Priscilla Pointon, â??A Valentineâ?•

Description

PRISCILLA POINTON

â??A Valentineâ?•

Pardon me, Sir, nor think the maid too bold,
That sends you this, the custom being old:
This day our sex does oft by VALENTINE
Chuse those they like, so I have chose you mine.
Antientâ??s the custom, as I name above,
Mine is but friendship, others may be love;
With me, ye Powâ??rs! let friendship ever reign,
I ask no more, nor let me ask in vain:
For shouâ??d I love, and meet with no return,
How wouâ??d my bosom, like to *Sappho*, burn!
Pity on me, perhaps, they might bestow,
But pity cannot ease the pangs of woe.
The very thought alarms my soul, â??tis true,
Thoâ?? Loveâ??s soft passion never yet I knew:
Thus may my heart from love be ever free,
And still a votâ??ress to DIANA be.
In single state we evâ??ry beauty wear,
Wise as MINERVA, and as VENUS fair;
But when once wed, we find it, to our cost,
That in the wife the goddess soon is lost:
No more you sigh, no more in transport view,
For strait weâ??re mortals, and mere husbands you.
Nay, dare to tell us in provoking strain,
That over woman, man was born to reign;
Him to obey should be her chiefest care:
Adieuâ?? P.P. such dire thoughts canâ??t bear.

NOTES:

1-4 *Pardon me, Sirâ?¦ I have chose you mine* The celebration of Valentineâ??s Day dates back to the Roman fertility festival, Lupercalia (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). By the mid eighteenth century in England, it was common for lovers or friends to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes.

9-10 *For shouâ??d I loveâ?¦like to Sappho burn* Pointon is referencing a well-known story about the Greek lyric poet Sappho (c. 630-570 BCE) that was popularized by Joseph Addison in *Spectator* no. 223 (15 November 1711). Addison provides a translation (by Ambrose Phillips) of the only known complete poem by Sappho,

â??An Hymn to Venus,â?• written after pursuing an â??inconstant lover,â?• the sailor Phaon, to Sicily. Addison notes that â??her Hymn was ineffectual for the procuring that happiness which she prayed for in it.â?• According to this tradition, Sappho died because of her unrequited love for Phaon by leaping from a cliff that was supposed to cure her passion (p. 204).

16 *votâ??ress to DIANA* Pointon is claiming herself devoted to Diana, â??an ancient Italian female divinity, the moon-goddess, patroness of virginity and of huntingâ?• and, thus, committed to remaining chaste *(OED).*

18 *MINERVA* A Roman goddess, regarded as the patron of handicrafts and the arts, and later also of wisdom and prowess in war *(OED); VENUS* â??The ancient Roman goddess of beauty and love,â?• notably â??sensual loveâ?• *(OED).*

26 *P.P.* An abbreviation of the authorâ??s own name which appears in several of her direct addresses in *Poems on Several Occasions.*

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions. By Miss Priscilla Pointon, of Lichfield* (Birmingham, 1770), pp. 24-25. [Google Books]

Edited by Lee Hammel