

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83034-8 - Samuel Richardson: Correspondence with Sarah Wescomb, Frances
Grainger and Laetitia Pilkington

Edited by John A. Dussinger

Excerpt

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RICHARDSON'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH
SARAH WESCOMB

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SARAH WESCOMB TO SR, FRIDAY 22 AUGUST 1746

Sarah Wescomb to Richardson

Friday 22 August 1746

MS: FM XIV, 3, ff. 9–10. Autograph letter sent.

Address: To Mr. Richardson at Northend near Hammersmith, Middx.

Endorsement: Miss Wescomb, Aug. 22. Answered 27 Aug. 1746 (in SR's hand).

Postmark: 23 AV, EN<F>IELD.

Already does my officious Pen endeavour to perform what you enjoin'd tho so unequal to the Task, & had not attempted so dangerous an Enterprize, but to assure you of my readiness to comply with your least request. This may be easily believ'd, since in spite of so much Stupidity and Folly as is inseperable from me, I yet Scribble on, not having the fear of making you Sick before my Eyes. And I have also the presumption to expect being rewarded for my impertinence, in having the fa<vour> of a Line from you, which as tis purchas'd at so high a price as¹ the expo<sing> my self to a deserv'd Ridicule for obtaining it. Cannot think I shall be refus'd. And to make use of the same Policy as one of Clarissa's Lovers,² if you'd have me drop this just commenc'd Correspondence it must be by telling me so.³ Thus are you Laid und<er> a necessity of Wrighting tho but to command my Silence. If the contrary which can hardly be imagin'd is desired, & you'd have me⁴ still persist in scrawling, hope in time to become more worthy this pleasure, by making some improvement (if not as I fear quite incapable) under so charming an Instructor. For at present there never was so strange a creature as my self.⁵ I really cou'd not have guessd it. For your <little>⁶ trifling Scribe was no sooner Seated at her Buroe,⁷ & taken Pen with trembling hand, <made so by the awful occasion, intended only to say how much I was obliged>⁸

¹ 'as' is a superscript insertion.

² Probably Mr Wyerley. In the first edition of this novel, Clarissa mentions having rejected this suitor because of his free-thinking and jests on Scripture. *Clarissa* (1748), 1, 17. Wescomb may have seen an earlier version where the heroine tells this suitor to cease writing to her.

³ 'it must be by telling me so' is a superscript insertion.

⁴ 'me' is a superscript insertion.

⁵ 'as my self' is a superscript insertion.

⁶ '<little>' is a superscript insertion.

⁷ "A chest of drawers with a writing-board" (Johnson): a writing-desk with drawers for papers, etc.' (*OED*).

⁸ Words within brackets are those pencilled on the cardboard mounting.

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to my good friend the Dear Mr Richardson for all his partial kindness to an undeserving Girl, (this being ever present to my thoughts)⁹ & then perhaps have finish'd with a formal conclusion. When instead of that, not knowing how to write or yet to let it alone, am running into an unreasonable length. & however unworthy your Perusal cannot yet have done. Therefore warn you to take the consequence. which is, to be insufferably tormentend (I being in the prattling Vein) & however deserving such a fate can accuse none but your self as the occasion. Yet methinks for all that have so much compassion to wish for your Peace Sake I had rather been fordeny'd this previlidge.

It was with the greatest regret I quitted dear Northend¹⁰ made charming by the frequent Presence of one of the best of Gentlemen, & Ladies. which can mean no other than the generous freind to whom I am wrighting, & my dearest Miss Vanderplank¹¹. who¹² if you'd still permit I'd Call her Anadea for a reason mentiond in the delightful Summer House, namely, the restraint so grave an appellation as the former¹³ lays me under. – nothing cou'd have lessend the concern that naturally overflow'd on my leaving so entertaining & improving Companions but the seeing a Dear & affectionate Par<ent> that <indulges> & is ever Studying the happiness of a little Insignificant poor (as youve somewhere¹⁴ admirably expressd) in all but gratitude. & incapable of any other return for all this Maternal tenderness. Without by a faint imitation of some of your truely Charming Precepts I may become something more deserving her Regard & if this don't produce the wish'd effect twill be in Vain to hope for such a Blessing. – My poor Mama is a little Indispos'd with that severe Illness the Gout, which seems fix'd in her Arm. She joins with me in begging you'll favour us soon with your Company at this Pla<ce> on which we depend. When I first mention'd¹⁵ to my Mama the obliging promise

⁹ '(this being ever present to my thoughts)' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁰ SR's house in Fulham, North End, leased from Samuel Vanderplank, who lived with his family in the adjoining house.

