consciousness. It is interesting to note that Charke is also aware of the fact that she has been digressing from the main story line and apologizes for it at the end (44). In talking about these digressions however, we should also keep in mind that *A Narrative* was being published in instalments, and it was completed in shorter than two months, the first instalment coming out on 1 March, and the final one on 19 April. This may attest to the fact that even if Charke had the inclination to edit her text, she had no time to do so.

Although in *A Narrative* Charke promises to disclose her transgressions, she leaves them unexposed and un-confessed. But Charke's text is not subversive in intent. A close examination of *A Narrative* reveals to us the author's internalisation of the patriarchal ideology of her time. Her autobiography attests to her total identification with the dominant gender and class ideology of the mid-eighteenth century England. Her adoption of the male perspective, as explicit in her treatment of Mrs. Brown, disables Charke from questioning or challenging the ideology that is putting her in the impossible situation she finds herself in. Indeed, her disenfranchisement and her consequent declassed status befall her because of the breach between herself and the

patriarchy personified by her father Colley Cibber, as well as her transgressions of the established socio-political system and the delimitations imposed on her because of her gender. In fact, Charke never discloses the reasons behind the breach with her father, or her gender trespassing, let alone criticize or even mention the Licensing Act, which was her undoing. Hence, in *A Narrative*, the patriarchy and the discourses that restrict or oust women from professional life are not at all questioned, and no ideological criticism is attempted at. Likewise, Charke's full identification with the gender and class ideology of the mid-eighteenth century England makes it impossible for her to look at herself in a self-critical manner. Thus in *A Narrative* we see her representing herself as the dutiful daughter, Cordelia to her eldest sister's Reagan. She is a royalist, an Anglican, a woman with a middle class mindset who is proud to align herself with the dominant ideologies of her society.

### **I. 3. The Significance of Self-writing Today**

Many critics of autobiography agree that the 1980s have proved to be revolutionary in theorizing autobiographical writing. Alongside the attempts to address the particular aspects of men's and women's writing, as a result of the extensive research done on life writings of women, many texts which had remained obscure for centuries made their appearance in the literary scene.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in "Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices" provide a guide to the evolution of the attempts to theorize women's autobiographical writings. After recounting the fact that research into this field has started only very recently, (although women had used autobiography to "... write themselves into history") and calling attention to the all-exclusive 'Great Men' tradition and its proponents, Smith and Watson probe the reasons for the acknowledgement of this new field of study in the following words:

The growing academic interest in women's autobiography may be the result of an interplay of political, economic, and aesthetic factors. The growth of gender, ethnic, and area studies programs to address the interests of new educational constituencies has created a demand for texts that speak to diverse experiences and issues. Too, (sic) publishers have discovered that rediscovering and publishing women's life stories is a profitable enterprise. Autobiographies by women and people of color introduce stirring narratives of self-discovery that authorize new subjects who claim kinship in a literature of possibility. Most centrally, women reading other women's

autobiographical writings have experienced them as ‘mirrors’ of their own unvoiced aspirations (Smith & Watson 5).

Smith and Watson further remark that as a result of this increased awareness and research, an alternative canon of female autobiographical writing, which also included the long ‘marginalized’ genres of memoirs, journals, diaries and epistolary collections were recovered. They maintain the fact that these long forgotten narratives provided models of ‘heroic identity’ since they represented:

... positive models of women who had creatively talked back to patriarchs, defied, resisted, in short, been empowered through writing their lives. In a literary canon and a western tradition that had ‘othered’ women, whether as goddesses or demons, on pedestals or in back rooms, this effort to reclaim women’s lives and discover how women would speak ‘in their own words’ was an essential initiatory gesture (7)

Another initial attempt on the part of the early feminist critical agenda was to try and define those aspects of women’s autobiographical practices that set them apart from those written by men. Mary G. Mason for example pointed out that unlike men’s attempts at ‘individuating’ themselves, women identified themselves through another (Mason, qtd. in Smith & Watson 8). According to Estelle C. Jelinek, men idealized themselves in their autobiographies and turned their autobiographies into “‘success stories and histories of their eras’” (Jelinek, qtd.in Smith & Watson 9). Women’s writings on the other hand focused on what is personal and talked about the details of their domesticity. Jelinek writes that:

... men shape the events of their lives into coherent wholes characterized by linearity, harmony and orderliness. Irregularity, however, characterizes the lives of women and their texts, which have a ‘disconnected, fragmentary... pattern of diffusion and diversity’ in discontinuous forms because ‘the multidimensionality of women’s socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write (9).

Smith and Watson both in the introduction of their book titled *Women, Autobiography, Theory* and in the articles they compile in the book bring to the fore the arguments that challenge these generalizations. They also seek to highlight the contributions of African American, Asian American, Postcolonial, Postmodern, Materialist and Queer theories into the field of women’s autobiographical writings, and to display the variety of writing that exist in this field.

## II. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PANORAMA AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICES

### II. 1. Autobiographical Writing until the Eighteenth Century

#### II. 1. 1. Autobiographies of Men

‘Who fitter than a man’s selfe [to set forth his history] as being best acquainted with, and most privy to the many passages of his life?’ (Burton, qtd. in Stauffer 216).

The above quotation from Henry Burton’s life narrative reflects the light in which autobiography was viewed in the seventeenth century England, an attempt to give the objective truth about the autobiographer. It is possible to argue that this attempt was the focus of early autobiographical writing, be it secular or religious. Another generalization, which can be drawn from the early self-writings is that it was a privilege belonging to social elites as the examples below shall try to illustrate. It was the emperor, the saint, and increasingly after the Renaissance, the aristocrat and the men of letters who wrote autobiographies, although it was not unheard of for professional men to produce life-writings after the Renaissance.

The earliest extant works of literature in the Western world are epics, poems and histories. Although Herodotus gives us a cornucopia of the world he lives in including legends and the information he gets through his travels, the main theme that holds his *Histories* together is the Persian War. Thucydides on the other hand, not only dwells on the Peloponnesian War in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, but also limits his work to relating the incidents of the war. We may conclude that wars and conquests were not only shaping history but were its foremost subject matter in the ancient world.

However, an innovation was on its way. The Greeks had also developed what could be called conduct notebooks, the “hypomnemata” that was written to the self, with the purpose of governing it. As Foucault puts it, the intention of this exercise was “‘... to collect the already-said, to reassemble that one which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself’” (Foucault, qtd. in Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* xiv). Therefore it can be argued that these hypomnemata were the initial examples of the attempts at autobiographical writing.



With the emergence of the Roman Empire, the scope of wars and conquest changed, as the Empire waged war on all corners of the known world. Also the switch from the Republic to an Empire drew the emperor and his achievements to the foreground. And thus we have a succession of Emperors who give early examples of autobiographical writing. Julius Caesar (100 BC-44BC) is the first of those emperors who seeks to commemorate his “works” or his achievements, that is his wars in Africa, Alexandria, Gaul, Spain and the Civil Wars. Hence, the title of Caesar’s autobiographical writing is *War Commentaries*. Another autobiographical quest is Marcus Aurelius’ (121AD-180AD) *Meditations* which is a Stoical questioning of philosophy that also offers an insight on the author-emperor.

St. Augustine, whose autobiography proved to have a groundbreaking impact on autobiographical writing for well over a millennia, was born in AD 354 and his *Confessions* were written in 397-8. It is possible to argue that *Confessions* is stamped with the new religious fervor, ushering the rise of Christianity as a force that altered the history of the world. In Augustine, a large amount of space is devoted to philosophy and these philosophical sections reveal how he sees himself and the world around him. Thus, war and military campaigns as the major “work” of the individual in previous secular autobiographies, is in Augustine irreversibly replaced by the centrality of the religious experience of conversion. This change in theme and intention marks a move from secular to religious autobiographies, a trend that will continue well into the sixteenth century, to be partly reversed only then.

The political instability that starts with the fall of the Roman Empire brings literature to almost a standstill, what is left of learning being preserved in monasteries. However, the twelfth century witnesses the reemergence of life narratives. One such narrative is Peter Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* or *The Story of My Misfortunes*. As Nicholas Paige has pointed out, Augustine’s *Confessions* has not only served as a model for religious biographies but “Over the years, the *Confessions* themselves would serve as an intertextual template for other writers and other experiences...” (Paige 179) and Peter Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* is no exception. *The Historia Calamitatum* is written in the form of a letter but the formal structure of the text and the rendition of the subject matter owe much to Augustine’s *Confessions*. However, when considered

in its own light, Abelard's autobiography gives a candid portrait of the individual, alongside with providing information on the intellectual climate and the monastic life of the period, and a love story that was to excite public imagination for centuries to come.

Although it was the religious autobiographies that set the tone of autobiographical writing of the middle ages, there existed exceptions to the rule. The Crusades started in 1096 and the occupation of the 'Holy Land' continued till 1291, the ongoing war providing ample opportunities for chronicles to be written. The Crusades had an unprecedented impact on both the East and the West, the actual clash of arms bringing along with it a clash of the two civilizations. One such attempt at life writing is Usamah Ibn Munqidh's *Autobiography, excerpts on the Franks*. Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188), was a Muslim warrior and courtier, who fought under Saladin. However as an inhabitant of the area occupied by the Crusades, he also had a chance to get to observe them intimately, as the representatives of the two cultures occupied the same space and interacted frequently. Ibn Munqidh's autobiographical writing can be dated around 1175 and as the title of the work indicates, the "Franks" - as the invaders were called in the East - are central to his autobiography. The style he uses is witty and humorous and he relates his personal encounters with the "Franks" in the form of anecdotes. These anecdotes reveal the differences in culture, habits and mentality as reflected in all aspects of life, ranging from varying practices in medicine and social manners to the relations between the sexes and even hygiene. However, it is still possible to glimpse the individual self in his considerably judgmental narration of the others.

Donald Stauffer, in *English Biography Before 1700* suggests that the Middle Ages were not a period when autobiography was cultivated. Stauffer maintains that the study of the individual was part of the medieval system only if it represented a pious example for others. Hence, self-analysis or the study of the individual remained outside the system and such medieval self-chronicles were infrequent and fragmentary in form. (Stauffer176) Stauffer quotes several examples, such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* which ends with a brief, matter-of-fact paragraph about himself and the Welshman Gerard de Bari's (1146?-1220?) self-study in Medieval Latin which also contains his sermons, letters and interpretation of visions.

In a similar vein, Peter Burke in his essay “Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes” argues that although what some historians call ‘ego-documents’, which refer to a broad category of self-writing, covering diaries, journals, memoirs and letters were indeed rare before 1500, he does mention those written by Petrarch, Pope Pius II and the French diplomat Philippe de Commines. Thus, the void was partially filled by biographies that were continued to be written throughout the Middle Ages, such as the lives of the saints, biographies of emperor Charlemagne, Dürer and Erasmus (Burke 20-21).

Burke further asserts that after 1500 there was an ever-increasing output in autobiographical writing. He proposes that urbanization and easier access to travel were among the reasons for this occurrence because city life and travelling enabled the subject to cut the existing ties with his community and experience an increased awareness of individuality. Another reason Burke suggests for the flourishing of autobiographical writing is the increased publication of fictional narratives such as the picaresque novel and sonnet-sequences, as “... these examples suggest the importance of the diffusion of printed models for the creation of a new or sharper sense of self, as well as for the breakdown of inhibitions about writing down the story of one’s life” (Burke 22).

According to Burke, there were a number of models of sixteenth century self-writing. One was the ‘impersonal style’ exemplified by commentaries in the style of Julius Caesar. Another was a Florentine tradition of memoranda called the *ricordanze*, which comprised of lists of births, marriages and deaths, and a variety of topics like prices, weather and news. The other main influence was the confessional style of Augustine, followed by Petrarch and St Teresa. Burke adds a final model, which was a secular form of the confessional model. He points out the fact that Renaissance learning revived the ancient learning and the fact that the sixteenth century autobiographical writing tended to follow the pre-existing models was not in itself surprising.

Stauffer focusing on self-writing in England maintains that autobiographies or ‘lives’ written in fifteenth century were in rhyme and only by the second half of the sixteenth century did autobiographies in prose start to flourish. One example of such early prose self-writing was the mystical account of the love adventures of George Gascoigne.

In discussing secular autobiography in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Stauffer remarks, it is important to note that a variety of different types of autobiography emerge in this period. One such was James Melville's (1549-1593) *Memoirs of his own life*, which was the forerunner of the autobiography written for the instruction of relatives and descendants, a type that would become prevalent in the seventeenth century. According to Stauffer, these were produced by the members of the gentry or nobility and reflected a definite sense of family pride (Stauffer 179).

Another group was that of adventurous anecdotal autobiography and one outstanding example was *Autobiography of Thomas Raymond*, written in the seventeenth century and first printed in 1917. With an astonishing amount of humor and subtle psychology, Raymond (1610?-1681?) narrated very personal incidents such as his fear of darkness or sketches the characters of his close relatives. In the form of entertaining anecdotes he related his travels and military adventures. According to Stauffer, the overall picture we get through his witty criticisms and subtle insight is that of "... a merry gentleman" (Stauffer 188).

Stauffer further suggests that the Civil Wars seemed to offer a new lease of life to the oldest form of autobiography, the military memoirs. They were usually written on the same plan and thus possessed little individuality. The best known of these political memoirs is *The Life of Edward Earl of Clarendon, Lord High Chancellor of England*, written about 1668-72 and first published in 1759. This autobiography Stauffer finds particularly interesting because it treats the same period Clarendon covers in *History of the Rebellion*, which draws our attention to the fact that for the author, there was a definitive difference between writing history and autobiography. Accordingly, Stauffer remarks that Clarendon's focus is narrower and more concentrated in his autobiography. He uses the third person in narration, which is an attempt at impersonality, a characteristic of the century, by which the autobiographers used the methods of biographers. Although Clarendon uses the third person he gives the reader a catalogue of his own faults. His self-analysis demonstrates his awareness of both his positive and negative qualities and he feels free to praise or blame himself: "He had a fancy sharp and luxuriant; but so carefully cultivated and strictly guarded, that he never was heard to speak a loose or profane word"; "He was in his nature inclined to pride and passion, and to a humor between wrangling and disputing very troublesome" (Stauffer 191). Most of Clarendon's work is devoted to the political events of his

career, to the exclusion of his domestic relations. The work starts with his birth in 1609 and ends after his exile in 1668, with a frank analysis of the value of his life. (Stauffer 189-192)

Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* asserts that the slow emergence of secular autobiography did not obliterate the autobiographical writings of the churchmen and after the Restoration they became plentiful. The reasons for this increased output can be found in "... the breakdown of censorship after the civil war and a newly democratized access to print culture" (Anderson 27). Thus, it is possible to argue that the Puritan autobiographies, which were very personal and devout, marked the latter part of the seventeenth century. The emphasis put on the individual experience by the Protestant movement has its reflection in these religious autobiographies as the Puritan had nothing to rely on but his own conscience and in order to accomplish that he had to turn inwards. *A Narration of the Life of Mr. Henry Burton* is an early Puritan autobiography and was in print by 1643. It narrates the persecutions of a nonconformist and his life in prison is described in detail. The author's motive for writing is: "... to give a just account to God's people of that divine support and comfort, which it pleased the Lord to uphold mee (sic) with, in all my tryalls (sic)" (Burton, qtd. in Stauffer 195). Stauffer argues that this was a common motive of religious autobiographers as they intended to encourage others of the same faith in their individual quests and hearten them in the persecutions they may suffer.

John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is the best known among these Puritan autobiographies and it was also very influential both in its time and in the next century to come. It was published in 1666 and reached its seventh edition in 1692. Bunyan was a 'Mechanick Preacher', someone who had received no formal education in theology and did not hold a formal position in the church. However, he based his authority on his own experience of spiritual conversion. According to Stauffer, *Grace Abounding* has been modeled on *Pilgrim's Progress*, although the generality of *Pilgrim's Progress* was replaced by the particular events in Bunyan's life, like his sinfulness and the love he bears for his family, which are related as parts of his spiritual struggle. Linda Anderson argues that for Bunyan, it was not the events themselves that were significant, but their spiritual implications and in this respect, he resembles Augustine. Anderson further comments that the Puritans have replaced the legal authority of the church with their individual experiences and Bunyan believes that he receives the Word directly from God

and turns to the Bible only later to confirm it. Thus, this emphasis on individual experience establishes "... the individual as a free agent with unique access to his own inner self..." (Anderson 33).

As Stauffer has observed, another religious group that produced an abundance of autobiographies was the Quakers. Quakers comprised the sect for whom religion was purely personal. Thus they have transformed autobiography into an expression of devotion and an encouragement for those of the same faith. Quaker autobiographies continued to be written well into the eighteenth century and relate only the mystical experiences of their writers, while concentrating on individual's relation to his God. According to Stauffer, the model for the Quaker biographies was that of George Fox, written shortly after 1674-1675, in the form of a spiritual Odyssey.

It is possible to argue that both the religious and secular autobiographies, be they the emperor, the saint, the aristocrat or the men of letters who wrote them, it was men of social standing who engaged in the act of writing, and as such, these 'seminal' autobiographies created a public persona for the consumption of the public, which was devoid of the private details of daily life.

## **II. 1. 2. Autobiographies of Women**

Early autobiographies written by women tend to fall into two categories, that of the religious and secular. The religious autobiographies written by women appear far earlier than the secular models, as during the period between 1100 and the mid-1500s, many Christian women and mystics composed written documents on their spiritual experiences. The secular models date from the seventeenth century and are written by aristocratic women and in a number of cases, their life-writings are appended to those of their husbands. It is also possible to argue that many of these secular self-writings were private exercises not written with intention of publication, such as the diaries, memoirs and letter collections (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 137).

Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe were two such Christian mystics writing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries respectively, who based their works on the conventions of medieval female sacred autobiography. Domna C. Stanton in her essay "Autogynography: Is the Subject

Different?” quotes Mary Mason’s declaration to the effect that the *Book of Margery Kempe* (1432) was ““ the first full autobiography in English by anyone male or female”” and Julian of Norwich, who wrote *A Shewing of God’s Love* (c.1300) was the first Englishwoman to ““speak out about herself”” (Mason, qtd. in Stanton 133).

In her essay “The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers” Mary G. Mason argues that women discover and acknowledge their identities through the presence of another consciousness. According to Mason, for both Julian and Margery Kempe, the other through which they reveal themselves is a divine being. Mason further maintains that “Julian establishes an identification with the suffering Christ on the cross that is absolute” (Mason 321) while such an identification does not obliterate Julian as a person, “for her account is shot through with evidence of a vivid, unique and even radical consciousness” (322). Mason resumes that in the case of Margery Kempe, this other consciousness is a Christ who is “her manly bridegroom” (322).

Mason also compares the narratives written by Julian and Margery Kempe on the grounds of their single and dual focuses respectively. She also remarks that whereas Julian speaks in the first person, Kempe keeps using the third person in her narrative. Julian was an anchoress, a woman who led a life of spiritual contemplation in a cell, and her writing is an attempt to give meaning and coherence to the mystic visions she has experienced. Margery Kempe on the other hand, was a wealthy woman who was also a wife and the mother of numerous children. Thus it is possible to argue that she had a life apart from the world of mysticism and visions and in her book, her secular life is glimpsed alongside her religious experiences. Similarly, Mason comments: “Julian’s intensity of focus [was] on a single divine figure and a corresponding intensity of being realized through relationship to that figure; Margery Kempe’s dual vocation in this world and in another and her dual focus on these two separate, secular/religious worlds...” (323).

Nicholas Paige, in his study on early autobiographical writing in France asserts that the seventeenth century witnessed the rise of another template for religious autobiographies, one especially influential on those that were to be written by women. He maintains that Teresa of Avila’s (1515-1582) *Life* provided the pattern for the many mystical first-person narratives written by women in the seventeenth century. Paige points out the fact that although *Life* of

Teresa of Avila stood by itself, the narratives that were modelled on it were usually integrated into biographies.

One cannot help but notice the abundance and fruitfulness of the writings of women mystics that were mainly produced in the latter part of the Middle Ages and also continued to be written well into the seventeenth century. Laurie A. Finke in her article entitled “Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision” argues that the visions experienced by the women mystics gave them authority which they otherwise lacked in the highly institutionized and misogynistic Catholic church, which accounts for the large number of texts written by and about women in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Finke maintains, “visions were a socially sanctioned activity that freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious figure” (Finke 406). Thus women, who from the twelfth century on could not hold official positions in the Catholic church were able to “... claim a virtually divine authority...” (408) through these mystic visions which were induced through practices such as flagellation and fasting. Finke further comments that “the female mystic of the Middle Ages did not claim to speak in her own voice.... Rather, the source of the mystic’s inspiration was divine; she was merely the receptacle, the instrument of a divine will” (412). Thus, through these visions that were controlled and defined by the church, these women were empowered with enough authority to impart the word of God, and established themselves firmly within the church through mysticism, which was a public discourse.

In a similar vein, Nicholas Paige in *Being Interior - Autobiography and the Contradictions of Modernity in Seventeenth Century France* suggests that the writings of the women mystics had certain aspects in common, that “... their pens were inspired canals for the transmission of a discourse which was not their own” (Paige 104). Thus the writer becomes a scribe, an arm, a ‘sylvus’ who merely dictates the divine ‘word’. Moreover, through this guided writing, the autobiographer is completely able to hide her self from view, as she is no more than a ‘human vessel’. Paige remarks that this turns out to be a contradiction as these autobiographies instead of “... providing access to the most intimate recesses of the human soul” (105), block the access to the interior experiences of the self.



The seventeenth century witnesses the rise of secular autobiographies by women. These were largely written by members of aristocracy, as these women who belonged to a privileged class had access to the technology of writing. One such secular autobiography was written by Margaret Cavendish, who was a prolific writer, trying her hand at a variety of genres, ranging from the biography of her husband William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, to poems on scientific topics and to utopian fiction. “A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life” appeared in 1656 as part of a volume named *Natures pictures drawn by fancies Pencil... by ... the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* and it was republished as an appendix to *The Life of William Cavendish* in 1667. In her short autobiography, Cavendish portrays her family, and relates the two years she spent at court and how she fell in love with her husband. Stauffer has suggested that her analyses of character are sound and lively and this is true for the way she summarizes her own character as naïve and proud: “... I’m very ambitious, yet ‘tis neither for Beauty, Wit, Titles, Wealth or Power but as they are steps to raise me to Fames Tower, which is to live by remembrance in after-ages...” (Cavendish, qtd. in Stauffer 208).

As Stanton has observed, Cavendish’s autobiographical writing provides a striking example for what Mason calls the “delineation of identity by way of alterity” (Mason, qtd. in Stanton 139). Cavendish argues that she is not writing for the sake of her readers but for her own sake: “... not to please the fancy but to tell the truth, lest after-ages should mistake, in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns... second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again” (Cavendish, qtd. in Stanton 140). Hence, Cavendish is writing out of a need to differentiate her self from others and she is constructing her identity in direct reference to her husband, as his second wife.

We also learn from Mason’s essay “The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers” that Cavendish wrote the biography of her husband some ten years after she wrote her own autobiography and the second edition of her autobiography was published as appended to her husband’s biography. Mason further comments that this was a literary convention of the times as Lucy Hutchinson and Lady Anne Fanshawe also “... wrote their memoirs and appended them to their husbands’ biographies” (Mason 322). Stauffer argues that Lady Anne Fanshawe’s memoirs,

written in 1676 are informed by the love she feels for her husband, and relate the political turmoil of the Civil Wars, which consequently take Lady Anne Fanshawe and Sir Richard Fanshawe to Italy, Spain Ireland and France, ending by the death of her husband.

Felicity A. Nussbaum in her book entitled *The Autobiographical Subject – Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* remarks: “seventeenth-century gentlewomen intimated through their choice of content that their husbands’ lives superseded theirs; they defined self by relationship” (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 137), an argument in line with that of Mason. Nussbaum also asserts that seventeenth-century women did not write their autobiographical accounts with intention of publishing them but for a small group of intimates. Therefore, many of these texts remained unpublished till the nineteenth century. From Nussbaum we learn that “Lucy Hutchinson’s memoirs were published in 1806, Anne Clifford’s in 1817, [and] Anne Fanshawe’s in 1829” (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 137).

In her essay “Representations of Intimacy in the Life-writing of Anne Clifford and Anne Dormer”, Mary O’Connor examines the way these two aristocratic women represent themselves in their writing. O’Connor maintains that Clifford wrote from 1660 to 1676 and used a variety of genres to represent her life, such as diaries, account books, chronicles and letters. On the other hand, Dormer wrote from 1685 to 1691 and left an epistolary collection comprised of her letters to her sister. O’Connor warns the reader against a modern fallacy, that of thinking the private and public realms as separate in the seventeenth century, a breach that would occur in the eighteenth century and suggests that for these women, their life in court was directly related to their private experiences. According to O’Connor, Clifford’s starting to keep an account book at the age of ten is an indication of the fact that she was constructing herself as an aristocrat and in terms of the material possessions she owned. After she gets married, Clifford continues her writing in the form of diaries. Clifford is the heir to one of the largest estates in England. However, she is disinherited and has to fight a legal battle to win back her inheritance, which causes a major dispute between herself and her husband. From her narration we understand that she is pressured even by the King to drop the suit. Yet, her sense of who she is very strong and as O’Connor puts it: “She writes about her life, claiming it a history, making it into history. Ultimately her technique will be to write out her activities and her rooms as history; the diary itself becomes part

of a larger history or set of chronicles that reinforce her claim to the northern lands and her Clifford lineage” (O’Connor 86). O’Connor further maintains that “Clifford’s life-writing was always a public act: a making of history and a confirming of lineage” (88).

O’Connor next asserts that life writing was a way of self-fashioning for seventeenth century women, which was also the case for Anne Dormer. However, Dormer was “...particularly aware of an inside and outside, of intimate writing and writing for show” (88). Dormer was writing at the time before the Glorious Revolution and her husband whom she calls a ‘tyrant’ and her father belonged to opposing parties. It is possible to argue that Dormer’s letter writing was a vent for her feelings, as she could only through writing tell her sister of “... all [her] joyes and all [her] sorrows” (Dormer, qtd. in O’Connor 88). O’Connor further remarks that writing and reading, for Dormer were a solace: ““a poore woman that lives in a thatched house when she is ill or weary of he[r] work can step into her Neigh: and have some refres[h]ment but I have none but what I find by thin[k]in writing and reading”” (Dormer, qtd. in O’Connor 89).

Just as a poor woman would socialize with her neighbours in times of need, a woman of Dormer’s social class would resort to writing and reading. Consequently, O’Connor points out the fact that for Clifford and Dormer, life writing was not only a process of self-fashioning but also a way of resisting to domination, both marital and political.

## **II. 2. What Changed in Eighteenth Century England?**

It is possible to argue that the eighteenth century has been a milestone in autobiographical writing. Although the two basic models of earlier self-narration employed by women, the mystical autobiographies and the autobiographies of aristocratic women were continued to be produced, there was an unprecedented change both in terms of the increased output and in terms of diversity. At this historical moment, more and more middle class women started producing secular autobiographical texts and this was the result of a number of interrelated occurrences. Growth of the middle class and a particular middle class consciousness, developments in the print culture, the rising levels of literacy and education of women, the changing role of women in eighteenth century English society, and the relation of women to the print culture are important

sites that require analysis in tracking the reasons and consequences of this outpour of autobiographic material in the eighteenth century.

## **II. 2. 1. Growth of the Middle Class and Middle Class Consciousness**

It is difficult to determine when the middle class arose as the dominant social class in England as the debates on when indeed such a change occurred are inconclusive. Moreover, arguing for the existence of a normative construct such as the ‘the middle class’ poses difficulties in itself. In a similar vein, Kathryn Shevelov in *Women and Print Culture – The Construction of femininity in the early periodical* refers to the differences regarding academics’ opinions as to when the middle class came into existence as a coherent social unit. Shevelov reiterates opinions of a variety of scholars, ranging from those who argue for the existence of a middle class since the Renaissance, to others for whom the early eighteenth century was a time when the aristocracy and gentry remained the dominant social class and it was only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the middle class gained hegemony. In discussing the growth of middle class in England, another difficulty lies in differentiating the middle class from the gentry and aristocracy as all of the social classes above were changing at a fast pace during this historical period.

However, according to Shevelov, the presence of a social class apart from the aristocratic elite was proven by the existence, in the periodicals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, of a discourse, which situated itself apart from that of the aristocracy. In Shevelov’s words, the periodicals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries “... demonstrate a sometimes aggressively articulated complex of beliefs and a marked social agenda formulated in opposition to what is presented as an alterable, upper-class-dominated status quo; and they do so in relation to an audience that, in so far as described or figured textually, includes readers who are not among the educated elite” (Shevelov 9).

Shevelov further adds that the periodical editors such as Dunton and Defoe were situated outside the elite as they lacked the main marker of male elite culture, which was a classical education. Moreover, the views of the periodical editors, as reflected in the periodicals were ambivalent in relation to the landed classes, sometimes antagonistic and at other times admiring. Thus, it follows that the existence of a body of literature in part produced by (as the readers participated

in designing the content of the periodicals through the epistolary pact between themselves and the editors) and written for the consumption of a readership that situated itself outside the elite, proves the existence of a particular middle class consciousness during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Likewise, Felicity Nussbaum in her *Autobiographical Subject – Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* argues that the middle class that was placed between the aristocracy and the working class and whose literacy was a comparatively new phenomenon mainly practiced autobiographical writing during the eighteenth century. In defining the middle class, Nussbaum reiterates E.P. Thompson's views to the effect that class rested in the individual consciousness, since Thompson maintains the fact that class is defined as men live their own history. Thus, class only exists if and when "... recognised by an individual as his place in the social and political system" (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 50). Consequently, it is possible to argue that the middle class came into being as more and more people thought of themselves as belonging to that particular social class in eighteenth century England. Hence for Thompson, the middle class was formed through an awareness of itself as such during the eighteenth century.

However, Nussbaum is of the opinion that consciousness is one but not the only factor in the formation of social classes and argues that the constitution of class is based on material circumstances as well. Consequently, Nussbaum quotes James Nelson who has argued in 1756 that the middle class was the largest among the five classes and was made up of: "the Men of Trade and Commerce, in which I comprize (sic) the Merchants, and all those that are usually distinguished by the Epithets of genteel Trades and good Businesses: such as require Figure, Credit, Capital, and many other Circumstances to conduct and support them" (Nelson, qtd. in Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 51).

Nussbaum remarks that according to Nelson, although in many countries the middle class was very distinct, this was not the case in England because in England, there existed a profusion of marriages between the members of aristocracy and the trades people and thus arose an additional difficulty in separating one social class from the other as class distinctions were further blurred by these inter-marriages. Hence, in 1780s the Irish theologian Philip Skelton writes of "... that

middle class which subsists between the court and the spade”’, marking the wide application of the term (Skelton, qtd. in Langford 96).

Another relevant model in trying to map the emergence of middle class might be the one proposed by Michael McKeon. McKeon suggests that during the period in question, “the emergent categories of ‘the novel’ and ‘the middle class’ coexisted with the older dominant categories of ‘the romance’ and ‘the aristocracy’ that they were beginning to replace” (Shevelov 9). Hence, it is possible to argue that although it is difficult to decide exactly when the middle class became dominant in eighteenth century and replaced aristocracy with regard to hegemony, a separate middle class consciousness existed and was explicit in the literary products of the age.

