

William Writes to William

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The Correspondence
of William Gilpin (1724-1804)
and his Grandson William (1789-1811)

By

Alain Kerhervé

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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and his Grandson William (1789-1811),
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Llanover Delany, Mary. *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville Mrs Delany, with Interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte*. Ed. Lady Augusta Hall Llanover. 6 vols. London: R. Bentley, 1861-1862.
- WG William Writes to William Letters, followed by the number of the letter in the present volume.
- Rogers Barbier, Carl Paul. *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin*. London: Oxford UP, 1959.
- Henley Neiman, Fraser. "The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35.2 (1972): 159-169.
- Warner Warner, Rebecca. *Original Letters from Richard Baxter, Matthew Prior, Lord Bolingbroke, Alexander Pope, Dr. Cheyne, Dr. Hartley, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Mrs Montague, Rev. William Gilpin, George Lord Lyttleton, Rev. John Newton, Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchanan...* London: R. Cruttwell, 1817.

INTRODUCTION

Painted by Henry Walton in 1781,¹ William Gilpin (1724-1804) has remained best known as the originator and theoretician of the picturesque.² As a matter of fact, his works comprise several travel notebooks and essays dealing with that aesthetic notion. And yet, he was also the author of several biographies and sermons and a compulsive letter-writer. First a gifted and inspired schoolmaster, then a caring clergyman, William Gilpin possessed, in his main biographer's words, "the knack of getting to the level of his audience, no matter whether he was talking or writing to his uncultured parishioners, his four-year-old grandson William, or to a bishop of the Church."³ His autobiography, his letters and two of his unpublished manuscripts held in the Oxford Bodleian Library⁴ point to the particular interest he paid to the theory and practice of epistolary writing.

¹ The portrait is held by the National Portrait Gallery: *William Gilpin* by Henry Walton, oil, 1781. Reference NPG 4418.

² Two pages in *The Penny Magazine* in 1835 confirm that reputation: "a man who deserves to be held in remembrance by every person of taste, and especially by every lover of the picturesque, as an excellent critic in art, and an artist himself of no inconsiderable pretensions." See "William Gilpin, his Church and School," *The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* 188 (7 March 1835): 4. Still in the early twenty-first century, in "William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.3 (2000): 349, Robert J. Mayhew notes: "William Gilpin (1724-1804) is remembered as the pioneer of an aesthetic approach to landscape, 'the picturesque.' The standard modern biography of Gilpin is exclusively concerned with his picturesque drawings and tours."

³ Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin. His Drawings, Teaching and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 149.

⁴ The present volume contains the full text of the first manuscript. For the second text, see Alain Kerhervé, *William Gilpin's Letter-Writer* (Newcastle: CSP, 2014).

Gilpin's life

With the exception of the biography in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,⁵ nothing was published in recent years about William Gilpin's life. Previous approaches focus more on his sketches and drawings, on his theory of picturesque beauty than on other aspects of his life.⁶ A central source to better understand him remains the autobiography he added to his great-grand-father's biography, entitled *Memoirs of Dr. Richard Gilpin [...] Written in the Year 1791, by the Reverend William Gilpin, Vicar of Boldre, Together with an Account of the Author by Himself*.⁷ Contrary to what may be concluded from the year 1791 mentioned in the title of the book, the autobiographical account ends up in 1801.⁸ As it was written by William Gilpin himself, it should not necessarily be taken at its face value and requires caution. In 1981, in *My Dearest Betsy: A Self-Portrait of William Gilpin 1757-1848* Dennis Dobson introduced a number of biographical facts, based on the content of letters and diaries held in the Bodleian Library. His very psychological and unscientific approach, however, also requires caution from academic readers.

Born on 4 June 1724 at Scaleby Castle, near Carlisle, William Gilpin was the son of Captain Bernard Gilpin (1701-1776) and Matilda Langstaffe (1703-1773). He entered Queen's College, Oxford, in 1740, and graduated BA in 1744 and MA in 1748, while being ordained deacon in 1746 by George Fleming, bishop of Carlisle, and appointed to the curacy

⁵ Malcolm Andrews, "Gilpin, William (1724-1804)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10762 [20 October 2010].

⁶ See, for instance, the title of Barbier's book, *William Gilpin. His Drawings, Teaching and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963). A more complete book on the topic dates back to 1939: William Templeman, *The Life and Work of William Gilpin (1724-1804) Master of the Picturesque and Vicar of Boldre*, *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, vol. 24.3-4 (1939) 1-336.

⁷ William Gilpin, *Memoirs of Dr. Richard Gilpin of Scaleby Castle in Cumberland and of his Posterity in the Two Succeeding Generations; Written in the Year 1791, by the Reverend William Gilpin, Vicar of Boldre Together with an Account of the Author by Himself* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1879). Contrary to more recent ones, the 1879 edition contains a full list of the manuscript sources available (181-190).

