

Introduction:

The Female Advocate, or, An Answer to a late Satire against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy &c. Of Woman is a poem created by Sarah Fyge Egerton. Fyge was born in London in 1672, with limited details left behind of her earlier years. She grew up decently well off with parents that privately educated her due to their sufficient wealth. The English poet's works traditionally revolved around controversial subject including religion, gender roles, and politics. As her budding talent grew, Fyge created her most famous piece of literature, *The Female Advocate*. *The Female Advocate* was originally published June 2 1686, when Fyge was only fourteen years old. Fyge would go on to revise the work for two new editions released in 1687 and 1707. Due to the poem's bold views, when her second edition was released, she was kicked out of her home by her father. The poem was constructed in response to Robert Gould's satirical and misogynistic poem *Love Give O'er: Or Satyron the Inconstancy of Woman* (1682). Gould's poem dives into the moral failures of women, highlighting women's lust, fickleness, and inconsistency. After Fyge's response with *The Female Advocate*, Gould then responded with writing *Sylvia's Revenge, or, A satyr against man in answer to the Satyr against woman*. She later published a collection of poems titled Poems on Several Occasions in 1703. Although Fyge published some of her writings, most of her works, as was typical for the time, were only shared among her fellow women writers. As her popularity grew, Fyge did not hold back on speaking out for women's rights, advocating for her often condemned sex.

Fyge's main argument is that men's main purpose is to seduce exemplary women only to corrupt them later. Man, through Fyge's eyes, are the catalyst to the downfall of women, yet claim no responsibility for their part. Fyge questions the place in society women hold, emphasize women's limited freedom, especially experienced through marriage. Her personal hardships with

marriage greatly influenced her poem. Fyge was married twice, with her first husband dying quickly and her second relationship was far from a joyful experience. Despite her domestic struggles with men, she continued to create moving poetry. Fyge also uses religion to further defend her case as women are the truly superior gender as they are the better, perfected counterpart to man. She also eerily foreshadows the decline in marriage and repopulation, because between the choice of a “Baudy House or Nunnery,” women would chose their chastity and solitude in monasteries or caves (Fyge 5). The poem continues to list the vices and issues of men, including their pride, ambition, and inconsistency. It is also important to note the playful, yet impressive jabs to Gould’s argument and satirical writing style sprinkled throughout the poem. Fyge clearly embeds her frustration and desire for women to have more autonomy. She challenges patriarchal power and the restrictive social customs placed upon women. Despite being rather young, Fyge uses worldly examples to further support her argument. Beyond the Bible, Fyge mentions women from history who have displayed dedication, honor, and strength through their actions, emphasizing women’s abilities men, especially Gould, deny to acknowledge. She also moves beyond Great Britain’s borders, reiterating the universality of loyalty often found in women across the globe, including places like India and Germany. Fyge also embeds various Greek and Roman gods and goddesses to enrich her argument through shared cultural themes of love, morality, and chastity fixed in their universal tales. Through her use of artful figurative language, playful slights towards Gould, and numerous global examples of exemplary women and wives, Fyge artfully crafts a witty yet well-founded argument in defense of women written by “a Lady in Vindication of her Sex” (Fyge).

By: Regan Lucero

The Female Advocate, or, An Answer to a late Satire against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, &c. Of Woman.

To the Reader.

That which makes many Books come abroad into the World without Prefaces, is, the only Reason that incites me to one, that is to say. the Smallness of them; being willing to let my Reader know why this is so: For as one great Commendation of our Sex, is, to know much, and speak little, so my Virgin-Modesty hath put a Period to the intended Length of the ensuing Lines, lest censuring Critics should measure my Tongue by my Pen, and condemn me for a Talkative, by the length of my Poem.¹ Then I confess the Illustrious Subject requires (no commands) an enlargement from any other Pen than mine (or those under the same Circumstances) but I think it is good Frugality for young Beginners to send forth a small Venture at first, and see how that passes the merciless Ocean of Critics, and what Returns it makes, and so accordingly adventure the next time. I might enlarge this Preface with the common Excuse of Writers for the Publication of their Books, namely the Importunities² of her obliging Friends: But what it was put me upon the Publication of this, I am not bound to give the Reader an Account of; but I think the Debauchery which I now answer, is a sufficient warrant for this appearing of mine; in which he doth not only exclaim against Virtue, but Moral Honesty too, and would (were it alone sufficient) banish