¹¹ Ann Vanderplank (b. 1722), dubbed 'Anadea' by Wescomb, was the daughter of SR's friend and landlord, Samuel Vanderplank. It was through the Vanderplank family that SR met Wescomb. Eaves and Kimpel, p. 198.

¹² 'who' is a superscript insertion.

¹³ 'as the former' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁴ 'somewhere' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁵ 'it' is deleted.

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you had made. it gave her infinite Pleasure. but fearing you might forget Us, charg'd me to <repeat> this request, which was to<o> agreeable to my hopes, not to be instantly complied with. & dare beleive I need not remind my Female friend. as She must be assur'd what joy twill give. & that thought will I am sure be a sufficient inducement to prevail with so generous a Mind as hers. that is ever ready to oblige, & indeed is never so happy as on having an opportunity to compleat the Felicity of her <xxxxx 1 word> friends. <Thus> the obligation is turnd on the other Side. You see how troublesome a Creature I am when once set a Scribbling. & that Ive given room to fear my trifling Stuff will¹⁶ be without end. Well I wont promise how that may fall out, but will go on as fast as Possible, & Advise you to do the same; & in time tis to be hoped may arrive safe at the bottom. But sure I can never think after all of sending this to you, & shoud (as I've said before) beleive my self guilty of the highest presumption to think of such a thing. if (as you've somewhere observ'd) the command so to do, had not given it a Sanction. But not at once to drive you to extremity's, & tire out the last remains of Patience by <xxxxx 2 words> this tedious & frightful Scratch, will now only add my Mamas & my Compliments to your good Self and Mrs. Richardson, with <mine> also to Mr., & Mrs. Goslin¹⁷. Miss Parson's¹⁸ & every kind enquirrer, if any such I have. the compliance with which Requests will enexpressibly oblig<e.>

PS Pray keep my dear friend to her promise Dear Sir (forgive the familiar Epithet) of corrisponding with Us but if you don't insist on it fear she will break <thro> her Word & if you request She cannot sure refuse. It's plain I cou'd not. Forgive the many blots bad wrighting frequent repititions. & <prolixity>, &c &c &c your most sincere & obedient Servant,

Sarah Wescomb.

¹⁶ 'will' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁷ Francis Gosling (1720–68), a bookseller and SR's banker. His wife, Elizabeth Midwinter, was the daughter of a bookseller. In 1757 he retired from business and in 1760 was given a knighthood.

¹⁸ Grace Parsons (1704–70), daughter of Sir William Parsons, Bart., was a friend of the Duchess of Portland and on 28 March 1747 married Thomas Lambarde. After this event SR's relations with both the Duchess and Mrs Lambarde cooled. Eaves and Kimpel, pp. 185–6.

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SR TO SARAH WESCOMB, WEDNESDAY 27 AUGUST 1746

Richardson to Sarah Wescomb

Wednesday 27 August 1746¹

Printed source: B, III, 244–9.

First printing: Barbauld, *Correspondence* (1804).

What charming advantages, what high delights, my dear, good, and condescending Miss Westcomb, flow from the familiar correspondences of friendly and undesigning hearts! – Surprising! that the generality of young ladies, delicate by sex, by education; and polite as delicate; their imaginations likewise so happily qualifying them for these mental employments, should be so little sensible of them as they are! – When styles differ, too, as much as faces, and are indicative, generally beyond the power of disguise, of the mind of the writer! – Who would not choose, when necessary absence, when the demands of an indulgent parent, deprive her of the person of her charming friend, to have a delight in retiring to her closet, and there, by pen and ink, continue, and, as I may say, perpetuate, the ever agreeable and innocent pleasures that flow from social love, from hearts united by the same laudable ties?

I make no scruple to aver, that a correspondence by letters, written on occasions of necessary absence, and which leaves a higher joy still in hope, which presence takes away, gives the most desirable opportunities of displaying the force of friendship, that can be wished for by a friendly heart. This correspondence is, indeed, the cement of friendship: it is friendship avowed under hand and seal: friendship upon bond, as I may say: more pure, yet more ardent, and less broken in upon, than personal conversation can be even amongst the most pure, because of the deliberation it allows, from the very preparation to, and action of writing.

A proof of this appears in the letter before me! – Every line of it flowing with that artless freedom, that noble consciousness of honourable meaning, which shine in every feature, in every sentiment, in every expression of the fair writer!

¹ For her answer to this letter, see SR to Sarah Wescomb to SR, 3 September 1746. SR's endorsement indicates that the above letter was written on this date.

