

Extracts from Gertrude Savile's diary (1721-1757)

Gertrude Savile (1697-1758) was a gentlewoman who spent most of her adult life at Rufford Abbey in Nottinghamshire. Her father died when she was 3, leaving her brother George to inherit the title and estates. She resented both her brother and her mother, on whom she became financially and socially dependent. Her diary is a fascinating example of writing by an individual who didn't fit the expected standards of sociability and polite deportment for a gentlewoman of her status. She never married and deplored her inadequate education. The final marginal word of each day's entry is a note of her state of mind: 'not happy', 'unhappy', 'miserable', 'happy', 'not unhappy' etc.

Sun Feb. 11 1728

... Brother and Lady Savile here, but in too great discomposure to go down [until] Mother and Aunt had din[e]d and were gone into the City. Went down to him, my heart bursting with vexation, and if I say rage too, 'tis too true. To be dispised... is a thought that strangles Patience. Passion is a Short Madness. If ever I have been so passionate, I have never given it vent so much... This strange affair kept Brother till past 10 ... The blackest Spott in my life. What can I say of this day's work? Fine day. Mad.

Weds Sept. 11 1728

Mrs Newton [Gertrude's aunt] came alone in a Hackny, without her Woman, Vallat, Page etc... I say she came alone, only a great parcel of Bundles, but soon had attendants enough. Not only her handmaid, but a whole Regiment of Stay-Makers, Mantua-Makers, Milliners etc... Sent for Mrs Mary, desired to ask Mother from me, in the name of God (I used the serious expression to obtain an answer)... how long she design'd to live in this uncomfortable manner to me, and scandellous to our observing Neighbours, for we eat separate, nothing said of our joyning in house-keeping as formerly, (I did not provide my own dinner till I heard she had hers), which what a figure that must make to the World. Me, shut out of the Rooms, with my Aunt and her Maid the chief parts of Mother's separate Family, and the house full of people attending them. Besides expensive and being kept in ignorance, not thought worth being told their designs. I think I had great reason to ask, and in a manner extort an answer. I desired Mrs Mary too, to tell her I had lock'd the Parlor door, because I thought it was fit I shoud have one room in the house. My angar made me add, that as the Kitchen was in common, I expected none shoud dine there that I [did not] think welcome, and who had been so saucy to me as Mrs Ann. After ½ an hour Mrs Mary brought word that Mother would dine in her own room and give me an answer when she saw me – which she did upon the Stairs when I went down to dinner. Aunt came out and stood with a malicious insulting smile ... I was provoked to call her an ill-Designing Woman. Mother (as customary, than which nothing can be more provoking) cry'd, don't speak [so] to her Sister. A Sister – What is she? A Sister!- But what am I? I should be a Child, but I have been used like a Slave; like a Creature that has not common sense; who has not a title, not only to kindness, but what I pay for. At present, 'tis owing to the designing, fawning Sister, who I consented (knowing her to be such) should come into the house I pay for, to oblige my Mother, how am I rewarded? She has brought it now to a quarrel will never be made up. Much discomposed.

Fri. Sept 13 1728

... Unwilling to come home, ill fortune carry'd me to Lady Castlemaine's, for there I behaved most sillyly, spoke a great deal too much, which I shall always repent. 'Passion is a short

Madness. No Man of Spirit knows how terrible a Creature he is, till he comes to be provoked'. (Spectator). I speak of our sad family affairs there, because Mother complains of me to them; but 'tis like a fool; Lady Casltemaine is against me, as she is a Mother and a haughty one, but more than that; Mother's Coach weighs against me, which she has often had the benefit of and hopes to have again. She told me our QUARELL was the Town talk and said pretty plainly, I was only condemn'd; that Mother was reckon'd the most tender Mother in the World. O 'tis far otherwise, but she takes pains to make it [seem] so. Yet the hearing of it exasperated me more, and made me talk more foolishly.

Wed. Sept 18 1728

... Did not see Mother. 'Tis a strange way of living. I have no reason to disturb her with my sight; it always puts her in passion and greatly discomposes me. She is to return to Wandsworth I understand, perhaps to shun me, till my Brother comes – and what am I then to expect? Know not what is become of my Aunt.

Sun Dec. 8. 1728

One whole afternoon was not enough for Mother to represent me as ill as she wishes to do. She had sent for Brother to have him this day also to herself. She made such an outcry and was so excessive angry at my coming in, as amaz'd and stun'd me, nor would she give me leave to say why I came, crying, now all was spoil'd; calling me base, disobedient, Devillish etc., but at last I was order'd by Brother to stay. I cannot I must not repeat what passed. Words cannot express more hate and rage than Mother. Indeed her passion was so great that it made more for me than anything I could say for myself. My Brother undertook only to condemn me; said he would not meddle or take notice of Mother's actions.... I am in the lowest condition of Life – Dependant upon Bounty. The greatest Authority is that of a Benefactor.... My sentence as to that was to choose to live with Mother with a formall respect and civility, or -Perdition. I fear there is no choice in the case. Brother reproach'd me for many Years agoe I said he was not a Brother to me. I remember it well. I meant ... that he used the Authority of a Father... He reproach'd me too in a most cutting manner with my dreadfull illness; what a loathsome, terrible object I was in it. ... But while I continue [dependent], I am the most abject Slave and must not speak or think. O! that he had Authority enough to stop my Thoughts which are wild and dreadfull, upon the brink of Desperations.

July 29-30 1756

Relations

'tis too often experienc'd, are not always the best Friends, often Enemies, but never was that so remarkable as [with me] and that not from the common cause – Interest clashing. My History in that Particular, were it worth my time in writing, would be extraordinary... From my Cradle, tho' an object of contempt, and treated as a poor abject Slave without common sense, passions or even feeling, yet...[an] object of jealousy, and Fear to most of them. ... That a dispis'd Idiot, a Creature not thought so much as rational, should at the same time be the Grand Butt for Machiavilian Policy to shoot at? And this from my good Mother (for very Good She was in most respects) down to my niece Hewett. My niece? Her Behaviour in my great Illness was almost as wonderfull as my own History, considering her Grand Characteristick is Prudence....

Friends

But disregardfully as all my relations treated me, (except dear, good Lady Scarborough), I found Friends in almost Strangers. Mrs Richards was, (I really believe) sincerely concern'd for me; would come to me before I almost cared to see any body – came daily, and did abundance of very kind, Friendly and usefull offices for me. Her company alone, was a great comfort to

one so neglected and forlorn with only careless, idle, hard-hearted Servants about me....In these sad circumstances Mrs Richards' Company which She was so good to give a great deal of (when mine could only be the most dull melancholly and shocking) was a great relief and happiness...I owe her much indeed. She became then and yet continues, quite necessary to me, ... I get her to do all my Citty business. Mrs Mathreus too, who was little more then a formall Acquittance, was surprisingly good to me. She would have come when I was at the very worst; sent twice a day...

... Mrs Hawley and Mrs Burroughs [new acquaintances], offer'd to come whenever it would be agreeable to me. 'Twas truly surprizing, (and surely I may think with great thankfulness), a good Providence that rais'd me up Friends in Strangers, when (except Lady Scarbrough) not a Relation had the humanity to inquire after me. But this I lay'd not to heart, haveing been inured to neglect ever since my Childhood.