all Goodness out of them; but that will be an impossible thing, so long as we (the most essentially good) do subsist: for 'tis observed in all Religions, that Women are the truest Devotionists, and the most pious, and more heavenly than those who pretend to be the most perfect and rational Creatures; for many Men with the Conceit of their own Perfections, neglect that which should make them so; as some mistaken persons, who think if they are of the right Church they shall be infallibly³ saved, when they never follow the Rules which lead to Salvation; and when Persons with this Inscription pass currant in Heaven, then it will be according to my Antagonist's Fancy, that all Men are good, and fitting for Heaven because they are Men; and Women irreversibly damned, because they are Women: But that Heaven should make a Male and Female, both of the same Species, and both indued with the like Rational Souls, for two such differing Ends, is the most notorious Principle, and the most unlikely of any that ever was maintained by any Rational Man, and I shall never take it for an Article of my Faith, being assured that Heaven is for all those whose Purity and Obedience to its Law, qualifies them for it, whether Male or Female; to which Place the latter seem to have the Claim, is the Opinion of one of its Votaries,

S.F.⁴

¹ Fyge's poem is in response to Robert Gould's *Love Given O'er: Or Satyr on the Inconstancy of Woman*. Gould's satirical poem sparked literary debate for attacking female lust and fickleness.

² Importunities defined as the fact of being persistent, especially to the point of irritation or annoyance.

³ Infallibly meaning without fail or liability to prove false.

⁴ In later editions, Fyge edited her preface as this 1686 publication contained errors and additions by the pamphlet's compositors against her will. In later publications she addresses this in her preface.

Blasphemous Wretch! How canst think or say
Some Curst or Banished Fiend usurped the way
When *Eve* was formed; for then's denied by you
Gods Omniscience and Omnipresence too:
Without which Attributes he could not be,
The greatest and supremest Deity:
Nor can Heaven sleep, tho' it may mourn to see
Degenerate Man utter Blasphemy.
When from dark Chaos Heaven the World did make⁵,
Made all things glorious it did undertake;
Then it in *Eden's* Garden freely placed
All things pleasant to the Sight or Taste,
Filled it with Beasts & Birds, Trees hung with Fruit,
That might with Man's Celestial Nature suit:
The World being made thus spacious and complete,
Then Man was formed, who seemed nobly great.

Curst: cursed

When Heaven surveyed the Works that it had done,
Saw Male and Female, but found Man alone,
A barren Sex, and insignificant;
So Heaven made Woman to supply the want,
And to make perfect what before was scant:
Then surely she a Noble Creature is,
Whom Heaven thus made to consummate all Bliss.
Though Man had Being first, yet methinks She
In Nature should have the Supremacy;
For Man was formed out of dull senseless Earth;
But Woman she had a far nobler Birth:
For when the Dust was purified by Heaven,
Made into Man, and Life unto it given,
Then the Almighty and All-wise God said,
That Woman of that Species should be made:
Which was no sooner said, but it was done,
Because it was not fit for Man to be alone.
Thus have I proved Womans Creation good,
And not inferior, when right understood:
To that of Man's; for both one Maker had,

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⁵ This segment of the poem calls attention to the Genesis creation story, specifically focusing on the creation of Adam and Eve in chapter two of Genesis (KJB).

Which made all good; then how could *Eve* be bad?
But then you'll say, though she at first was pure,
Yet in that State she did not endure.

'Tis true; but if her Fall's examined right,⁶
We find most Men have banished Truth for spite:
Nor is she quite so guilty as some make;
For *Adam* did most of the Guilt partake:
For he from God's own Mouth had the Command;
But Woman she had it at second hand:

The Devil's Strength weak Woman might deceive,
But *Adam* tempted only was by *Eve*.
Eve had the strongest Tempter, and least Charge;
Man's knowing most, doth his Sin make most large.
But though Woman Man to Sin did lead?
Yet since her Seed hath bruised the Serpent's Head:⁷
Why should she be made a public scorn,
Of whom the great Almighty God was born?
Surely to speak one slighting Word, must be
A kind of murmuring Impiety:⁸
But still their greatest haters do prove such
Who formerly have loved them too much:
And from the Proverb they are not exempt;
"Too much Familiarity has bred Contempt";⁹
For they associate themselves with none,
But such whose Virtues like their own, are gone;
And with all those, and only those who be
Most boldly versed in their Debauchery:
And as in *Adam* all Mankind did die,
They make all base for one's Immodesty;
Nay, make the Name a kind of Magic Spell,
As if it twould censure married Men to Hell.
Woman, ye Powers! the very Name's a Charm,
And will my Verse against all Critics arm.