Nussbaum further observes the close relation between middle class consciousness and the production of autobiographical writing, and argues that such a consciousness gave individuals a sense of their uniqueness, which enabled them to create texts about themselves, emphasizing their uniqueness as such. In doing this, the middle class defined themselves as superior to the working class who were illiterate and thus lacking this technology of self-expression. Nussbaum also maintains that the middle class consciousness enabled individuals to follow their self-interest. While group identity was a marker of working class identity, individuality was becoming the signifier of the bourgeois self. To back up her argument, Nussbaum quotes Elizabeth Eisenstein who suggests that printing has been an important factor, which had increased the split between public and private, the self and the society. Thus it was possible to scrutinize the self, write about it, print it and turn that into intellectual property. Eighteenth century was also significant in that what had long been communal, such as grounds and roads, were being turned into public property by the ruling classes, which was another indication of the move from the communal to the individual.

Hence it is possible to maintain that the middle class, which was still in formation during the eighteenth century, was not a coherent unit but a site of inconsistencies, which was reflected in the autobiographical texts produced. According to Nussbaum, as the subjects recognized themselves as belonging to this particular class, they had the “... illusion of control over [their] own identity...” (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 51). Thus, autobiographical writing was a

means of creating middle class consciousness. Nussbaum's writes: "Eighteenth century autobiographical writing is a location that tolerates inconsistencies, and it both constructs and propagates this new class consciousness to become a moral technology of that class formation" (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 51).

Consequently, the formation of middle class and the autobiographical texts produced by that particular social class appear to be in a symbiotic relation, as the subjects who believe they belong to this class produce autobiographical texts, which perpetuate middle class consciousness.

### **II. 2. 2. The Growth of the Arts**

If we locate the growth of middle class in England by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is possible to maintain that this growth was paralleled by an increase in demand for printed material. Hence it was a two-way relation, which was perpetuated by the middle class as it defined itself in opposition to the lower class, as the literate versus the illiterate. Consequently, the middle class was both reading more and more of the written material, from broadsides to pamphlets and chapbooks, periodicals to novels, but also creating autobiographical texts in the eighteenth century.

Kathryn Shevelov in *Women and Print Culture – The Construction of femininity in the early periodical* maintains that in examining the development of popular forms of literature such as the periodical and novel in the eighteenth century, much emphasis has been placed on the concept of the 'rise of the middle class'. Shevelov's quotation from Raymond Williams provides a summary of the relation between the new middle class and the emergence of new literary forms:

'It is from the 1690s that the growth of a new kind of middle-class reading public becomes evident, in direct relation to the growth in size and importance of a middle class defined as merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, and administrative and clerical workers. New forms of reading, in the newspaper, the periodical and the magazine, account for the major expansion, and behind them comes the novel, in close relation from its beginnings to this particular public' (Williams, qtd. in Shevelov 7)

Shevelov further cites Ian Watt's argument to the effect that eighteenth century witnessed the expansion of the 'intermediate class', whose relation to print culture Watts defines as such: "the

increasingly prosperous and numerous social groups concerned with commerce and manufacture.... may have altered the centre of gravity of the reading public sufficiently to place the middle class as a whole in a dominating position for the first time” (Watts, qtd. in Shevelov 7).

Thus the middle class had become the driving force behind the ever-expanding print culture. It is also worth noting that the early periodical which was at the nexus of the changing ideologies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was produced by editors who were culturally outside the elite. Further, the periodicals edited by such individuals were produced exclusively for the consumption of the middle classes.

In discussing the print culture of eighteenth century in *The Autobiographical Subject – Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, Nussbaum draws our attention to the fact that the eighteenth century texts were not fixed entities as we think of them in the twentieth century (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 18). Texts would be transformed and abridged before they were printed and also between consequent prints. This was the case even for standard eighteenth century novels, which would come out in a variety of versions throughout the century. Thus it was not possible to argue for the existence of authentic versions of texts, as a multiplicity of versions was available.

Nussbaum further maintains that the idea of a standardized version of a text was in formation during the century and the idea of a standard text did not match the actualities of printing in the eighteenth century. As told elsewhere, the increase in the production of literary texts required them to be cheap and thus available for all. Consequently, especially in the first half of the century, books were commonly sold in instalments. Hence the instalments would be far cheaper than the book and the owner of the instalments would have them bound when completed. This model of consumption was employed chiefly to cater for the needs of the lower and middle classes and by mid century, not only novels but also autobiographies were produced in instalments, as was the case with Charlotte Charke’s autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*.



### II. 2. 3. Decline of Royal Patronage and the Era of Bookseller-Publishers

By the mid eighteenth century the literary world was marked by a visible increase in printed material and a corresponding increase in the numbers of the reading public. Paradoxically, this century also witnessed a major change in terms of the financing of literary production. The court and the aristocracy were no longer providing authors with patronage, and the vacuum was filled by the newly emergent figure of the bookseller-publisher. *London Tradesman*, published in 1747 by Campbell defines the bookseller-publisher in the following manner: “Their Business is, to purchase original Copies from Authors, to employ Printers to print them, and publish and sell them in their Shops” (Campbell, qtd. in Langford 92). Thus we see that by the middle of the eighteenth century a class of middlemen have actively overtaken the production of literary works.

Paul Langford in *A Polite and Commercial People (England 1727-1783)* remarks that the decline of patronage and the lack of encouragement on the part of George II was extensively criticised by the eighteenth century public. Langford quotes Smollett to the effect that the greatest English writers of the day were neglected by the court and that genius had to flourish “under the culture of a public which had pretensions to taste” (Smollett, qtd. in Langford 317). Smollett was not alone in his condemnation of the shift from royal patronage to the new model of the bookseller-publisher. Goldsmith in similar vein laments “that fatal revolution whereby writing is converted to a mechanic trade; and booksellers, instead of the great, become the patrons and paymasters of men of genius” (Goldsmith, qtd. in Watt 55). According to Langford, the bookseller-publishers acted as the representatives of “... a novel form of patronage in which the author was turned into a hack and the public inundated with meretricious literature” (Langford 93). Langford further argues that Dr Johnson, to whom patronage was promised for his *Dictionary*, was among those disappointed by the nobility, since the promise was not fulfilled and that was the reason why Johnson wrote his *Letter to Chesterfield* dismissing aristocratic patronage for good.

Although by the middle of the eighteenth century the bookseller-publishers had reached an unprecedented affluence, a lucky few seems to have been unaffected by the decline of patronage the majority of the authors suffered from. It is possible to argue that Colley Cibber, who had proved his adaptability to the new form of relationship between arts and commerce early on by becoming one of the businessmen managers of theatre, was one of the lucky few. Although his

lack of literary merits was commonly criticised and satirized, Colley Cibber enjoyed a very long tenure as the poet laureate. Langford maintains that his tenure as the poet laureate, which was from 1730 to 1757, almost matched that of his royal master George II's reign (1727-1760). According to Langford Cibber "plumbed new depths of banality in his celebrations of official occasions" (Langford, 317). One such example of Cibber's verse reads thus:

"The word that form'd the world  
In vain did make mankind;  
Unless, his passions restrain,  
Almighty wisdom had design'd,  
Sometimes a William, or a George should reign." (Cibber, in Langford, 317)

Charlotte Charke cannot be but familiar with the advantages of the then declining system of royal patronage as exemplified by the long and profitable career of her father Colley Cibber. However, she in her turn was the victim of the new system of production and consumption, which was based on the ascendancy of the new middlemen of the literary market place, the bookseller-publisher, and the consequent commercialisation of literature, and *A Narrative* bears witness to the effects of such a change.

#### **II. 2. 4. The Changing Role of Women in Eighteenth Century English Society**

'In former times, the pen, like the sword, was considered as consigned by nature to the hands of men ... the revolution of years has now produced a generation of Amazons of the pen, who with the spirit of their predecessor have set masculine tyrant at defiance' (Johnson, qtd. in McCarthy 101).

Samuel Johnson in 1753 hailed the increased output in women's writing in eighteenth century as such. Thus it was not only autobiographies that women were writing in the eighteenth century, but they were shining "... in various walks of Literature" as a reviewer in the *British Critic* put it (McCarthy 101). Ironically, this change was occurring at the time when for women, the split between the public and private spheres was actually taking place. Hence, during the eighteenth century, in spite of the fact that women were participating in the public realm of the print culture through their writing, their homes and thus the private realm was becoming their designated place.

## II. 2. 4. 1. Othering of Women and the Split between the Public and Private Spheres

Autobiographical writing, by definition is associated with privacy and interiority. However, autobiographical writing is also, intricately linked to the public, as eventually the autobiographical text reaches its audience. The public realm also comes to the fore in tracing the historical factors that enabled autobiographical writing to be practiced. In discussing the effects of the public on the private realm, Nicholas Paige reiterates Jürgen Habermas's arguments in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Habermas, Enlightenment has fostered an arena of public debate in both France and England, which was separate from the institutions of state. Thus, the coffeehouse culture and the ever-increasing number of periodicals were established as a result of this "public sphere". In this public arena individuals from a variety of different backgrounds came together and their common denominator was rationality. Habermas further observes that the formation of a public sphere meant "the emancipation ... of an inner realm" (Habermas, qtd. in Paige 123) and this was manifest in the cultural productions of the Enlightenment such as epistolary fiction and non-fiction. Habermas has suggested that "subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented toward an audience" (Habermas, qtd. in Paige 123). Hence, the presence of a public realm made it possible for the private subjectivity to exist and to seek audition again in the public arena of a community, which we might call the audience.

When discussing the place of women in relation to the public and private realms, it is possible to argue that association of women with the private domain rather than the public was not peculiar to the eighteenth century. Women have long been associated with concepts such as marriage, children and the household. However, what was peculiar to eighteenth century was the new emphasis on the biological and social othering of women and the consequent emergence of an ideology, which was "... reformulating sexual relations and the family based upon new criteria" (Shevelow 2).

Shevelow suggests that the feminine ideal of the Victorian era, which found its culmination in the "Angel in the house", was not original to the nineteenth century but already in formation during the eighteenth century. As Shevelow has observed, it was in the eighteenth century that: "...

categories of masculine and feminine, public and private, home and world, assumed the shape of binary oppositions in which the meaning of each category was produced in terms of its opposite”(Shevelow 19).

Consequently, women were represented as having inherent traits, which disqualified them for the masculine public realm. However, women were given the right to exercise power within the private realm of home.

Ruth Bloch locates two historical periods in the last 500 years of Western history when gender constructions were radically changed. According to Bloch, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; “ ... an older notion of the separate domains of the sexes gave way to a neo-Aristotelian ‘vertical, hierarchical definition’ that stressed that women were fundamentally similar - though biologically inferior and socially subordinate to men” (Shevelow 11).

Then, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the neo-Aristotelian definition was discarded in favour of the older notion emphasizing an essential difference between sexes. Shevelow formulates this notion of difference between men and women as not of ‘degree’ but of ‘kind’.

Shevelow argues that this apparent paradox meant that the print culture, which was promoting women’s writing, was also serving to contain in by proposing a restrictive model of femininity and the popular periodical initially played an important role in this method of inclusion and restriction.

#### **II. 2. 4. 2. The Rising Levels of Literacy and the Education of Women**

In discussing literacy in eighteenth century England, it should be remarked that literacy was still not the rule but the exception to the rule. Although literacy was no longer solely in the possession of the aristocracy, the majority of the population was not literate. Shevelow has suggested that in spite of the marked increase in literacy, it was still “... a period in which literacy itself was a minority competence and a line of social demarcation, ... automatically partial and exclusionary” (Shevelow 20).

The reasons for the increase in literacy, resulting in the publishing of a profusion of periodicals by the end of the seventeenth century may well be traced to the political situation earlier in the seventeenth century. Shevelov maintains that during the Civil Wars the population had had to develop a habit of reading or listening to news being read to them. Among the printed materials that were in circulation during the Civil War, it is possible to recount political pamphlets, satiric papers and news reporting papers. Also, the accession of William and Mary in 1688 had resulted in the relaxing of the restrictions on publishing, which made it possible for publishing enterprises to flourish. The thriving publishing press meant the addition of epistolary journals, miscellanies and book reviews to the previously published material.

Another important factor with regard to the increase in literacy was the effect of Protestant movement with its emphasis on reading. In the post-Reformation period, the people were encouraged to read, as reading was "... a means to instill godliness and regulate conduct, [and] ... a means of advancing religion" (Shevelov 28). Accordingly, Puritan and Dissenting sects have been involved in printing since the Civil War, as part of their egalitarian activities. Likewise, after the discarding of the Stuart line, the opinions of the Low Church or Dissenting sects continued to be voiced in print. Shevelov remarks that engaging in printing served a double function: it was a profitable enterprise and a means of changing patterns of behaviour. Thus, reading was employed as a tool to change and reform the manners and morals of society and a mechanism through which it was possible to fight against social vices such as duelling, gambling, prostitution and adultery.

However, eighteenth century was groundbreaking in that the concepts of reading and the reader were going through a transformation. Reading, which used to be the domain of the "... upper-class, university-educated, predominantly male elite" (Shevelov 22), was now admitting into its ranks the readers who had been marginal to it. Shevelov maintains that it is possible to argue that a middle class reading public existed before the late seventeenth century, yet it was a more "prosperous and exclusive 'middle class'" (Shevelov 205) than the reading public of early eighteenth century which included "... lower-order professionals, commercial farmers, merchants, tradespeople, and skilled craftsmen, domestic servants and even laborers" (Shevelov 27). This increase in the literacy of the middle class was in turn, receiving a mixed response from

the upper class. To this effect, Shevelov quotes Charles Gildon's attack on Defoe: "there is not an old Woman that can go the Price of it, but buys thy Life and Adventures [of Robinson Crusoe], and leaves it as a Legacy, with the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Practice of Piety* and *God's Revenge Against Murther*, to her Posterity" (Gildon, qtd. in Shevelov 23).

Thus, the novel was approached in derisory terms because of its readers, as this new group of readers included the women and the lower classes. Nevertheless, not all responses were negative. Especially by the end of the century, this increase in literacy was celebrated by James Lackington who commented "all degrees and ranks now read" (Lackington, qtd. in Shevelov 22) and by Samuel Johnson as "General literature now pervades the nation through all its ranks" (Johnson, qtd. in Shevelov 22).

In discussing literacy, it is important to take into consideration the education that was available to the general public. From Spufford we learn that although the grammar schools and universities were intended for the upper class, elementary school education was available in most parts of England. However, the length of education depended on the extent to which the families could spare their children from labour, so that the children would continue their education. In elementary schools, reading was taught first, and writing was taught only after two or three years and even then usually to the male students only and this was the reason why a number of people could not write although they could read. The girls on the other hand, were usually taught reading and needlework, but not writing. Thus it was this small group of labouring poor who comprised the audience for the chapbooks and broadsides from sixteenth century onwards. (Shevelov 203-4)

Shevelov provides a thorough analysis of the educational facilities available by the beginning of the eighteenth century in England, also comparing the opportunities for women and men and remarking that even the upper class women received an education, which lagged far behind that of men. She lists the educational opportunities as follows:

... elementary schools such as the petty or dame schools and the newly developing charity schools, which accounted for the degree of literacy among the poor, girls as well as boys; private tutors for the children especially the boys, of the wealthy; the Dissenting academies that trained boys initially in classics for the Nonconformist ministry and later in a 'modern' curriculum for

business; the classics oriented grammar schools which were in the process of becoming increasingly socially restrictive; and the universities (Shevelow 27).

In terms of women's education, more importance was given to feminine accomplishments such as music and needlework, than to reading and writing. As Ruth Perry has observed, by the late seventeenth century, gender had become a more important determinant than social class in regard to education. Mary Astell, who was dubbed an early feminist, was writing in the late eighteenth century, and remarks upon the inequality regarding the education of men and women. According to Mary Astell,

'While the sons of rich plebeians were being educated at Oxford and Cambridge to fill the ranks of the church, it was becoming more and more commonplace for women who were their social superiors to remain ignorant and illiterate.... Increasingly it was possible and seemly for a man to move up in the world – whereas for woman the obstacle of gender was insurmountable.' (Astell, qtd. in Shevelow 28)

As Astell's comment reveals, women were totally excluded from universities regardless of the social class they belonged to. Thus, although basic elementary school education was available to women as well as men, the women's curriculum was intended to educate them in accomplishments befitting women, in those areas deemed suitable to the private domain rather than the public. Moreover, women were barred from higher education completely.

Hence, although the literacy level of women had risen in eighteenth century, and the leisure forced upon the middle class women resulted in their consuming more and more of the literary products, the educational facilities open to them were limited, and as such, women were expected to excel in feminine arts and graces, which would prove useful in the private domain that was becoming their designated place.

### **III. CHARLOTTE CHARKE AND HER FAMILY: PERFORMERS AND AUTHORS**

Charlotte Charke, actress, puppeteer, and author, was unconventional enough in that she had not only written a secular autobiography by the mid eighteenth century, which is hailed by many as the first formal autobiography written by a woman in England, but to have dedicated it to herself, claiming the title of “NON-PAREIL OF THE AGE” (Charke 5) (Capitalisation Charke’s).

She was born Charlotte Cibber on 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1713, the eleventh and last child of Colley Cibber and Katherine Shore Cibber. Her mother, Katherine Shore Cibber (1668-1734), who is only referred to in passing in both Charlotte Charke’s and Colley Cibber’s autobiographies, was a singer and came from a musical family. Katherine’s family boasted of a number of musicians, her father Matthias Shore was a trumpeter in the royal household. Later in life he became ‘Sergeant of the trumpeters, drummers, and fifes in ordinary’. Katherine’s brothers, William and John had followed their father and became trumpeters–in-ordinary to the king.

Katherine Shore and Colley Cibber married in 1693. Katherine’s singing career, which she launched in 1693-4, was apparently a short one. She spent most of her life giving birth to eleven children, only five of which reached adulthood. Of these five children, Catherine was baptized on 10 December 1695, Anne on 1 October 1699, Elizabeth in March 1701 and Theophilus on 25 November 1703.

The most infamous of the Cibber clan was Colley Cibber (June 11, 1671 – November 12, 1757) who, unlike his wife, was not from a family of performers. Colley Cibber’s father was a sculptor, originally from Denmark. Colley Cibber began his stage career quite early in life. He started working at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1690 and he became popular as a comedian as well as a successful playwright. Colly Cibber further proved to be a shrewd businessman and took over the management of Drury Lane Theatre in 1710, an enterprise that not only turned out to be highly profitable, but also Cibber enrolled into the ranks of the businessmen-managers. Colley Cibber’s final triumph came in 1730, when he was made the Poet Laureate, to the absolute dismay of the major literary figures of the age.



Although Colley Cibber's plays were very popular in the early eighteenth century, interest in them apparently waned shortly, since they were not continued to be produced into the nineteenth century. The literary merits or rather demerits of his works were widely discussed and they were frequently satirized. Cibber was often attacked by Pope and became a party to the Pamphlet wars, attacking Pope in return. In 1728, Pope took his revenge by changing the hero of his *Dunciad*, the King of Dunces, from Lewis Theobald to Colley Cibber, an insult hard to swallow even for Cibber.

It is possible to argue that Cibber's autobiography, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (April 1740) fared better than his dramatic works. Although it was also subjected to ridicule, it did not fail to reach a wide audience, and a second edition was out in less than six weeks after its first publication. *An Apology* narrated the public life of the author, starting with his days as a schoolboy and ending with the sale of Cibber's share in the Drury Lane Theatre, thus his retirement from stage. In this work of self-fashioning, Cibber's focus was definitely the theatre life of London. His marriage to Katherine Shore Cibber is mentioned only in passing. Cibber devotes his autobiography to the construction of a public character, at the expense of the private person, an approach that is followed by the male autobiographers that came after him. Jean Marsden in her essay entitled "Charlotte Charke and the Cibbers: Private Life as Public Spectacle" contends that *An Apology* was also remarkable in that; "... Cibber creates his greatest role, as hero of his finest play - a hero whose most advertised traits, folly and vanity, are strikingly similar to the characteristics of his favorite theatrical roles" (Marsden 68). *An Apology* was not Colley Cibber's sole attempt at creating a public image and its publication was followed by *The Egoist: Or, Colley upon Cibber* (1743), which is constructed in the form of a dialogue, and dwells at length on the many strengths and few faults of Cibber.

If working on stage is one trait that runs in the Cibber family, producing autobiographical writing is another. Both Charlotte and Theophilus follow in the footsteps of their father in producing autobiographical texts. F. Nussbaum in discussing the scandalous memoirs written in the eighteenth century, gives a comprehensive list which includes Charlotte Charke among their number (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 178). Admitting that Charke and her writing have certain qualities common to the scandalous memoirists, such as her transgressive life style, and

her willingness to exploit it in return for economic gain, and that the literary scene was dominated by an abundance of scandalous memoirs prior to the production of Charke's *A Narrative*, it is possible to presume that while writing *A Narrative*; Charke was following the examples set by her family, as Charke did not have to look far into the world of letters for examples, having them close by.

Charlotte Charke's only brother, Theophilus Cibber was not only an autobiographer, but also an ardent writer. He published a large number of autobiographical works such as his own memoirs, dissertations on theatre, letters complaining about theatre managers, documents on the topic of his scandalous divorce, and also *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland to the Time of Dean Swift*, which included 12 women amongst their number. This collection was written or rather compiled in the 1750's, when there was an abundance of such publications (Clery 162), which reveals that Theophilus was well aware of the literary trends of his times and was adapting his writing to the current tastes of his audience. The title of Theophilus' autobiography, which Marsden considers to be an imitation of Cibber's, is shortly called *A Serio-Comic Apology for Part of the LIFE of Mr. Theophilus Cibber, Comedian. Written by Himself* (1748). However, the full title of Theophilus' autobiography reads some ten lines, bearing witness to the verbosity of its author.

It is possible to posit that although Theophilus's private life had become a public commodity, in his autobiography he tries hard to change the verdict of the public, posing as the loving father of his precious daughter Jenny. Jenny is another member of the Cibber family, whose private life was notorious. Theophilus had reportedly forced his second wife Susanna into a liaison with a young rich man and then charged his wife with adultery and sued her lover for damages in 1738. Understandably, the trial was a huge sensation, and when Theophilus returned to stage in 1739, he was greeted by whistles and potatoes. Thus, his continuous autobiographical writing might be viewed as an attempt to whitewash himself and the dissolute life he has lead in the eyes of the public.

According to Jean Marsden, Colley Cibber, Charlotte Charke and Theophilus Cibber, father, daughter and son had more in common than their familial ties. Besides their chosen profession acting, and notoriety was an intrinsic aspect of the characters of all three. Marsden writes:

All three Cibbers were public, even notorious figures, and all three chose to exploit their notoriety through the public revelation of their personal lives, writing autobiographies and inserting autobiographical references into much of their prose and even dramatic writing. Their “going public” with folly thus serves a more complex function... it allows them to construct public identities through the semblance of private revelation” (Marsden 65).

In short, it is not the private but the public man, who is depicted in Colley Cibber’s autobiographical writing and this might account for the absence of his family from his writings, notwithstanding his general apathy towards them. However, the presence of Colley Cibber dominates Charlotte Charke’s autobiography. As early as the second page of her text, she informs her readers of the breach between herself and her father. Charlotte Charke’s *A Narrative* is as she puts it “the staff of her life”, her sole sustenance. However, she makes it very clear that the other reason why she writes *A Narrative* is to try and be reconciled with her father who had not only disowned her but shut her out completely. Through *A Narrative* she tries to reach out to her father although it can be argued that at times blackmailing becomes an option. By inserting her unopened letter to her father into the text of *A Narrative*, Charlotte Charke is aiming at creating a somewhat dialogic relation with her father. When she could not receive and append to her text the joyful letter of reconciliation she had been hoping for, she makes do with her own unopened letter, not forgetting to share the episode in full with her audience.

It is also possible to posit that the dialogic relation of father and daughter continued with the autobiographies they wrote. As opposed to Cibber’s *Apology* in which he almost never touches upon his family, in Charke’s *A Narrative*, Cibber is central to the text as the most important character, whereas Charke’s mother, two husbands, daughter and her friend “Mrs. Brown” all combined do not receive an equal space. Neither are they treated with the same intensity of emotion by Charke who is a master at promising much but disclosing next to nothing about her interiority.

Charlotte Charke not only follows her father in writing her autobiography but she also follows him to the stage. We know that Charlotte makes her stage debut as Mademoiselle in Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* at Drury Lane on 4 February 1730. Her brother Theophilus, makes his appearance on stage ten years earlier in 1720, but he continues to act until he is drowned on his way to perform in Dublin in 1758. According to records, Theophilus marries twice, and twice to actresses, to Jane Johnson in 1725 and to Susanna Marie Arne in 1734. His first wife dies in 1733, after giving birth to daughters Jane and Elizabeth. Theophilus is known to have continued frequenting brothels and taverns during both of his marriages. His divorce from his second wife, as mentioned earlier, was a scandalous and public event to say the least. Of Theophilus's daughters, Jane, referred as Jenny in his autobiography, also becomes an actress. According to Jean Marsden, Theophilus talks about Jane extensively in his writing in order to "... stress family bonds.... [and] by thus using Jenny to speak on his behalf, Theophilus constructs a public version of private life, one in striking contrast to the well-known facts of his behaviour" (Marsden 72).

Jane's first appearance on stage was also at Drury Lane, in 1741. Her first major role was Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In that performance she was accompanied by her father Theophilus who played Romeo, and by aunt Charlotte, who acted the part of the nurse. We learn from Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative* that at that particular time, aside from acting together, Charlotte had set up house with Theophilus. This collaboration however, turns out to have dire consequences for Charlotte. Colley Cibber is incensed by the fact that Charlotte and Jane were acting together and orders his grand daughter to be removed from Charlotte's sphere of influence. Thus, we understand that even late in her life and career, Cibber evidently considered Charlotte to be an evil and tainting influence on young girls. Charlotte is discrete in mentioning this event and relaying her father's comments:

... 'Twould be a Scandal for her to play with such a Wretch as I was. 'Twas letting her down, to be seen with me.... In regard to her Birth, I presume I was upon (sic) a Par with her; as her Grandfather's Daughter, and her Fathers Sister. *The only Disgrace was, my being under Misfortunes; the very worst Reason for my Family's contributing to a Perpetration of that, which Nature and Humanity should rather have excited' em to have helped me to overcome* (Emphases Charke's) (Charke 89).

She does not disclose any clues as to the reasons why she is being treated with such malice by her family, but reiterates her birth rights, and blames her misfortunes, positing the fact that it was

them, the family, by which she means Cibber and her eldest sister Catherine, who were aggravating the ills she was suffering.

Similar to Theophilus' choice of spouses from the theatrical world, Charlotte's first husband was an actor. Richard Charke was a singer, musician and composer. Robert Rehder, in his notes to *A Narrative* refers to the fact that in Charles Burney's *A General History of Music* (1776) Richard Charke's musical career is discussed (Rehder 147). We learn from Burney's *History* that Richard Charke was particularly successful and popular in the 1730s, which is during and after his short marriage to Charlotte. Charlotte's daughter, Catherine, who is infrequently mentioned in the tragic-comical anecdotes related by Charke in her autobiography, also becomes an actress and her stage debut was at Southwark in 1742. The young Catherine evidently follows the family tradition and in her turn marries an actor, John Harman in 1750. The couple act with strolling companies, and from time to time they are accompanied by a disgruntled Charlotte, until they move to the United States in 1758, where they continue acting till they die. According to her mother, Catherine's accomplishment as an actress is doubtful since she lacked the education and the physical graces necessary for serious roles. Charlotte believes that Catherine ought to play in comedies only.

We learn from *A Narrative*, that of Charlotte's three sisters, Elizabeth, also an actress, along with Theophilus shows goodwill towards her and tries to relieve her financial distress to the best of her ability or rather limited resources. In Elizabeth, Charlotte seems to have found a kindred soul. Starting life as an actress, Elizabeth was also reduced to opening a "House of Entertainment" in her later life, and was subjected to "... hard Struggles, through Seas of undeserved Misfortunes..." (Charke 77) as Charlotte laments in *A Narrative*. The remaining two sisters appear to be the only members of the Cibber clan who have not taken up careers on stage. Anne is completely left out, not mentioned even in passing in *A Narrative*. The eldest sister Catherine on the other hand, features in Charke's autobiography in the capacity of the evil sister who has taken over Colley Cibber's will, conscience and financial privileges that come with it. Yet, Colley Cibber's will verifies the overall influence of Catherine on him, as the bulk of Cibber's estate goes to Catherine. Theophilus' 2 daughters receive £ 5.000 each, Anne and Theophilus get £50. Her beloved sister Elizabeth and Charlotte receive £5, "and no more" (Morgan qtd. in Baruth 15).

Thus, through Catherine's influence or not, Colley Cibber's will serves to illustrate the hierarchy in the family, with Charlotte at the very bottom of the ladder, the pariah who receives only a pittance.

### III. 1. Charlotte the Actress

As mentioned earlier, Charlotte Charke makes her stage debut as Mademoiselle in Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* at Drury Lane, on April 8, 1730 at the age of seventeen. Shortly afterwards, Charlotte stops acting for a brief period since she is pregnant from Richard Charke, whom she marries earlier that year. By January 1731, she is back on stage, acting female parts in a number of plays. The year 1732 proves to be ominous as the previous share holders of Drury Lane, namely Booth, Colley Cibber and Wilks, for one reason or another, sell, assign or leave their full or half shares to members of the family or to strangers. Booth, Highmore, Ellys, and Theophilus Cibber form the new management. However, one thing the new managers have in common is constant disagreement amongst them. By 1732 and 1733, Charlotte is still playing female roles, but starts performing in breech roles, such as Damon in Theophilus Cibber's *Damon and Daphne*, or Haly, a eunuch in Rowe's *Tamerlane*, and Dol Common in Jonson's *Alchemist*, as well.

In 1733, the unease in Drury Lane reaches its culmination. Colley Cibber, sells his shares, which he had previously assigned to Theophilus, to Highmore without informing Theophilus, and retires permanently from the theatrical world. The incensed Theophilus, backed up by other actors, attempts to take over the Drury Lane. In return, the patentees, namely Wilks, Booth, Ellys and Highmore lock out the rebellious actors. The result is what is known as the Stage Mutiny, the secession of the Drury Lane actors, again led by Theophilus. Charlotte Charke is amongst the mutineers.

The Stage Mutiny has evidently left its mark on its times, and a surviving painting by John Laguerre by the name of *The Stage Mutiny* bears witness to its impact on the public imagination. We also learn that Charlotte acted in a play named *The Stage Mutineers* in 1735, which reveals the lasting popularity of the theme. Moreover, Robert Folkenflik in his essay entitled "Charlotte

Charke: Images and Afterimages”, quotes Morgan as to the effects of the Stage Mutiny thus: “The Mutiny was notorious because it split not only a theatre company, but also the Cibber Family” (Morgan, qtd. in Folkenflik, “Charlotte Charke” 153). Thus, it was not only a breach in business, or in the world of the theatre, but an event, which marked the beginning of a split between Charlotte and Theophilus, and Colley Cibber.

Eventually, Theophilus, Charlotte and other members of the company make their way to the New Theatre in Haymarket. The Drury Lane Theatre, now abandoned by its actors was desperate. Hence, Highmore was forced to sell his shares to Fleetwood. By March 1734, an agreement was reached and Charlotte returned to Drury Lane with the rest of the actors. 1734 was an important date for Charlotte for other reason as well. In that year she started performing a large number of male roles, a preference that will prove to be permanent. However, Charlotte’s return to Drury Lane was short lived. During the spring and summer of the same year, she was back at New Haymarket, working with Fielding.

By January 1735 Charlotte was again acting at Drury Lane. In June of the same year, however, she was at the Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and seems to be her own manager. It is possible to maintain that all these comings and goings account for the restlessness of her spirit, and foreshadow what was to come. These hectic moves also bear witness to the fact that Charlotte was not only able to get jobs as an actress or actor anywhere she liked, but also that she was dissatisfied with such initiative and freedom and started her own company.