⁸ Gilpin, *Memoirs of Dr Richard Gilpin* 152: "[His wife and he] were alive in the beginning of the year 1801; and having seen their two sons, both worthy young men, sufficiently provided for; well married; and at the head of large families, they had nothing now to wait for, but their last dissolution."

of Irthington in Cumberland. In that period, he wrote his first text on nature and ruins, *A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stowe* (1748). Spending some time in London, he started to write several biographies: his ancestor Bernard Gilpin's, published in 1752, bishop Hugh Latimer's (1755), John Wycliffe's (1765) and Thomas Cranmer's (1784).⁹

After marrying his cousin Margaret Gilpin (1725-1807), he became headmaster of the boy school of Cheam in Surrey, in 1753.¹⁰ There he worked twenty-four years, rehabilitating the place and reforming its pedagogical practices. The number of children increased from forty to eighty over the period.¹¹ His holidays were devoted to the discovery of the most picturesque places in England. In 1777, he handed over the school to his second son William (1757-1848), while he accepted the position of Vicar of Boldre, in the New-Forest area, with an annual income of six hundred pounds. He went on with his tours of Britain, equipped with his sketch-book and notebook, which made him a butt of caricature in William Combe's writings and in some of Thomas Rowlandson's drawings, in the early nineteenth century.¹² However, a series of observations made in those tours were published between 1782 and 1809: *Observations on Cumberland and Westmorland* (1786) or *Observations on South-west England and the Isle of Wight* (1796). Several theoretical essays were added to that production: *Remarks on Forest Scenery* (1791), *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; And on Sketching Landscape* (1792) being the most famous ones. In the 1790s, he was also a prominent actor of the local life of Boldre, where he gave a part of his literary revenue to build the two buildings of a school for boys and girls.¹³ He also initiated the building of a poor house, the working principles of

⁹ In *The Life and Work of William Gilpin*, Templeman comments on the experience and style of the biographer (39-57), whose short, colourful and stimulating anecdotes he prefers to the duller historical developments of the family memoirs.

¹⁰ He had worked several times in the school ever since 1750, Templeman notes (58).

¹¹ Gilpin, *Memoirs of Dr Richard Gilpin* 123.

¹² William Combe wrote *The Tour of Doctor Syntax, in Search of the Picturesque and Its Two Sequels* (1812, 1820, 1821), illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson. On that point, see Francesca Orestano, "The Revd William Gilpin and the Picturesque; or, Who's Afraid of Doctor Syntax?," *Garden History* 31.2 (2003): 164-167 and Vincent Carretta, "Combe, William (1742-1823)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6022 [29 October 2010].

¹³ Gilpin, *Memoirs of Dr Richard Gilpin* 144.

which he wrote in *An Account of a New Poor House* in 1796. Crippled by recurrent asthma and fits of dropsy, his health gradually declined, so that, thinking he was about to die, he received Holy Communion in the presence of his family and relatives in January 1798.¹⁴ However, he recovered and took up his literary and epistolary activity again.

More famous for his picturesque writings, such as *An Essay on Prints* (1768), which saw four editions in his life than for his religious writings, which he was fully aware of,¹⁵ William Gilpin died at Boldre, on 5 April 1804.¹⁶ He left a substantial production, which is composed of several unpublished manuscripts containing many autograph letters and a letter-writing manual.

Correspondence

William Gilpin's correspondence remains largely unpublished. A number of autograph manuscripts are held in the Bodleian Library¹⁷ and a few others in various archival centres.¹⁸

¹⁴ Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin: Their Friendship and Correspondence* (London: Oxford UP, 1959) 46.

¹⁵ At the end of his life, he writes: "I have figured so much lately as a picturesque man, that I should be glad to redeem my character as a clergyman." Quoted in Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989) 56.

¹⁶ At the end of his autobiography in 1801, he estimates that he has nothing else to expect but his dissolution. See Gilpin, *Memoirs of Dr Richard Gilpin* 152.

¹⁷ All the following references are to manuscripts held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: Letters to Mary Delany (1782-1786), Ms. Eng. lett. b. 27 ff.33-61; letters to Sir Harry Bernard Neale (1777-1804), Ms. Eng. lett. d. 195 ff.58-112; other letters (Ms. Eng. Misc. b. 73, c 387-93, d 556-88; Ms. Eng. Misc. e. 486-539; Ms. Eng. Misc. f. 178-378); Ms. Eng Misc d 575, "Correspondence between William Gilpin and his grand-son."

¹⁸ East Riding Archive and Local Studies Service, County Hall, Beverley. DDGR/42/20/66 ("Letter from William Gilpin," 23 Aug. 1770), DDGR/42/21/53 ("Letter from J. Gilpin," 7 Jul. 1771), DDGR/42/21/109 ("Letter from Will. Gilpin," 22 Sep. 1771), DDGR/42/33/13 ("Letter from William Gilpin, Cheam School," 28 Apr. 1766), DDGR/42/33/40 ("Letter from Thomas Grimston," 21 Oct. 1767), DDGR/42/33/67 ("Letter from Will. Gilpin," 5 Jul. 1769), DDGR/43/13/15 ("Letter from W Gilpin," 30 Jul. 1793), DDGR/43/13/23 ("Letter from Will. Gilpin," 1793).

A reduced amount of his letters was published in other correspondences or in critical studies of his works.¹⁹ It is the case for eight letters addressed to Samuel Henley (1744-1815), a man of letters, between 1768 and 1769,²⁰ for thirteen epistles sent to the blue-stocking Mary Delany (1700-1788), between 1781 and 1786,²¹ for six letters sent to William Green,²² the rector of Hardingham and translator of the psalms,²³ for twelve letters to the painter Mary Hartley (1757-1803) and to an unknown correspondent,²⁴ and for twenty-one missives exchanged with the poet Samuel Rogers between 1796 and 1803.²⁵ The chart below (Fig. 1) shows the detail of the letters written by William Gilpin published in those editions.

