Sarah Fyge Egerton, â??The Emulationâ?•

Description

[SARAH FYGE EGERTON]

â??The Emulationâ?•

Say Tyrant Custom, why must we obey,
The impositions of thy haughty Sway;
From the first dawn of Life, unto the Grave,
Poor Womankindâ??s in every State, a Slave.
The Nurse, the Mistress, Parent and the Swain,
For Love she must, thereâ??s none escape that Pain;
Then comes the last, the fatal Slavery,
The Husband with insulting Tyranny
Can have ill Manners justifyâ??d by Law;
For Men all join to keep the Wife in awe.
Moses who first our Freedom did rebuke,
Was Marryâ??d when he writ the Pentateuch;
Theyâ??re Wise to keep us Slaves, for well they know,
If we were loose, we soon should make them, so.
We yield like vanquishâ??d Kings whom Fetters bind,
When chance of War is to Usurpers kind;
Submit in Form; but theyâ??d our Thoughts controul,
And lay restraints on the impassive Soul:
They fear we should excel their sluggish Parts,
Should we attempt the Sciences and Arts.
Pretend they were designâ??d for them alone,
So keep us Fools to raise their own Renown;
Thus Priests of old their Graudeur to maintain,
Cryâ??d vulgar Eyes would sacred Laws Prophane.
So kept the Mysteries behind a Screen,
There Homage and the Name were lost had they been seen:
But in this blessed Age, such Freedomâ??s given,
That every Man explains the Will of Heaven;
And shall we Women now sit tamely by,
Make no excursions in Philosophy,
Or grace our Thoughts in tuneful Poetry?
We will our Rights in Learningâ??s World maintain,
Wits Empire, now, shall know a Female Reign;
Come all ye Fair, the great Attempt improve,
Divinely imitate the Realms above:
Thereâ??s ten celestial Females govern Wit,

And but two Gods that dare pretend to it;
And shall these finite Males reverse their Rules,
No, weâ??ll be Wits, and then Men must be Fools.

NOTES:

1 *Custom* â??Established practice, tradition, or habitâ?• (*OED*); often personified as a tyrant by women writers in the long eighteenth century.

5 *Swain* A young lover or suitor; typically masculine.

11-12 *Mosesâ?¦Pentateuch* Moses is the Biblical figure traditionally thought to have authored the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) (*OED*). The Pentateuch contains the Mosaic Laws, multiple of which relate to marriage; see Exodus 22:16: â??If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife.â?•

15 *Fetters* â??Anything that confines, impedes, or restrainsâ?• (*OED*).

36 *ten celestial Females* The goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, and her daughters, the nine Muses.

37 *two Gods* Probably the Greek gods Apollo and Mercury.

SOURCE: ***Poems on Several Occasions, together with a pastoral*** **(London, 1706), pp. 108-109. [Google Books]**

Edited by Ramiro Elizondo