As discussed above, Charlotte, Theophilus and Colley Cibber were all actors, playwrights, autobiographers, and theatre managers. In September 1735, we see Charlotte acting in her own play, *The Art of Management, or Tragedy Expell’d*. It is a farce that satirizes Fleetwood in particular and the Drury Lane managers in general and attests to the ongoing friction between Charlotte and the new management at Drury Lane. Fleetwood’s reaction is to hire men to sabotage the first night of the play, and the riot they raise makes its way to the newspapers, such as *The Daily Advertiser*. The same year Charlotte publishes *The Art of Management, or Tragedy Expell’d*, and this time Fleetwood’s desire for vendetta takes the form of an attempt to destroy all copies of the play. This unquenchable satirical strain in Charlotte, which put her in much trouble,

is soon to find its parallel in Henry Fielding, her mentor in the final phase of her professional acting career.

At this juncture, Colley Cibber steps up and arranges a short-lived reconciliation between Fleetwood and Charlotte, and Charlotte returns briefly to Drury Lane once again, to leave early in 1736 to join Henry Fielding's company New Haymarket.

One might speculate that Charlotte found in Fielding a kindred spirit in more than one way. Like her, Fielding was not only keen on producing farces, but again like her, his behaviour was erratic, defying all authority, including the political. His satires were directly aimed at the policies of George II and the Walpole administration. Philip Baruth in his essay "Who is Charlotte Charke" states that the success of Fielding's political satires were taken by Walpole to be signals of impending social unrest (Baruth 21). Some of his plays went as far as directly criticising the Parliament. For example, in his farce entitled *The Deposing and Death of Queen Gin*, Fielding condemns the passing of the Gin Act. According to Baruth, this play might be considered the first of a series of reactions shown by the public to the Walpole government, which later took the shape of protest over the turnpikes and merged with Jacobite dreams of Stuart succession (Baruth 21).

Fielding was shaping Charlotte's life and future in other ways as well. He was known to delight in satirizing Colley Cibber endlessly, in his satires, novels and plays. As Baruth maintains, Charlotte's presence at his company was an invaluable asset. Fielding used Charlotte to strike at Cibber, with Charlotte playing the part of Lord Place in *Pasquin*, a role which caricatured Cibber. Fidelis Morgan explains that Cibber's letter to Charlotte, dated 27 March of an indeterminate year, might have been written at this juncture in their relationship, and the rascal from whom Cibber tells her to dissociate herself from must be Fielding and not her husband Richard, as some critics argue (Morgan, qtd. in Baruth 23). The full text of Colley Cibber's letter reads thus:

'Dear Charlotte,  
I am sorry I am not in a position to assist you further. You have made your own bed, and therein you must lie. Why do you not dissociate yourself from that worthless scoundrel, and then your



relatives might try and aid you. You will never be any good while you adhere to him, and you most certainly will not receive what otherwise you might from your father.

Colley Cibber' (Cibber, qtd. in Folkenflik "Charlotte Charke"143).

This letter portrays a different Cibber from the one portrayed in *A Narrative*, the incommunicado father who returns her daughter's letter unopened, turning a blind eye to her desperate attempts at reconciliation. Although he is still the patriarchal figure with the power to bestow or withhold favours, in this letter he appears to be ready to compromise, when and if his daughter is willing to concede. Another letter from Colley to Charlotte where the year of composition is omitted again, marks a yet different phase in their relationship:

'21 September

To Mrs. C. Charke  
Madam,

The strange career which you have run for some years (a career not always unmarked by evil) debars my affording you that succour which otherwise would naturally be extended to you as my daughter. I must refuse therefore – with this advice- try Theophilus.

Yours in sorrow, Colley Cibber' (Cibber, qtd. in Folkenflik "Charlotte Chake"143).

She is no longer his 'dear Charlotte', Cibber is addressing a certain 'Mrs. Charke'. The attempt at formality and impersonality of the address does not bode well for the rest of the letter. Cibber is still smugly dwelling on his power to clear the obstacles on Charlotte's way, but this time he is withholding the boon, not indefinitely as in the previous letter but for good. He has burnt the bridges with Charlotte because of her "strange career" and "evil" ways. However, even this is a phase in their relationship, when Cibber is showing the decency to read the letters she writes to him, and respond to them. In other words he is still far from the man who will not let a granddaughter of his to live and act with Charlotte. Apparently, Charlotte's efforts at reconciliation, which is one of the two major reasons she writes *A Narrative*, have turned out to be too little too late.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint when this rift actually took place, according to the sketchy timeline Charke employs in her autobiography, it takes place after she quits Drury Lane for the second time. Charke writes:

I remember the last Time I ever spoke to my Father, a Triumvirate was framed to that end, and I was sent for from the Playhouse to put this base Design in Execution. After being Baited like a

Bull to the Stake, and perceiving they were resolved to carry their horrid Point against me, I grew enraged and obstinate; and finding a growing Indignation swelling in my Bosom, answered nothing to their Purpose, which incensed my Father: ...

My Father, having been worked up to a strong Fit of Impatience, hastily quitted his House, with a Declaration not to return to it, 'till I was gone. This I am too well assured,

“*Was a joyful Sound to Cleopatra’s Ear*” (emphasis Charke’s) (Charke 65).

Thus, Charke was summoned by her family to answer charges of an indefinite nature, which she refuses to do. The participants of the Triumvirate are another issue of debate. According to Rehder, the two participants were Cibber and Charke’s eldest sister, Catherine, whose married name was Mrs. Brown. Nevertheless, the third party is difficult to ascertain. As far as we can gather from *A Narrative*, Theophilus and Elizabeth had always been supportive of Charke even after her disenfranchisement, and the mother cuts too shadowy a figure to be actively engaged in such a witch trial. What we do know is, refusing to answer the charges against her, Charke is ordered out of the house by Cibber and turned out of her father’s house by her eldest sister Catherine unceremoniously.

Folkenflik is of the same opinion with Baruth and Morgan, and maintains that the family trial held by “the triumvirate” as Charlotte puts it, might have been an epilogue to the growing resentment of Colley Cibber on account of her ongoing cooperation with Fielding. Folkenflik further refers to Colley Cibber’s *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian*, and posits that Cibber “... represents himself as unruffled by the barbs of Pope, but vituperates Fielding, who had attacked him not just as actor, playwright, and laureate, but on his home ground in the theatre” (Folkenflik, “Charlotte Charke” 143).

While her business partnership with Fielding was possibly causing a major breach between herself and her father, Charlotte was about to suffer yet worse because of Fielding. In 1737, Fielding reviewed the events of the previous year in a farce named *The Historical Register for the Year 1736*. The play incensed many, Colley Cibber and Walpole being two. In the play, the character Ground-Ivy was based on Colley, and it depicted Colley Cibber as an undeserving poet laureate. Another character Pistol was a satirized version of Theophilus. One cannot help but wonder if that was the reason why in his letter dated 21 September Colley asked Charlotte to try Theophilus for help. In short, Theophilus was another family member who had reasons to bear a grudge against Charlotte, for taking part in a play ridiculing him along with his father.

Ironically, the play *The Historical Register* was a success. Baruth quotes Liesenfeld to the effect that it was performed thirty-five of the thirty-nine evenings of the Haymarket, the year it was put on stage, and Baruth further explains that “In the repertory world of eighteenth-century theatre, where a run of eight weeks constituted a hit, Fielding’s *Historical Register* was all but unprecedented” (Baruth 24).

As the play’s popularity was growing, the action taken by Robert Walpole was swift and efficient. We learn that three days after the first performance of *The Historical Register*, a bill was passed prohibiting dramatic performances in the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge. Baruth maintains that the Licensing Act was an amendment to the Act of Queen Anne intended to hold rogues and vagabonds at check, entitled “An Act for reducing the Laws relating to Rogues, Vagabonds, Sturdy Beggars and Vagrants, into One Act of Parliament; and for the more effectual punishing of such Rogues.... and sending them whither they ought to be sent.” Thus Baruth argues that the Licensing Act of 1737 extended the law concerning vagabonds to include actors. The express result of the Licensing Act was that only those theatres with licenses issued by the Lord Chamberlain could remain in operation. The Licensing Act also made it mandatory that all plays, old and new be reviewed by the Chamberlain, and fees paid for every permission that was granted. Hence, a censorship mechanism was firmly established, and ad-libbing or last minute changes in the texts of plays were outlawed, and all theatres were closed except the two patent Theatres Royal (Drury Lane and Covent Garden). Baruth further adds that one of Henry Fielding’s actors who sought to find a loophole in the Act was sent to Bridewell Prison (Baruth 25-27). Thus, The Walpole government was not taking any chances, and the Licensing Act was fully enforced. It is possible to argue that as a result of the hapless political criticism directed to the Walpole government in the plays of Fielding, Charlotte was permanently barred from the stage.

By 1739 Fielding was able to recover from the effects of the Licensing Act, establishing himself as a prominent author. For Charlotte however it was the beginning of a long series of misadventures. From *A Narrative* we can clearly conclude that the theatre was her element, and she had struggled endlessly to go back to acting after the Licensing Act took effect. The long

years of labour intensive jobs she had had to do, from selling oil and groceries, to becoming a valet, sausage higgler, waiter, and pastry cook, are spotted with aborted attempts that reveal her true aim. Be they acting sporadically at London theatres, running a puppet show, opening a public house and restaurant and throwing in a play or two for free, or even dreaming of starting a school where she would train actors to be or train the general public in theatrical arts, her objective remains the same; to go back to stage and to do it in London where her work was appreciated. Her long years of strolling were apparently too painful for her to record in full in her autobiography. She found the actors she had to work with and the audiences she performed far beneath her in terms of social class and artistic merits. Only when relating as little as possible of her days on the road, does she lose her characteristic proud and nonchalant attitude, and become resentful, inevitably comparing the inhumane conditions of the strolling companies to her former days of glory on London stages.

### **III. 2. Charlotte the Author**

In 1755 when her strolling days were finally over, and Charlotte published *A Narrative*, she was not a total stranger to the world of literature. Apart from her play *The Art of Management*, Charlotte had written another play, *Tit for Tat or Comedy and Tragedy at War*, which was performed in 1743, but not published in her lifetime.

As she makes it clear in *A Narrative*, writing was the new profession she had chosen for herself, and Charlotte makes a point of advertising her upcoming novel *The History of Mr Henry Dumont, Esq; and Miss Charlotte Evelyn* throughout *A Narrative*. This she does by arguing that her main project was to write a novel, and that she started writing *A Narrative*, with the aim of providing some biographical information to *The History of Mr Henry Dumont*. Charlotte concludes *A Narrative* saying:

As I have nothing farther to entertain my Friends with, as to my Life, I shall, with the humblest Submission take my leave of them; and, as I design to pass in the *Catalogue of Authors*, will endeavour to produce something now and then to make them laugh, if possible; for I think 'tis Pity to draw Tears from those, WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS MAKING ME SMILE (Emphasis and capitalisation Charke's) (Charke 143).

Since her attempts at reconciliation with her father have failed miserably, her audience, whom she calls her “friends” is Charke’s “sole support”, just as *A Narrative* is “the staff of [her] life”. Apparently her efforts to have her name cited in the Catalogue of Authors succeed. *A Narrative*, first published in eight instalments, go through two editions in the form of a book. The success of *A Narrative* must have given Charlotte’s writing career enough impetus to have enabled her to write not one but a total of four novels, or novellas to be precise.

### ***The History of Mr Henry Dumont***

According to Rehder *The History of Mr Henry Dumont* was published in the same year as *A Narrative*, but according to Nussbaum and Straub it was published in 1756. Luckily for Charke, it was to repeat the success of the autobiography, and by 1756 *The History*’s third edition was out. The full title of Charke’s first novel reads *The History of Mr Henry Dumont, Esq; and Miss Charlotte Evelyn Consisting of a Variety of Entertaining Characters, and very Interesting Subjects with some Critical Remarks on Comick Actors*. The harsh treatment of the homosexual characters in the novel is puzzling, given the sexual ambiguity of its author. Felicity Nussbaum in her Afterword to *Introducing Charlotte Charke Actress, Author, Enigma*, remarks that the main homosexual character of the novel, Billy Loveman is represented as “... monster in the midst of an otherwise civil society...” (Nussbaum, Afterword 235). In the novel, Loveman declares his love for the sentimental hero of the novel, Dumont, in a letter full of spelling errors, and the meeting between the two turns into a hysterical exhibition of violence. Polly Stevens Fields in her essay “Charlotte Charke and the Liminality of Bi-Genderings: A Study of Her Canonical Works” dwells at length on this section of the novel, where Dumont “... joins in the male community to punish a transgressor against manliness” (Fields 234). In Fields’ words;

All the male characters... gather for the gay bashing as if they were fighting off the very devil chasing them.... The violence with which the mob turns on Loveman, beating him and dunking/purifying him, receives confirmation of his worthlessness, when Loveman’s servant and his lover Turtle fear to offer him assistance or protection from the mob (Fields 234).

Considering Charke’s own indefinite sexual orientation her take on the homosexual characters appears perplexing. Accordingly, Fields maintains that “Rather than being a diatribe against

homosexuality, the novel is rather a graphic depiction of society's hypocritical treatment of homosexuals as 'unnatural monsters'" (Fields 235).

Keeping in mind the fact that Charke had promised in the title of her novel *Entertaining Characters and Interesting Subjects*, we may ask ourselves the extent to which chastising of homosexuals is in line with the entertainment and interesting context advertised in the title of the novel. In a similar fashion, the table of contents of *A Narrative* surprises us with the contents it advertises. It enumerates the seven parts of the book, but surprisingly, the fourth and fifth parts appear to have been devoted to what are minor incidents and not appropriate sections of the book. The fourth and fifth parts read: " IV. Her Adventures in Mens (sic) Cloaths (sic), and being belov' by a Lady of great Fortune, who had intended to marry her", "V. Her being a Genteman to a certain Peer" (Charke 3). Charke's aim must have been to attract the attention of the public, and promise titillation with these headings, which brings to mind the possibility that Charke was promising her audience what she thought would amuse and interest them, and this might have been the case for the episodic chastisement of Loveman in *The History of Henry Dumont*.

Nussbaum is of similar opinion, when she posits that written in dire circumstances, the content of *The History of Henry Dumont* might have been dictated by the pressing need for money. Nussbaum also maintains that revisions were made to the novel, and they were not originally Charke's idea. Her point of reference is the article written by Samuel Whyte for *The Monthly Review* in 1760, in which Whyte recalls a visit he and a bookseller friend had made to Charlotte Charke's "habitation... a wretched hatched hovel" (Rehder xlvi) with the intention of publishing her novel. Nussbaum further reiterates the fact that reactions to female and male homosexuality were dissimilar in the eighteenth century. The issue of disparate reactions to male and female homosexuality is widely discussed by Christina Straub in her essay "The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke". Straub refers to Lilian Faderman's work on lesbianism in the eighteenth-century, attesting to the existence of two dominant models for same-sex sexuality, which were the romantic friendship and the pornographic. The former was innocent by definition and the latter was "... representation of sexual 'toying' between women as an adjunct to, and preparatory arousal for, the 'real' thing of heterosexual intercourse.... [thus] framed within a heterosexual narrative" (Straub 110), and as

such, the homosexual aspect of it was rendered harmless. Straub further draws our attention to a fact attested to by Faderman, Vicinus, and Friedli, that in the eighteenth century, sexuality between two women was “... detected and punished only when a woman usurped the masculine role in sex and/ or marriage” (Straub 123). However, homosexual relations between men were considered to be a different issue. E. J. Clery remarks that effeminacy or feminization of men were considered abhorrent by the early eighteenth century public (Clery 10). That is why Straub places Charke’s depiction of Loveman “... in the context of [the] growing wave of homophobic discourse against effeminate men at midcentury” (Straub 128).

### ***The History of Charley and Patty***

The theme of homosexuality is not a recurrent theme of Charlotte Charke’s other novels. *The History of Charley and Patty; or the Friendly Strangers* is the story of not only a heterosexual couple, but one whose friendship is chaste. The novella is a total of thirty-two pages, and Nussbaum remarks that there is no publication date on this extant work, although Rehder dates it to 1760. The simple plot of the two friends is complicated by the interference of minor characters, both good and evil and the novella has a happy ending. However, the plot also has many incidents, which echo the events in Chake’s and her friend Mrs. Brown’s lives as they are depicted in *A Narrative*. This brings to mind the possibility that Charke was using autobiographical information in her fictional work and the happy ending points at a wish fulfilment on her part. To start with, both of the major characters in the novella are orphans from good families. Charke may be considered orphaned after being cast out of her family circle. Although we know next to nothing about Mrs. Brown, including her real name, in *A Narrative* Charlotte frequently refers to her friend as a gentlewoman. Nussbaum, summarizes the novella as a “...tale of misery engendered by poverty...” (Nussbaum, Afterword 238), which also sums up Charke’s life. According to Nussbaum the hero’s name echoes that of Charlotte’s. Charley is a derivative of her first name Charlotte, and we know that she had adopted that name when she took on the identity of Mr. Brown. Nussbaum concludes that the fluidity of these male and female proper names “... provide another example of Charke’s interest in gender fluidity” (Nussbaum, Afterword 238). To support Nussbaum’s argument it is possible to quote Charke from the section in *A Narrative*, when she is being bailed by the prostitutes of Covent Garden

who had come to her aid. Charke tells her readers that they had come”... for the Relief of poor Sir *Charles*, as they were pleased to stile me” (emphasis Charke’s) (Charke 48-9).

The novel provides further parallels with her autobiography in that, Charley and Patty teach themselves French and Latin, the two languages Charke always feels proud to know, markers of a good education and gentility in the eighteenth century. As a result of certain misfortunes, both the hero and heroine of her novel end up in prison, Charke’s lifetime dread, and Patty escapes from prison by exchanging clothes with a young man, which immediately brings to mind Charke’s own episode in jail, when she leaves the prison after exchanging hats with the bailiff. We learn from *A Narrative* that after the Covent Garden crew bring in an actress friend of Charke’s who pays for her bail, she is finally free to leave. However, to quote from Charke: “... the Officer advised me to change Hats with him, that being the very Mark by which I was unfortunately distinguished, and made known to him” (Charke 50). The parallels between the novel and *A Narrative* do not stop there. The happy ending of the novel comes after “... Patty’s aunt restores them to good fortune” (Nussbaum, Afterword 239). From *A Narrative* we learn that when Charlotte decides to become a pastry cook in Whales, she is as usual in debt. News arrive that Mrs. Brown’s uncle has died and she had inherited “... the amount of about Four or Five and Thirty Shillings, and if a Shilling would have saved us from total Destruction, we did not know where to raise it” (Charke 119). In short, although the money inherited by the heroine of the novel solves the problems of all the protagonists, the money inherited by Mrs. Brown is only able to save the day.

### ***The Mercer***

Another of Charke’s novels is *The Mercer: or, the Fatal Extravagance: Being a True Narrative of the Life of Mr. Wm. Dennis, Mercer, in Cheapside, London*, which is again originally undated, but the British Library dates it to 1755. But Morgan assigns it to early 1756. The title of the work indicates that Charke was well aware of the literary trends of her times and was insisting that her fictional piece was ‘a true narrative of the life’ of her hero, that is autobiographical, as was the fashion of the day. The title character Dennis is a young merchant. He is ruined because of his excessive spending habits, and his weakness for luxury, and he finally becomes a highwayman



and a murderer. Eventually Dennis' debts are paid by his sister's lover, who in his turn is hanged. It is again possible to read Charke's life into the plot of the novel. We know that Colley and Theophilus Cibber, and Richard Charke were well known for squandering money, gambling and whoring. Further, Colley charges Charlotte for trying to squander money from him. Charlotte in *A Narrative* attempts to refute the claims that she had turned a highwayman and threatened her own father in that capacity. Lastly, the final intervention from the family that saves the hero can be considered to be another wish fulfilment, as in *A Narrative* Charlotte fashions herself as the prodigal daughter hoping to return to the fold to no avail. The reconciliation she is not able to affect would have saved her from the brink of extinction, in the way her hero was eventually saved in the novel.

Although according to Nussbaum, *The Mercer: or, the Fatal Extravagance* attests to the fact that "... family strife is also rooted in the economic..." and that "... the tale criticizes the mercantile economy as interfering with blood ties" (Nussbaum, Afterword 239). It seems that Charlotte was also aiming at voicing the concerns of her age when she moralizes thus:

' the presumptiae (sic) Vanity daily increasing and prompting many Persons in Trade to live up to the State of those, whose Birth and Fortune might justify (sic) the running into such Expences, as must naturally terminate in the Ruin of Trading Families, and be the unhappy cause of Multiplying the numerous Indigent, who but for this failing in Parents might live comfortably to themselves and be generally beneficial to the world' (Charke, qtd. in Nussbaum Afterword 239-240).

Aside from voicing her own grievances, Charlotte is acting as a mouthpiece for the eighteenth century public in reflecting a wide concern about the ever-increasing commerce which was pumping the consumption of luxurious goods and the corruption of decent living since many still considered luxury to be an ill besetting England. It is possible to argue that "The South Sea Bubble" was still fresh in the collective memory of her audience. The South Sea Bubble was the name given to the fall of the South Sea stocks in the summer and fall of 1720, which had wrecked the English economy, as in the spring of the same year, part of the National Debt was transferred to the South Sea joint-stock company. When the price of stock fell from £1,100 to £190 in England ruin of many was inevitable, affecting many. (Clery 54-5) To make matters worse, The South Sea Bubble was followed by an outbreak of plague in South of France, and an epidemic of virulent smallpox in 1721, all of which affected the whole of Europe, making some of the key

figures of the financial scandal its victim. According to Clery the South Sea Bubble was interpreted by the religious: "... as a resurgence of original sin..." (Clery 55). Clery maintains that the reaction of the public was to the effect that "... such a flagrant display of greed and materialism must be followed by divine punishment" (Clery 55). Thus, Charlotte's insistence on the ills of luxury might be considered another attempt to play on the themes she considered sufficiently appealing to the audience.

Charlotte's handling of the issue of birth is also very traditional. She appears to be voicing older, aristocratic notions of social order, in which one's station in life is fixed when the individual is born and climbing up the social ladder is not possible, probable or proper. The motive behind this might be her desperate attempt to hold on to her lost birthright, a privilege, which although long lost to her, had never stopped shaping her take on the world. However, one should also note that her notions about the status quo, the stability of social hierarchy were not in any way in line with the developments of the age she was living in. The eighteenth century was an age in which all social classes tried to ape, to the best of their capacity, those who were comparatively upper in the social ladder than themselves, and social mobility was becoming the norm.

### ***The Lover's Treat***

Charlotte Charke's final work of fiction, *The Lover's Treat: or Unnatural Hatred* is again undated (dated by British Library as 1758). Its main theme is again family strife. Colley Cibber had died in 1757, leaving Charlotte and sister Elizabeth only £ 5 each. Charlotte was left destitute, with no cash and no hope of ever receiving a substantial inheritance, now that Cibber was dead and gone unconsolated. When we read the novel in the light of this autobiographical information, we can see that the fictional father features as a surrogate father figure who fulfils Charlotte's ultimate wish and loves all of his children equally. The villain of the family is Anthony a "Monster of Inhumanity and Falsehood" (Charke, qtd. in Nussaum Afterword 240), who does all in his power to cause discord between their father and his twin siblings George and Jenny, the protagonists of the novel. Anthony seems to embody all the negative qualities Charlotte attributes to her eldest sister Catherine, with whom Colley Cibber had set up house after the death of his wife, and who according to Charlotte manipulated Colley Cibber into

disowning Charlotte. Colley Cibber was known for his indifference to the members of his own family. However, we see him take action when Charlotte gets herself into one scrape after another, acting as go-between between her and the theatre managers. Even if his initial rift with Charlotte is caused by her alliance with Fielding, the letters to Charlotte reflect a person far removed from the blank walling father of *A Narrative*. Other critics argue that the reason for Charlotte's being cast out of the family had to do with an act of sexual promiscuity. However, Colley Cibber was known to have acted as the protégée of Laetitia Pilkington, a scandalous memoirist of dubious virtue, who was declassified after she divorced her husband. Thus, it is possible that Colley Cibber could have been manipulated into severing all ties with Charlotte by someone close to him, just like Charlotte argues.

In considering *The Lover's Treat: or Unnatural Hatred*, as another partially autobiographical novel where fact and fiction are intermingled, we cannot help but notice the similarities between Charlotte's and Mrs. Brown's fortunes and those of the protagonists, Jenny and George. All four are cast out of their family, and cut off from their inheritance, and thence have to wander off to seek means to support themselves. This novel too, like the previous ones has a happy ending. In the end, however, as the machinations of the evil brother are revealed, the birthright privileges of the twins are restored by their loving father. Charlotte must have been projecting onto this work of fiction her own unfulfilled dream of reconciliation with her father, a dream irreversibly lost, as Colley Cibber was no more.

Looking at the four novels Charlotte Charke has written, namely *The History of Mr Henry Dumont, Esq; and Miss Charlotte Evelyn; The Lover's Treat: or Unnatural Hatred; The Mercer: or, the Fatal Extravagance*, and *The History of Charley and Patty; or the Friendly Strangers*, we can conclude that in her fiction, Charke was elaborating on autobiographical themes, and that in the nexus of her writing was her life itself, both her past experiences and her present dreams. It is even possible to place her first play *The Art of Management* into this category as Charlotte was prompted into writing it because of an ongoing dispute with Fleetwood. Hence, the play was a response to a real situation. Another element common to her work seems to be the need and resultant attempt to cater for the literary and moral tastes of her audience, be that the condemnation of homosexuals, the effort to curb the ever increasing

dependence on items of luxury, or the production of sentimental tales of love and adventure, advertised as real life. But her writing is generally considered to be part of a series of attempts to seek sustenance in her late years, for herself, and her dependants. As for the dependants, we learn from Whyte's article in *The Monthly Review* that one was "... a tall, meagre, ragged figure, with a blue apron, indicating, what otherwise was doubtful, that it was a female..." (Whyte, qtd. in Rehder xlvi), who was probably 'Mrs. Brown', still loyal to her in the face of all adversity, and a menagerie of animals, which include a monkey, a tabby cat, a dog and a magpie, a surrogate family.

#### **IV. A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF MRS. CHARLOTTE CHARKE**

##### **IV. 1. Charlotte Charke and her Class Consciousness**

It is possible to argue that Charlotte Charke was informed by her father Colley Cibber's autobiography *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* in writing her own autobiography *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*. As Robert Folkenflik remarks, Charlotte and her father were the first pair of English father-daughter autobiographers, writing at a time when there was very little in the way of a secular tradition of autobiography (Folkenflik, "Gender, Genre, and Theatricality" 111). *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* and *A Narrative* were published in 1740 and in 1755 respectively, but reflect two completely different worlds. Phillip E. Baruth in his essay entitled "Who is Charlotte Charke" points out this latent disparity between the autobiographies written by Colley Cibber and Charlotte Charke with regard to the life pictured in them. In Baruth's words: "... Cibber describes London high-life and a class of actor socially venerated by the early 1700s, [whereas] Charke tells of the road, being thrown in jail as a vagabond, being robbed by managers, and hissed by illiterate audiences" (Baruth 10).

Baruth further dubs Charlotte Charke "a historian of middle and low classes", which is indeed a valid statement, given the world picture depicted in *A Narrative*. Although Charlotte Charke was from an upper middle class family, the circumstances she was reduced to caused her to live among the poor, and consequently Charke illustrates the low life in her autobiography. In a similar vein, Nussbaum while discussing the scandalous memoirists in *The Autobiographical Subject – Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, names Charlotte Charke among their numbers. Nussbaum writes:

The women who wrote scandalous memoirs, often displaced from rank and status expectations, possessed little property except themselves as they produced an urban consciousness that especially encouraged individualization. Their bodies, complexly inscribed as the location of sexual difference and desire, are perceived as violating the bourgeois family (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 139).

Although Charke takes care not to disclose the nature of her offence that causes her fall from the grace of her father Colley Cibber, be it her cross-dressing, a lesbian liaison, or simply her siding

with Fielding and lampooning her father in a number of plays, as different critics have argued, the fact remains: Charlotte Charke was cast out of her upper middle class family and lost the privileges of her social class. However it is possible to argue that although she was displaced and declassed, *A Narrative* affirms the fact that Charke continued to possess a middle class consciousness, which enabled her to fashion herself as different from and superior to the lower classes among which she had to spend her adult life.

The first anecdote Charke relates in *A Narrative* is her dressing up in clothes borrowed from her father, an early attempt at impersonating her father. The following anecdote is of her riding an ass into town, followed “with a numerous Retinue” (Charke 12). It is the treatment of this retinue by Charke that offers us a glimpse of her high standing among other children, a fact she underlines in the following manner: “... a small Troop of young Gentlemen and Ladies, whose low Births and adverse states render’d it entirely convenient for them to come into any Scheme, Miss Charlotte Cibber could possibly propose” (11).

Charke’s use of overstatements, when describing street urchins as young gentlemen and ladies, are juxtaposed to their low births and adverse states. Being addressed by someone of Charke’s standing seems to be more than enough for them to join in any scheme proposed by “Miss Charlotte Cibber”, let alone becoming her attendants. Further, their low status makes them invulnerable to any stigma attached to becoming the laughing stock of the public. However, this is not the case with Charke, who is chided severely by her father for turning herself into a spectacle, and then delivered to her mother who disciplined her by the birch.

Polly Stevens Fields in her essay “Charlotte Charke and the Liminality of Bi-Genderings: A Study of Her Canonical Works” argues that in certain ways, Charke was quite bourgeois, even strictly and strangely orthodox, in depicting her situation and her ideals. In a similar vein, it is possible to maintain that although Charke was disenfranchised, she was able to uphold the idea of her self as a unique individual and fashion a self which was different from the working class people who inhabited her new world.

Furthermore, Felicity Nussbaum in *The Autobiographical Subject* argues that in the eighteenth century, the social class of women was prone to change through their husbands and fathers. Nussbaum writes: “The class slippage among women is of course especially pronounced.... Eighteenth-century women, in particular, are privileged or deprived according to their husband’s or father’s status, but without taking on the economic benefits that come from earning the income” (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 52).

It is possible to posit that Charke’s experience proves Nussbaum right. Her middle class mindset was formed by those privileges and comforts that were a direct result of her being the famous or infamous poet laureate’s daughter. Thus, her ability to fashion a middle class self was a boon extended and later withdrawn by Cibber, who disowned her when she was a young divorced mother and in doing so Cibber becomes the cause of Charke’s social marginalization.

However, throughout *A Narrative*, Charke never seems to forget that she is Colley Cibber’s daughter and does not let her readers forget it either. Even the title of her autobiography is a reminder of this fact. On the front page of her autobiography, the title, *A NARRATIVE of the LIFE of Mrs. CHARLOTTE CHARKE*, is preceded by the words, in brackets, *Youngest daughter of COLLEY CIBBER, Esq.* When *The Gentleman’s Magazine* was publishing a heavily edited, and extensive summary of *A Narrative*, the name of her autobiography was left intact, as ‘*Some Account of the Life of Mrs. CHARLOTTE CHARK (sic), youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.*’. Apparently, the editors have taken care not to omit her close affiliation with Cibber, as from such advertisement, their sales would surely benefit.