¹⁹ A letter in French addressed to William Gilpin was published by William D. Templeman, "An Unpublished French Letter to William Gilpin," *Modern Language Notes* 46.2 (1931): 107-109. The manuscripts of six letters written by William Green to William Gilpin, between 1792 and 1794, are held in the Bodleian Library, Ms. Eng. Misc. c. 389, fol. 210-222.

²⁰ The letters were published from the manuscripts by Fraser Neiman, in "The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35.2 (1972): 159-169. For more detail on Samuel Henley, see George P. Moriarty, "Henley, Samuel (1740-1815)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12933 [accessed 26 October 2010].

²¹ Mary Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville Mrs Delany, with Interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte*, ed. Lady Augusta Hall Llanover, 6 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1861-1862) 6: 37, 78, 81, 83, 86, 91, 104, 245, 306, 339, 346, 349, 362, 371.

²² Those letters were published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1819: letters 1-3: *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 89 (1819): 2: 503-504; letters 4-7: *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 89.2 (1819): 606-608.

²³ Gilpin wrote a biography of William Green which is held in the Bodleian Library, Ms. Eng. Misc. d. 568. William Green is the author of *A New Translation of the Psalms from the Original Hebrew, with Notes Critical and Explanatory. To Which is Added, a Dissertation on the Last Prophetick Words of Noah* (Cambridge: Joseph Bentham, 1762).

²⁴ Rebecca Warner, *Original Letters from Richard Baxter, Matthew Prior, Lord Bolingbroke, Alexander Pope, Dr. Cheyne, Dr. Hartley, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Mrs Montague, Rev. William Gilpin, George Lord Lyttleton, Rev. John Newton, Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchanan...* (London: R. Cruttwell, 1817) 141-174. Two volumes of letters exchanged between William Gilpin and Mary Hartley are held in the Bodleian Library. They comprise about fifty letters written between 1781 and 1804. See Ms. Eng. Misc. d. 572 et 573. Those letters were not studied in detail.

²⁵ Barbier's book, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin...* contains eleven letters written by William Gilpin to Samuel Rogers between 1796 and 1803 (37-74). In the following pages, the references to those letters will be marked "Rogers" followed by the page number. Eight letters of the same correspondence were

	Samuel Henley	Mary Delany	Mary Hartley	William Green	***	Samuel Rogers	Total
Dates	1768- 1769	1781- 1786	1791- 1795	1792- 1794	1794- 1802	1796- 1803	1768- 1803
Number of letters	8	13	4	6	5	11	47
Total of words	2,343	6,182	2,200	2,530	1,420	5,777	20,452
Average: words per letter	293	475	550	421	284	525	435

Fig. 1. William Gilpin's published letters

The whole comprises forty-seven letters and 20,452 words,²⁶ written between 1768 and 1803. A few letters written by his correspondents show that they are admiring. For instance, Samuel Henley who was twenty years younger than William Gilpin respected the latter's talent, even though he dared formulate a few occasional remarks about his theories. Mary Delany pointed to William Gilpin's qualities in several letters she sent to her relatives, in which she admired his theories and regretted his not publishing some of his writings, as she wrote to Frances Hamilton, one of her friends, on 18 June 1781:

I have been mortified by a disappointment in an entertainment I was given encouragement to hope for; no less than the publication of Mr. Gilpin's *Tours*, with the drawings, *both* so excellent in their way and lost to the public from the check of prudence, which will not allow him to run the hazard of so great an expence. I think diffidence and modesty has some share in his reluctance; I wish I *cou'd steal* (for I fear I shall never *influence*) out of the mischievous banks at the gaming tables four or five hundred pounds, and bestow it on a work that wou'd do honour, not only to

copied by Catherine Brisco, seven of which were transcribed in Barbier's book. See Bodleian Library, Ms. Eng. Misc. d. 578, fol. 764-787. Letter 5 (779-785) is absent from Barbier's edition, which contains letters from other origins. Rogers must have been William Gilpin's pupil at Cheam. See Ms. Eng. Misc. e. 517, "Punishment Book kept at Cheam School, Surrey, 1759-1766," fol. 4: his signature appears on a note dated 26 June 1760.

²⁶ Only the letters written by William Gilpin were conserved and printed in his exchanges with Mary Delany and Samuel Henley. And yet, the extant letters refer to messages and answers from the two correspondents, some of which are held in the Bodleian Library.

the very worthy and ingenious author, but to the country which he lives in.
(Llanover 6: 32-33)

As she envisages the printing of part of William Gilpin's works, Mary Delany, then aged eighty draws the portrait of a fifty-seven year old man with whom she had probably not yet exchanged letters. And yet, William Gilpin's own letters better help define several characteristics of his own epistolary writing between the 1760s and 1780s. His style at the time was a clever, subtle and astonishing combination of technical care and of lack of retinue.