⁶ The fall Fyge is referring to was in Genesis chapter three when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. The fall is specifically focused on Eve's initial temptation (KJB).

⁷ This is a reference to the passage in Genesis 3:15, considered the Bible's first prophecy of the Gospel. The phrase means woman's seed (Jesus) was destined to overcome Satan through sacrificing himself on the cross (KJB).

⁸ Impiety is defined as a lack of piety (being religious), especially for a god.

⁹ The quote is a proverbial expression from Mark 6:1-6. The proverb suggests the more you know a person, the more likely are you to find fault in them (KJB).

The *Muses* or *Apollo* doth inspire¹⁰
Heroic Poets; but your's is a Fire,
Pluto from Hell did send by *Incubus*,¹¹
Because we make their Hell less populous;
Or else you never had damned the Females thus:

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But if so universally they are
Disposed to Mischief, what need you declare
Peculiar Faults, when all the World might see
With each approaching Morn a Prodigy:
Man curse dead woman; I could hear as well
The black infernal Devils curse their Hell:
When there had been no such place we know,
If they themselves had not first made it so.
In Lust perhaps you others have excelled,
And made all Whores that possibly would yield;
And courted all the Females in your way,
Then did design at last to make a Prey
Of some pure Virgins; or what's almost worse,
Make some chaste Wives to merit a Divorce.
But because they hated your insatiate Mind,
Therefore you call what's Virtuous, Unkind:
And Disappointments did you Soul perplex;
So in meer spite you curse the Female Sex.
I would not judge you thus, only I find
You would adulterate all Womankind,
Not only with your Pen; you higher soar;¹²
You'd exclude Marriage, make the World a Whore.
But if all Men should of your Humor be
And should rob *Hymen* of his Deity,¹³
They soon would find the Inconveniency.
Then hostile Spirits would be forced to Peace,
Because the World so slowly would increase.
They would be glad to keep their Men at home,
And each want more to attend his Throne:

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¹⁰ The Muses refer to the nine goddesses of inspiration that reside over the arts and sciences. Apollo is the god of music and the arts and served as the leader to the Muses in Greek mythology.

¹¹ Pluto is the Roman god of death and the Underworld. An incubus is a male demon that has intercourse with sleeping women.

¹² Here and throughout her poem Fyge addresses Gould's misogynistic poetry.

¹³ Hymen is the god of marriage ceremonies, fertility, and bridal hymns.

Nay, should an *English* Prince resolve that he
would keep the number of his Nobility:
And this dull custom some few years maintained,
There would be none less than a Peer oth' land.
And I do fancy it would be pretty sport
To see a Kingdom crammed into a Court.
Sure a strange world, when one should nothing see,
unless a Baudy House or Nunnery.
Or should this Act ever pass, woman would fly
With unthought swiftness, to each Monastery
And in dark Caves secure her Chastity.
She only in a Marriage-Bed delights;
The very Name of *Whore* her Soul affrights.
And when that sacred Ceremony's gone,
Woman I am sure will choose to live alone.
There's none can number all those virtuous Dames
Which chose cold death before their lovers flames.
The chast *Lucretia* whom proud *Tarquin* loved,
Her he slew, her chastity she proved.¹⁴
But I've gone further than I need have done,
Since we have got examples nearer home.
Witness those *Saxon* Ladies who did fear
The loss of Honour when the *Danes* where here:
And cut their Lips and Noses that they might
Not pleasing seem, or give the *Danes* delight.¹⁵
Thus having done what they could justly do,
At last they fell their sacrifices too.
Thus when curst *Osbright* courted *Beon*'s wife,¹⁶
She him refused with hazard of her life.

And some which I do know but will not name,
Have thus refused and hazarded the same.
I could say more, but History will tell

Baudy House: bawdy house (brothel)

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Chast: chaste

¹⁴ According to Roman history, Lucretia was raped by the son of the king (Tarquin), triggering a revolt and overthrow of the monarchy in place of a republic around 510 BCE. Lucretia is seen as a hero after her suicide was her attempt at avoiding dishonor to her family's name.

¹⁵ Fyge's reference to the Saxon ladies and Danes is originally a story from Roger of Wendover in his chronicle history, *The Flowers of History*.

¹⁶ The story of Osbright (Osebright) and Beon's (Buerne) wife originates from *The Brut*, or *The Chronicles of England* (1347). King Osbright of Northumberland raped Beon's wife.