Esq., the abbreviated form of Esquire was originally a social rank above that of mere gentleman, allowed to the sons of nobles and gentry who did not possess any other title. Paul Langford in *A Polite and Commercial People* discusses the political and cultural changes in English society from 1727 to 1783, and maintains that although the use of the title ‘Esquire’ was still restricted to men of property or professional standing, he adds that the title, which was considered to be incompatible with trade previously was frequently being assumed by retired businessmen in eighteenth century (Langford 65). Langford further argues that although the title ‘Esquire’ was

rapidly becoming depreciated, the issue of title was a major preoccupation of the eighteenth century Englishmen.

Evidently, when Charke is reminding her readers whose daughter she is, she is also not missing the opportunity to add her father's title. Thus, by fashioning herself as Colley Cibber's daughter, she is both drawing their attention to the fact that she is the poet laureate's daughter and also that her father is a member of the gentry. This can be read as an indication of the fact that Charke is defining herself not only through her father, but also through his class and social standing, even when she was no longer part of that social circle.

Although the chosen title of the work, *A NARRATIVE of the LIFE of Mrs. CHARLOTTE CHARKE* is by definition promising its readers to narrate her life, Charke is adamant in not revealing much about her private life in *A Narrative*. We are given only a brief glimpse of her first marriage, an enigmatic account of the second and at best an ambivalent record of her friendship with Mrs. Brown, whose existence some critics like Polly Stevens dispute, arguing that she stood for the feminine self of Charke and not a real person. However, in relating her first marriage, Charke maintains that the main motive of her husband was not to win her heart but simply to marry Colley Cibber's daughter. Richard Charke was a singer, musician and composer, and his main endeavour according to Charke was "... being Mr. Cibber's Son-in-Law, who was at that Time a Patentee in Drury-Lane Theatre..." (Charke 27). Thus, it was her father's social standing and his financial incentive that made Charlotte a good catch for her first husband in the first place.

Charke also makes sure to underline Cibber's social milieu. She argues that her husband expected economic gain from the marriage; "a fine Feather in his Cap, to be Mr. Cibber's Son-in-Law" (28). Charke maintains that her husband Richard's plans would have been realized if he had not started frequenting brothels before they had been married a twelvemonth. Charke ascertains the fact that Cibber would have promoted her husband's "Interest extreamly (sic) amongst People of Quality and Fashion" (28). Thus, according to Charke, Cibber was not only influential in the theatrical world, but among the upper class people as well and in that capacity was more than able to make or break fortunes of the family members.



Charke's comments on a variety of topics also reveal a person informed by a certain awareness of her own superiority. When trying a young horse before purchase, Charke runs over a three-year-old child with her chaise and then criticizes the reactions of the people who witness the accident. The parents of the overrun child seek her out attended by a "mob" and Charke orders "the Infant to be examined by a Surgeon" (26). From this it is possible to infer that Charke takes control of the situation and using her upper class privileges and superior knowledge, resorts to those means not available to the mob and demands a surgeon's evaluation. However, her own family is informed of the mishap and this seems to have angered Charke who refuses to take the accident serious, dismissing the common people's concern, arguing that "ignorant People are naturally fond of striking Terror" (26). Charke is drawing a generalization based on the difference between the privileged and the underprivileged, and it is those privileges they lack that makes them the target of Charke's attack. Charke is juxtaposing the ignorance of the mob, a marker of their low class to her own middle class education and superiority and finding them wanting. Thus, the common mob are making a mountain out of a molehill and striking terror, whereas for Charke all the fuss is completely unnecessary, and her getting a surgeon to examine the child is more than a sufficient compensation for the accident.

Another instance of her condescending attitude towards the lower class people is illustrated by the account Charke gives of her uncle's marriage. She refers to her uncle for the first time when she relates her borrowing of his globe for her studies in geography. From the notes to the text we learn that this maternal uncle was John Shore, trumpeter to James II and William III, and a member of the royal household band. Charke later in the text announces his uncle's choice in marriage as a clear indication of his madness: "... who, poor Man, had the Misfortune to be ever touched in his Brain, and, as a convincing Proof, married his Maid, at an Age when he and she both had more Occasion for a Nurse than a Parson" (43).

Apparently, it is his uncle's decision to get married in his advanced age and depriving her of his estate that is enraging Charke. However, his marrying his maid is indicated as the proof of his madness. According to Charke, the only circumstance that can reduce a middle class man to marry his old maid can be insanity. Charke maintains that her uncle must have been incapable of

making his will and she relates that she had threatened his wife - the former maid - by taking the issue of her uncle's will to court. Charke believes that if taken to court, "a mad Man's Will" shall be set aside in favour of "... those who have a more legal and justifiable Claim to his Effects, than an old Woman, whose utmost Merit consisted in being his Servant" (43). This statement of Charke's also elucidates a certain class antagonism, coloured by self-interest. Her claim to her uncle's estate rests on kinship and her middle class origins. Charke argues that against her's, the claims of the wife should be dismissed, as the wife's sole merit is to have served him in the capacity of his maid.

Nussbaum in *The Autobiographical Subject* maintains that eighteenth century women were given class designation because of their relationship to men and their class designations were revoked by separation, dispossession or death (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 145). According to Charke, her first husband had married her simply because she was Cibber's daughter. Then, Richard Charke's motive in this marriage was to gain upward mobility, and he did not possess the means to offer Charke any economic advantage in the first place. From *A Narrative* we learn that the marriage proves to be unsatisfactory to both parties. Charke's account reveals the fact that her husband frequents brothels even during the first year of their marriage. Charke's hopes of his rehabilitation after the birth of their daughter fail miserably and they agree to part. Charke owns that Richard continues to pay her visits, especially "when Cash run low" (29). The picture Charke draws of Richard Charke is of a parasite, who supports himself on Cibber's money: "... I as constantly supplied his Wants; and have got from my Father many an auxiliary Guinea, ... to purchase myself a new Pair of Horns" (29). Hence, even after she was married, Cibber apparently kept providing Charke with financial support, for herself, her newborn daughter and her whoring husband.

Throughout *A Narrative*, there are numerous enigmas Charke is resolved to leave unsolved. The rift between herself and her father is one of those enigmas. Although she time and again declares her intention to gain the forgiveness of her father, which was caused by some transgression on her part and the malice of others, (the chief culprit according to Charke being her eldest sister Catherine), she will not let her readers into the circumstances, which had caused the split. What is clear is that Charke is completely cast out of her family and maintains; "I cease to think myself

belonging to it” (65). In spite of Charke’s efforts to be forgiven by her father, as documented by *A Narrative*, the breach between Charke and Cibber turns out to be permanent.

It is also worth noting that although Charke protests that she wants nothing other than to prostrate herself at her father’s feet, it is clear that apart from the emotional aspect of the breach, the factual nature of the disenfranchisement is a major concern for Charke. As a result of the coup, - Charke’s having to answer the charges posed by the triumvirate, and Catherine’s turning her out of the family home - Charke is deprived of her rights. In her own words, “... the main Design was to deprive me of a Birthright ----- and they have done it...” (66). She is well aware of the privileges she has had access to as the daughter of the poet laureate and henceforth, she shall have none of the middle class comforts which had been hers by birth. Thus, dispossessed, Charke was a ruined woman like many others. In *The Autobiographical Subject* Nussbaum maintains that in the eighteenth century, it was a commonplace occurrence for women, who had fallen from class privilege or male protection, to become ruined and Nussbaum further posits that the pauper class included more women than men (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 148). However, it is possible to argue that having lost her class privileges, Charke had not lost her deeply rooted class designations and continued to identify herself by the bourgeois norms.

Charke, separated from her no good husband and disowned by her influential father, had to try and fend for herself. Although Charke never admits to it in her autobiography, the Licensing Act of 1737, coming right after her disenfranchisement deprives her of any means she could have of supporting herself. One option still open to her was then marriage, which promised financial security, and respectability. Hence, the third man whose fortunes or lack of them affects Charke and her class designation was her second husband. She marries John Sacheverell on 2 May 1746 and her name appears as “Mrs. Sacheverell, late Mrs. Charke” on the play bills from 19 May to 14 June (lxiii). However, in *A Narrative*, Charke provides her readers with a most enigmatic record of her second marriage. Although she had let her name appear as “Mrs. Sacheverell” in playbills back at 1746, writing *A Narrative* in 1755, Charke takes pains to conceal even her second husband’s name from the public she was addressing. The account of her second marriage runs thus in *A Narrative*:

... and in a genteel Light, I was addresses by a worthy gentleman (being then a Widow) and closely pursued 'till I consented to an honourable, though very secret Alliance; and, in Compliance to the Person, bound myself by all the Vows sincerest Friendship could inspire, never to confess who he was. Gratitude was my Motive to consent to this Conjunction, and extream (sic) Fondness was his Inducement to request it. To be short, he soon died; and, unhappily for me, not only sustaining the Loss of a valuable and sincere Friend, .... I was deprived of every Hope and means of a Support” (47).

Charke is seen to emphasize the “genteel” manner of their courtship and the fact that he was a “worthy gentleman”. She attempts to erase any doubts in the minds of her readership on the question of how honourable this match was, by adding that she was then a widow. She protests that the motive behind this betrothal was not love but gratitude and friendship on her part, and extreme fondness on his. From what Charke discloses, we may argue that the betrothal in question closely resembles the sentimental marriage, a marriage not of passion but of minds. After more affirmations to the effect that no motive shall ever induce her to go against the promise she had made to him and to disclose his name, Charke elaborates on her initial motive for the marriage, which suggest that it had been connived as a marriage of convenience: “This was Means indeed, by which I hoped to have secured myself far above those Distresses I have known; but alas! Proved the FATAL CAUSE OF ALL. I was left involved with Debts I had no Means of paying; .... [and] was arrested for seven pounds...” (Capitalisation Charke’s) (47).

Similar to her protestations against disclosing a name by which she had felt free to appear on public theatre bills some ten years ago, it is difficult to reason how a marriage which had promised Charke relief from all “distresses she had known”, turns out to become “the fatal cause of all”, burying her under a substantial amount of debt she was unable to pay. However, what is clear is the fact that Charke, being an eighteenth century woman, whose valuables and estates – if she had happened to have any - would have become the possession of her husband, is dragged through the slime and the mud at the death of her husband, having had to take over his debts. Thus her attempt to win back her gentility, her lost birthright through marriage eventually lands her in a prison cell.

Charke throughout *A Narrative* remains protective of her family and misses no opportunities to insist that they loved her heartily, with the exception of her eldest sister Catherine who for Charke is the enemy. There are numerous brief references to her brother Theophilus who helps

her in her hour of need. However, she chooses her sister Elizabeth Brett (and later Marples), the third of the five surviving Cibber children, to make amends to, to the best of her capacity in *A Narrative*, arguing Elizabeth “was the only Relation [she] had that took any Notice of [her] (76) in spite of the “... hard Struggles, through Seas of undeserved Misfortunes...” (77) Elizabeth herself had to put up with. Charke mentions her sister earlier in the text, in very affectionate terms, arguing it was now her “...Motive to assuage (sic) those Sorrows and Inconveniences of Life she... labour[ed] under” (36). Clearly to this end Charke tries to advertise the “House of Entertainment” Elizabeth had just opened, asking her readers to attend it to oblige her. Charke emphasizes the fact that at her sister’s establishment, her readers “will be certain of Flesh, Fish and Poultry, dressed in an elegant Manner, at reasonable Rates...and a Politeness of Behaviour agreeable to the Gentlewoman...” (77), pointing at the quality of the establishment and the middle class origins of its proprietor.

However, the evidence she provides in *A Narrative* is sufficient for us to infer that Elizabeth was another declassed member of the Cibber family, and this would explain Charke’s exceptional concern about her sister’s plight, finding in her a fellow sufferer. According to Charke her sister Elizabeth “...has had no Faults the Family can alledge (sic) against her” (37). Charke seems to be suggesting that unlike herself, her sister’s life was not scandalous. Yet, what is clear is that although Charke argues that her sister had given Cibber no reason for cutting her off, Elizabeth was very clearly suffering financially. Elizabeth, like Charke receives only £5 in Cibber’s will. We also know that Elizabeth’s second husband Joseph Marples was listed in *The Gentleman’s Magazine’s* bankruptcies column in 1753 (Rehder 153). Consequently, it is possible argue that Elizabeth was just another woman, whose fortunes and class designations were revoked because of the men in their lives, and whose misfortunes were resulting from the bankruptcy of her husband, if not the neglect of her father.

Besides all the protestations of Charke, it is apparent that even Elizabeth’s treatment of her revealed Charke’s lower status in the family after her fall from grace. When she relates the time she and her daughter boarded with her sister, she asserts the fact that she “...was put in the worst Apartment...” (35). According to Charke, this was because she “...was regarded as a favorite Cat or mischievous Monkey about the House...” (35). In her customary non-challant attitude, Charke

owns that she was unaware of the room's inconveniences until she was roused one night because of the wind blowing into her room and starts writing a poem which satirizes her lack of material comforts, a poem she has inserted in full into her autobiography. As usual, Charke is protective of the rough treatment she has received from her family and positively defensive of her sister Elizabeth. Charke was reduced to a begging and consequently she was not a chooser.

Nussbaum in *The Autobiographical Subject* further suggests that during the eighteenth century women were particularly prone to experience poverty and victimization and she quotes Dorothy George's study to the effect that the social conditions produced a high proportion of widows, deserted wives, and unmarried mothers, and the occupations of women were "... over-stocked, ill-paid and irregular" (George, qtd. in Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 147). The turn Charke's life takes after her disenfranchisement and the Licensing Act can be read as an illustration of such a statement. Charke takes up one hopeless menial task after the other and fails in one after the other, and *A Narrative* does become a history of low life in England in the eighteenth century. When she is put in jail because of the debts incurred by her second husband, it is Mrs. Elizabeth Careless, who bails her out. From Rehder's notes we learn that Mrs. Careless started her life as an actress but she was identified in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, in its summary of Charke's *A Narrative* as "a celebrated courtesan of that time" (Rehder 155). Rehder further adds that Mrs. Careless had appeared in the last scene of Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress*, which satirized and moralized on sexual promiscuity common to the era (155). However, the money provided by Mrs. Careless is not sufficient to keep her out of jail for long, and Charke needs to get another bail and this time it is "...the Ladies who kept Coffee-Houses in and about the *Garden*, each offering Money for [her] Ransom..." that come to her aid (48). In the notes to the text Rehder argues that Covent Garden was notorious for prostitutes, and suggests that a number of ladies who kept coffee houses were madams or prostitutes. According to Rehder, the fact that the Covent Garden ladies came to her aid so soon was an indication that they knew Charke intimately, and were concerned by her plight (155). This view however, seems to be at odds with E. J. Clery's study entitled *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England – Literature Commerce and Luxury*, who argues that from late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, the female barkeeper was "... presented as an inaccessible object..." in the prints produced in that period (Clery 21). Clery further comments that the coffee-house keeper's "...iconic

‘untouchability’ was a crucial factor in the reformation of men” (21). However, be them prostitutes or simply barkeepers, they were the social milieu Charke moved in and they were the friends she had who were there for her in her hour of need.

It has been argued that Charke’s *A Narrative* is similar to autobiographies written by men, which relate the major events of their public lives rather than their private worlds. However, one can argue that taking one job after the other and barely surviving could be factors to draw the actualities of one’s life to the front, and not leave much time or energy to relish one’s interiority. Nonetheless, Charke’s continuous efforts to survive reveal a sharp contrast to the privileged life she had as a part of her father’s household. When she has to take up strolling for the first time, she has to travel on foot; “in a dreadful Shower of Rain” from one town to the other and that way looses her voice (69). Consequently she was “turn’d off with Half a Crown, and rendered incapable” (69). For Charke, the treatment she had received stands as a clear indication of the character of the strolling company managers: “An excellent Demonstration of the Humanity of the low-lived Wretches! who have no farther regard to the Persons they employ, but while they re immediately serving ‘em; and look upon Players like Pack-Horses, though they live by ‘em” (69).

Charke is feeling insulted by the behaviour of the strolling company manager, who has caused her to lose her voice and then sacked her unceremoniously, with the imminent result of her having to pledge the clothes on her and her child’s back for support. Her reference to being treated like a packhorse reveals the disgust she feels for the humiliation she is suffering. It might be argued that Charke’s attitude is rather cavalier and carefree throughout *A Narrative* although she is most of the time relating misfortunes that befell her. This is in line with the fact that she is an actress and she is creating a dramatic performance on paper like the ones she acted on and off stage. However, only when the issue is her elder sister and the strolling company managers does she take up a different tone and become bitter and resentful.

Charke’s circumstances do not improve after she regains her voice. She is reduced to making and vending sausages from door to door, by the money provided by a friend. However she argues “... the utmost Excess of my Misfortunes had no worse Effect on me, than an industrious and honest Inclination to get a small Livelihood, without Shame or Reproach ...” (72). One of her diatribes

against her eldest sister, Catherine runs thus: “Though the Arch-Dutchess of our Family, who would not have relieved me with a Half-penny Roll or a Draught of Small-Beer, imputed this to me as a Crime....[who] THOUGHT THE HONOUR OF THEIR FAMILY WAS CONCERNED” (emphasis Charke’s) (72-73). Thus, the working class jobs Charke has to take are according to Catherine a dishonour to the family. Catherine herself will not do anything to relieve the financial distress of her sister, but will pass judgement on her plight.

Charke, the dispossessed, is calling her sister who still has access to all comforts and privileges of class “the Arch-Dutchess” and drawing the attention of the reader to the new disparity existent between them, the higgler and the middle class matron, the sole concern of the latter being the reputation and honour of the patriarchal family, while the former wants nothing but to be able to ward off starvation. Charke is also careful in referring to what used to be her family as “their family” and thus demarcating the gap between “them” and “her”, the middle class Cibber family of which her sister was the new head and the lonely sausage higgler, herself. However, Charke is still dignified and proud in arguing that it was “an honest Livelihood, as [she] did not prostitute [her] Person, or use any other indirect Means for Support, that might have brought [her] to Contempt and Disgrace” (73).

Charke’s insistence that she had not become a prostitute reveals the plight of declassed women in the eighteenth century England. As discussed earlier, women’s sole sustenance was their husbands or fathers in eighteenth century England, and they were reduced to begging or prostitution at their loss. Langford in elaborating on the issue of genteel poverty in eighteenth century England provides examples of women of genteel birth who did become paupers if not prostitutes:

Mothers driven into the grave and daughters into prostitution featured in many appeals for generosity. In fact the supposedly respectable background of London prostitutes claiming to be daughters of impoverished clergymen was one of the stock jokes of the period. Yet there were many for whom the plight of respectable women was no joke. The story recorded in the diary of the pious Mrs. Cappe, of an army officer’s widow who was left in poverty by the death of her husband in the Caribbean, matches the theme of many mawkish novel. Willingly accorded the title of ‘Madam’ in the Dales village where she settled, she was none the less threatened by humiliating prosecution as a pauper under the law of Settlements. (Langford 79)



Charke resumes her public act of defending her conduct by mentioning the rumours to the effect that she had become a fishmonger and that she even went as far as to slap her father with a large fish. She tries to refute the charges as utter falsehoods, declaring she never entertained the notion of selling fish. For one reason or another, for Charke selling fish is beneath her. She also protests that slapping her father with a large fish was an infamous crime and even if she had dared do such a thing, the public, whom she calls “the Mob” would not have stood by and watched but “... have prevented [her] surviving such an unparallel’d (sic) Villainy...” (74). For Charke the outcast, the people on the streets are still the Mob, as she feels way above them even in that hypothetical lowly fish mongering state. However, the respect the Mob would have shown for her father is again an affirmation of Cibber’s high social standing.

Notwithstanding the menial jobs she has had to do, Charke was from time to time, able to find employment at pantomimes if not the theatre. However, her creditors are informed and she has to move, to keep them at bay. What is worth notice is the fact that she never forfeits her self-worth, arguing; “Had not [her] Necessities been pressing, [her] Service would not have been purchased at so cheap a Rate...” (77). Charke also makes it clear that it was not her pride, which had caused her to leave the pantomime but the pressing matter of the creditors. Relating this episode of her life, when she was for a short while back in her own element, the stage, though acting in comedy, we see that her discourse and her concerns change remarkably.

The section of *A Narrative* in which Charke recounts her waiting on customers at an inn in men’s clothes provides another opportunity for her to illustrate the wide gap between her former class designation and the adversity of her later lot. Charke details her introduction to the innkeeper thus:

She was pleased to tell me, she liked me on my first Appearance; but was fearful, as she understood I was well born and bred, that her Service would be too hard for me. Perceiving me to wear a melancholy Aspect, tenderly admonished me to seek out for some less robust Employment, as she conjectur’d (sic) that I should naturally lay to Heart the Impertinence I must frequently be liable to, from the lower Class of People; who, when in their Cups, pay no Regard either to Humanity or good Manners. (82)

According to Charke, the innkeeper whom she calls a gentlewoman can detect her social superiority at first glance and find the employment she was offering Charke to be far below her.

Another concern on the part of the innkeeper is that the job might turn out to be too physically demanding and demeaning for someone of Charke's standing. Charke does not miss a chance to assert the total lack of humanity and manners expected of the "lower Class of People" when relating the words of the innkeeper. It is also worth noting that when this conversation was ensuing, Charke was donned in men's clothes. If we were to read between the lines, it also becomes apparent that attending to common folk is considered too low for a male of Charke's former social standing, let alone a woman.

Charke's reply to the innkeeper illustrates her dignity in the face of adversity and her non-challant attitude:

That notwithstanding I was not born to Servitude, since Misfortunes had reduced me to it, I thought it a Degree of Happiness, that a mistaken Pride had not foolishly possessed me with a Contempt of getting an honest Livelihood, and chusing (sic) rather to perish by haughty Penury, than prudently endeavour to forget what I had been, and patiently submit to the Severities of Fortune; which, at that Time, was not in my Power to amend. (83)

This statement can be taken as a manifesto on the part of Charke, summing up a life of hardship and the will of a woman who survives the direst circumstances. Although she argues that she had tried to forget "what she had been", the overall effect of *A Narrative* proves her unsuccessful in the task of forgetting that she had set herself to, as the picture provided by *A Narrative* is of a woman who feels superior to those around her and one who is aware of her difference, and taking pride in that. However, her silent submission as she puts it, to the "Severities of Fortune" mark her as having many affinities to the tragic characters she embodied on stage in the former glory of her acting career.

Throughout *A Narrative*, Charke does not play the damsel in distress or represent herself as a victim. Nor does she complain about any job or profession she takes on. The only exception, apart from her protestations against the rumour that she had been a fishmonger, is the way Charke discusses being a strolling actress. Although she works for nine years as an actress in the south-west of England (Rehder lxiii), she devotes relatively few pages to those years she spends on the road and when she does so, she makes it clear that she had felt a misfit in relation to both the audiences and her fellow actor and actresses. Further, Charke feels no inhibitions in expressing

the wayward habits of the other strollers and the country audiences. Back in London, Charke was a middle class woman who had lost her privileges and one who had had to survive by doing working class jobs. However, as an actress, she was one who had performed at the Drury Lane, Haymarket, and Lincoln's Inn, which were the foremost theatres in London and won success in that capacity. Thus, it might be argued that she belonged to the upper crust of her profession. This might explain the abhorrence she expresses towards the life with the strolling companies, or her neglect in relating the details pertaining to that part of her life. She was first and foremost an actress and as a number of critics argue, had spent her entire life taking up one profession after the other, like performing one part after the other, having rendered her life a performance. Starting life as an actress at the very top, the idea of having to act along with people "... who have good Trades, .... [but] idly quit them, to become despicable Actors; which renders them useless to themselves, and very often Nuisances to others" (98) had apparently proved to be too humiliating. Charke continues on the issue of laymen becoming upstart strollers and acting alongside those whose true profession is acting:

Those who were bred up in the Profession, have the best Right to make it their Calling; but their rights are horribly invaded by Barbers 'Prentices (sic), Taylors (sic) and Journeymen Weavers; all which bear such strong Marks of their Professions, that I have seen Richard the Third murder Henry the Sixth with a Shuttle.... Another set of Gentry who have crept into their Community, are Servants out of Place.... I have had the Mortification of hearing the Characters of Hamlet, Varanes, Othello, and many more Capitals rent in Pieces by a Figure no higher than two Six-penny Loaves, and a Dissonancy of Voice, which conveyed to me a strong Idea of a Cat in Labour; all which, conjoined with an injudicious Utterance, made up a complete tragical Emetick (sic).... And yet these Wretches very impudently stile themselves Players; a Name let me tell them, when properly applied, is an Honour to an Understanding, for none can deserve that Title, who labour under the Want of a very considerable Share of Sense. (98-99)

For Charke, being an actress is an honour and she is very bitter in her condemnation of those who debase the profession, as they lack the requirements that are sense, understanding and education. Besides, Charke is well aware of the lower class origins of the people she has to mix with in performing her designated trade in the county.

Another factor which has an important role in breaking Charke's spirit in her strolling career – along with continuously travelling on foot and living on the verge of starvation - is the audiences she had to act before. She relates one such incident in the following words:

... such an Audience, I dare believe, was never heard of before or since. In the first Row of the Pit sat a Range of drunken Butchers, some of whom soon entertained us with the inharmonious Musick (sic) of their Nostrils: Behind them were seated, as I suppose, their unsizable (sic) Consorts, who seemed to enjoy the same State of Happiness their dear Spouses were possessed of; but, having more Vivacity than the Males, laugh'd (sic) "*and talk'd louder than the Players*" (emphasis Charke's) (106).

Performing to an audience of people of no consequence or manners, namely drunken country butchers and their wives who prefer snoozing or chit-chatting to watching the performers, gives Charke and the rest of the company the freedom to improvise, putting together parts of different plays, as the audience is totally ignorant of any play they might watch. Thus, Charke exerts her superiority over the drunken lot at least momentarily.

Time and again in *A Narrative*, Charke tries to set right the opinion of the public in relation to her character. Felicity Nussbaum in her Afterword to *Introducing Charlotte Charke Actress, Author, Enigma* argues that: "Charke seeks her birthright through *A Narrative* in a public act of self-defense rather than through the more familiar model of female victimization and its suffering heroine" (Nussbaum, Afterword 229). One such attempt at clearing her reputation is the way she handles a rumour about her, to the effect that she had stopped her father on a highway and threatened him with a pistol. Charke writes:

...that my real Miseries were nor sufficient to crush me with their Weight, a poor, beggarly Fellow, ... forged a most villainous Lye (sic); by saying I hired a very fine Bay Gelding, and borrowed a Pair of Pistols, to encounter my father upon *Epping-Forest*.... That I stopped the Chariot, presented a Pistol to his Breast, and used such Terms as I am ashamed to insert; threaten'd to blow his Brains out that Moment, if he did not deliver-----Upbraiding him for his Cruelty in abandoning me to those Distresses he knew I underwent, when he had it so amply in his Power to relieve me: That since he would not use that Power, I would force him to a Compliance, and was directly going to discharge upon him; but his Tears prevented me, and asking my Pardon for his ill Usage of me, gave me his Purse with threescore Guineas, and a Promise to restore me to his Family and Love; on which I thank'd him, and rode off. (Charke 60)

After relating the story, Charke proceeds: "A likely Story, that my Father and his Servants were all so intimidated, had it been true, as to not been able to withstand a single stout Highwayman, much more a Female, and his own Daughter to! (sic)" (Charke 60). Robert Folkenflik argues that this is a story " ... of wish-fulfillment, a textual enactment of desire .... [it] dramatize[s] a

working out of the hostility toward her father that she officially disowns” (Folkenflik, “Gender, Genre, and Theatricality” 106).

Likewise, in her article entitled “The Transgressive Daughter and the Masquerade of Self-Representation”, Sidonie Smith touches upon the highway incident along with other aspects of Charke’s *A Narrative*. According to Smith, the fact that Charke narrates this rumour at all attests to her pent up anger at her father and her desire for vengeance (Smith 97). Smith further argues that: “...she creates a father emasculated, even “feminized”. Pitiful, helpless, humiliated, unheroic, he is reduced to tears of contrition. Finally, in this fantasy the daughter-“son” assumes the power of life and death over her father, reversing the dynamics of power in their real-life relationship” (Smith 97-98).

However, although the “stout Highwayman” is indeed a very masculine image, in her depiction of the incident Charke emphasizes her femininity and the fact that it was a woman facing a band of men. Even more striking is the image of the lone outcast, as opposed to the pomp of the father who was surrounded by servants, confident in the trappings of his social class. It is the wayward solitary outsider, who lacks even the material tools to become a highwayman and is hence on a hired horse and using a pair of borrowed pistols, who is standing up against the upper middle class father, surrounded by a retinue of servants, failing to recognize him/HER as his own.

#### **IV. 2. Her Views on the Relation of Class and Religion**

In discussing the relationship between class and religion in England, Paul Langford in *A Polite and Commercial People (England 1727-1783)* maintains that in the eighteenth century, the two were intricately linked. Although the middle class were more diverse in their religious practices, the majority of the gentry belonged to the Church of England (Langford 72). We further learn from Langford that from the very start, Methodism was perceived to be related to the religious life of the lower classes, and that the Methodists blamed the squirearchy for preventing them from spreading their message to the masses (252). Having made such a generalisation, Langford adds that the Methodists did have a small following among the upper classes and not all lower class communities were glad to receive them. He further argues that Methodists’ puritanical

insistence on condemning all fun and pastimes was one reason for their unpopularity across different strata of society. Langford writes: “Anything that savoured of drink, gaming, or mere frivolity, was condemned and forbidden to the faithful... all manner of popular revelry came under the censorious scrutiny of the new reformers” (266). To reflect the general attitude towards Methodists, Langford offers us the example of Joseph Milner, a former schoolmaster who goes from being a well-liked member of the community in Hull, to one who was greeted with ill will, after he turned Methodist and “... shunned cards, theatre, and the assembly...” (267).

Charlotte Charke’s long years of strolling takes her to those districts of England where she witnesses the activities of the Methodists, and Charke, far from trying to hide her revulsion towards them, dwells on them at length in *A Narrative*. Her first encounter with the Methodists takes place in Bath, and Langford maintains that cities such as Bath were frequented by Methodists who considered these fashionable resorts to be perfect places for seeking out sin. The abhorrence Charlotte Charke feels towards the Methodists should not surprise us, given her love of the theatre and her class-consciousness. Though she has to live in reduced circumstances, Charke continues defining herself as a member of the middle class, and this accounts for the hostility apparent in her treatment of the Methodists. Moreover, we know that Charlotte Charke, being an actress, constantly aligned with the aristocratic values as it was the crown and the nobility who used to support the artists. Finally, the Methodists’ worldview was purely utilitarian, and as such, culture was superfluous or even a threat to the reformed way of life they tried to promote. In short, the take of the Methodists on culture places them in direct opposition to the world and life of an artist such as Charlotte Charke.

In discussing her stay in Bath, after exceptionally good series of runs, Charke writes how the theatre season was interrupted because of the activities of the Methodists:

... a most terrible *Fracas* happened to the States-General of both the Theatres, occasioned by a mercenary View of Gain in an old Scoundrel, who was chiefly supported by charitable Donations; in which Mr. *Simpson* (whose Humanity frequently prompts him to such Acts) had been often very liberal to this Viper, who rewarded him by lodging an Information against his, and the Company in *Orchard-Street*. This put a Stop to the Business for about three Weeks, and was brought to a publick (sic) Process... (Charke 129-130).