William Gilpin's concern for epistolary rhetorics shows in the composition of his letters, as well as in his selection of initial and final formulae. His desire to abide by the classical model leads him to lavish epistolary advice on his friend Samuel Rogers:

When you write a letter in answer to one you have received a year or two before, never refer to any part of that letter unless you know the writer keeps a copy of it; but write *de novo*. For want of this caution I have been puzzled with several passages in your letter, referring to things now totally forgotten.²⁷

Before dealing with poetic matters, the schoolmaster offers a short epistolary lesson to his addressee. Logically enough, William Gilpin is careful to abide by the rules: his superscriptions are always chosen with attention, for instance when writing to Mary Delany whom he addresses as "Madam" in three letters, "Dear Madam" in the other ten, that second formula being once integrated into the first sentence: "Indeed, dear Madam, you were very kind to us on Thursday" (Llanover 6: 349). That form of familiarity, which brings the epistolary style and conversation closer and suggests sincere, intimate feelings between two correspondents, creates a sharp contrast with his resorting to the single apostrophe "Madam," in 1782, between two letters beginning with "Dear Madam."²⁸ This sign of regressive affection can however be justified by the content of his letter: Gilpin is crossed, offended, and as a consequence does not want to start his letter as a familiar conversation, but chooses a more distant opening. Conversely, while no initial formula is used in his very first letter to Samuel Henley, written in the third person, the next three start with "Sir," the last three with "Dear Sir," which is a sign of the growing friendship of the two men. William Gilpin's exchanges with Samuel

²⁷ Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin* 58.

²⁸ Llanover 6: 83.

Rogers are even more intimate, the former starting with "Dear Sir" only twice (letters 2 and 3), while choosing "my dear Sir," most often within the first sentence (letters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), as a superscription in his last three letters (9, 10, 11). In any case, his choice of initial formulae proves to have answered the expectations of the epistolary theory of the time.

His final formulae are also in keeping with the rules of the genre: William Gilpin does not neglect them,²⁹ nor did he forget to respect the visual layout of the subscription, which he most often wrote over five lines, including the signature:

I am, Sir,	I am, dear madam, with the truest respect and esteem,	Believe me, dear sir,
Y ^r . obliged, & Most Obed ^t Serv ^t	Y ^r most sincere and most obliged	Your very sincere & affect ^{le}
Will: Gilpin	Humble servant, Will. Gilpin	Will: Gilpin ³⁰

Those three examples are typical of his endings the structures of which are varied, as summarized in Figure 2 (below) in which the grammatical structures of the final formulae of the letters sent to his main correspondents are gathered. They are classified from the least to the most complex one. William Gilpin chooses twenty-seven different structures to conclude forty-five letters. Only four of them (a total of five letters) finish with the possessive pronoun "yours,"³¹ while all the others start with the possessive adjective "your," most often combined with the noun "servant,"

²⁹ Of the three letters sent to his sister held in the Bodleian Library, (Ms. Eng. Misc. b. 73, fol. 9, 11, 17), the first two end: "I am dear Betty your affectionate brother, WG" and "Believe me, dear Betty, your most affectionate brother W Gilpin" while the third one only reads "Your &c.." It can be explained by the lack of space remaining at the bottom of the sheet: the closing formula is written perpendicularly in the margin of the last page.

³⁰ The three excerpts are taken from "The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley" 2, Llanover 6: 362 and Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin* 57-59.

³¹ Endings in "yours" were not rare in the eighteenth century, even if they only became more frequent in the second half of the century. On that point, see Bijkerk, Annemieke, "*Yours Sincerely* and *Yours Affectionately*, On the Origin and Development of Two Positive Politeness Markers," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 5:2 (2004): 297-311.

with the exception of a few letters sent to Samuel Rogers. The closing formula is varied for each addressee, one only being taken up in two of the

Final formula							Henley	Delany	Hartley	Green	****	Rogers	Total
Your			very		adj. 1				1	1		2	4
			most		adj. 1	Servant	1	1					2
			very		adj. 1	Friend				2			2
				adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant					1		1
				most	adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant		1				1
			very	adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant	1						1
		adj. 3		most		adj. 1	Servant	1					1
		adj. 3	and			adj. 1						2	2
		adj. 3	and			adj. 1	Servant				1		1
		very	adj. 3	and		adj. 1						3	3
			adj. 3	and	most		adj. 1	Servant	2		1	2	5
			adj. 3	and	very		adj. 1	Servant		1			1
		most	adj. 3	and			adj. 1	Servant	1	1			2
		most	adj. 3	and		adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant			1	1	2
		very	adj. 3	and		adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant			1	1	2
		most	adj. 3	and	most		adj. 1	Servant		1			1
			adj. 3	and	most	adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant		1			1
		most	adj. 3	and	most		adj. 1	Servant		1			1
		much	adj. 3	and	most		adj. 1	Servant		1			1
		truly	adj. 3	and	most		adj. 1	Servant			1		1
	most	adj. 3	and	most	adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant		1			1	
	much	adj. 3	and	most	adj. 2	adj. 1	Servant		2			2	
	very	adj. 3	and	most	adj. 2	adj. 1			1		1	2	
Yours				truly	adj. 1							1	1
					sincerely				1				1
				very	sincerely				1				1
									1			1	2
							6	13	4	6	5	11	45 ¹

Fig. 2. Grammatical structure of William Gilpin's closing formulae³²

six published letters addressed to Samuel Henley, one again in the thirteen messages sent to Mary Delany. Moreover, no single formula is used for every one of his correspondents. While it is difficult to believe that the letter writer is able to remember the lexical and grammatical choices of his previous letters, more obviously when the exchange lasts over several

³² The figures 1, 2 and 3 placed near the adjectives (adj.) correspond to the successive modifications of the noun group the head of which is the signature of the letter.

years, William Gilpin is very likely to have kept, as some of his contemporaries did,³³ a copy or first draft of his letters, which permitted to vary the formulae after checking the previous letters. The most frequent structure [your + adj. + and + most + adj. + servant] is only used five times, for three different addressees, Samuel Henley, Samuel Green and ***, "your obliged and most obedient servant" being used for the first two, "your sincere and most obedient servant" for the anonymous correspondent.

