

Sarah Fyge Egerton

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Sarah Fyge (1670-1723) was born in London to Thomas Fyge, a physician, and Mary Beacham. After she had published her poem *The Female Advocate* in 1686 as a response to Robert Gould's 1682 satiric piece *Love Given O're: Or, Satyr Against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, Etc. of Woman*, Thomas banished Sarah from their family home and sent her to live with their relatives. It is said that she was rejecting suitors at these relatives' place while mourning the loss of her father's love (Medoff 156-7). She also wrote autobiographical poems in which she complained about her living situation. Years later, she married Edward Field, an attorney, who died before 1700. She wrote an ode to the late John Dryden in *Luctus Britannici: or the Tears of the British Muses* in the year 1700. Her poem *The Female Advocate* would also be revised for new editions in 1687 and 1707.

Sarah Fyge was married off to Reverend Thomas Egerton, a widower twenty years her senior who had adult children prior to marrying her, sometime between 1700 and 1703. In 1703, the Egertons would be involved in a divorce suit in which Sarah accused her husband of cruelty, while he accused her of desertion. The divorce suit was unsuccessful, and she would remain married to Egerton until his death in 1720. In the same year of her divorce suit proceedings, she published her collection *Poems on Several Occasions, Together with a Pastoral*, in which she describes her unhappy marriage in several of the poems.

"The Fatality," in *Poems on Several Occasions*, is written in iambic pentameter couplets. The speaker uses triplets to describe herself as being irrevocably confined to a life of what they refer to as "ills." They also address the belief of predestination in the poem: predestination was a particularly important doctrine during the period of the Reformation and there were significantly more Europeans who subscribed to the doctrine in the 1600s than in the 1800s. This belief stems from Augustine's disposition of a single predestination which suggests that God had pre-selected those who would go to heaven, while the rest were considered reprobates and rejected. In the long eighteenth century, this belief would shift towards the Calvinist framework of double predestination. In this framework, the reprobate is believed to be simultaneously predestined towards damnation and denied the ability to obtain salvation. This framework can be found in the opening lines of the poem, where the speaker mentions their

predestination towards “ills” in a slightly sarcastic manner despite their efforts to resist fate (ll. 3–4).

Sarah Fyge died in 1723 and her monument inscription depicts her as a victim of Fate, an image she often elaborated in her poetry.

Further Reading

Genovese, Michael. “‘Profess as Much as I’: Dignity as Authority in the Poetry of Sarah Fyge Egerton.” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 51, no. 1–2, 2010, pp. 45–66.

Keown, Kathleen. “Recent Scholarship on Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry.” *Literature Compass*, vol. 18, no. 8, Sept. 2021.

Tague, Ingrid H. “Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century.” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2001, pp. 76–106.

References

Medoff, Jeslyn. “New Light on Sarah Fyge (Field, Egerton).” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1982, pp. 155–75.

The Fatality⁵⁰

COME all ye grand Predestinarians⁵¹ now,
 Your Doctrine to the Height I will allow:
 I who with utmost Force resist my Fate,
 But am to Ills⁵² alone predestinate;
 In vain I strive th' immutable⁵³ Decree, 5
 Has pass'd on my unlucky Destiny.
 With Sighs and Tears I did at first begin,
 To conquer Fate as others would their Sin;
 Each Path I trod⁵⁴ I went with Caution on,
 But every Step doth⁵⁵ lead to be undone: 10
 And when a threatening Storm⁵⁶ was in my View,
 I from it (wisely as I thought) withdrew;
 But whilst the approaching Ills with Fear I shun,
 Into some other certain Harms⁵⁷ I run;
 So when some mighty Grief⁵⁸ did press my Soul, 15
 I would th' uneasy Tyranny controul;⁵⁹
 (Like a distracted Man⁶⁰ that will not bear,
 Those Fetters⁶¹ which Discretion makes him wear;

⁵⁰ First published in *Poems on Several Occasions, Together With a Pastoral: By Mrs. S. F.*, London, 1703, pp. 72-3; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

⁵¹ *Predestinarians* those who believe that some are predestined towards salvation while others are predestined towards damnation

⁵² *Ills* moral evils

⁵³ *immutable* unable to be changed

⁵⁴ *trod* past tense of tread on

⁵⁵ *doth* does

⁵⁶ *Storm* a violent disturbance

⁵⁷ *Harms* evils

⁵⁸ *Grief* "hardship, suffering" (OED)

⁵⁹ *controul* "to challenge" (OED)

⁶⁰ *Like a distracted Man* like a man who is troubled or confused

⁶¹ *Fetters* shackles

But frets and raves,⁶² and breaks the friendly Chain, 20
 Which did from greater Injuries restrain;
 He'll not be bar'd⁶³ a dangerous Liberty,
 Tho'⁶⁴ he to Outrages and Mischief fly.)
 Thus I from one Misfortune force my Way,
 By Means that does to greater still betray; 25
 One Sorrow seldom attends long on me,
 I have a torturing Variety, }
 I change and change, yet still 'tis Misery.
 A Hydra⁶⁵ Fate my Ruin does pursue,
 Cut off one ill, strait,⁶⁶ there springs up a new, } 30
 And they'll arise *ad infinitum*⁶⁷ too.
 Ther's none the mystick Scrolls of Fate can read,
 Nor shun the Ills by mighty Powers decreed, }
 Hood-wink'd⁶⁸ by them, just as they guide we tread.
 In vain we say we this or that will do, 35
 It cannot be unless they'll have it so;
 The only Way to ease our Discontents,
 Is to conclude they must be such Events;
 Such as the mighty hidden source of Things,⁶⁹
 Bubbles from its inevitable Springs.



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⁶² *raves* “to utter in a frenzied, enthusiastic, or uncontrollably angry manner” (*OED*)

⁶³ *bar'd* to be barred from

⁶⁴ *Tho'* though

⁶⁵ *Hydra* the multi-headed snake from Greek mythology that was slain by Hercules

⁶⁶ *strait* straight away, immediately

⁶⁷ *ad infinitum* “to infinity” (*OED*)

⁶⁸ *Hood-wink'd* to be prevented from seeing what is factual

⁶⁹ *Things* “cause, reason, account” (*OED*)