We understand that a Methodist preacher, whom Charke calls a scoundrel and a viper, had received donations from the manager of one of the two theatres in Bath and then reported both theatres to the authorities. Rehder identifies this preacher as John Wesley in the endnotes (170). The outcome is that all performances are suspended for three weeks. Thus, aside from the inherent class conflict, the Methodists had given Charke solid reasons to hate them, by way of closing down the theatres and causing Charke to go hungry indefinitely. Charke continues to voice her grievances against the Methodists by dwelling on the fact that Bath was a place frequented by the upper class, and that entertainment was one main reason why they frequented the place. She warns all citizens of Bath that if the upper class were to leave, the city of Bath would become a desolate place. Charke writes:

As *Bath* is the Seat of Pleasure for the Healthful, and a Grand Restorative for the Sick, 'tis looked on as a Privileged-Place; and those who come only to please themselves expect a free Indulgence in that Point, as much as the Infirm do the Use of the Baths for their Infirmities; therefore a Suppression of any part of their innocent Diversions was deemed, by the People of Quality, as the highest affront that could be offered them, especially as they, and others of Distinction, are the absolute supporters of the Place; which, without them, would be but a melancholy residence for the Inhabitants, if Custom had not made it fashionably popular, being a Town of no particular Trade. (130)

Here again Charke is emphasizing her affinity with the upper class, whom she describes as “the people of quality” and “distinction”. As an artist she is providing them with entertainment. She explains that her upper class patrons, resident in Bath are also made to suffer from this recession of the theatre season and warns the local population not to support the Methodists. She argues that the Methodists’ activities such as closing the theatres would scare away the upper class vacationers, and points out that without their contribution the local economy would stagnate. Charke writes: “This greatly exasperated every Person of Condition; who, as it was an Infringement upon their Liberty of Entertainment, interested themselves greatly in Behalf of each Theatre, and carried their Point against the insolent Invader of their Privileges” (130). The upper class, whose liberty of entertainment was at stake, was concerned with the plight of theatres and Charke is apparently appeased by their support. However, we also learn from Charke that the actors’ plight was noted even by the lowest class of inhabitants of Bath, those who carried people in sedan chairs: “During the Suspension, I could scarce walk through the Grove but the very Chairmen had something to say, by Way of Exultation, on the Misfortunes of the *poor Show-*

*Folk*, as they impudently and ignorantly termed them...” (emphasis Charke’s) (130). Being referred to as “poor show-folk” by the lowest class of people, whose ignorance Charke does not fail to mention, is too much of an affront for Charke to bear. Therefore, she gives full swing to her wrath when she refers to the Methodists and their pronounced joy at the plight of the ungodly actors:

Among this Set of *two-legged Horses*, were scattered some of the new-fangled methodical Tribe, who blessed their Stars that there was an End put to Prophanation (sic) and Riot.

‘Tis surprising that the Minds of those who wear the human Forms can be so monstrously infatuated, to be the constant Attendants on the Canting Drones, whose Talents only consists in Making a Shoe, or a Pair of Breeches. Have we not Thousands of fine Gentlemen, regularly bred at Universities, who understand the true System of Religion? And are not the Churches hourly open to all who please to go to them, instead of creeping into Holes and Corners, to hear much less than the Generality of the Auditors are able to inform their hypocritical Pastors? (130-131)

Charke’s attack on the Methodists who are known for their malevolent attitude towards the theatre, takes the form of class hostility. She insists that the public cannot be foolish enough to prefer the teachings of the Methodist preachers coming from such low origins over those of the Anglican clergy, who are university educated and of gentle birth. Nonetheless we learn that Charke has attended one such sermon in person:

I very lately visited Mr. *Yeates*’s New Wells, and was persecuted for an Hour with Words without Meaning, and Sound without Sense. I own, I should as soon think of dancing a Hornpipe in a Cathedral, as having the least Tincture of Devotion, where I had myself been honoured as a Heathen Deity, and dreaded as a roaring Devil.

No Mortal, but Mr. *Yeates*, could have thought of letting the Place for that Use; and, I believe, the first Symptoms of his Religion will be discovered, if there ever should be a Suppression of this Mockery of Godliness, in the Loss of his sanctified Tenants, and the sad Chance of the Tenements standing empty (131).

Charke has found the entire ceremony sacrilegious and although she hardly devotes a page to any single event, she spends more than two pages, ranting about the Methodists, which in itself is a clear indication of her fury. Charke begs her readers’ pardon for digressing but cannot bottle up her anger and continues thus:

I think the following these (sic) People so inconsistent with the Rules of Reason and Sense, I have not Patience to think that any Creature, who is capable of distinguishing between Right and Wrong, should listen to such Rhapsodies of Nonsense, which rather confounds than serves to



improve their Understandings (sic); and consequently, can be no Way instrumental to the Salvation of their Souls.

If Publick (sic) Devotion, four Times a Day, is not sufficient for that Torrent of Goodness they would be thought to have, their Private Prayers at Home, offered with Sincerity and Penitence, they may be assured will be graciously received, and prevent that Loss of Time bestowed in hearing the Gospel turned topsy-turvy by those, who really are as ignorant of it as the Rostrum they stand in, and whose Heads seem to be Branches of the same Root.

Notwithstanding the Gaiety of *Bath*, they swarm like Wasps in *June*, and have left their Stings in the Minds of many. I am certain Rancour and Malice are particularly predominant in them, which they discovered in an eminent Degree when the Houses were shut up, by saying and doing all they could to have them remain so, to the Destruction of many Families, who were happy in a comfortable Subsistence (sic) arising from them (131-132).

Charke believes that Methodists are originally from the lower class and that they are imminently ignorant and lack understanding, all of which disqualifying them from leading the faithful. She also makes a point of emphasizing the privacy and secularity of devotion and condemns the communal aspect of worshiping required by the Methodists. Her final point is that against all odds, the Methodists succeed in poisoning the minds of many, even the inhabitants of a popular town such as Bath, and that their insistence in trying to keep the theatres closed causes many a family to go hungry. In short, Charke in her long condemnation of the Methodists aligns herself firmly with Anglicanism, the state religion and the faith of the gentry from whose ranks she has fallen.

#### **IV. 3. Charlotte Charke's Approach to Gender and Education**

Charlotte Charke was writing *A Narrative* at a time when education was a major preoccupation of the eighteenth century English public. The fact that it was widely discussed attests both to the importance placed on it and to the confusion, which was current in the minds of the public. Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, published five years after Charke's *A Narrative* satirizes this preoccupation and confusion. Paul Langford provides us with two more examples of the centrality of this issue, namely Richardson's *Pamela*, and Locke's debates on education. In the eighteenth century, broadly speaking, the traditional grammar schools, the new private schools, and private tutoring were the main educational options for middle and upper classes. Langford suggests that the merits of the one or the other were frequently discussed in public and people were at odds as to what was the most efficient and effective way of educating the youth (Langford 86). An even larger controversy raged on the issue of women's education.

The new boarding schools for women were considered to be overtly dangerous, as it meant that women would by definition leave their houses, which was fast becoming their designated places. R. Polwhele writes: ““The girls, then, from such schools are totally undomesticated. And undomesticated women have houses without order; servants without discipline; and children without instruction”” (Polwhele, qtd. in Langford 109). Thomas Day’s treatment of the same issue is even more radical: ““A polite education may be considered as a species of inoculation, which effectually prevents the fair patient from feeling any subsequent attack of shame or timidity during the rest of her life”” (Day, qtd. in Langford 110).

Viewed from this perspective, we may argue that Charlotte Charke’s *A Narrative* holds a mirror to the overall confusion of the eighteenth century public regarding the merits or demerits of different forms of education, including the education of women. We can see that in *A Narrative* women’s education is depicted as a class marker in its own right. Charke discusses the significance of her own education from two angles; on the one hand, she claims that it is a sign of the attention and care she has received from her family. On the other, she believes that it enables her to fashion herself as a prodigy. Accordingly, her education is one of the very first themes Charlotte Charke talks about in her autobiography. Early on in the text, Charke asserts that although she was the last-born of the family she was much beloved by both of her parents. Her father and mother had taken great care in educating her: “... the Jealousy of me, from her other Children, laid no Restraint on her Fondness for me, which my father and she both testified in their tender care of my Education. His paternal love omitted nothing that could improve any natural Talents Heaven had been pleas’d to endow me with...” (9).

Charlotte Charke was indeed from a family, which boasted of producing a number of literary men. As mentioned earlier, Colley Cibber was a playwright, actor, and poet laureate. Likewise, Theophilus Cibber was a prolific writer. However, for a family to have literary men did not necessarily mean a good education was guaranteed by these men for the women of the same family. As Charke herself puts it, the education she received was unlike other women. It was so extensive and liberal that it befitted a son rather than a daughter:

As I have instanc’d, that my Education was not only a genteel, but in Fact a liberal one, and such indeed as might have been sufficient for a Son instead of a Daughter; .... that I was never made

much acquainted with that necessary Utensil which forms the housewifely (sic) Part of a young Lady's Education, call'd a Needle; which I handle with the same clumsy Awkwardness a Monkey does a Kitten, and am equally capable of using the one, as Pug is of nursing the other. (10)

Charke's above comments indicate that the education considered fit for a young Lady chiefly consisted of needlework. She owns that her genteel and liberal education was not extended to her in order to provide her with the skill and ability to work: "This is not much to be wonder'd at, as my Education consisted chiefly in Studies of various Kinds, and gave me a different Turn of Mind than what I might have had, if my Time had been employ'd in ornamenting a Piece of Canvas with Beasts, Birds and the Alphabet; the latter of which I understood in *French*, rather before I was able to speak *English*" (10). All along *A Narrative* Charke maintains that her different turn of mind was a direct result of the education she had received. Her parents had bestowed upon her an education fit for a male rather than a female out of fondness. It was an education that consisted of sciences and languages and not of needlework. Consequently the education she has received has caused her to act in a masculine fashion. Such reasoning follows that unlike Mary Astell, Charlotte Charke does not seem to question the established practices of education current in the eighteenth century England, which did not allow women ordinarily to be lettered in sciences and languages. According to Charke, feminine education means a female turn of mind, and masculine education, a masculine turn of mind. It is also possible to posit that Charke is trying to find excuses for her subversive life style, as the public opinion is important to her. Charke is selling the story of her life to make a living and wants to court public opinion, therefore the conventional morality of the public. This line of reasoning allows her to explain away her peculiarities of conduct, and also to affirm the patriarchal notions of acceptable female and male mode of conduct.

After relating two "Specimen[s] of [her] former Madness" (10) for example, Charke goes back to the issue of her education, and explains:

At eight Years of Age I was placed at a famous School in *Park-Street, Westminster*, governed by one Mrs. Draper, a Woman of great Sense and Abilities, who employed a Gentleman, call'd Monsieur *Flahaut*, an excellent Master of Languages, to instruct her Boarders. Among the Number of her Pupils, I had the Happiness of being one; and, as he discovered in me a tolerable Genius, and an earnest Desire of Improvement, he advised my Mother, in a Visit to me at School, to let him teach me *Latin* and *Italian*, which she, proud of hearing me capable of receiving, readily consented to. (Emphasis Charke's) (14)

She is sent to a boarding school, which is another indication of the care invested in her education, since many young girls and women of her class were home educated in the eighteenth century. She professes that her teachers were well qualified, Mrs. Draper a woman of great sense and abilities and Monsieur Flahaut an excellent master of languages. By telling her audience about the qualifications of her tutors, Charke is making sure that the status of genius bestowed on her is done so by credible people. Charke, who had previously informed the readers of her great capacity for learning foreign languages by arguing that she could understand French before she could speak English, is now further emphasizing her ability to master even Latin and Italian. Knowledge of Latin was itself a marker of the elite male culture in the eighteenth century. It was mastered by the few who had access to the best education, and the fact that she was taught Latin at school is another elaboration on the “male” elite education Charke had received.

In a similar vein, Paul Langford in discussing the educational establishments of the eighteenth century England maintains that the utility of the older educational institutions were questioned by the middle classes. Chief among those were the grammar schools, the Inns of Court, and the universities, because they were believed to provide “... a learning well suited to the gentry, with a view to a life of honourable leisure ...” (Langford 79). As such, Langford posits that to learn the classics only was not considered to be an asset by many middle class parents. Thus, to the classics were added English and mathematics, history, geography, drawing, dancing and foreign languages. From what we learn from Charke’s *A Narrative*, we can draw the conclusion that the education she was given covered all of the main components of a male elite eighteenth century curriculum.

Charke proceeds by providing her readers with more information on her education, arguing that her tutor was not satisfied with teaching her languages only but obtained permission from her parents to teach her geography. Charke owns that geography is a “... most useful and pleasing Science” (14), however she questions its relevance and propriety to a female pupil: “... I cannot think it was altogether necessary for a female: But I was delighted at being thought a learned Person...” (14). Thus, Charke takes pride in her education and her manly accomplishments, which give her the right to attribute to herself the status of a learned person. However, she also takes

care not to hurt the sensibilities of her readership, insisting that geography was not a necessity for a female, which is in line with conventional discourses of the times.

Charke is provided with the necessary books and globes by her “mad” uncle and pores over her scientific studies till she becomes almost “... as mad as [her] Uncle.... the vast Application to Study almost distracted [her]” (15). In this way she draws the attention of her readers to the fact that too much education is a dangerous thing, which nearly induces her to madness. According to Charke, due to the indulgence of her parents, she continues her education when her two years at boarding school is concluded. Now, she is home-schooled. Many eighteenth century women are stopped being schooled after they master a rudimentary education, as that was considered sufficient for females. Charke’s continuing her education and being home-schooled are other indicators of the upper class privileges extended to her by her family. At home, her language master continues tutoring her, along with other eminent personae, who teach her music and dancing. The emphasis her family puts on music and dancing may be due to the fact that they were a family of stage performers, and Charlotte was thus prepared for the stage.

When Charlotte is fourteen, “... ‘twas judged that [she] had made a necessary Progression in [her] Learning and other Accomplishments...” (16) and she moves into the country with her mother. However, she engages in boyish pursuits such as shooting birds, which are censured by the neighbours. Eventually Charke is again sent away for schooling, this time “... with the Hopes of [her] being made a good Houswife (sic).” (16-17). Charke satirizes that sort of learning, in which her “Mind was entirely uncultivated”. Charke writes: “I had imbibed such mistaken, pedantick (sic) Notions of a superiority of Schollarship (sic) and Sense, that my utmost Wisdom centered in proclaiming myself a Fool! By a stupid contempt of such Qualifications as would have rendered me less troublesome in a Family, and more useful to myself, and those about me” (17).

Charke next dwells on the time she spent at Thorly, where she was supposed to learn domestic virtues:

While I staid (sic) at Thorly, though I had the nicest Examples of housewifely Perfections daily before me, I had no notion of entertaining the least Thought of those necessary Offices, by which the Ladies of the Family so eminently distinguished themselves, in ornamenting a well-dispos’d, elegant Table, decently graced with the Toil of their Morning’s Industry; nor could I bear to pass a

Train of melancholy Hours in poring over a Piece of Embroidery, or a well-wrought Chair, in which the young Females of the Family (exclusive of my mad-cap Self) were equally and industriously employed; and have often, with inward Contempt of 'em, pitied their Misfortunes, who were I was well assured, incapable of currying a Horse, or riding a Race with me. (18)

Charke owns that she was still interested in nothing but masculine pursuits like riding and tending to the horses, although the young ladies of the household busied themselves with “housewifely Perfections” and set her excellent examples in “those necessary offices”. When examples proved to be fruitless, “...many and vain Attempts were used, to bring [her] into their Working-Community...” (18). However, Charke is not moved either by “...Threats or tender Advice...” (18), and continues spending her time in the stable. Her stay at Thorly, hence adds nothing to her feminine accomplishments, but kindles a passion for the “Study of Physicks”, by which Charke means the study of medicine. At the completion of another two years, she returns home to her mother and starts practising medicine, one of the many professions she was to adopt, in her chameleon like existence.

On the other hand we must not forget that throughout *A Narrative* Charke argues that her “masculine” education had been her undoing. Her belief in the superiority of scholarship had caused her to place sense and wisdom on a high pedestal and by doing so, she had looked down upon feminine accomplishments, and eventually she had become a trouble maker, and caused pain unto her family, herself and those around her. By such a comment, Charke is both trying to gain the support of her audience and also in revealing herself as the repentant daughter, seeking forgiveness to return to the fold, by asking to be forgiven for her misdemeanours. As mentioned earlier, one of the clearly articulated reasons for *A Narrative* to be written was the fact that Charke asks her father to forgive her and wants him to restore her the privileges she had to forego after their separation. Moreover, by emphasising very early in *A Narrative* the fact that she was troublesome, she is whetting the appetite of the readers for more graphic stories of the troubles she had run into.

Shevelov in *Women and Print Culture – The construction of femininity in the early periodical* argues at large that one major agenda of the early periodical was to regulate the lives of its female audience by means of the letters the audience wrote to the periodical editors – or those the editors themselves wrote - and the comments the editors made on these letters. The commentaries were

published alongside the authentic letters and those posing as such. In the particular case of *Tatler*, Steele created the fictional figure of Isaac Bickerstaff, an editorial persona who answered the letters in that capacity. Bickerstaff was an elderly bachelor, who upheld the ideal of the sentimental family and "... assumed a paternal voice when addressing women" (Shevelow 103). Another fictional editorial persona was Jenny Distaff, who was Bickerstaff's half sister and took it on herself to reply the audience letters in place of Bickerstaff. Jenny was witty, read plays and knew Latin although she misquotes and misunderstands Horace and provides Steele with the opportunity to place her outside the male elite culture and emphasize the futility of her attempts at learning. However, after a short while, instead of Jenny commenting on the lives and fortunes of her feminine readership, Bickerstaff starts commenting on Jenny and her conduct in general. Bickerstaff is of the opinion that Jenny needs to be educated and transformed, to embody the feminine ideals publicized by the *Tatler*, and become fit to take her place in sentimental marriage, in which men and women assumed different roles and the utter happiness of the family solely depended on the feminine virtues of the woman. In describing the present plight of Jenny and his intentions about her Bickerstaff writes:

Thus my Sister, instead of consulting her Glass and her Toilette for an Hour and a half after her private Devotion, sits with her Nose full of Snuff, and a Man's Nightcap on Her head, reading Plays and Romances. Her Wit she thinks her Distinction; therefore knows nothing of the Skill of Dress, or making her Person agreeable.... For this Reason I have dispos'd of her to a Man of Business, who will soon let her see, that to be well dress'd, in good Humour, and chearful (sic) in the Command of her Family, are the Arts and Sciences of Female Life. (*Tatler* No. 75, qtd. in Shevelow 125)

Jenny's behaviour and habits are described in such terms to emphasize their inappropriateness and her "masculinity" of conduct. Hence, Jenny's wit and love of literature are factors that reduce her to manly habits such as taking snuff and wearing a "Man's Nightcap on Her head". Instead, according to Bickerstaff, she should be taking care of her personal appearance by consulting "her Glass and Toilette for an Hour and a half" and busying herself with her private devotion. However, by marrying a middle class man, she will soon see her mistake and by discarding her former interest in the masculine arts and sciences, devote herself to "the Arts and Sciences of Female Life", that is her family and her housewifely duties.

When we reassess Charke in light of the example posed by the fictional periodical editor Jenny Distaff, we cannot help but notice the similarities. Charke's and Jenny's self proclaimed status of genius and wit respectively, and their marked interest in arts and sciences mark them as masculine and unfit for marriage. Charke's fowling and Jenny's disregard for her personal appearance are the direct results of such masculine pursuits and inclinations. However, Jenny is led out of her perverse behaviour by adhering to the guidance of two male figures of patriarchy, namely her brother Bickerstaff and her husband Tranquillus, and by becoming Mrs. Tranquillus, - a markedly Theophrasian name - Jenny is cured of her evil ways. Yet Charke did not mend her ways and lost all. Although in no place of *A Narrative* does Charke regret her past, in her autobiography she is making sure to voice and adopt the dominant discourse on education that help contain eighteenth century women.

The rest of Charke's *A Narrative* is spotted with further references to her education, good breeding, her knowledge of many foreign languages, and especially her ability to speak French. Her elite education enables her to find jobs, though menial, when all else fails. Her brother Theophilus helps her find a job as a valet at the household of a Lord for example, and this job she gets because she is "well-bred, and ... could speak French..." (Charke 70). Later in *A Narrative*, she gets a job as a waiter but the proprietor of the establishment is worried, as she "... was well born and bred, ... her Service would be too hard for [her]" (82). However, she takes the job and maintains: "Another recommendation of me to my good Mistress, was my being able to converse with the Foreigners, who frequented her Ordinary (sic) every Sabbath-Day, and to whom she was unable to talk, but by Signs" (84).

Her formal education comes to her rescue again, when she takes up a job at *The Bristol Weekly Intelligencer* "... at a small Pittance per Week, to write, and correct Press, when Business was in a Hurry..." (122). Charke maintains that if the publisher, Edward Ward had known who she was, and how much she had had it in her power to be useful to him and his newspaper, it would have turned out to be far better for both parties. From this comment we can surmise that Charke had never lost her sense of self-worth and superiority, even in the direst of circumstances.



From *A Narrative* we learn that a pet project of Charke's was to start an academy. Previously, she had argued that it was upon her friends' insistence that she was persuaded her to write her autobiography. Similarly, in introducing the idea of the academy, she maintains that this scheme was also advised by her friends. She elaborates on the details of the academy thus:

... which I shall put in Force as soon as I can with Conveniency (sic); and will on reasonable Terms, three Times a Week, pay constant Attendance from Ten in the Morning 'till Eight in the Evening, at my intended Academy: Where Ladies and Gentlemen shall be, to the utmost of my Power, instructed both in the Art of Speaking and Acting; that though they should never come upon the Stage, they shall be enabled even to read a Play more pleasingly to the Auditor, by a few necessary Hints, that 'tis likely they ever would without 'em. (91)

She intends her academy to be open to both male and female participants and she aims to instruct them personally in speaking and acting, not with a view to train actor and actresses but to enable them to enjoy literature more. It must be kept in mind that reading books aloud in company was a favorite pastime in elite circles well into the nineteenth century.

Charke is of the opinion that acting needs to be learned and perfected and we see that she is ready to impart her knowledge to others. When her brother Theophilus' daughter Jenny starts acting, Charke is living with Theophilus and acting with his company. However, Cibber commands Theophilus to withdraw Jenny from the stage, "on Pain of his Displeasure [as].... 'Twould be a Scandal for her to play with such a Wretch as [Charke] was" (89). As the child is removed from her sphere of influence for good, Charke regrets the fact that she will not be able to be useful to Jenny: "As Time, Experience and Observation, had furnished me with some little Knowledge of the Stage, I would, to the Extent of my Power, have rendered it serviceable to my Niece..." (90).

In a humble manner, using a number of understatements, Charke is informing her readers of her wide ranging skills in drama and her willingness to impart it to others. Teaching Jenny to act is the context by which Charke introduces her designs to give instructions in acting. Charke argues thus: "As I am foolishly flatter'd, from the Opinion of others, into a Belief of the Power of cultivating raw and unexperienced Geniuses, I design very shortly to endeavour to instruct those Persons who convince themselves capable of dramatic Performances, and propose to make the Stage their Livelihood" (90-99).

At the very end of *A Narrative*, as Charke mentions her Academy once again, saying: “ I shall very shortly open my oratorical Academy, for the instruction of those who have any Hopes, from Genius and Figure, of appearing on either of the *London Stages*, or *York, Norwich* or *Bath*, all of which are reputable...” (emphases Charke’s) (138-139). However, her academy remains one of her many aborted projects.

Charlotte Charke’s final statement is that her education was the cause of her strengths as well as her errors and that her education was a sign of the love and overindulgence of her parents.

#### **IV. 4. The Public Construct and The (Missing) Private Persona in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke***

Charlotte Charke was writing *A Narrative* at a time when the public and private spheres were being defined anew, and as such, established as dichotomous. A much more constrictive model of femininity was in formation, and looking at *A Narrative*, it is easy to see on which side of the bifurcation Charke was situating herself. What attests to her “masculine turn of mind”, perhaps more than her incidents of cross-dressing is the fact that she was attempting to usurp the public space by way of not only authorship, but through the act of writing an autobiography. Dale Spender, in *Man Made Language* maintains that men are not only associated with the public sphere but with writing as well, whereas women are simply associated with the private sphere. Spender also claims: “Females who take up their pen have, at least, the potential to enter the public sphere and thereby to cross – and confound – classification boundaries” (Spender 191). According to Spender, the woman writer in this respect becomes a contradiction in terms. Hence, Charke was making her life public, which was assumed to be private, and was trying to find herself a voice in the increasingly more exclusive male domain of the public sphere through the act of narration. Her claiming a space for herself in the public sphere, I would argue, renders the arguments whether or not she modelled *A Narrative* on Colley Cibber’s *An Apology* or not superfluous, because the fact remains that she was the first woman to have written a formal autobiography in England, an act which validates her statement that she was the “non-pareil of the age”.

It should also be kept in mind that in the eighteenth century, the changing modes of production and consumption were ascribing new roles for women, who were no longer an integral part of the work force, and were only considered to be consumers in this new economy. To the same effect, Ian Watt maintains in *The Rise of the Novel*, that the eighteenth century women were becoming more and more redundant as domestic industries were replaced by large scale manufacturing, with the result of an increase of women in the labour market, causing a further decrease in the wages of women workers (Watt 148). At the upper end of the social scale, the upper middle class women were steeped in leisure, as they could not actively engage in business or for that matter manage their own estates. Watt further recounts that Mrs. Thrale, by the end of the eighteenth century, was ordered by her husband “not to think of the kitchen” (Piozzi 175), although we learn from her autobiography that Mrs. Hester Thrale Piozzi was later not only to engage in business, but save the brewery brought to the brink of catastrophe as a result of the mismanagement of her husband (177).

All the afore mentioned examples attest to the fact that engaging in the task of supporting oneself was gradually moving beyond the proper domain of women. Charke is well aware of the fact that there were very few options still open to women and she more than once mentions that “... [she] did not prostitute [her] Person, or use any other indirect Means for Support, that might have brought [her] to Contempt and Disgrace” (Charke 73). However, it is also possible to posit that by writing *A Narrative* Charke was commodifying her life. Similarly Nussbaum argues that “... Charke uses the commercial system that would trade on her misfortunes to her own economic advantage” (Nussbaum, Afterword 237). All in all, Charke was fighting to remain in the public realm, trying to survive in a world, which offered her no chances of earning a decent living, at a time when the society had started confining women to their homes irrespective of their social class.

In her essay entitled “Charlotte Charke and the Cibbers: Private Life as Public Spectacle”, Jean Marsden maintains that the form used in the autobiographies of the Cibbers was the “candid” autobiography, but the Cibbers (including Charke) were not constructing the candid self in the act of confessing, but in that of acting. This statement is at odds with the fact that confession is inherently private, whereas the theatre is by definition rendered possible only in public space.

However, going back to Jean Marsden's comment that "...Charke and the other Cibbers constructed public identities through the semblance of private revelation" (Marsden 65), the noun 'semblance' requires closer scrutiny, pointing at the deceptive nature of the enterprise. Charke was constructing a public persona in the form of private confession, however its privacy was no more than an appearance. Thus, the final outcome of *A Narrative* is the public construct and the private persona of the author is not revealed in this enterprise.

It is possible to posit that Charke was constructing a public persona at the expense of the private. Even if we were to leave aside the arguments that she was acting one persona after the other in the drama that was her life, a life/ drama she had penned, *A Narrative* is a work packed full with action. Charke shares with her audience one plan she hatches after the other, never giving us any explanations, reasons or the emotional states involved. Thus, although publicizing her life, *A Narrative* is marked by the absence of the interior and private. Even the formative events of her life, like the rift between herself and her father or her reasons for cross-dressing, which were perhaps at the crux of the enigma who was Charlotte Charke are never resolved.

In short, in Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative*, the private persona always remains elusive, the people in her life are like actors with minor parts only, appearing briefly and then disappearing. Thus, all that is private and domestic is shrouded from the public gaze, with the only exception of Colley Cibber, whose presence looms over the whole work. The mother is not only figuratively but also literally absent. Charlotte is forever sent away from her on one pretext or another. However, she is always apologetic of her mother's actions, arguing that her mother had done all out of her "fondness" for her. An elder sister's, Anna's name does not come up at all. To Richard Charke, her first husband, Charlotte sees fit to devote three pages only, mentioning him twice in *A Narrative*. Her second husband, John Sacheverell fares even worse, unable to make it to *A Narrative* by his own name. Charke's liaison with him is presented as a marriage of convenience.

We understand that Charlotte works with Theophilus on and off all her life. He apparently has helped her to the best of his strained financial means, introducing her to people, who were instrumental in getting her jobs, when he himself could not offer any further assistance. That was how she got the position as a valet to a peer, or her prompting job in Bath. At one point, they set

up house together with their daughters. However, Theophilus receives heart-felt thanks from Charlotte only once. Charlotte relates that when her daughter is gravely ill, Theophilus "... kindly sent an Apothecary, at his own Expence (sic) ..." (Charke 51). Theophilus is not mentioned in *A Narrative* by his own right either, and his brief appearances are followed by long unexplained absences.

Charke's eldest sister is an exception in the sense that Charke gives full vent to her anger towards her in *A Narrative*. According to Charke, Catherine is the sole culprit for her disenfranchisement. And in *A Narrative*, she places the full blame of the breach between herself and her father Colley Cibber, and her consequent dispossession, on her eldest sister Catherine. Charke writes:

I am very certain my Father is to be, in Part, excused, as he is too powerfully perswaded (sic) by his cruel Monitor; who neither does, or ever will, pay the least Regard to any Part of the Family, but herself: And though within a Year of Threescore pursues her own Interest, to the Detriment of others, with the same artful Vigilance that might be expected form a young Sharper of Twenty-four. I am certain I have found it so, and am too sure of its Effects from the Hour of my Birth; *and my first Fault, was being my Father's last Born*. Even the little Follies of prattling Infancy were, by this person, construed in Crimes, before I had a more distinguishing Sense than a Kitten. As I grew up, I too soon perceived a rancourous (sic) Disposition towards me, attended with Malice prepense (sic), to destroy that Power I had in the Hearts of both my Parents, where I was perhaps judged to sit too triumphant, and maintained my seat of Empire in my Mother's to her latest Moments: And, 'tis possible, had she lived my Enemy might not have carried this cruel Point, to prevent what I think I had a natural Right to receive, when I so earnestly implored it (Emphasis Charke's) (64).

Charke traces Catherine's actions to sibling rivalry, which had started when she was an infant, and argues that Catherine was not only after controlling the finances of the family, but also of dethroning Charke from her rightful place in the hearts of both her parents. She argues Catherine had succeeded in both of these tasks as she had lost her "natural Right to receive" financial support along with the privilege of being admitted to her father's presence. Further, Charke represents her shadowy mother as the only person who would have had the authority to stop Catherine in her designs, which in part might be read as wishful thinking. One cannot but question the influence of Katherine Shore Cibber on Colley Cibber, because Cibber refers to her wife in his autobiography directly once, and then sarcastically, arguing she had produced as many children as he had produced plays (Cibber, qtd. in Baruth 15).

It is possible to argue that the Catherine as portrayed by Charke is not only responsible for the rift between Charke and her father, but as the middle class matron who continually censors Charke's actions such as her working class jobs or her cross-dressing. In this capacity, Catherine acts as the spreader of rumours about her youngest sister, and becomes the person who keeps on damaging Charke's reputation, and her standing in the family. Charke in relating her sausage higgling episode complains of Catherine's actions in these words:

...Though the Arch-Dutchess of our Family, who would not have relieved me with a Half-penny Roll or a Draught of Small-Beer, imputed this to me as a Crime. I suppose she was possessed with same dignified Sentiments Mrs. *Peachum* is endowed with, and THOUGHT THE HONOUR OF THEIR FAMILY WAS CONCERNED: If so, she knew the way to have prevented the Disgrace, and in a humane, justifiable Manner, have preserved her own from that Taint of Cruelty I doubt she will never (sic) overcome (emphasis and capitalisation Charke's) (72-73).