Regardless of the gender of the correspondent, the choice of adjectives made by William Gilpin is not very much varied: he alternates four qualifiers, "humble," "obedient," "obliged" and "sincere," which is close to the examples of the epistolary manuals, but is much less varied than in the messages of other famous letter writers³⁴ In the nine most complex structures, "Your truly sincere, and most obedient servant" and "Your much obliged and most obedient, humble servant," are reserved for women, Mary Delany and Mary Hartley. If it is not possible to infer from too few examples that William Gilpin's style was more grandiloquent when writing to women – since some other letters addressed to them also finish with "yours," "yours sincerely" or "your most obedient servant"³⁵ –, one can still note that more simple final formulae were used for male addressees.

A certain degree of liberty is perceived in his third message to Samuel Henley, which is more a billet than a proper letter: it is attached to a

³³ The keeping of draft letters was common from the sixteenth century onwards as demonstrated by James Daybell, "Women's Letters and Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603: An Introduction to the Issues of Authorship and Construction," *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999): 161-88. The historian draws several conclusions from the study of draft letters and their comparison with the actually dispatched messages. He highlights the importance of the finition stage, the choice of a particular spelling according to the recipient of the letter and notes that copies were sometimes made by relatives, giving the example of Muriel Tresham. Susan Whyman also shows the changes which may occur between the draft and the final version of the letters in *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009) 97.

³⁴ On that point, see Alain Kerhervé, "L'expression de l'intimité chez les épistoliers anglaises au XVIII^e siècle: de la théorie à la pratique," *La Lettre et l'intime. L'Emergence d'une expression du for intérieur dans les correspondances privées (XVII^e-XIX^e siècles)*, ed. Paul Servais and Laurence Van Ypersele (Louvain-la-Neuve: Bruylant-Academia, 2007) 97-105.

³⁵ See Llanover 6: 371, Warner 150 and Llanover 6: 104.

volume of the second edition of a book which was the topic of previous exchanges. And yet that card, which was written in the third-person singular, does not present any initial or final formula, while most billets did abide by those obligatory elements in the theory of the genre.³⁶ One of the letters sent to Mary Delany also contains a short *post-scriptum* – "Our compliments to Miss Port"³⁷ –, which was not recommended either.³⁸ The most amazing element is William Gilpin's systematic use of abbreviations, which he seems to be unable to do without, even when addressing correspondents he is not very familiar with, such as Mary Delany and, even more so, Samuel Henley, at the beginning of their exchanges. That distance from the rules of epistolary writing may have been a visual expression of a style which proves to be, in many ways, very little respectful of conventions.

William Gilpin's letters are often self-centered. They focus on his own literary production, whether his religious or his picturesque writings. His exchanges with Samuel Henley begin as the latter comments on the first edition of William Gilpin's *Essay upon Prints*; the first letters exchanged with Mary Delany begin with William Gilpin's thanks to Mary Delany for praising his works; his first letter to Mary Hartley deals with another reference to one of his essays: "I am extremely glad, you like my Exposition of the New Testament" (Warner 145-147), while a following message mentions *The Short Explanation, &c. for the Boldre School* and *An Account of a New Poor House* (Warner 155-156); his conversation with Samuel Rogers contains both a sharp criticism of one of his correspondent's poems (Rogers 39-40) and an obvious self-enjoyment at

³⁶ For example, the manual by Hallifax, *Familiar Letters on Various Subjects of Business and Amusement* [59] contains a section entitled "Different Forms of writing Messages on Cards" (262-276).

³⁷ Llanover 6: 349.

³⁸ In the eighteenth century, all the manuals developing theories of the post-scriptum agree that they should not be used, from *The Complete Letter-Writer* (1756): "When you write to your superiors, never make a postscript, and (if possible) avoid it in letters to your equals; especially complimentary postscripts to any of the person's family or relations to whom you write; as it shows disrespect in your neglecting such persons in the body of your letter" (15-16) to *The Correspondent* (1791): "In the three last specimens I have inserted a paragraph of complimentary remembrances, I have not done so in every letter to avoid repetitions, but the student must *never omit it*; and take particular notice that no opportunity of closing his letter gracefully with another subject, or fancied advantage or elegance of any kind, must tempt him to leave it out of the body of his letter, and throw it into a postscript." (46)

discussing the new opus of his English tours, *Observations on the Western Parts of England* (Rogers 50-53). The headmaster of Cheam, as well as the vicar of Boldre, enjoys to talk about his own works and to receive the advice, preferably positive, his interlocutors provide him with on his manuscript or printed works.