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SR TO SARAH WESCOMB, WEDNESDAY 27 AUGUST 1746

While I read it, I have you before me in person: I converse with you, and your dear Anna,² as arm-in-arm you traverse the happy terrace: kept myself at humble distance, more by my own true respect for you both, than by your swimming robes: I would say hoops, but that I love not the mechanic word! – I see you, I sit with you, I talk with you, I read to you, I stop to hear your sentiments, in the summer-house: your smiling obligingness, your polite and easy expression, even your undue diffidence, are all in my eye and my ear as I read. – Who then shall decline the converse of the pen? The pen that makes distance, presence; and brings back to sweet remembrance all the delights of presence; which makes even presence but body, while absence becomes the soul; and leaves no room for the intrusion of breakfast-calls, or dinner or supper direction, which often broke in upon us.

Not that these cares, neither, are to be neglected; nor, indeed, any of the least duties of that œconomy which falls properly under a lady's inspection: I have taken care to make my *Clarissa*, whom you obligingly three times³ in your letter take notice of, inculcate this doctrine, – that all the intellectual pleasures a lady can give herself, not neglecting the necessary employments that shall make her shine in her domestic duties, should be given; but otherwise that she should prefer the useful to all theoretic knowledge. But this is one of the felicities that give a preference to familiar correspondencies – that they may be carried on, and best carried on, at the retired hour, either morning or evening, before needful avocations take place, or after they have been answered. For the pen is jealous of company. It expects, as I may say, to engross the writer's whole self; every body allows the writer to withdraw: it disdains company; and will have the entire attention.

Writing to your own sex I would principally recommend; since ours is hardly ever void of design, and makes a correspondence dangerous: – Except protected by time, as in my case, by general character, by choice already filled up; where is the man that deserves to be favoured? – And were there the least room to suspect that there was any thing less than paternal in my views, I would not dare to urge the favour, or take the liberty.

² Ann Vanderplank. See above, p. 3, Sarah Wescomb to SR, 22 August 1746, note 11.

³ Since Wescomb mentions *Clarissa* only once, see above, p. 3, Sarah Wescomb to SR, 22 August 1746, apparently SR is referring to a missing letter written after the first one here on record.

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SARAH WESCOMB TO SR, WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1746

But it is the diffidence I wish to banish: the diffidence! which, in the right place, is so great a beauty in the charming sex; – but why the diffidence to such a one as I am! – a plain writer: a sincere well-wisher: an undesigning scribbler; who admire none but the natural and easy beauties of the pen: no carper: and one who has so just an opinion of the sex, that he knows, in an hundred instances, that the ladies who love the pen are qualified by genius⁴ and imagination to excell in the beauties of this sort of writing: – and that bashfulness, or diffidence of a person's own merits, are but other words for undoubted worthiness; and that such a lady cannot set pen to paper but a beauty must follow it; yet herself the last person that knows it.

But do not, dear Madam, in the future favours⁵ you bid me hope for, make apologies for length. The person who sits down, designing brevity, writing to a friend, on subjects of conversation and friendship, hastening, as I have known some visibly do, in their first line to the last, must, if leisure allow a larger letter, intend a slight. For what friendly heart can want a subject on such an occasion; when it must be sensible, that the goings-out, the comings-in, the visit either meditated, paid, or received, the visitors, the reading or musical subjects, the morning meditation, the mid-day bower, the evening walk: what she hopes, what she wishes, what she fears, are proper topics for the pen; and what friendship cannot be indifferent to. For what one thing is there, that a friend does, or is concerned in, or for, which can be too slight a subject to a friend?

I am, dear Miss Wescomb, Your most obliged correspondent,
S. Richardson.

⁴ 'Of persons: Characteristic disposition; inclination; bent, turn or temper of mind. *Obs.*' (*OED*).

⁵ 'A complimentary term for: Communication, letter' (*OED*).

Sarah Wescomb to Richardson

Wednesday 3 September 1746

MS: FM XIV, 3, ff. 5–6. Autograph letter sent.

Address: To Mr Richardson at North-End near Hammersmith Turnpike Middx.

Endorsement: Miss Wescomb, 3 Sept. 1746. Answered Monday Sept. 15, 1746 (in SR's hand).

Postmark: 2 SE.