Charke is drawing the attention of her readers to the fact that it was initially Catherine who had caused her to fall on such hard times, and also that she was the person who had the means to offer her help and relief. Hence, according to Charke, Catherine is withholding solace and further complaining that the honour of the family was lost through the actions of Charlotte, and thus vilifying her. It should also be noted that Charke is never questioning the patriarchal system that is the initial cause of her sufferings. Instead of rebelling against husbands that exploit her and a father who disowns her, Charke is ironically venting all her anger towards her sister, another woman, which is indeed an ironic attitude.

While trying to prove to the public that she had been an ideal wife and a daughter that deserves forgiveness, Charke makes sure she does not offend the men who were in her life, and who eventually ruined her. However, when the issue is Catherine, Charke is adamant in refusing to forgive or to forget, because for Charke Catherine is the sole culprit for all that goes amiss not only in her own life, but also in that of the other members of the family:

... I may live to see the Tears of Penitence flow from the Eyes of a yet remaining Enemy, to whose Barbarity I am not the only Victim in the Family.... If the Person I mean was herself guiltless of Errors, she might "*Stand in some Rank of Praise*" for the Assiduity in searching out the Faults of others, as it might be reasonably supposed the Innocent could never wish to be the Author of Ill to their Fellow-Creatures, and those especially NEARLY ALLIED IN BLOOD. We have all Realities of Folly too sufficient to raise a Blush, in

thinking Minds, without he barbarous Imposition of imaginary ones, which I, and others in the Family, have been cruelly branded with. I shall only give a Hint to the Lady, which I hope she'll prudently observe:

“The Faults of others we, with Ease, discern,

“But our own Frailties are the least we learn” (emphasis and capitalisation Charke's) (61).

Charke insists that Catherine does not have the right to censor the members of their family the way she does because she herself is not free of all fault herself. Charke also emphasizes the fact that they are all being falsely accused by Catherine, who fashions herself as the epitome of goodness.

If we are reading Charke's life correctly, Henry Fielding turns out to be a life changing force. But even Fielding is mentioned briefly and then in relation to the ongoing friction between Charke and Fleetwood. When relating that episode, Charlotte's focus is not on Fielding, who is formally referred to as “...the late Henry Fielding, Esq; who, at that Time, was Manager at the Hay-Market Theatre...” (33), but it is Fleetwood with whom she wishes to reconcile. Charlotte has apparently regretted having walked out on him twice. She insists that everything was going smoothly at the Drury Lane after the Stage Mutiny, till “... some particular People thought it worth while, by villainous Falsehoods, to blow the Spark of Fire between Mr. *Fletewood* (sic) and myself into a barbarous Blaze...” (33). On the issue of her second walk out, she is even more discrete, this time apologizing in her usual manner for failing to disclose what actually happened, telling her audience that “...’twas partly a Family-Concern, though perhaps I might be condemned, were I to reveal it...” (34). Thus, Charke leaves her audience in the dark as usual, affirming Robert Folkenflik's comment that “... her autobiography consists at once of exposing and hiding” (Folkenflik, “Gender, Genre, and Theatricality” 111).

#### **IV. 5. Charlotte Charke and Daughter Kitty**

Perhaps what surprises one most in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, an autobiography written by a woman, is the absence of the daughter from the life narrative of the mother. Charlotte Charke, unlike other women autobiography or memoir writers, does not devote much space to her daughter. For example, another interesting woman autobiographer Hester Thrale Piozzi (1741 – 1821), who lives and writes fifty years after Charlotte Charke, dedicates a

very large part of her self-writing to the fortunes of her children. Seen as a whole, Thrale's focus on her children is much more representative of women autobiography writers.

When Charlotte's daughter does appear in *A Narrative*, it is in such contexts that emphasize the mother's misery. Kitty is seldom a fellow sufferer like Mrs. Brown, but a further aggravation in her mother's already difficult life. We know that all her life, Charlotte finds herself in one futile enterprise after the other, never realizing that she is the cause of her misery and failure. She simply sees them as examples of her folly. It is the reader who arrives at the realization that they are the outcomes of her misjudgement and strong-headedness. In a similar way, Charlotte considers Kitty to be a person who has let her down. However, in *A Narrative* Kitty's appearances are always associated with Charlotte's general misery and misfortune. In her autobiography Charlotte mentions Richard Charke's name twice and in both instances, she voices her hopes that the birth of their baby would bring the husband back. In the first of these instances, Charke writes: "I was in Hopes that my being blest with a Child would, in some Degree, have surmounted that unconquerable Fondness for Variety, but 'twas all one; and, I firmly believe, nothing but the Age of *Methuselah*, could have made the least Alteration in his Disposition" (28). We understand however, that the presence of the "little Girl" was not enough to patch up the relationship of the husband and wife, and the baby starts life by frustrating her mother's hopes.

Charlotte introduces her daughter to *A Narrative* at a time when her fortunes had taken a decisively adverse turn. After the Licensing Act, she tries to run a puppet theatre and fails. Next, she marries Sacheverell, hoping to find sustenance, but this attempt at relative financial security proves to be Charlotte's undoing as at the death of her husband, she inherits nothing but debts, which she is wholly unable to pay. Consequently she is put in debtor's prison. Charlotte is recognized by "... a very handsome lac'd Hat [she] had on, being then, for some substantial Reasons, EN CAVALIER..." (Capitalisation Charke's) (47). Evidently, Charlotte was by then cross-dressing, by the bidding of her second husband, perhaps to escape the creditors. In the midst of this misery, we read of "the Child", and of how Charlotte sends her daughter word of her own whereabouts, and their meeting in jail, when her daughter comes to visit her, speechless with grief:



My poor Child, who was then but eight Years of Age, and whose sole Support was on (sic) her HAPLESS, FRIENDLESS MOTHER, knew not what was (sic) become of me, or where to seek me; and, with watchful Care, wore away the tedious Night, in painful Apprehension of what really had befallen me.

About Seven next Morning, I dispatched a Messenger to my poor little suffering Infant; who soon came to me, with her eyes over-flowed with Tears, and a Heart full of undissembled (sic) Anguish. She immediately threw her Head upon my Bosom, and remained in speechless Grief, with which I equally encountered her. For some time the Child was so entirely sensible of our Misfortunes, and of the Want of Means of being extricated from them, 'twas with Difficulty I soothed her into a Calm. (Capitalisation Charke's) (49)

Charlotte writes "... eight and thirty letters, some of which went where [she] thought NATURE might have put in HER CLAIM, but [she] could obtain no Answer..." (49). Her addressing some of the letters to members of her family bear witness to the fact that Charlotte never tires of expecting help from her family, and especially her father in the numerous scrapes she gets herself into. As is often the case, help arrives not from her family, but from elsewhere. It is the Covent Garden ladies, a tavern owner by the name of Mrs. Douglas, and a late Mrs. Hughes, who was known to sell and hire masquerade dresses and masks, that pay the necessary sum to get her out of debtor's prison. We learn from *A Narrative* that Charlotte's daughter seems to have fulfilled her expectations in acting as a messenger for her and she has been instrumental in bringing about Charlotte's release: "My poor little Wench was the melancholy Messenger, and neither eat or drank 'till she had faithfully discharged the trust I reposed in her" (49). Thus, we are told that it is the desperate child who dutifully takes Charlotte's eight and thirty letters to their destinations, and brings her mother the much-needed help.

Charlotte's episode of imprisonment is the only place where she expresses genuine concern for her daughter. She expresses her worries in the following manner: "[The] Child, ... might possibly have been despised only for being mine; and perhaps reduced to Beggary.... That my Relations, in such Extremity, though they were REGARDLESS OF ME, would have abandoned AN INNOCENT AND HAPLESS CHILD to that rigorous Fate my Fears suggested" (Capitalisation Charke's) (51). Charlotte is fearful that her family might disown her child, just like they had disowned her. This feeling of fellowship in the face of misery and adversity could account for the empathy she apparently feels towards her daughter at that particular moment.

When Charke is out of prison, she continues to rely on friends' help to support herself and her "fellow-sufferer", namely her daughter. Moreover, the child is ill and Charlotte blames her previous misfortune in bringing about her present illness about: "She, poor Child! was so deeply affected with the Malevolence of my Fortune, it threw her into a very dangerous Illness..." (51). Charlotte relates her daughter's illness thus:

I left the poor Girl one *Sunday*, to prog (sic) for her and myself, by pledging with an Acquaintance a beautiful Pair of Sleeve-Buttons, which I effected in about two Hours; and, on my Return, asking the Landlady how the Child did, having left her very much indisposed: She told me, Miss went up, about an Hour and Half ago, to put on some clean Linnen (sic); but, by her staying, she concluded she was (sic) lain down, having complained of being very sleepy before she went up. But, Oh! Heaven! How vast was my Grief and Surprize when I entered the Room, and found the poor little Soul stretched on the Floor, in strong Convulsion Fits; in which she had lain a considerable Time, and no Mortal near to give her the least Assistance (emphasis Charke's) (51).

However, the caring mother of the previous paragraph is soon replaced by the impotent despair of a cross-dressing woman, whose neither appearance nor behaviour is what is expected of a mother:

I took her up, and, overcome by strong Grief, immediately dropped her back on the Floor; which I wonder (sic) did not absolutely end her by the Force of the Fall, as in fact she was dead Weight. My screaming and her falling raised the House; and, in the Hurry of my distraction, I run into the Street, with my Shirt-Sleeves dangling loose about my hands, my wig standing on End. .... And proclaiming the sudden Death of my much-beloved Child, a Crowd soon gathered round me, and in the Violence of my distraction, instead of administering any necessary Help, wildly stood among the Mob to recount the dreadful Disaster. (52).

It is possible to posit that Charlotte's focus is her own grief rather than her daughter's condition. Further, the context of the daughter's illness is soon to shift to the mother's cross-dressing:

The Peoples (sic) Compassion was moved, 'tis true; but, as I happened not to be known to them, it drew them into Astonishment, to see the Figure of a young Gentleman, so extravagantly grieved for the Loss of a Child. As I appeared very young, they looked on it as an unprecedented Affection in a Youth, and began to deem me a Lunatick (sic), rather than (sic) that there was any Reality in what I said (52).

Thus, the severe illness and near death of the child is reduced to a farcical incident that reveals Charlotte's habit of cross-dressing and her success at it, as she is reportedly not detected by anyone except those who knew her intimately.

It should also be remarked that Charlotte never refers to her daughter by her name or even as her daughter, but as “child”, “poor Girl”, “poor child”, “little girl”, “poor little Wench”, or “little suffering infant”. Thus, Kitty is presented as an object of pity, a child born and raised in misery. But for two others incidents of hardship again related to her, we forget the existence of the daughter till the very end of *A Narrative*. The first mention is when Charlotte is sacked subsequent to losing her voice. There we learn that she “...was reduced to the Necessity of pledging, from Day to Day, either [her] own or [the] Child’s Cloathes (sic) for Support...” (69).

The second mention of the daughter again appears in the content of another pathetic incident. Charlotte is making and selling sausages to support herself and her daughter. Charlotte falls ill once more, and her daughter has to take care of the demanding job of selling sausages. Charlotte Charke explains the situation thus: “When I was brought so low, by my Illness, as to be disempowered to carry on my Business myself, I was forced to depend upon the infant Industry of my poor Child; whose Strength was not able to bear an equal Share of Fatigue, so that I consequently was obliged to suffer a considerable Deficiency, by the Neglect of my customers” (74). We are thus faced with another shortcoming of the daughter, her incapacity to carry on selling sausages and help support her mother during her illness.

The rest of the story unfolds in the following manner: After spending her last three pounds on the pork she uses to make sausages, Charlotte goes out to take some fresh air. Upon returning home, she discovers all had been devoured by a hungry cur, and she is bankrupt. According to Charlotte, this is one more misfortune she has to suffer, an event attesting to the despair imminent to her life: “The Child and I gap’d and star’d at each other; and, with a Despondency in our Faces, very natural on so deplorable an Occasion we sat down and silently conceived that starving must be the sad Event of this shocking Accident, having at that Time neither Meat, Money, nor Friends” (75).

In short, one cannot help but notice that Kitty’s appearances in *A Narrative* are almost always in connection with the illnesses, either of Charlotte’s or of her own. In other words, Charlotte refers

to her daughter only when she is relating the most distressing incidents of her life. Thus, it is possible to posit that in *A Narrative*, Charlotte equates her daughter with illness, and/or pathos.

After this incident of the hungry cur and the impending starvation, we almost forget the existence of Charlotte's daughter. She re-emerges in the story when Charlotte mentions her failure in choosing a spouse. As usual in *A Narrative*, the daughter is only the subtext to a larger issue. Charlotte attempts to put up a play once again and fails. The players she is unable to pay are from the troupe her daughter acts with. Hence, Charlotte re-introduces her daughter to the text, and this time she is referred as "Kitty" and not as "poor Girl" or "poor child", terms that drew attention to her status as the universal object of pity. Here, Charlotte sums up her daughter's present plight by way of dwelling on her marriage. According to Charlotte, Kitty had married "imprudently", and done so "contrary to [her mother's] Inclination" (124). By now, we know that Charlotte's mind is fertile with dreams and it does not surprise one to see that she has had her hopes and plans for the long ignored Kitty as well. We read:

Though I had no Fortune to give her, without any Partiality, I look on her a more advantageous a Match for a discreet Man, than a Woman who might bring one, and confound it in unnecessary Expences (sic), which I am certain *Kitty* will never do; and, had she met with as sober and reasonable a Creature as herself, in the few years they have had a Company, might have been worth a considerable Sum of Money, to have set them up in some creditable Business, that might have redounded more to their Quiet and Reputation.

But I fear that is as impossible to hope or expect, as 'twould (sic) be likely to unmarry (sic) them; which, had it been in my Power, should have been done the first Moment I heard of the unpleasing Knot's being tied (emphasis Charke's) (124).

Charlotte is extremely displeased with the husband her daughter has chosen for herself, wishing she could undo their marriage. Yet, she appears to be well aware of the fact that the eighteenth century marriage market was becoming more and more competitive, and that Kitty does not have much of a choice, being penniless, and with no connections. Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* briefly summarizes what he calls "the crisis in marriage" in the eighteenth century thus:

... women found it much more difficult to find a husband unless they could bring him a dowry. There is much evidence to suggest that marriage became a much more commercial matter in the eighteenth century than had previously been the case. Newspapers carried on marriage marts, with advertisements offering or demanding specified dowries and jointures....

At lower social levels there is also ample evidence to support the view of *Moll Flanders* that the marriage market had become 'unfavourable to our sex'. The hardships of poorer women were

most dramatically expressed by the sale of wives, at prices ranging, apparently, from sixpence to three and a half guineas. (Watt 148)

Notwithstanding the obvious financial disadvantages Kitty is subject to, Charlotte argues that Kitty's situation also has its advantages. For example, having lived without material comforts all her life, she would not have the inclination to spend much money, and as such, could prove to be a better wife than a woman who is used to luxury. Then, in her capacity as an economical wife, and one careful with the family finances, Charlotte dreams of Kitty and her imaginary husband managing a theatre company of their own and then investing the money they make in some other business, a business more creditable than the theatre. Late in her long career as a strolling actor/actress, Charlotte is aware of the dangers that follow the theatre world. It promises a disquiet life, one in which a person is likely to lose his/her reputation and be left destitute, with nothing but notoriety to accompany him/her.

Nevertheless, Charlotte's professed interest in Kitty and her well-being might be tainted with self-interest. Although she argues that the reason why she joins their company was "...notwithstanding [her] Dislike to her marriage, [she] wanted to be as near her [daughter] as [she] could..." (Charke 125), this act seems to be her last attempt at clutching to the theatre world. Here Charlotte does a onetime thing and actually complements her daughter. She writes that her daughter was a well-behaved girl, and both her private character and her public performance rendered her pleasing to the theatre audiences (125). Then Charlotte starts one of her diatribes, a diatribe similar to the one by which she advertised her sister Elizabeth's "house of entertainment". Her objective is to recommend her daughter to the managers of the Theatres Royal, the Drury Lane or Haymarket, mentioning that Kitty's talents are wasted in the roles she is playing with the strolling companies:

I humbly entreat to be believed, when, without Partiality, I aver her Genius would recommend her to a Station in either Theatre, if properly made use of, as she has an infinite Share of Humour, that calculates her for an excellent Low-Comedian; though she is obliged, having none equal to her Self, to appear in Characters in which her chief Merit consists in being positively a sensible Speaker (126).

Charlotte also shares with her readers her impressions about Kitty's acting ability. She says that she was "pleasingly surprised" by it, and begs her readers' pardon for speaking in praise of

someone so close to her. Later in the same section she discusses another performance of Kitty's. She explains why she was so delighted with Kitty's acting. She points to her daughter's "uncultivated Genius", and states that she "...had rather see her in Low-Comedy, as 'tis more agreeable to her Figure, and entirely so to the Oddity of her humourous (sic) Disposition..." (126). Thus, even while attempting to commend her daughter, Charlotte is drawing attention to Kitty's shortcomings as an actress. By referring to Kitty's lack of education, she not only assumes the status of an expert on the art of theatre, but she also finds it natural to patronize and criticize all, including her own daughter, who deal with this art form.

Charlotte also has an agenda in suggesting that Kitty would do well in low-comedy. She knows that it is not easy to get parts in established theatres, and low-comedy acted by mediocre companies might prove to be a solution for most actors. Charke continues thus:

... and I wish she was so settled, so to constantly play in that Walk, which is a very pleasing one, and most useful when Players come towards the Decline of Life: For when they have outlived the Bloom and Beauty of a Lady *Towly* or a *Monimia*, they may make very pleasing Figures in a Mrs. *Day* or a *Widow Lackit*..

I wish the Girl may take this friendly Hint, now she is young; as I am certain, in respect to her Years, she may, in all Probability, live long enough to make a considerable Figure in Characters of that Cast (emphasis Charke's) (126).

Charlotte leaves her daughter's company in a short while, because of the "impertinent" treatment she receives from her daughter's husband, and moves on to Bath, to start working as a prompter, another job Theophilus arranges for her. However, we soon learn that Charlotte does not stay long in Bath and returns to live with her daughter. Her second attempt to live with Kitty also proves to be a short lived one. Apparently, Kitty and her husband were not willing to keep Charlotte and Mrs. Brown with them. Thus, Kitty frustrates her mother's hopes by her unwillingness to provide Charlotte with redress in her hour of need. Charlotte tells her readers that she has started writing "Mr. *Dumont's* History". By then she is "...determined not to lead that uncomfortable Kind of Life any longer" (126). Apparently what Charlotte had in mind was to stop being a strolling actress, and have Kitty and her husband support her and her friend Mrs. Brown for a short while. Her plans receive no warm reception from the young couple. She says that:

This they either did not, or were not willing to believe, notwithstanding my frequent Repetition of it; and though I promised to make them happy with what might revert to me through my little Labours, they injudiciously conceived I was doing them an Injury, when, as I shall answer to Heaven, I intended to turn equally to their Account as to my own: But a want of understanding and good Mind on the one Part, and a too implicit Regard and Obedience on the other, led them both into Error they had better have avoided (136).

Thus, Charlotte tries to persuade her daughter and son-in-law into keeping them a while longer with them. Nonetheless, Charlotte's professed intention to share the revenue she was hoping to gain from the sale of her novel with them was not sufficient to convince Kitty and her husband, and the two women are asked to leave. Hence, it is possible to argue that Kitty is not presented in a favourable light because she has failed Charlotte in acting as a source of relief in her late life.

However, Charlotte, who is always protective of her family, again tries to put the blame of her mistreatment on someone else. For example, while talking about her childhood, her mother was blameless for constantly keeping Charlotte away from herself, as she wanted what was best for Charlotte. Her father is drawn by Charlotte as a compassionate figure, whose judgement was unfortunately clouded by malicious tongues, Catherine's being the foremost. The un-forgiven Charlotte is ready to whitewash all the members of her family, except Catherine, the Goneril of their family tragedy, whom Charlotte argues should repent before it is too late (66). Hence, while Charlotte feels no inhibition in expressing her disappointment with her daughter, she is still trying to foreground her husband's bad influence on her. She refers to Kitty's divided loyalties, to her mother and to her husband, and maintains:

I would not have the World believe, notwithstanding my Aversion to the Choice my foolish Girl has made, that I would not, in all reasonable Respects, have every Action of her Life correspondent with the necessary Duty of a Wife, which, I am certain, never can or should exempt her from that she owes me; who must, while we both exist, be undoubtedly her Mother. (136)

Thus, Charlotte is trying to protect her, putting the blame on the husband. Here although Charlotte is arguing that the duty of a wife should not exempt her daughter from the duty she owes her mother, she is still determined to protect her daughter and, extend to her the forgiveness she never received from her father, Colley Cibber. Charlotte is also able to find one more culprit besides her son-in-law, the morally debilitating life led in a strolling company: "Since the pitiful Villainy of Strollers could reach one so nearly (sic) as one's own Blood, I thought it then high

Time indeed to disclaim them: Though, I am well assured, the Girl would not have been guilty of the Crime of depriving her Mother of the Morsel of Bread she struggled for, had she not been enforced to it by a blind Obedience to an inconsiderable Fool” (137). Thus, Charlotte leaves her daughter and the life she had led on the road with the strolling companies, a life she detested, at one point calling it “Vagabondizing” behind her and continues her struggle to become a writer (116).

#### **IV. 6. Charlotte Charke and Mrs. Brown - or Mr. and Mrs. Brown**

In her life of rambling and hardship one person seems to have accompanied Charlotte Charke in all her ordeals. After the episode of the hungry cur which devours the sausages, and the ensuing bankruptcy, Charlotte receives help from an unexpected quarter:

... Grief was soon solved by the good Nature of a young Woman, who gave a friendly Invitation to us both, and though not in the highest Affluence, supported myself and Child for some Time, without any View or Hopes of a Return, which has since established a lasting Friendship between us, as I received more Humanity from her Indigence, than I could obtain even a Glimpse of from those, whose FORTUNES I had a more ample Right to expect a Relief from (Capitalisation Charke’s) (Charke 75).

Robert Rehder is of the opinion that this “young woman” is most probably Mrs. Brown. (Rehder xliii) From this time on in *A Narrative* Charlotte talks of a young woman with whom she has been very close. This “young woman” is referred as “my friend”, or “my worthy Friend”. Towards the end of *A Narrative* however, we are introduced to a “Mrs. Brown” whom we are told has been with her and supported her all through her misadventures. Whenever Charlotte talks about Mrs. Brown in *A Narrative*, her tone is always tender. She never fails to express her heartfelt appreciation of the support Mrs. Brown has provided her in her time of need. We understand that, Mrs. Brown has stuck with Charlotte in the face of all adversities and that they lived in the same house. Interestingly enough, midway through *A Narrative*, the “I” of Charlotte becomes “we”, coupling Charlotte with Mrs. Brown. After Charlotte decides to leave the strolling companies, she seems to be so closely linked with Mrs. Brown that her story becomes the story of the two.



Robert Rehder adds to his introduction to Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, an article written by the printer Samuel Whyte for the *The Monthly Review*. The article was written in 1760, probably after Charlotte Charke's death the same year. The article relates the impressions of the author, when he visited Charke in her house with the intention of publishing her novel *Henry Dumont*. We can date the visit to the year 1755 or 1756, as Rehder argues *The History of Mr Henry Dumont* was published in the same year as *A Narrative*, whereas Nussbaum and Straub place its publication to the year 1756. Whyte in his article depicts a woman who opens the door of Charke's dwelling to him and his bookseller friend in the following manner: "a tall, meagre, ragged figure, with a blue apron, indicating, what otherwise was doubtful, that it was a female before us; a perfect model for the Copper Captain's tattered landlady, that deplorable exhibition of the fair sex in the comedy *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. With a torpid voice and hungry smile, she desired us to walk in" (Whyte, qtd. in Rehder xlvi). Whyte proceeds by describing their encounter with Charke, at the end of which Charke demands thirty guineas for her novel. At this point Whyte remarks: "The squalid handmaiden, who had been an attentive listener, stretched forward her tawny length of neck with an eye of anxious expectation!" (xlix). Rehder argues that Charke's poverty as depicted in Whyte's article was so extreme that it was not likely that she would be able to afford the services of a maid, as Whyte's remarks of "landlady" and "handmaiden" suggest. Thus, Rehder concludes that the person described was possibly Mrs. Brown. Rehder writes:

Whyte may be offering us a glimpse of Mrs. Brown. The two friends have been through so much together that it is not unreasonable to suppose that they continued to live together after their return to London. This would explain her 'attentive' listening to the negotiations over the novel and her 'anxious expectation'. As Charke's friend and partner, it would be her livelihood as well that is in the balance, as her 'hungry smile' also suggests. The adjectives mark only small nuances, but do seem to present her as other than an illiterate and curious servant. That she remains throughout the reading (which would have taken several hours if the whole manuscript was read) is also an indication that she may have had a different status (Rehder 1).

Indeed, if Mrs. Brown is a real woman and not just Charlotte's "other" or "... a virtual duality of Charke's bifurcated voice..." as Polly Stevens Fields in her essay "Charlotte Charke and the Liminality of Bi-Genderings: A Study of Her Canonical Works" claims (11), we learn that she has accompanied Charlotte almost all her adult life, from the day she takes Charlotte and her little daughter into her house to her old age.

It is possible to argue that Charlotte Charke is not very generous in expressing her appreciation for the support various people give her. The only exception in this respect is her sister Elizabeth. Her brother Theophilus, whose assistance on and off continues all her life, gets to be thanked only once. Her other friends who help her in her misdemeanours are seldom appreciated. Nonetheless, Charlotte uses every opportunity to show her appreciation of Mrs. Brown and her willingness to support her in sickness and health through the long years of strolling together. For example she tells of the time when she was "... taken violently ill with a nervous Fever and Lowness of Spirits, that continued... for upwards of three Years (Charke 99) and when the illness finally abates, she and Mrs. Brown go riding, in accordance with the doctor's orders. At that point in *A Narrative* Charlotte takes great pains to express her gratitude to Mrs. Brown. She thanks her for the disinterested care she had provided her with in the following manner: "... my Friend, the good-natured Gentlewoman who commiserated poor *Torrismond's* Misfortune, and to whom I am most infinitely and sincerely obliged for her tender Care in nursing me in three Years Illness, without repining at her Fatigue, which was uninterrupted, and naturally fixes on me a lasting grateful Sense of the Favour" (99). In this incident although the real intention of Charlotte is to relate the story of their being befriended by two men whom they take to be their benefactors, but who prove to be "Gamblers and House-breakers", she does not miss the opportunity to extend her thanks profusely to Mrs. Brown (101).

Mrs. Brown's presence is also instrumental in helping Charlotte to face the other scrapes and difficulties she gets herself into. For example Mrs. Brown is the trusted person who delivers Charlotte's failed letter of reconciliation to Colley Cibber and returns with the unopened letter (86). Although nowhere does Charlotte dwell on the nature of their friendship, it is clear that Charlotte is the one who decides as to what course of action to take but because they seem to be inseparable, they live through the consequences of these decisions together. From time to time Charlotte implies that the reason behind the many ills that befall them is directly or indirectly herself, and Mrs. Brown is only a passive victim of the circumstances. This seems to increase her sense of indebtedness to "her friend". This is probably why she is so aggravated by the treatment her friend receives from her son-in-law at the time she is asked to leave Kitty's company. Charlotte remarks that her friend "... had been as often and equally insulted, by the little

Insignificant” man again because of her (127). In these sections of *A Narrative*, it appears that Charlotte is always the one who is taking the decisions and her friend passively agrees. By the end of the autobiography however, it is possible to see that the hectic moves that sum up Charlotte’s life were not always approved by Mrs. Brown. It is also true that Mrs. Brown does not assert herself and does nothing other than chide Charlotte for what she does. For example while trying to rationalize the decision she had taken to leave the prompting job Theophilus had got for her in Bath, Charlotte admits that her friend had disapproved of her act. She writes: “My Friend, as she had great Cause, began, though in a tender Manner, to reproach me for having left Bath...” (135). But neither in this episode nor in others is Mrs. Brown able to impose her views on Charlotte.

Towards the end of *A Narrative* Charlotte repeatedly voices Mrs. Brown’s disappointment at her behaviour. While relating another of her calamities for example, she tells of her decision to “... turn Pastry-Cook and Farmer; and, without a Shilling in the Universe, or really a positive knowledge where to get one...” (116). Therefore Charlotte fails again and further aggravates their desperate state. But instead of expanding on why she failed, she goes into great pains to ask her friend’s pardon for not taking her good advice in time. We are told that Mrs. Brown had seen the futility of the enterprise from the very start and cautioned her against it. In relating this episode in Charlotte is trying to make amends to her:

I must do her the Justice to say she advised me to forgoe (sic) my Resolution, and set before me all the Inconveniencies (sic) I afterwards laboured under: But she found me so determined, she dropped her Argument; and, being of an obliging Temper, forwarded the repairing of the house...  
...I not only involved myself, but the Gentlewoman, whom I have before-mentioned, that travelled with me, in the same needless and unreasonable Difficulties; for which I think myself bound in Honour to ask her Pardon, as I really was the Author of many Troubles, from my inconsiderate Folly, which nothing but sincere Friendship, and an uncommon Easiness of Temper, could have inspired her either to have brooked or to have forgiven (116).

We know that Charlotte has taken up one profession after another all through her life, a habit that goes back to her early teens when she would play at being a gardener or a doctor. In *A Narrative* Mrs. Brown appears to be the voice of reason and common sense as opposing this whimsical aspect of Charlotte’s character, her rashness, her “hurries” and “Folly”.

Although in retrospect Charlotte is always apologetic of her behaviour, at each instance she also seems to be determined to prove herself right to Mrs. Brown. Turning a deaf ear to her friend's protestations, Charlotte rents an unfurnished house, which will serve as the patisserie. She soon realizes that the prospect facing them is bleak, but she will not own it: "... I was secretly chagrined at my Exploit, but did not dare to make the least Discovery of it to Mrs. *Brown*, who had very justifiable Reasons to reproach me for an Indiscretion she had prudently taken much Pains to prevent" (116). When she is able to sell her pastry and earn twenty Shillings, she is delighted in thinking that she has proven to her friend that she was right in her decision: "I then began to triumph greatly at my Success, and thought it my Turn to upbraid my Friend, for having reproached me for leaving the Stage" (117). Charlotte is so excited by her success that she immediately elaborates on the present enterprise, deciding to buy a field of grass and a horse and thus enlarge the business, and carry the goods to the neighbouring markets. However, Mrs. Brown interferes again and this time she succeeds in "... wisely dissuad[ing] [her] from such a mad Scheme" (117).

The fix Charlotte gets them into by her impersonation of a pastry-cook and her further resuming the same course in a harbour town named Pill, is eventually resolved through Mrs. Brown, or rather by help of the money she inherits from her uncle. When the time comes to receive her legacy, it is again Charlotte, and not Mrs. Brown who has the initiative to act. We read: "On the Receipt of the Letter I showed it to the Landlord, hoping he would lend me a Guinea to bear my Charges to Mrs. *Brown's* Aunt, who lives in *Oxfordshire*, where I was to go receive her Legacy, which was a genteel one, and I should have left her as a Hostage 'till my Return" (120). In other words, it is Charlotte who goes to receive the legacy which is not hers, and Mrs. Brown who is the true inheritor is left as Hostage. Time and again Charlotte declares her distress at "... having unfortunately drawn [her] Friend to be a melancholly (sic) Partaker of [her] Sufferings" (122), but interestingly enough when she is unable to pay the actors from her daughter's company, she pledges Mrs. Brown's clothes and not her own: "... I was obliged to strip my Friend of the only decent Gown she had, and pledge it to the Players" (124).