Many more things that do these excel.
In Constancy they men excel as far
As heavens bright lamp doth a dull twinkling star.
Tho' man is always altering of his mind,
Inconstancy is only in womankind.
'Tis something strange, no hold, it isn't because
The men have had the power of making Laws;
For where is there that man that ever died,
Or ever expired with his loving Bride.
But numerous trains of chast wives expire
With their dear Husbands, tho in flames of fire:
We'd do the same if custom did require.
But this is done by *Indian* women, who
Do make their Constancy immortal too,
As is their Fame: We find *India* yields
More glorious *Phœnix* than the *Arabian* fields.¹⁷
The *German* women Constancy did show
When *Wensberg* was besieged, begged they might go
Out of the City, with no bigger Packs
Than each of them could carry on their Backs.¹⁸
The wond'ring world expected they'd have gone
Laded with treasures from their native home,
But crossing expectation each did take
Her Husband as her burden on her back.
So saved him from intended death, and she
At once gave him both life and liberty.

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How many loving wives have often died:
Drownded in tears by their cold husbands side.
And when a Sword was Executioner,
the very same hath executed her,
With her own hands; eagerly meeting death,
And scorned to live when he was void of breath.
If this isn't Constancy, why then the Sun
With Constant Motion don't his progress run.
There's thousands of examples that will prove,

¹⁷ Fyge references the Hindu practice (Sati) where a widow throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre. The sacrifice is done to show devotion to one's husband.

¹⁸ Fyge refers to the Siege of Weinburg (1140), known as the "Loyal Wives" story. Upon surrender, King Conrad III allowed the wives to saved their husband's lives by carrying the men and their belongings out of the city on their backs.

Woman is alwayes Constant in chast Love.
 But when she's courted only to some Lust,
 She well may change, I think the reason's just.
 Change did I say, that word I must forbear,
 No, she bright Star wont wander from her sphere
 Of Virtue (in which Female Souls do move)
 Nor will she join with an insatiate love.
 For she whose first espoused to virtue must
 Be most inconstant, when she yields to lust.
 But now the scene is altered, and those who
 were esteemed modest by a blush or two,
 Are represented quite another way,
 Worse than mock-verse doth the most solid Play.¹⁹
 She that takes pious Precepts for her Rule,²⁰
 Is thought by some a kind of ill-bred fool;
 They would have all bred up in *Venus* School.²¹
 And when that by her speech or carriage, she
 Doth seem to have sense of a Deity,
 She straight is taxt with ungentry.
 taxed
 Unless it be the little blinded Boy,
 That Childish god, *Cupid*, that trifling toy,²²

That certain nothing, whom they feign to be
 The Son of Venus daughter to the Sea.
 But were he true, none serve him as they should,
 For commonly those who adore this god,
 Do't only in a melancholy mood;
 Or else a sort of hypocrites they are,
 Who do invocate him only as a snare.
 And by him they do sacred love pretend,
 When as heaven knows, they have a baser end.
 Nor is he god of love; but if I must
 Give him a title, then he is god of lust.



Espoused: to marry



Taxt:



¹⁹ Mock-verse may be Fyge alluding to Gould's poor writing or a connection to a larger metaphor about theater and performativity. The moment is meant to be another insult against Gould and his poor writing style and stance.

²⁰ Precepts meaning a general principle intended to regulate a behavior or thought.

²¹ Venus is the Roman goddess of love, beauty, desire, fertility. She is often associated with both positive and negative aspects of femininity. A Venus-school may allude to a bardello (brothel) as ritual prostitution was common in her temples.

²² Cupid is the Roman god of love, desire, and attraction.

And surely Woman impious must be²³
When even she doth become his votary,²⁴
Unless she will believe without controul,
Those that did hold a Woman had no Soul:
And then doth think no obligation lyes
On her to act what may be just or wise.
And only strive to please her Appetite,
And to embrace that which doth most delight.
And when she doth this paradox believe,
Whatever faith doth please she may receive.
She may be Turk, Jew, Atheist, Infidel,
Or any thing, cause she need never fear Hell,
For if she hath no Soul what need she fear
Something she knows not what or when or where.
But hold I think I should be silent now,
Because a Womans Soul you do allow.
But have we none you'd say we had, else you
Could never damn us at the rate you do.