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SARAH WESCOMB TO SR, WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1746

A Thousand Thousand thanks¹ are due to my kind good sweet friend the dear Mr. Richardson for his truly charming Letter. I've read it every Day, (every Hower I should rather say) &, each time find more Beauties for which I'm interrupting my Self continually, with an o the sweet Man my second Papa (if you'll give leave, for I remember the word Paternal mention'd in this admirable Epistle,) & then to proceed with my exclamations – what fine Reflections how inimitably he Writes & so on thro the whole. Who then can think of repenting the having expos'd her folly to such a friend, since it has procur'd this pleasure & also has given himself really a Pappa to me² an opportunity to exercise a generous thought, in charitably convincing me of some of the ma<ny> error<s> I have & am discovering to you: this would be charity indeed. Nay twas not I expected. When instead of kind admonitions, just Reproofs, & Sweet Advice, (no not even to Silence an impertinent Pratler,) instead of this I say do you bestow comendations undeserv'd & which I neer presumed to think. No even³ if I'm less sensible of my faults than the generality of our conceited World is & that can hardly be,) yet cou'd not be thus blind & so must impute it to the fertility of a Genius, that on the most Barren Subject (as the present one⁴ certainly is) could say such pretty things as makes me so earnestly wish that I had (for my friends Sake) & tis more than probable when they are by me found unattainable, (except you undertake the task) shall really assume a great deal: & at last turn out a Vain Hussy. How will you then reflect on your self for leading a poor creature that is ready to beleive implicitly whatere you say, into such a <ri>diculous State. This timely warning I've given to prevent a too late repentance.⁵

<I> had answerd your favour sooner, but was unfortunately prevented till 12 o Clock this Night. For I could not have sat out to morrow as we oblig'd a 6 in the Morn, for a Kentish Tour⁶ of a Week⁷ without teizing you a little. But dear Sir if you are my friend, don't yet

¹ 'thanks' is a superscript insertion.

² 'to me' is a superscript insertion.

³ 'even' is a superscript insertion.

⁴ 'one' is a superscript insertion.

⁵ 'but' is deleted.

⁶ Wescomb is probably to visit her friend and relative Sarah Righton, who lived at Tenterden, Kent.

⁷ 'for a Kentish Tour of a Week' is a superscript insertion.

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SARAH WESCOMB TO SR, WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1746

be so sick of me that I may not have room to⁸ hope, to be entertaind with a Letter speedily, for fear of the dreadful Consequence, that of having a long Scrawl in answer. But then this justice must be done me, that Ive not deceiv'd you, since Ive told the worst that can happen.

I have a great many more things to have added but must to Night <miser> my self this pleasure, & you the fateigue of reading them, only Mr Vanderplank promis'd me when he got better he'd lend me my Dear Anadea,⁹ & my Papa being so happily mended, shall on the Instant of my wish'd return fly to my Pen &¹⁰ charm her Company with yours. which is long'd for with great impatience by my best Mama & her little Trifler. but if (yet how can I¹¹ be so presumptuous to ask another request,) still this (but if) will be uppermost, therefore must speak it. which is if <yo>ud regale me beyond any treat in the World, it can only be by sending me¹² a Letter to be¹³ ready for my perusal on our arrival here.¹⁴ Forgive my <d>aring Scribble, that woud thus tempt that sweet benign Countenance to frown upon me for aspiring too far. I am perswaided if the Clock had not reminded this incorrigable Tatler, (meaning my Self you may imagine that there was such a thing as Time) I shou'd <n>eer have done conversing with any good friend, & correspond<e>nt. but that tells me as Ive spent¹⁵ an hower so agreeably, tis necessary I shoud now pay a little Court to his stupid Leaden worship & who calls on me to close my Eyes,¹⁶ gives me leave only to say I am the Dear Mr Richardsons most Dutiful & Sincerely affectionate friend & servant –

Sarah Wescomb or Selena ad Libit¹⁷

my Mama joyns with her Sally¹⁸ in the mention'd¹⁹ requests & desire our compliments to your sweet Self, with mine to Mrs

⁸ 'have room to' is a superscript insertion.

⁹ Ann Vanderplank, see above, p. 3, Sarah Wescomb to SR, 22 August 1746, note 11.

¹⁰ 'fly to my Pen &' is a superscript insertion.

¹¹ 'I' is a superscript insertion.

¹² 'me' is a superscript insertion.

¹³ 'be' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁴ 'here' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁵ 'spent' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁶ '& who calls on me to close my Eyes,' is a superscript insertion.

¹⁷ *Ad libitum*: Latin for 'as one wishes' or 'if you please'.

¹⁸ Mrs Jobson apparently preferred the nickname Sally for Sarah Wescomb.

¹⁹ 'mention'd' is a superscript insertion.