Philip Baruth in his article entitled "Who is Charlotte Charke" dwells at length on the relationship between Charlotte Charke and Mrs. Brown, emphasizing the fact that in *A Narrative*, Charlotte

reveals herself as the active “male”, taking the male prerogative in the relationship. Baruth also quotes Lillian Faderman who maintains that: “Charlotte depicts them in a classic ‘butch/femme’ relationship without the slightest trace of self-consciousness. ‘Mrs. Brown’ leaves all the decisions to her, shows her deference in all things (even when it is apparent that because of Charke’s bad choices they will go hungry for a while)” (Faderman, qtd. in Baruth 46). Charlotte’s futile attempt at becoming a pastry-cook, and its consequences to herself and Mrs. Brown serve to prove Faderman’s comment right. In discussing Charlotte Charke’s treatment of Mrs. Brown in *A Narrative*, Baruth claims that Charlotte is impersonating the countless male characters she had assumed in her acting career and becomes “the thoughtless and henpecked husband” (Baruth 47). Baruth further comments that by taking over the legacy that rightfully belonged to Mrs. Brown, Charlotte is doing exactly what an Englishman living in the eighteenth century was allowed to do by the law, that is assuming total control over her wife’s finances. Ian Watt maintains that the legal position of women in the eighteenth century was to a large extent governed by the patriarchal concepts of Roman law. Watt explains that in that century “A woman’s property ... became her husband’s absolutely on marriage” (Watt 147). With Charlotte Charke assuming the part of the dominant male in the relationship, Baruth summarizes Mrs. Brown’s plight in the following words: “In this way, Mrs. Brown becomes an absolutely passive partner, creating an oddly stylized or exaggerated portrait of the imbalance of power in the traditional heterosexual union” (Baruth 48).

Notwithstanding the fact that Mrs. Brown is the only person to whom Charlotte tries to show her appreciation for the support she has received from her, and to whom she is constantly apologetic, in one respect Mrs. Brown fares worse than Charlotte’s second husband, John Sacheverell. Sacheverell’s name remains unpronounced by Charlotte throughout *A Narrative*, on the pretext that Charlotte had promised to conceal his identity. Yet it was still possible to disclose his identity from church records, and the theatre bills on which Charlotte appears as Mrs. Sacheverell. As for Mrs. Brown, we are not even able to learn her first name or ascertain if Mrs. Brown was her real name or not. It is possible to posit that spending a lifetime with Charlotte, who had a number of reasons to hide her own identity and name, Mrs. Brown’s name may also be fake.

Further, one is tempted to assume that in the portrayal of Mrs Brown, Charlotte was fashioning herself as this woman's significant other. If that was the case, then, Charlotte was probably forging an identity which would serve a number of purposes: to dodge the creditors not only in appearance but also in name, to strengthen her male identity in fashioning herself as a husband; and in a conscious or unconscious gesture to expose her bisexual identity. Interestingly enough, in his introduction to Charke's *A Narrative*, Rehder points to the fact that Charlotte's hated eldest sister, Catherine, was also Mrs. Brown, since she married a Colonel James Brown on 5 February 1719 (Rehder xliii). As such, Charlotte's preference of the name Mr. Brown would appear highly complex and ironic. Rehder suggests that it might be an attempt on the part of Charlotte to identify with her sister who had supplanted her in the affections of her father.

Throughout *A Narrative*, Charlotte's reaction to her chosen name and identity is ambiguous. After her imprisonment for debt she talks about a lady of fortune who falls in love with her in her assumed identity as Mr. Brown. She writes: "I appeared as Mr. *Brown*, (A NAME MOST HATEFUL TO ME NOW, FOR REASONS THE TOWN SHALL HAVE SHORTLY LEAVE TO GUESS AT)..." (emphasis and capitalisation Charke's) (56). Likewise, she expands on the merits of her adopted name in the episode where she is still hounded by her creditors: "... I then taking on me THAT DARLING NAME OF BROWN, which was a very great Help to my Concealment, and indeed the only ADVANTAGE I EVER RECEIVED FROM IT, OR THOSE WHO HAVE A BETTER CLAIM TO IT" (Capitalisation Charke's) (77). This comes right after Mrs. Brown takes her in together with her daughter. However, in her usual manner Charlotte is not disclosing any clues as to the reasons why she had adopted that particular name, but is ascertaining the fact that changing her name had helped keep the creditors at bay. Yet, the two references to the name Brown reveal the fact that Charlotte definitely associated her adopted name with that of her hated sister Catherine's.

Rehder explains that Mrs. Brown is indeed "... after the author herself, the most prominent character in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, and yet ... [she] remains a shadowy figure..." (Rehder xliii). Her identity, her exact relation with Charlotte, and even her name remain among the unresolved mysteries to this day. In short, although Mrs. Brown poses as

Charlotte's lifetime fellow sufferer, her conspicuous absence in *A Narrative*, accounts for the elusiveness of her private life and person.

#### **IV. 7. On the Fringe of Both Sexes: Charlotte Charke's Cross-Dressing**

Charlotte Charke's relation with Mrs. Brown as depicted in *A Narrative*, is a long-term relationship in which Charke clearly takes the male prerogative. Coupled by Charlotte's cross-dressing, this liaison inevitably provides the grounds for a discussion of her sexual orientation. Not surprisingly, a survey of the critical work produced on Charlotte Charke reveals an abundance of texts commenting on her sexual orientation; whether or not she was a lesbian, heterosexual or bisexual, as well as her probable reasons for cross-dressing. Philip Baruth in his article "Who Is Charlotte Charke" provides us with a brief synopsis of these works. We are told, for example that Lynne Friedli claims Charke "identified, or wished to identify herself as strongly masculine" (Friedli, qtd. in Baruth 48). Sidonie Smith thinks that Charke "... does not want to be a woman" (Smith, qtd. in Baruth 49). For Smith both her cross-dressing and her relationship with Mrs. Brown point at "...a deep psychological need to inhabit not only male prerogatives but a male body" (49). Baruth however, also points to the presence of those critics who argue vigorously that Charke was heterosexual, and that she "...merely used male clothing as an antreé to a less dangerous and more lucrative male world" (Baruth 49). One such critic is Sallie Minter Strange who maintains that working as a male meant "better working conditions and more sociability" (Strange, qtd. in Baruth 49). Strange also points out that male outlook must have helped Charke to avoid the sexual abuses that an actress was bound to encounter in those days. Another author who suggests that Charke's cross-dressing was not related to her sexual preferences is Fidelis Morgan who had in fact written a biography of Charke in 1988. According to Morgan, Charke had to select certain events of her life and develop them into a coherent narrative, and because she was well known for breech-parts, she was "more or less forced to play up those elements of her that cast new light on her notoriety" (Morgan, qtd. in Baruth 50). Baruth also refers to the more pragmatic reasons Morgan foregrounds while trying to explain Charke's cross-dressing: A male façade protects Charlotte from being arrested for debt or prostitution, and it makes her eligible for male employment (50).

Baruth ends this section of his article by reiterating the opinion of all contemporary critics who claim that that “the answer to amazing riddle of Charlotte Charke.... shall never be resolved” (Peavy, qtd. in Baruth 50). On the other hand, he is also of the opinion that the question of Charke’s cross-dressing must be addressed, because she brings it up many times in *A Narrative* insisting all along that her reasons for doing so must remain secret. Baruth writes: “Charke incites and fosters curiosity – a curiosity that assures her an avid readership – and guides that curiosity into speculation suited to her current enterprise of public recuperation. In a roundabout way, by honouring the dead and sainted ‘Gentleman’ Charke claims a patriarchal absolution for her ‘former madness’” (Baruth 51). Thus, according to Baruth Charke is using a very shrewd rhetorical tactic in arguing that she was cross-dressing by the bidding of her second husband and because of her promise to him she could not disclose her reasons for so doing.

Jean Marsden discusses Charlotte Charke’s lifetime habit of cross-dressing from a different point of view. In “Charlotte Charke and the Cibbers: Private Life as Public Spectacle”, Marsden maintains that theatricality informs the lives and life narratives of all the Cibbers, Charlotte Charke, Theophilus Cibber and Colley Cibber. She contends that Charke in her autobiography creates an identity that is “fundamentally performative” and that the keys to her cross-dressing can be found in “Charke’s treatment of life as performance and her need to market this life to a reading public” (Marsden 74-75). Marsden writes:

Eighteenth century readers were clearly fascinated by cross-dressing and Charke deliberately calls attention to her transvestitism in order to situate her work within the context of other popular narratives of cross-dressed women.... Rather than trying to *be* a man, Charke is *playing* the man. For her, the sexes are defined not by physical difference but by costume: masculinity is synonymous with periwig and breeches, femininity with skirts and needles.... Thus, “playing the man” becomes only one role in her repertoire, one whose prominence owes much to her contemporary interest in female transvestitism (Emphasis Marsden’s) (Marsden 75-76).

Thus, according to Marsden, cross-dressing is Charke’s one role among many, and the sheer amount of space she devotes to it in *A Narrative* is dictated by the tastes of her audience for breech parts not only on stage but also on the printed page. In this view Marsden is supported by Straub and Wanko, who also consider Charke’s cross-dressing as performative. Nussbaum on the other hand sees cross-dressing as a “positive example of subversion” in Charke’s character (Nussbaum, qtd. in Marsden 81). Interestingly enough, Smith and Mackie approach the subject



from a different angle. They consider Charke's cross-dressing as neither subversive, nor a rebellious act but one that is complicit with male dominant values in the society (Smith, and Mackie, qtd. in Marsden 81).

The scanty information we get from Charke's *A Narrative* regarding her private life is indeed a curious mix, and it appears that Charke was apparently on the fringe of both sexes. What Charke does impart to us in *A Narrative* is that she had been married twice, that she cross-dressed on and off stage, and that she spent some twenty odd years in the company of another woman, whom she frequently refers to as her friend. However, later in *A Narrative*, she calls her Mrs. Brown, a name which is particularly interesting considering the fact that Charke tells us that at times she fashions herself as Mr. Charles Brown. Throughout *A Narrative* Charke reveals as little as possible of her self and she never discloses her reasons for her actions. This is also true for her attitude to cross-dressing.

The very first anecdote Charke shares with her audience in *A Narrative* is her dressing up in her father's clothes at the age of four. She gives us her reasons for this uncommon preference in the following words: "As I have promis'd to conceal nothing that might raise a Laugh, I shall begin with a former Specimen of my former Madness, when I was but four Years of Age" (Charke 10). According to Charke, she is relating this anecdote of her early life for no reason other than to make her audience laugh. Her comment that she has promised to conceal nothing that might raise a laugh is very ironic when we look at *A Narrative* in its entirety. Because Charke does reveal next to nothing about herself although she promises not to "...conceal any Error, which I now rather sigh to reflect on..." (8). However, it is possible to argue that Charke keeps her word, and discloses those things that might raise a laugh, which gives her the opportunity to keep the sober facts and reasons of her life hidden.

Charke refers to her story of cross-dressing at the age of four as a "former madness", which points to the fact that the narrator is the possessor of a reformed self who is looking back and writing the life story of a much different self. Charke's story runs thus:

Having, even then, a passionate Fondness for a Perriwig (sic), I craw'd out of Bed one Summer's Morning at Twickenham, where my Father had Part of a House and Gardens for the Season, and

taking into my small Pate, that by Dint of a Wig and Waistcoat, I should be the perfect Representative of my Sire, I crept softly into the Servants-Hall, where I had the Night before espied all Things in Order, to perpetrate the happy Design I had framed for the next Morning's Expedition. Accordingly I paddled down Stairs, taking with me my Shoes, Stockings and little Dimity Coat; which I artfully contrived to pin up, as well as I could, to supply the Want of a Pair of Breeches. By the Help of a long Broom, I took down a Waistcoat of my Brother's, and an enormous bushy Tie-wig of my Father's, which entirely enclos'd my Head and Body, with the Knots of the Ties thumping my little Heels as I march'd along, with slow and solemn Pace. The Covert of hair in which I was conceal'd, with the Weight of a monstrous Belt and large Silver-hilted Sword, that I could scarce drag along, was a vast impediment in my Procession: And, what still added to the other Inconveniences I labour'd under, was whelming myself under one of my Father's large Beaver-hats, laden with Lace, as thick and as broad as a Brickbat. Being thus accoutred, I began to consider that 'twould be impossible for me to pass for Mr. *Cibber* in Girl's Shoes, therefore took an Opportunity to slip out of Doors after the Gardener, who went to his Work, and roll'd myself into a dry Ditch, which was as deep as I was high; and, in this Grotesque Pigmy-State, walk'd up and down the Ditch bowing to all who came by me. But, behold, the Oddity of my Appearance soon assembled a Croud (sic) about me; which yielded me no small Joy, as I conceiv'd their Risibility on this Occasion to be Marks of Approbation, and walk'd myself into a Fever, in the happy Thought of being taken for the 'Squire. .... The Drollery of my Figure render'd it impossible, assisted by the Fondness of both Father and Mother, to be angry with me; but alas! I was borne off on the Footman's Shoulders, to my Shame and Disgrace, and forc'd into my proper Habiliments (10-11).

According to Charke, her reasons for cross-dressing are her ever-present fondness for male clothes, and most importantly her obsession to look like her father or be/ become her father. Leaving aside psychoanalytical explanations, this clearly reveals Charke's fascination by her father who becomes a role model for her early on. We know that Charke follows him to stage and then perhaps following his lead, the daughter of the poet laureate becomes an author herself.

The first time we read of an adult Charke in male attire is right after she tells of her second marriage and the ensuing debts that cause her to be thrown in prison. Charke tells us that her hat was her undoing as she was recognized by it: "... a very handsome lac'd Hat I had on, being then, for some substantial Reasons, EN CAVALIER..." (Capitalisation Charke's) (47). This brings to mind the fact that Charke was cross-dressing, by the bidding of her second husband, perhaps to escape the creditors. Next, as Charke relates the ladies of Covent Garden that come to her aid, she writes that they have come "...for the Relief of poor Sir *Charles*..." which is a clear indication that she was known to her friends in her male garb (Emphasis Charke's) (48). Even if her main objective was to dodge the creditors, what is clear is that Charke must have been cross-dressing for some time before.

Another short anecdote, shortly following this one reveals once and again that “being recognized” was what Charke dreaded most. In her usual secretive manner, Charke offers no explanation as to why she was reduced from being a much sought after actress to one seeking one-night employment at theatres. However, we know that during her jobless years, The Licensing Act had taken effect and that led to Charke’s imminent unemployment. After one such night of acting, Charke changes clothes with another person to return home unrecognised:

When the play (which was, in fact, A FARCE TO ME) was ended, I thought it mighty proper to stay ‘till the Coast was clear, that I might carry off myself and Guinea securely: But, in order to effect it, I changed Cloaths (sic) with a Person of low Degree, whose happy Rags, and the kind Covert of Night, secured me from the Dangers I might have otherwise encountered. (Capitalisation Charke’s) (55-56)

Although we are not told of the dangers awaiting her, we may safely presume that the dangers Charke is alluding to could be the creditors or the authorities enforcing the Licensing Act, and in both cases if caught Charke would have faced a sentence in prison.

If her cross-dressing was allowing Charke to go out at night and seek employment, it was also providing her with fresh anecdotes, the nature of which helped Charke to promote the sales of *A Narrative*. As told elsewhere, one of the seven subtitles Charke uses in the table of contents to her autobiography is her “being belov’d by a Lady of great Fortune, who intended to marry her” (3). In describing the young heiress who falls in love with her, Charke offers us another lead as to why she was cross-dressing:

Notwithstanding my Distresses, the Want of Cloaths (sic) was not amongst the Number. I appeared as *Mr. Brown*, ... in a very genteel Manner; and not making the least Discovery of my Sex by my Behaviour, ever endeavouring to keep up to the well-bred Gentleman, I became, as I may most properly term it, the unhappy Object of love in a young Lady... (56).

This we can read as another indication that Charke required male clothing to go out and mix in the society. Male clothing, which was probably instrumental in her earning a living, almost gets her a wife. Charke argues that she “... received the Information with infinite Concern; not more in regard to [herself], than from the poor Lady’s Misfortune, in placing her Affection on an improper Object...” (56-57). We understand that the lady had seen Charke on stage and fallen in love with her, and sends a letter to her inviting her to tea. Charke accepts the invitation and

recounts her reasons thus: “I own I felt a tender Concern, and resolved within myself to wait on her; and by honestly confessing who I was, kill or cure her Hopes of me for ever” (57). When Charke and the young lady are alone, Charke discloses her identity, as “...the youngest Daughter of Mr. *Cibber*...” (58), and does her best to console the young woman. Charke’s colleagues from theatre, who had informed Charke of the amours of the lady, are apparently aware of the fact that an interview between the two women had taken place, and were waiting to hear the latest news. Charke writes:

On my Return Home, the Itinerant-Troop all assembled round me, to hear what had passed between the Lady and me ----- when we were to celebrate the Nuptials?----- Besides many other impertinent, stupid Questions; some offering, agreeable to their villainous Dispositions, as the Marriage they suppos’d would be a Secret, to supply my Place in the Dark, to conceal the Fraud: Upon which I look’d at them very sternly, and, with the Contempt they deserved, demanded to know what Action of my Life had been so very monstrous, to excite them to think me capable of one so cruel and infamous? (59).

Although Charke was trying to promote the sales of *A Narrative* by the promise of “Her adventures in Mens (sic) Cloaths (sic), and being belov’d by a Lady of great Fortune, who intended to marry her” (3), she is also trying to clear any stigma that might be attached to her character because of this episode with the young woman. After declaring twice that the only reason she met the young woman was out of concern for her, Charke is trying to disperse any doubts of a secret marriage that might have taken place between herself and the heiress. Furthermore, Charke insists she would take part in no fraud. Nussbaum in *The Autobiographical Subject* maintains that same sex marriages were not unheard of in the eighteenth century, and provides a number of examples, which she argues Charke would have been familiar with:

Susannah Centlivre lived for many years dressed as a man, and a woman named Sally Paul, according to the *Monthly Review* (1760), was brought before the magistrate for being married to a woman. Mary Hamilton, also known as “George”, came to trial in 1746 for transvestism and marriage to another woman. The Hamilton case probably inspired Fielding’s *The Female Husband*, a fictional history depicting Mary Hamilton’s invented sexual exploits in masquerade and her threat to sexual difference (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 198).

Thus, in trying to defend her character, Charke has more at stake than simply her reputation. We know that her lifelong nightmare was being put in jail, where she ends up twice, and same sex marriage was a criminal offence. Nevertheless, the adjectives “monstrous” and “infamous” that

she uses to describe such a liaison may be taken as an indication of the way she regards lesbian relationships which she might be accused of and she is clearly trying to denounce. It is possible to argue that throughout *A Narrative* Charke is recounting a number of rumours that were circulating about her, such as the highwayman incident or her becoming a fishwife, and each time in the process of relating these rumours, she is trying defend herself, and set right the opinion of the public. Considered in this light, her protestations against a fraudulent lesbian marriage might be a covert attempt to defend her character against such imputations. Whatever her actions or her reasons for those actions might be, it is clear that the reformed and repentant self Charke constructs in *A Narrative* is appalled by the suggestion of a lesbian liaison, and is readily defending her character against such implications.

The young rich heiress is not the only woman who falls in love with Charke in men's garb. Charlotte Charke relates another similar incident further on in *A Narrative*. This time, the woman who chooses Charke as the object of her desire is her boss' kinswoman, Mrs. Dorr and the incident occurs while Charke is working as a waiter/waitress at an inn. It is again a maid who acts as the go between. Charke does not disclose her identity to the maid, but impersonates a love-sick husband still mourning the loss of his wife, as well as a loving father who would not let her daughter suffer at the hands of a step mother. Thus she refuses the offer of marriage saying: "I positively assured her I would not, for I would not put it in the Power of a Mother-in-Law to use my Child ill; and that I had so much Regard, as I pretended, to the Memory of her Mother, I resolved never to enter into Matrimony a second Time" (85). Although Charke fabricates such an elaborate tale to keep her identity hidden, her true identity is disclosed to Mrs. Dorr by a third party. Despite the fact that she is informed of Charke's true gender the woman confronts Charke and insists on calling her a man. We read:

In the Interim Somebody happened to come, who hinted that I was a Woman; upon which, Madam, to my great Surprise, attacked me with insolently presuming to say she was in Love with me, which I assured her I never had the least Conception of. *No truly; I believe*, said she, *I should hardly be 'namour'd WITH ONE OF MY OWN Sect*: Upon which I burst into a Laugh, and took the Liberty to ask her, if she understood what she said? This threw the offended Fair into an absolute Rage, and our Controversy lasted for some time; but, in the End, I brought in Vindication of my own Innocence, the Maid to Disgrace, who had uncalled for trumped up so ridiculous a Story (Capitalisation and emphasis Charke's) (85-86).

Again we may read this episode as an attempt on the part of Charke to disperse any implications of homosexuality. Since the narrator goes on to give an account of what follows, how Mrs. Dorr pursues her to her house and ironically sees her again in male garb:

Mrs. *Dorr* still remained incredulous, in regard to my being a Female; and though she afterwards paid me a Visit, with my worthy Friend ... she was not to be convinced, I happening that Day to be in the Male-Habit, on Account of playing a Part for a poor Man, and obliged to find my own Cloaths (sic) (86).

That Charke was caught cross-dressing even in her own house comes as a surprise to the reader. However, Charke argues that she was to play a male part the same day, and that she was dressed for the act. In other words, Charke gives a full account of this incident to her readers to display her innocence of any insinuations. This explanation also points to the fact that Charke cross-dressed only outside, but switched back to female clothes once she was home. If we may take Charke for her word, then her cross-dressing self becomes a persona that she adopts for the consumption of the outside world, a persona she discards once she is home. We may also presume that Charke is able to find employment in only traditional male jobs since she loses these jobs when her sex is disclosed. Her job as a valet to a certain peer is a clear example of how she is dismissed once her identity comes into the open:

... there came two supercilious Coxcombs, who wanting Discourse and Humanity, hearing that I was his Lordship's Gentleman, made me their unhappy Theme, and took the Liberty to arraign his Understanding for entertaining one of an improper Sex in a Post of that Sort. His Lordship's Argument was, for a considerable Time, supported by the Strength of his Pity for an unfortunate Wretch, who had never given him the least Offence: But the pragmatistical (sic) Blockheads teized (sic) him at last into a Resolution of discharging me the next day, and I was once again reduced to my Scenes of Sorrow and Desolation (71).

As discussed earlier, the eighteenth century job market was one, which normally excluded women, and the options open to women were chiefly prostitution and begging. Paul Langford posits that work suitable for middle class women had become very hard to obtain in this century, and that "... the diminishing opportunities for respectable female employment, above the ranks of ordinary labourers and artisans, were much lamented" (Langford 110-111). Langford continues:

Such affectations did not conceal the diminishing role of women in practical and useful enterprises. 'The middling order of women', noted the clerical essayist John Moir, 'are deprived of those stations which properly belonged to them, very often to their utter ruin, and always to the

detriment of society'. Milliners, mantua-makers, staymakers, embroiderers, seamstresses, all were exposed to male competition. Hairdressing and peruke-making were coming to be dominated by men. The same was true of medicine, in some branches of which women had traditionally figured. Successful dentists, oculists, above all midwives, tended to be male. (111).

At a time when occupations that traditionally belonged to women were becoming dominated by men, the chances of a well educated woman for getting a job was very slim, and it is possible to contest that cross-dressing was addressing Charke's need to earn a living by giving her the opportunity to take up jobs that otherwise would be beyond her reach.

Yet, Charke hints that her cross-dressing was condemned by her hated eldest sister Catherine, who had practically become the head of the family. She writes: "My being in Breeches was alledged (sic) to me as a very great Error, but the original Motive proceeded from a particular Cause; and I rather chuse (sic) to undergo the worst Imputation that can be laid on me on that Account, than unravel the Secret, which is an Appendix to one I am bound, as I before hinted, by all the Vows of truth and Honour everlastingly to conceal" (Charke 73). This assertion comes right after Charke discusses her sister Catherine's reactions to her higgling sausages. Charke writes: "Though the Arch-Dutchess of our Family, who would not have relieved me with a Half-penny Roll or a Draught of Small-Beer, imputed this to me as a Crime" (72-73). Thus Catherine is blaming Charke for selling sausages because "...THE HONOUR OF THEIR FAMILY WAS CONCERNED..." (Capitalisation Charke's) (73). If the family honour is so vulnerable, and may be lost while selling sausages, we may only imagine the damage it would have to sustain when a member cross-dressed. Besides all these arguments, we see Charke again referring to the vow she had supposedly given to her deceased second husband as a pretext for not disclosing the reasons for her cross-dressing.

Near the very end of *A Narrative*, Charke once again talks about her cross-dressing as an issue, which is harming her relations with her family. In one of her numerous attempts to falsify rumours attached to her person, Charke declares:

Before I conclude the Account of my *Bath* expedition, I cannot avoid taking Notice of a malicious Aspersion, thrown and fixed on me as a Reason for leaving it; which was, That I designed to forsake my Sex again, and that I positively was seen in the Street in Breeches.

This I solemnly avow to be an impertinent Falsehood, which was brought to *London* and spread itself, much to my Disadvantage, in my own Family; where I was informed it was delivered to them as a Reality, by an Actress that came to Town, soon after I quitted *Bath* (133).

What is clear from Chake's vehement protestations is the fact that cross-dressing or "forsak[ing] [her] Sex" as she puts it, is on the one hand no longer compatible with the picture of the reformed self she is creating for the consumption of the public, and her habitual cross-dressing apparently was detrimental in her efforts to patch up the breach between her father and herself.

To conclude, at the end of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, we are left with the self-portrait of a woman who seems to relish cross-dressing from very early on, who has pursued masculine pastimes even as a child. She cross-dresses on and off stage, uses this habit as a selling point of her autobiography, (which she basically writes to earn a living) and gives only enigmatic reasons for so doing. We are told indirectly that cross-dressing has enabled her to take up jobs she otherwise would not have been able to get. Yet, we also see that throughout *A Narrative* she tries to defend her character from overt or covert suggestions of homosexuality and we further understand that her "Adventures in Mens (sic) Cloaths (sic)" injures the new and reformed self she wishes to display in her autobiography. Furthermore, it is obvious that her donning men's clothes has caused much disturbance in the family, and has been a damaging factor to her attempts at reconciliation with the members of her family.

#### **IV. 8. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, a Commercial Text**

It is possible to argue that the changes in the literary climate of the eighteenth century England have their effects inscribed into Charlotte Charke's autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*. *A Narrative* is a text produced according to the demands of the particular system of production and consumption, a system that was characterised by the bookseller-publishers. This new system was in ascendancy by the mid eighteenth century and hailed the full commercialisation of literature. Charke's autobiography was published in instalments, and this was dictated by the need to reach a wider public, as the instalments were far cheaper than a bound edition. An article written by Whyte for *The Monthly Review* in 1760, illustrates Charlotte Charke's encounter with the bookseller-publishers, who had become the sole controlling force



behind the world of literary production. Charke's *A Narrative* also bears witness to the fact that Charke was trying to follow the example of her father Colley Cibber is trying to win over the aristocracy and to get patronage if possible. Her autobiography clearly indicates that Charke was fully aware of the importance of the channel of communication at her disposal, and was attempting to market her upcoming projects through *A Narrative*.

Robert Rehder, in his note to the text of Charlotte Charke's autobiography ascertains that *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* was produced in eight instalments originally, appearing on 1, 15, 22 and 29 March and 5, 12 and 19 April 1755 (Rehder lxviii), which clearly reveals the fact that the full text of the autobiography did not exist prior to print. This organic structure of the text enables Charke to insert her letter of reconciliation to her father into *A Narrative* (Charke 62) along with the response she gets from her father, thus including her readers into the drama of her life which was unfolding. The fact that the text was still in formation gives Charke the added advantage of establishing a dialogic relation with her readers. Charke reminds the readers that the first instalment was published the previous week (61), and later shares with her audience the responses she has got after the publication of the third instalment (121), along with her plans as to when she shall finish writing, that is "... in two Saturdays more" (91). Charke also keeps informing her readers of how the autobiography they were reading came into existence. Charke insists that the initial reason she started to write *A Narrative* was to supply her upcoming novel, *The History of Mr. Henry Dumont, Esq.*, - to which she refers to a number of times throughout *A Narrative*, and which was also planned to be published serially, - with a brief account of her life:

... and must now beg Leave to apologize for swelling out my Numbers with my own History, which was originally designed to have consisted only of a short Sketch of my strange Life: But, on the Appearance of the first Number, I was enjoin'd (nay 'twas insisted on) by many, that if 'twas possible for me to enlarge the Account of myself to a Pocket Volume, I should do it. (91)

Charke's apology for writing a long "History" of herself and her protestations to the effect that she was persuaded by others to continue writing, reveal much about the pact between the public and the author in mid eighteenth century. What starts out as a brief introductory account of herself, which was to be appended to her novel, *The History of Henry Dumont, Esq.*, first evolves into an autobiography, published in instalments. The fact that those instalments sell well brings

with it the possibility of forming the contents into a Pocket Book. From Rehder we learn that after *A Narrative* was issued as a book, it goes through two editions in 1755. The same year, the content of Charke's text is rewritten in a manner to include editorial comments and is published by *The Gentleman's Magazine*, appearing in October (pages 455-8), November (pages 495-9) and December (pages 537-9) issues, as 'Some Account of the Life of Mrs. CHARLOTTE CHARK (sic), youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq.' And then as 'Life of Mrs. CHARLOTTE CHARKE Continued...' (Rehder lxix). This bears witness to the fluidity of the printed texts in eighteenth century. Further, such treatment reveals the fact that authorship was not fully established by the mid eighteenth century as editors of the *Magazine* felt free to summarize, rewrite and comment on any given text, as was the case with Charke's *A Narrative*.

It is possible to argue that although Charlotte Charke was using the fluidity of the text to her full advantage, she was also victimised by the new system of production and consumption based on the ascendancy of the new middlemen of the literary market place, the bookseller-publisher, and the consequent commercialisation of literature. Charke's brief encounter with members of this group, as depicted by Whyte in an article he wrote for *The Monthly Review* in 1760, bears witness to the treatment the authors received at the hands of the bookseller-publishers. In this article, Whyte describes in detail Charke's derelict house, the woman who opens the door (probably Mrs. Brown), the scanty furnishings of the "hovel", and finally Charlotte Charke herself. The whole scene as depicted by Whyte, reeks of the extreme poverty Charlotte was in. Then he offers us a glimpse of the business transaction that was the reason for the visit. Charke was trying to sell her novel *The History of Henry Dumont* to the visitors, the printer Samuel Whyte and a bookseller friend, presumably H. Slate. Whyte writes:

The work was read, remarks made, alterations agreed to, and thirty guineas demanded for the copy.

.... The bookseller offered five!

