

Letter from Erasmus Darwin to Matthew Boulton, 1778/01/11

Darwin gives his opinion on the poetry of a young lady of Boulton's acquaintance.

11 January 1778

Dear Boulton

I have polish'd, japan'd, and handed up, the verses of Miss Rogers, which you sent me. This I think the greatest compliment I could pay to the lady: since if I had not thought the contour fine, and several of the figures graceful and vivid, I would not have taken the labour to have touch'd them over again, have preserved the keeping, and put on the varnish.

Miss Seward sais they are the most beautiful lines she ever saw, and longs to be acquainted with the lady-author; and I beg leave to say, that if the fair Poetess should not be displeas'd with the liberty I have taken with her poem, and at any time wishes my criticism on any of her future productions, I shall be happy with her correspondence.

A Critique on some part of her poem seems necessary to add to this letter least yourself or Miss Rogers may think some [of] the alterations were not necessary.

1. As Fancy is the principle personage it was necessary to keep the Queen of Melancholy rather in the shade, to give light to the figure of Fancy, and thus preserve what the painters call Keeping. Hence "come pensive maid" tho' more lively than "and as with silent hand" was omitted.

It was necessary to make Melancholy a goddess tho' unseen, in the first stanza, as she was to be so in the second, hence Luxury of Melancholy was changed.

The 4th and 5th stanzas were thought burthensome to the conduct of the poem and the 5th not appropriate to the subject tho' very good lines.

"Sighs resistless" is a better line taken separately than "ceasless sorrow" but sorrow is contrasted to love: whereas sighs should have contrasted to laughter as the two former are passions, the two latter bodily actions. This is felt by all readers of the stanza, tho' not easily explain'd.

I am tired of writing.

The Lord keep you, adieu!

E Darwin

Lichfield

Jan 11-78

The inclosed letter is from my Sister, you will please to direct the sundries but don't lose the letter as I have no copy.