William Gilpin also enjoys speaking about himself. Lady Llanover, the nineteenth-century editor of Mary Delany's correspondence was upset with that tendency of his: "This sentence, indeed the whole letter, is another instance of Gilpin's irritable and unbecoming pride."³⁹ The following table confirms that his series of printed letters show similar proportions of the repartitions of the pronouns "I" and "me" and of the possessive adjective "my," the whole amounting to 6,8 % of the total of words used by the writer in his letters. That average is very superior to that of many letter writers in the eighteenth century.

	Gilpin to Henley	Gilpin to Delany	Gilpin to Hartley	Gilpin to Green	Gilpin to ***	Gilpin to Rogers	Total
Total number of words	2 343	6 182	2 200	2 530	1 420	5 777	20 452
<i>I</i>	120 (5,1 %)	292 (4,7 %)	87 (3,9 %)	91 (3,6 %)	65 (4,6 %)	279 (4,8 %)	934 (4,6 %)
<i>Me</i>	20 (0,8 %)	61 (1 %)	21 (1 %)	27 (1,1 %)	15 (1 %)	66 (1,1 %)	210 (1 %)
<i>My</i>	23 (1 %)	83 (1,3 %)	23 (1 %)	21 (0,08 %)	13 (1 %)	81 (1,4 %)	244 (1,2 %)
Average	7 %	7 %	5,9 %	5,5 %	6,6 %	7,3 %	6,8 %

Fig. 3. "I," "Me" and "My" in William Gilpin's letters

Although he occasionally pretends to care about the health or well-being of his correspondents, he rather talks of himself and of his own health. For instance, in 1801, when writing his compliments to his friend for his wedding, he rapidly turns to his own health worries:

I heard only yesterday morning of your marriage, by Mr. —, who called upon me. I should otherwise have done earlier what I now do, congratulate you on the occasion. From his account of your lady, I hope you have a prospect of great happiness before you; and I know little of you, if you do not make her a very kind, attentive husband; so I hope there is every reason

³⁹ Llanover 6: 362, about Mary Delany's last but one letter to William Gilpin.

to expect a happy marriage. *You are beginning life; Mrs. G. and I are ending it;* but, through the blessing of God! with much more comfort than we could expect at our years. Since my late illness, I have never been perfectly well. It has left a cough, and shortness of breath. I am obliged to see more company than I wish: but I have a kind friend, who manages things dexterously for me. I commonly sit in my bow-windowed parlour below stairs, and all company is carried into the drawing-room above; and such company as I wish to see, or want to see me, she sends down to me. Once more, my dear Sir, I join with my family in congratulating you, and paying our kind respects to all under your roof.⁴⁰

The content of the letter, which is here quoted extensively, with the exception of the introductory and closing formulae, is surprising both because William Gilpin talks more of himself than of the marriage but also because far from summoning images of joy, he resorts to representations of illness and solitude. The whole is hardly counter-balanced by the associated idea that perfect conjugal bliss can be an example for the newly married pair.

Similarly, when he answers one of Mary Delany's missing letters, which must have dealt with the old woman's growing blindness,⁴¹ he embarks on a demonstration of the importance of eyesight in the following words:

Our eyes, though so great a source of our pleasures, are certainly as much so of our temptations, which are emphatically called 'the lusts of the eye.' For myself, I have often thought there are few things which come upon us under the name of calamities which I could bear with more fortitude than the loss of my sight. Even the pleasures with which they furnish me are *not* nearly so lively now as they once were. With the works of art I am almost satiated. For the works of *nature* I have *still a relish*; but even here I find my eyes among my greatest misleaders; they are continually *distracting* my attention, and carrying it off among trifles. A ray of sunshine—a dark cloud—the sprig of a tree—anything, is sufficient to disturb the most serious thoughts which frequent my mind. Besides, I have seen so much of the works of nature, have attended to them so closely, and have gotten

⁴⁰ Rebecca Warner, *Original Letters from Richard Baxter, Matthew Prior, Lord Bolingbroke, Alexander Pope, Dr. Cheyne, Dr. Hartley, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Mrs Montague, Rev. William Gilpin, George Lord Lyttleton, Rev. John Newton, Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchanan, &c., &c.* (London: R. Cruttwell, 1817) 172.

⁴¹ Mary Delany gradually lost sight. At the age of twenty-seven, she wrote: "My eyes have been so much dazzled, that I can't see to fill this sheet of paper" (Llanover 1: 137). When seventy years old, she noted: "My eyesight grew dimmer" (Llanover 5: 97).

them so, in a manner, by heart, y' I can at any time shut my eyes and see nobler compositions than they can easily furnish when open, and these pictures I have at command; I can bid them come and go. They are rarely intruders. (Llanover 6: 104)

The excerpt begins with the possessive adjective "our" which permits to associate Mary Delany's visual deficiency with his own and to focus on himself and on his own experience of the works of art and nature. The excess of his words, based on a repeated use of ternary rhythm ("A ray of sunshine—a dark cloud—the sprig of a tree," "so much of the works of nature, have attended to them so closely, and have gotten them so"), the superiority of his sense of observation and his perfect mastering of his body and soul gradually take him away from his correspondent. Two letters addressed to Samuel Rogers begin with such lengthy paragraphs about his own health that he is reduced to apologize for his excessive selfishness when finishing them: "having thus talked of myself through a page; it is now time to come to your villa" (Rogers 47); "Now I know you have been criticizing all this egotistical narrative" (Rogers 54).