Our authoress did not appear hurt; disappointments had rendered her mind callous; however, some altercation ensued. This was [this] writer's first initiation into the mysteries of bibliopolism (sic) and the state of authorcraft (sic). He, seeing both sides pertinacious, at length interposed, and at his instance the wary haberdasher of literature doubled his first proposal with his saving proviso – that his friend present would pay a moiety and run one half the risk; which was agreed to. Thus matters were accommodated, seemingly to the satisfaction of all parties; the lady's original stipulation of fifty copies for herself being previously acceded to. (Whyte, qtd. in Rehder xlix)

Whyte's article depicts the plight of the author in trying to reach an agreement with the bookseller-publishers, who are seasoned businessmen. They first dictate changes to the work, and then decline to pay what is due to the author, which illustrates the commercialisation of literary works, and the exploitation of the author. Charke's aim is to be able to support herself through her writing and the bookseller-publishers reveal themselves to be opportunists in trying to give Charke as little as possible for her work. All along, the literary merits of the work are not at all discussed. It is no longer literature for the sake of art, but for the sake of money, and this sums up the attitude of both the author and the literary middlemen. Consequently, the literary work is reduced to any piece of commodity, which is haggled over. Affirming Smollett's comment that the new bookseller-publishers only had pretensions to taste, in Whyte's article they reveal themselves as having no knowledge of the author whose work they are inclined to publish. Whyte in his usual patronizing manner declares that it was the first introduction of Charlotte Charke into "the mysteries of bibliopolism (sic) and the state of authorcraft (sic)". However we know that Charke has had a play and her autobiography published before she sold the rights of her novel *The History of Henry Dumont*. Thus, the bookseller-publishers reveal themselves to be not only unethical greedy opportunists, but also ignorant of the literary productions of the authors whose works they publish.

Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* is a literary work that does not attempt at coherence, and might be read as a series of digressions. Although Charke maintains a somewhat chronological order throughout *A Narrative*, she feels free to insert letters, quotations from plays, and even poems she had written. In talking about one of her attempts to get work at theatre after the Licensing Act, in a haphazard fashion Charke inserts into *A Narrative* a poem she had written in praise of the royal family, which was to be read as a prologue to the play *The Recruiting Officer*:

I don't pretend to have any extraordinary Talents, in regard to Poetry in Verse, or indeed in Prose; but as it speaks the Warmth of my Heart towards the Royal family, whose illustrious Line may Heaven to latest Posterity extend, I will venture to insert what I wrote: though I am but an insignificant and humble Subject, every true *Briton* will let my Zeal plead an Excuse for my Deficiency, in the attempting so noble and glorious a Theme.

*From Toils and Dangers of a furious War,  
Where Groans and Death successive wound the Air;  
Where the fair Ocean, or the chrystal (sic) Flood*

*Are dy'd with purple Streams of flowing Blood,  
 I am once more, thank Providence, restor'd;  
 Tho' narrowly escap'd, the Bullet and the Sword.  
 Amidst the sharpest Terrors I have stood,  
 And smil'd at Tumults, for my Country's Good.  
 But where's the Briton dare at Fate repine?  
 When our Great WILLIAM's foremost of the Line!  
 With steady Courage dauntless he appears,  
 And owns a Spirit far beyond his Years.  
 With Wisdom, as with Justice, he spurr'd on,  
 To save this Nation from a Papal Throne.  
 May gracious Heav'n the youthful Hero give,  
 Long smiling Years of Happiness to live:  
 And Britons, with united voices, sing,  
 The noblest Praises of their glorious King;  
 Who, to defend his Country and its Rights,  
 Parted from him in whom his Soul delights.  
 Then, with a grateful Joy, Britannia own,  
 NONE BUT GREAT GEORGE SHOULD FILL THE BRITISH THRONE.*

Though my poetry may be lame, my Design was good; and, as I am sensible it has no other Merit than that, shall say no more about it, but that it was well received at the *Hay-Market* Theatre, and I was handsomely rewarded... (Emphasis and capitalisation Charke's) (Charke 86-87)

Charke is aligning herself with the aristocracy and their traditional values because it used to be the crown and aristocrats who supported the artists. The reason behind the affluence Colley Cibber enjoyed throughout his long life, and the tenure he received cannot be a mystery to Charlotte. By inserting into *A Narrative* this prologue to a play, which is a long poem in praise of William August, Duke of Cumberland, the third son of George II, Charlotte might be attempting to win the sympathy of the nobility and secure a patronage or a tenure. However, Charke's timing in trying to appease the royalty could not be more wrong. *A Narrative* was published in 1755, at a time when the breach between the world of letters and that of the court was fully established. Charlotte had worked with Fielding the anti-royalist satirist for a long time and had been subjected to the restrictions of the Licensing Act by not being allowed to perform at established theatres. In other words, Charlotte was too late in trying to establish herself as an ardent supporter of the royalty and nobility, although that is how she chooses to portray herself consistently in *A Narrative*.

These attempts, at appeasement are futile since they come after the Licensing Act, which cuts Charlotte off from the glamorous world of the London theatre for good. However, Charlotte is

adamant in never mentioning the Licensing Act in *A Narrative*, or pinpointing the Act as the cause of her misfortunes. Similarly, she never explains why after her years of continuous success at London theatres, she all of a sudden starts running a puppet show. Charlotte fails at running a puppet show, as she was to fail in all her attempts to earn a living outside the sphere of the theatre, and is eventually reduced to seeking secretly one-night employments at the London theatres. This shift from affluence to despair goes unexplained.

The Licensing Act of 1737 was initially an extension of the Vagrancy Act of 1724. By means of the Licensing Act, the Vagrancy Act, which was a measure against the rogues and beggars, was extended to include the actors. This motion was indicative that the actors, far from being supported financially by the royalty, were considered to be a menace to the crown, and to community at large. It is also possible to argue that this breach between the crown and the theatre world was mutually induced. We know that in the first half of the eighteenth century the theatrical world had become an arena for satirizing the political situation in England, Fielding's plays being foremost in deriding the royalty. The mechanism of censorship, which was the direct outcome of the Licensing Act, had provided the government with the initiative to put an end to all manner of criticism. As from that time on, all plays were scrutinised by the Lord Chancellor prior to production. In short, according to Langford: "... the [Licensing] Act was the one undoubted and comprehensive victory in Walpole's extended warfare with the intellectuals of his day" (Langford 48).

We may presume that although Charlotte Charke was very much aware of the changes in the literary market. We know that in the eighteenth century new models of promotion and publicity were employed and booksellers had to advertise or "puff" the books they sold. When we read Charlotte Charke's *A Narrative* in this context, with an eye to commercialising her life, and advertising her upcoming novel, we see that Charke is a genius. She is aware of the significance of the channel of communication at her disposal, namely *A Narrative*, and she is exploiting it to the full. To start with, Charke is emphasizing certain particulars of her life as early as the table of contents of *A Narrative* in order to get the attention of the reading public. She is fashioning herself as the "(*Youngest Daughter of COLLEY CIBBER, Esq;*)", and aiming to get publicity through the literary fame of her father (Charke 3). Next, Charke's choice to name the fourth part

of her autobiography after a minor incident in her life is also meaningful. The fourth part reads: “IV. Her Adventures in Mens (sic) Cloaths (sic), and being belov’ by a Lady of great Fortune, who had intended to marry her” (3). Charke’s target must have been to promise titillation to her readers.

Further, Charke tries to promote her upcoming novel, *The History of Mr Henry Dumont*, throughout *A Narrative* by way of providing numerous references to it. Sometimes Charke’s references to her novel are closely integrated into *A Narrative*, but at other times, she mentions the name of her novel simply to advertise it. For example, Charke’s comment that she had started writing the *History of Henry Dumont* at the time she sought employment at her daughter’s strolling company for the second time, adds to the totality of *A Narrative* (126). Because in that section of her autobiography Charke protests that although she planning to share the profit she was expecting from the novel with her daughter and her husband, she and her friend Mrs. Brown were turned out of their house unceremoniously. Likewise, in elaborating on the reasons why she was writing *A Narrative*, Charke informs her audience that what had started as a short biographical section for the novel had evolved into the autobiography she was writing at present (143).

However, other references to her upcoming novel are far from being integral parts of the autobiography and appear to be inserted merely to rise interest in the novel. For instance, while comparing the merits of learning and travel, Charke argues that her opinions on the superiority of learning to travel had changed and writes: “In the second Chapter of Mr. DUMONT’s History I have expatiated on this Error, and refer my Readers thereto...” (Capitalisation Charke’s) (18). In a similar way, after relating her daughter’s illness, Charke provides the readers with a list of the people who have helped her in her hour of need. Charke explains: “... and many more of the generous Natives of *Ireland*; who are, in Nature, a Set of worthy People, when they meet with Objects of Pity: And I have made bold to expatiate, in a particular Manner, on that Subject in my History of Mr. *Dumont*, which will be immediately published, after the Conclusion of this Narrative” (emphases Charke’s) (53-54). These sections are not organic parts of the text, and can serve no other purpose than to advertise the novel. They remind the readers to buy the novel when it finally comes out.

Charke is so intent on using *A Narrative* as a channel of promotion, that she not only advertises the novel, but also the academy of arts she was planning to open. Nevertheless, Charke is aware of the fact that even *A Narrative* might not be enough to advertise the academy and declares to her readers that she will be using other media to publicise it: “When this Narrative is ended, I shall advertise to that Purpose in the daily Papers...” (91). But once having started advertising, she will not miss the opportunity to update her readers on the latest news of the novel:

... I have deferred the Publication of Mr. *Dumont*'s History 'till this is finish'd, which will be now in two *Saturdays* more, and I hope that, Though the Town is not so well acquainted with the above-mention'd Gentleman, they will be equally curious to become so with his Story, as they have been with mine; and, I dare promise, that 'twill afford them such a Satisfaction in the reading, they won't repent their Encouragement of the Author.  
As Morality is the principle Foundation of the Work, I venture to recommend it to the Perusal of the Youthful of both Sexes, as each will find a Character worthy of their Observation; and, I hope, won't blush to make their Example. (91-92)

Charke is recounting a number of reasons as to why her readers should buy her upcoming novel. For one, she is professing that the story of her novel's protagonist is as interesting as her own life story. Second, Charke is bidding her readers to read more of her work to help her earn a living. Charke's final point is the moral uprightness of her work. Thus the novel will fulfil an educational purpose, which Charke insists is suitable for the youth of both sexes.

Charlotte Charke concludes *A Narrative* by giving a brief summary of the contents of her work. Nonetheless, the summary of the sections of the book, as they appear at the end of the work do not match the sub-titles in the table of contents she provides in the table of contents. In the table of contents, the first sub-title reads “I. An Account of her Birth, Education, and mad Pranks committed in her Youth.” (3), in the summary Charke's emphasis is again her upcoming novel, which was in her words the sole reason why she had written her autobiography: “This Work contains, Ist, A notable Promise of entertaining the Town with the *History* of HENRY DUMONT, *Esq*; and *Miss* CHARLOTTE EVELYN; but, being universally known to be an odd Product of Nature, was requested to postpone that, and give an Account of myself, from my Infancy to the present Time” (emphases and capitalisation Charke's) (140). Thus, by the very end of *A Narrative*, we see that Charke is single-minded in promoting interest in her upcoming novel,

on which she rests as Whyte puts it all “... her hopes (sic) and treasure...” (Whyte, qtd. in Rehder xlix).



## V. CONCLUSION

### **An Assessment of *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* in the Context of Eighteenth Century Autobiographical Writing**

At the beginning of *A Narrative*, in accordance with the conventions of eighteenth century autobiography, Charke promises her audience to hide nothing from them:

As I have promis'd to give some Account of my UNACCOUNTABLE LIFE, I shall no longer detain my readers in respect to my Book.... Nor will I, to escape a Laugh, even at my own Expence (sic), deprive my Readers of that pleasing Satisfaction or conceal any Error, which I now rather sight to reflect on; but formerly, thro' too much Vacancy of Thought, might be idle enough rather to justify than condemn (Charke 8).

However, Charke does not confess to her faults or errors, or shares with her audience those transgressions she tried to justify before she was “reformed”. Nor is Charke’s autobiography the story of who she is. What Charke does is to provide us with a brief non-introspective account of the memories of her eventful past, taking us on a roller coaster ride, dazzling us with a life which is packed full with action. We read on and on about her adventures or misadventures to be precise. However, at no point in *A Narrative* does Charke stop and offer us an introspective moment, confessing or condemning her acts. Charke is not narrating her self or her interiority, we do not observe a process of reconstruction of the self. She also does not disclose those transgressions, which she argues that her reformed self condemns. Thus, Robert Rehder’s claim that “[Charke’s] autobiography is written out of a profound inner need to understand her [own] behaviour” (Rehder 158), seems rather questionable. At no point in *A Narrative* does Charke engage in introspection or self-analysis.

It is possible to argue that in choosing what to recount in *A Narrative*, Charke is not prioritising the formative events of her life, but those events that she thinks would excite the curiosity of her audience. Philip Baruth, in the notes he provides for his article “Who is Charlotte Charke” remarks that Charke adopts a similar language in those sections of the text where she falsely promises to make her apologia. Each time the narrated events are of seminal importance when we consider her life in its entirety. Chief among these events is her breach with her father, her

leaving Drury Lane for the second time and her reasons for cross-dressing. When discussing Charke's secretive treatment of these issues, Baruth maintains that "... it is safe to assume that her circuitous expressions are meant to conceal transgressions more serious to her society" (Baruth 58). In each case, we see that these curiosity-arousing incidents are first brought up and then abandoned, making us wonder what Charke's true agenda is in first bringing them up, and then leaving them untold. Sidonie Smith in "The Transgressive Daughter and the Masquerade of Self-Representation" argues that Charke "... effectively enhances the portrait of herself as [an] eccentric rebel, and additionally, piques her readers' curiosity with the promise of unusual revelations" (Smith 85). Her cross-dressing for example is advertised by Charke in the table of contents of *A Narrative*. Hence, we may surmise that Charke aims at titillation by bringing to the fore "her Adventures in Mens (sic) Cloaths (sic)" (Charke 3). By so fashioning herself, Charke is exploiting her notoriety, and trying to arouse the interest of the reader.

Although Charke is promising to disclose titillating events in *A Narrative*, she is also aware of the fact that moralizing about traditional values will be another selling point of her autobiography. Accordingly, as early as in the second paragraph of *A Narrative*, Charke tells her readers that (unlike the products of the pens of certain female writers), there is nothing in the text that will offend their morality:

However, I must beg Leave to inform those Ladies and Gentlemen, whose Tenderness and Compassion may excite 'em to make this little Brat of my Brain the Companion of an idle Hour, that I have paid all due Regard to Decency wherever I have introduc'd the Passion of Love; and have only suffer'd it to take its Course in its proper and necessary Time, without fulsomely inflaming the Minds of my young Readers, or shamefully offending those of riper Years, a Fault I have often condemn'd, when I was myself but a Girl, in some Female Poets. I shall not descant on their Imprudence, only wish that their Works had been less confined to that Theme, which too often led 'em into Errors, Reason and Modesty equally forbid (7).

Charke proves herself well versed in the mainstream argument that claim the love stories written by women are dangerous for the minds of the young generation. Hence, she situates herself firmly within the dominant morality of her times, arguing that she also condemns such works and that her autobiography is different, it will not lead the public into erroneous behaviour.

Cross-dressing and moralizing are not the only tactics Charke employs in trying to sell her autobiography. Charke tries to make use of her father's fame and renown. She keeps on emphasizing that she is Cibber's daughter, and is very much like him. In the table of contents to *A Narrative* she fashions her self as “(Youngest Daughter of COLLEY CIBBER, Esq;)”, aiming to get publicity through the literary fame of her father. Further, when relating the episode with the young heiress who falls in love with her, Charke narrates the fact that she is Colley Cibber's daughter which we are told surprises the young heiress more than her true sex. Charke writes:

With much Difficulty, I mustered up Courage sufficient to open a Discourse, by which I began to make a Discovery of my Name and Family, which struck the poor Creature into Astonishment; but how much greater was her Surprise, when I positively assured her that I was actually the youngest Daughter of Mr. Cibber, and not the Person she conceived me! She was absolutely struck speechless for some little Time; but when she regained the Power of Utterance, entreated me not to urge a Falsehood of that Nature.... (emphasis Charke's) (58).

In other words, Charke is very much aware of the public fame and interest that goes with her father and misses no opportunity to use it to her interest. In a different section of the autobiography, we see Charlotte Charke appealing to her readers' sense of pity and sympathy. She explains that although she enjoys writing her autobiography, its sale and revenue is also her sole support, and sustenance. Indeed, *A Narrative* abounds in attempts at promotion, be they aimed at creating a clientele for her sister Elizabeth's restaurant, or selling her own upcoming novel *The History of Henry Dumont* or finding students for her prospective acting academy. These examples attest to the mercenary motives that were at work in the writing of *A Narrative*. Felicity Nussbaum in the Afterword to *Introducing Charlotte Charke* explicates the economic reasons why Charke had to write in the first place, and wrote in the way she did. Nussbaum contends:

The economic inducement for Charke's professional decisions, including her decision to write her *Narrative*, cannot be overestimated, though recent criticism has paid insufficient attention to it. Charke's inexplicable life is partly explicable because of her lack of money.... Though she could not trade on her virtue (the one certain commodity that mid-eighteenth-century women possessed) her public display of titillating private life in the *Narrative* yielded economic value. In an important way, Charke uses the commercial system that would trade on her misfortunes to her own economic advantage. She seems bold and even vulgar, but she cannot be accused, as can most eighteenth-century women who aspire to a social class, of personifying the prevailing notions of consumption that expected her to wear the spoils of commercial gain. Business is not simply funneled through her; she initiates it and claims its profits while she insists (perhaps aware

of the common collapsing of the distinction between lesbian and prostitute) that 'I did not prostitute my person' (Afterword 237).

We are told that the reasons for the dire circumstances to which Charlotte was reduced resulted from her exploitation by her two husbands, as well as her being abandoned by her father. On the other hand, throughout *A Narrative*, the readers are made aware of the fact that the socio-political conditions of the eighteenth century England played a significant role in ruining the lives of women like Charlotte Charke.

Charke wrote at a time when the private and public spheres were bifurcating, and homes were becoming designated places for women. Middle class women were being confined to a life of leisure, as occupations that traditionally belonged to women were increasingly becoming dominated by men. Finally, the Licensing Act, equating actors and actresses with vagabonds and paupers was causing actors or actresses like Charke to lose their chances of a decent survival. Since plays could now only be performed in two theatres and Charke had burnt the bridges with both, she had no means of earning a decent living. From this point of view, it is possible to argue that *A Narrative* illustrates what is at stake if you are an unmarried and disinherited woman. Under normal circumstances, the one option still open to women of reduced circumstances was prostitution. Charke insists that she refuses to practice prostitution, and argues that there is no shame in the working class jobs she resorts to. On the other hand, Charke is very proud of her elite education that opened up different job opportunities, although these jobs were designated only for men. Thus, it is possible to argue that cross-dressing was one way out of the difficulties Charke was facing. In men's garb, she was able to get jobs that would have been impossible for her to find were she to reveal her identity.

Interestingly enough, Charke chooses to share with her audience the relish with which she started cross-dressing when at the age of four she dressed herself in her father's clothes. One reason for this may be that she idolized Colley Cibber so much that she was attempting to impersonate him. Sidonie Smith points to this fact saying: "...Charke desired to be the "son" by dressing in her father's clothes and by following in his footsteps" (Smith 92). We know from Cibber's own autobiography that he was not a family man, and that he was reknown by his indifference to his family. The portrait Charke draws of Cibber however is very different. He is represented as a

doting father who continually puts up with the misdemeanours of her daughter. The father who disowns her is never blamed. On the contrary, it is her eldest sister, Catherine who has to bear all the burden of the rift. In *A Narrative*, Colley Cibber is represented as an ineffectual old man whose will is taken over by Catherine, the Reagan of the family.

It is possible to argue that the author of *A Narrative* is a woman whose middle class mentality despite her reduced circumstances is not lost. Seen in this perspective, it is possible to argue that another intention of Charke in writing her autobiography is to try and get back her birthright by reconciling with her father. At the time Charlotte was writing her autobiography, Cibber still had the means and the power to admit his daughter back into the ranks of the upper middle class society from whence she had descended. Sidonie Smith points out that in her appeal to her father, Charke takes care to portray herself as a true member of her class. She argues that "... Charke seeks to exonerate her transgressive life by affirming her true membership in the class from which she herself as prodigal daughter has strayed. To the extent that she appears humbled by her errancy, blameless before the malice of others, and a true woman of her class, she vindicates herself and commands her father to reconsider his rejection of her" (90).

Felicity Nussbaum while discussing scandalous memoirists writing in the mid eighteenth century, places Charlotte Charke amongst them (Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject* 178). Nevertheless, as stated earlier, unlike other scandalous memoirists, throughout *A Narrative* Charke never discloses the nature of her transgressions. Joseph Chaney, in his essay "Turning to Men: Genres of Cross-Dressing in Charke's *Narrative* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*" voices a similar opinion, saying that *A Narrative* is an apology. Chaney enumerates the structural requirements of an apology in the following manner: "The genre of apology has as its *telos* the substantiation of a normative subject. By means of a series of self-condemnatory and justificatory gestures, the apologist publicly reenacts the internalization of societal norms. That goal requires that the apologist shape a coherent identity from the fragments of experience (Chaney 202). Chaney further posits that Charke's apology is a failure because of the author's over indulgence in the requirements of the genre. He maintains that Charke dwells so much on her faults, that "...she risks the appearance of glorifying..." in them (202). Indeed, in *A Narrative* Charke is presenting to the public a reformed self but we see that she not only does not apologise for her

past transgressions, but also refuses to name them. Likewise, it is difficult to argue for the presence of a coherent identity in the text, as Charke is picking one identity, discarding it, taking up another and so on, just like the roles she impersonated on stage. The only exception is her relationship with her father, which portrays a repentant daughter. In short, we may posit that Charke's autobiography is a partial apologia because Charlotte is trying to make amends with her father from whom she has been alienated.

On the other hand, some critics, Sidonie Smith being among them, maintain that Charke may be blackmailing her father by beginning to expose their relationship in this manner. Smith goes on to suggest that Charke's prospects of financial gain from the sales of her autobiography and blackmailing her father are interlinked. She writes:

The very writing of her life becomes a complex effort at holding her father up for ransom in an act of filial blackmailing.... She professes in the opening pages her disinterested desire to recover her father's affection; but such profession is fundamentally duplicitous. In fact, the material purposes of her "small treatise" are assuredly very real. Writing her life is her latest scheme for making money and easing her destitution. If her narrative wins her reconciliation with her father, she can count on his financial support to relieve her. Like the other schemes she chronicles throughout her narrative, however, this one proves to be just another failure: her father will not "buy" it. But her audience will; and so, when the first of her purposes fails, she continues to "sell" her life for her living, forced as she is by the economic exigencies she chronicles so effectively into an act of survival that if it fails to earn her reconciliation with her father, at least it earns her some money" (Smith 99).

Similarly Philip Baruth draws our attention to the fact that Charke clearly informs her readers of the reconciliation she was hoping to effect with her father, and there is the insinuation that if Cibber refuses her, he would lose face to the public that had read her daughter's autobiography. According to Baruth the serial form of the autobiography was an asset for Charke since "... she could greatly increase the pressure on her father to take her back into the family. Those Londoners who read the initial instalment.... were made an audience to the reconciliation attempt.... At a stroke Charke increased her leverage with her father and her pool of paying customers (Baruth 14).

Early on in *A Narrative* Charke very clearly informs her audience of the rift between herself and her father, as well as her intention in winning back his affection, before the serial autobiography is completed. Charke says:

Nor was I exempted from an equal share in my Father's Heart; yet, partly thro' my own Indiscretion (and, I am too well convinc'd from the cruel Censure of false and evil Tongues) since my Maturity, I Lost that Blessing: Which, if strongest Compunction and uninterrupted Hours of Anguish, blended with Self-conviction and filial Love, can move his Heart to Pity and Forgiveness, I shall, with Pride and unutterable Transport, throw myself at his Feet, to implore the only Benefit I desire or expect, his BLESSING, and his PARDON.

But of that, more hereafter – And I hope, ere this small Treatise is finish'd, to have it in my Power to inform my Readers, my painful Separation from my once tender father will be more than amply repaid, by a happy Interview (Charke 8-9).

Here Charke is emphasizing that the form of reconciliation she was trying to effect was simply her father's forgiveness. Concerning any prospective benefit however, it is still possible to argue that her protestations may in themselves be an indication that the prospect of a profit is not far from her thoughts.

Charlotte's letter of reconciliation to her father is written directly after the first instalment of her autobiography is published. The letter is delivered to her father by Mrs. Brown and is returned to her enveloped in a blank sheet of paper, unread. Charke shares this turn of the events with her audience, writing in the latter part of her autobiography that this incident was "... one of most tragical Occurrences of my Life" (61). She also inserts her letter into *A Narrative* which reads:

*To COLLEY CIBBER, Esq; at his House in Berkly Square.*

HONOUR'D SIR; Saturday, Mar. 8 1755

*I doubt not but you are sensible I last Saturday published the First Number of a Narrative of my Life, in which I made a proper concession in regard to those unhappy Miscarriages which have for many Years justly deprived me of a Father's Fondness. As I am conscious of my Errors, I thought I could not be too publick (sic) in suing for your Blessing and Pardon; and only blush to think, my youthful Follies should draw so strong a Compunction on my Mind in the Meridian of my Days, which I might have so easily avoided*

*Be assured, Sir, I am perfectly convinced I was more than much to blame; and that the Hours of Anguish I have felt have bitterly repaid me for the Commission of every Indiscretion, which was the unhappy Motive of being so many Years estranged from that Happiness now, as in Duty bound, most earnestly implore.*

*I shall, with your Permission, Sir, send again, to know if I may be admitted to throw myself at your Feet; and, with sincere and filial Transport, endeavour to convince you that I am,*

HONOUR'D SIR,

Your truly penitent

And dutiful Daughter,

CHARLOTTE CHARKE (emphasis and capitalisation Charke's)  
(Charke 62).

Baruth maintains that the letter draws Cibber into the net Charlotte was weaving all along. He inevitably becomes an actor in the life-size drama Charlotte was constructing/ enacting / experiencing/ narrating:

Whether intended or not, the set-up carried a faint whiff of blackmail: should Cibber fail to reconcile with her, more instalments would follow and these would be filled with the same sort of cross-dressing “pranks” he had always warned his daughter against. He would be forced to relive in turn each of his daughter’s disgraces and missteps. Worse, the reading audience would be informed, by the very appearance of each new number, of his continuing hard-heartedness. Cibber, whether he liked it or not, had become a character in his daughter’s highly public “Prodigal” drama. The only choice left him was whether he would play the Father-as-Hero or the Father-as-Villain (Baruth 15).

As a number of critics agree, Cibber was weathered in bracing himself against attacks of all kinds, even from such literary wits as Pope and Fielding. Furthermore, it was not the first time that members of his family had been the objects of scandal. Hence, for one reason or another, Cibber refuses to even read Charlotte’s letter. Charlotte, on the other hand, not only talks about her failed hopes of reconciliation, and inserts the contents of the letter into *A Narrative*, but she also shares her response to the situation with her audience:

... to be denied that from mortal Man which HEAVEN IS WELL PLEAS’D TO BESTOW, WHEN ADDRESS’D WITH SINCERITY AND PENITENCE, EVEN FOR CAPITAL OFFENCES.

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 notorious Malefactors; but as I have not been guilty of those Enormities incidental to the foremention’d Characters, permit me, gentle Reader, to demand what I have done so hateful! So very grievous to his soul! So much beyond the Reach of Pardon! That nothing but MY LIFE COULD MAKE ATTONEMENT! (Capitalisation Charke’s) (Charke 63).

Thus Charke fashions herself as the prodigal willing to return home and in doing that she is borrowing from the biblical narrative of the Prodigal Son, and insisting that the prodigal should have been joyfully received by the father. Charke further argues that mercy was extended even to criminals, declaring that her transgressions were not capital crimes.

Sidonie Smith however, argues that although Charke tries to impersonate the prodigal figure with all its Biblical implications, that role does not befit her, because the prodigal by definition is part of the religious and male discourse. Smith writes:



Playing the prodigal son, Charke informs her secular autobiography with typological references to the sacred text. Part of the “typological habits of mind” of the eighteenth century, this biblical type functioned as a popular cultural figure. Yet the prodigal was a culturally valued figure of male selfhood, whose androcentric story fulfilled the culture’s desire for both prodigality and reincorporation into community. In fact, rejection of the father and his authority became a sign of entry into the world of the fathers, a sign of manhood. It thereby became a figure of selfhood identified with formal autobiography. When Charke assumes the story line of the prodigal, therefore, she must wrench it to fit her story, “abstract[ing]” the biblical figure, “draw[ing it]” away from the theological field of action” and embedding it in the detailed realism of a woman’s sensational life story. As the type is pressed through the specificities of Charke’s strange story, it becomes too culturally distorted. In the end, the story of the prodigal wrapped around the story of a woman does not undermine the sanctity of the type so much as it undermines her attempt to add sanctity to her story. As a prodigal “son”, she is more ridiculous than significant (Smith 100).

Joseph Chaney, in discussing the prodigal son narrative Charke attempts to incorporate into her autobiography, also remarks that in portraying herself as the prodigal, Charke is “... lay[ing] claim to a traditional masculine role (Chaney 202). Hence, Charke’s appeal to Cibber is bound to fail because her insistence to return home by arguing her prodigality is in itself “a kind of gender-crossing” (211). Chaney further attests to the fact that a woman’s prodigality is incapable of reform, because when she falls, a woman falls into corruption, and gets tainted, and once tainted, the woman has to be driven away. The male prodigal on the other hand, is capable of reform because he is initially a moral creature and because of that inherent capacity, reform is possible. Chaney writes:

A prodigal daughter of the eighteenth century cannot return home to a father’s forgiveness, precisely because she cannot properly *be* the traditional prodigal in the first place. Her prodigal condition, unlike the son’s, would be considered incapable of reform. When a daughter falls, she falls into irretrievable corruption. One model for such a fall would be Hogarth’s six-scene series, “A Harlot’s Progress” (1732), which traces the precipitous fall of a country girl, “M. Hackabout,” from her innocent arrival in London, through several stages of moral corruption, thence to her death from syphilis at age twenty-three. A young woman is valued for her chastity but defined by her impressionability. The daughter functions as a sign of the father’s honour. Because the daughter is not a fully moral creature, but instead partly a cultural object or symbol, she is permanently tainted by any corruption with which she comes into contact. Her prodigality, no matter how slight, can only signify an irrevocable squandering of the soul (Chaney 211).

A discussion of Charlotte Charke’s autobiography, cannot avoid focusing on the way Charke relates her public career, and suppresses all that is private in the manner of male autobiography of her time. Her first marriage is mechanically told, her second marriage is shrouded in some mystery, her only daughter is equated with pathos and failure, and her significant, other Mrs.

Brown is significant by her absence. It should also be remarked that Charke was writing by the mid eighteenth century, the historical moment when women were being confined to the private sphere. Madeleine Kahn, in her article entitled “Teaching Charlotte Chake: Feminism, Pedagogy, and the Construction of the Self” relates the reaction of college students to Charke’s autobiography, saying that the students saw in it “a defiant resistance to social pressure to retreat to the private sphere” (Kahn 64). Kahn also remarks that being born into the public realm because of her father, and having chosen highly public careers add up to the very publicity of Charke’s life (166). It is also possible to maintain that the very act of writing a secular autobiography and thus attempting to make the private public, in itself meant defying conventions, if and when the autobiographer was a woman. Likewise, Sidonie Smith argues that writing an autobiography is a public career and as such a male act. Smith further maintains that Charke’s autobiography is masculine in the sense that “... there is the suppression of the mother and the realm of the feminine that characterizes male autobiography. Assuming the adventurous masquerade of man, Charke reinscribes the myth of origins constitutive of the story of man and claims her place in the world of men, words, and public spaces” (Smith 94).

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