

## MONTHLY LITERARY RECREATIONS

Monthly Literary Recreations; or Magazine of General Information and Amusement ran for only three volumes (1806-1807). Virtually nothing is known about its editorial structure, if it had one. Byron, who contributed both the review of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) and a poem, "Stanzas to Jessy," to the July 1807 issue, claims not to have known the editor or any of the contributors besides himself (see Byron to

Elizabeth Pigot, August 2, 1807). He sent his poem directly to the publisher Crosby, who was the London correspondent of Ridge, Byron's Newark publisher. Monthly magazines (the *European Magazine*, for example) tended at this period to be informally organized; the publisher often acted as editor and asked friends and correspondents to contribute whatever they pleased, selecting enough material to fill out each issue.

### July 1807

Byron, *Hours of Idleness* (1807); *Monthly Literary Recreations*, III (July 1807), 67-71. Byron gloated over this review in a letter to Elizabeth Pigot (August 2, 1807); "I knew nothing of the critic, but think *him* a very discerning gentleman, and *myself* a devilish *clever* fellow." What Byron does not emphasize is that Crosby, publisher of *Monthly Literary Recreations*, was the London agent for Ridge, the Newark bookseller who published *Hours of Idleness*, and that there may have been some puffery in the favorable review appearing under Crosby's auspices. Byron's own review of Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) immediately preceded this review in the July 1807 issue of the magazine.

Reviews of New Works.

HOURS OF IDLENESS, A SERIES OF POEMS, ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED.—One vol. 12mo.

BY GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON, A MINOR.

THE young and noble author of these poems introduces them to public notice with a degree of modesty, which does honour to his feelings as a poet and a lord. He expresses a strong desire that the whole attention of the reviewer should rest upon his work, and not his title, and that the abilities he has received from nature, and exerted in his "Hours of Idleness," should be fairly examined, without suffering the splendour of a rank, for which he is indebted to his ancestors, to dazzle the critic's eyes, and disarm his hand. We will, therefore, strive to gratify his wishes; and the impartiality of our censure and praise will shew that we sincerely hope he will re-enter the fields of literature at some future and not far distant period, and think that truth comes from friends alone, who wish to foster, and not to crush the buds of nascent genius.

The original pieces are much more numerous than the translations, and better calculated to unfold the powers of our poet's imagination. Many of them are dedicated to a subject which all ages, all nations, civilized and uncivilized, have celebrated, and which, as it is the source of the myriads that crowd the universe, has been deemed by poets inexhaustibly fertile—to Love. This part is, in our opinion, greatly inferior to the rest, though some new thoughts are scattered here and there, so as to relieve their author from the imputation of having condescended to copy. Some stanzas deal too much in hyperbole, such as the two last of the poem addressed to M——, page 25, which are imitated from Shakespear.

'Tis said, that Berenice's hair  
In stars adorn the vaults of heaven;  
But they would ne'er permit thee there;  
Thou would'st so far outshine the seven.

For did those eyes as planets roll,  
Thy sister lights would scarce appear;  
E'en suns, which systems now controul,  
Would twinkle dimly through their sphere.

The Avon bard was justified in placing such language in the mouth of Romeo, and thereby shewed that he was well acquainted with the bombastic expressions of Italian lovers; but an English one should ever preserve, even in the most impassioned bursts, the characteristics of his country. We should not have been so severe upon this passage, had we not compared it with several pieces, mostly consecrated to friendship, it is true, but where the purest sentiments are clothed in simple, energetic, and elegant language. The poem entitled "The Tear," is one of his happiest effusions, and some of the stanzas are excellent; we will transcribe a few for the benefit of our readers.

When friendship and love  
Our sympathies move;  
When truth in a glance should appear;  
The lips may beguile,  
With a dimple or smile,  
But the test of affection's a tear.

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Too oft is a smile,  
But the hypocrite's wile,  
To mask detestation or fear;  
Give me the soft sigh,  
Whilst the soul-telling eye  
Is dimm'd, for a time, with a tear.

The man doom'd to sail,  
With the blast of the gale,  
Through billows Atlantic to steer,  
As he bends o'er the wave,  
Which may soon be his grave,  
The green sparkles bright with a tear.

The soldier braves death,  
For a fanciful wreath,  
In glory's romantic career;  
But he raises the foe,  
When in battle laid low,  
And bathes every wound with a tear.

Sweet scene of my youth,  
Seat of friendship and truth,  
Where love chag'd, each fast, spoiling year,  
Loth to leave thee, I mourn'd,  
For a last look, I turn'd,  
But thy spire was scarce seen thro' a tear.

Notwithstanding the opinion we expressed about our author's love verses, truth compels us to acknowledge, that the lines "To Mary, on receiving her picture, teem with fire and genuine passion.

We have now reached one of the most considerable poems of the whole volume, and which afforded us true delight: it is entitled "Oscar and Alva, a Tale," the story is entertaining, the descriptions highly poetical; and the young bard displays a richness of imagination and force of expression, which few of our modern poets have surpassed. Some extracts from it will, we trust, be warmly greeted by our readers.

But often has yon rolling moon,  
On Alva's casques of silver play'd;  
And view'd, at midnight's silent noon,  
Her chiefs in gleaming mail array'd.

And on the crimson'd rocks beneath,  
Which scowl o'er ocean's sultry frown,  
Pale in the scatter'd rains of death,  
She view'd the gasping warrior down.

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When many an eye, which ne'er again  
 Could view the rising orb of day,  
 Turn'd feebly from the gory plain,  
 Beheld in death her fading ray.

The picture presented in the last two stanzas, is peculiarly striking and true, though the beauty of the whole passage is impaired by the too frequent recurrence of the verb to view.