What dost thou think thou hast priviledge given,
That those whom thou dost bless shall mount to heaven,
And those thou cursest unto hell must go.
And so dost think to fill the Abiss below²⁵
Quite full of Females, hoping there may be
No room for souls big with Vice as thee.
But if that thou with such vain hopes should'st die
In the fluid Air, thou must not think to fly,
Or enter into heaven, thy weight of Sin
Would crush the damned, and so thou hast enter in.
But hold, I am uncharitable here,
Thou may'st repent, tho' that's a thing I fear.
But if thou should'st repent, why then again
It would at best but mitigate thy pain,
Because thou hast been vile to that degree,
That thy repentance must eternal be.
For wert thou guilty of no other crime
Than what thou lately puttest into Rhyme,

Dost: do

Wert: were

²³ Impious is defined as not displaying respect, especially towards a god.

²⁴ Votary (Votaries) meaning a person (like a monk or nun) who made vows to carryout religious service.

²⁵ Abiss (Abyss) alluding to hell, a place where redemption is lost.

Why that without other offences given,
Were enough to shut the gate of Heaven.
But when together's put all thou do,
It will not only shut but bar it too.

For when Heaven made woman it designed
Her for the charming object of Mankind.
Nor is altered only with those who
Set *Bewly, Stratford*, no and *Chreswell* too,²⁶
Or other Bawds, chase their acquaintance out,²⁷
And then what they must be we make no doubt.
'Tis to make heaven mistaken when you say

It meant one and it proves another way.
For when heaven with its last and greatest care,
Had formed a female charming bright and fair,
Why then immediately it did decree,
That unto man she should a blessing be,
And so should prove to all posterity.
And surely there is nothing can be worse
Than for to turn a blessing to a curse.
And when the greatest blessing heaven ever gave,
And certainly the best that man could have.
When that's scorned and contemned sure it must be
A great affront unto heaven's Majesty.
But I hope Heaven will punish the offence,
And with it justify our Innocence.

I must confess there are some bad, and they
Lead by an *Ignis fatuus*, go astray:²⁸
All are not forced to wander in false way.
Only some few whose dark benighted sense,²⁹
For want of light han't power to make defence
Against those many tempting pleasures, which
Not only theirs but Masculine Souls bewitch.
But you'd persuade us, that were we alone

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Han't: have not

²⁶ Bewly, referenced in Gould's poem, alongside the other names are infamous bawds during Fyge's time.

²⁷ A bawd is a woman in charge of a brothel.

²⁸ Ignis fatuus (fatuus) is a latin term which translates to "foolish fire." Other names for this light are jack-o'-lantern and will-o'-the-wisp, both of which are connected to folklore about men who carry a light around at night.

²⁹ Benighted meaning a person in a state of moral ignorance, typically due to lack of opportunity (ignorant).

Are guilty of all crimes and you have none,
Unless some few, which you call fools, (who be
Espoused to wives, and live in chastity.)
But the most rational without which we
Doubtless should question your Humanity.
And I would praise them more only I fear
If I should do't it would make me appear

Unto the World much fonder than I be
Of that same State, for I love Liberty,
Nor do I think there's a necessity
For all to enter Beds, like *Noah's* beast³⁰
Into his Ark; I would have some released
From the dear cares of that lawful State:
Hold I'll not dictate, I'll leave all Fate.
Nor would I have the World to think that I
Through a despair do *Nuptial* Joys defy.³¹
For in the World so little I have been
That I've but half a revolution seen
Of *Saturn*, only I do think it best³²
For those who love to contemplate at rest,
For to live single too, and then they may
Uninterrupted, *Natures* Work survey.
And had my Antagonist spent his time
Making true Verse instead of spiteful Rhyme,
As a Female Poet, he had gained some praise,
But now his malice blasts his twig of Bays.³³
I do not wish you had, for I believe
It is impossible for to deceive
Any with what you write, because that you
May insert things supposed true.
And if by supposition I may go,
Then I'll suppose all men are wicked too,
Because I'm sure there's many that are so.
And because you have made *Whores* of all you could,

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³⁰ Noah's beast refers to the Ark constructed to survive the great flood in Genesis chapters six through nine (KJB).

³¹ Nuptial Joys refers to the happiness during a wedding or marriage

³² Saturns revolution, or orbit around the Sun, is approximately 29.4 Earthy years. Meaning Fyge was roughly 14 years old when she created this poem.

³³ A twig of Bays most likely meaning a branch of a bay laurel tree, which historically represent triumph, honor, and achievement.

So if you durst, you'd say all Women would.
Which words do only argue guilt and spite:
All makes you cheap in every mortals sight.

Durst: dare