He also enjoys demonstrating his culture. He is very well-read in literature as well as in painting: he multiplies references, quotes Latin sentences twice,⁴² and proves to be very proud of his own assessments: "I am glad you agree with me in my opinion of Virgil" (Henley 4); "Milton, I dare say, was no painter; but you can plainly see he was a musical man. Spencer is very picturesque." (Henley 4).⁴³ His advice is often linked with his own theory of the picturesque, which he thus promotes, for instance when addressing a young correspondent.⁴⁴ That tendency is also exemplified in his letters to Samuel Rogers, at a time when William Gilpin intends to sell some of his drawings:

⁴² "The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley" 6: "Quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi." The sentence which can be translated by "Whatever you show me so, I disbelieve and I hate" is taken from Horace, *Ars Poetica* (l. 188); it gathers proverbial meaning; "Virgil, I always thought, was full of these ideas; & I am convinced he was a painter. In Milton I see much poetical, but little picturesque beauty" ("The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley" 5).

⁴³ Also see "nor can my eye dwell upon a picture with any satisfaction, however elegant the parts may be, in which the composition, and distribution of light do not make a whole. It is amazing how deficient in these things the Italians are" ("The Letters of William Gilpin to Samuel Henley" 7).

⁴⁴ Fraser Neiman (156) points to William Gilpin's "readiness to communicate his ideas to younger contemporaries."

Having talked a good deal about you, let me now talk a little about myself. I propose, if nothing prevent me, to bring on, this spring (about May) my drawings to be sold, for a future endowment of my parish-school. As I am a modest man, I can say but little myself: but I have no objection to your telling every body you meet, that they may never again have so good an opportunity of *filling their cabinets with such exquisite pieces of art*. (Rogers 63)

The artist thus proves to be able to advertise his own works. The sale, which did take place on 6 May 1802, was a huge success. Duly informed by letter, Samuel Rogers bought four lots amounting to over thirty-five pounds.⁴⁵ Moreover, William Gilpin's literary criticism is sometimes harsh when some writers solicit his advice, such as an author to whom he writes in 1794:

According to your desire, I have looked over your work with a critic's eye; and I have taken great liberties with your stile, which I do, upon the principle of performing a trust. You may adopt, or not, as you please. A good stile, in my opinion, consists in the fewest and easiest words, arranged in the simplest and most natural order, and running as smoothly as the ear will admit. On these principles I have used my correcting pen; all quaint phrases, and embarrassed sentences, should be avoided. You will find an example of what I mean by an embarrassed sentence, in the middle of the 46th page; where you must read two or three lines, before you can guess what is to come. (Warner 167-168)

The nature of his criticism probably explains why the writer's name was replaced by a series of stars in that nineteenth-century edition. William Gilpin shows as little tact when he criticizes one of Samuel Rogers's poems in 1797, regretting the conciseness of the piece and the plainness of the images.⁴⁶

When he neither intends to eulogize his own works nor lavishes criticism on literary works, William Gilpin often desires to see his talent acknowledged by persons of importance surrounding his correspondents. Most of his letters to Mary Delany refer to the Duchess of Portland,

⁴⁵ Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin* 64.

⁴⁶ Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin* 40: "With regard to the *whole*, you seem to me, (what is certainly a fault, if it be one, on the better side) too concise. I think your subject would not only have allowed more; but disappoints us in not having more—particularly in the description of the *cottage*, & the *library*. [...] So much for the *whole*. With regard to the *parts*, I have not much to say. Most of the lines, I think, are unexceptionally beautiful."

possibly because she is Mary Delany's closest friend at the time and because he knows her particular interest and taste for nature, but also perhaps because she is a member of the aristocracy and may be of some assistance to him. His first letter to Mary Delany alludes twice to the Duchess of Portland, while William Gilpin's main concern is to recommend his niece to his correspondent, who might be acquainted with a relation who could be interested in learning embroidery. His enterprise is successful and he thanks Mary Delany for her intervention in August 1782 (Delany 6). Thus Mary Delany provides William Gilpin with direct access to the aristocracy. In a similar way, after the death of the Duchess of Portland, after learning that Mary Delany is offered an annual income and Windsor apartment by King George III, thus becoming a member of the royal household, William Gilpin begins one of his letters to her in this sudden way: "You have *highly gratified* me, by telling me the Queen has approved my book. I can now with some confidence present it to her. How much I rejoice, dear madam, in their Majesties behaviour to you!" (Delany 8).⁴⁷ Such an *in medias res* start shows the man's personal interest in the promotion of his works, highlighted by the numerous first person pronouns ("me," "me," "I," "I") and the possessive adjective "my." William Gilpin's sincerity can be questioned: does he really rejoice for her or for his own indirect benefit in the process? Afterwards, she grants him access to Windsor on two occasions, in April 1786.⁴⁸

Moreover, William Gilpin's epistolary style is often oral, his tone, straightforward, if not abrupt. Still, in two exchanges, he is more careful

⁴⁷ Dated 9 November 1785, that letter is the second one sent by William Gilpin to Mary Delany in 1785 and is followed by another four in 1786. Before 1785, William Gilpin had only written to Mary Delany in 1782. The rising frequency of his epistolary activity may have been motivated by Mary Delany's position at court. However, that conclusion only relies on a corpus of extant letters, whilst others may have been exchanged and lost at the same period.