Hark ! to the pibroch's\* pleasing note !  
 Hark ! to the swelling nuptial song ;  
 In joyous strains the voices float,  
 And still the choral peals prolong.  
 .....

But who is he, whose darken'd brow  
 Grooms in the midst of general mirth ?  
 Before his eyes far fiercer glow  
 The blue flames curdle on the hearth.

Dark is the robe which wraps his form,  
 And tall his plume of gory red ;  
 His voice is like the rising storm,  
 But light and trackless is his tread.  
 .....

As the length of this poem precluded us from extracting the parts which relate to the story, we chose those which formed pictures, and in which the hand of a master is revealed. The only ground for censure we find, is the sudden change of the measure, and adoption of double rhymes, beginning with the 64th stanza, and after running through the five following, expiring as unexpectedly with the 69th.

The "Answer to some Verses sent by a friend to the author," contains some very spirited passages ; all the sentiments are just, and elegantly expressed.

"Lashin y Gair" is written with fire, and beautifully descriptive ; the same praise, justice will allow us to bestow upon the "Elegy on Newstead Abbey." The "Address to Romance," would supply us with some interesting extracts ; did not want of room forbid us that indulgence : but the "Childish Recollections" will prove one of the most solid foundations upon which Lord Byron's fame, as an eminent poet, will stand. It is replete with feelings, not of a sickly, but a manly nature, and the pleasing melancholy which it breathes throughout ; the flowing harmony of its style, the animated pictures he gives us of the companions of his youthful studies and enjoyments, the regrets he expresses when he finds the worldly scene barren of happiness, and mourns over his orphan and brotherless state ; spread an inexpressible charm over the whole of this production, from which we shall select a few passages.

\* The bagpipe.

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Stern Death forbid my orphan youth to share  
 The tender guidance of a father's care ;  
 Can rank, or ev'n a guardian's name supply  
 The love which glistens in a father's eye ?  
 For this can wealth, or title's sound atone,  
 Made, by a parent's early loss, my own ?  
 What brother springs a brother's love to seek ?  
 What sister's gentle kiss has press'd my cheek ?  
 For me how dull the vacant moments rise,  
 To no fond bosom link'd by kindred ties ;  
 Oft, in the progress of some fleeting dream,  
 Fraternal smiles collected round me seem,  
 While still the visions to my heart are prest,  
 The voice of love will murmur in my rest ;  
 I hear, I wake, and in the sound rejoice ;  
 I hear again ;—but, ah ! no brother's voice.  
 A hermit, 'midst of crowds, I fain must stray  
 Alone, tho' thousand pilgrims fill the way ;  
 While these a thousand kindred wreaths entwine,  
 I cannot call one single blossom mine.  
 .....

Nor yet are you forgot, my jocund boy !  
 Davus, the harbinger of childish joy,  
 For ever foremost in the ranks of fun,  
 The laughing herald of the harmless pun ;  
 Yet, with a breast of such materials made,  
 Anxious to please, of pleasing half afraid ;  
 Candid and liberal, with a heart of steel  
 In danger's path, tho' not untaught to feel.  
 .....

Ida ! still o'er thy hills in joy preside,  
 And proudly steer thro' time's eventful tide ;  
 Still may thy blooming sons thy name revere,  
 Smile in thy bow'r, but quit thee with a tear ;  
 That tear, perhaps, the fondest that will flow  
 O'er their last scene of happiness below !  
 Tell me, ye hoary few, who glide along,  
 The feeble veterans of some former throng ;  
 Whose friends, like autumn leaves by tempests whirl'd,  
 Are swept for ever from this busy world.  
 Revolve the fleeting moments of your youth,  
 While care, as yet, withheld her venom'd tooth,  
 Say, if remembrance, days like these endears,  
 Beyond the rapture of succeeding years ?  
 Say, can ambition's fever'd-dream bestow  
 So sweet a balm, to soothe your hours of woe ?

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Can treasures, hoarded for some thankless son,  
 Can royal smiles, or wreaths by slaughter won,  
 Can stars or ermine, man's maturer toys,  
 For glittering baubles are not left to boys,  
 Recal one scene, so much belov'd, to view,  
 As those where youth her garland twin'd for you?  
 Ah! no—amidst the gloomy calm of age,  
 You turn, with falt'ring hand, life's varied page;  
 Peruse the record of your days on earth,  
 Unsullied only where it marks your birth:  
 Still ling'ring pause above each chequer'd leaf,  
 And blot with tears the sable lines of grief:  
 Where passion o'er the theme her mantle threw,  
 Or weeping virtue sigh'd a faint adieu:  
 But bless the scroll which fairer words adorn,  
 Trac'd by the rosy fingers of the morn,  
 When friendship bow'd before the shrine of truth,  
 And Love,\* without his pinions, smil'd on youth.

"The Death of Calmar and Orla," an imitation of Macpherson's *Ossian*, displays the pliability of our author's talents, and is worthy of being ranked among the works of the ancient bard.

The translations from various authors are also entitled to the greatest praise, that of the Episode of Nisus and Euryalus in particular.

The young poet, whose works we have been reviewing, declared in his preface, that he did not believe he should ever appear any more, as an author, before the tribunal of the public. As friends to the cause of literature, we have thought proper not to disguise our opinion of his powers, that we might alter his determination, and lead him once more to the Castalian fount. His defects we have pointed out; they proceed from the warmth of his feelings, and the facility with which he writes. The one, by exposing him to receiving too strong impressions, and consequently unfolding them with the same exuberance of force, which creates hyperbole, and the other by hurrying him on through his subject, without always repressing the wild flights of his imagination. His beauties grow on the soil of genius, which, therefore, ought to be carefully cultivated, and not permitted to sink into a barren soil.