⁴⁸ See letter 10: "Shall I trespass upon you if I take Windsor in my way home, and spend half an hour with you about Thursday or Friday sevendnight?"; letter 11: "Indeed, dear madam, you were very kind to us on Thursday. Nothing allayed my pleasure but the distress of my wife, who, in the perplexity of a thousand niceties and delicacies (with which she is more troubled than any person I know), was under continual apprehension of trespassing upon you"; letter 12: "While I was putting up those two little drawings which I told you were ambitious of having a place in the closet you shewed me, the chaise not only was made ready; but, without my knowledge, went and brought Mrs. Gilpin from your house to the inn. As such was the case I thought it wrong, for the sake of a ceremonious moment, to give you any farther trouble, after having given you so much."

of abiding by the rules of the genre and writes with more propriety: "Mr. Henley will excuse it, if the author [William Gilpin] hath addressed him with any impropriety" (Henley 1), "I am mortified to the last degree, lest, in my rage, I *should* have said something improper" (Delany 4). The former letter addressed to Samuel Henley is written in the third person, since he wants to tell his correspondent that he will not accept negative criticism from a reader (Henley 1). In 1782, one of his letters to Mary Delany begins thus:

Some people are never to be satisfied; you shewed my papers to a friend or two—I flew into a violent rage—you immediately returned them—now I vibrate as far into a contrary passion. I am mortified to the last degree, lest, in my rage, I should have said something improper, and have offended you! My requisition was not made above three posts ago, and by that very post I receive a note from Mr. Blamire, informing me that you have sent him the papers. Sure, madam, you would not have been in such a prodigious hurry unless you had been offended? (Delany 4)

His words transcribe the violence of his feelings, which he seems to be little able to control. The succession of dashes and the initial parataxis reinforce the impact of a vocabulary devoid of nuances, with the repetition of "rage," in which the physical effects of Mary Delany's actions transpire ("flew into a violent rage," "vibrate [...] into a contrary passion"). Although he feigns to worry about having offended his correspondent, yet he is the one who has felt offended and lets it know bluntly, at the beginning of another letter in which some woodcutters are called "ruffians" performing a "bloody work."⁴⁹ He proves to be as unpredictable and disagreeable towards Mary Delany when he reproaches her with not answering his latest letter:

I beg you to consider what *injustice* you have done me, by keeping a letter of mine in your hands, of which you have not deigned to take the least notice, ever since I returned home last from Windsor. And yet, madam, I believe I should not have written on this matter, if I had not been under *some* apprehension of having given *you* *offence* by my abrupt departure? (Delany 12)

His letter is dated from 3 July 1786, at a time when the eighty-six year old Mary Delany rarely puts pen to paper. Once again, he pretends that he fears he has offended the old woman while he is dissatisfied with not having received any answer: he is unable to hide his feelings. The letter he sent her, a fortnight later, to thank her for her answer is the last

⁴⁹ "the ruffians had begun their bloody work" (Delany 4).

conserved, perhaps because the old woman was desirous of more delicacy and propriety. In another message, William Gilpin expresses his anger at not receiving an answer from Samuel Rogers, then finishing his first paragraph with: "But my wrath is now appeased. I shake hands with you; and all is well" (Rogers 58). His epistolary style is direct, oral and occasionally passionate. It is not very different from the one in which he develops his pedagogical and aesthetic theories.⁵⁰

Aesthetic and pedagogical theories

Much has already been written on William Gilpin's theory of the picturesque.⁵¹ Although *An Essay on Prints*, in which he defines the picturesque as "a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture," (XII) was first published anonymously in 1768, his author's name being revealed only in the third edition of the work, it is a first-hand source. Aware of the novelty of his theory,⁵² William Gilpin defines some "principles of picturesque beauty," to paraphrase the full title of the first edition. They are grounded on the study of many landscapes painted by numerous masters, among whom Claude Gelée, le Lorrain. His next theoretical considerations are based on his systematic observations of English landscapes, recorded in notebooks, illustrated by drawings or sketches occasionally improved by his nephew William Sawrey Gilpin, and organized in a few later essays, released between 1782 and 1809,⁵³ among which *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792, 1794). Starting from Plato and Burke's theories of the beautiful, William Gilpin introduces the notion of roughness, in opposition to the smoothness of the

⁵⁰ Templeman asserts: "the style found in all his writing: a crisp, kindly, elucidating simplicity, which seems somehow to bear the living echo of the sound of his voice." (176)

⁵¹ Francesca Orestano, "The Reverend William Gilpin and the Picturesque; or, Who's Afraid of Doctor Syntax?," *Garden History* 31.2 (2003): 163-179.163-179; Dabney Townsend, "The Picturesque," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55.4 (1997): 365-376. Also see Templeman, *The Life and Work of William Gilpin* 113-130 ("Early Picturesque Usage"), 131-146 ("Theory of the Picturesque") and 225-306 ("Master of the Picturesque").

⁵² *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1794) III: "[it] hath never yet, so far as I know, been made the set object of investigation."

⁵³ See *Observations on the River Wye* (1782), *Tour of the Lakes* (1786), *Scottish Tour* (1789), *Remarks on Forest Scenery* (1791), *Three Essays* (1792, 1794), *Southern Tour* (1804) and *Eastern and North Wales Tour* (1809).